

Special Section:
**Health and
Wellness**
page 11-18

- 3 **THRIVE!**
Youth ministry gathering
- 3 **High School Placement Test**
- 3 **Cathedral broadcast time change**
- 3 **40 Hour Devotions**
- 3 **Bambinelli**
Schedule of events
- 3 **2024 DPAA preparations begin**
- 6 **Benedictine exchange program**
- 21 **Obituary**
Sister Marylyn Ehrman, S.N.D.
- 21 **Eucharistic Revival**

Bishop's Schedule	3
Commentary	4
People and Events	9
Shopper's Guide	19
VIRTUS	19
Classifieds	20
News Briefs	23

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Brother bishops gather in Baltimore for fall assembly, discussion and prayer

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) came together Nov. 13-16 for its Fall Plenary Assembly in

Baltimore, Maryland.

The assembly began with a focus on prayer, opening with a Mass for Peace at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Mary. On the

following day, public sessions for the assembly began with the bishops sending prayers

and a message to the Holy Father, Pope Francis, as well as an address by Cardinal Christophe Pierre, papal nuncio to the United States. Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA addressed the body as USCCB president.

Bishop John Iffert, bishop of the Diocese of Covington, was one of the bishops in attendance at the assembly, whose impression of the meeting and involved discussions were overall "good."

"There was a good discussion about the Synod on the Synod," he said, "and we had great reports back from folks who had participated in the Synod."

Bishop Iffert also said that bishops were given a preview of materials intended to help dioceses and parishes to process the conversations that happened at the Synod in Rome, and to "begin to build on that, and remembering that the whole purpose of the Synod is not to make a particular decision, but the whole purpose of the Synod is for us to practice listening to one another in love, journeying together."

Another key discussion to the assembly was regarding a new process for USCCB's pastoral planning. According to Bishop Iffert, there's going to be "more diocesan engagement in how we feed information upward to the Conference for establishing the Conference's priorities."

Re-issuing faithful citizenship was another topic on the assembly's agenda — a teaching document on the political responsibility of Catholics, which some bishops believe is in need of updating. Other topics include updates on the Eucharistic Revival, a national pastoral plan for Hispanic Ministry, and a vote in support of the bishops' conference of England and Wales asking the Holy Father to name St. John Henry Newman a Doctor of the Church.

Mental health was also a topic presented at the assembly, with Bishop Iffert mentioning a "new initiative on trying to promote mental health awareness." A presentation was given on the topic, with two USCCB committees working on materials hoping to address growing mental health concerns in the United States. According to Bishop Iffert, the topic of mental health was one that got "the most engagement" of anything discussed during the assembly. "There was more conversation, more input from the bishops," he said, with input often engaging the personal experiences of the bishops.

Bishop Iffert commented on the "fraternity and comradery" felt among the bishops at the assembly, stating that the "reports of controversies among the bishops" were "over-reported." "When you share this vocation, everyone else is so good and well-intentioned, but nobody understands what you're doing except someone else who's doing that— and, so to be able to be there, have conversations and share meals... it really does connect you to the sense of the universal Church, and that you're part of this carrying the ministry forward."



OSV News photo/courtesy Angelus Virata, Baltimore Basilica

Bishops attend Mass Nov. 13, 2023, at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore at the start of their 2023 fall plenary assembly.

Diocese of Covington pilgrims return from NCYC 'Fully Alive' for the faith

Laura Keener
Editor

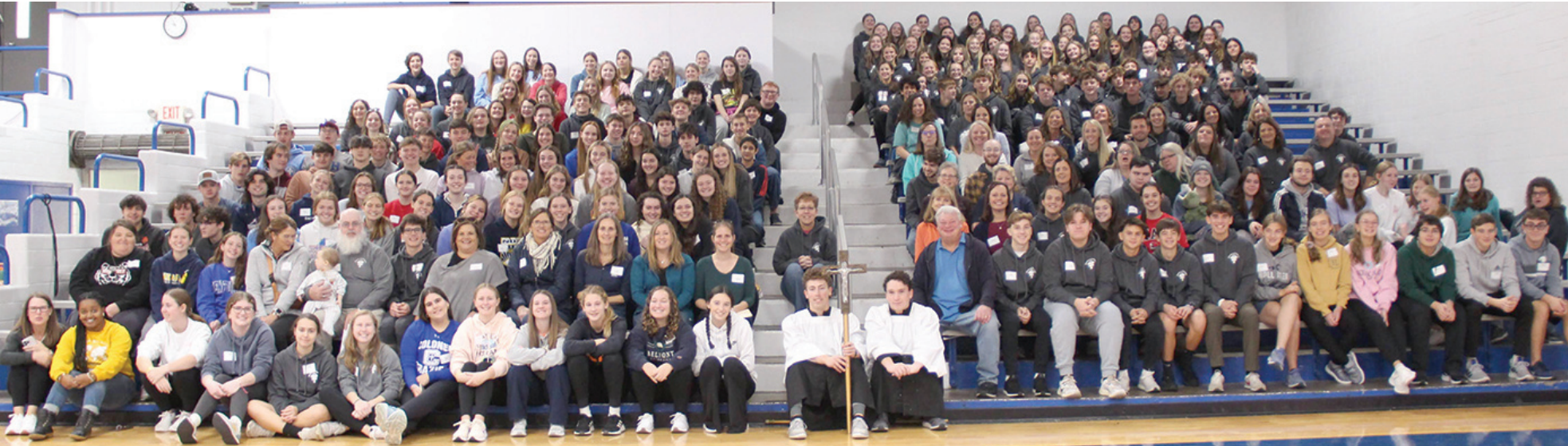
Over 250 teens and chaperones from the Diocese of Covington attended the National Youth Conference, Nov. 16-18, at Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis. The theme for the Catholic youth conference was, "Fully Alive!" Based on the comments from youth returning from the event, NCYC lived up to its theme.

Bishop John Iffert was one of 17 celebrating bishops at NCYC's closing Mass,

Nov. 18, which he said "was really something." The homilist, Bishop Joseph Espaillat, an Auxiliary Bishop of Archdiocese of New York, at the age of 46, is the youngest bishop in the United States and the second youngest in the world. "He was just on fire that night. He was a great witness," said Bishop Iffert. (See related story on page CLOSING#.)

"I was very impressed with our delegation," said Bishop Iffert about the over 250

(Continued on page 2)



(above) NCYC pilgrims from the Diocese of Covington gathered for a group photo, Nov. 16, before the send-off Mass celebrated by Father Michael Hennigen at Covington Catholic High School.

(right) “NCYC was one of the most beautiful experiences I have ever had. There is something so powerful about 13 thousand young people all gathering to grow in their faith,” said Clara Howard, member of St. Timothy Parish, Union, Youth Group. “This experience has really helped me to be closer to God and it has taught me a lot about myself. The speakers at NCYC helped me to explore my relationship with Catholicism and grow in my prayer life. The culture of NCYC is unlike anything else. Everyone had silly hats and pins to swap! The kindness and friendship I found in everyone I met showed me what it truly means to be a member of the Church. I am so thankful for this experience, and I want to thank everyone that contributed to this amazing weekend!” Pictured are ladies from the St. Timothy Youth Group waiting for the final NCYC Mass to begin.



(above) “I have no way of describing the feeling of seeing 12,000 kids like me become fully alive in Christ!,” said Abby Price, student, Notre Dame Academy. “Having the experience of going to confession and being forgiven before participating in adoration with so many people helped me feel the true love of Jesus Christ. Thank you NCYC.” Pictured (from left) of Josie Stallard, Josie Bozeman, and Abby Price right after experiencing Mass with 12,000 people.



(above) Students and chaperones from St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs, clucking it up at NCYC 2023.

(Continued from page 1)

teens and chaperones who attended NCYC. “There was a great response from the youth and the young adults who served them and took care of meals for them — they had a great spirit.” Bishop Iffert was also impressed with the adult chaperones, many of whom have been attending NCYC and ministering to the youth of the Diocese for 20 or more years.

Bishop Iffert said that the conference “was what it always is — a great shot in the arm, a joyful experience with young people coming together and meeting people from across the country, for them to reconnect and to be energized, to come to know the joy of the Church and that Christ loves them.” Bishop Iffert told the teens from the Diocese of Covington that they are “both/and.” “They are the future of the Church and they are part of the Church now.” He encouraged them to take to heart discernment for their vocation, “They will be the next generation of Catholic leaders.”

The following are comments from pilgrims from the Diocese of Covington who attended NCYC:

“NCYC is a once in a lifetime experience that made me rethink what I am chasing after in my life. We as the youth

are the now and the future of the Catholic Church,” said Annie Dierker, St. Pius X Parish, Edgewood

“NCYC brought so much lasting joy to this community of Catholics that took this pilgrimage of faith,” said Adam Kolar from Villa Madonna Academy. “It was hard not to smile surrounded by 13,000 voices proclaiming the Good News in song, and even harder not to feel God’s presence in every single person who crossed our path. The enthusiasm for good we derived from this conference leads us to go out and live with Joy over fear, and we can be certain that every action we take will bring us closer to Heaven.”

Peer leaders from St. Mary Parish, Alexandria, shared the following about their experience at NCYC:

“This year’s NCYC was especially awesome for me. Being able to experience the conference as a young adult made the whole experience even more rewarding,” said Ethan Ruschman, peer leader and student at Thomas More University. “It is always heartwarming and inspiring to see so many young people so excited about their faith and not being afraid to show it. I’m so happy that NCYC has been a part of my life and cannot wait for 2025.”

Jillian Ruschman, peer leader and freshman at Bishop Brossart High School, said, “I had such a fantastic time

and it was so special! I came to NCYC not knowing what to expect and just expecting that I would be listening to a lot of speakers and that it would be boring. That is the complete opposite of what actually happened. My heart was opened up to many different perspectives on how people see God and their faith and just thought it was so cool. Also, Adoration was one of the coolest experiences I’ve ever had before.”

Sienna Verst, peer leader and student at Campbell County High School said, “NCYC was so Awesome! I don’t know what I thought it was going to be like, but it was so much more, and one of the best experiences I have ever had!”

“NCYC brought so much lasting joy to this community of Catholics that took this pilgrimage of faith,” said Adam Kolar from Villa Madonna Academy. “It was hard not to smile surrounded by 13,000 voices proclaiming the Good News in song, and even harder not to feel God’s presence in every single person who crossed our path. The enthusiasm for good we derived from this conference leads us to go out and live with Joy over fear, and we can be certain that every action we take will bring us closer to Heaven.”

THRIVE! Youth ministry gathering.

Dec 6, 5:30–8 p.m. at the Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington.

Momentum for Youth Ministry is building in the Diocese of Covington, according to Angie Poat, diocesan Youth Minister. Youth returning from last week’s NCYC (National Catholic Youth Conference) has spawned unprecedented energy, excitement and ideas among the diocese’s youth. The teens who attended NCYC have taken to heart Bishop Iffert’s message that they are “both/and” the future Church and the Church now and are eager to share their “Fully Alive” faith.

Adult leaders — volunteers, catechists, teachers, coaches, campus ministers, youth ministers, chaperones, retreat leaders, and all who desire to serve the young church — are needed to join the youth in their excitement. THRIVE! Is a gathering of youth ministers. Come hungry! Dinner and spiritual nourishment will be provided, including a positive, prayerful and productive night filled with information to help our Diocese THRIVE! RSVP by Dec 2, at covdio.org/youth.



Bambinelli and Christmas Tree Lighting and Blessing

Sunday, Dec. 17

St. Mary's Park, 1125 Madison Ave., Covington

Schedule of Events

Inside at Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium

6:30–8 p.m.
Hot chocolate, cookies, sandwiches

7:15 p.m.
Storytime — “Bambinelli Sunday: A Christmas Blessing,” by Amy Welborn; narrated by David Cooley

Outside at St. Mary’s Park

6:30–6:45 p.m.
Blessed Sacrament Parish Children’s Choir

7:00–7:15 p.m.
Christmas Tree Blessing and Lighting with Bishop Iffert

7:15–7:30 p.m.
The Cathedral Bishop’s Choir

7:30–8 p.m.
Blessing of the Bambinellis with Bishop Iffert

St. Henry District High School Chamber Choir

High School Placement Test

The Department of Catholic Schools announces the annual High School Placement Test Saturday, Dec. 9, 9 a.m. to Noon

The High School Placement Test is administered to current 8th grade students who are interested in attending a Catholic high school in the Diocese of Covington. High School Placement Test Scholarships will be awarded to students only from the high school where the student took the test.

The registration process is coordinated through each individual high school. For further information, contact any secondary school listed or the Department of Catholic Schools at (859) 392-1500.

- Bishop Brossart High School, Alexandria www.bishopbrossart.org
- Covington Catholic High School, Park Hills www.covcath.org
- Holy Cross District High School, Covington www.hchscov.com
- Newport Central Catholic High School, Newport. www.ncchs.com
- Notre Dame Academy, Park Hills. www.ndapandas.org
- St. Henry District High School, Erlanger. www.shdhs.org
- Villa Madonna Academy, Villa Hills. www.villamadonna.org

The following schools do not administer the standard High School Placement Test. Contact the school directly for admission information.

Covington Latin School, Covington. www.covingtonlatin.org
Entrance exam: Dec. 9, 9 a.m. or Feb. 17, 9 a.m.

