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'Emmanuel — God is with us'

The *Messenger* staff wishes you and your loved ones a very merry Christmas and a blessed New Year. This is our final issue of the year. Our next issue — the first issue of the 94th edition of the *Messenger* — will be Jan. 5.

The Curia offices will be closed from Dec. 20 – Jan. 2 for the Christmas season. Many staff members will have limited access to their e-mail during the holiday.

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Missed an edition? Current and back issues of the *Messenger* are available online at covdio.org/messenger.



Christmas 2023

Dear Brother's and Sister's in Christ,

"What is the best Christmas gift you have ever received?" This was an icebreaker question for a group meeting I recently attended. The answers were varied, some amusing, others incredibly touching. They ranged from a gadget that was at the center of a beloved childhood memory to the reuniting and reconciliation of family members. There was one common theme that stood out clearly, the best Christmas gifts are those that assure us that we are loved. The respectful love of the giver is the true value of the gift.

At Mass on Christmas morning the Church proclaims, "*And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14). Of course, this gift of our Savior is the greatest gift imaginable. We had turned our backs on God and been separated from the source of life because of sin. God, however, did not turn his back on us, but continued to long for us with the greatest possible love. So eager is God to respect us, that he empties himself to take on our human nature, becoming like us in all things but sin.

Let's interrogate that last note. God deigns to become like us *in all things but sin*. We know that Jesus was not stained by original or personal sin. This is an article of faith. Sin is foreign to God. Yet, Jesus Christ was born into a fallen world and willingly shared with us the curse that flows from our personal and social sin. For love of us, the Word of God became flesh. He became subject to discomfort, illness, and even death. At birth, Jesus joined our plaintive wail as he drew his first breaths. Jesus assumed the duty of labor and work. He lived under an oppressive Roman regime and suffered under the whim of a ruthless puppet king. He knew racism and antisemitism. And violence. Jesus lived in a violent world and was eventually its victim. He accepted being shunned and an outcast. Jesus knew the betrayal of a trusted friend. In the end, he experienced the isolation of abandonment. Pain, so much pain. And grief.

The Lord of the universe was born a child. He made himself small and vulnerable so that you and I might know that a love that respects us is the ultimate reality of our lives. God chose to do this for us. This is God's gift. It is the greatest gift we could ever imagine. The respectful love of the giver is the gift.

This is the time of year when Christmas cards assure us of the affection of friends and family. The best of them also points us toward the reality of the respectful love God has for each of us. One card that I received this Advent bears this simple quote from St. Therese of Lisieux. "A God who became so small could only be mercy and love." This is Christmas and this is the Christmas gift we receive; the source of all creation reveals himself to us as mercy and love.

As we have received, let us give. St. Therese strove to harmonize with this gift of mercy and love by making herself small and offering herself in a thousand little ways for the love of all others. This Christmas, let us imitate the giver by living with respect and love for all others.

Please pray in an intense and charitable way this Christmas for those who grieve and suffer in the Holy Land and in every nation wracked by violence and war. Have faith that all things are possible for God and that God will use even our smallest efforts to heal the world's greatest harms. Act on this faith.

I give thanks to God for the works of charity that come so naturally to you. And, as always, I am amazed by your faith, inspired by your kindness, and grateful for the warm welcome you extend to me on every occasion. I am most pleased that you love one another and urge one another toward holiness.

Merry Christmas everyone. With respect and love for us, the giver makes himself the gift. Let us take up our cross and follow him.

Yours in the Joy and Love of Christmas,

+John Iffert
Bishop of Covington



Bishop invites us to ‘rejoice in Mary,’ commemorating the Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception, celebrated Dec. 8, is a feast day celebrating the conception of the Virgin Mary without original sin. It is one of most important Marian feasts in the Catholic Church, and is celebrated as a holy day of obligation.

Bishop John Iffert celebrated a vigil for the feast day, Dec. 7, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington.

Dec. 8, 1854, was the year Pope Pius IX defined the teaching of the Immaculate Conception, Bishop Iffert began his homily noting.

“It doesn’t mean that he was engaged in creative theology or pulling something new out of the air,” he said, “To say that a pope defined the teaching means that the teaching was in the content of the faith handed down to us from the apostles.”

The apostles and fathers and mothers of the Church taught that Mary had been protected — that she had been “maintained in her purity, that God had acted in a gracious and wonderful way to protect Mary so that she might be the tabernacle that would bear her Lord to the world.”

This was always Christian teaching, Bishop Iffert continued, but it was in 1854 that it was defined and established as dogma in the Catholic Church — and that the Feast of the Immaculate Conception was established.

“In the first instance of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits

of Jesus Christ, savior of the human race, was preserved, exempt, from all stain of original sin,” he said.

Mary was “uniquely placed” in human history, Bishop Iffert continued, uniquely, she received the grace to remain “pure of heart, mind and body” to be the tabernacle— so that no sin would touch the Savior:

“The cross of Jesus Christ, in the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Mother, is revealed as the central act of human history,” Bishop Iffert said, “The offer of salvation to every human being that has ever existed and will ever exist — flowing forward in time and back in time... the center of history, the cross of Jesus Christ.”

“We rejoice in Mary. We honor her and venerate her and rejoice in her unique vocation,” Bishop Iffert concluded his homily. “She, in all the history of the world, was the one who God could prepare to bring us our Savior — and this very truth teaches us that the central act of all human history, of all creation, is the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord. And from that: every gift and blessing flows.”



(above) Deacon Jerry Franzen (left) and Bishop John Iffert (center) at the vigil Mass celebrating the Immaculate Conception. The color blue, worn on their chasubles, is consistent with Marian feast days.

(left) A statue of the Blessed Virgin in the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington— dressed in a blue cloak and decorated with fresh flowers in commemoration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.



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



An Epiphany Epilogue

The Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption will resonate with festive music as the Cathedral Concert Series brings the Season of Christmas to a close with “An Epiphany Epilogue” concert, Jan. 7, 3:00 p.m. Seasonal selections from a wide variety of traditions make this program a treat for music lovers of all ages. The Seven Hills Brass Ensemble returns as the featured guest ensemble. LeeAnn Kordenbrock, Cathedral cantor and soloist, and Principal Organist Dr. Greg Schaffer offer unique arrangements for voice, synthesizer and organ. Traditional adornments of the Nativity scene, poinsettias, and evergreen enhance the stunning interior of the Basilica while the music and sacred art surround the listener. All are welcome. There is no admission charge. A freewill offering will be accepted. For more on the Cathedral Concert Series visit www.cathedralconcertseries.org.



Christmas at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption Mass Schedule

Sunday, December 24

5:30 p.m. — Mass of the Vigil of Christmas
Music: Organ, Violin, and Cantor

Monday, December 25

Midnight — Pontifical Mass
Doors open at 11 p.m.
Prelude Music begins at 11:30 p.m.
Music: Organ, Cathedral Bishop’s Choir

Midnight Mass will be live streamed and broadcast live on The CW at 12 a.m.

Monday, December 25 (continued)

10 a.m. — Mass of Christmas Day
Music by the Cathedral Bishop’s Choir

Sunday, December 31

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
7:30 a.m., 10 a.m., 5:30 p.m.

Monday, January 1, 2024

Solemnity of Mary, The Holy Mother of God (not a holy day of obligation this year)
Daily Mass at 8:15 a.m.

Confessions will be heard:

Friday, Dec. 15, 12–1 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 16, 3–4 p.m.
Friday, Dec. 22, 12–1 p.m.
Saturday, Dec. 23, 3–4 p.m.

The Cathedral will be closed after 10 a.m. Mass on Christmas Day

The Parish Office will be closed on Dec. 21–Jan. 2

See page 17 for Pope Francis’ Christmas liturgy schedule.

Correction — The December 1 edition of the *Messenger* incorrectly cited Juan Aviles and Paul Smith as employees of Bishop Brossart High School, Alexandria. Mr. Aviles is general chair of the ‘23-’24 ACUE Annual Fund and Mr. Smith is honorary chair of this year’s ACUE leadership appeal. The *Messenger* apologizes for this error.

Celebrating Our Lady of Guadalupe



Cristo Rey Parish, Florence, held a special Mass in celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Dec. 12. The Mass was celebrated



by Bishop John Iffert, joining Father Allan Frederick, pastor; Cristo Rey.

The Mass, joined by hundreds of wor-



shippers, came together in community, celebra- tion and song. At the end of the Mass, mem- bers of the Cristo Rey community presented Bishop Iffert with a gift: a song sung by a grandfather and his grandchildren.

The feast commemorates the appearance of the Blessed Mother to Mexican St. Juan Diego in 1531, an event which brough about the con- version of millions of people.

The feast day on Dec. 12 was established by Pope Benedict XIV in 1754; Pope John Paul II declared Our Lady of Guadalupe as “Patroness of the Americas” and “Star of the New Evangelization” in 1999.

2024 March for Life looks to the state

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Since the overturning of Roe v. Wade, emphasis on changing hearts and minds in the states has been made the primary objective of the 2024 March for Life — with Kentucky’s happening in Frankfort in the new year, Jan. 23. The March is held in conjunction with the Archdiocese of Louisville, the Family Foundation, the Knights of Columbus and other Christian churches.

“The idea was that after Roe v. Wade,” said Faye Roch, director, Pro-life Office for the Diocese of Covington, “the states needed to bring more recognition on the issue of (pro-life) to their community. And the National March for



Life encouraged all states to hold a statewide March for Life.”

Starting with Mass at 9:30 a.m. at Good Shepherd Church, Frankfort, the event will include a rally and prayer until around 3 p.m. at both the Kentucky Capitol Rotunda and the Memorial for the Unborn in the his- toric Frankfort Cemetery.

Four buses are scheduled to shuttle people from the Diocese of Covington to Frankfort for the event, with RSVP’s for the buses due by Jan. 19.

“We’re hoping to fill all the buses,” said Mrs. Roch, who is also encouraging people to travel to Frankfort on their own for the March, if the buses end up filling.

RSVP’s can be given to the diocesan Pro-Life Office, (859) 392-1500.



In preparation for the Bambinelli blessing and Christmas Tree lighting, Dec. 17, Curia employees decorate the tree in St. Mary’s Park using an assortment of oversized baubles decorated by Catholic schools and institutions.



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. 16**
Knights of Columbus annual Children’s Christmas Party, Elsmere, 10 a.m.

Dec. 17
Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 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.

Dec. 19
Advisory Council meeting, 9:30 a.m.

Diocesan Finance Council meeting, 2 p.m.

Dec. 20
Vespers and seminarian Christmas dinner, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 4:30 p.m.
- Dec. 21**
Priest Holy Hour, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 3 p.m.

