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MESSENGER

Serving the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky since 1926

Join Bishop Iffert on an 11-day pilgrimage to Greece ‘In the Footsteps of Paul the Apostle’

Laura Keener
Editor

Have you ever wanted to visit Greece to walk in the footsteps of St. Paul? If so, Bishop John Iffert is inviting 44 travelers to join him on a pilgrimage to Greece. The 11-day trip includes a 3-night cruise through the Greek Islands and Turkey. Travelers will depart from the Northern Kentucky/Greater Cincinnati Airport, Oct. 22 and return home Nov. 1.

Noting that St. Paul is the patron of the Diocese of Covington, Jim Hess, director, Stewardship and Mission Services for the Diocese of Covington, said, “We wanted to pick something for the first pilgrimage Bishop Iffert is leading that would be meaningful to the diocese and special for people who would go on it.”

Mr. Hess said that many people have asked him if Bishop Iffert was going to be leading any pilgrimages. Bishop Iffert enjoys traveling “and he sees the value of making a pilgrimage and wants that to be a part of his ministry of the Diocese,” Mr. Hess said. Mr. Hess has contracted Collette travel agency to manage the details of the pilgrimage, including reservations, air and land travel, hotel stays and some meals.

When asked what’s the difference between a vacation and a pilgrimage, Bishop Iffert said, “It’s the end. It’s what you want to get out of it. When I travel I’m looking to see beautiful things, I’m looking to meet people, I’m looking to see art, I’m looking to see architecture. You do a lot of the same on a pilgrimage, but the end is to worship and to be inspired to worship by these places of Christian history that you encounter.”

On this pilgrimage, in the footsteps of St. Paul, “we will be in those places where the early churches who heard the preaching of Paul gathered. We’ll be in those places where when the Church moved outside of the cradle of Jerusalem, these are the earliest churches where the fire of the Gospel caught on, we’ll be there on that ground,” said Bishop Iffert.

Bishop Iffert said that we are always connected to the saints, whether you’re in Covington or Greece or anywhere in the world, but visiting the places where the saints lived, “reminds us of that connection,” Bishop Iffert said.

Other differences of a pilgrimage would be the way a person travels, leaving behind some of the luxuries and making time for prayer during the trip and in preparation.

“I think it’s always good to pre-read a bit about the area that you’re visiting,” said Bishop Iffert. “Not just historical knowledge, but especially if we can connect to



In the Footsteps of St. Paul Pilgrimage to Greece

Spiritual Reflection

On this journey, feel the spirit of the New Testament as you walk in the footsteps of the great apostle St. Paul, patron of the Diocese of Covington. Experience the places where Paul lived and preached, gaining a deeper understanding of the biblical narrative.

Highlights of the Journey

3-night Cruise: Sail through the enchanting Greek islands of Mykonos, Patmos and Santorini.

Ephesus, Turkey: Explore the ancient Roman city that played a significant role in the life of Paul the Apostle.

Acropolis in Athens: Stand in awe of this iconic symbol of ancient Greek civilization.

Corinth: Discover the biblical town where Paul stood before the tribunal and explore the Agora and the Bema.

Philippi: Visit the place where Paul delivered his first sermon in Europe and baptized Lydia, the first Christian.

Dates

October 22 to November 1, 2024

Cost

Base per person rates: Double \$5,490; Single \$6,490; Triple \$5,440

Information contact

Collette
1-800-581-8942
Refer to booking #1221094

Second Sunday of Advent, Dec. 10



(top) Ephesus in the modern-day province of Izmir, Turkey, is where St. Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians.

(above center) Dark, sandstone pinnacles rise abruptly from the plain of Thessaly, with six historic monasteries perched upon their peaks.

(above) The fabled island of Santorini, known as the “Black Pearl of the Aegean,” is one of the featured stops on the three-day cruise through the Greek Islands.

the spiritual life that has been lived there, to the life of the saint who has marked that place.”

Bishop Iffert said that he also enjoys being part of a group. “It just builds those bonds,” he said. “You’ve experienced something that is a movement of faith in your life and you feel like you have a connection with those people for a long time.”

For anyone who can’t make this particular trip but want to join Bishop Iffert on a pilgrimage, know this is not a one and done experience. A second pilgrimage is already being planned for Fall 2025 to Rome. And, as the diocese begins to build a pilgrimage program, Bishop Iffert will be leading pilgrimages to local and regional holy places.

“I think it would be a very good thing for us to do, as we build a pilgrimage program, to make sure that everybody has access to participate,” said Bishop Iffert. “People don’t think about it, but right here in and around Kentucky, we have all kinds of examples of holiness.”

For information about the Diocese of Covington’s pilgrimage to Greece, visit www.covidio.org or call Collette at 1-800-581-8942, and refer to booking #1221094.

Covington’s Cathedral catches French attention

A filming crew from France Télévisions, the French national public television broadcaster, were at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Dec. 1. Chloe Ferreaux, journalist, and Ato Phillipe, videographer, recently learned of the Covington’s Cathedral and its reputation for resembling Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris. As restoration from the 2019 fire of the famed Paris Cathedral is completed, editors at France Télévisions sent its Washington, D.C. crew to Covington to learn more about the Cathedral’s history, to interview Father Ryan Maher, rector, and parishioners and receive a tour by Stephen Enzweiler, Cathedral historian and docent.

Mr. Phillipe said that when he lived in Paris he would attend Mass a Notre Dame Cathedral. When he saw Covington Cathedral’s he said, “The look of it and the feeling of it here was something very homey.

The segment on Covington’s Cathedral will be broadcast on the evening news to five to six million French viewers, “just to show a bit like this little gem hidden in America,” said Mr. Phillipe.

(top left) Chloe Ferreaux from France Télévisions clips a microphone to the lapel of Stephen Enzweiler while Ato Phillipe records.
(top right) Ms. Ferreaux interviews parishioners from the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption while Mr. Phillipe records.
(right) A front view of Mr. Phillipe behind the camera.
(far right) Mr. Enzweiler discusses the Cathedral’s mosaic Stations of the Cross.



New year-long program encourages young women to ‘Give God a Year’

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

The Sisters of Notre Dame have introduced a new year-long program for young adult women, called “Give God a Year.” The program was formed in response to the “needs of young women” that were in contact with the Sisters of Notre Dame, according to Notre Dame Sister Jenny Zimmerman, one of three Sisters of Notre Dame in the United states involved in the young adult and vocation ministry team.

The program is tailored to young women who feel “stuck” in their vocational discernment. Whether being called to religious life, married life or single life, Sister Zimmerman said that many young women who reach out to the Sisters of Notre Dame are “not completely at peace”

with where they are, and are unsure “where God is leading them.”

“This is our response to that need,” said Sister Zimmerman, “We want to see if we can bring these women together from across the country, let them know they’re not alone and journey with them towards a process of greater clarity.”

“Give God a Year” will be an online program, hosted via the Zoom app, to better facilitate a nationwide connection for young women discerning their vocation. The Sisters of Notre Dame have four regional centers: three in the Midwest and one in California — and the program hopes to reach women spanning across the United States. An optional in-person retreat is also planned, according to Sister Zimmerman, for when the year comes closer to com-

pletion, however details are not yet finalized.

The plan is to have group online meetings once a month, filled with Scripture, prayer and conversation. Spiritual direction and mentoring one-on-one with members of the SND’s sisters will be a part of the program, as well.

“Things we hear from young people we work with are fears of commitment, fears of doing the wrong thing, fear of missing out,” said Sister Zimmerman. The program hopes to tackle these issues in their sessions, and overall assist young women to overcome these fears and find peace in their vocational journey.

Young women interested in the program can contact Sister Jenny Zimmerman at jjzimmerman@sndusa.org or at (419) 438-6056 to sign up or to find out more information.

Service Award Honorees

Five Years

Betsy Djordjevic, Tribunal
Carrie Schuler, Finance

Ten Years

David Cooley, Catechesis and Evangelization
Laura Gillespie, *Messenger*

Fifteen Years

Patti Anderson, Catholic Charities
Dale Henson, Finance
Joanie Lecoy, Chancery
Father Daniel Schomaker, Worship and Liturgy



Service Awards Luncheon honors diocesan employees

Eight diocesan employees were honored at the Diocese of Covington’s Service Awards Luncheon, hosted at the Covington Metropolitan Club, Dec. 1. These employees, serving both the Covington Curia and Catholic Charities, have served the diocese for five, 10 and 15 years. “Thank you for all the good work that you do,” Bishop Iffert said, thanking both the honorees and all the employees in attendance at the luncheon, “Here in the Diocese of Covington, it’s a real vocation, this work of ours. I thank you all for playing your part in it so beautifully.”

Retired Sister of Notre Dame recalls her time as a teacher, having ‘grown to love it’

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Religious women and men in the Diocese of Covington and nationwide have served communities as educators, healthcare and childcare workers and more for generations.

Notre Dame Sister Evelynnn Reinke is one of 25,000 retired Catholic religious in the United States. For over 50 years prior to her retirement, Sister Reinke served as an

educator and administrator in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Covington, and eventually went to educate the next generation of teachers at Thomas More University.

“I just fell in love with Jesus in high school,” Sister Reinke fondly recalled her own vocational story, stating that becoming a sister was the “obvious conclusion.”

“I had Sisters of Notre Dame (as teachers) from the fourth through the eighth grade, and then went to Notre

(Continued on page 7)

Spend this Advent season with the saints

Bert Ghezzi
OSV News

Advent prepares us for Jesus’ coming at Christmas and for his coming into our lives afresh. And no one knows how to get ready to welcome Christ better than the saints.

They express their love for him by putting him first in their hearts. They make room for him by clearing out the clutter of sins and faults. The saints pursue holiness by embracing the Lord’s teaching and lifestyle. They respond to his graces by practicing spiritual disciplines like prayer, Scripture study, fasting and almsgiving. And the saints express their love for God by reaching out to others with the Good News. They especially dedicate themselves to caring for the poor and marginalized.

So, let’s make the most of this Advent and spend it with three representative saints, imitating the ways that they opened their hearts to Jesus. Week 2 we learn from Venerable Matt Talbot.

Venerable Matt Talbot (1856–1925)

For 16 years, Venerable Matt Talbot was a daily drunk. Then one day, an unanticipated conversion transformed him and he became a model penitent following Jesus Christ.

