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‘Do Sundays count?’ — it’s a question of faithfulness

Most Rev. John Iffert
Bishop of Covington

As you plan for the beginning of Lent, you are probably thinking about the practices of fasting, prayer and almsgiving that you will undertake. As you do, be sure to think about Sundays.

The most common question I receive about Lent is “Do Sundays count?” I do not hear that question pre-Lent or in the early days of the season. It tends to show up around the third week of Lent. Typically, the person is fasting from some favorite treat — candy, soda, coffee, bourbon — and just as the cravings take hold someone tells them that Sundays are “in Lent, but not of Lent.” They notice that there are more than 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter, and they want to know if they are allowed to consume the treat they are abstaining from on Sundays.

Sometimes they have heard this from an authority. Their parish priest, or grandma, assures them that it is a thing. “Every Sunday is a little Easter,” you sometimes hear; “a celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord during which we do not fast.” I have even had industrious questioners quote Scripture in defense of adjusting their Lenten fast to exclude Sundays. “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?” (Mark 2:19), they ask.

I always answer this question about fasting on Sunday with a question of my own: What did you intend to do when you began your Lenten practice?

Did you say to yourself and to God that you would sacrifice throughout Lent, or did you intend to make that little sacrifice each day except Sunday? Whatever commitment you set your mind and heart to, keep it. Fulfill the little promises that you make to God, and God will build on your faithfulness to trust you with, and support you through, weightier matters. That is the surest course of action. Be honest and faithful.

Lent is a campaign of Christian charity. The fasts we undertake are meant to help us love God and our neighbor. We eat less and experience hunger so that we recall our complete dependence upon God’s divine providence. We are reminded that many in the human family live without and we redouble our prayer and action toward



Bishop John Iffert

justice and mercy. We engage in these practices of praying, fasting, and giving alms as a way of preparing to renew our baptismal promises at Easter. So let us be honest in the little things and beg God’s help to endure in the great work of discipleship.

As you prepare for Lent 2024, think ahead about the sacrifice that you are making. What will help you to be more selfless and grow in your capacity to love God and others? Will that practice be daily or are you going to rest from your fast on Sunday? Either pattern can be justified if we are honest with God and ourselves from the beginning. As in all things, faithfulness matters.

I join you in praying for a holy Lent that will help strengthen us to take up the cross and follow Jesus.



Celebrate the beginning of a beautiful Lent together!

Bring your special someones to **Ash Wednesday Mass, Feb. 14**, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington 10 a.m. with celebrant Bishop John Iffert and 5:30 p.m.

Lent at the Cathedral

Stations of the Cross
Fridays, Feb. 16–March 26, 6:30 p.m.

Rite of Election
Sunday, Feb. 18, 2 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.
No 5:30 p.m. Mass



PREPARE THE WAY

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

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

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

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

Catholic Schools Week Mass celebrated united in ‘faith and love of Jesus’

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

The pews filled with diocesan students, teachers, administrators and supporters, Jan. 31, to celebrate a Mass commemorating Catholic Schools Week. The Mass was held in the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, and celebrated by Bishop John Iffert. Students representing every diocesan grade school and high school were present among their educators, processing in with banners decorated in school colors.

Kendra McGuire, superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Covington, greeted the congregation prior to Mass, inviting students to take a “quiet moment” to look around the room at the cathedral’s architecture. “The construction of this Cathedral began in 1894, that was 130 years ago,” said Mrs. McGuire. “I want you to think about what life was like in 1894,” and how, “without the technology and equipment we have today,” people built the Cathedral and all the “beautiful works of art” within it.

“It was a strong love for God that brought them together to labor for more than 15 years to construct the space we are sitting in today,” she said, noting how Catholic schools, too, are united similarly in their “faith and love of Jesus.”

“Today,” she said, “you are here for our larger faith community ... we have come here to unite as one.” Mrs. McGuire continued, “You have the responsibility to bring the faith of your school community and share it with all the other schools gathered here today.”

The Mass coincided with the feast day of St. John Bosco, patron saint of students.

In his homily, Bishop Iffert quoted the Italian saint, saying, “I want to give you the formula for sanctity. I want to give you the formula for holiness, the formula for friendship with God. I want to give you the formula for becoming a saint.” He continued, “St. John Bosco, who is a friend of God, who is a canonized saint of the Church, who lived a holy life ... wants to give you the formula for sanctity.”

The first part of the formula, Bishop Iffert said, was “be happy,” an example he said St. John Bosco set in his life quite well. “He practiced seeing the good in everyone he met,” said Bishop Iffert, “...to see the good in everyone, to cherish it, is a gift from God. It’s a recipe for happiness.”

“Study and pray,” was the second part of the formula, said Bishop Iffert, “seek the truth in every way you can,” and the third part, “be good to everyone.”

“We know that it’s difficult to live as a young person sometimes,” he said, “We know that your young life has been filled with all kinds of challenges. We know that sometimes when we’re so busy and things change so fast ... it can be anxiety-inducing. It can be fearful.”

“We want you to have a full education,” Bishop Iffert said to the students, “so that you know how to find yourself, from where to draw meaning and how to rejoice in life and put your strength to use. Be happy. Study and pray. Do good for everyone.”

He continued, mentioning how it’s a “life’s work” to achieve sanctity in this way. “Catholic schools are a great place to start this. To recognize it’s more than just a few years of training— it’s a pattern of life. That’s what makes our schools different. That’s what makes them so important. That’s why it’s such a blessing to be with you to celebrate.”



(above left) Banners representing various diocesan schools line the pews at the annual Catholic Schools Week Mass.

(above right) A young girl observes the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption prior to Mass, prompted by Superintendent Kendra McGuire, who opened the Mass asking students to take a “quiet moment” to look around the cathedral

(left) Bishop John Iffert greets the congregation at the 2024 Catholic Schools Week Mass, Jan. 31.

(right) Kendra McGuire, diocesan superintendent of Schools, welcomes those gathered to the Mass celebrating Catholic Schools Week.

(below) A young boy speaks to Bishop Iffert after presenting the gifts.



Correction

Last week’s edition used the improper Cursillo logo. The Cursillo weekends outlined in the article on page 2 are associated with the Covington Cursillo, not Cincinnati Cursillo. The *Messenger* apologizes for this error.



Monthly Holy Hour

Bishop John Iffert and the priests of the Diocese of Covington pray a Holy Hour every month for survivors of sexual violence and for the sanctification of priests.

The Holy Hour occurs every third Thursday at 3 p.m. at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington.

The next Holy Hour will be Feb. 15.

All are welcome.

‘Head up, feet moving,’ Bishop Iffert encourages consecrated religious

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Women and men religious gathered with laity for Mass, Feb. 3, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. This special Mass celebrated World Day of Consecrated Life. Bishop John Iffert celebrated the Mass, joined by Father Ryan Maher, the Cathedral’s rector, with Deacons Barry Henry and Gerald Franzen assisting.

The World Day of Consecrated Life was established as a day of prayer for religious men and women in 1997 by Pope St. John Paul II. This celebration is attached to the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on Feb. 2.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops connects the celebrations saying, “This feast is also known as Candlemas Day; the day on which candles are blessed symbolizing Christ who is the light of the world. So too, those in consecrated life are called to reflect the light of Jesus Christ to all peoples.”

This was the first year that Bishop Iffert has held a special Mass for this celebration in the Diocese of Covington, and it is anticipated that the Mass will be held every year.

Notre Dame Sister Marla Monahan, vicar for Religious for the Diocese of Covington, said the Mass and the World Day of Consecrated Life “celebrates the religious’ gift to the Church, and expresses gratitude for all they have done.”

Many religious have the gift of “casting their eyes along

with Christ’s eyes,” Bishop Iffert said in his homily, “To see the world as Christ sees it — to allow our hearts to be moved with pity.”

Bishop Iffert mentioned a conversation he had with Abbot Lambert Reilly, OSB, former Archabbot of St. Meinrad Archabbey, Indiana. Abbot Reilly, he said, “had given many retreats for Mother Teresa and her sisters in Calcutta.” He mentioned how Abbot Reilly said that Mother Teresa would often invite him back, because she “liked what he did.”

While many would praise the works of the sisters at Calcutta, Abbot Reilly would say, “Sisters, you’re pretty good and you do great work ... but you can always do better.” Bishop Iffert then said to the religious gathered to the Mass, “We love you, you’re great, keep going” — expressing the ongoing mission of the diocese’s men and women religious.

Mentioning his football coach as a freshman lineman, Bishop Iffert recalled the advice given to him by his coach, “Head up, feet moving,” which he encouraged religious to do the same.

“Eyes on where Christ’s eyes are focused,” he said, “listening for Christ’s word in the world. Discovering, seeking, finding and then serving like Christ ... Continue to form your minds with the mind of Christ, and let yourself be moved with pity ... thank you for the witness of your life.”



(above left) Franciscan brothers, from both the Diocese of Covington and Archdiocese of Cincinnati, join for the Mass.

(above right) Divine Providence Sister Leslie Keener, vocations promoter for the Sisters of Divine Providence, Melbourne, lectors.

(right) Women religious read from Mass programs.

(below) Bishop John Iffert greets those present at the Mass for World Day of Consecrated Life, Feb. 3.