St. Patrick High School, Maysville www.stpatschool.com
Schools in the Diocese of Covington accept students of any race, color and national or ethnic origin who otherwise meet the criteria for admission.

Broadcast Mass time change

Beginning Sunday, Dec. 31, the time of the Sunday broadcast of the TV Mass from the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, will change from 12 p.m. to 10 a.m. Viewers will continue to tune-in to the Mass on The CW on the following channels: antenna 12.2; Spectrum 117 or 25; Cincinnati Bell 17 or 517; and DirectTV 25. The Mass is also streamed live with a recording available on the Cathedral’s website covcathedral.com.

40 Hour Devotion

This year, the three-year Eucharistic Revival is in its parish phase. To help unite parishes around the Eucharist, Bishop John Iffert, at the request of the diocesan Worship Committee, has asked pastors to host 40 Hours of continual Eucharistic adoration.

These 40 Hours will be scheduled sometime during the year, from now until July 2024, when the revival culminates with a Eucharistic Congress, July 17–21, 2024, at Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis. Discounted tickets for the Congress are available through the diocesan Office of Worship and Liturgy; an application is online at covdio.org.

Upcoming 40 Hour Devotions

- Dec. 8, 2023, St. Patrick Parish, Maysville
- Dec. 15, 2023, St. John Parish, Carrollton
- May 3, 2024, St. Joseph Parish, Camp Springs



2024 DPAA preparations begin

The 2024 Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal chairs met with Jim Hess, director, Stewardship and Mission Services, and his staff, Nov. 16, to make plans for the annual campaign. Linda Rawe returns this year as the DPAA General Chair with Jeff Jehn coming on as the Leadership Gifts Chair. The theme for the 2024 DPAA is “Zeal for Your House Will Consume Me.” Pictured (from left) are: Jennifer Readnour, Jennifer Cox, Allison Miller, Jim Hess, Linda Rawe and Jeff Jehn.

Important dates for the DPAA are:

- Feb. 15
DPAA Kick-off Dinner – Maysville
- Feb. 24–25
Pre-Announcement Weekend
- Feb. 29
DPAA Kick-off Dinner – Hebron
- March 2–3
Announcement Weekend
- March 16–17
Commitment Weekend
- April 6
Follow-up Weekend



Bishop’s Schedule

- | | |
|--|---|
| Nov. 28-30
Province Meeting, Knoxville | Dec. 2
Vigil Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 4:30 p.m. |
| Nov. 30
Serra Club’s Priest Appreciation dinner, Blessed Sacrament Parish, Ft. Mitchell, 5:30 p.m. | Dec. 3
Advent Lessons and Carols, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 3 p.m. |
| Nov. 26
Mass, Cathedral Basilica, 10 a.m. | Dec. 4-6
Good Leaders, Good Shepherds retreat, Jesuit Spirit Center, Milford |
| Nov. 27
Confirmation, Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, California, 7 p.m. | Dec. 5
St. Elizabeth Healthcare annual Christmas dinner, Ft. Mitchell Country Club, 5:30 p.m. |
| Dec. 1
Diocesan Curia staff Service Awards luncheon, Metropolitan Club, 11:30 a.m. | |

Since May of 2007, St. Therese Parish, Southgate, has offered a Men’s Fellowship Group. Early Saturday morning we share in fellowship, prayer and reflection on Sunday Scripture.

This rhythm of life for the 40-plus men who have joined over the years is a beautiful thing. What has evolved in our meetings has become a great blessing to us all. This blessing is the presence of the Holy Spirit but also of everyone present, especially one man who faces more obstacles than most.

Paul Mohr and I were both kids at St. Therese School in the 1970s, and life happened in between. He returned to St. Therese in 2005 at the age of 43. Paul

had adventures in California and Connecticut, not all virtuous, but he never left his Catholic faith. In his words, he pursued worldly pleasures and treasures, but found that happiness fleeting. He was a fitness enthusiast, and in top notch shape. Working for the Federal Bureau of Prisons as a recreation supervisor and later as a teacher helping inmates earn their GED and teaching English to the Spanish speaking men. He spent five years in between discerning a call to the priesthood.

His journey brought him back home after a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis. His is the worst type — primary progressive. First detected in 2001, near the end of his time in the seminary, it is a disease that is very slow, very gradual but very constant with no end in sight.

VIEWPOINT



Ronald M. Bertsch

I want to tell his story because he is an inspiration. His life message is something I felt compelled to share, just like the light he shines, it must not be hidden.

Paul prays and delivers a reflection on the Sunday Scriptures he studies and prepares for two weeks leading up to each meeting. He does this because he makes the time but mostly, he finds immense joy in sharing his faith.

He finds blessings in everything, his sister Mary Lee, all his family, friends, past work, and excellent health and retirement benefits so important now. He is thankful for his mind, eyesight, hearing, and voice, although his vocal cords are weakening. Thankful he still has limited and shaky use of his left hand and his long arm to open a book or computer, answer a phone, turn on a radio or television. He finds it a blessing he has no wife or children so that he can devote fully to his vocation. He is thankful the MS is slow, as it has given him time to adjust gradually to the decline.

In his paralyzed state confined to a wheelchair or hospital bed, he is completely dependent on Carmel Manor staff, family and friends who come to visit. He cannot feed, bath, use the restroom, dress, scratch an itch, move his legs, torso, or right side at all. He has restless leg syndrome and scoliosis to add to his ailments. He views all this as merely inconveniences, it is for him an extraordinary opportunity God has given him to participate with Christ in prayer and the apostolate of redemptive suffering.

In all this suffering, Paul remains at peace, and always positive to be given this great blessing. He is at peace that the priesthood and his work in prison ministry, although good and beneficial in their own time, were not his call. God had another plan, a better plan for him. Paul prays daily for patience and the ability to continue in embrac-

ing his vocation and to see, accept and love himself. When first diagnosed, he briefly asked why me Lord, but quickly reversed that to ask, why not me? He recognizes the gifts God gives him; the countless blessings weaved throughout his entire life which he sees as preparing him for his great blessing. This blessing is hard, it doesn’t feel good, he is not sitting around smiling all day, but he says the joy comes in knowing he is doing God’s will as best he can.

Paul quotes Father Walter Ciszek, “Prayer doesn’t take away the physical pain or mental anguish, but it gives you a certain moral strength that allows you to bear any burden patiently.”

As I speak for all the men at fellowship group, we pray for Paul’s strength to continue to be with us, but he has been preparing us that his gradual decline will one day prevent him from participating. Paul has said many times, keep praying, take advantage of the gifts Jesus gave us in the Church, the sacraments in particular. Enjoy and accept the life and ministry God called us each to have.

Lastly, I recall something Paul once said visiting him at the nursing home. “My condition has removed many temptations of this world, riches, power, prestige, pleasures. All has been stripped, and for good cause. This blessing has given me humility foremost, and time and desire to prepare for the next life.”

Not all of us can say our life circumstances have removed temptations, but what a reminder it is to focus on the most important task. Christ opened the doors of heaven and has shown us the way Like St. Paul, our Paul today is helping remind us of our end goal.

Ronald M. Bertsch is director of Therapeutic Foster Care/Adoption for the DCCH Center for Children and Families, Ft. Mitchell.

Really want to end abortion? Then heal sexual brokenness

As pro-life advocates lament Ohio’s decision to enshrine abortion in its constitution, I’m reminded of a Catholic high school pro-life seminar I covered several months ago, and what it revealed about our incomplete approach to the issue.

The event brought hundreds of students in a dreary auditorium to hear ministry leaders earnestly describe their approaches to ending abortion — the only pro-life issue on the agenda.

Some panelists extolled prayer and sidewalk counseling at abortion clinics; others stressed providing impoverished, abortion-

vulnerable women with material support: housing, medical care, job training, etc. Another speaker urged the students to vote pro-life.

The teens listened politely but without enthusiasm. Then a Sister of Life took the microphone, walked into the audience and looked around at the students. “I want to tell you what the real problem is when it comes to abortion,” she said to them. “And that is, I just don’t think you know how much Jesus loves you.”

Suddenly, the teens were paying attention; in less than 10 seconds, that sister had hauled the pro-life issue from the mire of politics, social justice, religious infighting and sexual ideology, and placed it back where it belongs: at the feet of the Lord, in that small sacred space between Creator and creature.

Being pro-life wasn’t a matter of simply marching in demonstrations, collecting donations and hosting prayer vigils, the sister said. Rather, it flowed from understanding who we are in Christ, and what God’s intention is for our enfolded souls and for human sexuality.

In an era of profound sexual brokenness, Catholics desperately need to give such courageous and comprehensive witness. Without that, we cannot hope to end the scourge of abortion and every other attack on human dignity that manifests itself through the misuse of our sexuality.

The pro-life battle for hearts doesn’t start at the threshold of the abortion clinic, and it doesn’t end at courtrooms or state legislatures. Planned Parenthood founder (and ardent eugenicist) Margaret Sanger recognized the limitations of the law in regulating human sexual behavior. In “The Pivot of Civilization,” her 1922 manifesto for birth control she railed against “idealists and reformers who think that by the ballot society may be led to an earthly paradise.”

Everywhere, humans are struggling with deep sexual confusion and woundedness, and with deadly consequences. More than 64 million abortions have taken place in this country since the procedure was legalized in 1973. Globally, some 73 million abortions are performed each year. That’s about 6 million higher than the planet’s total annual deaths in 2022, and 5.1 million more than the current population of the nation of France.

Meanwhile, the pornographic industry in the U.S., which grew almost 12% from 2017-2022, rakes in over \$1.1 billion in annual revenue. Some 4.5 million people worldwide, many of them children, are exploited by sex traffickers. An estimated 736 million women (almost one in three) across the globe have experienced sexual violence, most commonly due to a spouse or intimate partner – and

that total does not include those who have been subjected to sexual harassment. In the U.S., 1.6 million people ages 13 and up consider themselves as transgender; almost one in five are ages 13 to 17.

None of that data mirrors what God had in mind when he gifted us with human sexuality. As Catholics, our faith challenges us to know and to do better, for ourselves and for humankind.

Before we can say we are truly pro-life, we need to undertake, both individually and collectively, a thorough sexual examen, and ponder the ways we have (or haven’t) stewarded our sexuality, regardless of our state in life.

We need to teach more effectively about chastity, which derives from the cardinal virtue of temperance and which enables us to attain an inner unity of body and soul.

We need to accompany our youth as they develop sexually, and not forfeit that task to Instagram.

We need to reach out to the single and the divorced, and to those who are confused about their sexuality, rather than leaving them to figure things out via TikTok.

We need to minister to those who have been sexually abused (whether by our own clergy or by others) and work to recognize potential abusers before they become offenders.

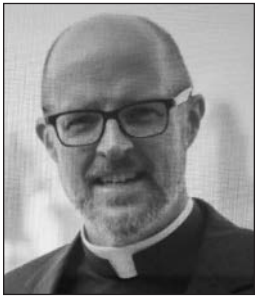
Mostly, as a society, we need to grow up, stop treating our gift of sexuality like a ramshackle playground and look at it from a holistic, “body, mind and spirit” — dare I say “trinitarian” perspective. We must demonstrate a little humility before our Maker; that we might stand tall in the fullness of our humanity, living out our dignity as sons and daughters of God — and ensuring that others can do the same.

Gina Christian is a national reporter for OSV News.

The tilt of reality, the Kingship of Christ and the Kingdom of God

The readings for The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe — Cycle A — are: Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Phillip DeVos

and Matthew 25:31-46.

In the novel, “The Dimensions of a Cave,” the main character, Quentin Jones, has a realization about a sinister reality he has uncovered, saying, “if objective reality tilts too far in its imperfection, subjective reality no longer has any meaning.”

A quick glance at the headlines shows us the sharp tilt of objective reality toward the imperfect — intractable wars, violence of the most terrifying sort, the loss of faith and struggles within the Church, among other things we might mention. With the tide of all that washing over us, we can experience a hollowness in our subjective reality. Within our soul. We go through our daily routine. We try to cling to our faith, but all that is good and true can feel jostled by this jagged tilt of reality.

I was thinking about all this in relation to the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. My first thought, was, “well if He is King, He needs to start doing a better job! Everything is a dreadful mess!” Our opening collect for Mass offers a corrective direction to my blame game: “Almighty, ever-living God, whose will is to restore all things in your beloved Son,” acknowledges that reality is damaged and reminds us that it is the Lord’s will to restore it because we cannot.

Accepting Christ’s Kingship as our norm beckons us to contemplate what we experience happening in the world and in the Church, where it feels like some load-bearing beam holding them both up is about to snap, leaving us with only a foggy, terrifying guess as to what comes next.

Failing to grapple with the exponential disintegration of a properly human culture, the loss of faith among large demographics within the Church, and the state of our own soul in relation to it all, will leave us overwhelmed by a totalizing cognitive and spiritual dissonance. The symptoms of that dissonance are shown when we serially prefer seeking comfort to truth; mistake cynicism for enlightenment and maturity; conflate power with wisdom; and confuse the passions of the present with the truth of everything.

Put plainly, it all just begins to feel like the faith we profess and what we try to live either is not true — or if it is it true — it does not seem to mean very much. Our subjective experience of faith starts to feel meaningless and listless. This brings to the fore what I think is at the heart of the spiritual malaise of our age: Anonymous atheism and the nullification of God.