As a child of a poor family in Dublin, Matt had to forgo school for a job. After a year of basic education, he started

working for a wine seller. And Matt started drinking heavily at the early age of 12.

His father beat him and made him change jobs — but nothing could stop Matt’s habit. He said that when he was intoxicated, he occasionally thought about the Blessed Mother and prayed an off-handed Hail Mary. Matt speculated later that she had something to do with his conversion.

One day in 1884 everything suddenly changed. Matt had been out of work several days and expected his buddies to take him drinking. When they snubbed him, he made a decision that transformed his life.

When he arrived at home, his mother said, “You’re home early, Matt, and you’re sober!” He replied, “Yes, mother; I am and I’m going to take the pledge.” The next day he went to confession and took the sobriety pledge for three months.

But Matt extended three months of going without alcohol into 41 years. In 1891, Matt found community support by joining the Franciscan Third Order. He lived the rest of his life quietly, working and praying. St. Paul VI declared him venerable in 1975.

At a time when addictions to alcohol, other drugs and pornography are running rampant, Matt Talbot stands as an exemplar of the ways to freedom and holiness through Jesus.

This Advent, following the saints, may we decide always to love God above all and to do the loving thing in every circumstance.



OSV News photo/CNS file, Gina Christian, catholicphilly.com

Venerable Matt Talbot is pictured in an undated painting.



Serra Club Priests’ Appreciation Dinner

At its annual Priests’ Appreciation Dinner, Serra Club for Vocations – Northern Kentucky members presented a check to Bishop John Iffert for the Seminary Education Fund. The dinner, which was held Nov. 30 at the Blessed Sacrament Parish Undercroft, is one of several ways that the Serra Club for Vocations supports priests, seminarians and men and women religious in pursuing and living their vocation.

Pictured (from left) are: Father Conor Kunath, diocesan vocations promoter; Msgr. Daniel Vogelpohl, vicar for Retired Priests; Bishop Iffert; Jeff Jehn, Serran and Steve Novak, Serran. For information visit www.serranky.org.



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



Bishop’s Schedule

- | | |
|--|--|
| Dec. 9
Vigil Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 4:30 p.m. | Dec. 14
Directors meeting, 9:30 a.m.

Diocesan Review Board Christmas luncheon / meeting, Metropolitan Club, noon. |
| Dec. 10
Mass and 40th anniversary of Church building, St. Mary Parish, Alexandria, 11 a.m.

Permanent Deacons and wives Christmas party, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, 2 p.m. | Mass with students at Northern Kentucky University, Newman Center, NKU, 7 p.m. |
| Dec. 12
Priest Formation Day, St. Joseph Heights, Park Hills, 10 a.m.–2 p.m.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mass, Cristo Rey Parish, Florence, 7 p.m. | Dec. 16
Knights of Columbus annual Children’s Christmas party, Elsmere, 10 a.m. |
| Dec. 13
Religious Superiors Christmas luncheon/meeting, Metropolitan Club, Covington, noon | Dec. 17
Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 7:30 a.m.
Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 5:30 p.m.

2nd annual Christmas Tree/Bambinelli blessing, St. Mary’s Park, Covington, 6:30 p.m. |

Two roads diverged in the spiritual life

I love the game of chess, but I am often convinced that the game of chess does not love me. Chess has been a somewhat serious hobby of mine for over a decade and

for as much time as I spend studying or playing chess I just don't seem to move too far from where I am in terms of skill or rating. It is deeply frustrating.

I have set goals for myself and made plans. I have bought books and subscriptions and done all sorts of different things to try and move in the right direction, but I never really seem to budge. The worst part is that I know exactly why I don't

improve. I know the precise reason that I haven't moved too far up the ranks in over a decade. It's because I don't play enough games. I play some games, but not enough. I enjoy studying the game so much that actually playing it doesn't really come up that often. So I remain stuck.

I suspect that this is precisely the same experience that so many people have in their spiritual lives. You buy books or jump on the latest fads in the Church and hope that this time things will be different. This time you will really grow and change and become the saint you're called to be. But nothing really changes.

You stay on it for a little while, but almost immediately it falls away. At the heart of this is the same problem that I have with chess. All the books, retreats, podcasts, subscriptions, Bishop Barron videos and Sunday sermons won't do any good unless you're willing to put the time and effort into individual, quiet prayer with God.

No spiritual guru can take you to the heights of holiness unless you're on your knees every single day saying the prayers that you need to say. This situation is not uncommon in the spiritual life, and in fact is related to some foundational ideas in discernment.

Saint Ignatius wrote 14 rules that help people understand their spiritual experience. The first two rules con-

cern the basic direction of a person's life.

There are two directions: bad to worse and good to better. People moving from bad to worse are people who go from mortal sin to mortal sin, have broadly given up on prayer and the practice of the faith, and are moving further and further away from God. This might seem like a narrow group of people, but in reality it can include people who are not yet deep into mortal sin, but have started moving in that direction. Perhaps their spiritual life consists of minimal and irregular prayer, inconsistent use of the sacraments, and a lack of effort to build virtue or fend off vice.

On the other hand, people moving from good to better are those who are moving away from mortal sin. Although they might not yet be free of it, they have a consistent daily practice of prayer even if it is a small practice, they use the sacraments frequently, and they are trying to radically purify their lives of sin. This group can be anybody that has begun the process of truly being a disciple, even if they just started yesterday.

Understanding the general direction of one's life is critical to understanding the movements of the good and evil spirits because, depending on the direction of one's life, the spirits act differently. It might seem obvious, but it is important to keep in mind that the good and evil spirits are always moving contrary to each other: This makes sense because the good and evil spirits want two entirely different things. The good spirit is working for your salvation and the evil spirit is working for your damnation. It is utterly natural that they would work against each other.

When a soul is moving from bad to worse, the evil spirit wants nothing more than for the soul to move even further in that direction. In this situation the evil spirit will encourage the soul in every kind of sin and wrongdoing. He will offer all sorts of new opportunities for the soul to distance itself from God. Perhaps through a sinful relationship, or going deeper into sinful activities, or encouraging whatever other activity might take the soul from God.

The good spirit, on the other hand, will use exactly the opposite means. He will discourage wrongdoing, sting the conscience with guilt, and hinder the soul from moving further away from God.

If the situation is reversed and the soul is moving good to better and towards God, then it will be the good spirit encouraging the soul and the evil spirit discouraging the soul. The good spirit will offer plentiful consolations and help and will open doors so that the soul can move closer and closer to God.

The evil spirit, on the other hand, will use every means available to him to prevent the soul from moving towards God. Typically, this means new difficulties or troubles in relationships whether it is a marriage, a friendship or a work relationship. Prayer will sometimes become dry or difficult, temptations will be strong, and the soul might experience shame or worthlessness due to previous sins, among other things. The evil spirit uses all of these things to stop the soul from moving towards God and to begin retreating back into a life of sin.

When we understand the way that the two spirits work on us and against each other, we can begin to see why we might never make real progress in the spiritual life. A profound grace strikes our heart and we realize that we need to do better, so we take up new habits of prayer and buy some books and try to respond to the grace we received.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, a tornado of discouragement, dryness, and shame tears through our lives and that little seed that grace had planted in us is choked by the evil spirit until it dies and we stop. After all of this we find ourselves back where we started wondering why we can't make any progress.

When you respond to the movement of grace in your life and begin a new spiritual practice, realize that the evil spirit is not far behind and will be trying to stop you by whatever means necessary. Realize that in all the chaos and discouragement, if you can persevere in what you committed to do, and can avoid the various problems the evil spirit throws at you, your spiritual life will begin to grow. You will become closer to God and will move quickly toward becoming a saint.

Remain steadfast, and above all, keep on praying. *Father Conor Kunath is vocations director for the Diocese of Covington and pastoral administrator, Sts. Boniface and James Parish, Ludlow, Ky.*

Jesus Christ is 'Fully Alive' in the Diocese of Covington

In the Diocese of Covington, 260 youth, young adults, adult chaperones, four priests, two deacons and a bishop, have traveled to Indianapolis, Indiana to attend the

National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC). Four busloads of pilgrims and pilgrims who drove their own private cars departed Northern Kentucky and joined more than 13,000 youth from across the country for the biennial event.

This year's NCYC three-day conference with its theme "Fully Alive," provided opportunities, such as prayer, keynote speakers, hundreds of workshops and a "Reign

Forest" thematic park to our youth and their chaperones to grow in their faith, make friends and have fun.

Those youth and adults not able to participate in NCYC this year were able participate in other ways and supported those who were going. We are thankful and grateful for the people of the diocese to journey with us

through their prayers and encouragements.

I personally was so blessed to have had the opportunity to gain experience in my Catholic faith from the friendships I have encountered, specifically with our Youth Ministers, Campus Ministers, chaperones, parents, priests, deacons and our youth. In my time with them during NCYC, I have begun to discover more about the purpose of why I am here, and they have invited me to take an even deeper dive into who I am called to be.

My favorite pope, St. John Paul II, was quoted as saying, "Youth are children of the light. You belong to Christ and He has called you by name."

As an NCYC attendee and leader of our delegation, I was given the opportunity to not only encounter the light of Jesus through the sacraments, dynamic speakers, and other faithful witnesses, but to learn, alongside 13,000+ high school students and their chaperones, how to "be the light" in the world, sharing my own testimony of encountering Jesus Christ and the freedom of the path the Lord calls us to. I know a shared experience with so many other faithful students and their chaperones was a pivotal in me standing firm in my Catholic faith amidst the challenges seen in schools and the world. My hope, and the hope for all who attended NCYC, is to encounter the Lord more deeply, be transformed by his love and goodness, and find a parish community to launch you into a jour-

ney of lifelong discipleship with Jesus Christ.

St. Paul to the Corinthians said that we should not look to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Cor 4:18) In Mark, Jesus said, what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul. (Mark 8:36)

Many people spend all their energy seeking pleasure. Jesus, however, said that worldliness, which is centered on possessions, position or power, is worthless. Whatever you have on earth is only temporary; it cannot be exchanged for your soul. If you work hard at getting what you want, you might eventually have a pleasurable life, but in the end you will find it hollow and empty.

Let us all follow Jesus, and we will know what it means to live an abundant life now and for eternity as well.

NCYC has always been a blessing for me. It is an incredible platform to encounter Jesus Christ, and have this abundant life through prayer, the sacraments and fun.