Dec. 20–Jan. 2
Diocesan Curia offices closed in observance of the Solemnity of Christmas

Dec. 23
Vigil Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 4:30 p.m.

Dec. 24
Christmas Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 11:59 p.m.

Jan. 3
Diocesan Curia Offices re- open 8:30 a.m.



THRIVE! prepares for the Christmas season, new year
Angie Poat, diocesan Youth Minister, and the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization, held a THRIVE! youth ministry night, Dec. 6. A night of prayer, community and song, the evening provided those involved in youth ministry within the Diocese of Covington information to continue contributions to helping the diocese THRIVE! throughout the Christmas season and new year.

Feel
The Miracle
This Christmas

And the magic of this holy season.
May this year hold
the birth of new
blessings and the
promise of
lasting peace.

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& HAPPY NEW YEAR

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IT'S COVID,
COLD & FLU
SEASON

That time of year when your nose is sneezy, your tummy's queasy, and your body's wheezy.
The good news is, there's help.
Check out our advice on staying well and getting healthy.

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NORTHERN KENTUCKY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

SPILLAB

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We Choose Life



Pro-Life Office

of the Diocese of Covington

Mission Statement

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

Resources

Relevant Christmas Verses

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”
– John 1:14

Finding the light of Christmas

Very Rev. Ryan L. Stenger, J. C. L.
Contributor

In the Mass of Christmas Day, the Church presents us with one of the most important and beautiful texts in the entire Bible: the Prologue of the Gospel according to St. John. This passage summarizes not only the great mystery of the Nativity of our Lord, but really it summarizes the whole long history of salvation. It starts, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). With these words, St. John draws our attention back to the very first words of the Bible, the creation account in the Book of Genesis. And his intention in doing so is to show us that the birth of Jesus was not simply an isolated historical event that occurred some 2,000 years ago, but rather was the culmination of what began at the very beginning of creation countless ages ago at the foundation of the world.

According to the imagery used by that first account of creation in the Book of Genesis, God speaks the world into existence. He says, “Let there be light,” and there is. He says, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures,” and it does.

In St. John’s words, “All things came to be through [the Word], and without Him nothing came to be.” (John 1:3) What this means is that the universe is not dumb or irrational or meaningless. Just as every word that we speak is first formed within our minds and hearts and is filled by us with meaning and purpose, so too all of creation from the very beginning is imbued with purpose and rationality and order, because it proceeds from the mind and heart of almighty God.

Our lives and our world are not mere happenstance, not the product of random chance; on the contrary, they are the result of God’s specific intention and plan. Every human person is directly willed and loved by God. This is the source of our dignity, our right to live, and indeed of our very existence itself.

And yet, it is abundantly clear from even the most casual survey of human history and of our own hearts that this divine order has not been fully realized in our world. From the very beginning, man has so often refused to accept the Word, refused to acknowledge the truth about himself and his world, refused to live in accord with God’s order. As St. John writes, “He was in the world, and the world came to be through Him, but the world did not know Him. He came to what was His own, but His own people did not accept Him.” (John 1:10-11)

This is the tragedy of sin: that God created us to bask in the light of His glory, and yet we fled to the shadows in order to try to create our own light. God created us with eternal significance and purpose, and yet we turned inwards upon ourselves and retreated into our own private worlds, in which there is space for no one other than ourselves.

There was no room for Christ in the inn on the first Christmas. And throughout the thousands of Christmases that have come and gone since then, we still have struggled to find room for Him within our lives — and to find room for the poor, the lowly, the vulnerable, and all those in whom we ought to see His face with particular clarity and love.

That original sin has remained fundamentally the same down throughout the ages. Today we act as though we create ourselves, as though our opinions and preferences and desires were the arbiters of truth, and morality, and the meaning of life. Our pride is

such that even something as basic and fundamental as the right to life is cast aside when it becomes inconvenient.

Still today, our lives and our society are thrown into disorder and chaos because of our proud refusal to accept the Word of God, to acknowledge the divine order and truth that lie within all creation.

And yet, in the face of sins piled on top of sins, in the face of countless acts of proud disobedience and rebellion down through the ages, God has never ever turned away from us. In fact, the Book of Genesis tells us that, from the very moment of the sin of our first parents, the Lord God was planning our salva-



CNS photo/Vatican Media
Children accompany Pope Francis in procession to the Nativity scene at the conclusion of Christmas Eve Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Dec. 24, 2022.

tion. He declared to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel” (Gen 3:15).

He promised a Savior, born of a woman, who would conquer Satan and the disorder that he had introduced into creation.

What we celebrate on Christmas is the fulfillment of that promise. In the immortal words of St. John, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:14) That Word of God, who was in the beginning, by whom and through whom all things were made, that Word who fills all creation with light and truth and order and purpose, that same Divine Word has become man, entered into time and history, and made His dwelling in our midst.

This union of God and man is at last the culmination of creation, the realization of God’s purpose for the world. In Jesus Christ, human nature has at last been brought into perfect harmony with the Divine Nature. Man has at last entered into God’s order with complete humility and obedience. The purpose of all creation has at last been made manifest in this union of the things of Heaven with those of earth. Our human dignity has found its highest and noblest expression in being inseparably united to God Himself.

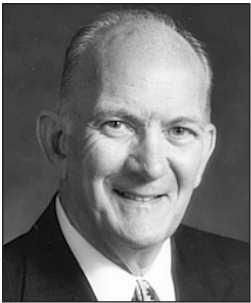
This Christmas, let us pray that we may live always according to that sublime dignity and that it may be recognized and respected throughout our world.

Father Ryan Stenger is judicial vicar, Diocese of Covington and pastor, St. Joseph Parish, Camp Springs, Ky.

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

Somewhere along the way, I heard hundreds of Christmas stories and experienced a few good ones myself. Here are two of my favorites.

ALONG THE WAY



Ray Smith

We volunteers had just finished another season at the "Christmas Store," a yearly shopping opportunity for urban residents who were having difficulty making ends meet.

The shoppers were allowed to preserve their dignity, so to speak, by being permitted to pay a small amount per family member with a maximum of five dollars per family, no matter how large. Also, they were not on the end of

handouts. Rather, they were able to shop the contents of the store and select from among new and used items according to individual needs and tastes. It was a great concept, providing a worthwhile service and all of us felt privileged to be a part of it.

The "Christmas Store" was formerly known as "Be-Con," short for "be concerned" and similar in sound to "beacon." Our working motto back then was "Light Up The Lives Of The Poor." That humble start gave way to the full-time operation which, eventually under the leadership of the late Betty Zimmer, brought, and still brings, much brightness into the lives of many. It exists today as "Be Concerned."

Betty and her family were there that closing night when we assembled in the upper room of the old Twelfth Street firehouse, the site of that year's store (we never knew what space we might find for the store from one

year to the next). Traditionally, we had a celebration and a Mass of thanksgiving each year immediately following the store's closing for the season.

The atmosphere was perfect, for we were among friends and loved ones. A feeling of satisfaction filled the room. Those of us who had been privileged to closely assist the shoppers remembered the faces, the smiles and the gentle handling of the items by our guests. We never ceased to be amazed by the unselfish, orderly behavior of these fellow human beings who, for one reason or another, had little to call their own.

We came to the part of the Mass where all are invited to share petitions. I shall never forget the words spoken, and the example set, by one of Betty's sons who shared these amazing, unselfish words with us:

"For the person who, just a few minutes ago, broke into my car and stole my new radio and tape deck, we pray to the Lord."

Silence. Then tears. Then hugs all around. The Mass could have ended on the spot and there needn't have been a homily earlier. It was one of the greatest lessons any of us had ever been taught. The only thing missing was Jesus and the mount. It made that Christmas special all around.

The other story was also a personal one.

As often happens, the Christmas season had leaped upon us and caught us by surprise one particular year. Also, in April of that year, my wife and I had received blessed gifts — quite a surprise, especially at our ages — in the form of twin daughters.

There would be little or no time for the usual Christmas shopping. Our other six children were practically grown, so we decided to try something different. We gave them the funds for shopping, told them to make their selections, bring them home to be wrapped and we would all open our gifts on Christmas morning as usual.

Shepherds and angels

usually as challenging as they are consoling. Angels may call one to go to a place that is foreign or to lead armies with a few warriors against a mighty nation. The angel who appeared to Mary asked her to say "yes" to a request that meant her whole life was no longer her own. It takes courage to recognize angels and do what they ask of us.

As I continue to ponder this invasion of heavenly creatures, I suspect that they are a literary or poetic way to indicate that people can discern how God is calling them or revealing self to them in the circumstances of their real life at the time. It's more about the openness and attentiveness of the people who see the angels than about the way the angels look. The persons next to me who are in need of welcome, in need of recognition, in need of my care and concern are the angels who are appearing to me at this moment. Their need is the invitation I am asked to attend to. There really are angels calling me and sending me. That is if I am listening.

The shepherds call me to see, to be open to the eternal in the present, to God in my neighbors, family, co-workers. I am challenged to open my eyes, to allow faith to change my everyday perceptions. After all, the shepherds were not in the temple, they were not at a prayer meeting or a Scripture study. Those, of course, are all good places to be and fidelity to those experiences may have been part of informing their daily life with a special kind of openness to God. But they were actually going about their daily task — in the fields, with their smelly sheep. They were doing their mundane, not so glorious, duty and

They loved the idea and all was going well with the plan. Then something happened.

Shortly before Christmas, one of our sons, age 18, had a mishap. Thank God, there were no injuries and no total wreckage, but it was a no-fault accident that would cost him to get his car repaired. In short, the deductible on his policy had wiped out his Christmas funds for shopping and then some.

We all hurt for him and my wife and I pondered the best solution. He was not going to have to sit in the living room and watch everyone else open presents. Something must have inspired one of our daughters, the twelve-year old. She shared her idea with her five siblings and, once again, Christmas proved to be a true season of sharing.

On Christmas morning, we gathered in the dining room to sing our traditional "Happy Birthday" to the baby Jesus. Then, I hammed it up by glancing in the living room and acting like Santa had skipped the Smith house. Then, I wisely got out of the way of the stampede to the various piles of gifts located in the that room.

No one had alerted our hard-luck son as to what was about to take place. He did not expect to see very much there for him and car wrecks or various mishaps can leave one "down in the dumps," as "me mother" used to say.

As it happens, his brothers and sisters had put their heads together, pooled their funds and bought gifts for him. When he walked into the room, he stared at the biggest pile of gifts, all for him, because his siblings were willing to take less than Christmas.

The large, hand-printed sign simply read, "Merry Christmas, Michael."

Merry Christmas, indeed!

