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



Young marcher holds sign at pre-rally location.

Young photo

'Love Them Both' – 2024 March for Life Ky.

Bella Young
Multimedia Correspondent

The clouds were gray, and the rain was pouring as hundreds gathered in Frankfort for the first Kentucky march for life. The day started with Mass celebrated by Father John Lijana, pastor, Good Shepard Church, Frankfort.

"Life is good because it comes from God ... do with it what he wills." This was the message that rang throughout Father Lijana's homily on Jan. 23.

The words hung over the congregation of about 500 as they took in the message that what they will be marching for is the sanctity of life and the dignity of mother and child. The latter of which being the theme of this year's march, "Love Them Both."

After Mass, marchers, including the Diocese of Covington's 250 attendants, met at the pre-rally spot to join in prayer. Sheets of rain were coming down as heads were bowed and prayer rang out, though it could not dampen the spirits of those that marched. After all were gathered at the pre-rally location, the official march commenced with a police escort guiding the way. If you listened closely there were many different prayers being said, some quietly as to keep their intentions close, and some loudly with the idea that oth-

ers could join in.

Signs sporting, "I demand protection at conception" and "I am the post-Roe generation" could be seen above the crowd. Pro-Life chants broke out as the group neared the capital. "Seeing all the young people ... passionate about pro-life ... it gave me hope," said religion teacher Lisa Baumann.

Faye Roch, diocesan director of the Pro-Life office, said, "We have won the battle in Washington when it comes to Roe v. Wade, it is now here in our State of Kentucky where we must continue to

(Continued on page 7)



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.

Bishop Iffert and parishioners meet to preserve Our Lady of Lourdes Parish

Laura Keener
Editor

Ten days following the removal of the pastoral leadership of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Bishop John Iffert met, Jan. 28, with over 200 parishioners to answer questions and to gather their thoughts and energies to preserve the parish. Despite tensions, which at times were quite palpable, mutual respect and the common goal of exploring solutions for the betterment of the parish carried throughout the meeting.

Based on the meeting’s discussion, the primary challenges facing the parish community are its openness to new pastoral leadership, its ability to support a parish — quite possibly at a different location. Bishop Iffert also emphasized that clergy and the lay faithful who revere the older form of the Liturgy must also accept and show respect for the Church’s current Liturgy.

“I understand that the purpose of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish is for the celebration of the liturgy according to the 1962 Missal,” said Bishop Iffert. “The right to exercise that pastoral option depends on your acceptance of the Rites of the Church currently and the authority of the Church to regulate the Liturgy and reform its Rites. That has to be accepted for a person to participate in the Liturgy of the



(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

1962 Missal.”

Bishop Iffert repeatedly assured parishioners that the current situation was not an attempt to discontinue celebration of the Traditional Latin Mass in the Diocese of Covington or to close Our Lady of Lourdes Parish.

“I am glad to have the Traditional Latin Mass ministry in the diocese,” said Bishop Iffert. “It’s my intention to do all we can to try to support and encourage that ministry ... It is my intention (also) to do everything I can to try to preserve Our Lady of Lourdes Parish and to accompany you as you work to regain what you’ve lost in this situation.”

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish lost use of the church building in Park Hills after the faculties to preach and teach publicly of its pastor and parochial vicar — both Missionaries of St. John the Baptist — were removed, Jan. 16. The Board of the Missionaries of St. John the Baptist own the church building and the Missionaries of St. John the Baptist consider it the chapel of its public association. Given the circumstances, initially the priests were not willing to permit the Diocese or Our Lady of Lourdes Parish to use the church building.

In order that the celebration of the Traditional Latin Mass could continue uninterrupted, St. Ann Mission in Covington has welcomed Our Lady of Lourdes Parish to share its church building. The Parish began celebrating Sunday Masses at St. Ann Mission, Jan. 21. After that first weekend, the Missionaries of St. John the Baptist contacted Bishop Iffert with an offer to allow the Parish to resume use of their church.

Parishioners encouraged Bishop Iffert to accept that offer. While they expressed gratitude to the pastor and people of St. Ann Mission for their welcome, the physical space of the small mission church restricts the fullness of parish life the 400-plus members of the community would like to maintain. These challenges include lack of parking, lack of physical space for parish offices and educational programs, and lack of outdoor space for socialization, especially for children. Parishioners also expressed that over the last seven years, they have devoted a lot of money

and sweat equity into the Park Hills church.

Bishop Iffert thanked parishioners for sharing their concerns and assured them that he is giving those concerns prayerful consideration. He said that he has also discussed the offer with his Presbyteral Council and will weigh their advice to determine the most stable path forward for Our Lady of Lourdes Parish.

“It’s a difficult thing for me to say I’m going to move forward with trying to establish a stable home for you and then to put you in a facility that I ultimately have no stewardship,” said Bishop Iffert. “We wouldn’t want to experience another week like last week,” referring to the anxieties and uncertainty both he and the parishioners shared in scrambling to find a suitable place for the parish to celebrate Mass.

Bishop Iffert said that he “is giving himself two weeks” before deciding on the offer.

“I know that this is a very, very stressful moment for a lot of people and my heart goes out to you. I love you and care for you,” said Bishop Iffert, “It’s my goal to be able to work alongside you to try to recover” the full parish life of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish.



Bishop John Iffert speaks with parishioners of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Jan. 28.

Upcoming Cursillo weekends offer tools to enrich the Catholic faith for a lifetime

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

A new year means a new year of Cursillo retreats, with the next scheduled as soon as this month.

Cursillo is named for a Spanish word meaning short course. A Cursillo (pronounced “kur-see-yo”), therefore, is a short course in Christianity. Originating in Spain in the 1940s, today Cursillos are given in more than 50 nations on 5 Continents. It is estimated that more than 2 million men and women of various races and languages have participated. Locally, all Cursillo weekends are held at the Jesuit Spiritual Retreat Center in Milford, Ohio.

It occurs over a three-day weekend, according to Vince Lonneman, starting Thursday night and lasting through Sunday.

“Each day,” he said, “There’s a series of talks by both lay people, priests and deacons.”

Talks vary in topic, from Christian study and prayer; action and leadership, living a life in relationship with God and the role of the layperson in the church.

The first day, Mr. Lonneman explains, is centered around the self, day two around Christ and day three around others.

“It’s meant to give you tools to become deeper rooted in your Catholic faith,” said Mr. Lonneman, “so that you can take from the Cursillo and use it on a ‘go-forward’ basis ...



a Cursillo weekend is more than just a retreat, it’s the beginning of giving you more so that you can continue to grow in your faith.”

Diane Enzweiler, parishioner, Mary, Queen of Heaven Parish, Erlanger, attended Cursillo in November 2008 on Women’s Cursillo #88.

“The Cursillo experience is ongoing. It’s about more than just a weekend,” Ms. Enzweiler said about her experience. “The weekend gave me the tools to increase my faith life and to live it out in everyday life ... As a cradle Catholic, I realized I was lukewarm in my faith. I had 12 years of Catholic education, but soon realized there was so much I didn’t know or understand. I harbored a need to learn more about the Catholic faith and a more in-depth learning of Scripture ... Cursillo helped me realize we are never alone,” she said.

“Now my favorite part of the experience, 16 years later, is being a member of the Cursillo community and experiencing my faith journey with many others throughout the Diocese of Covington,” Ms. Enzweiler added.

Today, Ms. Enzweiler is still active in the Cursillo mission, serving as secretary for the Covington Cursillo Secretariat, and will also serve as assistant coordinator for the women’s weekend this fall, in September.

Questions about Cursillo can be directed to Mr. Lonnemann at vjlonne@gmail.com or, (513) 708-4926. The next men’s weekend is Feb. 29–March 3, and the next women’s weekend is April 4–April 7.

Catholic Conference of Kentucky encourages Catholics, ‘your voice is important’

Marnie McAllister
Louisville Record Editor

Catholics are urged to contact their state senators as bills related to crime and gun violence make their way through the General Assembly.

In a Jan. 29 e-mail update about the session, the Catholic Conference of Kentucky told Catholics, “Your voice is important, and your elected representatives need to hear from you.”

Constituents can have an impact on two current issues, said the e-mail from Jason Hall, executive director of the conference, which represents the state’s bishop on matters of public policy.

The first issue is House Bill 5, which was approved by the House and now awaits action in the Senate. Known as the “Safer Kentucky Act,” the bishops are concerned about some provisions of the bill, wrote Hall.

“Perhaps the biggest problem with HB 5 is that it criminalizes homelessness,” said Hall. “A new crime, known as ‘unlawful camping,’ would be created. We are all aware of the increasing homelessness problem in our communities, but criminalizing those experiencing homelessness is not the answer.”

If House Bill 5 becomes law, “The crime would exist and be enforceable even in counties without a homeless shelter or any available shelter beds. Before we even consider using law enforcement to arrest homeless Kentuckians, we need to make sure resources are available to provide shelter,” he said.

The bill also imposes lighter penalties for criminal mischief on those who have the financial resources to pay restitution.

“There is a certain logic to this (if you damage property, but make it right, we will reward that), but the effect of putting this language in the law will be that anyone with resources can buy down their sentence while those without will be stuck with a more significant penalty,” Hall

explained. “There is enough disparity in our criminal justice system without actually writing into the law different penalties for people at different economic levels.”

The other issue Hall addressed has the conference’s support. Senate Bill 13, known as the Crisis Aversion and Rights Retention

bill, would temporarily remove firearms from someone in crisis as a means to prevent self-inflicted harm and harm to others.

In a recent interview about the bill, he said that studies have shown these measures reduced suicide rates in other states. And there’s hope that such provisions could reduce mass violence as well, he said.

“If someone attempts suicide and survives it, that is typically a wake-up call for those who love them, and they get what they need. And they tend not to die by suicide later,” Hall said.

In the e-mail, Hall asked readers, “Please ask your state senator to support and, if they do support, to co-sponsor the bill.”

To express your views on these issues, call 800-372-7181 and leave a message for your senator or visit <https://legislature.ky.gov/> to e-mail your senator.