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

Join Bishop Iffert 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



Bishop’s Schedule

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Feb. 10
Pastoral Council meeting,
10 a.m. | Feb. 14
Ash Wednesday Mass,
Cathedral Basilica of the
Assumption, 10 a.m. |
| Mass/renewal of vows for
4 Benedictine jubilarians,
St. Walburg Monastery,
Villa Hills, 5 p.m. | Building Commission
meeting, 2 p.m. |
| Feb. 11
Mass, Cathedral Basilica of
the Assumption, Covington,
10 a.m. | Feb. 15
Directors meeting, 9:30 a.m. |
| Feb. 12
Advisory Council meeting,
9:30 a.m. | Monthly Holy Hour,
Cathedral Basilica of the
Assumption, 3 p.m. |
| Feb. 13
Priest Formation Day, Bishop
Howard Memorial
Auditorium, Covington,
10 a.m. | DPAA kick-off dinner,
Maysville, 6 p.m. |
| Sacrament of Confirmation,
All Saints Parish, Walton,
7 p.m. | Feb. 16
Religious Superiors meeting,
10 a.m. |
| | Feb. 18
Rite of Election, Cathedral
Basilica of the Assumption,
2 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. |
| | Feb. 19
Curia closed in observance
of Presidents Day |

Official Appointment

Effective January 1, 2024
Suzanne Deatherage
To: Catholic Charities Advisory Board
Term: Three years

Appointed by the Most Rev. John C. Iffert
Bishop of Covington


Jamie N. Schroeder
Jamie N. Schroeder
Chancellor

Pro-Life Christians: Now is the time to shout from the rooftops

This article was adapted from Bishop Barron's homily for the 2024 Respect Life Sunday

Tom Holland's magnificent book *Dominion* develops in detail what amounts to a very simple proposition —

WORD ON FIRE



Bishop Robert Barron

namely, that Christianity is responsible for many of the central values that we take for granted and that we assume to be universal. In point of fact, he avers, our insistence upon the dignity of the individual, fundamental human rights, the principle of equality, and perhaps above all that the poor; the marginalized, and the victimized ought to be specially cherished, flows from basic Christian convictions.

What prompted Holland to investigate this claim initially was his extensive work in the history of ancient Rome. The longer and more deeply he looked at Roman society, the stranger it seemed, the less like our own time. And the more he studied the great heroes of Rome, the more alien and morally problematic they appeared.

To give just one example among many, he urges us to consider perhaps the most impressive of ancient Roman personalities, Julius Caesar: Eager to enhance his political reputation, Caesar embarked on a military campaign in Gaul (present-day France). His remarkable success in subduing this land and making it a Roman province served to cover him in glory and became the subject of his book “The Gallic Wars,” which is read to this day.

But what is rarely remarked upon is the staggering fact that in the course of this conquest, Caesar killed, by conservative estimate, one million people and enslaved another million or so more.

Now, Caesar had a boatload of enemies in Rome who suspected him of lusting after kingly power. But what

Holland finds fascinating is that none of his opponents were scandalized by his murderous rampage through Gaul. In fact, all of Rome praised him for it.

So the question arises: Why would we today consider someone who killed and enslaved on such a massive scale a scoundrel while even the best and brightest in ancient Roman society considered Caesar a hero? The answer, in a word, is Christianity.

What the early Christians brought to Roman culture was the belief in the one God who made every human being in his image and likeness and who thereby endowed them with rights, freedom and dignity. Moreover, the Christians taught, the creator, God, became human and went willingly to the very limits of suffering and degradation, in St. Paul's words, “accepting even death, death on a cross.”

They proclaimed a savior who was a victim of Roman tyranny and whom God raised from the dead. And by this proclamation, they brought all the tyrannized, all of the victimized, all of the weak and forgotten from the margins to the center.

These beliefs were, of course, initially regarded as absurd, and the early Christians were brutally persecuted for them. But over time, and through the witness and practice of courageous people, these beliefs soaked into the fabric of Western society. So deeply did they penetrate our consciousness that we came, as Holland has argued, to take them for granted and to mistake them for general humanistic values.

Now, why is all this important to us today? We live in a time when the Christian faith is rather regularly denigrated by those in the upper echelons of elite society, in the universities, and in the media. Moreover, armies of people, especially the young, are disaffiliating from the churches and ceasing to engage in religious ritual and practice.

Harmless enough, you might think, or even to the advantage of a society reaching maturity through secularization? Think again.

As Christian faith and praxis evanesce, the values that

Christianity has inculcated in our culture evanesce as well. Cut flowers may bloom for a time once they've been ripped from the soil and placed in water, but they will fade soon enough. We delude ourselves if we think that the values instilled in us by Christianity will long survive the demise of Christianity itself.

Signs of the emergence of a neo-paganism in fact abound. In many states in our country, as well as in Canada and many European countries, a regime of euthanasia holds sway. When elderly or sick people become inconvenient, they can and should be eliminated.

And, of course, in most countries in the West, when a child in the womb is judged to be a problem, he or she can be aborted at any point in pregnancy, up to the moment of birth.

In my home state of Minnesota, a proposal has been made to enshrine this “right” to the murder of the unborn in the constitution. How like this is, by the way, to the ancient Roman practice of exposing unwanted newborns to the elements and the animals. And how fascinating, in light of Tom Holland's analysis, that the early Christians got the attention of the envioning Roman culture precisely by their willingness to rescue and take in these abandoned babies.

So, what is the needful thing? Christians must raise their voices in protest against the culture of death. And they must do so by claiming and publicly proclaiming the values that come from their faith.

For too long, believers have been cowed into silence by the insinuation that religion is a “private” matter. Nonsense. Christian values have informed our society from the beginning and have provided the coherent moral framework that most of us still take for granted.

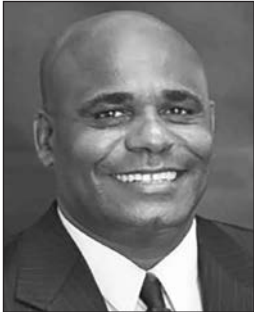
Now is not the time for quietude. It is time for us to shout our convictions from the rooftops.

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

Teachers and catechists — agents of Good News

Again, this year, the Diocese of Covington and dioceses across the United States celebrated Catholic Schools Week a week ago.

GUEST



Isaak A. Isaak

This annual observance usually begins the last Sunday in January and runs throughout the Week, which this year was Jan. 28 through Feb. 3.

Each year, the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) selects a theme and every Catholic school across the country plans activities around this theme. In addition to special school activities for students, families and the community at large, students also attend Mass at local parishes and sending student and teacher representatives to the local Mother Church, in our case the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption.

This year's theme for Catholic Schools Week is “United in Faith and Community.”

This is a vital and appropriate theme for all our teachers and catechists because this is what they do daily. They teach the faith in our communities. It is truly a beautiful theme. Teachers and catechists are indeed agents of teaching the faith.

When I think of Catholic Schools Week, I immediately think of our schoolteachers and catechists who teach the faith in our Catholic schools and parishes. They are the ones who stand as witnesses to the person of Jesus Christ in their classrooms. St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, says, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.” (Romans 10:15)

Our teachers and catechists are agents of good news. They bring good news to our students in the classrooms. Christ becomes present in the classrooms. They touch the lives of all the young people who come to our schools and parish religious education programs by teaching the Word of God. They are great examples and evangelizers of the faith. And we are truly grateful for what they do on behalf of the parents, who are the first catechists of their children.

Every year, I look forward to seeing our students in their school uniforms when they come to the Cathedral to attend Mass. I especially like seeing them as they approach the altar, lining up to receive Holy Communion. They stand up and make a statement of faith by receiving the Bread of Life. Indeed, this is great statement of faith, believing that the author of life, Jesus, is truly present in the Eucharist. Of course, they make statements of faith every day in learning the faith, in serving the community, in leading and succeeding in the Catholic way of life.

To further strengthen these great and beautiful institutions of learning, the Diocese of Covington has developed a unique partnership with the Franciscan University's Catechetical Institute. This partnership with

the Institute will enable the Office Catechesis and Evangelization along with the Catholic Schools Office to provide workshop tracks at no charge, and with unlimited access to over 200 courses, to our parish and school catechetical leaders, catechists, and schoolteachers.

For anyone who lives, serves, and worships in the Diocese of Covington, Bishop John Iffert is generously providing these workshops to all at no cost. Detailed information about this will be coming soon.

It is our hope that teachers and catechists will immerse and engage themselves in these workshops so that through their own formation they will form others in our beautiful faith.

Our teachers and catechists are sowers of the seed — the Word of God (Romans 10:17). These resources will assist in doing just that. It is my hope and prayer that whenever they sow the seeds of faith, these seeds will take root in the lives and experiences of all the youth of our Diocese.

Teachers and catechists are ordinary people who perform an extraordinary duty because they teach as Jesus teaches and teach in his name. They are faithful to the author of life by dedicating themselves to deepening the faith of the present generation. They teach and live the faith just like Jesus.