Ray Smith is a commissioned Lay Pastoral Minister for the Diocese of Covington.

I have been reflecting about those shepherds who came to Bethlehem to see the child Jesus. It is a very peaceful and joy-filled Christmas story with great possi-

MUSINGS



Sister Fidelis Tracy, C.D.P.

bilities for the front of a Christmas card. My reflections are usually about the beauty, the joy, the peace of it all, about the image on the card, about the wonder of the shepherds as they gaze at the child or the glory of the angels in the night sky. However, if I did not leave the image there on the card but took it to heart, I would find some serious challenge in the story.

This is not the only time that there are angels coming on the scene in the

stories of both the old and new testaments. Those accounts sometimes put me at a distance since I have never, and do not ever expect to have angels suddenly entering my space — singing or proffering lilies or anything else. As a matter of fact, I am pretty sure that if angels invaded my space, I would be so frightened that I would not even listen.

The angels who arrive in the Scripture narratives are

there they were about to understand the bigger picture, the life of the world, the call of God. They heard the message uttered by the entire cosmos.

Christ, the savior, is born and needs to be welcomed. Sometimes life is so mundane that I do not see any significance in what I am doing beyond getting the job done. I love crossing stuff off my "do-list." That's all. Breathe a sigh of relief. And all the while there are people around me with needs and gifts I do not see.

I am barely aware of the person next to me, much less of the cosmic significance of every act. That is where the angels sing — in the space that goes beyond my needs, my failures, my frustrations, and my success. The angels' message is a challenge to see who needs to be welcomed at this time in my world. Christ is born today, in my world. I will find Christ in the homeless and the helpless, in whoever is awaiting welcome.

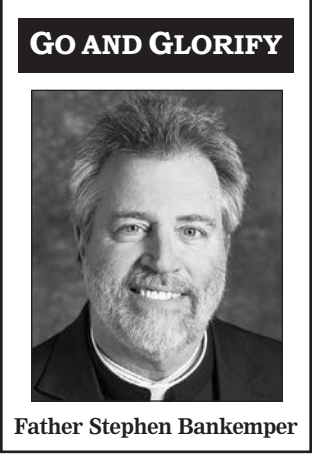
Receiving the message, the shepherds do not hesitate. There is no "What shall we do?" "How shall we proceed?" "Do we need a savior?" "Who will lead?" "What if we fail?" "Is this what our religion tells us the savior will be like?" No, they proceed with haste to the place they were told they would find the unwelcome one. There is no search for a map or formation of a committee to decide how to respond. There is no questioning of the validity of the request. They go with haste.

Divine Providence Sister Fidelis Tracy is a retired theology professor at Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, Ky.

Prepare — Christ is coming

The readings for the third Sunday of Advent — Cycle B — are: **Isiah 61:1-2A, 10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 and John 1:6-8, 19-28.**

“May the God of peace make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thes 5:16-24)



It is hard to pinpoint exactly when Advent was instituted as a liturgical season, but it was first practiced as a penitential season of preparation for the celebration of Christmas, probably in imitation of Lent as a penitential season of preparation for the celebration of Easter.

In the Christian East, Advent began as a 40-day period of fasting, sometimes called “the St. Philip fast” because it began around 15 November, when Eastern Christians celebrated St. Philip’s feast day.

The Western Church had a similar period of fasting, sometimes called “St. Martin’s fast” or “St. Martin’s Lent,” because it began on 11 November, the feast day of St. Martin of Tours. As the season developed over the centuries it became shorter, to our four-week season, and many will say that it is no longer a season of penitence, but of waiting and preparation.

Yet penance and preparation are not opposed to each other; in fact, penance is one of the three main ways we can prepare both to celebrate our Lord’s birth at Christmas and receive him at the end of time. All three of these ways are suggested to us in these Advent liturgies; let us look at each briefly.

The most obvious way that we prepare for the celebration of Christ’s birth and his return is by meditating on them and their implications for our lives. Although it is not the only way, this is precisely what we do in the liturgy. Through the prayers of the Mass, the Scriptures, and the homily, different aspects of the great actions God has done or will do are considered, that we may understand them more deeply, and the way we understand and live our lives may be affected.

We often do not take the Scriptures seriously enough to be bothered by them, but we should let the words of Paul quoted above — from this Sunday’s second reading — sink in, especially these three words: “perfectly,” “entirely,” and “blameless.” Do we understand that this is not hyperbole on Paul’s part, that, scripturally speaking, pretty good is not good enough, that God’s plan for us is that we be blameless, entirely perfect in all aspects of our being?

If we think this is far-fetched, let us remember the solemnity we just celebrated, The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Part of the theological justification for this dogma of the Church is that it was fitting, since Mary was to carry the Son of God in her body, that God preserve her from all stain of Original Sin.

It is the same Son of God, whose birth we celebrate at Christmastime, the same Son of God, who will come to us at the end of time, in whose presence we desire to live forever. Is it not just as fitting for us to be as distanced from our sinful desires as we prepare to celebrate that birth, as we think about his return? And is it not necessary that we be made perfect, as no evil can remain in the presence of God?

Of course, becoming perfect and blameless is impossible by our own efforts, and that is precisely why God gave

(Continued on page 20)

Putting love into action this Christmas season

I will admit to anyone that I absolutely love the magic of the Christmas Season. I come by it honestly, my mother loved Christmas and my heart swells when I see my daughters following the same path.



But this year as my kitchen is torn up for renovations and my mantle, usually decorated for the Feast of St. Nicholas, is covered with dust, I wondered if anyone but me would miss the stockings which were normally up and hung by the fireplace with care? Then, thoughts of those unable to decorate and fill those stockings came to mind. During this season when many find joy, many also have lost the hope of Christmas.

I have had the experience this year to meet many people who are in this situation, through the Diocese of Covington Walking with Moms (and families) in Need ministry. This ministry was initiated by the United State Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2020 to bring awareness to those moms and families in need that the Catholic Church is working to lift up by offering hope and support in their struggles.

This year’s Respect Life theme, “Radical Solidarity,” calls us to put our love into action — your struggle is my struggle. Our Blessed Mother, Mary, is a beautiful example of this kind of love and action. While pregnant with our beloved Savior, she traveled through difficult conditions to assist her cousin Elizabeth in her pregnancy.

Our diocese is blessed with many who answer this call of radical solidarity and give much needed hope to those they encounter who are struggling, these needs cover

many different situations. A young pregnant woman, homeless and in a city and state where she knows no one, has no family support, is wanting employment, but needs some mentoring to support herself and her expectant child. Thanks to the assistance of a diocesan parishioner and to a local maternity home, this young woman now has hope.

Another young woman, pregnant and with no family support, and abortion minded, finds a mentor through one of her social workers and a local pregnancy care agency and makes the decision to give life. Upon giving birth, she realizes the blessings of motherhood and has hope for the future of her infant son.

A family with an infant and four-year-old with special needs is struggling to make ends meet in the current economy. While the father has employment and is able to provide the very basic needs, the cost of formula and diapers is overwhelming. Through a parish-based St. Vincent de Paul ministry, a local pregnancy care center and the Walking with Moms in Need ministry, those necessary baby items are being provided and the family is getting some hope.

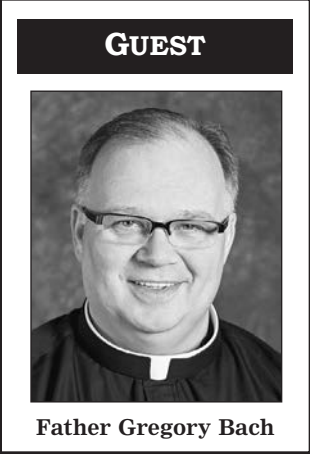
Over 200 pregnant women and their families, many new to the Northern Kentucky area, found educational and material resources thanks to local pregnancy care organizations and ministries at two community baby showers hosted by the Pregnancy Care Network of Kentucky. For many in attendance, the new outfits, strollers, car seats and gift bags were the first time they had been showered with friendship and compassion and experienced the voice of hope.

We all have the opportunity to put our love into action and to show that the light of our newborn King shines through the darkness. This message of Christmas is not about the decorations or presents, it is about bringing hope to the hopeless.

Faye Roch is the director of the ProLife Office, Diocese of Covington, Ky

A mother and her child change everything

The headline on the front page of the *Chicago Tribune* read, “31 Days Without Direct Sunlight.” It was during the fall leading into winter. I was studying at Mundelein Seminary at the time, so I decided to take a day off. I hopped on a train not far from the seminary and headed downtown. The seminary was about 45 miles from the center of town.



As I climbed aboard the train there were just a few people in the train car. As I looked around it was a depressing sight. People had their face in newspapers and in briefcases, some were starring out the window to the gray landscape that passed by. Everyone was stuck in their own world.

As the train moved closer and closer to downtown the same situation played out. People jumping on to the train and then burying themselves in work or catching up on the news or simply staring out the windows.

We were just a few steps away from downtown when I noticed a young mother boarding the train. She had her infant son in one arm, her purse and diaper bag in the other hand. She was fumbling around looking for an empty seat and after finding one she took the baby’s coat

off and began to play peekaboo with her son. I looked around the car and everything had changed. People were no longer deep in their newspaper or work. People were no longer staring out the window, but everyone was looking at the mother and child. The simple scene of a mother and her child changed everyone’s life that day, if just for a few minutes.

That simple scene of a mother and her child played out 2000 years ago when a mother and her child boarded the train of humanity and changed everything. The people had been promised a savior year after year. People waited and it got to the point that people no longer believed. The people took up the motto, eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. There was no hope.

It was through Mary and Jesus that the whole world changed. Jesus was to bring peace and hope to a world in despair. The people were given a savior, one they could see. One they could listen to and who could heal their infirmities. Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah who came to set his people free.

No longer shall our faces be buried in the busy world we live in. No longer shall we stare out into the gray landscape of our lives no, we should rejoice in Jesus our Savior who has come to give us peace.

Lift your eyes and see the redeemer of the world who has come to bring light and life into our hearts in the simple scene of a mother and her child.

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

Be Witnesses

*“Wake up the world!
Be witnesses of
a different way
of doing things,
of acting, of living!”*
— Pope Francis

Religious Communities in the Diocese of Covington

Benedictine Sisters of St. Walburg
Monastery www.stwalburg.org

Brothers of the Poor of St. Francis
www.brothersofthepoorofstfrancis.org

Passionist Nuns
www.erlangerpassionists.com

Sisters of Divine Providence
www.cdpkentucky.org

Sisters of Notre Dame
www.sndusa.org

Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker
www.ssjiw.org

Public and Private Associations

Franciscan Daughters of Mary
www.fdomary.org

Missionaries of St. John the Baptist
www.msji.org

A gift of great value

Karen Kuhlman
Messenger Correspondent

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God ... so will the Lord God make justice and praise spring up before all the nations.” (Isaiah 61, Third Sunday of Advent)

We travel through Advent with one eye on the past and the other on the future. The liturgies of the season remind us that our human failings need not destroy our hope — if we choose to live in love. Divine Providence Sister Alice Gerdeman is just one of the women religious who helps us achieve that goal by offering positive ways of understanding and dealing with the complex issues facing us today.