The legacy of St. Blaise of Sebaste

Feb. 3 celebrates the feast of the saint and martyr Blaise of Sebaste, a historical Armenian bishop and physician. His patronage includes physicians, the sick, illnesses of the head and throat and wool workers.

As bishop of Sebastea, a region in modern day Turkey, people would come to St. Blaise to cure both bodily and spiritual sicknesses, as he doubled also as a talented physician. According to legend, St. Blaise was also able to heal animals, and was assisted by them in healing, as well.

In the year 316, the governor of Armenia sat out to persecute Christians under Emperor Licinius, and St. Blaise was seized. He would be tortured with steel combs, and eventually martyred via decapitation.

Four hundred years after the death of St. Blaise, the apocryphal “Acts of St. Blaise” was written. This account praised the late bishop’s piety and skill and recounted a story in which the imprisoned St. Blaise miraculously healed a young child who was choking on a fish bone when the mother placed the boy at his feet. It is this legend that primarily attributes healing of diseases of the throat and head, as well as choking, to St. Blaise.

On his feast, some parishes will enact the blessing of St. Blaise. During this blessing, two blessed candles are held in a cross-shape by the priest and held over people’s throats — praying, “Through the intercession of St. Blaise, bishop and martyr, may God deliver you from every disease of the throat and from every other illness.”



Formato Margherita, Wikimedia commons photo

St. Blaise prays over a young boy choking on a fish bone for healing in this historical engraving. On the left, a caduceus, a staff wrapped by two snakes and a symbol for the medical profession, can be seen.

Official Assignments

Effective January 16, 2024

Rev. Sean P. Kopczynski
To: Residence, Missionaries of St. John the Baptist, Park Hills
From: Parochial Vicar, Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Park Hills

Effective March 5, 2024

Rev. John K. Opoku
To: Parochial Vicar, All Saints Parish, Walton
From: Archdiocese of Kumasi, Ghana, Africa

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

Jamie N. Schroeder

Jamie N. Schroeder
Chancellor

Official Appointments

Effective January 1, 2024

Michael Enzweiler
To: Catholic Charities Advisory Board
Term: Three years

Amy Hatfield
To: Catholic Charities Advisory Board
Term: Three years

Rafael Torres
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



Bishop's Schedule

- | | |
|--|--|
| Feb. 1
All-school Mass/student play, St. Edward School, Cynthiana, 9:30 a.m.

Sacrament of Confirmation, St. Mary of the Assumption Parish, Alexandria, 7 p.m. | Feb. 7
Sacrament of Confirmation, St. Augustine Parish, Augusta, 7 p.m. |
| Feb. 3
Mass for World Day of Consecrated Life, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 10 a.m. | Feb. 8
Sacrament of Confirmation, St. William Parish, Williamstown, 7 p.m. |
| Feb. 5
Advisory Council meeting, 9:30 a.m. | Feb. 10
Diocese of Covington Pastoral Council meeting, 10 a.m. |
| Feb. 6–9
Good Leaders, Good Shepherds retreat, Jesuit Spiritual Center, Milford | Mass/Renewal of vows for four Benedictine Jubilarians, St. Walburg Monastery, 5 p.m. |
| Feb. 6
Sacrament of Confirmation, St. Timothy Parish, Union, 7 p.m. | Feb. 11
Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 10 a.m. |

We need Catholic schools more than ever

In the early 1980s my parents faced a quandary: I was the oldest child, and it was time to enroll me in kindergarten. My dad, a history teacher, was recently laid off from the local public school. While both parents were baptized Catholic and my mother attended Catholic school through 12th grade, they had married civilly and long ago abandoned any practice of faith. With public school out of the question, they had one option: the nearby Catholic school.

In Providence’s design, Catholic education opened doors for my parents to return to the Catholic faith. That journey didn’t happen quickly or easily.

Little by little, God planted seeds and disposed their hearts to grace. By enrolling their child in a Catholic school, they were suddenly confronted with the need to consider their own relationship with God and His Church. This changed not only my parents, but our whole family.

One incident was particularly decisive. My younger sister, in second grade at the time, came home and asked Mom if we could pray the rosary, since she had been

learning it in school. Mom didn’t have a good reason to say no. So, we prayed. I’m not sure what we prayed that first evening. My parents didn’t remember how to pray the rosary, so it was led by my little sister. It was probably punctuated by a good bit of yawning, interruptions and bickering between siblings. But the family rosary became a habit. With time, family prayer led us to God and to friendship with Our Blessed Mother and bound us together in a new way.

In his abundant goodness, God called me to follow Him more closely as a consecrated religious, and to a congregation serving Catholic education. I have been blessed to be in Catholic schools all over the country and internationally, and I am convinced that we need Catholic schools more than ever.

I don’t need to tell you that data on religious practice in this country is not promising. Each generation shows higher rates of either disaffiliation or no religious belief at all. Attendance in Catholic schools has declined for nearly 60 years. Other indicators of religious practice, such as marriages, baptisms and Mass attendance, have likewise trended downward for the same period. In a time such as this, the Church needs to support its schools more, not less.

When religious practice is declining and God is more and more eclipsed from many of our contemporaries’ vision, we need schools in which the Catholic faith is taught and lived with dynamism, joy and hope. When confusion about what it means to be human is widespread, we need education founded on the Christian

vision of the human person, made in God’s image and likeness and endowed with inalienable dignity. When society is rent by divisions and brokenness, we need students who know that Truth is real. He is a Person, Jesus Christ, who alone can heal our wounds and teach us to love as He has loved us.

There are many American parents today who might hesitate to enter a church, but choose to enroll their children in a Catholic school. Even if they can’t articulate it, they recognize that it offers something that public education can’t. And their children, immersed in a rich environment of faith and intellectual development, will start to learn the Gospel, and, please God, see it lived out around them.

These children, evangelized seven hours a day, five days a week, cannot help but start to evangelize their parents and those around them in small ways. Perhaps, one day they will come home and ask mom if the family can pray the rosary. I pray that God will open their hearts as He opened my parents’ hearts. I know that I am forever changed from the ways Catholic education shaped my life.

Sister Mary Agnes Greiffendorf, O.P., Ph.D., is a Dominican Sister of St. Cecilia Congregation of Nashville, TN She has taught at all levels of Catholic education and served in numerous administrative positions, including as the President of Aquinas College in Nashville. She is currently the principal of St. Gertrude School in Madeira.

Loss as gift

Life is a freely given, an undeserved gift from God. When it is taken from us, it is easy to be angry, but remembering that it was never ours to begin with has helped me.

My son Anthony was taken to our Heavenly Father on Tuesday, Dec. 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the unborn, when my wife was 14 weeks pregnant. As we sat in the hospital chapel, we held the ultrasound picture in our hands.

With this gesture of holding our hands open as we held his picture, our anger dissipated as we came to realize that Anthony is a gift to us. The only response to a gift is to accept the gift in whatever way it is given and offer the gift back to the

Father. Anthony was never ours to begin with, but the Father’s.

A song that we have always loved, “Receive me (I’m Yours),” by Brother Isaiah, struck us particularly following this loss. The first lines of the song say, “You loosen my grip on life, you lighten my heart with your Love ... to you, oh Lord, I abandon everything.”

We know, in the face of this loss, the only thing we have to do is to offer. The child is a gift. And the only response to a gift is to say thank you, to offer the gift of the child back to the Father. For indeed, Anthony is not ours, but His.

A gift is never given just for an individual, but for all. Anthony’s life was not just for us but for the whole world. Anthony’s short life greatly impacted our community.

After the funeral and burial, we learned from others how their life had been touched; some who were never able to have a Mass for their child who died in utero found closure in ours; some of our friends who are not Catholic experienced the beauty of Mass for the first time and are now very curious about the Catholic faith; and some were able to re-connect with their faith and heal broken wounds that had existed for years through wit-

nessing Anthony’s funeral. A gift is never meant to be kept to oneself but is given to be shared with others. Anthony has shown this to us so clearly.

In my work, as the director of Stewardship and Mission Services for the Diocese of Covington, I am used to speaking about stewardship, “taking care of what belongs to another,” in terms of physical goods, and money, but now I understand in a new way what living a true life of stewardship is about.

As Catholics, we believe everything we are and have, are freely given gifts from God. This includes our family, and even ourselves. Even in the life of small Anthony, we were given care of him for a short while, but he was never ours. We offer him back to the Father, and Anthony reminds us to offer ourselves, our children and everything we have to God — and ask him for the grace to do his will.

Jim Hess is director of Stewardship and Mission Services for the Diocese of Covington, Ky

Reporting Misconduct in the Diocese of Covington

Anyone who has experienced sexual misconduct by a cleric, employee or volunteer of the Diocese of Covington is asked to contact Ms. Julie Feinauer, diocesan victims assistance coordinator (859) 392-1515. Professional assistance and pastoral support will be provided in confidentiality and with respect.

A copy of the “Diocesan Policies and Procedures for Addressing Sexual Misconduct” is available by contacting the Chancery, (859) 392-1510 or visiting www.covdio.org and going to “Sexual Misconduct Policy.”

Informando sobre conducta inapropiada en la Diocesis de Covington

Cualquier persona que haya experimentado conducta sexual inapropiada por parte de un clérigo, empleado o voluntario de la Diócesis de Covington está invitada a ponerse en contacto con Ms. Julie Feinauer, coordindora diocesana para dar asistencia a las víctimas. Teléfono (859) 392-1515. Asistencia profesional y apoyo moral serán ofrecidos de una manera confidencial y con respeto.

Una copia de “Normas y Procedimientos sobre Conducta Sexual Inapropiada” está disponible poniéndose en contacto con la Cancillería, Teléfono (859) 392-1510, o visitando www.covdio.org y marcando “Sexual Misconduct Policy.”

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No. 1

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In a loud world, pray without ceasing

The readings for the fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle B — are: Job 7:1-4, 6-7, Psalms 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23 and Mark 1:29-39.

Death has been in the forefront of my priestly ministry during this last week. I had two funerals back-to-back, my parents lost a very dear friend suddenly and two children in my neighborhood lost their lives through violence. And, of course, there is rarely a news story that doesn't reveal more death because of hatred and war: I often wonder how people without faith approach these evils of life... how do they go on?