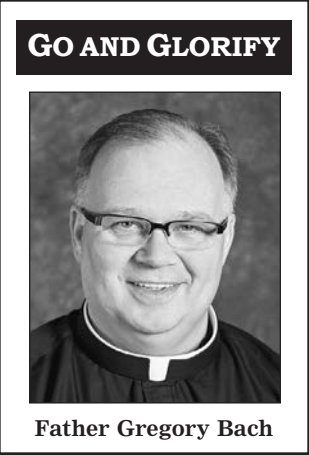
Jesus — Teacher of teachers and Catechist of catechists — bless our teachers and catechists throughout this year and beyond. Amen!

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

Reach out to Jesus and be made clean

The readings for the sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle B — are: **Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46; 1 Corinthians 10:31—11:1 and Mark 1:40-45.**

Prayer is an essential tool for healing in our life and is an excellent source of comfort, courage and strength for those who are suffering. During times of illness, disease or a difficult life, nothing is more important than to offer



Father Gregory Bach

prayer and to join others in pledge of these prayers.

In addition to prayer, the saints protect us against harm, help strengthen our faith and offer spiritual guidance and healing. They are models of prayer, and their intercession helps present powerful prayers of healing to God on our behalf.

St. Servatius was born in Armenia during the fourth century and was said to be a distant rela-

tive to Jesus and to St. John the Baptist.

Servatius became a priest and guardian of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. While in Jerusalem, he had a vision in which he was ordered to go to Tongres to succeed Bishop Valentine.

Servatius had been bishop of Tongres for several years when the Huns threatened to invade the city. In 382, as a refuge, Servatius took a pilgrimage to Rome where he had another vision. St. Peter told him that Tongres would be destroyed and to move his see to Maastricht.

Peter also handed Servatius the key to the Gates of Heaven, which gave him the power to forgive sins, and to open or lock the Gates.

No more than a few days after his relocation to Maastricht, Servatius fell ill with fever from an infection in his leg. He died on May 13, 384. St. Servatius is recognized today as the patron of those who suffer with foot or leg ailments. His feast day is May 13th.

It seems like there is a patron saint for everything and for every illness. It is a good and holy thing to reach out and pray for the intercession of the saints to help us. Things like burying a statue of St. Joseph to help sell a house. Asking for St. Anthony to help find something that is lost, “Tony, Tony, turn around...”

The people in Jesus’ times are not as lucky as we are in finding someone who has experienced the things that we go through in life who suffered like we do. Some of the people were able to find Jesus and reach out for his healing touch.

In the Gospel this weekend we hear the story of a man who had leprosy who calls out to Jeus, “If you wish, you can make me clean.”

Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, “I do will it. Be made clean.”

The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean. The leper reached out for help and found it in the person of Jesus who saw his great faith. His great faith led to his healing.

We are about to embark on a 40-day mission in which we are called to grow our faith through prayer and works of mercy. It is as if we are like the man with leprosy with great faith asking Jesus to heal us.

We also look to the lives of the saints and see what we can imitate through our life. To pray and to perform acts of charity is what these coming days are about. This Lent and every Lent is a time for us to be made clean. May we allow the hand of Jesus to touch us and be made clean.

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

For a healthy Lent, don’t let your membership lapse

During Catholic Schools Week, student representatives from all our diocesan schools attended Mass at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption. Prior to the Mass,

we took a few moments to take in the beauty of the Cathedral and thought about how, in 1894, a community was able to come together to construct the magnificent church we are still worshipping in to this day.

The community achieved this because of their faith and love for God. Their love for God was so great that they were able to work together, making great sacrifices, to build a church

that truly glorified hod. Over 130 years after construction began, the Cathedral continues to draw thousands of visitors every year, many Catholic, others just visiting this architectural wonder. It inspires many and the fruits of those labors are helping point people to God every day.

After thinking about the construction of our cathedral and others from centuries ago, one can’t help but wonder where are today’s magnificent churches being built? Are our parish communities united in a strong faith like those before us? How are we uniting in our faith and love for God?

These are worthy questions to ask. The answer though may point to one of the challenges of our time. When you stop and look at how we live today it can become clear that our priority might not be God or being part of a community of believers. Our priorities seem to be more about self rather than God, about striving for our personal enjoyment over making sacrifices for him or others.

We can see this in our homes and the constant pursuit of the most technologically advanced devices and appliances. We renovate kitchens, bathrooms and everything in between — not because they are in disrepair but because they are no longer in style. The size of families has shrunk while our huge, empty homes continue to grow. We put thousands and thousands of dollars into these things all while complaining that our pastor asked for a few more dollars to pay the utility bills at church.

We can head next to the garage where we store our vehicles. The costs of which are beginning to resemble

the home mortgages from just a few years ago. We spend countless hours in these expensive vehicles, taking multiple vacations and driving our children to activities nearly seven days a week. They have replaced the kitchen table where we used to gather for meals with our children and the living room where we would talk, read and play games.

And when we stop and think about all the magnificent things we have built and purchased, we have to ask, is it leading us to God? We are sacrificing time with our families and our church community to build all of this. Are our lavish homes and luxury vehicles pointing our children to the right worship of God, our creator?

I think we can all answer no. These things are not drawing anyone to God. In fact, it leads to a pursuit of all things bigger and better and there is no end to it. At some point we must come to the realization that life is more than these things. Decades from now no one is going to marvel at your home. Instead, they will gut it to make it modern and trendy. Or tear it down completely and build a new one.

We need a better way. Maybe we should start by looking to those who labored in the past to build magnificent cathedrals. They did not have electricity or cars, no telephones or televisions. Their lives revolved around family and church. They attended Mass, prayed together, and worked together to build a community that would pass on the faith to their children and their grandchildren.

They didn’t ask if they were “getting anything” from their church. Instead, they were asking themselves what they could give to make their church stronger. Their love for God allowed them to care for one another. The fruits of this love can still be seen in the church communities we are using today.

We are early in this new year of 2024 and Lent is just around the corner. Instead of going on a fad diet or trying to keep up the gym membership we just opened, maybe we should take advantage of our membership in God’s family. Maybe it’s time we spent more time in the church that generations before us knew was the most important part of their family and their community.

Let’s step back from all the stuff, from all the noise and clutter that fills our lives. Let’s ask God to show us the path back to him. And in doing so, let us pray that we can learn to place God in the center of our lives and trust in the fruits of his love.

Kendra McGuire is superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Covington, Ky

Valentine’s Day, life as a couple and Ash Wednesday

This February, we celebrate Valentine’s Day, the day of love and friendship. February 14 is also Ash Wednesday,

the beginning of Lent. At first glance, many will think that we will not be able to celebrate with our partners, but there are interesting parallels between true love as a couple and Lent.

During Lent, we focus mainly on three important things: prayer, fasting and charity. Likewise, to have a successful and holy marriage, it is also required to have a prayer life with Christ at the center, make many sacrifices and be generous in giving ourselves to our family as Christ offered up himself for the Church.

Prayer is essential for a Catholic home and a couple’s relationship to last and bear much fruit. When we look at the lives of the saints, many were the fruit of their par-

ents’ lives of prayer.

We have the example of St. Therese of Lisieux, whose parents were known for a deep life of prayer and devotion.

Also well-known is the testimony of St. Monica, mother of St. Augustine, who persevered in prayer for many years for the conversion of her son, who, despite having had a non-exemplary life, decided at one point to embrace the faith, becoming a doctor of the Church.

My in-laws, Paul and Barbara, are examples of prayer, sacrifices and charity. I have always admired their great faith and commitment to serving others. They were always involved in pro-life ministry. They adopted a child from the foster care system and, over the years, helped many single mothers financially.

From them, I learned what it means to live the faith, not just in the parish, but Monday through Sunday. I remember that, at every family gathering, they would begin with a family prayer. They always led by example and never missed going to church. When we went on vacation together and were away for the weekend, finding a church where we could attend Mass on Sunday was very important.

(Continued on page 6)



Kendra McGuire



Silvio Cuéllar

Protecting God's Children for Adults Safe Environment Trainings

For all employees and volunteers of the Diocese of Covington who in any way provide a safe environment for children.

Step 1: Contact parish/school institution leader to review the Policies and Procedures and fill out the Application and Acceptance Forms.

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 theregistration.

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:

■ February bulletin: posted Sunday, Feb. 4; due Tuesday, March 5

www.virtusonline.org, enter you 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:

■ Thursday, Feb. 29, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Thursday, Feb. 29, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Auditorium Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Tuesday, March 5, 6:30–9 p.m., Diocesan Catholic Children's Home, Miller Building – Training Room, Ft. Mitchell

■ Thursday, March 19, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Thursday, March 19, 9–11:30 a.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

Valentine’s Day and Ash Wednesday

(Continued from page 5)

One suggestion during this Lent would be to take on (or pick back up) the practice of praying the rosary as a family, giving the children the opportunity to lead a decade. In our home, we offer intentions for someone who needs our prayers at the beginning of each decade. Let us remember that “The family that prays together, stays together.”

For Catholics, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are obligatory days of fasting and abstinence. Likewise, the Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence; on those days, we abstain from eating meat.

That may not be a sacrifice for you so there are many other ways in which we can practice sacrifice and fasting. For example, we can fast by limiting or eliminating social media and technology use during the 40 days of Lent.

Sacrifice is also very important for a couple. Spouses should love and make sacrifices for each other as Christ sacrificed himself for the Church. This concept goes against the modern culture of instant gratification, where the “I” comes first.