Sister Alice was the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center coordinator in Cincinnati for 22 years and currently serves on the Peace and Justice Committee of the Sisters of Divine Providence. She is an invaluable source of knowledge for advice on how to live in love.

Perhaps one of our most challenging issues today is one that no one wants to experience and of which no one wants to be guilty. The hurt resulting from the painful role racism plays in its victims’ lives is deep, making it difficult to trust that it won’t be experienced again. Nevertheless, the only way to begin to eliminate the evil of racism is to root it out by acknowledging its existence.

Sister Alice says, “It is helpful to accept that people are generally good, but it is also important to acknowledge that mistakes have been made. All of us have been caught in cultural situations where perhaps we have not acted perfectly, but we are still good people. When we acknowledge that we accept all kinds of things in our culture that are less than perfect, we can perhaps begin to improve things.”

Sister explained that when we look at a system riddled with sin, as all human systems are, we are not saying that all who lived at the time were guilty. A very bad system, slavery, was in place — evil was perpetrated, and people believed and accepted things. We probably do the same thing now. We can begin to challenge ourselves when we can acknowledge the evil done without placing personal blame. By acknowledging we accept all kinds of things, we can look at what was being done historically — and what is being done now. When we understand that “I am not perfect, nor is anyone else,” we can challenge ourselves to work and make things better.

Sister Alice said, “We can begin by crossing one line we are frightened to cross. Maybe it is something as simple as inviting

someone to coffee. Maybe on our family vacation, we visit one of Selma’s museums, the excellent Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice, or the Rosa Parks Museum in Montgomery. Or we can devote an afternoon to visiting the Freedom Center in Cincinnati. And we must allow our-



Courtesy of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center

Through permanent and traveling exhibits, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Cincinnati, shares challenging and inspiring stories of freedom’s heroes, from the era of the Underground Railroad to contemporary times.

selves to feel uncomfortable for a few moments during those visits. One of the most phenomenally holy women I have ever met, a woman of color, told me, ‘The truth in that discomfort is a grace. Being uncomfortable about some of these issues is a grace because grace challenges us to take another step. Each step helps us appreciate people who are different, which is good.’”

Poverty in many communities has been driven by drugs and by those who use others in whatever manner they choose. However, unfair stereotypes make it difficult to distinguish between the perpetrators and those trapped in impoverished communities. On the other hand, white business criminals’ actions that result in other people’s families falling into poverty do not pass that stigma on to all white people.

“We are all made in the image of God, and that has nothing to do with color. Each of us shows something of God to the world. When we understand that, we have hope. The hope that, perhaps, hearts can be changed,” Sister Alice said.

However, Sister Alice says that will take a long time, and “I wonder if white people can be patient with themselves while pushing forward. And can those who have other life experiences be patient with us? We must learn to share what we have with others and let others share what they have with us. Variety is how God made us, a blessing we need to recognize. God didn’t want us to be alike.”

This Christmas, God’s children can give one another a gift of great value — if we choose to live in love.

For more information about consecrated life in the Diocese of Covington, contact Sister Marla Monahan at mmonahan@covdio.org or (859) 392-1569.

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 3 we learn from Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati.

Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati (1901-1925)

Pope St. John Paul II celebrated Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati as a man of the Beatitudes. Athletic and strong, he devoted himself to the weak and malformed. He was wealthy, but he lived in poverty so he could give everything

to the poor. He was gregarious, but a lover of solitude. He was rambunctious, the life of every party, and a practical joker; but at prayer he was solemn, reflective and quiet.

As a teenager, Pier Giorgio made friends of the poor in Turin's back streets and gave them whatever he had — his money, his shoes, his overcoat. "Jesus comes to me every morning in holy Communion," he replied to a friend who asked why the hovels did not repulse him. "I repay him in my very small way by visiting the poor. The house may



be sordid, but I am going to Christ."

Pier Giorgio saw the need for social change to relieve the causes of poverty. At the university, he decided to major in mechanical engineering so that he could work with miners, who were especially disadvantaged. He was a leader in student political organizations and actively opposed Benito Mussolini and the Fascists.

At the same time, he was the organizer of student parties, games and ski trips to the Alps, where he would lead his friends in prayer. Afterward, they relaxed and enjoyed food, wine, cigars and songs.

Blessed Pier Giorgio has become the hero of contemporary young Catholics. They recognize his high Christian ideals, still held while pursuing the same pleasures that they enjoy. They gravitate to this handsome and charming saint who delighted in reciting the poetry of Dante, praying the rosary in a booming voice and spending a night in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

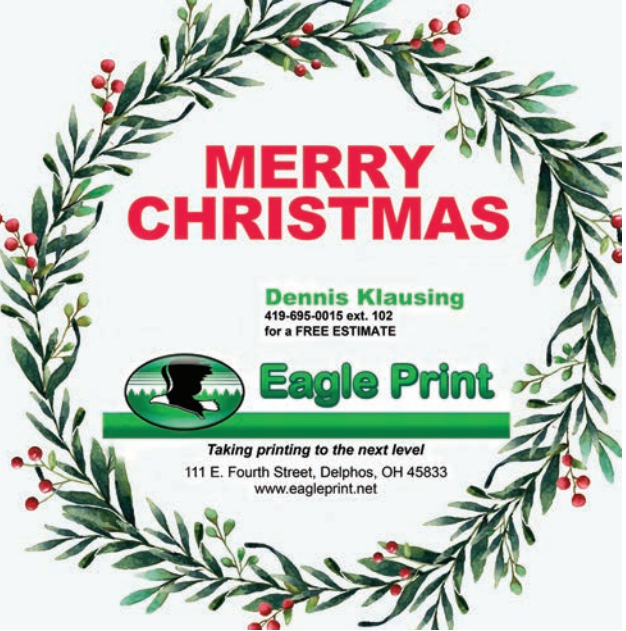
This Advent, following the saints, may we decide always to love God above all and to do the loving thing in every circumstance.



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Transubstantiation and the Eucharist

Father Luke Spannagel
USCCB

I often hear people ask why it is that, for so many priests, the Consecration is their favorite moment of the Mass. How exactly does the Consecration “work”?

Thanks for asking! Some years ago, I was in the midst of a large assignment by myself and was struggling with some health issues. I was working long days to try and cover all that was needed, but I felt myself regularly falling short. Around that time, I was gifted with a wonderful confession from one of our wise priests, who reminded me that the best and most important part of my day is always what happens at the altar. He said I could end the day with unfinished projects and unanswered messages, but if I prayed the Mass faithfully at the altar, then it will have been a great day. What great words of consolation.

At the moment of the Consecration and the elevation that follows, I am always reassured that I am exactly where I am supposed to be: I am answering the call God gave to me to serve as a priest. As we all are, I am a work in progress, and some days feel like much more progress is needed. However, in that



moment of the Mass, I am always comforted and strengthened, humbled and invigorated. Because I can be a perfectionist, I don’t always receive compliments well; because I have a quick mind, I’m often thinking of problems to solve and things that need to be done. But in that moment of the Mass is true rest and peace. If you are like me and often have a preoccupied mind, I invite you in that special moment of the Mass to enjoy resting in his peace. Remind yourself that there is no better place to be in that moment than united with Jesus truly present on the altar.

How exactly does the Consecration work? Let’s turn to our Catechism for some helpful wisdom. “It is by the conversion of the bread and wine into Christ’s body and blood that Christ becomes present in this sacrament. The

Church Fathers strongly affirmed the faith of the Church in the efficacy of the Word of Christ and of the action of the Holy Spirit to bring about this conversion. Thus St. John Chrysostom declares: ‘It is not man that causes the things offered to become the Body and Blood of Christ, but he who was crucified for us, Christ himself. The priest, in the role of Christ, pronounces these words, but their power and grace are God’s. This is my body, he says. This word transforms the things offered’” (CCC, 1375).

The Catechism tells us that the word of Jesus is what changes the bread and wine into his Body and Blood.

The Catechism continues, “The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: ‘Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation’” (CCC, 1376).

For many of us, transubstantiation can be a big and intimidating word. The reason we use words like these is
(Continued on page 18)

May the season bring much harmony and bliss,
For family and friends near, and those you will miss,
With the blessings of Heaven’s goodwill and grace,
Reflected in the shining smiles on every face!

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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.

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 jzimmer-

man@sndusa.org or at (419) 438-6056 to sign up or to find out more information.

A Martin Luther King Day regional celebration will be held at Our Savior Church, Covington, Jan. 13, 9:30-11:35 a.m. The celebration will include breakfast and a discussion on “The White Washing of Black History” by Dr. Eric Jackson, author of the “Black America Series, Northern Kentucky”. All are welcome and the event is free. For information, call Sister Janet at (859) 491-5872.

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.



Waiting in joyful hope

The St. Pius X community gathered for an Advent Prayer Service. The students who were recognized with the Christian Behavior Award in November were chosen to be the participants.



The light of Christ shining

Father Andrew Young of St. Joseph, Cold Spring, wanted the entire school to walk into Advent together “shining as bright as the light of that first star.” At the school Advent prayer service, Father Young blessed the classroom Advent wreaths and asked God to bless the teachers and students as they walked this journey together with the light of Christ shining for all to see.



Prepare for Mass
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?

Dec. 24 — Fourth Sunday of Advent (Lk 1:26-38)
This Gospel reading tells how Mary found out she was going to be the mother of Jesus. God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary when she was at home. Mary was going to be married to Joseph, who belonged to the family of King David. Mary did not understand what Gabriel explained to her, but because of her love and faith she said yes, “May it be done to me ...”



OSV News illustration/Eric Carlson

As was the Jewish custom, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem 40 days after his birth to consecrate him to the Lord. There, Simon and Anna recognized him as the Light of the World! Find the hidden objects in this illustration of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple.

— Do you think it was difficult for Mary to say yes? When do you say yes to God?

Dec. 31 — The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph (Lk 2:22-40)
Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple to conse-

crate him to the Lord. While there, a holy man, Simeon, and an aged woman, Anna, recognized Jesus as the Messiah, who they were longing for. Simeon’s prayer/song has become one of the Church’s hymns still prayed today.
— How is your family like Jesus, Mary and Joseph?