While I was attending NCYC, I was praying for our diocesan parishes, schools and the faithful to thrive in the Lord's mercy and the love that endures forever.

Isaak A. Isaak is co-director of the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization.

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The liturgical calendar of the family, the domestic church

Each Christmas my youngest brother makes a photo calendar for our extended family. Thanks to the ease of photo websites and pre-made templates, it's an easy task

GUEST



Laura Kelly Fanucci

to drop pictures into each month of the year — but it's become one of our favorite gifts to receive. All my kids fight over who gets to flip through the calendar first, laughing at goofy poses and remembering vacations from years past.

Beyond the big photos splashed across each month, the calendar lets you insert smaller photos on particular dates. My brother adds pictures for each family member's

birthday and each couple's anniversary. He always finds a funny photo of our oldest brother who died at age 21 (once a sibling, always a sibling, and we like to think he'd still laugh at his 8th8th-grade photo). He also includes a birthday picture of my twin daughters in the NICU before they died.

With these small but meaningful gestures, he keeps our whole family alive in spirit and before our eyes in the everyday. Each month holds dates that are meaningful only to our family, but they stand as mighty memorials to the ones we have loved and lost.

As the Church begins a new liturgical year this Advent, we have the perfect chance to meditate on the mysteries of how our individual lives weave together with the wider Church. If each family is rightly considered a “domestic church,” then our own celebrations, birthdays, anniversaries, and memorials can become a domestic liturgical calendar, too.

In his poem “Holidays,” Henry Wadsworth Longfellow writes:

“The holiest of all holidays are those
Kept by ourselves in silence and apart;
The secret anniversaries of the heart,

When the full river of feeling overflows.”
Your personal “holy days” might be celebrated by only a few: your grandparents’ wedding day, the date your child’s adoption was finalized, the anniversary of your sobriety, or the day you moved into your home. In addition to these bright celebrations, the calendars of our domestic churches can hold harder days, too: the memory of a car accident or a house fire, the date of a life-changing diagnosis, the anniversary of a miscarriage, or a wedding date long-annulled. Just as Holy Week holds both Good Friday and Easter Sunday, we can find comfort knowing that every year brings highs and lows — yet the God of time holds it all.

Adding baptismal anniversaries, first communion dates, or confirmation days to our yearly calendars can help us celebrate the spirit of the sacraments long after the initial graces have been received. My own kids’ baptism days and namesake saints’ days are burned in their brains because they get to choose a special dessert to celebrate. Liturgical calendars are meant to help us both fast and feast, after all.

“Teach us to count our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart,” sings Psalm 90. As we choose or create new calendars for the coming year, we might pause to pray over the blank pages. What joys and sorrows will this year hold? What celebrations, big or small, might we mark within its pages?

My favorite part of my brother’s family calendars is keeping them as a treasure from one year to the next. Flipping back through the pages, we watch babies arrive and their birthdays take their place among our holy days at home. We remember anniversaries long past even as each married couple ages beyond the grinning kids in wedding photos. And we hold tight to our beloved dead, asking them to intercede for us.

Each domestic church’s liturgical calendar is as diverse as its members, yet still anchored by the great high feasts. As we turn the calendar to a new Advent, may we ask God’s blessing upon our homes and hopes for another year: teach us to number our days.


Laura Kelly Fanucci is an author, speaker, and founder of Mothering Spirit, an online gathering place on parenting and spirituality.

Pull over, Advent is here

The readings for the second Sunday of Advent — Cycle B — are: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; 2 Peter 3:8-14 and Mark 1:1-8.

Funeral processions these days can be a little dangerous. You never know when a car is trying to get out in front of the procession or trying to wiggle their way into the middle of the procession. Sometimes funny things happen.

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Gregory Bach

There was once a situation where the funeral procession was traveling in the right-hand lane and in the left lane there was a girl riding a moped. It was very loud. She kept up with the funeral procession riding alongside the hearse. At times she would speed up and at times she would slow

down. It's one of those you had to be there to appreciate the humor.

Growing up in rural community funeral processions were not that dangerous. On the way to the cemetery, out of respect, cars would stop or pull off the road as the procession passed by. Those pulling off the side of road may not have known the person who had died but they still pulled off the road to let the procession pass by.

In our first reading for this weekend, we hear the words from the prophet Isaiah — “A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!”

In the Gospel of Mark, we hear the words repeated “prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.”

What path should we straighten out to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ, what highway do we need to pull over to the side to get directions or to take a breath?

The Advent season is one full of hope, we hear it in the Scriptures. It is a call for us to look at our life and see what may be changed. Through prayer, the holy sacrifice of the Mass, and through reconciliation we can examine our life to prepare the way of the Lord, to make straight the path to our heart.

The season of Advent is a season that is overwhelmed with the messages of Christmas and does not allow us to hear the message of Advent — to watch, to prepare and to pray, for the coming of Christ is near.

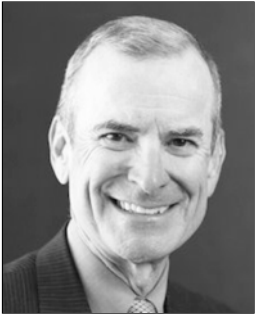
You can ride your loud moped up and down the road or you can pull off to the side listening to Christ who is calling out to us during this grace filled time.

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

‘You kill your crickets, eh?’ Discovering Dickens’ other Christmas tale

Few pieces of English literature are more closely associated with Christmas than Charles Dickens’s novella, “A Christmas Carol.” For many people, the stage production

GUEST



Kenneth Craycraft

or its many literal or analogous film adaptations are more familiar than the book. “A Christmas Carol” has provided characters and turns of phrase known even by people who scarcely know of the story. Scrooge and his exclamation “Bah! Humbug!” are common tropes even apart from the context of Christmas. Christmas ghost stories are perennial traditions for some families. And how many people have

prayed “God bless Us, Every One!”, the last words of “A Christmas Carol,” uttered by Tiny Tim Cratchit?

But “The Christmas Carol” is only the most prominent of Dickens’s several Christmas stories, my favorite of which is “The Cricket on the Hearth: A Fairy Tale of Home,” published on Dec. 20, 1845.

Other than by reference to the date of its publication, it may seem odd to call “Cricket” a Christmas story. It is set in late January. Christmas is never mentioned, and

the story is devoid of explicit Christmas symbols or images. But the message of “The Cricket on the Hearth” places it squarely within any consideration of the spirit of Christmas. The fundamental themes of “Cricket” are selflessness, sacrificial giving, and disinterested gestures of love and grace. The journey to the conclusion is filled with hardship, bewilderment and disenchantment. And the narrative is constructed around an extravagant, mysterious surprise, carefully concealed and delightfully revealed.

Many characters in “The Cricket on the Hearth” have characteristics that are strikingly similar to those in “A Christmas Carol.” For example, big-hearted toymaker Caleb Plummer and his blind daughter, Bertha, are similar to Bob and Tim Cratchit. Caleb is employed by the mean, ill-tempered, Scrooge-like toyshop owner, Tackleton. John and Mary Peerybingle, at whose hearth the cricket chirps, are this story’s Mr. & Mrs. Fezziwig (although the Peerybingles are more central to “Cricket” than are the Fezziwigs to “Carol”).

Unsurprisingly, the dynamic relationships among these characters are analogous to the interactions in “A Christmas Carol.” And I am giving nothing of the story away to say that its ending is satisfying and joyous. It is, after all, a Christmas story.

The cricket from “The Cricket on the Hearth” is both an insect in the Peerybingle’s living room and metaphor for John and Mary’s hospitality and generosity. Along with the teapot, it supplies the chorus for the comedic

dialogue and narrative of the tale.

The cricket makes the Peerybingle’s house more than “four walls and a ceiling.” It’s the symbol of a hospitable and welcoming home. When the cricket stops chirping, “somehow the room was not so cheerful as it had been. Nothing like it.” For the Peerybingles, it is a comforting companion; for Tackleton a noisome nuisance. Tackleton: “Why don’t you kill that Cricket?” John: “You kill your Crickets, eh?” Tackleton: “Scrunch ’em, sir.”

Thus is Tackleton’s bleak house, by his own description, nothing more than “four walls and a ceiling.”

Part of the contentment of reading “The Cricket on the Hearth” is the felicity of Dickens’s prose. For example, after Mrs. Peerybingle fills the tea kettle in the outdoor fountain on a cold January evening, she sets the kettle on the fire. “In doing which she lost her temper, or mislaid it for an instant; for the water, being uncomfort-

(Continued on page 16)



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For more information about Thomas More University, visit www.thomasmore.edu.

Thomas More University makes impact on region through entrepreneurship and innovation

Submitted by Thomas More University

Thomas More University is embracing the spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation to bolster and uplift the entire Northern Kentucky/Cincinnati region. By instilling a culture of integrity along with creativity and forward-thinking, the University is not only preparing its students for the challenges of the modern world but is also actively contributing to the economic and social vibrancy of the communities it serves. Partnerships with local businesses, industry leaders, and governmental bodies have been forged to create a dynamic ecosystem that nurtures budding entrepreneurs and cultivates innovative solutions to societal challenges.

In an exciting collaboration that brought together tradition and innovation, Knox Joseph Distillery at the OTR Stillhouse founder Michele Hobbs spoke at Thomas More University's Evening of Innovation, Nov. 16. Held at the Stillhouse, the event featured Jeni Al Bahrani '05, director of Thomas More's Dr. Anthony '65 and Geraldine '66 Zembrodt Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (ZCEI) interviewing Hobbs in exploration of the innovation and entrepreneurship witnessed by the success of the Stillhouse under Hobbs' direction.

The event is part of the Evening of Innovation series that provides a unique opportunity to foster and strengthen relationships with entrepreneurs and innovators who shape the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky region.

"Events like these are essential to helping Thomas More University secure its place as the innovation destination of the region," says Dr. Joseph Chillo, president, Thomas More University. "We gather to celebrate not only the achievements of our partners and professors but also the boundless potential of innovation itself. I have no doubt that the conversations and connections forged at these events will lead to groundbreaking ideas, collaborations, and solutions that will propel our region forward."