GO AND GLORIFY



Very Rev. Daniel Schomaker

Throughout the Sacred Scriptures, Jesus tells his disciples (us): “Do not be afraid.” This is usually followed by: “Just have faith.” Faith is a voluntary assent to the divine truth as revealed in

Revelation. The Church reminds us regularly that the core truth of the faith is that the very nature of God is love, and, that as love itself, God is always and constantly willing our good.

That's a wonderful theological reality on which to reflect! But, how does it change and move the heart towards the Good? Ultimately, in my opinion, it doesn't. The study of the faith is a good thing... we should be doing so regularly... fides quaerens intellectum... faith seeking understanding. But more than that, we should be following the example of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel for this Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time. “Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed.”

In the course of the difficulties and the stresses of his life, Jesus had to enter into prayer... he had to enter into an intimate communion with God the Father: It was this time of prayer that would sustain him to continue and complete his ministry on earth. In the chaos which can be our lives, in the stresses and the anxieties and the evils, the answer is prayer! The first thing we should do is pray, then we should pray some more, and finally, when there is nothing else to do, we should pray. St. Paul reminds the Thessalonians to “pray without ceasing.”

The world is loud. Each and every day we need to take time to enter into the silence of prayer... we need to talk to God... and be sustained to tackle whatever life might throw at us... even the reality of the evil of death.*Father Daniel Schomaker is pastor, St. Augustine Parish, Covington and director, Office of Worship and Liturgy for the Diocese of Covington, Ky*

In gratitude

Every Christmas seems to bring out the best in folks. This past holiday was no exception, as DCCH Center for Children and Families benefited mightily.

VIEWPOINT



Ronald M. Bertsch

School principal Bob Noll made sure Santa and Mrs. Claus were present to deliver the toys. This year we were surprised with an enormous collection of beautiful poinsettias donated by a classroom of children from St. Thomas Elementary School organized by Lexi Sheets and Sara and Elmer Grosser. The flowers adorned the Nativity scene, the backdrop around the Christmas tree, and the dining table center pieces for everyone to take one home afterward. Special homemade cinnamon sweet rolls donated by Becky Hill were sent with every family for their own delicious breakfast treat to be served another day. Car passes to Coney Island's Night of Lights — before anyone knew this was the last year for such an opportunity — were gifted to foster families by Laura Mosqueda, DCCH grants writer, and her kind friends who wanted to give the children and parents an evening out to create new memories. Another group donated Newport Aquarium passes for the children in foster care to help

Starting with the annual Christmas party for the children and their foster families, we were blessed by donations which paid for our catered fried chicken dinner with all the sides, drinks and desserts. Behind the Badge, a non-profit organization of police officers starting inside the Covington Police Dept., founded by Ryan Eldridge, organized his fellow volunteers to purchase and wrap gifts.

parents afford the admission for larger size families. Not to forget the older youth in foster care, the Fury and Wise families offered funds to purchase larger gifts for the young men and women in the Independent Living Program at DCCH. Travel expenses for one young lady to fly and visit her older sister living in Texas, with whom she has never traveled to see since their mother died and she entered foster care. Other IL youth received gifts of furnishings that made their living space more comfortable and pleasing. Another received desired baby items for her young son after choosing life and committing to be the best mom possible.

Denise Govan, president of DCCH, said the generosity at Christmas is overwhelmingly remarkable. This was Govan's first Christmas at DCCH since taking on her leadership role and she said, “it was quite impressive to see this level of support from our community, I am just in awe and gratitude.”

Longtime staff Pam Vonderhaar, Joan Norris and Notre Dame Sister Pamela Geiger worked together since November to coordinate and distribute the donations for St. Nicholas and Christmas for all the full-time residential youth.

No less than 54 local restaurants, businesses and families offered extra donations of money, meals and gifts to make December one the children and staff never forget. The longest tradition to bless the children comes from the Drees Company who for more than 34 years straight, host a party for the children and staff.

With such blessings to last well into 2024, how much more can we pray — except that more people consider fostering, adopting and mentoring to give the children everlasting favors. Contact DCCH at (859) 331-2040 or www.dccchcenter.org for more information.

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

Why it's worth thinking about friendship this Catholic Schools Week

It is fitting that as Catholic Schools Week begins and we mark the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas, the patron saint of Catholic education, that we consider the importance and significance of friendship.

GUEST



Peter K. Kilpatrick

friend, and, unfortunately, how often we tend to ignore him and not offer him the love and friendship that he so deeply craves. In doing so, Msgr. Benson reminds us of how we are called to be friends for one another and how exactly we can do that.

Why is this such an important topic on the feast day of St. Thomas Aquinas?

St. Thomas himself wrote a great deal about friendship. In 1267, St. Thomas wrote a short piece called “De regno ad regem Cypri” or “On Kingship to the King of Cyprus.” In that piece he wrote:

“First of all, among all worldly things there is nothing

I recently read a beautiful book titled “The Friendship of Christ,” by Msgr. Robert Hugh Benson. Msgr. Benson is one of the favorite authors of both our current Holy Father Pope Francis, and of our recent Pope Benedict XVI.

In his book on friendship, Msgr. Benson reminds us, first of all, of how desperately Jesus wants to be our closest

which seems worthy to be preferred to friendship. Friendship unites all good men and women and preserves and promotes virtue. Friendship is needed by all people in whatsoever occupations they engage. In prosperity it does not thrust itself unwanted upon us, nor does it desert us in adversity. It is what brings with it the greatest delight, to such an extent that all that pleases is changed to weariness when friends are absent, and all difficult things are made easy and as nothing by love.”

A really good friend believes in us and comforts us. Friends come out of themselves to give to us without counting the cost. We were created for self-giving love, as St. John Paul II reminded us, and that is what friends do. So not only is receiving the warm, heartfelt friendship of another good for us, but it is especially good for us to be the giver of that friendship.

My wife, Nancy, reminded me that the primary role of a husband and a wife is to help each other save their souls and be received for eternity into heaven. Isn't this also the role of a friend? So, call your friends today and this semester. Let them know how grateful you are for their friendship. Help them in their pursuit of sanctification.

I also encourage you to identify those persons around you in need of your friendship. We live in a perilous time of loneliness and social isolation, and there are many who want and need your friendship.

Let us live well the admonition of St. Thomas to “unite us in friendship so as to preserve and promote virtue.”

Peter K. Kilpatrick is president of The Catholic University of America.

Wrath destroys relationships, pins blame on others, pope says

Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service

Wrath is a “dark vice” that destroys relationships, focuses all blame on others and only worsens over time, Pope Francis said.

“It is capable of depriving us of sleep, of barring the way to reason and thought” because wrath completely clouds thinking clearly and builds up incessantly without mercy, the pope said Jan. 31 at his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall.

Continuing a series of audience talks about vices and virtues, the pope reflected on the vice of wrath.

“If it is born of an injustice suffered or believed to be suffered, often it is unleashed not against the offender, but against the first unfortunate victim,” he said, giving as an example people who can “withhold their rage in the workplace,” but then unleash it at home on their spouse and children.

Wrath “destroys human relationships. It expresses the incapacity to accept the diversity of others, especially when their life choices diverge from our own,” he said.

When someone is dominated by wrath, the pope said, “they always, always say the problem is the other person; they are unable to recognize their own defects, their own shortcomings.”

St. Paul recommends Christians face up to the problem right away and attempt reconciliation before the end of the day, the pope said, quoting the apostle’s Letter to the Ephesians (4:26) “Do not let the sun set on your anger.”

“The night cannot be handed over to the devil,” the pope said, repeating that it is important that any misunderstandings be handled before the day is over since this vice can keep people “awake at night, brooding over our reasons and the unaccountable mistakes that are never ours and always the other’s.”

“In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus makes us pray for our human relations, which are a minefield: a plane that is never in perfect equilibrium,” he said.

“We are all sinners, all of us,” with outstanding debts or “trespasses” committed and experienced throughout life, he said.

“Therefore, we all need to learn how to forgive” as far as

humanly possible, he said. “Wrath is countered by benevolence, openness of heart, meekness and patience.”

However, the pope said, “not everything that stems from wrath is mistaken.”

“We are not responsible for the onset of wrath, but always for its development,” he said.

Sometimes “it is good for anger to be vented in the right way,” he said. “Holy indignation exists,” especially at an injustice, but this is not wrath.

Jesus felt it several times in his life, but “he never responded to evil with evil,” the pope said.

When he entered the temple and drove out the merchants and overturned the tables of the money changers, Jesus “performed a strong and prophetic action, dictated not by wrath, but by zeal for the house of the Lord,” he said.

“We need to distinguish the good,” which is holy indignation, he said, from the bad, which is wrath, and to pray to correctly govern one’s passions, “to educate them so that they turn to the good and not the bad.”

The pope also recalled Jan. 31 was the feast of St. John Bosco.

In his greetings to visitors in other languages, the pope highlighted the work of the 19th-century Italian saint, saying he helped many young people in their difficulties and,



CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Pope Francis greets a child after his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Jan. 31, 2024.

with his apostolic zeal, brought them to Christ. “Let us also be witnesses to young people that Christ wants to enter our lives to fill them with the joy that only he can give.”

He invited people to imitate the saint, “educating young people in the faith and training them in the different sciences and professions, for a better future in which humanity can enjoy peace, brotherhood and tranquility.”

New gender law takes effect in April after Ohio lawmakers override DeWine’s veto

Kate Scanlon
OSV News

Ohio lawmakers voted Jan. 24 to override Republican Gov. Mike DeWine’s recent veto of legislation that bans certain types of medical or surgical gender reassignment procedures for minors who identify as transgender and also prohibits athletes from competing on sports teams corresponding with their self-perceived gender identity opposite their biological sex.

The Ohio Senate voted Jan. 24 to override DeWine’s veto of House Bill 68. The state’s House did so Jan. 10. The bill will become law, scheduled to go into effect in April, but it has a grandfather clause for minors already undergoing transgender treatments.

The Catholic Conference of Ohio said Jan. 24 it provided testimony in support of HB 68 in both the House and Senate, “emphasizing that experience of gender incongruence among young people are serious and individuals must be met with compassion, charity and personal accompaniment without resorting to medical interventions that harm a developing body.”