Family/friends support bring missionary to meet Jesus in people of Kitale

Laura Keener
Editor

If Theresa Glaser were to invite you to her home, you would find “hundreds of lists, on my refrigerator and on the bed next to me,” she said, as she prepares for a 3.5-year mission trip to Kitale, Kenya.

Ms. Glaser, a parishioner at St. Anthony Parish, Taylor Mill, will be traveling as a Maryknoll Lay Missioner as one of three of the Class of 2023. She will be working under the Diocese of Kitale, with the approval of Bishop Henry Juma Odonya, who was installed as Kitale’s second bishop in November 2022.

Ms. Glaser said she will be working at the St. John Bosco Rehabilitation program with the street children of Kitale, teaching them English in preparation for formal schooling, which after third grade is taught in English.

These children come to Kitale where the climate is nicer and more conducive to vegetation, usually with their mother and/or grandmother or as orphans, from the drier climate of Northern Kenya. In Northern Kenya, many of the people there are pastoralists, whose major source of food and income come from livestock. In times of draught, which is quite frequently, fathers leave their families, herding the livestock in search of water and food.

She will also be teaching the students how to use the computer, which she said is ironic, since “I’m not terribly skilled, but I hope I’m a little bit more skilled than they are,” she said.

The children range in ages from seven through 12. During the week, the children will live at the St. John Bosco Rehabilitation center, returning to their families or guardian on the weekend.

Also, in preparation for her mission trip, Ms. Glaser has been teaching herself Swahili using the popular Duolingo app. Swahili is the second language of Kitale, although anyone who has gone to school speaks English. Her students will all speak tribal languages. After she arrives in Kenya, for the first 14 weeks Ms. Glaser will participate in orientation provided by Maryknoll, which includes “language school.”

“It will be very challenging to try to teach English with-



Theresa Glaser, a parishioner at St. Anthony Parish, Taylor Mill, will begin a 42-month mission trip to Kitale, Africa, in January as a Maryknoll Lay Missioner.

out being able to communicate in any language,” she said.

She takes comfort in the support and encouragement of Divine Providence Sister Paula Gohs. Sister Paula works with the burgeoning Guatemalan community at St. Anthony Parish, teaching English. She also is teaching a small group of women parishioners Spanish, to help with the parish’s goal of being a welcoming and unified community.

“Sister Paula has provided me with a lot of materials,” Ms. Glaser said.

Ms. Glaser said that St. Anthony Parish is “a wonderful

place” and that she will miss Father Ivan Kalamuzi, pastor, Sister Paula and the daily morning Mass group that she has come to be a part. “I just realize what a wonderful group that is and how much I’ve been very influenced and deeply affected by these people in that church,” she said.

Ms. Glaser said that she has “always had a heart for the poor.” This will be her third mission trip. Her first was a year-long mission trip to Gambia, Africa, where she worked in a mobile medical clinic alongside St. Joseph of Annecy Sister Alexis Chirayil, who she describes as “the Mother Teresa of Gambia,” ministering to AIDS victims and orphans.

“She worked around the clock tirelessly, joyfully. Her example was amazing ... a great, great leader that really helped and influenced me,” Ms. Glaser said.

Since returning in 2008, “I’ve been praying, nonstop, haranguing God,” to make another mission trip. And while she made several attempts, it wouldn’t be until February 2023 before another opportunity presented itself. Sister Paula encouraged her to apply with Maryknoll, which she did in October 2022. It took many months before she would hear from them to learn that she had been accepted. In the meantime, she had been asking Father Ivan to help her find another mission trip, so he invited her to travel with him to Uganda. He was planning a month-long visit home to visit with family and to work on some projects he started there. She could volunteer at some other missions there; he would check in on her; she could stay with his family and he even arranged for a good friend to be her driver.

She took him up on his offer. While in Uganda she worked a week at a Catholic home for babies, ranging in ages from newborn to five years old, who were abused or abandoned; a week teaching children at a very poor fishing village on Lake Victoria, and a week at a residential facility for severely disabled young men. The later, she said, “was an AP course in spiritual development.”

Sixty-six of the male residents needed complete care, “they never got out of bed or off of a floor mat,” she said. The other 30 to 40 men were somewhat disabled but could provide basic self-care. “It was overwhelming, and I thought I don’t know if I can do this. The first day I wanted to run away,” Ms. Glaser said. “By the end of the week, I loved it. It was powerful and it has not left me.”

At age 72, Ms. Glaser will be Maryknoll’s second oldest missioner. She said she is a little self-conscious about her age and that she often receives a questioning look when talking to others about her upcoming mission trip. “I get that,” she said about the reaction, “But it’s kind of funny, I don’t know that I’m old, I truly don’t ... my sister says that the soul doesn’t age, the spirit doesn’t age.”

She admits that there is a little fear as she begins her longest mission trip — fear that her good health won’t hold out, fear of the unknowns that lie ahead. But she has faith that God has called her to this and that he will be with her. She also takes comfort in the support from her six siblings. “They’re all supporting me in various ways,” she said.

Having just come from morning Mass, Ms. Glaser was inspired by the Gospel story of the paralytic, whose friends lowered him through a hole in the roof so that he could meet Jesus.

“In his short homily, Father Ivan said, if you have friends that are willing to drag you through the crowd and lower you through the roof so that you can meet Jesus, then you’ve got very good friends. That resonates with me. I thought it spoke of my family,” she said as she finishes her final preparations to meet Jesus in the people of Kitale.

Ms. Glaser leaves for Kenya in January and asks the people of the Diocese of Covington to keep her and the people she will be serving in prayer. She has graciously accepted the invitation to provide quarterly updates to the *Messenger*, so that readers can follow along on her journey.

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U.S. Catholics Are Transforming Lives of Poor Families in Kenya by Funding Water Systems

As Americans, we’re used to modern water systems that include a range of technological features — a large treatment plant with sophisticated filtering systems, a massive network of pipes, and a variety of household hardware to deliver the water into our homes and yards. But in much of the world, the solution to water scarcity is far less complicated. Some communities simply need the funds to tap into underground sources.

“Drilling a well may seem like a simplistic approach to solving a water problem, but it’s actually the best way to provide safe water in a poor African village,” explained Michele Sagarino, president of Cross Catholic Outreach, an official Catholic ministry founded to serve the poor around the world. “In fact, in remote places with little or no access to electricity, it’s really the only way to provide families with a reliable and abundant source of safe water. The cost of a solar-powered system is reasonable too. Many of our Catholic donors are eager to fund the installation of a well when they learn just how much of an impact it has on the poor.”

According to Sagarino, Cross Catholic Outreach’s most recent water projects have been supplying safe water in remote villages in Kenya through a relationship the ministry has formed with Good Samaritan Water Sanitation Services and the Catholic priest who leads it.

“Church leaders in Kenya are very aware of the needs of the poor and are particularly concerned about the threats posed by unsafe water sources, but they lack the resources to cover the cost of even a simple project like well construction. That’s why our donors are so important to the process. Their gifts are essential in funding the installation of those wells,” Sagarino said.

Asked why Kenya was currently a major focus of Cross Catholic Outreach’s efforts, Sagarino explained some of the hardships faced by the families living there.

“Kenya has faced recurrent droughts for several years, forcing rural families to walk long distances in search of water. Those sources are often contaminated by animal waste and contain bacteria and parasites that create serious health risks — even taking the lives of children in some cases,” she said. “In Kenya, the terrain and wildlife are hazards too. Children are often the water collectors in a family, and they typically leave at dawn or earlier on a miles-long trek to get water. Because water is also essential to elephants and other dangerous animals, there have been serious injuries at watering holes.”

Sagarino added that some of the water systems Cross Catholic Outreach has been installing in Kenya are actually being modified to keep elephants from getting at tanks where water is being stored for future use.

“We face a lot of challenges supplying water to families in these remote, rural parts of Africa, but we persevere because families there face a life-or-death situation in some cases. Water is life, and it is essential that the water we deliver is clean and safe,” she said.

While installing a clean-water well is a less complicated process than building a more sophisticated water system, there are still very important steps involved.

The project begins with the hiring of a trusted, local drilling company and commissioning a hydrogeological survey to determine the best location for the water system. Once experts have chosen a promising site, a huge rig is brought in to drill the well. Since the terrain varies greatly from region to region, determining the depth of the



When a well project is completed and is blessed by the local priest, the whole community celebrates. The tap providing safe, clean water becomes a symbol of Christ — the living water — and the people’s faith is strengthened.

well becomes a critical decision too. “We’ve had to drill down 200 meters or more in some cases to ensure we reach a plentiful source of water,” Sagarino explained.

After the well shaft is encased in a special tubing to preserve its strength and purity, pump tests are run to ensure that there is enough water for the community, and water quality is checked to make sure the water is safe for people and animals.

Once this work is done, additional pumping equipment is installed (some water systems also include storage tanks or solar-powered pumping systems). With proper maintenance, wells like these can serve a community for decades and bless generations to come.

“There’s a lot of excitement on the day a new well is blessed and dedicated

to God,” Sagarino said. “It is a deeply moving experience, and we often share those stories with our donors because they were instrumental in making it happen.”

Readers interested in supporting Cross Catholic Outreach’s water programs and other ministries to the poor can contribute to the ministry by using the brochure inserted in this issue or by sending a tax-deductible gift to Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC02607, PO Box 97168, Washington, DC 20090-7168. The ministry has a special need for partners willing to make gifts on a monthly basis. Use the inserted brochure to become a Mission Partner, or write “Monthly Mission Partner” on mailed checks to be contacted about setting up those arrangements.

Unique Christmas Catalog Created To Bless Donors — *and the World’s Poor*

If you are like most people, your mailbox has been choked with Christmas catalogs this year. In fact, their arrival has almost become a sign of the season, like the appearance of houselights and department store decorations.

This Advent and Christmas season, Cross Catholic Outreach intends to offer a catalog too — but theirs is a very different offering with a very different purpose. It has been designed to bless both givers and receivers by using the holiday gift-giving tradition to help the

world’s poorest families.

Rather than offering gizmos, gadgets, neckties and jewelry, the Cross Catholic Outreach Christmas Catalog is giving Catholics with a concern for the poor an opportunity to share the blessings in their lives with needy families by sponsoring practical and urgently needed items such as medicines, milk powder, seeds for farming, access to safe water or materials for roof repairs. Of course, it also offers blessings for children, including toys and sports equipment, so individuals can choose to

sponsor both practical items suitable for families and gifts to bring children joy.

“Like most Christmas catalogs, ours offers lots of items so donors can choose to give something very specific. That said, they can also make a general gift to address the poor’s greatest needs,” explained Jim Cavnar, CEO of Cross Catholic Outreach, the Catholic relief and development ministry offering this program. “When donors choose to give to Greatest Need, they provide us and the Catholic missions we serve with the freedom to address any urgent need.