This anonymous atheism and the consequent nullification of God is characterized by an emphasis on the immanent, the material, and the here and now. It is what the philosopher Augusto del Noce called irreligion, “where God has vanished from the horizon; where God has been exiled from the substance of our thinking and is, at best, treated like an afterthought or an add-on.”

The philosopher, Michael Hanby, has trenchantly noted concerning this phenomenon, that “‘Catholic atheism’ is not principally a question of intention, piety, or sincerity of belief but of the structural exclusion of God from our field of vision by the mostly unspoken assumptions that govern our world. Indeed, piety and sincerity serve largely to conceal this atheism from its adherents, making us the inverse of Rahner’s ‘anonymous Christians’: anonymous atheists who do not know ourselves.”

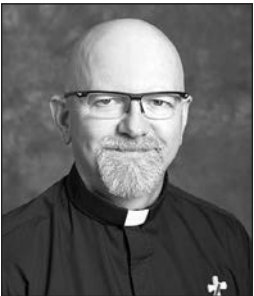
The celebration of the Solemnity of Christ the King carries within it a promise and a hope. As the prophet Ezekiel notes, the Lord God ... will look after and tend his

(Continued on page 20)

The risk and reward of faith

One of my favorite Gospel writings is the parable of the talents. There are so many layers to this and multiple ways for this parable to impact our lives. Each time I read it, I gain greater insight into my own life. It is a parable that calls for deep introspection.

VIEWPOINT



Deacon David Profitt

Recently, I was in a meeting with my Philadelphia Next Generation Parish that I have the privilege to lead through the pastoral planning process. We were doing an opening Gospel reflection on this parable and the priest was asking each person if they had used their talents in the way God intended? When he got to me, I said no because I knew there were plenty of times where I had failed to do so. But, I also said that this is the beauty of the love of God and the Church. I have the opportunity today to start over and do the best I can.

For me, this parable speaks, at least at this point of my life, to two distinct themes. First is our own human potential. That potential is a multi-layered understanding of who we are as people operating under the conditions in which we live. It speaks to the need to do the best I can in all the aspects of my humanity and those include my spiritual life, intellectual capacity, my expression of love of my fellow man and my physical being. When I am trying to be better each day in those aspects of my life, I move closer to my true human potential.

The second theme I see here is the concept of risk and reward. The two men who took their talents and multiplied them took some risk. It is the idea we all have heard that where there is no risk, there is no reward. This is not to say we should take unnecessary risk, but we also should not be afraid to stick ourselves out there when needed. This is particularly important when it comes to evangelization. We should be prepared to proclaim the truth of the Gospel whenever we can. That’s not a great risk because we know when speaking to the love of Christ and the great sacrifice he made for us, the Holy Spirit will be present to help us. Yet the rewards are great when we do that.

Some people are natural risk takers, not afraid to try

new things. Those people have a great trust in their abilities to accomplish great tasks that seem impossible to the average person. I think of the great adventurers who are well documented throughout history. There are also the business leaders and inventors who have put their reputation and beliefs on the line in the pursuit of some great accomplishment. We would not be where we are in the areas of medicine, technology and even sports were it not for those adventurous souls.

Then there are the martyrs of our faith, people willing to put their life on the line for the truth of the Gospel. They are the true risk takers, and we are all better off in the faith because of them.

I do consider myself a risk taker, though certainly not to the level of the heroes of our faith. But I do like to think that my risk taking is more inclined to following the will of God versus what the world tells me I should do.

Then again, that’s not really taking a risk is it? If God leads me to it, then he’ll get me through it. What it does require from me is trust, a trust that God has a greater plan for me than I do. That plan isn’t concerned with my status in the world. Instead, it is concerned with the state of my soul. That’s the most important aspect of our human existence, to get to the next life and share in the beatific vision in heaven.

The worst kind of risk to take is to reject the love of God. There is no winner in that one. That kind of risk has no reward and that’s where our need to share the truth of Jesus is so needed in the world today.

If we have the true love of God in our life, we need to be willing to share that. I know I’ve failed in that regard too many times but today is a new day. This is where using my human potential needs to be focused. To live my life to the fullest with a heart full of joy and a gratitude for the gifts I’ve been given.

Potential is only that if we don’t use it for good and use it to the fullest of our ability. Take some time today to reflect on your potential and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in how you should use it for the benefit our fellow man. The world will be a better place when we do. Each day that you wake up and see the ceiling, that’s a gift. It is a new day and opportunity for us to live out our lives in the way the Lord intended. Make the most of it.

Deacon David Profitt is a leadership consultant for the Catholic Leadership Institute and is assigned to Holy Spirit Parish, Newport.

outlaw all Jewish religious practice.

What resulted from each of these periods was the uprooting of Jews from Judea and the establishment of significant Jewish communities throughout the ancient world. Separated from others by language, culture, creed, and the demands of Mosaic law, Jews were subject to all kinds of myths and suspicions. Perhaps worst was the misguided notion that “the Jews” should be held responsible for the death of Christ. Even though the Blessed Virgin Mary and almost all the first Christians were Jewish, this has been used as the underlying rationale for cruelty against Jews across the centuries of church history.

Even Christians who know better often forget that at his crucifixion, Jesus was identified by his executioners as the “King of the Jews” (John 19:19-22). The Son of God was often identified as the Son of David, that is, the fulfillment of Jewish kingship. Those who consider the ramifications of that realize that it’s not enough to say that Jesus was Jewish. Jesus is still a Jew and always will be. The Incarnation of Christ in Mary’s womb means that Jewish humanity is seated at the right hand of the Father.

As Catholics, we owe a significant debt of gratitude to the Jewish people. Everything we believe is rooted in what God entrusted to and revealed through them. As Jesus himself reminds us in the Gospel of John, “Salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22b). And if we need a more specific list, St. Paul is more than happy to provide one. Saddened by his own people’s rejection of Christ, he states, “They are the Israelites; theirs the adop-

(Continued on page 22)

Catholics and Jews and Jesus, the King

As we slide toward the end of another liturgical year and the Solemnity of Christ the King, war in the Holy

CALLED TO HOLINESS



Jaymie Stuart Wolfe

Land is sadly dominating the headlines once again. So are reports of not just threatened but actual attacks against Jews around the world. To borrow from General Douglas MacArthur, it’s proof that old demons never die, and they don’t just fade away either.

But how should Catholics understand and interpret what is going on in our world?

The persecution of Jews is one of humanity’s oldest surviving “hate crimes,” though I hesitate to use that term. Long before Christians were crucified, stoned, beheaded, or thrown to wild beasts, the Jewish people were an object of scorn and discrimination.

Oppression and deportation began as early as 605 BC, under the Second Babylonian (or Chaldean) Empire. Less than 200 years before Christ, the Seleucids banned sacrifice, sabbaths, feasts, and circumcision and made owning a copy of their sacred writings an offense punishable by death. Things got even worse when Rome destroyed both the Temple and the city of Jerusalem in AD 70. And that was followed by Hadrian’s second-century attempts to

Student exchange program connects Benedictine schools

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Villa Madonna Academy, Villa Hills, shared the first few days of November with students from St. Bede Academy in Peru, Illinois. Both schools are among the 24 United States Benedictine High Schools, and the exchange program was created to allow the two schools to stay connected with one another.

The idea for the exchange program went into development before the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Benedictine Sister Eileen O’Connell, a theology teacher at Villa Madonna Academy and head of the academy’s exchange program. “The administrators had gotten together at a conference, and my principal and I were talking, what a great idea it would be if these kids could get to know each other and share and see what other Benedictine schools do,” she said.

Villa Madonna Academy exchanged students once before with a Benedictine school in Alabama prior to COVID, with “great results,” which led Villa Madonna Academy to invite St. Bede to send students this year.

“A hallmark of Benedictine schools is hospitality. All of us from St. Bede Academy experienced this hospitality in so many ways during the recent exchange with Villa Madonna Academy,” said Benedictine Father Ronald Margherio, chaplain at St. Bede Academy.

Students from St. Bede arrived on Wednesday, Nov. 1, and stayed with the Benedictines in their guest house until the following Sunday. Alongside their host students at Villa Madonna, these students shadowed classes, attended a dance Saturday night, and participated in stewardship activities like visiting the Newport Aquarium and Cincinnati Zoo— all following Benedictine hospitality and community.

Tommy Wenning, a senior at Villa Madonna Academy, said, “The exchange program was a great way to meet other students our age from a fellow Benedictine school. I made friends I won’t ever forget in the short time that they were here! I hope they enjoyed their time in our backyard

whether it was the Graeters, the zoo or the aquarium! I can’t wait to see what they show us in the spring, too!” He said, noting how the same students that hosted those from St. Bede will be heading to Illinois in the spring of next year to complete the “exchange” experience.

YaWen Yang, another VMA senior, said, “I really enjoyed the time with the exchange program, especially getting to know the students from the other Benedictine

school, I’m really glad that I got to show them our school and the Cincinnati area.”

The exchange was a huge success, according to Sister Eileen, who said that, now, she has “kids approaching (her) asking if they can be a part of the program, seeing how fun and how good I was— to make new friends from other parts of the country and have those kinds of relationships.”



Students from St. Bede Academy, Peru, Illinois, and Villa Madonna Academy, Villa Hills, visit the Cincinnati Zoo together.



United in Prayer

On a dark and drizzly fall evening, about 20 people gathered at the Goebel Park Bell Tower, Covington, Nov. 20, for the United in Prayer for Peace prayer service. The bi-monthly public prayer event is sponsored by the Benedictine Sisters, the Sisters of Divine Providence and the Sisters of Notre Dame. The early sunset lent the perfect backdrop for the prayer’s service reflection on light, how everyone is a light to the world and that because of violence in our world, too many people’s lives are snuffed out. (above left) Notre Dame Sister Marla Monahan, vicar for religious, lights a candle held by Divine Providence Sister Alice Gerdeman. (above right) Participants raise their candles as they are asked to experience the pain and suffering of the families of those who have lost loved ones to violence. The next United in Prayer for Peace has not been scheduled but is expected to be held in January. Follow the Sisters of Divine Providence, Melbourne, Kentucky on Facebook for an announcement.

'Fully alive' NCYC youth challenged to celebrate mysteries of faith, science and self

Natalie Hoefer
OSV News

Grace Stacker of the Diocese of Helena, Montana, pulled out her cellphone and called her dad, right in the middle of a talk during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC).

In fact, teens all around her were talking on their phones, even as the speaker stood on the stage. But they had his permission.

“I want you right now, in one minute, to just make a call to somebody in your life whom you love, who’s pretty special, whom you appreciate,” Scripture scholar and astro-physicist Father John Kartje asked of the more than 12,000 NYC participants, including over 250 teens from the Diocese of Covington.

The request came as part of his talk on the oneness of God and the universe — faith and science — that served as the topic of the opening session of NCYC in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 16.

He began the talk echoing words spoken by Archbishop Charles C. Thompson just moments before.

“The line that really struck me amongst everything he said is this,” Father Kartje noted: “You’re not a problem to be solved, but you are a mystery to be encountered.”

Archbishop Thompson spoke to the teens about this year's NCYC theme "Fully Alive" in a prayer service at the beginning of the opening session — after the teens had settled down from a rousing concert by Christian rock band for KING + COUNTRY.

He quoted his “favorite line” from Pope Francis’ encyclical, “*Laudato Si*”: “Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.”

“We heard that beautiful reading about creation from the Book of Genesis,” Archbishop Thompson said of the beginning of the prayer service. “But the ultimate part of that creation is when God created humanity, when God created us. We are part of that creation that’s been given life by the Spirit breathing into us, by the Word taking root in us, claiming us as his own.

“And so no one here is a problem to be solved, but is to be contemplated as a joyful mystery with gladness and praise.

“Whatever pains in our lives, whatever is going on, whatever hurts, whatever guilt, whatever fears, whatever anxieties, whatever it is — that does not define us.”

Rather, he said, we are defined by our identity in Christ, whose body, blood, soul and divinity is present in the Eucharist.

“The Eucharist has been given to us through the passion, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ so that we have life, that we have what is necessary to be witnesses

to the good news, what it means to be fully alive," Archbishop Thompson said.

“We are most fully alive when we live our lives not with ourselves at the center, but keeping Christ at the center. We are fully alive when we live for the glory of God and in service to others,” he said. “We gather tonight remembering that we belong to something greater than ourselves as children of God, created in the image of God. We have a dignity, a dignity no power on earth can take away.

“That’s why we can claim to be fully alive.”

Father Kartje picked up where Archbishop Thompson left off — speaking about the NCYC theme.

"If you talk about being fully alive, I can't think of a better way to get at what that actually looks like in our world today than to look at this interaction between faith and science," he said. With doctorates in Scripture and astrophysics, the current rector and president of the University of St. Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary in Mundelein, Illinois, is an expert on both topics.

He quoted John 1:3: "All things came into being through him. Without him, not one thing came to being."

“A hundred billion galaxies exist,” Father Kartje said. “That very same God of creation is the



Isaak photo

Bishop John Iffert has attended seven NCYC's but this was his first time attending and concelebrating Mass as a bishop. About this year's conference, Bishop Iffert said, "the conference was what it always is — a great shot in the arm, a joyful experience with young people coming together and meeting people from across the country, for them to reconnect and to be energized, to come to know the joy of the Church and that Christ loves them."

said.