“We are grateful to the Ohio House and Senate for prudently addressing these concerns through HB 68 and ensuring it becomes Ohio law,” the conference said.

In a Jan. 10 statement after the state House overrode his veto, DeWine stood by his decision.

“I continue to believe it is in the best interests of children for these medical decisions to be made by the child’s parents and not by the government,” he said.

Supporters of prohibiting surgical or hormonal treatments for minors who identify as transgender say such legislation would prevent minors from making irreversible

decisions as children they may later come to regret as adults. Critics of such measures argue that preventing those interventions could cause other risks to minors, such as mental health issues or an increased chance of self-harm.

Similarly, supporters of prohibitions on athletes who identify as transgender competing on teams opposite their biological sex argue it would adversely affect women’s sports by allowing biological male competitors who may have an advantage over them in factors including weight and size. However, opponents of those measures argue such prohibitions are discriminatory to athletes who identify with a gender that is not their biological sex.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, that the override vote was “a shameful legislative act.”

“We will do everything we can to fight this,” the post said.

A 2022 study by the UCLA Williams Institute found there are approximately 1.6 million people in the U.S. who identify as transgender, with nearly half of that population between the ages of 13 and 24.

The Ohio legislation’s athletic component concerns a relatively small number of students. In April, Ohio’s NBC 4 reported that the Ohio High School Athletic Association found 19 biologically male youths, who identify as transgender, have participated in girls’ sports in the past eight years, among them six high school students taking part during the 2022-23 school year. The association said about 400,000 athletes in grades 7-12 participate in its sanctioned sports each school year.

In guidance on health care policy and practices released

in March 2023, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Doctrine opposed interventions that “involve the use of surgical or chemical techniques that aim to exchange the sex characteristics of a patient’s body for those of the opposite sex or for simulations thereof.”

“Any technological intervention that does not accord with the fundamental order of the human person as a unity of body and soul, including the sexual difference inscribed in the body, ultimately does not help but, rather, harms the human person,” the document states.

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2024 March for Life Ky.

(Continued from page 1)

fight to change hearts and minds for the sanctity of life for the most vulnerable — the unborn.”

Currently Kentucky is a pro-life state. In 2022 when the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, a “trigger” law went into effect. That law, passed in 2019 as House Bill 148, states: “No person may knowingly: Administer to, prescribe for, procure for, or sell to any pregnant woman any medicine, drug, or other substance with the specific intent of causing or abetting the termination of the life of an unborn human being; or ... Use or employ any instrument or procedure upon a pregnant woman with the specific intention of causing or abetting the termination of the life of an unborn human being.” The law does allow termination of a pregnancy to protect the life of the mother.

Months after Roe v. Wade was overturned, Kentucky voters shot down a proposed constitutional amendment that would have made clear that nothing in Kentucky’s Constitution can be interpreted to include a right to abortion or funding for abortion.

The pro-life movement in Kentucky now shifts its advocacy for greater protections and supports for mothers and their children. On Jan. 5, Senate Bill 148 moved out of committee and into appropriations and revenue. This bill focuses on not just children but also mothers, giving her the support she needs. It would require Medicaid coverage for lactation support services and breastfeeding supplies; establish a tuition and student fee waiver for eligible pregnant women and parents; and provide a rental assistance program for pregnant women and households that include children under the five years of age.

This bill embodies the theme of the march, “Love Them Both.”



(left) Student stands in front of the capital holding pro-life signs. (right) Holy Cross Student, Kyah Ryan, holds sign during the march. (top) Diocese of Covington seminarian, Will Fuller, gives news interview.





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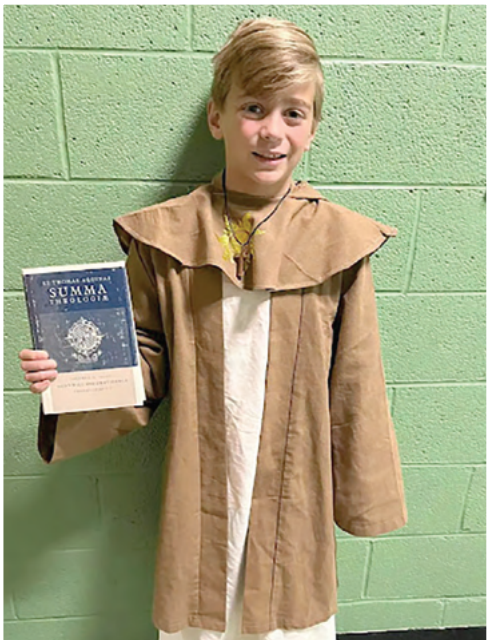
Catholic Schools in Action



(above left) Father Boelscher, pastor, St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs, talks to first graders at St. Joseph School about their school theme, “Leading to Serve With Holy Moments.” (above right) Eighth graders at St. Joseph School, Crescent Springs, had the opportunity to challenge themselves on the rope course during their eighth-grade trip to Camp Joy.



(above left) Advent brings additional opportunities for prayer as students at St. Anthony School, Taylor Mill, prepare their hearts for Jesus’s birthday. They gathered on the last day before Christmas break to share the story of Christmas and truly remember the greatest gift God gave to his people at Christmas — his son, Jesus. (above right) During the month of October, all St. Anthony students gathered to pray a Living Rosary. Seventh and Eighth grade students made paper flowers for each bead of the rosary. All students formed a large rosary in Church and held up a flower to represent their prayer bead during the rosary. Pictured are kindergarteners visiting a statue of Mary after the Living Rosary.



(above left) Fifth graders at St. Catherine of Siena School, Ft. Thomas, researched their patron saint and created a speech. At the school’s all-school Mass, students came dressed as their saint and Father Bankemper guessed who each student was dressed as. He did extremely well — guessing correctly for each one. (above right) St. Thomas Aquinas pictured here with his famous publication *Summa Theologica*.

For more information about the Department of Catholic Schools, call (859) 392-1500 or e-mail asmorey@covdio.org.

PEOPLE AND EVENTS

The weekly TV Mass from the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption is broadcast locally on The CW, Sundays, 10 —11 a.m. Viewers can tune-in on the following channels: antenna 12.2; Spectrum 117 or 25; Cincinnati Bell 17 or 517; and DirectTV 25.

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

Join us for THRIVE Peer Ministry Leadership Training – for high school and college leaders – Feb. 8, 6-8 p.m., at the Curia. Attend as an individual peer leader or with your parish, school, music, or retreat team. Newcomer’s welcome. RSVP at covdio.org/youth/

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.

St. Agnes Parish, Ft. Wright, fish fry beginning Feb. 16 every Friday until March 15, 5–8 p.m.

St. Benedict Parish, Covington, Holy Name Society’s fish fry, every Friday during Lent except

Good Friday, 4:45–7 p.m. Carry-out available. Bingo follows on Feb. 16, March 1 and 15.

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.

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.

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

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

For Reflection
Sunday Gospels

Feb. 4 — Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Mk 1:29-39)
Everywhere Jesus went, he healed the sick, bringing hope to people. Even when he went off to pray, people looked for him. Jesus immediately responded, going to the next village to teach, care for and help people.
— Jesus took time to pray. What do you think Jesus prayed about? What do you pray about?

Feb. 11 — Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Mk 1:40-45)
Jesus shows his compassion in this Gospel when he cures a man of leprosy, a disease that was considered so bad in those times that no one would even touch a person who had it.
— How do you think the people felt when they saw Jesus reach out to touch the leper?

Feb. 18 — First Sunday of Lent (Mk 1:12-15)
In today’s Gospel Jesus comes to Galilee after spending 40 days in the desert. His time there prepared him to spread the Good News. His first message was: “The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”
— What do you think God wants you to do with the 40 days of Lent?

Feb. 25 — Second Sunday of Lent (Mk 9:2-10)
Today’s reading from Mark tells the story of Peter, James and John on a mountain with Jesus when he was transfigured (changed) in a magnificent way. His clothes became dazzling white, the prophets Moses and Elijah appeared, and a voice from the cloud said: “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.”
— The Apostles heard God say: “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” Where do we hear God speaking today?

Feb. 14 is Ash Wednesday
Find all of the kids who have received ashes! Point to the pictures of the kids who have ashes on their faces.

St. Nicola Saggio
Feast day: Feb. 2

One of the newest saints of the church, St. Nicola was canonized on Nov. 23, 2014. Born Giovanni Battista Clemente Saggio on Jan. 6, 1650, he was the first of five children born to an Italian farmer and his wife. He went to school under the Order of the Minims and, at age 20, against his family’s wishes, he became an Oblate, taking the name Nicola. Well known for his work as a catechist, he died on Feb. 2, 1709.

OSV News illustration/Frank Fraser, courtesy OSV Kids



The Eucharist makes us pro-life

Bishop Michael F. Burbidge
USCCB

Our responsibility to care for every human life is not a uniquely Christian vocation but also a human one. As Catholics, we have a particular awareness of this duty. When, at the Last Supper, Christ commanded, “Do this in remembrance of me,” he left a memorial of his saving Death and Resurrection. That command reminds us daily of his sacrificial love for every life. In the Sacrifice of the Mass, the priest renews that sacrifice at the altar, and the baptized are invited to offer themselves to God “by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 48). In the Eucharist, we are incorporated into Christ’s unique sacrifice for all of us... and for each of us. We cannot look at another person as dispensable and disposable, or simply as a part of the larger society. “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40).

That union with Christ in his saving Death and Resurrection is deepened and nourished by sacramental Communion, where we receive Our Lord truly, substantially and personally present under the appearance of bread and wine. The consecrated bread and wine are not ordinary food. They are the Body, Blood, soul and divinity of Christ Jesus, who revealed to St. Augustine, “I am the food of strong men; grow, and you shall feed upon me; nor shall you convert me, like the food of your flesh, into you, but you shall be converted into me” (*Confessions*, VII.10). Unlike any other kind of food, when we partake of Communion, we do not transform him into us; rather, we are transformed into him.