The priests and religious sisters we support really appreciate that flexibility. It’s the best way to empower their work among the poor.”

This unique Christmas catalog is easy to access. Readers will find a link for it at the ministry’s website (CrossCatholic.org), or they can reach it directly by entering the web address CrossCatholic.org/Christmas.

“Our hope is that everyone will be blessed by the experience,” Cavnar said. “It’s a wonderful way for us to celebrate the birth of our merciful Lord!”

Church’s Effort To Supply Safe Water to Needy Families in Kenya Has Deep Material and Spiritual Impact

To the families living in the more rural and remote areas of Kenya, the partnership of Cross Catholic Outreach and Good Samaritan Water Sanitation Services is an answer to prayer. The two ministries — one based in the U.S. and the other in Kenya — have pledged to provide the poor with safe drinking water by installing professionally drilled wells, and the impact of this work has been nothing short of miraculous.

“I give the glory to God and the credit for the success of our partnership to the Catholic donors who have helped fund our efforts. They are the real heroes in this mission of mercy. Without their support, we couldn’t have taken on a project of this size,” said Michele Sagarino, president of Cross Catholic Outreach, an official Catholic ministry founded in 2001 to serve the poor around the world. This organization supports a global network of dioceses, priests and



religious sisters involved in outreaches to the poor. In Kenya, they are currently working on life-changing water projects in the Diocese of Machakos and the Archdiocese of Mombasa. (See related story on the opposite page.)

“I think most Americans would be saddened by how extreme the need for water is in some of these areas. The fact is that many parts of the African continent are very dry, and when periods of drought come, the lack of safe water sources can become life threatening,” Sagarino explained. “We’ve launched a special campaign called *Water for Life* to draw attention to this problem and to seek support from U.S. Catholics with the goal of installing 15 water systems in communities where families are currently struggling to survive.”

The urgency Sagarino feels to solve this problem is understandable because



Like many girls in her village, Cynthia rises early to fetch water from an open ground source every day. The trek is difficult, the burden is heavy, and the water is often contaminated, but she has no choice. Her family must have water to survive.

children often face the greatest threats from this crisis. When there is no clean water in their village, they are often forced to walk many miles to find and collect their family’s daily water supply.

“And young girls are typically responsible for this chore,” Sagarino explained. “They rise early — often before dawn — and carry jerrycans to collect water at the nearest source before going to school. Traveling those long distances to the source and waiting in the long line of people drawing water can make them late for school or cause them to miss classes entirely. Even when they do get to school, many are too tired and hungry from their trek to make the most of the lessons.”

If a child needs to fetch water after school too, there are even more sacrifices, Sagarino said. They often arrive home after dark and lose the valuable time they could have used to do their homework.

Water contamination is also a serious problem. The water collected from sources like ponds or rivers can easily be tainted with bacteria, animal waste and parasites, so illnesses are common.

“Children are especially susceptible to waterborne illnesses that range from

painful stomachaches and diarrhea to more serious conditions like typhoid and cholera. These frequent illnesses also rob kids of important class time, and their families have the added burden of covering the cost of medical care,” Sagarino said.

Fortunately, Church leaders in Kenya are aware of these hardships and — with the help of American Catholics — they have been working on providing solutions to the water shortages local families have been facing. One of the most successful of these relief efforts is the partnership between Cross Catholic Outreach and Good Samaritan Water Sanitation Services. The priest who

oversees that work has a proven track record of success and is excited about the additional wells the *Water for Life* campaign will enable him to install.

“Working together, we’ve been able to drill many safe water wells in recent years, but there’s still a lot more we can accomplish if American Catholics continue to support this work,” Sagarino said. “Catholics — especially those who have been blessed during their own lives — are eager to share what they have with those in need, and now that they are aware of the hardships water scarcity is creating in Kenya, I believe they will do everything they can to help these precious families.”

How to Help

To fund Cross Catholic Outreach’s effort to help the poor worldwide, use the postage-paid brochure inserted in this newspaper or mail your gift to Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC02607, PO Box 97168, Washington, DC 20090-7168. The brochure also includes instructions on becoming a Mission Partner and making a regular monthly donation to this cause.

If you identify an aid project, 100% of the donation will be restricted to be used for that specific project. However, if more is raised for the project than is needed, funds will be redirected to other urgent needs in the ministry.



How to celebrate a Catholic Christmas

Amy Welborn
OSV News

At Christmas, we celebrate God’s gift of Jesus to the world. The very name of the day and the season — “Christ’s Mass,” derived from the Old English way of speaking of it — places Jesus, present to us in the Eucharist, at the center of the day. Might this Christmas be the beginning of a closer friendship with Jesus, nurtured by the Eucharist?

There are actually four different Masses for Christmas: the Vigil, Midnight Mass, Mass at Dawn and Mass During the Day. Each has a distinct theme and different readings, reflecting the richness of the mystery of the Incarnation. Even though most of us will attend only one Mass at Christmas, it’s a beautiful custom — and well worth our while — to meditate on the Mass readings from the others as well. This can deepen our appreciation for what God has done for us and the whole world in Christ.

Christmas is rich with symbols. We put up Christmas trees, Nativity sets and lights, all beautiful in their own right — and all symbolic of the deeper, richer dimensions of meaning that our faith brings to this season.

Christmas trees, being evergreens, speak to us of God’s eternal life and love, embodied in Christ. They also recall the tree in the garden through which sin came into the world, and the tree of the crucifixion by which that sin was conquered. Saying a prayer as we put up our tree, and making sure that some of our ornaments evoke the Nativity, can help bring this “home” to us.

The Nativity scene, or crèche (“crib” in French), was popularized by St. Francis of Assisi in the 13th century out of a desire to bring home the

reality of the humility and love of Christ. Setting out the Nativity scene — saving the Child for Dec. 25 and the Magi for Epiphany — can be natural moments for prayer and reflection.

God gives the world his Son, who dwells among us, filling us with a love that must be shared. So we, on Christmas, give gifts. Contemplating the examples of gift-givers like the Magi, St. Nicholas and King Wenceslas can bring a new perspective to our own actions. Who is in greatest need, and what gifts can we give?

Many families have already discovered the joy of giving of themselves to others on Christmas Day: seeking out shut-ins, visiting residents of nursing homes or hospital patients, or serving the poor and the homeless. They reach out, as God reaches out to us in Christ. We can consider other alternatives as well: supporting charities in the name of our friends, or encouraging our families to center their

gift-giving energies on those less fortunate in order to give as Christ has given to us.

We know as Catholics that Christmas isn’t over Dec. 26. Even just those first few days after Christmas invite us to continue to open our hearts to the Christ Child and what he brings: There’s the challenge of discipleship (St. Stephen Dec. 26), the beauty of the Word Made Flesh (St. John the Evangelist, Dec. 27), the reality of opposition to Christ (the Holy Innocents Dec. 28) and the blessing of family (Holy Family, the Sunday after Christmas).

Jan. 1 is the beginning of a new calendar year, but that’s not the reason we celebrate it as a feast. On the Roman calendar, New Year’s Day is the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, and a day of prayer for peace. We make all sorts of resolutions for a new year, but alongside those efforts, we say a different sort of prayer. God has come to us, not in over-


(Continued on page 19)

Vatican Christmas stamps 2023

Paintings by Piero Casentini’s have been chosen as the Vatican’s 2023 Christmas stamps. The Magi adoring the baby Jesus is the image the Vatican philatelic office chose for its 1.30-euro Christmas stamp for 2023. Casentini painted the work in 2006. His painting of St. Francis of Assisi holding the baby Jesus in the cave in Greccio, Italy, where he set up the first Nativity scene 800 years ago while a priest celebrates Mass is the image the Vatican philatelic office chose for its 1.25-euro Christmas stamp for 2023. The painting was done in 2004.




CNS photo/courtesy of the Vatican Philatelic and Numismatic Office



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From the Vatican: Pope Francis’ Christmas liturgy schedule

Dec. 24, 7:30 p.m.
The Mass of the Nativity of the Lord, St. Peter’s Basilica. While the Mass is commonly referred to as “midnight Mass,” the Vatican celebration has been earlier for more than a decade.

Dec. 25, noon
Pope Francis gives his message and blessing “Urbi et Orbi” (to the City and the World), central balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica.

Dec. 31, 5 p.m.
Evening prayer and the chanting of the “Te Deum” in thanksgiving to God for the year that is ending, St. Peter’s Basilica.

Jan. 1, 10 a.m.
Mass for the feast of Mary, Mother of God, and World Peace Day, St. Peter’s Basilica.

Jan. 6, 10 a.m.
Mass for the feast of the Epiphany, St. Peter’s Basilica.

Jan. 7, 9:30 a.m.
Mass for the feast of the Baptism of the Lord and baptism of several infants, Sistine Chapel.

Christians must be open to listening to God, helping others, pope says

Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service

Christians must be open to the Word of God and to welcoming and serving others, Pope Francis said.

“‘Be open,’ Jesus says to every believer and to his church: be open because the Gospel message needs you to witness to it and proclaim it,” he said during his weekly general audience in the Paul VI hall Dec. 13.

The pope also appealed for an immediate cease-fire and a resumption of negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

“I continue to follow the conflict in Israel and Palestine with much concern and sorrow,” he said. “I renew my call for an immediate humanitarian cease-fire: there is so much suffering there.”

Pope Francis encouraged all parties to resume negotiations, “and I ask everyone to make an urgent commitment to get humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza who are on their last legs and really need it.”

The pope also called for the immediate liberation of all the hostages, “who had seen hope in the truce a few days ago, so that this great suffering for Israelis and Palestinians might come to an end.”

“Please,” he said, “no to weapons, yes to peace.”

In his main audience talk, the pope concluded his yearlong series of talks about zeal for evangelization.

Since late November, Pope Francis has had respiratory difficulties related to a bronchial infection and has been cutting back on how much of his prepared texts he reads aloud.

Reading only excerpts but adding off-the-cuff comments, the pope talked about how every Christian is called to allow “the Word of God to inspire us, to help cultivate the passion to proclaim the Gospel.”

Often the Bible uses examples of people afflicted with deafness and muteness as metaphors for being “deaf” or closed off to God’s word and, consequently, being unable to speak to others about faith.

When Jesus heals a deaf man who had a speech impediment, according to the reflection read at the audience,



CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Pope Francis greets a newlywed couple at the end of his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Dec. 13, 2023.

Jesus — in the Gospel of Mark (7:31-35) — uses an Aramaic word that means “be open,” which is an invitation not just to the man who was deaf, but to all his disciples, then and today, the pope said.