At the beginning of a marriage, we go through the honeymoon or infatuation stage, where everything is

rose-colored. Then comes the maturity stage, where every day we make the decision to love the person God has placed in our lives. That implies making sacrifices for the sake of our partner and family, putting them ahead of our needs.

I remember recently, the night after a very exhausting weekend, I was very tired on my way to bed when I received a call from my son at 10:30 p.m. He was at the gym and had no way to get home. Even though my body was telling me to go to bed, without a moment’s hesitation, I answered, “I will be there in 15 minutes.” As parents, we may have countless examples of how we have sacrificed for our children, including our time and income.

Another important way to make sacrifices and an excellent investment is, for example, to enroll our children in a Catholic school, where they can receive an excellent education and formation in the faith. I sometimes joke that I could be driving a luxury car with what I pay for my daughter in high school. But the truth is that as parents we know that any material sacrifice is not enough to give the best to our children.

Finally, Lent is a time to practice charity more intensely.

Many of our parishes participate in Catholic Relief Services’ Rice Bowl campaign to support the efforts of the U.S. bishops’ international relief agency, which helps the world’s most disadvantaged with development programs and emergency assistance. Diocesan Catholic Charities’ campaigns also help fund diocesan ministries and local relief. Let us be generous with these opportunities and offer our generosity in our parish community.

In married life, we can focus on giving more of our time this Lent, seeking to strengthen the relationship between spouses and with our children by being more present in their lives and activities.

We can also make time to reconnect with family members with whom we have not spoken for a long time, call them to reconcile, ask forgiveness if we have offended them, give them a word of support and offer to pray for them.

This Lent, let us seek to focus on habits of prayer, fasting and charity, using our resources, time, treasure and talents to volunteer in ministries that serve and help others.

Silvio Cuéllar is a writer, liturgical music composer and journalist. He is a former coordinator of the Hispanic Ministry office and editor of El Católico de Rhode Island newspaper in the Diocese of Providence. Her column has been provided by OSV News.



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‘Walking in new life’ Mother of God and Divine Mercy parishes to host ‘24 Hours for the Lord’

Bella Young
Multimedia Correspondent

Lent is a season of penitence and renewal; a time when Catholics aim to become unbounded by their shortcomings in order that they may fully accept the gift of Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice — death on the cross for the redemption of sinners.

The Catholic Church requires its members to make a confession at least once a year. It is a common practice for Catholics to make a confession during Lent.

In 2013, Pope Francis through the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, began the Lenten initiative “24 Hours for the Lord.” The goal of this initiative was to open wide God’s mercy by providing extended access to prayer, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the sacrament of reconciliation during the Lenten season.

In a 2019 interview with *Vatican News*, Msgr. Krzysztof Marcjanowicz, an official at the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, said, “We started this because people were asking for the moment of adoration and the moment of peace of a common prayer with the Holy Father and it started actually during the Year of Faith and the feedback from this adoration gave us this input to propose the 24 hours for the Lord, which is basically an initiative based on adoration and confession...”

Now in its 11th year, the motto chosen by Pope Francis for this year’s “24 Hours for the Lord” is: “Walking in a new life.” (Romans 6,4) The Diocese of Covington joins this initiative on two consecutive Fridays, with two parishes being open for 12 consecutive hours. Calling it a “beautiful tradition” in a 2020 interview with *Vatican News*, Pope Francis said this is a perfect opportunity to attend confession and Eucharistic adoration.

This year in the Diocese of Covington, “24 Hours for the Lord” will be held from noon to midnight, March 1 at Mother of God Parish, Covington, and March 8 at Divine Mercy Parish, Bellevue.

“It is a wonderful opportunity during Lent to come into the Lord’s presence and to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation,” said Father Martin Pitstick, pastor, Divine Mercy Parish.

“24 Hours for the Lord”

Confessions and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

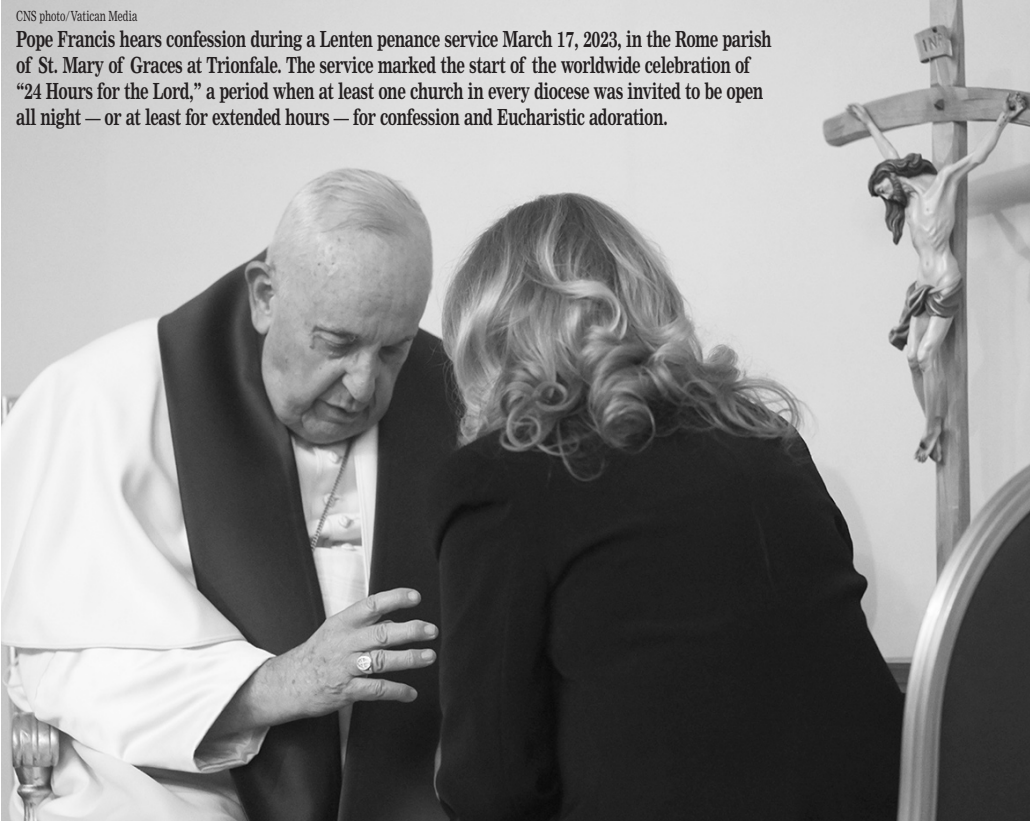
March 1, noon–midnight, Mother of God Parish, Covington

March 8, noon–midnight, Divine Mercy Parish, Bellevue

No registration needed.

CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Francis hears confession during a Lenten penance service March 17, 2023, in the Rome parish of St. Mary of Graces at Trionfale. The service marked the start of the worldwide celebration of “24 Hours for the Lord,” a period when at least one church in every diocese was invited to be open all night — or at least for extended hours — for confession and Eucharistic adoration.



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Bishop Iffert and the priests of the Diocese of Covington will pray a Holy Hour for survivors of sexual violence and for the sanctification of priests, 3 p.m., every third Thursday monthly, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. All are welcome. The next Holy Hour is Feb. 15.

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.

CONNECT Junior High Retreat, “Arise,” Feb. 10, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., at Thomas More University. Open to all sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students. Register at covdio.org/youth/ by Feb. 1.

A Marriage Encounter Experience will be held on Feb. 16–18 at the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center in Norwood, Ohio. Interested parties can call Andy and Melanie Reinersman at (859) 653-8464.

Mornings of reflection, Sts. Boniface and James Parish, Ludlow, 9–11 a.m. Feb. 17 will discuss Lectio Divina; March 16 will discuss discernment. Includes Mass, adoration and available confessions.

New Manna Retreat: Dining in the Desert will be held at Mother of God Church Hall, Covington, Feb. 17, 8 a.m.–4 p.m. In this one-day retreat, Fr. Thomas Picchioni will explore the four different faces of the Real Manna come down from heaven and how with each face comes a different understanding, a different response and even a different relationship. RSVP appreciated to Anne Raispis at sproutingstumpministries@gmail.com or call/text at (859) 803-8890.

Start the Lenten Season with an hour of harp music by Dr. Diane Schneider, Feb. 18, 3–4 p.m., St. Benedict Church, Covington. Free will offerings will be accepted.

The William T. (Bill) Robinson III ’67 Institute for Religious Liberty presents “Who’s My God”, an interfaith dialogue, Feb. 21, 7–9 p.m. in Steigerwald Hall in the Saints Center on Thomas More University’s Campus. This interfaith dialogue will feature a panel of experts led by moderator Brian Adams, Ph.D., who chairs the governing board for international NGO A Common Word Among Youth. Experts include: Shakila T. Ahmad representing the Muslim faith, Brett Greenhalgh a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Thomas More professor Hannah Keegan representing the Roman Catholic religion and Rabbi Gary P. Zola, Ph.D., of the Jewish faith. For more information visit thomasmore.edu/religiousliberty.