In its document, *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops recently recalled, “The personal and moral transformation that is sustained by the Eucharist reaches out to every sphere of human life.” In this, my brother bishops and I echo the reminder of Pope Francis that we participate in Mass not simply to fulfill a precept but, more importantly, “because only with Jesus’ grace, with his living presence within us and among us, can we put his commandment into practice, and thus be his credible witnesses” (Audience, Dec. 13, 2017). In other words, our specifically Catholic witness to the gift of human life flows from the Eucharist.

All of this is to say that the power and effectiveness of events such as the upcoming March for Life, as well as our



hope for their success in bringing widespread protection to the child in the womb, emanate from Christ and the transformation he brings in the Eucharist.

Joining us to himself, Our Lord Jesus Christ transforms us so that, day by day, we might recognize more clearly that all human life is a gift and respond more fully with profound self-offering. So transformed, we are sent forth to work always with God’s grace to ensure that each person has this same opportunity to experience as fully as possible the gift of our existence and to respond with great love to our Creator.

Bishop Michael F. Burbidge is the Bishop of the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia.

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Vocations to religious life in US decline, but key factors can positively impact numbers

Gina Christian
OSV News

A new report shows a continued decrease in the number of permanent vocations to consecrated life in the U.S. — but key factors such as family life, devotional practices, Catholic education and personal encouragement can positively impact those numbers.

“Women and Men Professing Perpetual Vows in Religious Life: The Profession Class of 2023” was released Jan. 26 by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University, ahead of the church’s World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life on Feb. 2.

The study — annually commissioned since 2010 by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations — was written by CARA researchers Jonathon Wiggins and Sister Thu T. Do, a member of the Lovers of the Holy Cross of Hanoi.

The 101 religious members (53 sisters, 48 brothers and priests) who participated in the survey represented 70 percent of the 144 potential members of the profession class of 2023, as reported to CARA by 69 percent of the nation’s religious superiors.

Of the participating religious superiors, 87 percent reported their orders had no member profess perpetual vows in 2023, up from 82 percent in the 2022 report. In 2023, one in 10 institutes had one perpetual profession, while 4 percent reported between two to 15 members professed perpetual vows.

“We are finding that there’s a continuous decline in the number of men and women making a final profession to religious life each year,” Jesuit Father Thomas Gaunt, CARA’s executive director, told OSV News.

He also noted the length of time from entrance into religious life to perpetual profession can vary from “seven to 20 years,” with the Jesuits, or Society of Jesus, having a particularly long span.

The average age of the 2023 profession class is 36, with half of the survey participants age 33 or younger.

More than three quarters (76 percent) were born in the U.S., and 67 percent listed their primary race or ethnicity as Caucasian, European American or white. One in 10 or less identifies as Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian (12 percent); as Hispanic or Latino (9 percent); as African, African American or Black (7 percent); and as mixed race or other (5 percent).

An overwhelming majority, 94 percent, said that as children they had at least one parent who was Catholic, with 86 percent of the respondents stating both parents were Catholic. Almost all survey participants (99 percent) were raised by their biological parents during the most formative part of their childhood. Close to nine in 10, or 88 percent, were raised by a married couple.

Just over half of the class, 51 percent, attended a Catholic elementary school, and respondents were more likely than other Catholics in the U.S. to have attended both a Catholic high school (46 percent) and college (43 percent). About 14 percent reported being homeschooled at some point, with the average length of time being nine

Members of the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia Congregation in Nashville, Tenn., are pictured in a file photo preparing for Mass at the Cathedral of the Incarnation, where they made their final profession of religious vows.



years.

“Generally, the more Catholic education, (the more) you increase the likelihood that someone will consider a religious vocation,” said Father Gaunt. “And it gets stronger often enough, if (that education extends) to Catholic high schools or colleges. Part of that is you’re just more exposed to a Catholic environment, and the consideration of a religious vocation will not be as countercultural, in one sense, as if you had not attended those Catholic schools. It makes (religious life) a little more thinkable.”

The report described the 2023 profession class as “highly educated,” with 62 percent entering their respective religious institutes after earning at least a bachelor’s degree, and 20 percent after obtaining a graduate degree.

At the same time, educational debt did not delay most survey participants from entering religious life; the 9 percent who reported educational debt experienced less than a year of delay as they cleared just under \$37,000 in student loans, assisted by friends and family members.

While respondents said they were on average 18 years old when they first considered a vocation, some 82 percent had prior work experience before entering religious life — more than half (55 percent) had worked full time — with business, education and health care the top fields.

Respondents reported that Eucharistic adoration (82 percent), the rosary (72 percent) and retreats (72 percent) were among their most common formative prayer experiences, with four out of five respondents regularly practicing adoration prior to entering religious life.

Father Gaunt also highlighted the need to pay “attention to the cultural differences in devotions and practices” — such as processions, home altars, family prayers and other forms of popular piety — which are informing the

one quarter of foreign-born religious aspirants to religious life in the U.S.

The study found that participation in religious programs and activities also correlated highly with vocations, as more than 93 percent of the respondents cited experience in ministries such as lector (55 percent), altar servers (54 percent), and youth ministry or youth group (45 percent).

“That’s a key element, and a piece of the invitation,” said Father Gaunt. “It’s just placing younger people in a ministerial role.”

Personal interactions also helped to foster consecrated life, with 82 percent of the respondents noting that they had been encouraged to consider a vocation by a priest (45 percent), religious sister or brother (44 percent), friend (41 percent), teacher or catechist (27 percent) or parent (mother, 26 percent; father, 23 percent).

At the same time, more than 55 percent reported that one or more persons had discouraged them from pursuing a religious vocation, with women more likely than men to report this experience.

Just under one third of the respondents (31 percent) said they first became acquainted with their respective religious orders through a sponsored institute, such as a school or hospital. Another 26 percent said they learned of their institute through print or online promotional material.

Almost all (94 percent) of the respondents said they had taken part in some form of vocational discernment program, particularly “come and see” experiences.

In many respects, creating a culture of religious vocations involves consistently doing “simple things ... that are very important for us to keep in mind,” said Father Gaunt.

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Priest’s Success in Haiti Proves Faith-Filled Action Can Bless Thousands of Lives

When Father Glenn Meaux established the Kobonal Haiti Mission in 1989, families living in that region were trapped in material and spiritual poverty. Seeing their extreme needs, he felt called by God to make a difference in their deeply impoverished villages and developed a plan to provide help. His first outreaches were small, but they quickly expanded as others joined his cause and offered their support.

The impact of his faithfulness to God’s calling has been inspiring to see. Through his obedience to the Lord and unwavering commitment to follow the Holy Spirit, thousands have been blessed beyond anyone’s expectations.

“An incredible transformation has taken place in Kobonal, Haiti, and it all began with a bold decision to respond to God’s calling and to serve as the Lord’s instrument of mercy,” confirmed Michele Sagarino, president of Cross Catholic Outreach, one of the largest and most effective Catholic relief and

development ministries working in the region. “That’s really how every effective ministry begins. Someone encounters a situation that breaks their heart or challenges them spiritually, and then God tells them, ‘I want you to be a part of the solution!’ At times like those, we need to step out in faith and let God work through us. Those are acts of

“At times like those, we need to step out in faith and let God work through us.”

Michele Sagarino,
Cross Catholic Outreach

obedience and merciful service that both glorify God and bless lives.”

Sagarino knows Fr. Meaux well because the ministry she leads has been championing his efforts for more than two decades. During that time many



Fr. Meaux celebrates Mass with students at the Kobonal Haiti Mission.



The new homes being built for needy Haitian families are seen as an answer to prayer.

U.S. Catholics have also become aware of the Kobonal Haiti Mission and have joined the cause too.

“While I celebrate the many wonderful things that have been accomplished at the Haiti Kobonal Mission, I’m currently focused on helping the children and families there that still have extreme needs,” Sagarino said. “For example, I know there are children in the region who are still illiterate and desperately want to go to school. I want to be sure they get that opportunity. Then there are the families who will be going to sleep tonight in a ramshackle, unsanitary dwelling. I want them to have a safe place to live. Fr. Meaux has created a powerful ministry to support Haiti’s poorest families, but the individuals he is trying to reach can’t be supplied with what they need unless we step forward to fund those works of mercy. That’s how we can make a difference and bless lives.”

According to Sagarino, Cross Catholic Outreach’s current and specific goal is to help Fr. Meaux’s team provide

another group of needy families with new homes. (See related story on the opposite page.)

“His house building ministry has become very popular with U.S. Catholics because it provides struggling families with simple but sturdy homes — a foundation for building a better life. People want their charitable donations to produce major benefits and have an impact that will last. My hope is that as people learn more about what Fr. Meaux is accomplishing in Kobonal, Haiti, they will experience the same calling he has to help the poor and will also want to be a part of the solution.”

Readers interested in supporting Cross Catholic Outreach’s work for the poor can contribute through the ministry brochure inserted in this issue or send tax-deductible gifts to: Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC03031, PO Box 97168, Washington, DC 20090-7168. The ministry has a special need for partners willing to make gifts on a monthly basis. Use the inserted brochure to become a Mission Partner.

Catalog of Merciful Gifts Provides Catholics With Unique Lenten Almsgiving Options

The long-held tradition of almsgiving during Lent has always been a blessing to Catholic households, but there have been times when families longed for ways to extend their compassion to international communities where the ravages of poverty are often more extreme. We know those needs exist. The challenge is in finding a way to address targeted needs in specific places.

This year, the respected relief and development ministry, Cross Catholic Outreach, has offered a solution — its

Easter Catalog of international mercy projects in need of funding. Through the catalog, individuals, families and parishes can build homes for the homeless, provide meals to combat malnutrition, sponsor educational scholarships for poor children, address urgent medical needs and undertake many other acts of compassion, all under the supervision of respected Catholic leaders in the countries being served.

The opportunities listed in the catalog truly span the globe, including missions of mercy in the Caribbean, Central and

South America, Africa, and beyond.