“We, who have received the ‘epiphatha’ of the Spirit in baptism, also are called to be open” to the Word of God and to welcoming and serving others, he said.

“Christians who are closed always turn out badly because they are not Christians,” the pope said, “they are

ideologues” with an ideology of being closed in on themselves.

Pope Francis suggested people ask themselves: “Do I truly love the Lord to the point of wanting to proclaim him? Do I want to become his witness or am I content to be his disciple? Do I take to heart the people I meet, bringing them to Jesus in prayer? Do I want to do something so that the joy of the Gospel, which has transformed my life, might make their lives more beautiful?”



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Transubstantiation and the Eucharist

(Continued from page 10)

that they help us describe with precision what we believe is true. Transubstantiation helps us know that the “what it is” is what changes during the Mass.

As we said before regarding the gifts, what they are before the consecration is simple bread and wine. Those words of Jesus change the bread and wine into his Body and Blood. Even though the appearances remain, we believe that the whole Christ is present in the consecrated host and chalice.

As our Catechism teaches, the reason we believe that Jesus is present is because Jesus said it. We believe him

when he says: “This is my Body.” We believe him when he says “This is my Blood.” We believe that the Eucharist really is Jesus. The same Jesus who was born in Bethlehem, the same Jesus who offered himself on the Cross — Jesus is truly with us.

“But Father, the host still ‘looks’ the same!” some may say. St. Cyril of Jerusalem (314-386) teaches, “Do not think these are just plain bread and plain wine. They are the body and blood of Christ, as the Lord asserted. Faith must convince you of the latter even though your senses suggest to you the former. Do not judge about this according to

your preferences but, based on your faith, believe with firmness and certainty that you have been made worthy of the body and blood of Christ” (Understanding the Mass, pp. 140-141).

If your faith feels unsure, ask the Lord to help you see with the eyes of faith that he is truly there. Let the genuflections and reverence from your body help remind your mind of what we believe is true. Let the model of faith from the saints and the martyrs inspire you. Let our hearts be filled with joy after the consecration, and let us rejoice in recalling that Jesus is sacramentally present.

Let us shout with joy the words of St. John, “It is the Lord!” (John 21:7).

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Thomas More President’s leadership secured through 2028

Staff report

Dr. Judith Marlowe, Thomas More Board of Trustees chair, announced a10 that Dr. Joseph Chillo, the 15th president of the University, has accepted a new five-year employment agreement, retaining his transformational, mission-driven leadership through 2028.

“As the Catholic University of the Diocese of Covington, Thomas More needs a visionary leader who builds upon the distinguished legacy of this University by identifying and pursuing exciting opportunities that reinforce and advance our reputation for excellence in Catholic liberal arts education,” said Dr. Marlowe. “President Chillo is committed to service, collaboration, equity, and student success. He not only embodies those values; he actively seeks and implements new initiatives combined with intentional, strategic guidance to achieve positive results.” She adds, “This five-year agreement ensures the University will continue to benefit from his vigorous, transformative leadership



Dr. Joseph Chillo

aimed at achieving the bold goals in the Strategic Plan; Lighting the Way and continued funding for these and other significant plans that will enable Thomas More to thrive and serve our students and the community in the years ahead.”

President Chillo arrived at Thomas More in 2019. During his first four years, Chillo surrounded himself with a capable team which, under his leadership, allowed the University to embark on the ambitious “Strategic Plan: Lighting the Way,” which focuses on student success, academic innovation, and responsible stewardship. The plan guides the University through 2026 and, as a funding mechanism for the goals outlined, President Chillo and his team launched the largest capital campaign in Thomas More’s history. Entitled the “Second Century Campaign; It’s time for More,” the \$30M financial goal was realized three years ahead of schedule, with more than \$36M raised to date. It

is a testament to his leadership and achievements that for the four years he has been at Thomas More, Cincinnati Magazine has named Chillo as one of the top 300 business leaders in the Cincinnati area.

“I am grateful to serve a community that is deeply rooted in the foundational values of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and champions the transformative power of the liberal arts,” said President Chillo. “I am truly honored and excited to continue the work that we set out to accomplish. We have taken a number of steps to increase enrollment, grow our endowment, expand the size of our campus, and create an exciting vision for the second century of Thomas More University for our students, alumni, faculty, and staff.

“Over the next five years, we plan to expand and elevate the University as the region’s premier Catholic Liberal Arts University through the development of new academic programs, academic and athletic facilities, and the continued focus on a mission-driven educational experience for our students. I truly believe that a college education isn’t supposed to be a hoop to jump through or a box to check in order to get a good job. Education is a transformative endeavor, not a transactional exchange. It is a community, not a commodity.”

A Catholic Christmas

(Continued from page 16)

whelming power, but in humility as a child. So, on this day, we pray that the new year might be marked by humility and peace, brought by Christ and modeled by Mary.

The Solemnity of the Epiphany, traditionally observed Jan. 6 (the day following the familiar “Twelve Days of Christmas”), is transferred to a Sunday in the United States. “Epiphany” means “manifestation,” and it’s the celebration of Jesus manifesting his glory as Savior to all nations of the world (symbolized by the Magi).

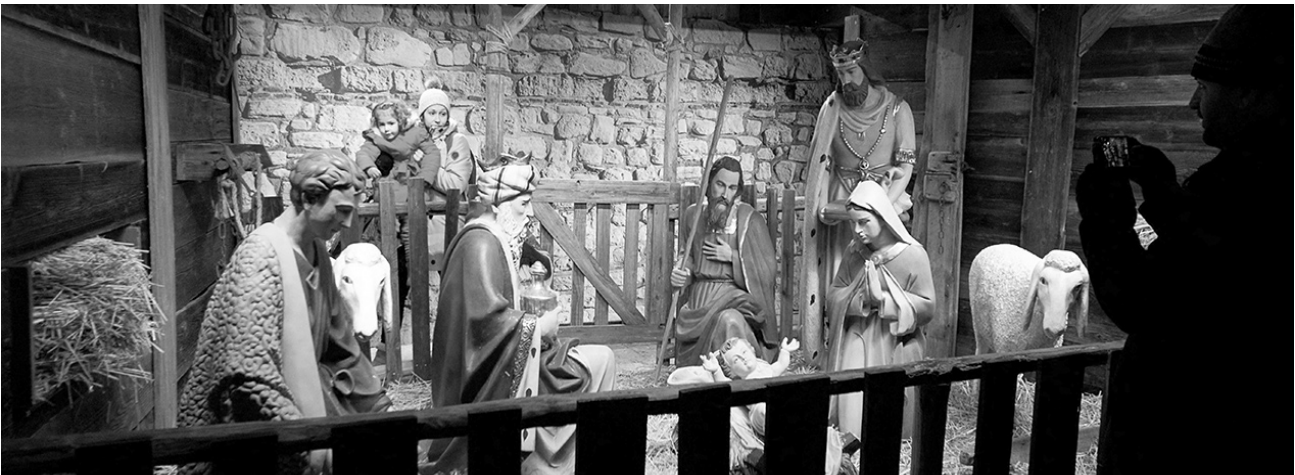
Epiphany is a gift-giving day in some cultures, as well as a day to ask for God’s blessings on our homes. One particular blessing includes bracketing the initials of the traditional names of the Magi who visited the home of Jesus — Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar — with the year above the front entry door, usually in chalk, like this for 2023: 20+C+M+B+23.

In the scope of the universal Church, past and present, the Christmas season actually has two endings:

In the old Roman calendar, the feast of the Presentation Feb. 2 marked the end of the Christmas season. On this day, also called Candlemas, candles are blessed as a symbol of Simeon’s recognition of the infant Jesus as the light to the Gentiles, and as a way to bring the light of Christ home to burn all year. Even today, the Christmas tree and crèche in St. Peter’s Square in Rome remain on display until Candlemas.

Likewise, the Baptism of the Lord, celebrated the Sunday after Epiphany, commemorates the final “Christmas” feast of our present Roman calendar. As we hear the Scriptural account of the Father revealing the divinity of Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan River, we celebrate our own baptism, our “new birth” in Christ and inclusion in his body, the church.

For Catholics, Dec. 25 is only the beginning of the celebration of Christmas. As others pack away the decorations, we continue to celebrate the gift of Christ, ever present for us in the Eucharist — a continual manifestation of God’s loving care for us all year long.



CNS photo/Lisa Leutner, Reuters
A person takes a cellphone photo of a Nativity scene in the Viennese Christmas Market at City Hall Square in Vienna Dec. 6, 2022.

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Prepare — Christ is coming

(Continued from page 7)

us the sacrament of penance or reconciliation. Grace can accomplish within us, provided we cooperate with it, “far more than we can ask or imagine.” (Eph 3:20)

Celebrating the sacrament of confession, and doing acts of penance for love of God and hatred of sin, will allow God to prepare us to receive Jesus, both in our liturgical celebrations and when he comes again.

The spiritual life is about more than not sinning, though, and this is where the third practice comes in. In

the Collect for the first Sunday of Advent we pray that God would grant his faithful “the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ/ with righteous deeds at his coming,/ so that, gathered at his right hand,/ they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom.”

What better way to receive our Lord than with righteous and loving deeds? Think of Jesus’ parable in Matthew’s Gospel about the coming of the Son of man with his angels. Jesus says that all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will welcome the sheep into the kingdom prepared for

them, for they fed him when he was hungry, and clothed him when he was naked, and visited him when he was sick and in prison. The good that we do Jesus accepts as done to him.

Advent is a time of preparation, for the second coming of Jesus and for the celebration of his birth. By meditating on the meaning of these two events, letting God cleanse us of sin, and filling our arms with righteous deeds to offer him when he comes, we will be preparing well.

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

Protecting God’s Children for Adults Safe Environment Trainings

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Step 2: Go to www.virtus.org and click on Registration. Follow the prompts to create an account and to request a background check. Selection.com is a secure site; the background check is posted on your

account and you receive a copy if you request it during the registration process. You will sign up for a VIRTUS training class during the registration.

Step 3: Your account becomes active when your background check, VIRTUS session and Acceptance Form are posted on your account. You will receive 12 bulletins per year. You will receive e-mail notices at system@pub.virtus.org unless your computer program blocks them.

Bulletins:

■ Dec. bulletin: posted Sunday, Dec. 3; due Tuesday, Jan. 2.

www.virtusonline.org, enter your user id and password. If your account is suspended contact your primary location where you volunteer or are employed. Your primary location contact information is found under your Contact Tab.