Newport Central Catholic High School announces its 23rd class of inductees into its Athletic Hall of Fame: Tyler Barto ’02, Bob Brunemann ’70, Olivia Huber Bryant ’12, Anastasia Little Frey ’04, Glenn Meyers ’89, and AJ Simon ’95. Also being honored as the “Team of

Distinction” is the 2002 Boys Soccer Regional Champion Team. NCCHS will be awarding the Coach Jim Connor Award to Dave Meyers ’98 and the Father John Hegenauer Community Service Award to Mark and Carol Keller Buemi ’82. The induction ceremony is Feb. 24, at the Newport Central Catholic Gymnasium, beginning with a social hour at 6 p.m.; followed by dinner and ceremony at 7 p.m. Cost \$30, prior to Feb. 12, online at <https://gofan.co/event/1323351?schoolId=KY6479>. Contact the NCC School Office at (859) 292-0001.

Upcoming Covington Cursillo retreats at the Jesuit Spiritual Retreat Center, Milford: Men’s weekend, Feb. 29–March 3; Women’s weekend, April 4–7. For information contact Vince Lonnemann at vjlonne@gmail.com or; (513) 708-4926.

Bishop Brossart High School Girls softball and volleyball Euchre Tournament, March 2 at BBHS cafeteria. Doors open 5:30 p.m.; tournament begins 7 p.m.; \$25 pre-registration by Feb. 24, \$30 at the door; \$10 optional skin game. Food, soft drinks and water included in admission. Cash bar available. Contact Kari Bezold (859) 391-5119 or kariebb1@gmail.com.

2024 Thomas More Women’s Conference, March 15, 8 a.m.–1 p.m., Steigerwald Hall, Saints Center. An interactive conference designed to enlighten, engage, and challenge women to seek more within their lives and careers. The 2024 Women’s Conference explores the topic of “Responsibility to Others.” Information available at tmuky.us/tmwc. Cost: \$50 for alumni and friends; free for current students/faculty/staff. Special rates available for high school groups.

Holy Cross District High School, Covington, 26th annual mulch sale. Students will deliver mulch to your home, business or rental property anywhere in Kenton, Boone and Campbell Counties and will put it anywhere on your property, starting March 30 and continuing for at least four weeks. Call (859) 392-8999 for information.

St. Augustine Parish, Covington, will celebrate Tenebrae, Spy Wednesday, March 27, 6 p.m. All are welcome.

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 per-

sonal losses, this program invites participants to move toward their own new beginning. The next session will be held on consecutive Thursdays – Jan. 25, Feb. 1, Feb. 8, Feb. 15, Feb. 22, Feb. 29, March 7, and March 14, 2024, 7-8:30 p.m., Holy Trinity Elementary, Bellevue. Register at covdio.org/new-beginnings.

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

Fish Frys

Fridays, Feb. 16–March 15

St. Agnes Parish, Ft. Wright, 5–8 p.m.

Fridays, Feb. 16–March 22

St. Bernard Parish, Dayton, 5–7 p.m.

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

St. Edward Parish, Cynthiana, 5–7 p.m.

St. Francis Xavier Parish, Falmouth, Knights of Columbus, 4–7:30 p.m.

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

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

St. Paul, Florence, 4:30–7:30 p.m.

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

St. Timothy Parish, Union, dine in 5–7:30 p.m.; drive thru 4:30–7 p.m.

Fridays, Feb. 16–March 29

St. Augustine Parish, Covington, 4–7 p.m.

St. Benedict Parish, Covington, 4:45–7 p.m.



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Lindsey Zitzke Photography
Katie (McLaughlin) and
Anthony Gillespie arrive
at Veraestau Historic
Site, Aurora, Indiana,
for their wedding
reception Oct. 28, 2023

"We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become."

—St. Clare of Assisi

MARRIAGE AND WEDDINGS

National Marriage Week USA and World Marriage Day to be celebrated February 7–14

USCCB

Each year, National Marriage Week USA and World Marriage Day provide an opportunity for the Catholic Church to focus on and celebrate the vocation to marriage and family life. This year, National Marriage Week USA will be celebrated February 7-14 and World Marriage Day, which is commemorated on the second Sunday of February, will be celebrated on February 11.

The theme for this year’s celebration of National

Marriage Week is “Love Beyond Words,” which recalls the self-sacrificing love in marriage that is rooted in the wedding promises that the couple makes in matrimony. Each day of National Marriage Week, digital content will be shared on the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ social media channels: including X (formerly Twitter), Facebook and Instagram

National Marriage Week USA, launched in 2010, is part of an international event seeking to mobilize individuals,

organizations, and businesses in a common purpose to strengthen marriage in communities and influence the culture. World Marriage Day was started in 1983 by Worldwide Marriage Encounter. More information is available on their website, NationalMarriageWeekUSA.org.

This article has been edited by *Messenger* staff.

Matrimony, sacrament of service

Isaak Isaak
Contributor

The Church has long talked about vocation and sacrament. The one sacrament referred to as a vocation, a calling, has been priesthood and religious life. The sacrament of matrimony was rarely referred to as vocation.

Today, it is! Our sacrament of matrimony is indeed a true sacrament. It is an outward sign of unity only achieved through years of letting go of self for the purpose of feeding the relationship. Those years couples share are years of adjustment, struggle, joy, peace and turmoil. They are years of happiness and sorrow, gain and loss. Slowly, two become one, sometimes despite the struggle each goes through to hold on to their own individual self.

The sacrament of matrimony has the same purpose as Holy Orders; to bring people to a deeper relationship with God, through Jesus Christ. It does so in a different format, relating to specified individuals as opposed to reaching out to masses of people at the same time. Both vocations rely on modeling, setting example and being consistent in one’s own relationship with God.

Couples are charged with bringing in new life, educating that new life and reaching out to those around them with the touch and love of Christ. They are to do all this

with minimum training. Oftentimes, couples find themselves asking for the manual to being married and raising children.

Today, society is struggling to maintain its balance. Marriages are breaking up at unreasonable rates, couples living together imitating marriage, society striving to redefine marriage and its purpose, attempting to eliminate God and his purpose for humankind. If society is to rebound from where it finds itself at this point, it will have to be through strong, God-centered couples intent on living out their vocation.

The basic cell of society is the family. The family has conquered difficult environments, overcome strife and deprivation, but in the midst is still able to teach new life of God and God’s ways. It is the faith and families we celebrate.

It is the vocation of matrimony which holds hope for society.

It is time to regain society as God intended for us, one family at a time. Therefore, “Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage.” (Heb. 13:4)

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

Getting married in the diocese

The Catholic Church and your diocesan community are here to support couples and help them stay centered on Christ to form strong, lasting marriages.

There are three requirements for all engaged couples wishing to marry in the Diocese of Covington:

1. **Contact the parish priest** at least nine to 12 months before your wedding to set an initial appointment and to start your marriage preparations.
2. **Attend one of the following marriage preparation programs** at least three to six months prior to your wedding. Since marriage preparation programs often fill quickly, it is best to register two to three months before the program date. Program options:

Dates: April 20 and 27, June 15 and 22
Time: 9:00 a.m.– 3:00 p.m.
Cost per couple is \$100.
For more dates and registration for Living Marriage as Sacrament visit: <https://marriedoc.org/>
For any questions, please contact Eric and Lauri Nienaber at: register@marriedoc.org

Directions: St. Timothy Church
10272 Highway 42
Union, KY 41091
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I-75 to Florence/Union Exit (180). South on US 42 approximately 4.4 miles. St. Timothy is on the left, across from Ryle High School.

Living Marriage as a Sacrament
This program is held at St. Timothy Parish, Union, on two consecutive Saturdays with large group presentation, private couple interaction, and small group discussion. The focus is on a couple’s relationship and the beauty and importance of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Covington-Cincinnati Catholic Engaged Encounter
The weekend retreat offered by the Cincinnati-Covington Catholic Engaged Encounter (CEE) ministry offers couples a unique opportunity to look at their commitment.

(Continued on page 12)



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Getting married in the diocese

(Continued from page 10)

ment to each other in a deeper way as they prepare for marriage. Free from the pressure and distractions of the outside world, couples are given 30-plus hours to dialogue honestly and intensively about their prospective lives together.

Two married couples make up the presenting team and share brief stories about their marriages and the impact of the Sacrament of Matrimony on their lives, with the goal of encouraging participants to explore their own attitudes and expectations. The team also offers couples ideas on how to continue to love each other, even amid the pres-

sucesos del mundo.

The engaged couples should anticipate discussing each other's strengths and weaknesses, desires, and ambitions, as well as their attitudes about money, sex, children, family and the role of the Church and society in their future marriages. Our motto is: "A wedding is a day; a marriage is a lifetime."

Most people spend huge amounts of money and many months planning for their wedding. CEE is about preparing for what most hope will last 50 or 60 years — your marriage.

Location:
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Registration: visit <https://cincinnati-covington.engageden-counter.com/>

To love and to cherish: Bringing mercy into marriage

Bill Dodds
OSV News

On their wedding day, a bride and groom may have stars in their eyes, but they have rocks in their heads if they think their partner isn't going to:

- Drive them nuts. Sometimes.
- Take them for granted. On occasion.
- Do something that truly hurts them. Once in a while.
- Husband does it to wife. Wife does it to husband.