“And because the projects listed in the catalog are very specific, those who donate will know exactly how their alms are being utilized,” explained Michele Sagarino, president of Cross Catholic Outreach. “That creates some wonderful opportunities for parents with young children being taught the importance of almsgiving. Imagine the excitement of your son or daughter knowing their contribution at Lent built a home for a struggling family or ensured an illiterate child would finally

be able to attend school. These are not just symbolic charitable efforts. The projects being accomplished are life-transforming.”

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

“Lenten almsgiving is always a blessing, but its impact is even more significant when it blesses those with the greatest needs,” Sagarino said.

US Catholics Having Major Impact on Poverty by Building Simple, Sturdy Homes for Needy Families

Sadly, Rosetithe Augustin’s two sons are growing up in conditions no child should ever experience. Their family’s tiny dwelling in Haiti has a leaky scrap metal roof, and its mud-and-wood walls are slowly melting away with each passing rainstorm. In the summer months, the air inside often becomes so oppressive it can be challenging just to breathe.

“When it rains, I would look up to see where the water was coming from. Then, I would look down and see a river at my feet,” lamented Rosetithe. “The children would get wet, and their books would get wet and were destroyed in the water.”

“Like any mother, Rosetithe wants the best for her sons, but she knows her family’s living conditions are creating a lot of roadblocks to their success. It’s almost impossible to create a stable, healthy home life for young children in a house like hers. I know I would struggle to do it,” said Michele Sagarino, president of Cross Catholic Outreach, one of the largest and most respected Catholic relief and development ministries serving in the Caribbean region. “That’s why we have made it a priority to build and repair the homes of poor families in places like Kobonal, Haiti. When someone like Rosetithe receives that helping hand and can raise her children in a safe, sturdy home — well, it’s life-transforming. There’s no other way to describe it.”

Asked why home security is so important, Sagarino detailed how that foundational support radiates blessings to many other areas of a family’s life.

“A safe home improves health by creating a dry and sanitary place for people to eat and sleep. It has educational benefits too. Children don’t lose school days due to sickness, and they have a productive place to read and study,” she said. “Then there’s the security and peace it provides. Families are safe from intruders and vermin, and they no longer need to worry about the dangers posed by tropical storms. Imagine the relief it is to have all those burdens lifted from your shoulders.”

This year, in its effort to improve the living conditions of families like Rosetithe’s, Cross Catholic Outreach has launched a special national campaign called “Children of Light,” a name chosen to reflect the powerful call to service God makes in Ephesians 5: *For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light — for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.*

“There is actually a double meaning in



Above: Many fragile, single-room homes in Kobonal, Haiti, have dirt floors and leaky roofs, making them unsanitary and unsafe. Below: The Augustin children face tremendous challenges in life. The poverty in their region of Haiti is extreme.



this particular campaign title,” Sagarino said. “We Catholics stand as children of light when we serve the poor, and the boys and girls we’re helping — are also children of light. They have incredible potential to shine for the glory of God if we can just help them overcome the hurdles poverty has placed in their lives.”

To accomplish its home building goals in Haiti, Cross Catholic Outreach will be working with the Kobonal Haiti Mission, located in the country’s Central Plateau region. The director of the mission, Father Glenn Meaux, has

a goal of building 50 homes to provide 336 children and 109 adults with a safe, sanitary place to live. Catholics in the U.S. are being asked to contribute to the project by sponsoring a house at a cost of just \$11,920 or by giving a smaller donation that can be combined with others to accomplish the same goal.

“I know it’s a significant amount to ask someone to give, but a number of people are eager to fund an entire house,” Sagarino said. “They have generous hearts, and they appreciate the fact that the contribution they are giving will provide a very specific blessing and will have a far-reaching impact. Of course, we’re deeply grateful to those who give any amount to this goal. Every dollar is important in helping Fr. Meaux

achieve his goal of building 50 homes for families in need.”

Sagarino added that she hopes those who participate in the “Children of Light” campaign will also use the opportunity to learn more about the Kobonal Haiti Mission and its other outreaches to the poor.

“Too few Catholics in the U.S. are hearing about the incredible work being done in the developing world by our priests, religious sisters and Catholic lay leaders,” she said. “We want to get the word out. We want to celebrate the wonderful things the Church is doing in the world — as well as to encourage U.S. Catholics to support important missions of mercy. One way they can do that is by building homes in Kobonal.”

How to Help

To fund Cross Catholic Outreach’s effort to help the poor worldwide, use the postage-paid brochure inserted in this newspaper, scan the QR code, or mail your gift to Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC03031, PO Box 97168, Washington, DC 20090-7168. The brochure also includes instructions on becoming a Mission Partner and making a regular monthly donation to this cause.

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



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

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CRS head, eyewitness to Gaza Strip horrors, urges cease-fire

Gina Christian
OSV News

As the Israel-Hamas war enters its fourth month, ending hostilities “all around” to deliver humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip has become critical, the head of a U.S.-based Catholic aid agency told OSV News.

“We need a stopping of the violence,” said Sean Callahan, president and CEO of Catholic Relief Services. “Stop the bombing and the violence and let’s allow humanitarian actors to get in there and get the appropriate supplies (to people in Gaza).”

CRS, the official international humanitarian agency of the Catholic community in the United States, provides a range of assistance programs in more than 100 nations, and is now working to alleviate suffering caused by the Israel-Hamas war.

The war was sparked by Hamas’ Oct. 7 surprise attack — coinciding with a Sabbath and Jewish holiday — on some 22 locations in Israel, leading to the worst loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust. Israel formally declared war on Hamas Oct. 8 and placed Gaza under siege, pounding the dense urban enclave with airstrikes and launching a ground invasion.

To date, more than 1,200 people in Israel, most of them civilians including 30 U.S. citizens, and at least 26,751 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, have been killed, according to Israeli and Palestinian officials, respectively. Hamas still has more than 100 hostages from its devastating assault, which a New York Times investigation confirmed involved the sexual assault, mutilation and murder of women and girls in at least seven locations.

The ensuing humanitarian crisis has left the Middle East “on the verge of the abyss,” according to United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres.

Callahan, who traveled to Gaza, Jerusalem, the West Bank, Jordan and Egypt Jan. 16-26, spoke with OSV News to share his thoughts on addressing that humanitarian crisis.

He said the first step for CRS was “(visiting) with partners, people on the ground and our colleagues, just to make sure that we were understanding the situation on the ground adequately.”

In addition, he sought to “make sure our partners and our team on the ground knew we were thinking of them ... and that we would use all the resources of the agency to support them.”

Currently, CRS has 45 staff members in Gaza, down from 52, said Callahan. Two international members had departed and four have left for Egypt due to family reasons — including the birth of a child to a CRS worker who is eager to return to her mission, he added.

One female CRS staffer, a Gaza native and mother of two young children, remains injured within the Holy Family Catholic Church complex in Gaza City, having been wounded during a Dec. 16, 2023, attack on the compound that killed an elderly woman and her daughter, he said.

“When the Israeli (forces) killed two of the women in the compound, she went to help them and then they threw a device in there, which ended up exploding, and it shattered her legs,” Callahan said. “She’s had some surgery, but they haven’t got all the shrapnel out and they haven’t mended it.”

His agency’s attempts to move the woman out of the country for treatment have so far been unsuccessful, he said.

CRS’ Gaza offices have had to relocate from their original Gaza City site — since the team “can’t get back into

Gaza (City), and the building’s windows have been blown out” — to space over an unused grocery store in Rafah, using solar panels to maintain electrical power and internet connections for their work, said Callahan, noting that some colleagues are “living in tents ... with their combined families.”

Along with food and water distribution, creating shelter for those in Gaza is “key” amid the “devastating situation,” especially as rain and falling temperatures have compounded the misery of those displaced by the hostilities, said Callahan.

“When I was there, the temperature was in the high 40s (Fahrenheit),” he said. “That’s pretty cold when you’re in a tent.”

He recalled seeing a family from the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis — exhausted from their journey, during which they carried all of their belongings — caught in a “pouring rain.”

“Their heads were in their hands,” said Callahan. “Their mattresses, anything they would sleep on, were just getting soaked. These types of situations are very traumatizing for people.”

Sanitation conditions also have worsened, he said, with people “digging latrines ... kind of randomly, (since) the infrastructure in many areas has been bombed.”

Callahan said that some medical groups with whom he spoke advised him of “100% diarrhea and dysentery” among those they are seeing.

Respiratory ailments are soaring due to inhaling dust from damaged buildings, he said, noting that “there’s a lot of cement in the air ... and a lot of people have croup.”

Others, like the CRS staffer at Holy Family Parish, are trying to function with injuries that cannot be adequately treated by a failing health system.

“I met one young man who had a fracture in his femur because of one of the buildings coming down,” said Callahan. “He actually had an operation, and you can see the metal pins and the metal holding the bone together exposed. He’s in a tent, and you can imagine carrying him from the tent to the latrine.”

Callahan asked the man, who was a day laborer, how he was faring in terms of getting food.

“He said, ‘(CRS) gave us a box of food, and when that’s gone, I don’t know what I’m going to do,’” Callahan recalled. “People are in a desperate situation.”

Relief efforts have also been complicated by emerging intelligence data showing that at least 12 staff members of UNRWA, the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, were connected to Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack. An estimated 10% of UNRWA’s Gaza staff has ties to militant Islamist groups, and about half have close relatives belonging to the groups, according to reports reviewed by The Wall Street Journal.

Following the revelations, a number of nations — including major donors such as the U.S., Germany, and the European Union — have suspended millions of dollars in UNRWA funding.

Callahan said that CRS, as a matter of policy and in compliance with U.S. government regulations, does not partner with either UNRWA or the Hamas government in Gaza.

“Our vendors have all been reviewed and approved through U.S. government programs,” he said. “So we’re making sure that we maintain credibility, and that there isn’t any doubt of where our aid goes, who gets it and who doesn’t.”

He added that CRS Gaza has “fortunately not had any problems with violation of our premises or our supplies. We’ve been giving (aid) to the people and we haven’t had any stealing from our trucks or not.”

Callahan urged people in the U.S. to “remember the people and keep them in our thoughts and prayers.

“And if you are able to, please provide assistance, because the local church organizations are working night and day with those people most in need,” he said.

In the long term, large numbers of amputees, including children, will also need aid, he said.