The innovators featured in the series have ties to the University. In this case the Stillhouse has a long-running partnership with Thomas More professors Jyoti Saraswat, Ph.D., of the Department of Mathematics and William Wetzel, Ph.D., of the Department of Chemistry. These two professors, along with student collaborators perform cutting-edge research to determine the chemical footprint which makes up bourbon and other spirits.

A previous Evening of Innovation in April 2023 was hosted at St. Elizabeth Cancer Center in Edgewood, Kentucky. St. Elizabeth is a valued partner for the University and at that event, Doug Flora, M.D., LSSBB, executive medical director of the cancer center, spoke about the life-changing innovations taking place at the facility and how it is affecting cancer care in the region. Flora plays a pivotal role in shaping the region's healthcare landscape, driving advancements in cancer research, and fostering collaborations with top-tier medical professionals to ensure cutting-edge treatment options are accessible to residents.

Innovation in entrepreneurship takes center stage in the work of the ZCEI, as Al Baharani is steadfast in creating connections and new opportunities for students. Al Bahrani and



Thomas More senior business administration major Erin Preston participated in a StartUpCincy Week event on Oct. 26, 2023, in Cincinnati, Ohio. Both spoke during a panel event entitled, "From Dorm Room to Boardroom: How Top Universities are Incubating Top Talent." StartUpCincy Week serves to connect the region's and nation's entrepreneurs, investors, and innovators to cutting edge knowledge sharing, networking, resources, and to our ecosystem.

The ZCEI hosted the annual Fifth Third Bank Fast Pitch Competition on Oct. 3. At the event, teams of undergraduate students pitched new concepts, ideas for growth potential for existing businesses, and community growth models. The top student team took home \$2,000 to help get their idea off the ground, while second place received \$1,000 and third \$500.

"Not only are we celebrating the winners today, but also the invaluable skills our students have acquired throughout this journey," said Al Bahrani. "Skills like communication, presentation, problem-solving, problem validation, teamwork, time manage-

ment, resilience, and navigating feedback are just the tip of the iceberg. Furthermore, the ability to navigate failure stands out as an important asset in any entrepreneurial venture or career."

Area high school students are also drawn into the entrepreneurial ecosystem at Thomas More through the annual Square1 NEXT program. The program works with high school students by teaching them how innovation and an entrepreneurial mindset can change their life's trajectory. Schools and students from across Greater Cincinnati participate in this region-wide innovation and work skills education and development program.

The year-long program ends with a final pitch event held at Thomas More University. Three teams of stand-out students are selected by a panel of judges for top honors in the competition and as a result receive scholarships to Thomas More University, including first-place, full-tuition scholarships, second-place \$25,000 scholarships, and third-place \$22,000 scholarships.

"The Dr. Anthony '65 & Geraldine '66 Zembrodt Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, as well as our new academic center, provides the ideal environment for young innovators to thrive with the support and guidance of the first-class faculty that we have here at Thomas More University," said President Chillo.

Sister of Notre Dame recalls her time as a teacher

(Continued from page 3)

Dame Academy,” she said, “so I had a lot of experience with our congregation.”

For Sister Reinke, this obvious choice had her join the Sisters of Notre Dame in May, immediately following her high school graduation the previous September — when she was only 17 years old.

“I knew what I wanted, and I never looked back,” she said.

When she was younger, Sister Reinke said that she was “scared to death of teaching.”

“I wouldn’t even play school when I was a kid because I was afraid they would make me a teacher,” she said, “but after five or six weeks in the classroom, I was hooked. After that, I loved it ... I know some of us sisters always knew they wanted to be teachers. That was not my story, but I grew to love it.”

Sisters of Notre Dame, especially historically, fulfilled roles of teachers commonly, as well as working in health care and childcare.



Notre Dame Sister Evelyn Reinke

“When I entered, most of them (taught),” Sister Reinke recalled, but also remembers the sisters’ work with St. Joseph’s Orphanage in Cold Spring, and in healthcare in the Covington area in the 50s and 60s. Other jobs included domestic work in seminaries, although sisters today hold all sorts of jobs and roles in their respective dioceses.

Of all things about religious life, one of Sister Reinke’s favorite things was the opportunity for prayer.

Collection for Retired Religious

The annual Retirement Fund for Religious collection is scheduled in parishes throughout the Diocese of Covington the weekend of Dec. 16-17. In 2022, parishioners contributed \$38,773.41 to the collection.

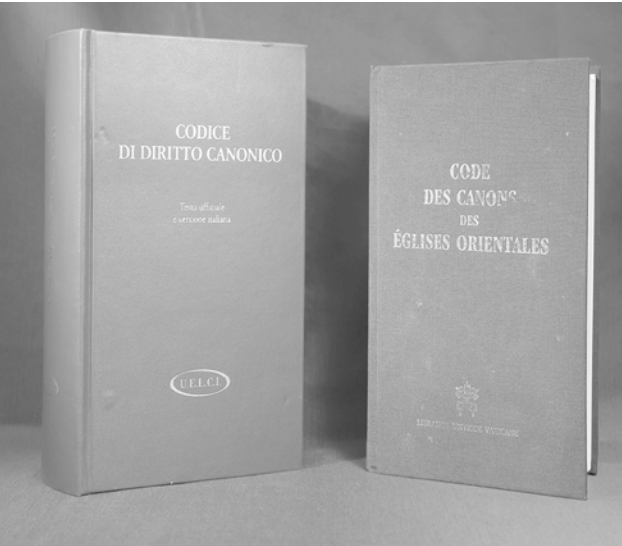
Mr. John Knutsen, director of the National Religious Retirement Office, looks forward to this year’s collection, stating, “We are privileged to support those who have dedicated their lives to tireless service, and we are immensely grateful for the continuing generosity of U.S. Catholic donors to this vital cause.”

This annual appeal benefits 25,000 elderly Catholic sisters, brothers, and priests nationwide. In 2022 Catholics expressed their appreciation for the men and women religious by contributing \$27.6 million to the Retirement Fund for Religious. These funds from the Retirement Fund for Religious collection provided financial assistance for retirement needs for 297 U.S. religious communities.

“It really helps you grow your relationship with the Lord, and to each other, too,” she said. “That’s been very, very valuable to me.” Community life, while sometimes challenging, has also been a highlight of religious life, she said.

Nowadays, Sister Reinke is enjoying her retirement without the stress of the “papers and deadlines” those working in education often have. Though she looks fondly back on her time working as a teacher, “the chance to enjoy life a little bit more freely,” has been good, to her.

Canon law must be part of Church’s mission of mercy, pope says



CNS photo/Paul Haring

Code of Canon Law books for the Latin and Eastern Catholic churches are pictured in Rome at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in this Sept. 15, 2016, file photo. Pope Francis has ordered several changes to canon law, giving more authority to local bishops and bishops’ conferences.

Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

All the Catholic Church’s structures, including tribunals and faculties of canon law, must undergo a “pastoral and missionary conversion” to ensure the Church is giving the world “the only thing it needs: the Gospel of the mercy of Jesus,” Pope Francis wrote.

“To be pastoral does not mean that the norms should be set aside, and one sets off in whatever direction one wish-

es, but that in applying the norms one should make certain that the Christian faithful find in them the presence of the merciful Jesus, who does not condemn but exhorts them to sin no more because he gives grace,” the pope wrote to an international group of canon law scholars.

Pope Francis made his remarks in a message to the “Consociatio Internationalis Studio Iuris Canonici

(Continued on page 14)

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

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.

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.

The Sisters of Notre Dame will have an Adventures to Give day Dec. 10, 1–3 p.m., St. Joseph Heights, Park Hills. All are welcome to come and help put items together for local immigrant brothers and sisters in need of help, bake cookies, and participate in a prayer service. If you cannot come but would like to still participate monetary donations are accepted. To register or if you have questions, email rlubbers@sndusa.org or call (859) 750-8190.

Sacred Heart Church, Bellevue, will be holding a candlelight Advent Rorate Mass to Our Lady, Dec. 16, starting with rosary service at 7 a.m. The Mass, open to all, is sponsored by Sacred Hearts’ Catholic Men’s Group and the Knights of Columbus. Free will donations accepted.

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

The Sisters of Notre Dame introduce their new online year-long program called “Give God a Year.” This program has been created in response to the significant number of young women who are feeling “stuck” in their vocational discernment. Each monthly session will include shared conversation and prayer as together we strive to deepen our relationship with God in order to better follow the path that leads to greater peace, joy and true inner freedom. The first online session will be on Jan. 7, 7:30–9 p.m. and will continue on the first Sunday of each month for the year. Women in their 20s and 30s are invited to contact Sister Jenny Zimmerman at jzimmerman@sndusa.org or at (419) 438-6056 to sign up or to find out more information.

New Beginnings is an 8-week program for separated or divorced individuals, which provides an opportunity to heal and move forward despite a complicated situation. Led by facilitators who have been through their own personal losses, this program invites participants to move toward their own new beginning. The next session will be held on consecutive Thursdays – Jan. 25, Feb. 1, Feb. 8, Feb. 15, Feb. 22, Feb. 29, March 7, and March 14, 2024, 7–8:30 p.m., Holy Trinity Elementary, Bellevue. Register at covdio.org/new-beginnings.

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

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. 15, 2023, St. John Parish, Carrollton



December

Prepare for Mass with these Gospel summaries and reflection questions for December.

Gospels
Dec. 10 — Second Sunday of Advent (Mk 1:1-8)
The beginning of Mark’s Gospel tells us that John the Baptist is the messenger promised by the prophet Isaiah. God sent John to prepare the path for the Messiah. John was popular; people listened to him and were baptized by him.
— Who has been a messenger to you about Jesus? How can you be a messenger about Jesus?

Dec. 17 — Third Sunday of Advent (Jn 1:6-8, 19-28)
Today’s Gospel from John tells us again that some people misunderstood who John the Baptist was. They thought he was the Messiah or one of the prophets. John reminded them that he was only a voice crying out, “Make straight the way of the Lord,” the Messiah who would be coming very soon. John’s role was to be a witness to Jesus, the light.
— During this Advent season, how can you be a witness to the light that is Jesus?