God alive in our own bodies. The very same God that gives you the galaxies ... gives us the very life in our hearts."

Science and faith are both a way of looking at the world, he explained — one through the lens of a telescope, the other through the glass of a monstrance.

“The Eucharist you see through the glass of the monstrance gives us the ability to see the body and the blood of Christ in a way that doesn’t look like the body and blood of Christ,” Father Kartje

Meanwhile, through the new Webb Telescope “you can see the world that goes all the way back to Genesis,” he said. “It’s the world that goes back to the life that is in us. That is a monstrosity all its own, these beautiful images from the Webb Telescope, to look at them for who Jesus is precisely because he is the one through whom all of that glorious astronomy is possible.”

To gaze upon the universe or to gaze upon Christ in the Eucharist, said Father Kartje, “is literally to let yourself be gazed upon by the one who delights in your very existence.”


As for his request for the more than 12,000 youths to call someone they love, Father Kartje explained the connection to faith and science.

“The person you called is probably feeling loved right now,” he said. “The reason something special happened at that connection is because of what you see in the mon-
strance. That’s why Christ came into the world — the one who does all of this is love.”

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Natalie Hoefer, The Criterion photo

More than 12,000 youths, chaperones and volunteers stand as nearly 200 priests and bishops process in for the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference, Nov. 18, in Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis.

Bishop exhorts youths at NCYC closing Mass to choose ‘joy over fear’

Sean Gallagher
The Criterion

The joyful shouts of 12,000 Catholic teens from across the country echoed loudly during the two-hour closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

Bishop Joseph A. Espailat, an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New York, described the scene well during his homily in which he often led a loud call-and-response dialogue with the youths.

“Jesus, my sisters and my brothers, left us the best party! He left us the Eucharist,” Bishop Espailat shouted. “This is the party par excellence, man! You’ve got a front seat, buddy! This is good news!”

The congregation responded immediately with a deafening, “Amen!”

“Did you hear that? I think that was louder than a Colts game,” said Bishop Espailat from the floor of the stadium where the city’s National Football League team plays its home games.

Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minn., was the principal celebrant of the Mass. He was joined by 17 concelebrating bishops, including Indianapolis Archbishop Charles C. Thompson and Covington Bishop John Iffert and more than a hundred concelebrating priests.

While Bishop Espailat had many moments of fun and laughter during his homily, he also gave important messages to his listeners to take with them as they returned to their homes across the country.

The first was that they were called to put “joy over fear.”

In explaining this, Bishop Espailat distinguished between a “worldly fear that creates panic and anxiety” and “a holy fear, or fear of the Lord, [that] is a source of peace and happiness.”

“If we love God and know that we are loved by God, then why do we need to fear?” he asked his listeners.

Bishop Espailat then laid out three simple points he

wanted the young people at NCYC to take home with them.

“You’ve got to have faith,” he said. “You’ve got to have fun while you do it. And you need family and friends and community along the way.”

Bishop Espailat added that the faith to which he exhorted the youths involved more than simply affirming that God exists.

“It’s not just about believing in God,” he said. “It’s accepting what God gives us, especially through the Church, and then responding by our actions by how we treat each other and the way we live.

“Faith is critical because it leads us to joy. And joy overcomes worldly fear because it leads us outside of ourselves.”

During his homily, Bishop Espailat quoted from Pope Francis’ 2013 apostolic exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium” (“The Joy of the Gospel”), in which the pontiff wrote that all believers have the “mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing” (#273).

Regarding the blessing mentioned by the pope, Bishop Espailat asked his listeners with a smile to raise their hands if they knew how to curse at people.

Many in the stadium predictably raised their hands.

They also cheered loudly after Bishop Espailat told them that “if you know how to curse, you know how to bless. If you know how to curse, you are following what the enemy wants you to do. That’s what the devil wants. But God doesn’t want you to curse. God wants you to bless. So, instead of cursing somebody out, we need to bless people up.”

In closing his homily, Bishop Espailat called his young listeners to take up the mission given to them by Christ in their baptism.

“We are the now of God,” he said. “NCYC, we are counting on you. Jesus started with 12 Apostles. We have 12,000 here today. So, we can change the world.”

A long, loud cheer filled the stadium in response to Bishop Espailat’s call. As the cheer died down, the bishop

gave a parting blessing.

“God bless you. God keep you. May he continue to let his face shine upon you. And always remember: have faith, have fun while you’re doing it. And remember, hold on to the Church, because the Church is holding on to you.”

The raucousness of the 35-minute homily later gave way to quiet, emotional and heartfelt prayer during Communion as the house band played such popular contemporary Christian meditative songs as “Yeshua” and “Lord, I need you.”

As the Mass closed, the rejoicing returned, with flashlights on smartphones lighting up the floor and stands in the stadium. When the closing procession was over, the band began playing upbeat music and teens rushed forward to celebrate as close to the stage as they could get.

Zach Spahr, a member of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Indianapolis, was proud that so many of his Catholic peers from across the country had come to celebrate their faith.

“There are a lot of times when I think that Indy is not really the best place,” said Zach in a concourse of the stadium after the liturgy. “But then you see something like this and it’s like, ‘What a great place to live.’ There’s a little bit of pride.”

He spoke about how he, as a Catholic, sometimes feels alone at North Central High School in Indianapolis where he’s a student.

“So, seeing that there are so many other Catholics across the country is important to me,” Zach said.

The jubilation of the 12,000 young Catholics at the closing Mass confirmed that conviction in Ean Nelson, a sophomore from the Diocese of Des Moines, Iowa.

“It was something like I’d never seen before,” he said of the closing Mass. “It’s something that I’ll never forget. It was cool being able to see that I’m not alone.”

For Ean, NCYC “was life-changing.”

“I’m going to be more aware of myself, more happy and full of the Lord.”

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Parish Kitchen needs your help. **Parish Kitchen needs new sleeping bags and new blankets for guests.** Many of our brothers and sisters spend these long winter nights in unheated spaces or outdoors. Your gift of new sleeping bags and blankets will not only warm their hearts and souls but may even save their lives. Donations can be dropped off at Parish Kitchen, 1561 Madison Ave., Covington, 8 to 11 a.m., Monday thru Friday. The drive is held Nov. 15–30. Any questions call 581-7745.

The Bishop Brossart High School Cheerleaders will host a **Skyline Chili Spaghetti Dinner** Nov. 26, 2-7 p.m. at BBHS in Hegenauer Hall. All you can eat \$15; split the pot and raffle baskets.

Bishop Brossart High School invite alumni and friends to a morning of **Mustang Magic**, Dec. 1, beginning with Mass at 6:45 a.m., St. Francis of Assis Chapel. After Mass, 7:15 am a light breakfast will be served in the cafeteria along with an opportunity to mingle and jingle. For information or to RSVP, contact cschroder@bishop-brossart.org.

The Newport Central Catholic drama department will perform **“Santa Spikes the Eggnog (and Other Family Secrets)”** by A.K. Forbes, Dec. 1 and 2, 7 p.m. in the school’s Ciafardini Family Black Box Theatre. Tickets are \$5 and can be purchased at <https://gofan.co/app/school/KY6479>.

Thomas More University Department of Creative Media presents **“Christmas Carol Untold”** Dec. 1 and 2, 7:30 p.m. and Dec. 3, p.m. When the ghost of Charles Dickens hijacks a local production of “A Christmas Carol,” holiday hijinks ensue. Be one of the first to see the world premiere of this brand-new holiday play written by Northern Kentucky playwrights Zach Robinson and Alexx Robinson specifically for Thomas More University. Intended for audiences 15 years of age and

over. General admission \$10; free for current Thomas More students. Purchase tickets at tmuky.us/tmtheatre.

The **International Nativity Display** will be showcased every Sunday in December, 10 a.m.–4 p.m., at Bishop Brossart High School, Alexandria, featuring nativity sets made by artists and craftsmen from 82 different countries with 200 nativities on display. Admission is free and open to the public. Handicap accessible.

Newport Central Catholic is offering a **two-hour course designed to help prepare any eighth grader for the High School Placement Test (HSPT)**. The same HSPT prep course will be offered on two different days, Dec. 3 and Dec. 5, 4:30-6:30 p.m. Cost \$20 and includes printed course materials. Pre-register and pay: <https://gofan.co/app/school/KY6479>. Day of registrations will be accepted, and payment can be made by cash or check.

Women’s Advent Day of Recollection with the New York Sisters of Life is offered free of charge by St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs, women’s Friends in Faith, Dec. 9, 9 a.m.– 3:30 p.m. Lunch is provided. Check-in at church starts at 8:30 a.m. Register by Dec. 5 to mamamet@yahoo.com and include name, phone number and any dietary restrictions.



Treats for Troops

Third grade students at St. Joseph School, Cold Spring, came up with an idea to distribute all the candy that was left over from a too cold Halloween. They decided to donate to soldiers who are keeping people safe. The students invited their friends and peers to collect wrapped candy and bring it in to donate to Soldiers’ Angel Treats for Troops!



Prepare for Sunday Mass
Nov. 26 — Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe (Matt 25:31-46)

This last Sunday of the liturgical year celebrates the feast of Christ the King. This year’s Gospel looks at the Last Judgment, where there is only one criterion: our acts of compassion. Jesus identified with the hungry, thirsty, lonely, sick, naked and imprisoned. He resides in the least of these. We serve Jesus when we serve them.

What can you do to help the hungry, thirsty and lonely?



OSV Illustration/Ted Schluender-fritz

Christ is king!

Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is king of the universe and reigns with love and mercy. Find the matching pairs of crowns above.



‘Holy Moments’

Immaculate Heart of Mary School, Burlington, is focusing its school theme on Matthew Kelly’s book “Holy Moments.” The book and theme are bringing students, parents and teachers together to discover how they can create holy moments in their lives.



(left) Students from St. Henry District High School shared inspiring quotes that have stuck with since their return from NCYC:

“If we want to be alive, we cannot be afraid,” said Cami Spellman.

“Love is not an ‘extra’ in our lives, it is our lives,” said Maddie Ritchie.

“Prayer knows no boundaries and extends to one’s enemies,” said Sophie Ernst.

“We were made in love, by love, for love, to love,” said Mikah Breetz.

“You carry my weakness, my sickness, my brokenness all on your shoulders,” from music group For King and Country, said Olivia Wulfeck.

“You are not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be encountered,” from Father John Kartje’s homily, said Keylee McDaniel (see related article page OPENING#)

(below) Jake Kleier, Religion teacher, and students from Covington Catholic High School arrive for Mass at Lucas Oil Stadium. “NCYC was such a moving weekend. It was so powerful to be a witness to our faith with 12,000 other youth while we all worshipped God together,” said Mr. Kleier.



(above) Deacon Jim Fortner and Father Michael Hennigen process in for the NCYC send-off Mass at Covington Catholic High School. Both also accompanied the youth to the conference in Indianapolis.



(above) Isaak Isaak, co-director, Office of Catechesis and Evangelization; St. Joseph the Worker Sister Patricia Jean Cushing and Deacon Jerry Franzen are three of the many adult leaders who have been a part of the diocese’s Youth Ministry for decades. NCYC 2023 was no exception.

(left, from left) Emerson Heim, Ollie Bentley and Alex Code from Bishop Brossart High School met other Catholic high schoolers from around the nation while trading hats at NCYC. This is a tradition that serves as a fun conversation starter for teens. Ollie Bentley said, “The speakers and the music made it feel like Jesus was being revived in me.”



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HEALTH AND WELLNESS 2023

SPECIAL SECTION OF THE MESSENGER
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*‘Beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.’*

Psalm 23:2

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Have you been to the club?

St. Charles Community Contributor

Have you been to the club? Charlie’s Club that is! If you haven’t, you really should stop by, especially if you’re look-



Seniors at St. Charles Community’s “Charlie’s Club” play bingo.

ing for a place to spend a day or two with other folks who come here to enjoy the warm, friendly environment including breakfast, lunch and lots of attention. And while folks are enjoying themselves at the Club, their family members are running errands or going to work. By the way, did you know that Charlie’s Club has been providing day-time care for senior adults and much needed respite for their full-time caregivers since 1986? That’s right— Charlie’s Club has been here on the St. Charles Campus, just off Kyles Lane, for thirty-seven years. So, if you think you, a family member or friend might find Charlie’s Club to be just what you have been looking for— call us at (859) 331-3224 and, ask for Charlie! Or, maybe you should ask for Misty Marcum. (Charlie is having too much fun to come to the phone!)

The Eucharist is the “source and summit” of Christian life—hospitals need extraordinary ministers to bring it to the hospitalized

Maura Baker Staff Writer

For the better part of the past two years, Deacon Tom Murrin has served as the chaplain at St. Elizabeth hospital, Fort Thomas. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the hospital had a number of Eucharistic ministers, a pool of mostly retired people, who brought the Eucharist to those hospitalized. “When COVID hit,” Deacon Murrin said, “we were told that we could not have outside people coming into the hospital—so, we lost our pool of Eucharistic ministers, and we’re trying to get them back.” Not necessarily the same people, Deacon Murrin explained, as many of those who served pre-COVID were in their 70’s and decided not to return to ministering following the pandemic, but instead, St. Elizabeth is seeking new ministers to bring the Eucharist to those who are sick and hospitalized. “We do have a shortage of Eucharistic ministers,” said Deacon Murrin, “All three of the hospitals— Florence, Edgewood and Fort Thomas— are in need. Beth Schopf, a retiree and parishioner of St. Philip

Volunteer Contact for Eucharistic Ministers

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Florence (859) 212-5375
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parish in Melbourne, was one of the people who responded to the call for ministers— having seen a message in her parish bulletin earlier this year. “It’s very humbling to be able to bring Jesus to people,” Ms. Schopf commented, “I find people are very receptive— the majority want to receive Communion when they’re in the hospital. I’m happy that I am able to do that for them.”