There are moments — there can be periods — when those wedding-day stars are replaced with long-time-married sparks of anger. Even in a happy marriage. Even in a marriage filled with joy and grace because: A marriage is made up of two imperfect people. (Yes, yes, your betrothed was perfect! But how he or she has changed! Or more correctly, how your perception has improved.) That's why each person, at times, needs to seek forgiveness. Why each, at times, needs to offer it.

Enter mercy. Wedding homilists and marriage vows speak of love, honor and cherish, but mercy pops up again and again as the marriage progresses. And with mercy, that relationship does make progress. It broadens, deepens, intensifies.

If love is the engine that drives a marriage, mercy is the oil that keeps its many parts running smoothly.

What's in this amazing fluid that goes such a long way on cutting down friction? The glossary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way: Mercy is "the loving kindness, compassion, or forbearance shown to one who offends (e.g., the mercy of God to us sinners)."

No couple gets very far down the road of life together without one person offending the other. And the other person offending the one. Those unpleasant mileposts can demand loving kindness, compassion and forbearance (that is, patience and leniency).

Wonderful in theory. Pretty darned tough sometimes in the real world. And marriage is no honeymoon. It's as real as real can get.



With all that in mind, here are a few points to consider: To grow in love is to grow in mercy. God, all merciful, is love (1 Jn 4:8) and — thanks be to God! — a husband and wife were created in his image. But that growth in love and mercy isn't like some beautiful piece of furniture delivered to your front door and placed in your home.

No, no, no. When it comes to virtues, God can be more like ... IKEA. Here's a box crammed with parts, here are the instructions. Now, put it together! (Yes, his helpline is always open.)

How do you do that? The good news: He gives each of

you a lot of opportunities to get better at loving and being merciful. The bad news: He gives each of you a lot of opportunities to get better at loving and being merciful. Practice won't make you perfect, but it will make you much, much better.

Mercy talks, and mercy listens. It's no secret that one of the cornerstones of a happy and healthy marriage is communication. But not all talking is created equal. Sometimes it's so easy. ("That coat looks good on you.") Other times, not so much. Other times, it's saying things

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Bringing mercy into marriage

(Continued from page 13)

that are hard to say or hearing things that are hard to hear: (“Over the last couple of months your drinking has ...”)

It’s a wonderful, heady feeling to realize that someone who knows you better than anyone else on earth still loves you. Who, despite his or her awareness of your many faults and shortcomings, still truly loves you.

But that also means your spouse is the one who can tell you when you’ve started to go off course. Started to slip here or there. Started to become less like the person God created you to be.

Not that you or your loved one will ever reach that goal in this lifetime, but moving forward in that direction matters. To you. To him or her. To your marriage.

There’s a big — and important — difference between being merciful and being a doormat. A misguided sense of mercy can lead to a host of problems in a marriage. Mercy doesn’t overlook, ignore or simply dismiss an action or pattern that needs to be addressed.

At times it can rightfully and wisely call for professional help. A case of the sniffles? Maybe a nice bowl of chicken soup. A ruptured appendix? Much more sophisticated and professional care. A series of spat or a developing pattern of underappreciating each other? Perhaps a date night or setting up those evenings on a regular schedule. A larger and more complex problem — infidelity, addiction or abuse? Assistance from those educated and trained to help couples and individuals.

Mercy is always a choice — an action

based on free will. Just as God will never force someone to be merciful, neither can one spouse force the other to act that way. Yes, over time, being merciful can seem like an automatic response, but that’s only because — as the years have passed — a person learns to offer mercy with grace and speed. It may appear effortless, but each time, whether for a small misdeed or large offense, mercy demands an action. Or, rather, four actions.

Being merciful is making the decision to be kind, compassionate, patient and lenient.

In “Misericordiae Vultus,” Pope Francis’ message announcing the Jubilee of Mercy, the Holy Father wrote: “As we can see in sacred Scripture, mercy is a key word that indicates God’s action toward us. He does not limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible.

“Love, after all, can never be just an abstraction. By its very nature, it indicates something concrete: intentions, attitudes and behaviors that are shown in daily living. The mercy of God is his loving concern for each one of us. He feels responsible; that is, he desires our well-being and he wants to see us happy, full of joy and peaceful. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other.”

So you are called to be merciful to that wonderful, amazing, loving — and imperfect — person you married.

Bill Dodds writes from Washington.

What is real love?

Msgr. Daniel B. Gallagher
OSV News

The world is forever asking the question, in poetry and song, “What is real love?” In his first encyclical from 2005, the late Pope Benedict XVI proposed an answer. In fact, he reminds us that God has already revealed to us the answer: “In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an expiation for our sins” (1 Jn 4:10).

The very title, “Deus Caritas Est,” states a fundamental truth of the Christian faith: “God is love” (1 Jn 4:16). Every Christian, and indeed many non-Christians, can agree on that. But unfortunately, if we have misunderstood what love is, we will surely misunderstand who God is.

“Today,” observes Pope Benedict, “the term ‘love’ has become one of the most frequently used and misused of words.” We seldom stop to reflect on the difference between loving our ice cream, loving our pets, loving our families and loving our God. We indiscriminately say we love each of these.

Pope Benedict suggests that we can begin to sort out the complex issues surrounding love with a preliminary observation: Love is twofold. We love something or someone because we derive a benefit from that something or someone.

When we eat ice cream, we derive the pleasure of tasting its sweetness. But the ice cream derives no benefit from our love.

We love our pets because they provide us with protection and companionship. We also feed them because we don’t want them to go hungry, but if we had only one steak, we would give it to our children before giving it to a dog. Love means something quite different in each of these cases.

We love because we are fulfilled through love, but also when it seems to leave us unfulfilled. The ancient Greeks had a way of distinguishing between these two aspects of love. Eros is the love that overwhelms us without our thinking or willing it. It is the love that moves Romeo to gasp “for I ne’er saw true beauty till this night” when he catches his first glimpse of Juliet.

Agape, on the other hand, is the love we freely choose. It’s the love we extend to the other not for our own good, but for the other’s good. “Amare est velle alicui bonum,” taught St. Thomas Aquinas: “To love is to will the good of the other.”

This is the love that impelled Mother Teresa to found her Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata, India. It’s the love that beckons you to forgo your favorite TV program so you can play a game of cards with a lonely friend in the nursing home.

God loves with an agape surpassing all others. He had no need to create us, nothing to gain by saving us. He is utterly perfect and self-sufficient within himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Yet, Paul writes, “God proves his love (agape) for us in that while we were still sinners,

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MARRIAGE AND WEDDINGS

(Continued from page 14)

Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). God did not wait until we demonstrated our love toward him. He poured out his love for us “while we were still sinners.”

This total act of divine self-giving is a great mystery. Indeed, it almost seems that such a love contradicts God’s very nature. God, who needs nothing from us, gives everything for us.

Pope Benedict summarizes this profound paradox when he writes that Jesus’ “death on the cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form” — the love that has transformed the world!

It is also, the pope teaches, the love that transforms eros. Eros is not stripped of its value in the face of Christian agape. To the contrary, agape sheds a whole new light on the true meaning of eros.

Eros, when it is properly understood, is the gateway to agape. Romeo would never have had the chance to love Juliet for her own sake if he had not first felt a strong desire to have her for his own sake.

In the classical tradition, eros was understood as a form of ecstasy (From the Greek “ek-stasis”), which literally means “to stand outside oneself.” The rapture we feel in the presence of something or someone beautiful arouses in us a strong desire to become one with that something or someone. Such a desire can even make us feel dizzy.

“Love,” writes Pope Benedict, “is indeed ‘ecstasy,’” yet “not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self toward its liberation through self-giving, and thus toward authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God.”

In this sense, Christianity affirms erotic love. In fact, because eros holds so powerful a sway over us, sacred Scripture repeatedly draws upon erotic images to help us fathom the bottomless depths of God’s agape. Erotic love is ordered to, and ultimately culminates in, the sacrament of matrimony.

Consequently, we shouldn’t be surprised to find that God speaks to us in marital images. “I will allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart,” God says to the people of Israel through the prophet Hosea. “I will espouse you to me forever. I will espouse you in fidelity and you shall know the Lord” (Hos 2:21-22).

Our experience of eros, if not denigrated by our sinful inclinations, can thus lead us to understand something about God’s passionate love for us.

The pope urges us to remember, however, that we should not stop there. The fickleness of desirous love (eros) must give way to the purity of unselfish love (agape). This transformation can take place fully only through our participation in the divine agape of the church’s sacraments, especially the holy Eucharist.

“The Eucharist draws us into Jesus’ act of self-oblation,” writes Pope Benedict. “We enter into the very dynamic of self-giving. The imagery of marriage between God and Israel is now realized in a way previously inconceivable.”

Pope Benedict’s encyclical challenges us to examine our motives for participating, or for neglecting to participate, in the holy Eucharist. Too often we view this great sacrament in terms of eros. We are too quick to ask, “What will I get out of going to Mass this Sunday?”

The pope invites us to view the liturgy instead in terms of agape. Our participation in the Mass is nothing short of a participation in Christ’s total and utter self-giving — an actual sharing in his very body and blood, offered up for us once on the cross, and continually offered to us week after week at the Lamb’s High Feast.

Romeo died for his beloved bride Juliet because of a tragic mistake. Shakespeare’s tale is one of eros gone awry. But Jesus’ death for his beloved bride, the church, was no mistake. The Gospel is the story of the triumph of agape.