Saint
St. Lucy
Lucy is one of the early martyrs of the Church. Not much is reliably known about her life, except that she died during the persecutions of Diocletian. A medieval legend says that her eyes were gouged out prior to her death, which has led her to be named as the patron of the blind. Her feast falls close to the winter solstice and she is commemorated, especially in Scandinavian countries, by having the youngest daughter of a family wear a crown of candles and serve special cookies or rolls to her family. Her name is rooted in the Latin word lux, meaning “light.”
In her memory:
— Listen for her name in the list of martyrs in the first Eucharistic prayer.
— Pray for the residents of the island of San Lucia, which was impacted by Hurricane Maria this past fall.
— Donate used glasses to the Lion’s Club, which recycles them, and be sure to have your family’s eyes examined.

OSV Kids is a monthly children’s magazine helping kids live and love and their Catholic faith. For more information go to osvkids.com.



Photo: Flaticon.com



Grinch Christmas Literacy Night

Saint Therese School, Southgate, successfully hosted another Christmas Literacy Night sharing the treasured tale of “The Grinch Who Stole Christmas.” Students in grades 3-5 gathered to hear the book, then participated in activities such as: writing, creating Who instruments, bookmarks, a Grinch ring toss and silly snow globe photos. In addition to the fun, each student received a hardbound copy of this Dr. Seuss classic.

Do this in memory of me: the Consecration

Father Luke Spannagel
USCCB

After the calling down of the Holy Spirit, we are now ready for the Consecration. As Charles Belmonte reminds us, “What mankind has been waiting for through centuries is now going to take place among us” (*Understanding the Mass*, p. 138).

At this moment of the Mass, the priest takes the bread and chalice of wine that will become the Body and Blood of Jesus. We hear the words of Jesus: “Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my Body, which will be given up for you.” And soon after, “Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me.”

Let’s pause for a moment and think about what just happened in the Mass: Jesus himself, Almighty God, Second Person of the Trinity, through the hands and voice of the priest, is now truly, really, and substantially present on the altar!

After the Consecration, the priest raises the host and



chalice above the altar in a moment of silence. This elevation is a wonderful moment of prayer and adoration. We are gazing upon Jesus truly with us, and in that moment, we can adore him for all he has done for us — that he would be willing to come and dwell among us. That he would be willing to bear the burden of our sins on the cross so we could be forgiven. That he loves us so much that he remains with us in the Blessed Sacrament. Praise him!

Following the elevation, the priest places the host and the chalice on the altar, and then he genuflects in adoration to the Lord Jesus present on the altar.

In this moment during the Mass, I often recall a very influential priest in my life. He shared that anytime he would make a genuflection, he would pray the words of St. Thomas from Divine Mercy Sunday, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). He said that praying these words always reminds him of who is truly present in front of him, that Jesus is truly in our midst.

Going even deeper on the moment of elevation, Charles Belmonte explains, “Three things are intended by the elevation of the sacred host: [1] To expose Jesus Christ, now present on the altar; to the adoration of the faithful. [2] To re-present the elevation of Jesus Christ’s body on the cross... [3] To offer to God in silence this only one Victim of our salvation.”

Belmonte continues,

“During the elevation, we should glance at the Eucharistic species in adoration. But we should also remember that we have come to Mass not only to worship Jesus Christ present in the sacrament of the altar. That could be done equally well in the Exposition and Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament. We come to Mass also to offer Jesus Christ on the cross with the priest and the entire Church, and to offer ourselves to God with Jesus Christ and as part of the Mystical Body. In other words, we come mainly to share in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As part of the Church, we are united to Christ in the act wherein he himself offers his sacrifice to his Father” (*Understanding the Mass*, pp. 142–143).

As we have said before during the Offertory, the Mass truly is an invitation for us to share in the sacrifice of Jesus. We will come back to that as we continue through the Eucharistic Prayer:

One more thing on the Consecration: did you notice anything different about how the priest says those words of Jesus during the Consecration? As the Diocese of Peoria teaches, “The priest speaks in the first person because he is acting in the person of Christ [this is called in persona Christi]. At his ordination, the priest is configured to Christ the High Priest in such a way that he acts in his person as he continues the priestly work of Christ here on earth.

It was Christ himself at the Last Supper who commanded his apostles to continue this great mystery and sacrifice of love throughout the ages. The same Word that created the heavens and the earth in the beginning, and the same Word that became flesh in the womb of Mary, is the same Word that commands the bread and wine to be the very Body and Blood of Christ” (*A Study of the Mass*, p. 15).

For me as a priest, this is always one of the most humbling and awe-inspiring moments. I’ll never forget nearly 20 years ago at my first Mass of Thanksgiving, holding the Sacred Host — truly Jesus — and marveling in wonder: “Lord, how did you just do that ... with these hands ... with this voice ... amazing!”



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Holy Spirit inspires creativity, simplicity in evangelization, pope says

Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

Christians must rely more on the Holy Spirit than on their own plans and strategies if they hope to fulfill their mission to share the good news of God’s love and of salvation in Christ, Pope Francis said.

The pope began his weekly general audience Dec. 6 explaining to the crowd that he once again asked an aide to read his catechesis “because I’m still struggling — I’m

much better, but I struggle if I speak too much.” Since late November, Pope Francis has had respiratory difficulties related to a bronchial infection.

Msgr. Filippo Ciampanelli, an official of the Vatican Secretariat of State, read the pope’s text, which was part of a yearlong series of talks about zeal for evangelization. But Pope Francis took the microphone back at the end of the audience to ask people to continue praying for peace in Ukraine and in Israel and Palestine.

The pope’s main text focused on the need to pray for and rely on the Holy Spirit’s assistance in evangelization. Without the Holy Spirit, the pope wrote, “all zeal is vain and falsely apostolic: it would only be our own and would not bear fruit.”

“The Spirit is the protagonist; he always precedes the missionaries and makes the fruit grow,” the pope said, and that is a comforting thought because then Christians know that while they have an obligation to share the Gospel, the results are always the work of the Holy Spirit. “The Lord has not left us theological dispensations or a pastoral manual to apply, but the Holy Spirit who inspires the mission,” he said.

Mission outreach inspired by the Spirit “always has two characteristics: creativity and simplicity,” the pope’s text said, and those traits are especially necessary “in this age of ours, which does not help us have a religious outlook on life.”

At “the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at church renewal,” he said, is the simple Gospel truth: “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.”

When sharing that Gospel message seems “difficult, arduous (and) apparently fruitless,” he said, people may be tempted to stop trying.

“Perhaps one takes refuge in safety zones, like the habitual repetition of things one always does, or in the alluring calls of an intimist spirituality or even in a misunderstood sense of the centrality of the liturgy,” he said. “They are temptations that disguise themselves as fidelity to tradition, but often, rather than responses to the Spirit, they are reactions to personal dissatisfactions.”

But Christians can be certain that relying on the Holy Spirit and focusing on the key truths of the Gospel, they will find “new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world.”

Pope Francis urged Christians to pray for the Holy Spirit’s help and guidance each day and not be afraid “because he, who is harmony, always keeps creativity and simplicity together, inspires communion and sends out on mission, opens to diversity and leads back to unity.”



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Francis receives a painting of Blessed Józef and Wiktoria Ulma and their seven children at the end of his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Dec. 6, 2023. The Ulma family were executed by Nazis in Poland 1944 for sheltering Jews and were beatified in September.



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Immaculate Conception window commemorates Pius IX and *Ineffabilis Deus*

Stephen Enzweiler
Cathedral Historian

For more than a half a century, visitors and faithful alike have filed through the north doors of the Cathedral Basilica on their way to Mass, confession, to pray at adora-

tion or perhaps celebrate a wedding. But high above them, patiently silent and framed in mortar and stone tracery, is a stained-glass window unlike any other in the Cathedral Basilica. It tells the story of Pope Pius IX and his Dec. 8, 1854 apostolic constitution, *Ineffabilis Deus*, which formally defined and proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

The window's story begins in 1904 as worldwide celebrations were underway honoring the proclamation's 50th anniversary. That was the same year that Covington's Bishop Camillus P. Maes was planning the installation of stained-glass windows for the recently completed St. Mary's Cathedral. Imbued with a deep, heroic devotion to the Virgin Mary and inspired by the proclamation's anniversary, Bishop Maes decided to include a special window in the cathedral that would honor the Virgin Mary and celebrate the essential teachings contained in *Ineffabilis Deus*.

To create the Cathedral's new stained-glass, Bishop Maes chose Mayer and Company of Munich, one of the premiere makers of church stained glass in the world.

Writing to Mayer in 1909, Bishop Maes presented the basic descriptions of imagery and subjects he wanted the window to contain. Stained-glass windows are essentially visual catechisms, originally developed in the Middle Ages for a faithful who could neither read nor write. Ordinarily containing a single scene or story told at a point in time, they teach some aspect of the faith through the subjects, gestures, clothing, colors, symbols and other artistic subtleties. But the window Bishop Maes wanted, presented nine different aspects of the Church's teachings in a single window spanning millennia. The common thread tying it all together would be the truth of God's singular gift to Mary as described in *Ineffabilis Deus*: her Immaculate Conception.

To accommodate such a complex story, Mayer laid out the window in such a way that it could be read like a book – from top to bottom and left to right. In this way, the window's imagery follows a temporal progression through time, beginning in Genesis with Eve and man's fall from grace, followed by Old Testament prophecies of the virgin birth by Isaiah, then entering New Testament time, and culminating in the Church's formal acknowledgement of the teaching with Pope Pius IX's proclamation in 1854.

Installed in the summer of 1910, the window is organized into five major sections or chapters. In the apex of the tracery we begin with what Bishop Maes described as "the apparition of the Virgin and child." Dressed in white and blue (symbols of purity and chastity), Mary wears a golden crown, the symbol of queenship, and holds her infant son. Her eyes are cast down in humility, yielding, as she always does, to her son who looks directly at us with open arms, inviting us into his salvific mystery. Like the introduction to a book, the image establishes the relationship of the mother and son from even before the beginning, reflecting what Pope Pius IX described in *Ineffabilis Deus*: "To her did the Father will to give his only-begotten Son ... It was she whom the Son himself chose to make his Mother."

Below the apparition is a litany of small tracery windows illustrated with fig trees and its fruit. Two white heraldic roses representing the purity of Mary decorate each side. In Christian symbolism, the fig is sometimes used in place of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and is also sometimes used as a symbol for Israel. The tracery tells us that God's plan from the beginning was to use Israel to bring man back into union with him, and he would use a virgin — immaculately preserved from sin — to bear the child who will use another tree (the cross) to bring it about.