Even in the face of violence and destruction, Callahan said, “almost everybody” he encountered during his visit “had some hope about the future.

“They were very hopeful that this was going to end,” he said. “And I think the most poignant thing was in talking to a few women in our office, who said, ‘We just want peace; we want peace for our families.’ They weren’t harboring revenge or hostility against people. These were people that have gotten trapped in a war ... they were just asking for peace for their families.”

Sean Callahan, president of Caritas North America and CEO of Catholic Relief Services, in a tan vest, is pictured at a camp for displaced people during his visit to southern Gaza Jan. 23, 2024.



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■ Jan. bulletin: posted Sunday, Jan. 7; due Tuesday, Feb. 6.

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Church’s surrogacy teaching rooted in the rights of the child

Maria Wiering
OSV News

“The gift of life which God the Creator and Father has entrusted to man calls him to appreciate the inestimable value of what he has been given and to take responsibility for it.”

So begins the 1987 document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith known as “Donum Vitae” — “The Gift of Life” — on the Church’s respect for human life and the dignity of procreation, replying to bioethical questions raised by emerging conception practices.

“Donum Vitae” is a document that, nearly 40 years ago, made explicit the Church’s teaching about in vitro fertilization and related practices, including gestational surrogacy — a teaching that in January 2024 made headlines after Pope Francis called for a worldwide ban on surrogacy while speaking with members of the diplomatic corps assigned to the Holy See.

“The path to peace calls for respect for life, for every human life, starting with the life of the unborn child in the mother’s womb, which cannot be suppressed or turned into an object of trafficking,” he said at the beginning of his address specifically to ambassadors. “In this regard, I deem deplorable the practice of so-called surrogate motherhood, which represents a grave violation of the dignity of the woman and the child, based on the exploitation of situations of the mother’s material needs. A child is always a gift and never the basis of a commercial contract.

“Consequently,” he continued, “I express my hope for an effort by the international community to prohibit this practice universally. At every moment of its existence, human life must be preserved and defended; yet I note with regret, especially in the West, the continued spread of a culture of death, which in the name of a false compassion discards children, the elderly and the sick.”

“Gestational surrogacy” describes the practice of a woman carrying a child in pregnancy on behalf of another individual or couple through the use of IVF. Gestational surrogacy is reportedly more commonly used than its predecessor “traditional surrogacy,” which relied on artificial insemination, resulting in the “surrogate mother” also being the egg donor; and thus the child’s biological mother, creating greater legal (and psychological) complexity.

As an international commercial industry, surrogacy is reportedly experiencing what Forbes magazine described as a “global boom.” Global Market Insights anticipates that it will grow from an estimated value in 2022 of \$14 billion to \$129 billion within a decade.

Contributing to this rise are celebrities who have publicly used surrogacy for their own children, including Kim Kardashian, Anderson Cooper, Matthew Broderick and Sarah Jessica Parker and Paris Hilton.

According to one surrogacy website, the United States “is the ‘gold standard’ destination for surrogacy” for its clinics and “supportive legal framework.” However, surrogacy laws vary by country (and, in the U.S., by state), with some having no regulations around the practice.

Nine years before the CDF (now the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith) published “Donum Vitae” — largely in response to the development of IVF — Louise Brown had been hailed as the world’s first “test tube baby,” after being conceived via in vitro fertilization in Britain. Prior to this scientific breakthrough, surrogacy was possible through artificial insemination, requiring the child’s “surrogate mother” to also be his or her biological mother. It also allowed for the possibility of a couple who could not conceive themselves to have a child at least partially genetically related to them.

In April 1986, a Detroit housewife became the first “gestational surrogate” to give birth to a child conceived of another couple’s gametes through IVF and then implanted in her uterus. It was the second time the surrogate, Shannon Boff, had carried a pregnancy for a New York couple, Elliott and Sandra Rudnitzky.

The first time Boff had served as a surrogate, the child was biologically hers — she was considered the “egg donor” but inseminated with the intended father’s sperm. With that baby, “I had to keep telling myself that this was the couple’s child,” Boff told People magazine in 1987. “This one I knew wasn’t mine. That made it easier.” She was paid \$10,000.

Less than three weeks before Boff gave birth, another surrogate, Mary Beth Whitehead, gave birth in New Jersey

to “Baby M.” As a “traditional” surrogate, Whitehead was the child’s biological mother. After giving birth, Whitehead threatened suicide if the baby’s parents, William and Elizabeth Stern, didn’t give her more time with the newborn. They permitted her to take the baby for one week. Instead of relinquishing the infant, Whitehead and her husband absconded with the baby to Florida. With both the Sterns and the Whiteheads claiming parental rights, the case went all the way to the New Jersey Supreme Court. The Sterns ultimately were granted custody, but the case challenged the legality of surrogacy contracts.

While the case was before the New Jersey Supreme Court, the New Jersey Catholic Conference filed in July 1987 an amicus brief that sided with neither couple, but rather expressed concerns about surrogacy as a whole, arguing the practice “promotes the exploitation of women and infertile couples and the dehumanization of babies.”

“In short, it traffics (sic) for profit in human lives,” the New Jersey bishops said. “What is being paid for is a living child.”

Their position reflected “Donum Vitae,” which had been released in February. However, Noel Keane, the Michigan attorney who brokered both surrogacy contracts, was quoted in *The New York Times* saying, “I think the Church is a little out of touch with the reality of all the Catholic couples who want children to say, ‘You’ve been dealt this hand by God and you’re going to have to live with it.’”

The document, however, makes it clear that its aim is freedom, not limitations, rooted in God’s plan for the human person. “Donum Vitae” considers specifically the morality of in vitro fertilization, including respect due to the embryo, the procedure’s intervention upon human procreation, and its relationship to civil law.

The instruction affirms that from the moment of fertilization, an embryo is a unique human life and therefore “demands the unconditional respect that is morally due to the human being in his bodily and spiritual totality.” It further notes that the IVF procedure often involves “spare” embryos that are ultimately destroyed. “The connection between in vitro fertilization and the voluntary destruction of human embryos occurs too often,” it states. “This is significant: Through these procedures, with apparently contrary purposes, life and death are subjected to the decision of man, who thus sets himself up as the giver of life and death by decree.”

“Donum Vitae” completely rejects the use of IVF, even for married couples, explaining that fertilization cannot be separated from the conjugal act, because that act is “inseparably corporal and spiritual.”

Also among considerations in “Donum Vitae” is the use of surrogacy. It asks the question, “Is ‘surrogate’ motherhood morally licit?” and answers, “No ... for it is contrary to the unity of marriage and to the dignity of the procreation of the human person.”

“Surrogate motherhood represents an objective failure to meet the obligations of maternal love, of conjugal fidelity and of responsible motherhood,” it states further. “It offends the dignity and the right of the child to be conceived, carried in the womb, brought into the world and brought up by his own parents; it sets up, to the detriment of families, a division between the physical, psychological and moral elements which constitute those families.”

In 2007, 20 years after the publication of “Donum Vitae,” the CDF revisited the document and new bioethical considerations, especially related to human embryo research,

in the instruction “Dignitatis Personae.” It affirmed that “the teaching of ‘Donum Vitae’ remains completely valid.

So what of the infertile couple? Does “Donum Vitae” simply declare that married couples will simply “have to live with it,” as Keane, the Michigan surrogacy attorney, suggested?

No, indeed. Rather, the document suggests that Keane’s kind of criticism is based on a false premise — that a couple has a right to a child, and that “right” usurps the rights of that child.

“The child is not an object to which one has a right, nor can he be considered as an object of ownership: rather, a child is a gift, ‘the supreme gift’ and the most gratuitous gift of marriage, and is a living testimony of the mutual giving of his parents,” “Donum Vitae” states. “For this reason, the child has the right ... to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents; and he also has the right to be respected as a person from the moment of his conception.”

The document calls for continued medical research to prevent and remedy sterility, and for couples who experience infertility to recognize that it can be “an occasion for other important services to the life of the human person, for example, adoption, various forms of educational work, and assistance to other families and to poor or handicapped children.”

“Donum Vitae,” however, acknowledges the real suffering that can accompany infertility and calls for the Church to accompany couples who cannot become biological mothers and fathers. The Church’s pastoral documents, especially the 2009 document from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Live-giving Love in an Age of Technology,” expound upon why artificial reproductive technologies “are not morally legitimate ways” to solve the problem of infertility. Rather than turn to ART, the bishops encourage couples not to lose their hope for a child and to pursue medical treatment that could remedy their situation.

As ART has advanced, so has NaProTechnology, developed at the St. Paul VI Institute in Omaha, Nebraska, which aims to identify and treat the medical reasons a couple is experiencing infertility. Meanwhile, the ministries in the Church have also developed to walk with couples enduring this hardship. The U.S. ministry Springs in the Desert, for example, offers multimedia resources, pastoral toolkits for parishes, Zoom-based meet-ups and other events for couples with infertility.

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Catholics need better liturgical formation, expert says

Justin McLellan
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Catholics need to know what their words and gestures at Mass signify and evoke, a liturgical expert said.

“What does it mean to be standing or kneeling? To have my hands joined or extended?” are questions Catholics should be able to answer, Father Ricardo Reyes Castillo, an official in the Vatican Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, told Catholic News Service.

“If we don’t know these things or we only know parts of them outside of their whole context,” it is a sign of not understanding and being fully engaged in the liturgy, he said during a late January interview.

Father Reyes said he believes that since the Second Vatican Council, the church has been so focused on ensuring the forms and texts used at Mass are correct that it has not devoted enough energy to communicating the meaning of the Mass to the faithful.

The council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (“Sacrosanctum Concilium”) “spoke about the importance of reworking the texts of rituals, which was an immense task, but this work had to proceed together with liturgical formation,” he said.

“The work on the texts of was so large that formation got left aside,” Father Reyes said. “The problem is that today when we find ourselves with even very rich texts, we don’t truly know their significance.”

Father Reyes’ concern is one that is shared by the pope. In June 2022, Pope Francis published “Desiderio Desideravi” (“I have earnestly desired”), an apostolic letter “on the liturgical formation of the people of God,” in which he invited the whole church “to rediscover, to safeguard and to live the truth and power of the Christian celebration.”

The Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments said in a press release at the time that the pope’s letter brought together many of the propositions that came out of the dicastery’s 2019 plenary session on liturgical formation of the faithful.

Father Reyes said that is why he wrote his book, “The Mass Revealed,” as an accessible way to immerse Catholics in the fullness of Mass.

Written in a question-and-answer format and accompanied by illustrations, the book is not intended for children, he said, but to “allow everyone to enter into the greatness of the eucharistic event.”

He told CNS that many of the questions in the book were inspired by questions he was asked during a six-month period when he lived as a priest in a center for young people struggling with issues related to substance abuse.

The format of the book was intended to be accessible, since today people are accustomed to “quick, constantly changing information and images,” he said.

“To me, the Eucharist is repose, strength, forgiveness, light, hope, expectation, movement, surprise, and above all Love, which gives meaning and color to all things,” Father Reyes wrote in the book’s introduction. “For this reason, it is my desire to write in a simple manner about the awe I experience each time I celebrate the Eucharist. I will do this by means of two fictional characters: a boy (who asks questions), and a monkey (who answers him).”

The book’s questions range from the general, such as “What is the Mass?” to specific elements of the liturgy, like why people give money during the presentation of gifts. The book’s main protagonists also ask one another deeper questions about the nature of sin and how one can engage with the Holy Spirit. The book, only 92 pages long, is available in English, Spanish and Italian from online booksellers.

Father Reyes said that many gestures performed during Mass have a deep spiritual meaning that is often lost on people. As an example, he cited how every Mass begins and ends with the celebrating priest kissing the altar, which conveys how the Mass is the act of entering into a loving relationship with God.

When even adults lack a full understanding of the Mass, he said, it should not be surprising that many young people today do not want to attend Mass “because they do not understand the meaning of what they are doing.”

“As Christians today we need more than ever to find the true meaning behind what we do,” he said.

To that end, Father Reyes proposed that each parish offer a brief, simple, but intentional liturgical formation course for adults “just as kids have catechesis before their (first) Communion or confirmation.”

In societies where interest in religion is waning, he said, evan-

gelization increasingly depends on people acting as witnesses of their faith to others. Yet without a full appreciation of the Mass, Christians today are “not able to completely transmit what they what to” about their faith. Instead, they “risk talking without communicating.”

“The task of Christians today is not to tell others what to do, but to how live out what they believe,” he said. Namely, that the “Eucharist is not just something that is nice,” but is “the greatest treasure we have.”

Covers of “The Mass Revealed,” by Father Ricardo Reyes Castillo, are seen in various languages in this undated photo.





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NEWS BRIEFS

National/World

Nigerian Christians ask U.S. government to put their country on religious freedom watch list

WASHINGTON — Nigerian Christians are calling on the U.S. State Department to designate Nigeria as a “country of particular concern” in response to violence in that country perpetuated against predominantly Christian communities. More than 100 people were killed and 300 injured in Nigeria’s Plateau state on Dec. 23-24, 2023, in what some news outlets attributed to clashes over land between farmers and herders amid ecological changes brought about by climate change. But Bishop Wilfred Chikpa Anagbe of the Diocese of Makurdi in Nigeria’s Benue state told OSV News that the attacks are targeted against Christian communities. “It is a jihad, purely a religious war, a genocide, the elimination of the indigenous tribes who are mainly Christians,” he said, noting “climate change is a global problem, not just a Nigerian one” and other conflicts aren’t dismissed as ecological problems. At a Jan. 30 event in the Capitol complex, hosted by the pontifical charity Aid to the Church in Need, Bishop Anagbe and other clergy showed graphic images and footage of Christians killed or injured by violence in a region of Nigeria known as the “Middle Belt.” The International Religious Freedom Act requires the annual designation by the U.S. government of “countries of particular concern,” or CPCs, defined as countries where governments either engage in or tolerate “particularly severe violations” of religious freedom.

Pence suggests US alter trade agreement with Nicaragua in response to church persecution

WASHINGTON — Former Vice President Mike Pence condemned Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega’s anti-Catholic persecution in comments at a religious freedom summit in

Washington Jan. 30, arguing the U.S. should alter its existing trade agreement with that government if its religious persecution continues. In comments at the International Religious Freedom Summit, an annual gathering of lawmakers and human rights advocates in Washington, D.C., Pence said, “I believe the time has come for the United States to make it clear to Nicaragua that we will not tolerate action against, suppression of, church leaders and religious leaders in Nicaragua without consequence.” Ortega’s regime has persecuted the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, U.S. officials and lawmakers have said, targeting church leaders who have criticized his government. Among them, Bishop Rolando Álvarez was sentenced in February 2023 to 26 years in prison the day after he refused to be deported to the U.S. with more than 200 other Nicaraguan political prisoners. Pope Francis publicly denounced Bishop Álvarez’s sentence and the deportation of Nicaraguans from their homeland. The Vatican March 18 shuttered its nunciature in Nicaragua. Bishop Álvarez, along with 18 other churchmen, was exiled and deported to Rome earlier in January, after spending over 500 days in prison. Pence argued the U.S. should alter its trade agreement with Nicaragua if the Ortega regime does not stop targeting Catholic clergy and religious.

Three bishops, approved by pope and government, ordained in China

VATICAN CITY — In less than a week, three Chinese bishops were ordained with the approval of both Pope Francis and the Chinese government. The ordination Mass for Bishop Peter Wu Yishun, 59, was celebrated Jan. 31 after Pope Francis named him head of the Apostolic Prefecture of Shaowu in the Chinese province of Fujian Dec. 16 “within the framework of the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China,” the Vatican announced Jan. 31. The apostolic prefecture had been without a bishop since 1964. The Vatican said Father Anthony Sun Wenjun, 53, was ordained to the episcopacy Jan. 29 in Weifang, about 320 miles south of

Beijing, and Bishop Thaddeus Wang Yuesheng was ordained the bishop of Zhengzhou Jan. 25, also in accordance with the accord with the Vatican-China agreement, which was originally signed in 2018 and has been renewed every two years since. The text of the agreement has not been published, but Vatican officials have said it outlines procedures for ensuring Catholic bishops are elected by the Catholic community in China and approved by the pope before their ordinations and installations.

Catholic priest with 50 years of service and his sister killed in Florida shooting spree

PALM BAY, Fla. — A retired Florida Catholic priest and his sister were killed in a multi-location rampage that also took the life of another man, left two police officers injured and ended with the death of the suspect. Father Robert Hoeffner and his sister, Sally Hoeffner, were found slain at their Palm Bay, Florida, residence on the evening of Jan. 28, as police were investigating a domestic disturbance at another area home that turned deadly. Their car had apparently been stolen by 24-year-old suspect Brandon William Kapas, who loaded the car with a cache of weapons and drove it to a family gathering nearby. Police were called to the home after Kapas became agitated and destructive, and in the course of his flight, Kapas killed his grandfather and injured two police officers before he himself was shot and killed. No motive for the shootings has been given. In a statement, Orlando Bishop John Noonan said the diocese is mourning the loss of life and will miss Father Hoeffner’s “grace-filled presence.” Father Hoeffner had celebrated his 50th jubilee in 2023, recalling decades that included becoming a founding pastor, celebrating Mass on television regularly, and establishing a multicultural parish council at his final assignment. “I’ve had a glorious ride. I’m proud to serve and do wonderful things for wonderful people. I enjoy doing that,” Father Hoeffner said in his jubilee reflection for the diocese.

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Pope encourages youngsters to tell everyone Jesus loves them

Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

Pope Francis asked thousands of Italian children preparing for confirmation to be witnesses of God’s love. “Go to Jesus, meet him, and then tell everyone how good it is to be with Jesus, because he loves us and is always waiting for us,” the pope told 4,000 young people from the Archdiocese of Bari-Bitonto and some 3,000 catechists, parents and family members who accompanied them. The group set off in 150 buses from southern Italy before midnight and drove about five hours to get to the Vatican for their meeting with the pope and to pray in St. Peter’s Basilica, Archbishop Giuseppe Satriano told Vatican News.

Meeting the boisterous group Jan. 27 in the Vatican audience hall, the pope began by asking for a show of hands of how many of the children knew the date of their baptism. Not many of the 11- to 13-year-olds raised their hands, so the pope told them to ask their parents when they got home. “The date of baptism must be celebrated every year like a second birthday,” he told them. “Have a cake with candles, too! An extra cake — not bad!”

Pope Francis told the children he was not joking. Pope Francis hugs a child during a meeting with more than 7,000 people — including 4,000 youngsters preparing for confirmation — from the Italian Archdiocese of Bari-Bitonto in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Jan. 27, 2024.



because with baptism “we were born into Christian life, to life in Jesus, which lasts forever, which is eternal life, forever! Then we entered the great family of the church, and the Holy Spirit came to dwell in us and will never abandon us; and finally, we have received the greatest inheritance there is — Heaven!” With confirmation, he said, the Holy Spirit and the Church will confirm them in that faith and help them grow stronger. But, he added, confirmation also involves a personal commitment to be “protagonists” and not just “spectators” of Christian life. Pope Francis urged the young people to learn about Italian Blessed Carlo Acutis, who died of leukemia in 2006 at the age of 15. In Blessed Acutis’ short life, “he did a great deal of good

things,” the pope said. “Above all, he was impassioned by Jesus; and since he was very good at getting around on the internet, he used it in the service of the Gospel, spreading love for prayer, the witness of faith and charity toward others.” “Prayer, witness and charity” were the hallmarks of Blessed Acutis’ life and should be a key part of the life of every Christian, the pope said. “He spent a lot of time with Jesus, especially at Mass, which he attended every day, and he prayed before the tabernacle, so he could announce to everyone, with words and gestures of love, that God loves us and is always waiting for us.” “Listen to this,” the pope told the children: “God loves us and is always waiting for us.” “Let’s say it together: ‘God loves us and is always waiting for us.’”

A graphic for an open house event. It features a green background with various school supplies like pencils, a magnifying glass, a clock, and a calculator. The text is written in a white, hand-drawn style.

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