So just what is real love? “Love,” writes Pope Benedict, “is ‘divine’ because it comes from God and unites us to God. It makes us a ‘we’ which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is ‘all in all.’”

Msgr. Daniel B. Gallagher is a priest of the Diocese of Gaylord, Michigan.

Strategies for promoting marriage in the Church

USCCB

The most cited reasons by leaders for why Catholics do not get married in the Church were a lack of knowledge about the faith and a lack of connection to Christ and the Church. Respondents reported that many couples do not see the value of marrying in the Church or understand the difference between a sacramental and civil marriage. Respondents also frequently noted a negative perception of the Church’s marriage preparation process (and declaration of nullity process in some cases) as being restrictive, cumbersome and expensive.

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis reminds the Church of the need to reach out, evangelize, accompany and support

ty program can attract others by word of mouth. Marriage prep can also be an important place of evangelization and catechesis for the engaged couple, as well as a “refresher” on the sacrament.

In addition, surveys reported, high-quality and engaging programs can challenge the pervasive view that marriage prep in the Church is simply a series of boxes to check and hoops to jump through. Many respondents cited the need for Theology of the Body and Natural Family Planning courses in marriage prep to awaken the faith and change hearts. Many also suggested making marriage prep more relational by including sponsor couples or mentor priests.



marriages and families. In this vein, the best practices and strategies proposed by the leaders who were surveyed demonstrate a creative and enthusiastic response to encouraging and strengthening marriage in the Church. Their suggestions and ideas can help all Catholic leaders who work with youth, young adults, engaged couples, and those married outside of the Church.

Strategy #1: Strengthen Youth and Young Adult Ministry

Practically speaking, youth and young adult ministers suggested that programming should include the implicit and explicit promotion of marriage. Ministry events for youth and young adults should actively work to include married role models as leaders and mentors. These couples stand as witnesses to the Sacrament of Matrimony and can offer a healthy ideal for individuals without examples of strong marriages in their life.

#2: Collaborate with Catholic Educators and Catechists

Leaders noted the importance of ensuring that all educational and catechetical leaders are well-formed and well-versed in the Church’s teaching on marriage. One diocese hosts an in-service day for leaders to deepen their understanding of marriage and encourage Catholic education as a way of guiding youth toward marriage.

Strategy #3: Raise Awareness of the Vocation of Marriage

Pope Francis reminds us that “marriage is a vocation” and that family life is “a true path to daily sanctification and mystical growth, a means for deeper union with God” (AL, nos. 72, 316). Many survey respondents noted that they promote marriage as the vocation it is, but that this understanding is not widespread. By emphasizing marriage as a beautiful sacrament with its own spirituality and mission in the Church and society, more young people and couples may fully realize their call to marriage in the Church.

Strategy #4: Make Marriage Prep Supportive, Engaging, and Accessible

The leaders who were surveyed point out that although couples who attend marriage preparation programs have already decided to be married in the Church, a high-quality

Strategy #5: Support Couples Regularizing their Marriage

Leaders shared that couples going through the convalidation process (to bring a civil marriage into the Church) or the declaration of nullity process need extra support and accompaniment. Some suggested strategies included providing language options for non-English speakers going through these processes and offering specialized marriage preparation classes for couples regularizing their marriage, in some places called “Cana II.” Another increasingly common approach is to celebrate regularized unions with group weddings (recognizing numerous convalidations in one celebration), which can also lessen the financial burden for couples. Other leaders suggested, similarly to Pope Francis, that if possible, fees associated with the declaration of nullity process be reduced or even eliminated.

Strategy #6: Reach out

Respondents noted that one such time to be a missionary is when couples return to the parish for sacraments or religious education for their children. One diocese trains parish leaders to identify couples in irregular marital situations and then has the pastor reach out in person or with a personalized form letter to invite them to regularize their union. Having an identifiable point person in the parish who couples can reach out to is another way of approaching this.

Strategy #7: Make Information Accessible

Many respondents noted that young couples are likely to do internet research before calling a parish or diocese about marriage preparation. A strong web presence is necessary; then, to answer questions about Church teaching on marriage, the declaration of nullity process, and convalidation. When couples do call about getting married at a parish, the parish staff should be prepared to warmly welcome and congratulate them as they begin marriage preparation.

It was suggested that information about Catholic marriage should also be easily accessible at the parish level. Many dioceses have started offering information sessions on the declaration of nullity, some including witness talks from couples or individuals who went through the process.

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MARRIAGE AND WEDDINGS

Strategies for promoting marriage

(Continued from page 15)

These sessions can be accompanied by healing Masses, Holy Hours, or short retreats to offer support for people in a difficult situation.

Strategy #8: Remove Financial Barriers

A number of respondents indicated that for many couples, the cost of a wedding can be prohibitive to getting married. While a bare minimum celebration can be affordable, sometimes even that is too much for people struggling financially. One suggestion on this point is for parishes and dioceses to re-examine the cost of marriage preparation programs, renting Church facilities, and other related services. Another suggestion is to work with couples

who are struggling financially so that a lack of resources does not impede a truly joyous celebration. One parish

reported a creative approach: hosting group weddings with parish-sponsored receptions.

Strategy #9: Celebrate Marriage!

As the saying goes, “a wedding is for a day, but a marriage is for life.” Happily, many parish and diocesan leaders reported that they have taken on the challenge of supporting marriage in all of its stages. Many dioceses host an annual wedding anniversary Mass at the cathedral to honor and celebrate couples who continue to live out the Sacrament of Matrimony. This can be done at a parish or diocesan level or incorporated into weekly Mass by inviting couples to receive a blessing from the priest on the

occasion of their anniversary. Other dioceses offer marriage enrichment retreats throughout the year, in different lengths and locations to accommodate as many people as possible.

Strategy #10: Continue Promoting Marriage to All Catholics

To come full circle, a final suggestion offered by leaders was that strengthening and promoting marriage in the Church needs to include outreach to the entire Church, not only engaged couples and young people. This outreach could include a well-developed web presence, multimedia campaigns and diocesan and parish level ministry. By continually seeking to deepen the understanding and appreciation of marriage by all Catholics, marriages – and the Church – are strengthened.

Navigating marriage after baby

Simcha Fisher
OSV News

Ever have one of those days when you lose the hamburger you were defrosting and find it later in the washing machine, full of soap? And you can deal with that, but you cannot deal with being accused of leaving the medicine chest door open again, when you are fairly sure you closed it. You just cannot deal with being treated this way.

Chances are, this level of bone-headedness and this level of inappropriate drama mean one thing: You’re tired. And you’re tired in a way that only a parent of a new baby can be tired, and you’re angry at your spouse in the way

on those levels,” the Popcaks say. “Then, once the baby arrives, they need to talk openly and regularly about how those rituals need to continue evolving so they can maintain those connections.”

Work at forming a habit of talking things through rather than assuming that your needs are obvious. It’s OK to be vulnerable as long as you’re also prepared to be generous.

Care for each other as things stand now, not as they used to be, or how they ought to be, or how everyone on TV seems to be. Rededicate yourself to the person in front of you, rather than a fantasy or a memory of a person.

Father Dwight Longenecker, himself a husband and father as well as a priest and author, says that many couples poison their marriages and families by buying into fantasies of a tidy, prosperous, air-brushed “Disneyland” life.

“Recognize that subtle propaganda and laugh it off,” he counsels. “That’s not real.”

If you chase after shiny illusions, you will rob your real life of its real joy and peace.

What about when the little one is actually born?

The first few weeks and months are intensely demanding, but it won’t be that way forever. Focus on surviving each day,

and remember that chronic exhaustion makes rational thought impossible — so don’t take tired thoughts and words to heart. Forget housework, forget socializing, forget everything you can afford to forget and rest as much as possible — all three of you — until you turn the corner.

In these early days, there is no such thing as too much patience. Even young, fit moms don’t instantly spring back to supreme physical and emotional health after the birth.

According to the Popcaks, “It can take a year or more to feel normal after pregnancy and delivery, but husbands — and often the women themselves — don’t appreciate how hard it really is to get your ducks back in a row after a baby and how normal it is to feel and be out-of-sorts for months afterward.”

Here is where husband and wife must talk, talk, talk — and listen. In the first several months, the husband really needs to step up while his wife recovers. Only moms can breastfeed, but there’s no reason dads can’t deal with diaper explosions and howling werewolf babies. To a postpartum woman, there is no hero like the husband who lets her sleep. And many men are surprised to realize how much they enjoy being with their babies.

But it’s not all about mothers. Fathers also need time to

recover. They are going through changes, too.

“Postpartum depression is surprisingly common in men,” the Popcaks said. “Part of it has to do with tiredness, the disruption in schedule and the feeling of being torn between wanting to be with wife and baby and having to be at work, combined with a little jealousy if mom gets to stay home. Some husbands also struggle with the feeling of being displaced or replaced.”

Moms and babies need to bond, but they don’t want to bond dad right out of the picture. Gratitude, affection, admiration and trust can go a long way toward reassuring a new dad that he’s still the one.

But these are all secular problems, aren’t they? Shouldn’t Catholics have an edge over their nonreligious peers?