Below the tracery and reading left to right, first are Adam and Eve shown in the very act of disobedience. The serpent slithers up the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and woos Eve with lies and deception ... she bites, gives Adam the apple to eat, and the deed is done. "She took of its fruit and ate ... and he ate." (Gen 3:6) Next, the story advances in time to the prophet Isaiah, here dressed in red and gold, colors associated with blood, martyrdom and the Messiah's kingship. Behind him we again see the Tree of

the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In his hands, he holds a scroll proclaiming the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14: "*Ecce Virgo concipiet*" ("Behold, a virgin shall conceive"). *Ineffabilis Deus* addressed Isaiah's prophecy when it said: "The words of the prophets ... describe this wondrous abundance of divine gifts and the original innocence of the Virgin of whom Jesus was born."

Below this are four panels that tell us about four distinct aspects of the Church's teaching. The far-left panel takes us to Mary's nativity, where an angel dressed in purple (the color of sovereignty) raises an open book above his head in which is written in Latin, "*Macula originalis non est in te*" ("The original stain is not in you"). "This doctrine so filled the minds and souls of our ancestors in the faith," wrote Pius IX, that they "frequently addressed the Mother of God ...

Enzweiler photo
The Immaculate Conception window.



Pope Pius IX. It was this photograph that Mayer & Co. used for the Pope's image in the window.



(above) Detail of the proclamation of Pius IX.

Enzweiler photo



The defeat of Satan at the end of time.

Enzweiler photo



The "Apparition of the Virgin."

Enzweiler photo



Courtesy of Mayer of Munich

The studios of Mayer and Company in 1910, where the Immaculate Conception window was created.



Adam and Eve in their disobedience.

Enzweiler photo

as immaculate in every respect.”

To the right of the angel is the Virgin herself “beaming in glory,” as Bishop Maes described her. The image also evokes Revelation 12:1, the “woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” Dressed in blue and white (colors symbolizing purity and chastity), the image tells of the glory accorded her by God in her conception without original sin. She stands on a globe of the earth, one foot on a crescent moon, the other crushing the serpent. “Eve listened to the serpent with lamentable consequences, she fell from original innocence and became his slave,” says *Ineffabilis Deus*. “The most Blessed Virgin, on the contrary, not only never lent an ear to the serpent, but by divinely given power she utterly destroyed the force and dominion of the evil one.”

Farther right, we see Sts. Peter and Paul with their apostolic symbols — St. Peter with the keys to the Kingdom and St. Paul with a sword and the book of the Word. Both are dressed in the colors of wisdom, constancy and faithfulness, kneeling before Mary representing the Church’s faithful acknowledgement of the dogma’s truth and of its ancient origins. At far-right, the story of salvation reaches its climax at the end of time in the ancient serpent’s final defeat. Archangel Michael, in the red garments of battle decorated with celestial stars, stands over what Bishop Maes described as “the prostrated evil spirit.” Michael raises his sword, ready to strike the final blow. This scene also evokes Revelation 12:9 where the “ancient serpent” is “thrown down.” The evil spirit which is Satan, with its green skin and horns, fearfully holds a book with the Vulgate text of Genesis 3:15: “*Ipsa conteret caput tuum*” (“She will crush your head”). Even in defeat, Satan has no choice but to testify to the truth and power of the Immaculate Conception.

This story reaches its climax in the bottom section of the window. Here, Pope Pius IX is surrounded by cardinals, bishops and priests at St. Peter’s in Rome. He is clad in gold vestments decorated with flower rosettes, lilies and fleur-de-lis (all Marian symbols). He holds *Ineffabilis Deus* in one hand and raises the other in affirmation and blessing, proclaiming: “We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.”

Canon law must be part of Church’s mission of mercy

(Continued from page 7)

Promovendo” (literally translated as the international association for promoting the study of canon law), which was celebrating its 50th anniversary with a conference in Rome Dec. 1.

When canon law is an instrument of mercy, the pope wrote, “even when a severe sanction is to be applied to one who has committed a very serious crime, the Church, which is mother, will offer him the help and spiritual support that is indispensable so that in repentance he may encounter the merciful face of the Father.”

In its application, he said, each Church law must be interpreted in light of the “supreme law,” which is “salus animarum,” the salvation of souls.

The application of canon law is something which must be done in prayer and with fidelity to the word of God, the living tradition of the Church and the magisterium or teachings of the popes, he said.

“The wisdom that comes from God, received in prayer and in listening to others,” he said, should guide canonists “in distinguishing what is essential in the daily life of the Church, inasmuch as it is desired by Christ himself and established by the Apostles, and also expressed in the Magisterium, and what instead is merely a set of external forms, perhaps useful and significant in the past, but no longer so in the present or, indeed sometimes, an impediment to a witness that, especially today, requires greater

simplicity to be credible.”

As a model, Pope Francis pointed to most Catholics’ mothers, who first taught them the faith. This essentiality of faith is what was transmitted to us by our mothers, the first evangelizers. “Why not take her as a point of reference regarding the attitude of spirit to be lived in the various situations of Church life?”

The pope thanked the canon lawyers for their contributions to Church life and prayed that they would be “instruments of God’s justice, which is always inseparably united with his mercy.”

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On ‘goodwill tour’ to Nigeria, Kentucky bishop finds packed Masses, vibrant vocations

Elizabeth Wong Barnstead
OSV News

By the time he set off on his 16-day trip to Nigeria in October, Bishop William F. Medley of Owensboro had become something of a pro at international pastoral visits.

And yet, these experiences never cease to move his heart and give him an opportunity for deep reflection upon returning home.

The bishop’s goal for his international trips is always the same: “To meet and thank the families of our priests, for sending them to serve our diocese,” in reference to the 27 priests serving western Kentucky who were not born in the United States.

These priests are the pastors of 29 of the 78 parishes in the Diocese of Owensboro. They come from countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, India, and Myanmar (also known as Burma), as well as several countries within the continent of Africa.

(The Owensboro Diocese currently has 80 priests — though this includes several retired priests and one priest, Father Uwem Enoch, who is serving as a military chaplain with the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services.)

Bishop Medley began what he calls his “goodwill tours” in 2018. He was aware of the sacrifice of these priests’ families, most of whom never see their sons apart from when the priests can travel home for occasional visits.

He felt the need to say “thank you” in person.

Bishop Medley’s inaugural trip was to Mexico. Then, in early 2020 — the same year he celebrated his 10th anniversary as bishop of Owensboro — he visited India and Myanmar. It was while returning home from the latter trip that he saw people wearing masks in airports, and shortly after he made it back to Kentucky the world was overcome with the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the pandemic waned, the bishop was able to visit Guatemala in 2022. And following that successful visit, he considered Africa — keeping in mind that western Kentucky’s priests hail from countries as varied as Nigeria, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda.

He decided to visit Nigeria, which is home to five priests currently serving the Owensboro diocese: Father Emmanuel Udoh, Father Uwem Enoch, Father Julian Ibemere, Father John Okoro, and Father Jude Okeoma. Nigeria is also the home of the provincial house of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, two of whom currently minister in the Diocese of Owensboro (Sr. Anthonia Asayoma and Sr. Anne Maria Joshua).

Several of these priests were ordained for and belong to the Diocese of Owensboro, and others serve the diocese with permission of their bishops in Nigeria.

During Bishop Medley’s Oct. 9-24 trip, he was accompanied by Father Udoh, as well as by Father Jerry Riney, an American priest of the diocese.

Out of everything he saw and experienced, he was most impressed by the “celebration of the liturgies,” the bishop told *The Western Kentucky Catholic*, Owensboro’s diocesan newspaper.

He said that at all Masses he attended — from typical parish Masses to an ordination — “people were backed out the door for want of room” and it was normal for the liturgies to last several hours.

Bishop Medley said this is consistent with the data he has seen: according to the World Values Survey, between 2017-2022 Nigeria had the highest rate of Catholic Mass attendance among countries surveyed. The report stated that weekly or even more frequent Mass attendance among self-identified Catholics in Nigeria is at 94 percent.

The bishop also was impressed by “the vocations of both men and women. Our Nigerian sisters have to turn down as many as they accept,” he said.

Indeed, the *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae* 2021 — which provides a global view of the pastoral action of the Catholic Church — showed that during that year, Africa had nearly 1,000 priestly ordinations.

“I marveled at the prolific vocations,” said Bishop Medley.

At the invitation of Bishop Camillus Raymond Umoh of



OSV News photo/courtesy Father John Okoro

Fathers Emmanuel Udoh, Jerry Riney, John Okoro, Jude Okeoma, Bishop William F. Medley of Owensboro, Ky., and Father Julian Ibemere pose for a photo in traditional Igbo Nigerian attire, during Bishop Medley’s visit to Nigeria. Bishop Medley made a pastoral visit to Nigeria from Oct. 9-24 to thank the families of the five Nigerian priests who currently minister in his diocese.

the Diocese of Ikot Ekpene, Bishop Medley even presided at the ordination of three transitional deacons.

Fulfilling his original goal of the trip, Bishop Medley met with the families of the Nigerian priests ministering to the Owensboro Diocese. All five of the priests were able to be present, having coordinated their schedules to be in Nigeria during the bishop’s visit, including Father Enoch, who received special permission from his military chaplain duties.

The bishop also visited the Nigerian headquarters of Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. bishops’ overseas relief and development agency.

“I’ve always been fascinated by their work, especially as a bishop,” he said. He said that in January, he had contacted CRS to see if he could meet with a representative during his visit.

They went to the CRS national office in Abuja and met the country representative, Akim K. Kikonda, whose role is like that of an executive director.

“He took us to a vocational training graduation for 60 young adults,” said Bishop Medley, listing fish production, seamstress work, and design/digital communications as some of the tracks offered.

He learned that CRS in Nigeria has more than 400 employees, “many of whom are not Catholic.”

Throughout his visit, Bishop Medley said he never felt uneasy for his personal safety, despite


news reports of violence in Nigeria ahead of his trip. Aid to the Church in Need, for instance, documented that in 2022 alone, 28 priests were kidnapped and four were murdered in Nigeria.

The bishop said his uneventful journey could have been because they spent most of their travels in regions not impacted by regular violence, and that he knew those traveling with him were vigilant about his safety in case any concerns were to arise.

The bishop said one of his most profound experiences in Nigeria was when he saw some wooden desks in a local school. Painted on the front of each desk was a message that said these desks had been donated by St. Thomas More Catholic Church in Paducah, Kentucky.