VIRTUS Training:

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

■ Tuesday, Jan. 9, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Thursday, Jan. 11, 6–8:30 p.m., Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Britt Hall, Burlington

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

■ Wednesday, Jan. 24, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Wednesday, Feb. 7, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Wednesday, Feb. 7, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

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

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

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Celebrating the gift of school lunch
A Christmas party was held, Dec. 11, for the cafeteria managers of Catholic schools. The school lunch program in the Diocese of Covington has served almost 320,000 meals to students this year, thanks to the hard work and dedication of managers and staff alike.

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Epiphany of the Lord: Traditions that focus on the ‘rey de reyes’

Maria-Pia Negro Chin
OSV News

After preparing for the birth of Jesus with posadas, live Nativity scenes, midnight Masses and Nochebuena (Christmas Eve) traditions, thousands of Latinos in the United States will continue the Christmas season by celebrating Epifanía, or Epiphany.

Epifanía, or “the manifestation of the Lord,” celebrates Jesus making himself known to the whole world, said Alejandro Aguilera-Titus, assistant director of Hispanic affairs for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Secretariat for Cultural Diversity in the Church.

In many parishes, there are reenactments of the “Wise Men from the East” prostrating themselves before the child in Bethlehem, as the Gospel according to St. Matthew describes. These Three Kings or Magi — traditionally known as Melchior, Gaspar (or Caspar) and Balthasar — remind everyone of the importance of pausing to contem-

plate the love and mercy of God made flesh in the Christ Child.

When the figures of the Magi approach the manger, it becomes clear — especially to the little ones in the house — that Jesus is “the king of kings,” Aguilera-Titus said.

“We come together as a community,” said Wanda Vásquez, director of the Office of Hispanic Ministry at the Archdiocese of New York. “We celebrate in prayer, reflecting on the birth of our Jesus — anticipating the Magi’s coming.”

Vásquez said that in Puerto Rico and many parts of the Caribbean, all traditions focus on Jesus’ birth, rather than on characters like Santa Claus or elves.

While Christmas Eve and Christmas center on Christ’s birth, gifts are traditionally reserved for Epiphany. This tradition was inherited from Spain, and thousands of Catholics from Latin America celebrate it differently. Some children put shoes under the tree, others under beds, and even food and water are left for the Magi’s camels.

What these traditions have in common is the centrality of the Christ child in the manger, prompting contemplation of how God’s promise is fulfilled.

As part of the Epiphany tradition, the Rosca de Reyes, an ornate circular loaf with candied fruit and a plastic figure of a child representing the newborn Jesus, is shared. “Whoever gets the little doll has to make the tamales on Candlemas Day,” explained Aguilera-Titus.

“For many,” Vásquez said, “Christmas doesn’t end until Feb. 2, with the presentation of the Lord at the temple,” also known as Candlemas.

In addition to the opportunity to delve into the words of the Bible, Aguilera-Titus said, Epiphany celebrations are ways to make “Christian living more present in the home and within the community of faith, in the temple.”

“Everyone is looking for God from their culture, from their tradition,” said Humberto Ramos, parish life director at Epiphany Church in South El Monte, California.

He estimates that about 2,000 people — not including children — will come to celebrate Epiphany, the parish’s patronal feast, with a big festival where people dressed as kings bring candy to the children.

He reflected on the gifts brought to the baby Jesus, “incense for God, gold for the King, and myrrh for the one who will die,” as said the fifth-century doctor of the church St. Peter Chrysologus.

In addition to the traditional rosca, Ramos said, his parishioners observe another Mexican tradition, the “levantada,” or lifting, of the Christ Child from the crèche. A godfather or godmother — typically those who found the baby in the rosca — would dress the image of Baby Jesus in ornate clothes so that it will be ready on Candlemas Day, where it will be blessed and “lifted” from the crib amid prayers.

“It’s what we learned from our parents, in our homes, and it’s something that leads to having an experience and an expression of God, of Christ in your home,” Aguilera-Titus said.

The date of Epiphany is Jan. 6 — 12 days after the Nativity — but, in the United States, the celebration of Epiphany will be observed in 2024 on Sunday, Jan. 7.

Father Jose Cruz Alvarez, pastor of Sacred Heart in the South Bronx, New York, told OSV News that his parishioners were looking forward to reviving their Epiphany traditions in 2023. With the support of a sponsoring parish, the “kings” were able to hand out gifts at the Mass for the children in the neighborhood. This upcoming Christmas season, the sponsoring parish will provide a smaller token — possibly gloves, scarfs or hats — to the children, which will include 300 children from the parish’s religious education program.

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NEWS BRIEFS

National/World

Tennessee tornadoes strike nearly to the day of 2021 storm

OWENSBORO, Ky. — Two years ago over the course of a Friday night Dec. 10-11, a series of tornadoes struck western Kentucky, killing 57 with additional fatalities in Illinois, Arkansas, Tennessee and Missouri and damaging and destroying several thousand residences as well as nearly 200 commercial buildings. Just one day before area residents officially observed the outbreak’s second anniversary, tornadoes ripped through middle Tennessee and southern Kentucky inflicting another weather disaster Dec. 9 just weeks before Christmas. Although no Catholic schools or parishes suffered storm damage, six people were killed in Clarksville, Tennessee, and other communities were devastated as well. Laura Miller, faith formation director and office assistant at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church and School in Clarksville, told OSV News their buildings escaped damage but “north Clarksville is pretty torn up.” Father Ryan Harpole, pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Bowling Green, Kentucky, reflected on their own experience rebuilding following the deadly 2021 tornadoes, saying “we have adapted quite well and people have moved on, and if anything came out of this it is a message that says there is hope in the future.” Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky, Bishop William F. Medley issued a special statement of reflection for the remembrance of the December 2021 tornadoes, saying that while they “permanently changed our communities” they also showed the Catholic Church’s “fast and generous response to those who suffered.”

Court strikes down law restricting pro-life pregnancy center speech

ROCKFORD, Ill. — A federal court has struck down an Illinois law that restricted what the state’s 100 pregnancy resource centers, but not abortion clinics, could tell patients.

Judge Iain D. Johnston of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, Western Division, has issued a permanent injunction against the Deceptive Practices of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers Act (SB 1909) in response to a lawsuit filed by the Chicago-based Thomas More Society, a public-interest law firm. Under the Dec. 11 injunction, Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul has agreed not to enforce the law, which declared both advertising and counseling by the centers, including sidewalk counseling, to be a “deceptive business practice.” Violation would have imposed fines of up to \$50,000. Pregnancy resource centers do not perform abortions, refer women to abortions, or provide abortion-inducing drugs, and their counseling discusses possible after-effects of the procedure. The Thomas More Society filed its lawsuit July 27, the same day Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed the law, which the Catholic Conference of Illinois objected to as open to “a very broad interpretation” that left “no guidance” on how to avoid violations. Johnston issued a temporary injunction Aug. 3 calling the law “both stupid and very likely unconstitutional,” adding “its own supporter admitted it was unneeded and was unsupported by evidence when challenged.”

Supreme Court agrees to review legal challenge to abortion pill

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court said Dec. 13 it would take up a case concerning the abortion pill, the first major case involving abortion on its docket since the high court overturned its previous abortion precedent in last year’s Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization decision. The timing of the case could result in justices issuing their decision next summer amid the 2024 presidential campaign. A coalition of pro-life opponents of mifepristone, which is the first of two drugs used in a medication or chemical abortion, previously filed suit in an effort to revoke the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s approval of the drug, arguing the gov-

ernment violated its own safety standards when it first approved the drug in 2000. The FDA has argued the drug poses little risk in the early weeks of pregnancy. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s abortion statistics from 2021 showed 53% of abortions were carried out via medication, sometimes referred to as a medication or chemical abortion. The justices indicated their review would be of the lower court’s ruling rolling back FDA’s loosened regulations on the drug’s access, not its initial approval in 2000, as they did not take up the challengers’ petition for review on that decision.

Ireland to dramatically cut Ukrainian refugees welfare benefits

DUBLIN — Plans to dramatically cut welfare benefits for refugees from Ukraine who flee to Ireland to avoid Russia’s war are causing anxiety, according to a priest who works with the new arrivals. Officials in Dublin say that they want to “slow” the number of people arriving from Ukraine. The government announced Dec. 12 that starting in January, new arrivals from Ukraine would see benefits cut in a bid to discourage so-called “secondary movement” from Ukrainians who have already settled in other safe European countries with less generous benefits than Ireland. Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar told a press conference that officials were concerned that a “pull factor” may effectively be in operation when comparisons of benefits are carried out. Ireland’s rate for new arrivals from Ukraine will now drop from \$237 to \$41.84 per week, and free accommodation and board will be limited to just 90 days. Eugene Quinn, national director of Jesuit Refugee Services Ireland, said he is concerned that after 90 days there will be nowhere for the refugees to go, and they will be forced into homelessness. “We’re concerned that it’s more evidence of an accommodation system that is at a breaking point,” he told Newstalk radio station.



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Giving Machines come to Greater Cincinnati, support local charities

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

The Kenwood Mall in Cincinnati, OH, will be home to the area’s first “Giving Machine”— contributing to the more than 50 locations worldwide.

A part of Light the World, a global Christmas initiative of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, its purpose is to “encourage people to show love to others.” The Giving Machines, which resemble large vending machines, display cards representing items for local and



(above) A woman and her daughters visit a Giving Machine in this promotional image.

global nonprofit organizations including essentials such as food, water, clothing, shelter, education, medical care and more. Individuals who visit the machine select and purchase items to donate, as they would any other vending machine. One-hundred percent of every donation is transferred to the respective charities to use towards the purchased good or service.

In 2022, Giving Machines worldwide donated thousands of items: including 41,000 chickens, 25,000 ducks, 516,000 vaccines for children and more than 30 million water purification tablets.

Cincinnati’s machine will be available starting Dec. 14, and last until the end of the month on Dec. 30. Global charities including the African Girls Hope Foundation, the American Red Cross and CARE will be supported — as well as local charities Shelterhouse, NEST Community Learning Center, Catholic Charities of Southwestern Ohio and Northern Kentucky’s food pantry Be Concerned.

The Church of Latter-day Saints originally reached out to Be Concerned in 2022, according to executive director Andy Brunzman, donating a sizeable amount of food to the food pantry that year — as well as providing funding for infrastructure improvements to Be Concerned. Due to their pre-existing relationship, the Church reached out to Be Concerned asking if they would like to participate in the Giving Machine this year.

“We’re all about neighbors,” said Mr. Brunzman, “the community being to help and whatever was easiest for them ... we thought it was an innovative idea to try with them.”

For Be Concerned, items available in the Giving Machine will contribute to their food pantry and free grocery store — with options such as gallons of milk and packs of diapers for visitors to the machine to donate to the mission.

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