She continued, saying, “there’s no better gift we can take to them for healing.” Eucharistic ministers in hospitals need to be approved ministers in their parishes, explains Deacon Murrin— confirmed adults, but those interested in volunteering can contact the volunteer coordinator at their local St. Elizabeth hospital. The Eucharist is the “source and summit of Christian life,” Deacon Murrin said, quoting the Second Vatican Council. “It’s rewarding to bring people the Eucharist. Eucharist is part of the healing of people.”

‘Play reminds us of joy, the joy of the Lord’

Father Patrick Kelly, SJ Catholic News Service

What difference does a Catholic approach to sport make? Such reflection will benefit not only Catholics but also the wider culture and sport itself. The following are four themes from the Catholic heritage that can make a difference in how Catholics and others approach sports.

Play is accepted in cultural expressions and taken seriously intellectually.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, there can be “a virtue about games.” For him, virtue had to do with moderation. A person should not work or study all the time, but needs time for recreation, which play and games provide. For Thomas, play is not merely the “pause that refreshes” so that the person can get back to work and be more productive. Rather, it is engaged in for its own sake. As he put it, “the only thing that is sought in play is the soul’s delight.” The enjoyment of play does have an end, however, and that is the restoration and re-creation of the human person. Thomas’ thought had a significant influence on late medieval preaching about games and sport and on Catholic education up to the present. The “play ethic” of Thomas needs to be retrieved and developed in our time, as sports are increasingly regarded instrumentally as means to the end of money or prestige, and the play element is being marginalized or lost altogether.

The human being is created in the image and likeness of God. This understanding of the human being is the foundation for the emphasis in Catholic social teaching on the unity of the human family. The popes have emphasized that sports competitions provide the opportunity for people from different cultures, races and religions to encounter one another as members of the same human family. Bishop Bernard J. Sheil, who founded the Catholic Youth Organization in Chicago in 1930, is a good model in this regard. In one of the most segregated cities in the United States, the CYO from the start welcomed athletic participation by all and provided a context for young people from different socioeconomic, racial and religious backgrounds to encounter one another. Cardinal Blase J. Cupich has called for a revitalization of the CYO in Chicago as a way to bring young people of different backgrounds together and address discrimination, poverty and gun violence. This understanding of the human being is also the foundation for the emphasis in Catholic social teaching on the dignity of the human person. According to the popes, the dignity of the person needs to be front and center when it comes to the consideration of sport practices and policies. As St. John Paul II put it, “sport is at the service of the person, and not the person at the service of sport.” He pointed out that sport serves the person when it leads to

(Continued on page 18)

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Staying healthy this flu season

NKYHealth
Contributor

It's COVID, cold and flu season, that time of year when noses run, bodies ache and people become overwhelmed with a general feeling of "blah." The good news is, there's help. With some common sense and a few tips, you can get well and stay healthy.

The first thing you need to know is that COVID is still here, and it's not going away. It's no longer a national health emergency, but it is part of the respiratory illness scene. Each year it will produce variants that we will have to deal with, just like the flu. And it can still be dangerous— even deadly— to those who are elderly or immuno-compromised, just like the flu. So the approach of the Northern Kentucky Health Department is to bring COVID into the mix and categorize it as part of an expanded COVID, cold and flu Season.

While many of the tips to fighting COVID, colds and flu might fall under the category of common sense, it helps to be reminded of what to do. In general, just take it easy. No matter how hard you try to ignore or pretend you don't have the viruses, they aren't going away. They have to run their course. If you don't rest and give your immune system the strength to fight, it just might take even longer.

Otherwise, here are six tips to keep you healthy or help you recover.

Get a vaccine. Vaccines are safe and proven effective. They can help prevent you from getting sick, or at least minimize the duration and effects of your illness.

Stay home. If you don't feel well, help yourself and protect others by staying home. Curl up under a blanket. Drink some tea. Take a nap. You'll feel better, and your coworkers and friends will thank you for not sharing your germs.

Keep it clean. Good hygiene is always a good practice, but it's especially true when you're sick. Cover your cough or sneeze. Wash your hands often. Clean commonly touched surfaces. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Take (Over the) Counter Measures. Numerous over-the-counter medicines exist that can help ease the symptoms of COVID, colds and flus, from fever reducers to nausea medicine to pain relievers to help with body aches. Identify your symptoms and then search the pharmacy shelves.

See your doctor. If your symptoms don't improve within a week, schedule a visit (or Zoom call) with your doctor, who may prescribe something stronger than OTC medicines. Only you know when you've reached that point.

Protect Others. Nobody likes isolating. Nobody likes not being able to socialize. Certainly nobody likes wearing masks. But nobody also likes knowing they were the one who got someone else sick, especially if that person is vul-



nerable. Think of others. There will always be another party of family gathering.

You can learn more at [NKYHealth.org/covid-cold-and-flu](https://www.nkyhealth.org/covid-cold-and-flu), including how to tell if you have COVID or the flu, where to get vaccinated, and even a flu fighting guide for parents.

Holiday hope

Linnemann Funeral Homes
Contributor

What is hope? "Hope is an optimistic state of mind that is based on an expectation of positive outcomes with respect to events and circumstances in one's life or the world at large."

Holidays can be particularly difficult for individuals who have lost a loved one, especially within the first year of their passing. During a time when everyone is expected to be joyful and celebrating, those who are grieving may experience feelings of sadness, loneliness and depression. The sense of loss is wherever you look. Decorations in stores, advertisements on TV and radio programs filled with stories and songs of togetherness and love— all these things can stir up a multitude of emotions. Every person you meet asks that one question you dread hearing: "What are you doing for the holiday?" While most people can't wait for the holiday to arrive, you can't wait for it to be over.

It's crucial to recognize that the holiday season may be challenging and devise a strategy to manage it healthily. Ignoring the holidays shouldn't be an alternative. Therefore, when dealing with them, be proactive and plan ahead. Release any expectations of what you or others believe you "should do" and focus on what you genuinely need.

During the holiday season, these tips can bring hope and peace to you and your family.

Be gentle with yourself. This holiday season will be different than any other year.

Accept your limitations. You can't do it all. Allow others to help you with holiday tasks.

Give yourself permission to feel good, to laugh and even to have fun.

Take care of yourself physically. A grieving body is more susceptible to illness and needs proper nourishment and rest. Your body needs these things to restore and support your physical, mental and emotional energy.

Be mindful of substance consumption. Excessive use of drugs or alcohol will only postpone the painful feelings, not eliminate them. Be cautious not to overindulge in order to bury your pain.

Confide in someone. Consider having an escape plan in

place in case you feel the need to leave a gathering. Share your plan with a trusted friend or relative for support.

Find a special way to memorialize your loved one that is meaningful to you. Give a toast before the family meal, light a candle in their honor, play their favorite music or game, cook one of their favorite dishes, read a poem, hang an ornament, give a donation or volunteer in their memory to a cause or charity that was important to them.

During this season, it's essential to keep in mind that other family members are also grieving. Therefore, it's necessary to give each other grace when emotions arise and offer comfort and support. Have open conversations with your family about your needs and allow others, including children, to express their needs as well. During this holiday season, may you come together to find hope and healing as you lean on one another while honoring your loved one.

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The St. Charles Senior Resource Center services provide service for NKY seniors and families

St. Charles Community
Contributor

St. Charles Community, sponsored by the Sisters of Notre Dame, has been a leader in providing services for Northern Kentucky's seniors and their families for over 60 years. A major focus of the St. Charles' ministry has always been to give back to the greater community and to identify and strive to meet the current and pressing needs of seniors and their families. In keeping with this focus, two years ago St. Charles expanded beyond its Farrell Drive campus, to establish a Senior Resource Center in Latonia to assist seniors and their families in navigating the maze of senior services and to help them access the services that meet their individual needs. The reality is that this is not something people think about until the need becomes personal and immediate.

Almost daily, Margie Volpenhein, LSW, and Brittney Landers, Senior Resource Liaisons, who staff the Center, have seen an increase in the number of persons seeking assistance. In these past two years, the Senior Resource Center has served over 1,000 seniors and their families. In addition to providing education and hands on assistance, the Center also sup-

plies, free of charge, needed personal care items and equipment that many cannot afford—the major requests have been for mobility and adaptive devices such as walkers, wheelchairs, shower chairs and safety bars. Alarming, many persons come to us in need of food, because they lack the knowledge or ability to access entities that could meet this need. In these cases, the Center helps to supply food while educating the person in need, how to access food banks, Meals on Wheels, etc. The Center's staff says that although their role involves being confronted multiple times a day with the reality of great needs, they consider themselves very blessed to have the opportunity to minister to seniors through patient listening, timely assistance, and most of all, through compassionate understanding.

The St. Charles Senior Resource Center's services are free of charge, and staff can be reached by phone, email or by stopping in at the Center, located at 3705 Winston Ave., Latonia, Ky. The Center is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. through 4:30 p.m. Our phone number is (859)261-0746. Our email address is Seniorresource@stcharelscommunity.org.



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Handling grief during the holidays and beyond

Colonial Heights Senior Living
Contributor

The Holidays can be hard to get through during the best of times. The hustle and bustle can be overwhelming. Family and yearly traditions, expectations, social events and “cheer”, the Season can blindside you. You can lessen the emotional impact by being prepared.

If you have experienced the recent loss of a loved one, there are tools that can help enable you to not only survive the coming holidays, but also to face them with a measure of peace and assurance.

At many Senior Living Communities, they are very cognizant of trying to temper the holidays with understanding and patience. At Colonial Heights Senior Living, a Northern Kentucky Senior Community, they have begun a Grief Share group that has made a difference in lives of our residents, as well as our community at large.

It starts with a luncheon and a Grief Share session right before Thanksgiving. It is an opportunity to have a meal together and share their stories. This is a tradition that began for residents and they have recently opened it up to include the public.

This program has been so successful that after Colonial Heights’ Holiday Seminar, Colonial Heights will provide a weekly Grief Share Support Group for people grieving the death of a family member or friend.

At Grief Share you will discover:

- How to handle the overwhelming emotions.
- Where to find the strength to go on.
- What to expect in the days to come.
- How to grieve in a way that is healthy and suited your needs.

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The family at Colonial Heights have faced the death of a loved one before and you can be assured that there is real help because they really do care as you face tough, debilitating emotions. You are grieving deeply because you loved deeply.

You will make it through and you can find comfort, healing and hope again, even amid the grief, pain and tears.

Taking the step to come to Grief Share at Colonial is difficult, but it may be one of the best decisions you will make as you seek to survive and heal from grief.

To obtain more information about this program please contact our Wellness Director, Pam Asher at (859) 525-6900 ext. 104.

Sacrament of the sick: Amazing grace

David Gibson
Catholic News Service

Sickness can be nothing less than dumbfounding. Perhaps without warning it strikes a friend or relative, someone who last month appeared entirely healthy. Its arrival stuns us.

Initially we may feel helplessly at a loss, neither knowing what to do, what to say to this person or how to say it. The sacrament of the anointing of the sick is for people like this — all of them, though in different ways.


First, it is a healing force for good in the life of someone who is seriously ill. Anointing a sick person with the oil of healing and peace petitions God to strengthen, comfort, encourage and even heal the person.

Second, when the sacrament assembles a small community of friends, relatives and others around a sick person, it serves them all by giving voice to their natural desire to ease suffering. The sacrament enables them to stand alongside their suffering friend and to join in coping with the confusions, pain or shaken hopes a serious illness can bring.

Personally, I never knew anyone who found this sacrament’s celebration anything less than wonderful. Even the parent of a teen whose life hung in the balance due to a dire, life-threatening injury, described how uplifting, comforting and inviting the sacrament was.

Mercifully and thankfully, that child survived and thrived.

The very existence today of this sacrament shows that the sick remain a central concern of the Church community and are not meant to be ignored or pushed aside. When sickness prevents someone from coming to the Sunday Eucharist, the Church’s ministers to the sick come



ANOINTING OF THE SICK

“Each time that we celebrate this sacrament, the Lord Jesus, in the person of the priest, comes close to the one who suffers and is seriously ill or elderly.”

– Pope Francis

to them.

The reason for this is clear in Scripture. Jesus went out of his way to comfort, speak with and heal the sick and people suffering from physical conditions that caused others of that time to ignore them or ostracize them.

The Gospels show that Jesus did not relegate profoundly ill people or others living with serious disabilities to a life apart.

Thus, he noticed the blind man who “used to sit and beg” at the Pool of Siloam in what today is Jerusalem. Speaking to the man, Jesus told him to “go wash” in the pool, which the man did. He “came back able to see.”