“Being 5,000 miles from home,” he said, “and yet seeing these hand-painted desks” made him proud of the people of his diocese, who, having benefited from the service of Nigerian priests, had in turn provided these gifts for the schoolchildren of Nigeria.

Elizabeth Wong Barnstead is the editor of The Western Kentucky Catholic, the newspaper of the Diocese of Owensboro, Ky.










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‘You kill your crickets, eh?’

(Continued from page 5)

ably cold, and in that slippery, slushy, sleety sort of state wherein it seems to penetrate through every kind of substance . . . had laid hold of Mrs. Peerybingle’s toes.”

Similarly, Dickens’s anthropomorphisms are a continuous delight. The kettle “wouldn’t hear of accommodating itself kindly to the knobs of coal,” for example. It “WOULD lean forward with a drunken air; and dribble ...

on the hearth. It was quarrelsome, and hissed and spluttered morosely at the fire.” The “sullen and pig-headed” kettle was defiant, “cocking its spout pertly and mockingly at Mrs. Peerybingle, as if it said, ‘I won’t boil. Nothing shall induce me!’”

Delightful to the ear and eye as these and many other passages are, however, the virtue of its characters and the power of its narrative are what make “The Cricket on the Hearth” such a delightful tale. The story radiates the light of Christian charity, echoing themes of generosity and

joy, focusing the luminosity of God’s gift to man in the unique event of the Incarnation. God’s grace came to us through a Man and he calls us participatively to share that grace with one another. If that is the message of Christmas, “The Cricket on the Hearth” is a complete Christmas story.

Kenneth Craycraft is an associate professor of moral theology at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary and School of Theology in Cincinnati. His column has been provided by OSV News.

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■ Wednesday, Jan. 24, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

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Fewer states use capital punishment, but more prisoners executed in 2023

Kate Scanlon
OSV News

Just five states — Texas, Florida, Missouri, Oklahoma and Alabama — carried out executions in 2023, while a majority of U.S. states have banned or paused the practice by executive order, according to a new report by the Death Penalty Information Center.

However, there was an increase in executions in 2023 from the previous year: 24 people were executed in 2023, while 18 were executed in 2022. This year, the report said, was the ninth consecutive year with fewer than 30 executions.

The report also found that people of color were overrepresented among those executed in 2023, as nine of the 24 prisoners executed were people of color.

The report attributed the increase in executions from 18 in 2022 to 24 in 2023 to Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis resuming the practice in the state ahead of his presidential bid.

Earlier in 2023, DeSantis signed legislation, SB 450, eliminating the state’s requirement that juries in capital punishment cases agree unanimously to recommend death sentences, lowering the number of jurors needed to hand down a death sentence from 12 to eight, the lowest threshold of any U.S. state. Florida’s Catholic bishops criticized the legislation, which is an outlier among states where the death penalty remains legal. Of the 27 states that permit capital punishment, three do not require a unanimous jury to impose it. Alabama allows a 10-2 decision, while Missouri and Indiana allow a judge to decide when there is a divided jury, according to the National

Center for State Courts. DeSantis, who is seeking his party’s nomination in the 2024 Republican presidential primary, is Catholic. He has sought to expand the use of the practice in Florida.

The report also noted that earlier in November, Gallup found that a record high percentage of Americans (50%) said the death penalty is applied unfairly in the U.S., the highest percentage since Gallup started asking the question in 2000.

Robin M. Maher, the Death Penalty Information Center’s executive director, said in a statement the report shows “most Americans no longer believe the death penalty can be imposed fairly.”

“That important change can also be seen in the unprecedented show of support for death-sentenced prisoners from conservative lawmakers and elected officials this year, some of whom now oppose use of the death penalty in their state.”

The Catholic Church opposes the use of capital punishment. St. John Paull II said that “the new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life,” and called the death penalty “both cruel and unnecessary.”

In his 2020 encyclical “Fratelli Tutti,” Pope Francis cited the writings of St. John Paul II, teaching that his predecessor “stated clearly and firmly that the death penalty is inadequate from a moral standpoint and no longer necessary from that of penal justice.”

“There can be no stepping back from this position,” Pope Francis wrote. “Today we state clearly that ‘the death

penalty is inadmissible’ and the Church is firmly committed to calling for its abolition worldwide.”

In 2018, Pope Francis revised paragraph No. 2267 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church to reflect that position.

Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, executive director of Catholic Mobilizing Network, called the report “encouraging” in a statement saying “we saw most states growing more and more reluctant to engage with the death penalty this year.”

“It’s not lost on the American public that capital punishment is too flawed and risky, too arbitrary and unfair; too cruel and dehumanizing to justify pursuing executions,” Vaillancourt Murphy said.

The data points in the report, she said, “unequivocally indicate that the practice is on its way out in this country.”

“We believe that the few outlier states that continue to execute and sentence people to death can, and ultimately will, course correct and distance themselves from this inhumane practice,” Vaillancourt Murphy said.

Catholics have a role to play in pushing the few remaining states that actively use the death penalty to stop their use of the practice, Vaillancourt Murphy added.

“As Catholics who believe every life is sacred, we have an important message to share with elected leaders in states where the death penalty still persists,” she said. “In the coming year, I pray more Catholics will harness their faith to call for an end to this flawed, immoral system and to seek approaches to justice that honor the sanctity of life, rather than throw it away.”

Pope calls world leaders to end divisions to fight climate change

Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service

The future of humanity depends on what people choose now, Pope Francis said in his message to global leaders at the World Climate Action Summit of the U.N. Climate Change Conference.

“Are we working for a culture of life or a culture of death?” he asked in his message. “To all of you I make this heartfelt appeal: Let us choose life! Let us choose the future!”

“The purpose of power is to serve. It is useless to cling to an authority that will one day be remembered for its inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so. History will be grateful to you,” the pope wrote.

Excerpts from Pope Francis’ full written message were read by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, Dec. 2 during the high-level segment with heads of state and government at the climate conference, COP28, being held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Nov. 30-Dec. 12.

Pope Francis was to have been the first pope to attend the U.N. climate conference Dec. 1-3, but canceled his trip Nov. 28 after coming down with a serious bronchial infection.

The Vatican published the pope’s full speech Dec. 2, although Cardinal Parolin read only excerpts at the summit to respect the three-minute limit on national statements. The text was submitted in full to the conference.

“Sadly, I am unable to be present with you, as I had greatly desired,” the pope’s text said.

The destruction of the environment is “a sin” that not only “greatly endangers all human beings, especially the most vulnerable,” he wrote, but it also “threatens to

unleash a conflict between generations.”

“The drive to produce and possess has become an obsession, resulting in an inordinate greed that has made the environment the object of unbridled exploitation,” the pope wrote. People must recognize their limits, with humility and courage, and seek authentic fulfillment.

“What stands in the way of this? The divisions that presently exist among us,” he wrote.

The world “should not be un-connected by those who govern it, with international negotiations that ‘cannot make significant progress due to positions taken by countries which place their national interests above the global common good,’” he wrote, quoting from his 2015 encyclical “Laudato Si’, On Care for Our Common Home.”

The poor and high birth rates are not to blame for today’s climate crisis, he wrote. “Almost half of our world that is more needy is responsible for scarcely 10% of toxic emissions, while the gap between the opulent few and the masses of the poor has never been so abysmal. The poor are the real victims of what is happening.”

As for population growth, births are a resource, he wrote, “whereas certain ideological and utilitarian models now being imposed with a velvet glove on families and peoples constitute real forms of colonization.”

“The development of many countries, already burdened by grave economic debt, should not be penalized,” it said. “It would only be fair to find suitable means of remitting the financial debts that burden different peoples, not least in light of the ecological debt that they are owed” by the few nations responsible for the bulk of emissions.

“We have a grave responsibility,” he wrote, which is to ensure the earth, the poor and the young not be denied a

future.

The solution requires coming together as brothers and sisters living in a common home, rebuilding trust and pursuing multilateralism, he added.

The care for creation and world peace are closely linked, the pope wrote.

“How much energy is humanity wasting on the numerous wars” being waged, he wrote, and “how many resources are being squandered on weaponry that destroys lives and devastates our common home!”

The pope again urged governments to divert money away from arms and other military expenditures toward a global fund to end hunger; to promote sustainable development of poorer countries and to combat climate change.

“Climate change signals the need for political change” away from narrow self-interest and nationalism, he wrote.

There must be “a breakthrough that is not a partial change of course, but rather a new way of making progress together,” he wrote. There must be “a decisive acceleration of ecological transition” regarding energy efficiency, renewable sources, the elimination of fossil fuels and “education in lifestyles that are less dependent on the latter.”

He promised the “commitment and support of the Catholic Church, which is deeply engaged in the work of education and of encouraging participation by all, as well as in promoting sound lifestyles.”

“Let us leave behind our divisions and unite our forces,” Pope Francis wrote. “And with God’s help, let us emerge from the dark night of wars and environmental devastation in order to turn our common future into the dawn of a new and radiant day.”



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Hospital close to Christ’s birthplace in Bethlehem struggles to operate amid war

Judith Sudilovsky
OSV News

The Holy Family Hospital in Bethlehem, located just 1,500 steps from the birthplace of Christ, is confronting significant challenges amid the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip 45 miles away.

The hospital, the premier maternity hospital and neonatal critical care center in the Bethlehem region of the West Bank, has been facing difficulties in its ability to operate, struggling to ensure the delivery of essential medical services since the outbreak of the war Oct. 7.

Israel launched a military assault on Hamas after Hamas terrorists from Gaza breached a security fence on Israel’s southern border Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people, and kidnapping almost 240 people, including babies and elderly, of whom only a fifth made it safely home as of Nov. 28.

As war erupted, roadblocks were put up and checkpoints closed in the West Bank, making it difficult for medical supplies such as pharmaceuticals, epidural kits and highly specialized baby formula to reach the hospital, Order of Malta Ambassador to Palestine Michèle Bowe, president of Holy Family Hospital Foundation told OSV News in a phone interview.

Prices for the medical supplies also increased dramatically, she told OSV News. All this has put the hospital’s ability to fully serve the community at risk.