Maybe, but Catholics are still human, and it still takes us time to learn new tricks. Learning flexibility can be harder than any other skill. Legalism and rigidity masquerading as religious piety can increase domestic conflict as husband and wife adjust to their new life.

“Babies have a way of stretching your comfort zones,” the Popcaks write. “If your faith helps you deal with that and respond accordingly, both your faith and relationships will become healthier as you grow as a person. But if your faith is mainly about having hard and fast rules to live by, you might not adapt as well to the unpredictability that comes with post-baby life.”

Father Longenecker agrees: “Rigid gender roles are subjugated to the law of love. Loving our spouse and children in a free and generous way is what it’s really all about. Gender roles are not law; they are there to help us achieve complementary love.”

So how, specifically, do we learn to adapt?

Always be looking for ways to spend time together, and revel in the small but happy moments. “Look for little ways to connect instead of holding out for big things (dates, sex),” the Popcaks say. “Concentrate on creating small moments of connection. You’ve built this life together. Instead of running away from it to connect, use it!”

Worry less about doing things the right way, or the way your mother, your friends or the expert of the week says to do it, and worry more about staying close to each other no matter what. There are many, many right ways to raise a child. But when the child, or the parenting theory, edges out the one we’ve vowed to love, then misery will follow for everyone.

And what about that spiritual life? Becoming a parent both deepens and complicates your relationship with God. There ought to be a trophy for surviving Mass with an infant in tow. But if you do get to hear some of the Scripture readings, be prepared to hear them with new ears. God as tender father; the Church as merciful mother; Christ as the one who gives up his body because of love — suddenly these mean so much more when you’re a parent yourself.

Maintaining a spiritual life while raising a child is parenthood in a nutshell: It’s hard, complicated, tiring, sometimes frustrating and confusing — but rich, deep, profound beyond measure.

So pray together, even if — like so many things in life with a new baby — it’s just a quick one. Look at your new baby and remind yourself that love is in the small things.

Thank God for the gift of your child; and ask God, over and over again, to make you a gift to your spouse.

Simcha Fisher writes from New Hampshire.



that only a parent of a new baby can be angry at his or her spouse: truly, thoroughly, with your whole heart, tired and angry.

This is what marriage can look like when a baby comes on the scene.

No matter how much a baby was desired, his arrival will often turn a marriage on its ear. Take a snapshot of a married couple with a new baby and it may look less like a holy card and more like an S.O.S.

Is the secular world right, and are babies the fast ticket to misery and grief?

In general, no. But yes, change is going to happen when couples start a family. Dr. Gregory and Lisa Popcak, authors of the book “Then Comes Baby: Surviving and Thriving in the First Three Years of Parenthood” (Ave Maria Press, \$16.95), say that the principle idea is to embrace that change deliberately, rather than fighting it. Take possession of change, and take charge of where your marriage is heading.

A couple can take charge even before the baby is born. “It’s incredibly important for couples to establish rituals for connecting across work, play, talk and prayer, before baby comes on the scene so that they are used to relating

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National/World

Pakistan elections stir some hope among Christians

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — As Pakistan holds general elections for the national and provincial assemblies on Feb. 8, Christian minority hopes they will strengthen the democratic process and state institutions. For decades, Christian community faced discrimination and persecution because of their faith in an Islamic society of the world’s fifth-most populous nation. Archbishop Joseph Arshad of Islamabad-Rawalpindi emphasized that minority aspirations should also be considered. “The minority and other marginalized sections of society cannot be ignored in this process of elections. Therefore, for the integrity of minorities in society, their aspirations should also be taken into account in elections,” the archbishop said as the campaign was gaining momentum. For many Christians, the fear that the election might not bring any tangible change however is strong after the attack on Christian houses and churches in Jaranwala in August 2023. Naeem Yousaf Gill, executive director of National (Catholic) Commission for Justice and Peace, a human rights body of the bishops’ conference in Pakistan, told OSV News that in some areas “Christians are less enthusiastic because of various political and cultural reasons.” However, Akmal Bhatti, a Catholic political leader and head of Minority Alliance Pakistan, originally from Khushpur, a Catholic village in Punjab province, said that despite all reservations, Christians should not be discouraged and take an active part in the general elections. Ahead of the general election Pakistan is tormented by a cycle of political vengeance, jailings and military influence.

Pope gives mother of hostage ‘permission to not lose faith in humanity’

JERUSALEM — Since her 23-year-old son Hersh had his left arm blown off at the elbow and was taken hostage into Gaza by Hamas on Oct. 7, 2023, Rachel Goldberg-Polin has gone from the self-described “Jane Doe” anonymity of Jewish woman, to becoming the international voice for hostage families, entering a world previously unknown to her — public speaking and meeting world leaders to gain the release of her son and the other hostages taken by Hamas that day. “I think the real way to recover from Oct. 7 is to get the hostages back,” she told OSV News. She felt extremely “grateful and privileged” to have met with Pope Francis, along with 11 other hostage families. She showed him the video of Hersh, who had been able to put a tourniquet on his arm to stop the bleeding, climbing onto the back of a pick-up truck with his arm blown off. The pope was visibly shaken after having seen the video in a Nov. 22 meeting, she said. After viewing it, he said the families had experienced terrorism, which he called “the absence of humanity.” Goldberg-Polin said that “without realizing it” she had begun “to question humanity,” but Pope Francis gave her “permission to not lose faith in humanity.” “I can still have faith and hope that humanity will be victorious over the darkness” the hostage families and the hostages “are going through.”

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Spiritual oasis: Year of Prayer a needed rest stop on journey to jubilee

Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — With little fanfare, Pope Francis officially opened the Year of Prayer after Mass for the Church’s celebration of Sunday of the Word of God.

“Today we begin the Year of Prayer; that is, a year dedicated to rediscovering the great value and absolute need for prayer in personal life, in the life of the Church and in the world,” he said, after praying the Angelus with visitors in St. Peter’s Square Jan. 21.

The pope called for the special year last February to help prepare Catholics worldwide for the Holy Year, which begins with the opening of the Holy Door in St. Peter’s Basilica Dec. 24.

Preparing for the jubilee is not just about the huge construction projects underway throughout Rome to help welcome and facilitate the flow of an estimated 35 million pilgrims expected for the Holy Year 2025.

The year 2024 also should be about rebuilding and renewing spiritual pathways and practices so that the spiritual significance of the jubilee can “emerge more clearly, something which goes far beyond the necessary and

urgent forms of structural organization,” said Archbishop Rino Fisichella, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization’s section for new evangelization, which is coordinating the Holy Year.

Speaking at a news conference Jan. 23 about the Year of Prayer, the archbishop said 2024 is about preparing the groundwork so the jubilee “spiritually enriches the life of the Church and of the entire people of God, becoming a concrete sign of hope.”

The jubilee must be “prepared for and lived in individual communities with that spirit of expectation which is typical of Christian hope,” he said, unveiling several resources the dicastery is providing to help bishops, dioceses, parishes, families and religious communities rediscover the value of and need for daily prayer.

Unlike other years designated by the pope, “this is not a year marked with particular initiatives,” Archbishop Fisichella said. Rather it is a time to get back to basics: to discover how to pray and how to educate people in prayer “so that prayer can be effective and fruitful.”

The dicastery will release ideas, suggestions and resources as the year continues, starting with an eight-volume series of booklets titled, “Notes on Prayer,” that “delve into the various dimensions of the Christian act of praying, signed by authors of international renown,” Msgr. Bell said at the news conference.

As the translations are done, the series will be made available to the world’s bishops’ conferences, the archbishop said.

The first volume, titled “Praying Today. A Challenge to Be Overcome,” was released Jan. 23 and was written by Cardinal Angelo Comastri, retired archpriest of St. Peter’s Basilica, with a preface by Pope Francis.

“Prayer is the breath of faith, it is its most proper expression. Like a silent cry that comes forth from the



heart of those who believe and entrust themselves to God,” the pope wrote.

The other texts, to be released over the next three months, will carry titles such as “Praying with the Psalms,” “The Prayer of Jesus,” “Praying with Saints and Sinners,” and “The Prayer Jesus Taught Us: The ‘Our Father.’”

The dicastery also will send out texts and guides digitally for dioceses to integrate, modify and distribute as they see fit, Archbishop Fisichella said. The different texts will cover many possible aspects of a Christian’s prayer life, including spiritual retreats, shrines and the priesthood.


In addition, he noted, Pope Francis’ 38 general audience talks on prayer, given from May 6, 2020, to June 16, 2021, are available online, reflect on the various forms of prayer and contain many useful suggestions.

Pope Francis will set up a “school of prayer” for 2024, he said. It will be similar to the pope’s “Fridays of Mercy” initiative during the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy in 2016, when he visited people on the “peripheries,” including babies in a neonatal unit, a center for the blind and a housing project.

“This will be a series of moments of encounter with specific groups of people to pray together and better understand the various forms of prayer: from thanksgiving to intercession; from contemplative prayer to the prayer of consolation; from adoration to supplication,” the archbishop said.

There is “a profound need for spirituality,” he said. And the Year of Prayer is meant to be “a way of fostering the relationship with the Lord, offering moments of genuine spiritual rest.”

“It is like an oasis sheltered from daily stress where prayer becomes nourishment for the Christian life of faith, hope and charity,” the archbishop said.




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