(Continued on page 16)



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Sacrament of the sick

(Continued from page 15)

Later, Jesus went again to look for the man and speak with him. It seems the man was ridiculed and pushed aside — barred from the pool area due to his statements about Jesus (John 9:1-39).

The importance Jesus accorded to sick people was noted by St. Peter in a speech in the city of Caesarea, according to the Acts of the Apostles (10:38). Peter explained that Jesus “went about doing good and healing” oppressed people.

A Scripture reading from the Gospel of Luke that might well be heard during a celebration of the sacrament of the sick tells of Jesus curing many people “of their diseases” and sufferings (7:18-23). In this reading John the Baptist sends two of his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” Jesus responds:

“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: The blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.”

In early Christian times the epistle of James accented the importance of an anointing for the sick (5:13-15). It asked, “Is anyone among you sick?” If so, it continues, “he should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint (him) with oil in the name of the Lord.”

The sacrament of the sick continues the healing work of Jesus. This sacrament puts into practice the Christian community’s great concern for human well-being, including both spiritual and bodily health.

Often the sacrament of the anointing of the sick is misunderstood, thought of as a sacrament for the dying only. True, the sacrament may be celebrated together with holy Communion for the dying that is known as viaticum or food for the journey.

The sacrament of the sick, however, is not reserved to those nearing death. Actually, it expresses hope for healing and recovery. So people with serious illnesses of many kinds receive the sacrament, including those who are injured, face serious surgery or suffer emotional illnesses, for example.

The sacrament of the sick expresses Christ’s healing care and kindness toward people who are sick and suffering. But what kinds of healing are meant?

Recovery from an illness or physical condition is one kind. But a healing of the spirit within that gives rise to renewed hope and trust in God, as well as to the quieting of anxiety and fear, also is meant. And could the sacrament’s celebration lead to the mending of relationships?

Care and kindness, after all, are dynamic. Many dying people themselves have become models of care and kindness toward others.

Christ’s care and kindness tend to spread, to expand in amazing ways.

November: A season of resting before the Lord

Margaret Rose Realy
OSV News

Not quite past autumn, but not yet winter, November is a difficult month to describe. Dried grass fronds and flower heads full of seeds sway in the late fall breeze, the berries and fruits of trees and shrubs glisten with frost. This is the month when nature goes dormant, a time to be wrapped in restfulness. Summer has ended and all that remains are the products of a season now past.

I remember in early summer the abundant bright-magenta blossoms of the Prairie Fire crabapple that is now adorned with deep red pomes, and it makes me mindful of how the flowering of moral virtues helps produce our fruitfulness.

As I go about the garden and fields collecting ripened seeds for next year’s growth, there is an anticipation of sowing goodness; a lovely metaphor from Our Lord for spreading his word.

The thing about being a sower, as a farmer or a gardener, is understanding all that took place in order to produce the fertile seeds that I now hold in my hand. We gather them from plants that had been successfully developed and grown before us. We know what the seed’s purpose is, what



fruit it will produce, and how it will feed us in body or spirit.

As with our great ancestry of Catholic saints, there was a desire by those men and women who endeavored before us to determine what needed to be grown, and how to make the growth more abundant. They tried to strengthen them, over time, or further develop what is not yet “just right” — just as we do with those virtues that by grace are planted in our soul.

If a plant expresses dormancy — a state of resting, a time of minimal activity — it will have worked through a productive season and developed fruit and seed; it must rest. Many organisms require this cycle of “downtime.” Without it the future holds reduced productivity and

impaired vitality — plants don’t flower; animals become obese and people distraught. Dormancy is the time when roots expand; when the overt activities of life decrease, and we become grounded in the soil of purpose.

This is when the true purpose of dormancy develops in us and our lives of faith. It is the time after we have prepared the soil of our soul and planted the seeds that Our Lord has given us to sow. We’ve worked, yoked to the Holy Spirit, and pulled the weeds, strengthened what was weak, watered with the word, and shared what was produced for the spiritual health of others.

Now, like the plants, we rest from active production (our evangelizing work), knowing that the seeds we’ve gathered that are to be sown merely await the movement of the Lord. We are in a fallow season, and all the work we’ve done, whether in the garden or in our soul, settles in for a period of dormancy and becomes the dream for future growth. When we will again “Sow for yourselves justice, reap the reward of loyalty; break up for yourselves a new field, for it is time to seek the LORD...” (Hos 10:12)

We work, we pray, we contemplate, and, by doing so, we grow ever deeper our roots of faith. Our ability to produce good results is greater from these periods of inactivity; for we gather ourselves before the Lord, seeking out his embrace and awaiting the next season and its fruitfulness.

Margaret Rose Realy is a Benedictine Oblate and the author of “A Garden Catechism: 100 Plants in Christian Tradition and How to Grow Them” (OSV, 2022).



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Mother Teresa’s essential lessons for living

Amy Welborn
OSV News

No modern figure has been more revered as a saint in life, so the rapid progress of Mother Teresa’s cause from her death to her canonization within two decades came as no surprise.

From the day Mother Teresa rode on a train in India in 1946 and heard Jesus Christ tell her, “Come be My light,” her life was a steady answer to that call until her death Sept. 5, 1997. Pope Francis canonized her in 2016. With her Sept. 5 feast day, the church honors St. Teresa of Kolkata for committing herself to bring the light of God’s love to the poorest of the poor.

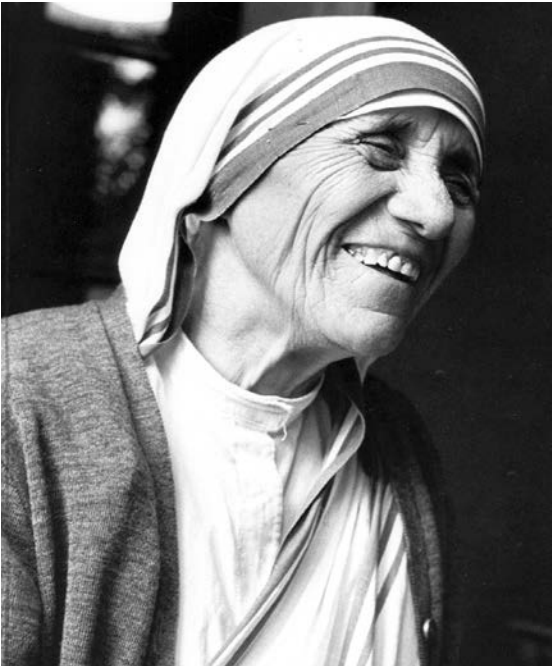
Her response has borne great fruit, as we can see from the continued ministry of the Missionaries of Charity with the dying, the destitute, the orphans and the rejected. But Mother Teresa would not want our reflections on her life to stop with appreciation of what others have done in her name. As she said many times, God desires to work through each one of us. When we reflect on her life, we are really seeing how any of us — if we allow God to fill our hearts and guide us — can change the world, one life at a time.

She was born Agnes Bojaxhiu Aug. 27, 1910, in Yugoslavia, of Albanian parents. In 1928, she joined the Sisters of Loretto and traveled to Ireland for formation. Soon after, she was sent to India to teach in her order’s school for girls in Calcutta (officially renamed Kolkata in 2001, four years after her death).

In 1946, then-Sister Teresa was traveling to a retreat when she experienced a “call within a call” from God to follow him in a new direction. “The mission was quite clear,” she later told a biographer. “It was an order: I was to leave the convent. I felt God wanted something more from me. He wanted me to be poor and to love him in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor.”

Sister Teresa became Mother Teresa, foundress of a new religious order, the Missionaries of Charity. Teresa left her old motherhouse with only a few coins in her pocket, began dressing in traditional Indian attire — a white sari with a blue border — and moved to the poorest section of Calcutta. She obtained some basic medical training and opened a school. Within a year, she had been joined by several of her former students, and in time, they embraced the ministry for which they are most well known today: the care of the dying.

At the time of her death, the Missionaries of Charity ministered to the poor throughout the world, from Calcutta to Baghdad to New York City. They continue to touch the lives of thousands with the love of Jesus, bringing his light to those whom the world would like to forget.



OSV News photo/CNS file, Dwight Cendrowski

St. Teresa of Kolkata smiles during the opening of a Missionaries of Charity convent in Detroit in 1979. Her feast day is Sept. 5.

much to learn from them. They teach us about human dignity, patience and wisdom. It is, as Mother Teresa said, a privilege to live with and serve the poor.

It is tempting to turn away from the difficulty of suffering, to let someone else handle it, to hope it will go away. Sometimes we are even tempted to take pleasure in the suffering of others or, at the very least, rest complacently in our belief that suffering was unavoidable or even deserved.

But when we listen to Jesus, when we see how Mother Teresa put flesh onto his words and what joy it brought to the suffering, even if for only the brief moments before they passed from this life, how can we continue to think this way?

By the 1970s, Mother Teresa was famous. Books had been written about her; documentary films had been made about her; and she had received numerous important awards. We live in an age of celebrity, and perhaps some think that Mother Teresa’s importance lay in her fame, or in the big things she had done, because today, that is what we value: huge achieve-

ments, powerful institutions and a wealth of attention. But Mother Teresa’s life and message always stood in complete opposition to this modern sensibility. From the day she took the first dying person into her room in Calcutta, she was a witness to the importance of the small gesture and simple acts of care, performed with great love. In a world that values productivity, health and usefulness, Mother Teresa’s care for the dying seems kindly, but of doubtful use, perhaps even a “waste.” But that is the way the world sees it. Through the eyes of Mother Teresa, each dying person is a precious child of God in need of love, no matter how close death might loom.

Cleansing a wound, sharing food, pushing a wheelchair, or simply being present to another: acts that will not inspire headlines or make a profit, but small acts that are precious because they are “something beautiful for God.”

The suffering that Mother Teresa and her sisters have dealt with is extreme. Over the years, many have traveled to Kolkata to serve with the Missionaries of Charity, doing valuable work and building up other foundations and ministries of the order around the world.

Mother Teresa, however, always made it clear that there is no need for any of us to travel across the globe to follow Jesus. She said, “You can find Calcutta all over the world, if you have eyes to see. Everywhere, wherever you go, you find people who are unwanted, unloved, uncared for; just rejected by the society — completely forgotten, completely left alone. That is the greatest poverty of the rich countries.”

There are many kinds of hunger besides physical hunger, Mother Teresa constantly reminds us. Even those who are well fed suffer from loneliness and hurt. There are many kinds of suffering — physical and spiritual — and many kinds of darkness. This is where the love of Christ can shed light, and why Mother Teresa said, “Do ordinary things with extraordinary love.”

Amy Welborn is a freelance writer living in Birmingham, Alabama. She is the author of many books on faith and spirituality for children, teens and adults.



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Catholic Church ‘never despairs’ of souls lost to suicide

Gina Christian
OSV News

When his 29-year-old daughter Katie died in 2016, Deacon Edward Shoener shared a heartrending truth in the obituary: she had taken her life amid a long-running struggle with depression.

“(She) fought bi-polar disorder since 2005, but she finally lost the battle,” wrote Deacon Shoener, who serves at the Cathedral of St. Peter in the Diocese of Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Nov. 18 marks International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day, dedicated to those who wrestle with the complex and often silent grief of having lost loved ones to suicide. Ahead of the observance, Deacon Shoener told OSV News the Catholic Church needs to be on the frontlines of addressing suicide and mental illness, and understanding their impact on individuals and loved ones.

After his daughter’s obituary received national attention, Deacon Shoener said he “heard from literally thousands, if not tens of thousands of people ... predominantly Catholics, saying, ‘The church needs to step up and be more involved in mental health ministry, and support the people that have lost someone to suicide.’”

Part of that mission is spreading awareness of the profound comfort those who have lost a loved one to suicide can find in church teaching on the issue — something Father Chris Alar, a priest of the Marians of the Immaculate Conception and superior of the order’s U.S. and Argentina provinces, has been doing for several years.

Father Alar, whose grandmother took her life several years ago, co-authored the book “After Suicide: There’s Hope for Them and for You” with fellow Marian Father Jason Lewis.

While the Catechism of the Catholic Church stresses that suicide is “gravely contrary to the just love of self”, Father Alar told OSV News that “if somebody does make that wrong choice, it should not cause us to despair.”

He pointed to the Catechism’s observation, in paragraph 2282, that “grave psychological disturbances,

anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide.”

As a result, the three conditions for a sin to be mortal explained by the catechism — a grave matter committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent — are usually not met in cases of suicide, Father Alar said.

“Most people who take their life probably don’t have free will,” said Father Alar. “They have some kind of mental illness or some kind of depression or anxiety.”

Deacon Shoener and Bishop John P. Dolan of Phoenix — who himself has lost three siblings and a brother-in-law to suicide — are also working to bring the light of Catholic faith to bear on the issue of mental illness, and now lead the Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers as president and chaplain respectively.

The organization, under the patronage of Our Lady of Lourdes, is a lay association of the Christian faithful whose members seek to be “a healing presence in the lives of people with mental illness,” and to “see Christ in those who live with a mental illness,” according to its website.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is one of the leading causes of death, with almost 49,450 individuals taking their own lives in 2022, an increase of 2.6% from the year prior. Most of those who die by suicide are male, although suicide among females rose 3.8% in 2022 to 10,194 individuals.