The hospital, a charity institution, delivers approximately 5,000 babies annually and provides 150,000 services, including a crucial mobile clinic — which, until the war, went out daily to reach women in isolated West Bank villages — a gestational diabetes clinic and the only menopause clinic in the West Bank. They treat close to 20,000 patients a year, from the areas of Bethlehem, Hebron, Jericho and smaller villages.

Because of the tense political situation, overwhelmed hospital staff were preferred not to have media visitors at the hospital at the time of the interview.

“We are the only hospital in the West Bank that can deliver and care for babies as small as one pound and serve a catchment area of around 1 million people,” said Bowe. “We have a Level 3 NICU and some babies at the unit are born really small — as small as one pound. They need a highly dense caloric formula, which is very expensive, but it is the difference between a baby surviving and a baby not surviving or surviving poorly.”

At the time of the Nov. 14 interview, they were waiting



OSV News photo/courtesy HPH Foundation

A woman is pictured in a file photo holding a newborn at Holy Land Family Hospital of Bethlehem in the West Bank. The hospital, located just 1,500 steps from the birthplace of Christ, is confronting significant challenges amid the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip 45 miles away.

for the delivery of infusion pumps needed to deliver intravenous medicine to women and babies and a sonogram machine, much needed to check on unborn babies and to monitor babies’ organs once they are born.

The hospital relies heavily on donations, and though patients are asked to contribute for services they receive, the hospital subsidizes services by 50%, said Bowe. However, the closures and uncertainties about subsidies from organizations such as UNRWA — United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East — and the Palestinian Authority, which normally contribute to patient care but are now redirecting funds for Palestinians in Gaza, have strained their financial situation, she said.

To further exacerbate the situation, since the economy of Bethlehem is based on pilgrimages and tourism, 90% of the workforce is not receiving salaries now, so fewer patients are able to contribute toward their care.

Already practiced in working under stressful conditions following the second intifada and the COVID-19 pandemic, the staff went into emergency mode, splitting work schedules so people would not have to travel to or from work in the middle of the night, and trading residents with other hospitals so each resident would be working closer to

their home.

“The one thing our staff is, is extremely resilient and resourceful,” said Bowe. “We have to rely on ingenuity to work.”

One of the biggest concerns now is any need for surgeries for the NICU babies since the hospital is not equipped for that. Normally, they’d transfer the babies to an Israeli hospital with payment subsidized by the Peres Peace Center for Peace and Innovation. Israeli surgeons would treat the babies while waiving their fees. But under the current situation, the center will not be able to help with funding this year.

Before the outbreak of the war, a baby born with the valves in his heart transposed was at an Israeli hospital undergoing lifesaving cardiac surgery within eight hours of birth, but now staff members hold their breath every time a mother comes in with a complicated pregnancy, Bowe said.

“They are praying that the baby who is born will not need surgical intervention. The situation is not like it was before, where they could transfer the baby for care,” she said.

But as the Christmas season approached, Bowe said she preferred to remember the recent birth of a baby aptly named Amal (hope in Arabic) to a young mother, Nadeem, who came to the hospital after realizing she hadn’t felt the baby move for a significant amount of time.

Already parents of two older children, she and her husband had waited for some time for their third baby. She was afraid of having an expensive hospital bill and no baby to bring home, but when she told her husband, he rushed her to Holy Family Hospital. There, medical staff jumped into action and performed an emergency cesarean section. At first, the baby was gray and unresponsive, but the staff did not give up and finally the little girl let out a tiny cry and she was brought to the NICU.”

Nadeem said it was the prayers of her children that saved her baby. She couldn’t stop thanking the staff for the gift of life and of hope the baby brings,” said Bowe. “The birth of her baby brought her hope in this time of terrible war and the loss of so many lives. There is a new baby in Bethlehem and it gives her hope that this will pass.”

Judith Sudilovsky writes for OSV News from Jerusalem.

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National/World

Fighting in Holy Land, bombing in Philippines prompt prayers

VATICAN CITY — The end of the temporary cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hamas “means death, destruction, misery,” Pope Francis said. After reciting the Angelus prayer Dec. 3 from his Vatican residence, Pope Francis had an aide read his remarks expressing sadness over the resumption of fighting in the Holy Land Dec. 1 after a weeklong truce. “Many hostages have been freed, but many are still in Gaza” in the hands of Hamas, the pope’s text said. “Let’s think about them, their families who had seen a light, a hope to embrace their loved ones again.” Israel and Hamas had agreed on the temporary cease-fire to allow Hamas to release hostages captured in Israel Oct. 7 in exchange for the release of Palestinians jailed in Israel. The agreement also allowed aid agencies to deliver needed food, water, medicine and fuel to Gaza. Pope Francis also used his midday Angelus remarks to pray for the victims of a bombing at a Catholic Mass held earlier Dec. 3 in a gym at Mindanao State University in Marawi, Philippines. Five people died and 50 were injured.

Tuberville ends hold on military promotions over abortion policy

WASHINGTON — Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., told reporters on Capitol Hill Dec. 5 that he would end his months-long blockade on hundreds of military promotions undertaken in protest of a Pentagon abortion policy. Tuberville said he agreed to an arrangement with Sens. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, and Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, that would release all of his holds on military officers at the three-star level and below, but his holds on some nominations for four-star generals and officers would remain in place for now. “I’m releasing everybody,” Tuberville told reporters. “I still got a hold on, I think, 11 four-star generals. Everybody else is completely released from me. But other than that, it’s over.” Since March 8, Tuberville had blocked nominations by denying the Senate the ability to confirm nominees through unanimous consent, a procedure in which the Senate considers a matter agreed to if no senator objects. Tuberville used the Senate procedure to block hundreds of military promotions in protest of the Pentagon’s abortion policy allowing service members to be reimbursed for travel costs associated with getting an abortion, along with his criticisms of what he called the military’s “woke politics.” In November, Ernst, a veteran who is pro-life, argued Tuberville’s blockade disrespected service members and their families more than it challenged the abortion policy, which she said would be better challenged in court.

Univ. of Notre Dame names its new president

NOTRE DAME, Ind. — The University of Notre Dame has selected a new president who said he hopes to position the school as an “ever-greater engine of insight, innovation and impact.” The school’s board of trustees announced Dec. 4 that Holy Cross Father Robert A. Dowd has been named Notre Dame’s 18th president, effective July 1. Father Dowd — an Indiana native and Notre Dame alumnus — has since 2021 served as the school’s vice president and associate provost for interdisciplinary initiatives. He is also an associate professor of political science, a university fellow and trustee, and religious superior of the Holy Cross community at Notre Dame. Father Dowd will succeed fellow Holy Cross Father John I. Jenkins, who said in October that he had decided to step down at the end of the 2023-2024 academic year after serving as president for 19 years — a tenure that was marked by both significant advances in the school’s development and occasional controversy. In a statement, Father Dowd, admitting he was “deeply humbled and honored” by his appointment, said he planned to build on the legacy of his predecessor. “Informed by our Catholic mission, we will work together so that Notre Dame is an ever-greater engine of insight, innovation and impact, addressing society’s greatest challenges and helping young people to realize their potential for good.

France protests rising antisemitism, leaders encourage dialogue

PARIS — Little more than a month after the attack in Israel, the French Interior Ministry said 1,247 antisemitic incidents had been reported since Oct. 7, nearly three times the total for all of 2022. These incidents have included the star of David, a symbol of Judaism, being marked on Jewish people’s homes — which reminded the older French generation about the horrors of German occupation, marking the Jewish house only to point whom to later exterminate. More than 180,000 people across France, including 100,000 in Paris, marched peacefully on Nov. 12 to protest against rising antisemitism. The march in the cap-

ital was attended by Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne and representatives of several parties from left to far-right. President Emmanuel Macron did not attend, but expressed his support for the protest and called on citizens to rise up against “the unbearable resurgence of unbridled antisemitism.” “A France where our Jewish citizens are afraid is not France,” he wrote in a letter published Nov. 11 in the daily Le Parisien. The day after the marches, Macron received Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and other religious leaders at the Elysée Palace, to discuss the problem. Macron asked them to work to “defend universalism and republican values” by “multiplying educational actions” in favor of peace, particularly among young people.

Lawmakers call for release of Bishop Rolando Álvarez

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers and exiled Nicaraguan nationals at a congressional hearing Nov. 30 called for the release of Bishop Rolando Álvarez, a Catholic prelate imprisoned by Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega. Ortega’s regime has persecuted the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, the lawmakers said, targeting church leaders who have criticized his government. Among them, Bishop Álvarez was sentenced in February to 26 years in prison the day after he refused to be deported to the U.S. with more than 200 other Nicaraguan political prisoners. Pope Francis has publicly denounced Bishop Álvarez’s sentence and the deportation of Nicaraguans from their homeland. At the hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations chaired by Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., lawmakers said trumped-up charges against Bishop Álvarez by Ortega, who they called a dictator, is part of the regime’s crackdown on religious freedom in the country. “Today, we appeal to President Daniel Ortega: Let imprisoned

Catholic Bishop Álvarez go,” Smith said. “Release him from prison ... let him come to the United States or to the Vatican or somewhere else, or stay right in Nicaragua, where he can again serve the people, preach the good news and the Gospel, and care for the weakest and most vulnerable.”

Mexican Catholics condemn euthanasia initiative

BUENOS AIRES — Catholics in Mexico have condemned an initiative to legalize euthanasia, accusing lawmakers of simply wanting to “save money,” while presenting their proposal “under the guise of false piety.” A proposed law presented in the lower house of Congress is expected to be debated by its health commission and proposes allowing euthanasia for certain patients so long as they receive medical and psychological evaluations and their written request is reviewed by a notary. Those circumstances include terminal illness, irreversible conditions and “being in agony.” The proposal sparked disquiet among church leaders and pro-life groups in Mexico, which recalled that the lower house hosted “National Euthanasia Week” in June 2022 and talked about palliative care for terminal patients being costly. “The regulation of euthanasia in Mexico, if approved by the legislative branch, could mean, in terms of investment in health, a ‘savings’ for the state,” Emmanuel Reyes Carmona, the health commission’s president, said at the event. The Mexican bishops’ conference released a statement, dated Nov. 27, opposing the euthanasia initiative, saying that “more than an act of compassion, taking the life of another person is a gesture of abandonment, which is why euthanasia is always an attack against the dignity of the person.” It added, “The key is to understand the difference between ‘causing death’ (killing) and ‘allowing death’ (accepting its natural end).”



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