Overall, more than one in five U.S. adults live with a mental illness, with one in 25 of them experiencing serious conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or major depression, and with over one in five young people (ages 13-18) gripped by a seriously debilitating mental illness, according to the CDC.

Deacon Shoener and Bishop Dolan assisted in developing the recently launched U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ National Catholic Mental Health Campaign launched Oct. 10 to coincide with World Mental Health Day.

While the campaign is still in its early stages, one of its initial goals is simply to “encourage people to recognize

this illness not as a condemnation, not as a punishment, but something that is to be touched by the Lord and embraced by the community,” Ukrainian Catholic Archbishop Borys Gudziak of Philadelphia, who chairs the USCCB’s Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, told OSV News just before he updated the bishops on the campaign Nov. 15 during their fall plenary assembly in Baltimore.

Overcoming the stigma attached to mental illness and to the grief of suicide survivors is essential, Deacon Shoener said.

“Katie’s not defined by her illness or manner of death,” he said. “She’s a beautiful child of God and loved by Christ. We need to do better and we need to drop the stigma, and stop discriminating against people that live with these illnesses.”

Father Alar said he himself wrestled with that stigma at his grandmother’s death by suicide.

“I was still in college, so I was old enough to understand the impact but young enough to still be very influenced by it,” he said. “I really was carrying baggage, because I didn’t even pray for her at the time she died. I was more concerned with the reputation of the family and the scandal that this was going to cause.”

Yet God’s mercy is still present when a loved one chooses suicide, said both Father Alar and Deacon Shoener.

Father Alar cited section 2283 of the Catechism, which states that “we should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives,” since “by ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance,” and therefore “the Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives.”

Deacon Shoener said that when he ministers to those mourning a suicide loss, “the first thing I tell them (is that) their loved one still very much exists ... albeit in a different state of existence.

“I pray for Katie all the time,” he said. “And I think anyone who’s lost someone to suicide can be assured that they’re loved by God ... and we can pray for them.”

Play reminds us of joy

(Continued from page 12)

his or her integral development.

The human being is a unity of body, mind and spirit.

Because the person is a unity, embodied activities such as sport necessarily affect persons at the level of consciousness — their making of meaning, understanding of themselves and their relationships with others. It will also affect them at the level of spirit, that dimension of the person that makes one capable of relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Educational institutions should provide opportunities for young people to reflect on how playing sports is affecting the way they understand themselves, their relationships with others and the meaning of their lives. The element of joy associated with play is particularly important to attend to with respect to their spiritual lives. As Pope Francis said, “Play reminds us of joy, the joy of the Lord.”

As it stands, most schools in the U.S. tend to operate out of a body-mind dualism, with athletics and academics having little or nothing to do with one another. We don’t typically ask young people to reflect on the embodied activities in sport that many of them are spending a great deal of time engaging in.

The human being is social by nature.

We are meant to live in community and it is in the context of community that our gifts are recognized and called forth. When team sports are practiced within a Catholic institution where community values flourish, there can be a symbiotic relationship between sports participation and the educational mission of the school.

Former Villanova basketball coach Jay Wright points out that the Villanova mission statement says that the university seeks to reflect the spirit of St. Augustine by having “mutual love and respect ... animate every aspect of university life.”

Wright said that this isn’t the sort of language one usu-

ally associates with a competitive athletic program. “But it is exactly these principles of love and respect, of compassion and serving others, that give Villanova a certain something special that sets it apart.”

Experiences of playing on a team with communal values can help young people to appreciate the importance of commitment to the common good and to persons who are excluded, discriminated against or living in poverty.

Jesuit Father Patrick Kelly is an associate professor of religious studies at University of Detroit Mercy. His article has been supplied by Catholic News Service.

CNS photo/Matt Cashore, courtesy University of Notre Dame
Arike Ogunbowale of the University of Notre Dame women’s basketball team cuts a piece of the net after Notre Dame defeated Mississippi State 61-58 April 1, 2018, in the championship game of the Final Four of the NCAA Tournament in Columbus, Ohio.



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■ Tuesday, Nov. 28, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Tuesday, December 5, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial

■ Tuesday, December 5, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Tuesday, Jan. 9, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

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The tilt of reality, the Kingship of Christ

(Continued from page 5)

sheep and the Lord will rescue them from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark.

The restoration in Jesus Christ we long for on this solemnity is the overcoming of those divisions between faith and life; between the world and Christ; between ourselves and grace. In “making all created things subject to His rule ... He might accomplish the mysteries of human

redemption” through our glorying in obedience to the commands of Christ, so we would become whole in every way through our communion with the realm of God, Christ’s Kingdom.

This realm is “an eternal and universal kingdom, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, and a kingdom of justice, love, and peace.” Thus,

anchored in this realm, the tilt of objective reality bends back toward God and our subjective reality is filled anew with the ultimate, eternal meaning that is the charity, unity and peace of the Kingdom.

Father Phillip W. DeVous is pastor of St. Charles Borromeo, Flemingsburg and St. Rose of Lima, May’s Lick.

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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.

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Obituary

Sister Marylyn Ehrman, S.N.D.

Marylyn Kathleen was born into the loving family of George and Helen Ehrman, Oct. 31, 1931. She was the second oldest of five children. Her father was an engineer for the L&N Railroad and her mother was a full-time homemaker. Her family was a very happy one, and early in life Marylyn was taught to share, make sacrifices, and help those in need.

Marylyn attended Holy Cross Grade School, Latonia, Ky, and Notre Dame Academy High School, Covington, Ky. She originally wanted to become a nurse and raise a large family, but God had other plans. He touched her life with many different signs and so she entered the Sisters of Notre Dame, taking her profession of vows Aug. 17, 1957.

She received her B.A. from Villa Madonna College and her Master of Education from Xavier University.



Sister Marylyn Ehrman, S.N.D.

Sister Marylyn served for many years in elementary and junior high grades as teacher, principal and secretary.

After many happy years in education, Sister Marylyn requested a change in her ministry and was asked to go to St. Claire HealthCare (St. Claire Medical Center) in Morehead, Ky. Sister wondered what God was going to ask of her next. She soon found out. At the hospital, Sister Marylyn began working in the Business Office. She also decided to register for a course in Clinical Pastoral Education, which she found to be interesting and very challenging. Soon a part-time position opened

in pastoral care, and the director asked Sister if she would like to be the center's chaplain. She felt this was a direct call from God.

Sister Marylyn also volunteered to help the men in the detention center receive their GED. She was always willing to make personal sacrifices to help others improve their lives and reach their full potential.

Her one desire was to bring Christ to those in need. She considered it a true blessing to share with others the gifts God has so generously given to her. Later sister retired and returned home to Covington, helping in community service at Rosedale Manor as a Eucharistic minister. There she visited many residents bringing them daily joy and companionship.

She was among the first sisters to move to the St. Charles Community, where she made many friends and blessed them with her presence.

Sister Marylyn went home to God surrounded by her family and sisters on Nov. 11, 2023. Sister will always be remembered by her quiet nature, sincerity, compassion and contagious smile.

May her love with which Sister Marylyn served her God give her eternal happiness with him forever! May she rest in peace.



The background of the Eucharistic Prayers

Father Luke Spannagel
USCCB

What is the background for the Eucharistic Prayers? We begin with what Jesus himself said and did. Father Guy Oury writes, "According to St. Paul and Saint Luke, Jesus 'gave thanks' (1 Cor. 11:24; Lk 22:17). According to Saint Matthew and Saint Mark, he 'said [a] blessing' (Mt. 26:26; Mk 14:22). The two expressions are equivalent. They designate a blessing prayer of thanksgiving that was customary among the Jews. The ritual of the Passover meal, which may have been the setting for the institution and first celebration of the Eucharist, included such a prayer" (*The Mass*, p. 92-93). If we look through the Gospels, we will see Jesus often giving thanks. This reminds us of the word *Eucharist*, which means thanksgiving!

As Edward Sri observes, "Scholars have noted that the Eucharistic prayer has roots in the Jewish table prayers recited at every meal. Near the start of the meal, the father of the family or the one presiding over the community would take bread and speak a blessing (*barakah*) which praised God, saying: 'Blessed are you, Lord, our God, king of

the universe, who has brought forth bread from heaven.' The bread was then broken and given to the participants, and the people began eating... When the meal neared its conclusion, the presider prayed a second and longer *barakah* over a cup of wine. This blessing had three parts: 1) *praise* of God for his creation; 2) *thanksgiving* for his redemptive work in the past (for example, the giving of the covenant, the land, the law); and 3) *supplication* for the future, that God's saving works would continue in their lives and be brought to their climax in the sending of the Messiah who would restore the Davidic kingdom" (*A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, p. 93). Doesn't that structure and content sound familiar? Sri goes on to say that this pattern was found in early Eucharistic prayers and is still present today. We also see this pattern in the writings of St. Justin and St. Hippolytus.

It makes sense that Jesus prayed in the pattern of the Jewish people of his day. What was different, and what changes these prayers for us, is when Jesus said, "This is My Body. This is My Blood." As Fr. Oury continues, "In his blessing prayers, and especially the one he spoke on the eve

of the Passion for the institution of the Eucharist, Jesus went beyond the blessing prayers of his contemporaries. He referred to more than the benefits of creation or the blessings of the history of salvation in the Old Testament. He showed the promises fulfilled in himself... At the Last Supper Jesus left his disciples a memorial of his covenant. He left them certain actions to be perpetuated: breaking and distribution of bread, presentation of the cup, together with the words of institution" (*The Mass*, p. 94).

Knowing more about the Jewish background can be a great help to us in understanding customs and references we find in the Scriptures as well as seeing how many prayers of the Mass took shape. Above all, this background can help us understand even more clearly the longing for the Messiah and the amazing gift that Jesus is as he is truly present with us! As we continue our journey through the parts of the Mass, the notes of thanksgiving and praise will continue to be present, as well as ongoing reminders of how Jesus is truly present with us and why the Mass is such a unique and perfect prayer of praise to the Father. Challenge for the week: See how many times you notice "thanks" present in the Mass!

‘Poverty is a scandal,’ pope says; Christians must use gifts for charity

Catholic News Service

The material, cultural and spiritual poverties that exist in the world are a “scandal” that Christians are called to address by putting their God-given capacity for charity and love into action, Pope Francis said.

The poor, whether “the oppressed, fatigued, marginalized, victims of war,” migrants, the hungry, those without work or left without hope, “are not one, two, or three, they are a multitude,” the pope said during a Mass celebrated for World Day of the Poor Nov. 19 in St. Peter’s Basilica.

“And thinking of this immense multitude of the poor, the message of the Gospel is clear: let us not bury the wealth of the Lord. Let us spread charity, share our bread, multiply love,” he said. “Poverty is a scandal.”

Among the 5,000 who filled the basilica for Mass were homeless persons and other people in need who were seated in the front rows near Pope Francis. After celebrating Mass and praying the Angelus, the pope ate lunch in the Vatican audience hall with some 1,250 people, continuing a tradition he began on the first World Day of the Poor in 2017.

Seated at a central table, the pope prayed that God would bless the food and “this moment of friendship, all together.” On the three-course menu were ricotta cheese-filled pasta tubes, meatballs and tiramisu for dessert.

This year’s World Day of the Poor, the seventh edition, drew its theme from the Book of Tobit: “Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor.” In the week leading up to the world day, the Vatican extended the hours and operations of a medical clinic it runs near St. Peter’s Square dedicated to caring for anyone in need.

In his homily at the Mass, Pope Francis said that Christians “have received from the Lord the gift of his love and we are called to become a gift to others.” Archbishop Rino Fisichella, the Vatican organizer of the world day, was the main celebrant at the altar.

Reflecting on the day’s Gospel reading from St. Matthew, in which Jesus tells the parable of a man who buries the money given to him by his master rather than seek to multiply it, the pope lamented the many “buried



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Francis greets a woman and child during a lunch in the Vatican audience hall Nov. 19, 2023, the World Day of the Poor.

Christians” who hide their gifts and talents underground.

Mercy, compassion, joy and hope, he said, “are goods that we cannot keep only for ourselves.”

“We can multiply all that we have received, making life an offering of love for others,” the pope said, “or we can be blocked by a false image of God and because of fear hide underground the treasure we have received, thinking only of ourselves, without becoming passionate about anything other than our own comforts and interests.”

Pope Francis said that just as the master in the Gospel reading returned to his servants to “settle his accounts” with them, people must prepare for Jesus’ coming at the end of time in which he “settles the accounts of history

and introduces us to the joy of eternal life.”

“We must ask ourselves, then: How will the Lord find me when I return?” he said. The pope referenced the writings of St. Ambrose, who wrote that upon his return Jesus will ask, “Why did you allow so many of the poor to die of hunger when you possessed gold to buy food for them?”

The pope also urged people to be mindful of poverty’s “modesty,” noting that “poverty is discreet, it hides. It must be us to go look for it, with courage.”

“Let us pray that each of us, according to the gift we have received and the mission entrusted to us, may strive to make charity bear fruit and draw near to a poor person,” he said.

Parishes play ‘vital role’ in bringing Christ to the world, say bishops

Gina Christian

OSV News

Parishes play a “vital role” in bringing Christ’s transformative love to the world, said two U.S. bishops as a key document on social ministry marks its 30th year.

“Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish” was approved by the U.S. Catholic bishops in November 1993 and continues to serve as a roadmap for parish social ministry.

The document’s title points to Jesus’ likening of the disciples to salt and light, called to season and illuminate the world with the Gospel message (Mt 5:13-16).

“Three decades after its release, we see the enduring importance of this guiding document,” said Archbishop Borys A. Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Bishop David J. Malloy of Rockford, Illinois, who in mid-November completed his

three-year term as chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on International Justice and Peace.

“We continue to invite faith communities to integrate social ministry throughout the life of the parish, and to take up the call to be communities of salt and light, forming and sending the faithful to protect the least of these,” said Archbishop Gudziak and Bishop Malloy in a statement issued Nov. 20.

The statement noted that updated resource pages, available in both English and Spanish, have integrated Pope Francis’ teaching with the original document. Also available are new prayer and educational materials, including an interactive assessment tool to help parishes implement their social ministry initiatives.

While preceded by major pastoral letters on several issues, “Communities of Salt and Light” was the U.S. Catholic bishops’ first effort to specifically address what they called “the crucial role of parishes” in the church’s social ministry.

“We are convinced that the local parish is the most important ecclesial setting for sharing and acting on our Catholic social heritage,” since “the parish is where the church lives,” said the bishops in the document.

Parish social ministry “has clear biblical roots,” and “especially in the Hebrew prophets and the life and words of Jesus,” wrote the bishops.

In “Communities of Salt and Light,” the bishops stressed that “our faith is profoundly social,” since “we cannot be called truly ‘Catholic’ unless we hear and heed the church’s call to serve those in need and work for justice and peace.”

At its heart, the church’s social teaching “is the life, dignity and rights of the human person,” they said.

Social ministry should not be a separate component but rather “an integral part of the entire parish,” woven “into every aspect of parish life— worship, formation and action,” said the bishops in the document.

Catholics and Jews and Jesus

(Continued from page 5)

tion, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; theirs the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5).

Antisemitism has continued to rise around the world for the past decade, but what has unfolded since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israeli civilians demands our attention and response. This month, most of us likely didn’t observe the 85th anniversary of Kristallnacht, the Nov. 9, 1938, “night of broken glass” orchestrated by Nazi leaders against Jews in German-controlled territories. That night, 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps. It was the first mass arrest of Jews. Kristallnacht signaled a change. Antisemitism that had

been expressed socially and by words exploded in acts of terrorism and violence.

October 7 may be our generation’s Kristallnacht.

Our most important response is more personal than public. There is no room in Catholic hearts for hatred toward Jews. If we view God’s chosen people as enemies, if antisemitism is something we have been taught, we must repent of it. Of course, that doesn’t mean we should be silent about ongoing injustices in the Holy Land, or war crimes that may be committed by Israel or any other country. Nor should we harbor hatred toward Muslims or anyone else. Our calling is love.

The world can be ugly yet hope remains. Jesus Christ, King of the Jews, is also the supreme ruler of heaven and earth. He is still on the throne. His kingdom is justice and peace, and his reign eternal. And it can begin here and now in every human heart.

Jaymie Stuart Wolfe is a Catholic convert, freelance writer and editor, musician, speaker, wife and mom of eight grown children, loving life in New Orleans.

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National/World

Haiti hospital attack shows ‘those most in need’ pay price of violence

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — A recent attack on a hospital in Haiti underscores the desperate condition of that nation’s civilians, a Catholic Relief Services official told OSV News. The Fontaine Hospital Center in Cité Soleil— an extremely impoverished area of Haiti’s capital, Port-au-Prince— had to be evacuated Nov. 15 after armed gang clashes enveloped the facility. More than 100 patients— among them, 40 children including several newborns— fled the building, escaping in armored police vehicles to a private facility as gang members riddled hospital walls with bullets and set neighboring houses on fire. The hospital is one of the few medical facilities left in the ravaged area. Over the past few years, Haiti has spiraled into what the United Nations office in Haiti called a “catastrophic spiral of violence. In July 2021, Haitian President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated, exacerbating Haiti’s multiple, sustained crises such as political instability, natural disasters, foreign intervention and international debt. “Ultimately, the people paying the price for this violence are those who are most in need,” said Jennifer Nazaire, the country representative for Catholic Relief Services in Haiti. With “many people” in Haiti continuing to “struggle daily to obtain the basics like food and healthcare, “the increase in violence and the targeting of places that are normally considered a refuge, like hospitals, is deepening a humanitarian crisis that is already making daily life a constant challenge,” she said.

Destination Dubai: Pope heads to climate conference to press for action

VATICAN CITY — When Pope Francis visits Dubai in the

United Arab Emirates Dec. 1-3 to address the opening of the U.N. Climate Change Conference, he will be the first pope ever to attend one of the global gatherings that began in 1995. The visit marks yet another unique effort by this pope who— in honor of his namesake, St. Francis of Assisi— has made caring for creation a hallmark of his pontificate and has repeatedly reminded people that actions speak louder than words. His presence, anticipated speech and private bilateral meetings at the 28th conference, known as COP28, will add further strength to his many urgent appeals that nations reduce greenhouse gas emissions, transition swiftly to clean energy sources and compensate countries already harmed by the effects of climate change. Pope Francis made his hopes for COP28 clear in “Laudate Deum”: “May those taking part in the conference be strategists capable of considering the common good and the future of their children, more than the short-term interests of certain countries or businesses. In this way, may they demonstrate the nobility of politics and not its shame.”

Latino group forms young adult Catholics in faith, creates community, promotes education

CHICAGO — Iskali, a Chicago-based organization dedicated to empowering and supporting young Latinos through faith formation, has supported and inspired hundreds of Hispanic Catholics and is now in places like Wisconsin and Indiana, but its founder Vicente Del Real told OSV News, it all started with a small step. Del Real founded Iskali as a small group in 2010. After a parish retreat at St. Charles Borromeo, in Melrose Park, Illinois, he asked his pastor if he could “start something new for young (Latino) people born in the United States. The pastor said yes, and Iskali was born— organizing annual retreats, creating lay discipleship communities, or implementing a faith formation program. For four years, the organization started attracting more participants from all over Chicago and Del Real opened up Iskali to other parishes. The amalgamation of faith formation with the development of nurturing personal relationships and professional development has resonated with over 1,500 young adults— primarily second and third-generation Latinos— who have seen their lives transformed through the organization.

Spanish cardinal urges calm, protests mount over separatist amnesty

MADRID — The president of the Spanish bishops’ confer-

ence has appealed for calm following mass protests against the planned release of jailed Catalan separatists under a deal with the new socialist-led government. “I’m asking political leaders and opinion formers to do everything possible to lower the social tension— to work at all times for the general interest,” said Cardinal Juan José Omella of Barcelona. “Any deal that modifies the status quo agreed by Spaniards under our 1978 constitution should have the consensus of all political and parliamentary forces, and support from a qualified majority of society. Otherwise, such pacts will lead only to greater division and confrontation.” The cardinal spoke Nov. 20 at the opening of the Spanish bishops’ Madrid plenary, which will confirm reparation payments for victims of clerical sex abuse. The amnesty law for Catalan separatists was agreed to in early November by socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez in return for support from Together for Catalonia party and Republican Left. It will free hundreds of separatists and law enforcers jailed after an October 2017 Catalan referendum on independence was ruled illegal by the Constitutional Court, sparking prolonged violence. However, 70% of Spaniards, including a majority of Socialist Party voters, opposed the amnesty in a September opinion poll, while police, judicial groups and civil and business associations have warned it could fuel new independence demands.

Annual collection to help elderly men, women religious to be held Dec. 9-10

WASHINGTON — Most U.S. dioceses will take up an annual collection Dec. 9-10 to help approximately 24,000 elderly religious sisters, brothers and religious order priests pay for retirement necessities, including health care. Through the National Religious Retirement Office, the Retirement Fund for Religious collection supports religious men and women who historically dedicated their lives to church ministries, often with little to no compensation. Consequently, many men and women religious have insufficient retirement funds, especially in the face of rising health care costs. NRRO data show 6% of reporting religious communities say they have sufficient retirement funding. The collection raised \$27.6 million last year, with more than \$975 million raised since the collection began in 1988. However, the annual expense of supporting elderly religious sisters, brothers and priests has been more than \$1 billion since 2009.

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The St. Andrew Novena: Prayerful preparation for Christmas

Anna Wilgenbusch
OSV News

Ten years ago, Erika Kidd sat at the edge of a family member’s hospital bed. It was almost Christmas; wind buffeted the window. Quietly, she recited the St. Andrew Novena over and over again.

“Hail and blessed be the hour and moment in which the Son of God was born

Of the most pure Virgin Mary, at midnight, in Bethlehem, in the piercing cold.

In that hour vouchsafe, I beseech thee, O my God, to hear my prayer and grant my desires Through the merits of Our Savior Jesus Christ, and of his Blessed Mother. Amen.”

It is a curious novena. Unlike a traditional novena, which spans nine days, it lasts from the feast of St. Andrew on Nov. 30 to Christmas Eve. On each of these days, it is repeated 15 times, either all at once or throughout the day. The novena has a reputation for answered prayers.

The prayer recalls the “hour and the moment” of Christ’s birth “at midnight, in Bethlehem, in the piercing cold.” It evokes, with precision, the moment the Incarnation is revealed. For Kidd, the darkness at the moment of Christ’s birth was reminiscent of the darkness of the cold hospital room.

“Waiting in the hospital, I felt myself to be in those dark moments, just before the arrival of Christ,” Kidd said. “And I prayed that he would come and set all things right. I prayed that he would come and save us.”

Her request — that her family member return home in time for Christmas — was answered. Prayers of thanksgiving trod on the heels of her novena.

“The prayer invites us to take seriously the darkness of our current situation: The fact that Christ has not yet come again in glory, the fact that we are often living with difficult

and troubling situations, and it invites us to welcome Christ and rejoice in Christ’s coming,” said Kidd, an associate professor of Catholic studies at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, who teaches a class on Mary.

For Father Edward Looney, president of the Mariological Society of America, the St. Andrew Novena is “prayerful preparation” for Christmas.

“We can be caught up in the busyness in preparing for Christmas — going to concerts, shopping, all of these things — but at least this prayer allows us to stay rooted and grounded, and to think about what it is and why it is that we are celebrating Christmas,” said Father Looney, author of the 2022 book “How They Love Mary: 28 Life-Changing Stories of Devotion to Our Lady.” The priest, of the Diocese of Green Bay, Wisconsin, also hosts the “How They Love Mary” podcast. In December 2022, he posted a video on



YouTube of the 15 repetitions of the novena, hoping to popularize the novena and facilitate the process of praying it.

It can be difficult to keep track of the prayer’s 15 daily repetitions; however, some Etsy sellers aim to remedy this with bracelets for tracking the devotion. Even if a person misses a day or prays less than 15 repetitions, Father Looney said that the novena is still efficacious.

“There can be a specific grace that you request, but then I think there are just the different graces of the Christmas season joy, hope, peace,” he said. “The joy of the incarnation — that is what we are praying for.”

Father Looney said that what we pray the novena for might be answered in a different way than we expected.

“There is always going to be a grace given by God. We believe, in our finite knowledge, that we know what God should do. But God, who is greater than us and knows all things, knows what is for our good or their good,” he said. “God is still at work, and God is aiding that situation.”

The prayer has an obscure history. Rachel Fulton Brown, an associate professor of medieval history at the University of Chicago and an expert in medieval Marian devotions, said that the repetition of 15 has a long tradition in the church.

While the monks of the Middle Ages ascended into the chapel, they recited the 15 psalms traditionally associated with Mary — Psalms 119-133 in the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible prepared by St. Jerome. Over time, these 15 psalms became associated with the stairs that the 3-year-old Mary ascended into the temple as recorded in the “Protoevangelium of James,” an apocryphal, or non-scriptural, Gospel account from the second century that describes the infancy of Mary. Although the text does not specify the number of steps, the monastic tradition associated each psalm with a step into the temple.

Brown said that the St. Andrew Novena’s 15 repetitions likely stem from this tradition.

She also noted many evocations of traditional Marian devotion in the words and phrases of the text. The word “piercing,” for example, has roots in the medieval understanding of the Incarnation, she said.

“One of the things that the medieval imagery likes to do is to show Christ as the light-beam. There is a lot of meditation, at the Incarnation, on how he can enter into Mary like a ray of sunlight through glass,” said Brown. “They make all of these beautiful windows in cathedrals to show that he passes through her like a crystal, taking light on without breaking her, so she is still virginal.”

Brown said that there is evidence that the novena sprung from a movement to revive church tradition in the 19th century. This movement attempted to repopularize texts such as the “Protoevangelium” and monastic traditions like a Marian version of the Liturgy of the Hours.

Sister Joseph Maria of the Holy Family, prioress of the cloistered Dominicans of Our Lady of the Rosary in New Jersey, had not heard of the St. Andrew Novena before she entered religious life.

Her novice mistress encouraged her to pray the novena. She now prays it every Advent in the silence of the convent.

“Just the act of praying it for so long, it does really help prepare you for the birth of Our Lord,” she said.

She prays the novena so much during Advent that she said she does not bother to count to 15.

“I probably pray more than is needed each day,” she said. Before praying the Divine Office, when working around the convent, and while brushing her teeth, she silently repeats the St. Andrew Novena, over and over again.



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