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(top left) Bishop Iffert blesses the Easter fire at the beginning of the Easter Vigil.

(top right) Bishop Iffert stands in the sanctuary of the Cathedral, holding a lit candle.

(above) Deacon Gerry Franzen anoints the Gospel with incense from a thurible prior to the Gospel reading.

(left center) A young family holds candles lit from the Easter fire.

(right center) Pontifical servers light the candles on the altar using flame blessed at the beginning of the Mass.

(left bottom) Water from a scallop shell is poured over the head of a catechumen, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

(bottom right) Bishop Iffert anoints the forehead of a candidate during the celebration of Confirmation.



Baker photos

'The stone has been rolled away,' Bishop Iffert celebrates at the Easter Vigil

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

The Lenten season ends and the Easter season begins with the Easter Vigil, celebrated in the Holy Night by Bishop John Iffert, March 30, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington.

The Mass opened with total darkness in the Cathedral, save for a lit fire. The same fire was blessed by Bishop Iffert at the beginning of the Mass as the Easter fire, and it would be used to light the year's Paschal candle for the first time — as the candle was also blessed and prepared as part of the Blessing of the Fire at the Easter Vigil.

Smaller candles, held by every member of the congregation, were lit as well from the fire, held during the procession of the Mass until the lights illuminated the Cathedral once more.

These same candles would be lit again following the Rite of Initiation, where catechumens and candidates of the Cathedral parish were welcome in full communion with the Church.

In his homily, Bishop Iffert compares the story of the Resurrection to the Greek mythological story of Sisyphus — a cruel king sentenced in the afterlife to eternally roll a stone up a hill, never to reach the top.

A similar stone was rolled in front of Jesus's tomb he was buried in. "This stone, then," said Bishop Iffert, "represents the very limitations of our human condition. It is the sense of meaninglessness, the perceived futility of our labors ... it is the curse."

Bishop Iffert continued, "The Bible teaches us in the Book of Genesis that the curse of meaninglessness came into the world because of the fall," referring to Original Sin. "The stone that human beings have known since the creation and have written stories about in every culture — longing for God and being separated from him."

Bishop Iffert then referenced the part of the Mass's readings where Mary Magdalene, Mary, the Mother of James and Salome approached the tomb of Jesus following his crucifixion, and asked "Who will roll away the stone for us?" Bishop Iffert said, "Who will remove the curse?"

The women find that the stone had been rolled away. "The Lord is risen," said Bishop Iffert, "No one any longer needs to ask the question of who will roll away the stone, who will answer the curse. It has been rolled away."

Bishop Iffert concluded, joined with the congregation, "Alleluia, alleluia — Jesus has risen from the dead, and we are set free."

The Eucharist and serving others are ‘one piece’ says Bishop Iffert on Holy Thursday

Laura Keener
Editor

The sacred Triduum, the three days leading up to Easter — Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil — are the three holiest days of the year. It is the time for Christians to walk with Jesus through his passion, death and resurrection — the Paschal Mystery.

Holy Thursday Mass — the Mass of the Lord’s Supper — celebrates in a focused way Jesus establishing both the institution of the Eucharist and the ordained priesthood. The Gospel recounts Jesus’ washing the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper.

“If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” (John 13:14-15)

During the Holy Thursday Mass, in imitation of Jesus and his Mandatum, “to love one another as I have loved you,” the celebrant washes the feet of 12 people. In his homily at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, Bishop John Iffert said that he “loves” the foot washing.

“That connection with this day, where we celebrate the priesthood and the inauguration of the gift of the Eucharist — the life of the Church — with foot-washing leadership is a beautiful sign, a beautiful witness to the ministry of Christ,” Bishop Iffert said.

Bishop Iffert encouraged those present to see Jesus in the Eucharist and his serving others as “one piece.”

“Our reception of this most holy Eucharist and our being sent to serve others, our being sent to wash the feet of our neighbor, they are one piece, one way that we receive Jesus’ love and imitate his Divine Presence in the world,” Bishop Iffert said.

“To respond joyfully to the needs of our neighbors is not another way to Christ separate from this Holy Sacrament, they are one in the same. It is the way we live like Jesus.”

On this night, during the celebration of the Eucharist, the mood changes as the Church begins to enter the sacred

silence that will continue until the lighting of the altar at Saturday’s Easter Vigil. During the consecration, the tinkling of bells is replaced with the startling crack of crotala, wooden clappers.

After Communion, Bishop Iffert, carrying the Eucharist, processes through the Cathedral to the altar of repose. The Eucharist is placed in a tabernacle where people are invited to stay and pray with Jesus throughout the evening and on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. There is no final blessing. The congregation is dismissed in silence.



(above far left) Following in procession, Bishop Iffert carries the Blessed Sacrament to the altar of repose.
(top, above center and right) In imitation of Jesus at the Last Supper, Bishop Iffert washes the feet of 12 parishioners during Holy Thursday Mass at the Cathedral.
(far left) Bishop Iffert prays before the altar of repose.
(left center) Pontifical servers light candles at the altar of repose.
(left) At the consecration of the Eucharist, Bishop Iffert raises the chalice. In his homily, he said that receiving the holy Eucharist and our being sent to serve others “are one piece.”

Good Friday — a day to unite sufferings with Christ on the cross

Bella Young
Multimedia Correspondent

At three in the afternoon on the day of his death Jesus cried out, “Eli, Eli lema sabachthani? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46-47) Catholic churches around the world, including the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, held Communion services, with the inclusion of the passion of Christ and veneration of the cross, March 29, Good Friday. The tabernacle was empty and the altar barren as Catholics gathered to solemnly remember the death of Jesus.

As a sign of identification with Christ who was “obedient even to death on the cross,” Bishop John Iffert and the other celebrants lay prostrate at the foot of the altar. This act is seen only one other time — at the ordination of priests — when those who are to be ordained lay in front of the altar as a symbol of abandonment to the will of the Lord.

A silence fell over the congregation as Bishop Iffert lay in front of the altar; a heavy weight of knowing what they were gathered for. As the Gospel began and the crucifixion of Jesus was put into words many bowed their heads, some weeping at the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

After the Gospel those in attendance were invited to venerate the Cross, a tradition of the Good Friday service dating back to 4th century Jerusalem. Those

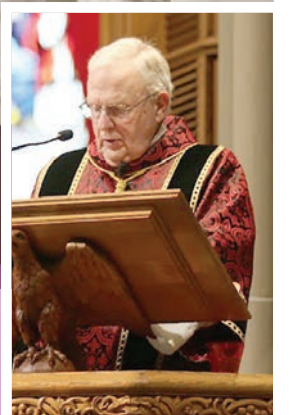
who came forward to venerate the cross would kneel, bow or kiss the Cross as a sign of adoration for the sacrifice of Jesus.

In his homily Msgr. Kurt Kemo, vice rector at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, said, “Recalling and honoring Christ’s cross is not the only thing we do today, we recall our own crosses in this life and unite our pain and suffering to the cross of Christ.”

While those in attendance lined up to venerate the

Cross against the backdrop of music, it was a time to remember the sacrifice Jesus made for the salvation of all.

“Jesus cried out again and gave up his spirit.” (Matt 27:50)



(above left) Bishop Iffert lays prostrate in front of the altar.
(above right) Attendant venerates the Cross.
(right) Deacon Gerald Franzen reads the Passion of Christ from the ambo.

Child Abuse Prevention Month kicks off with ‘Blue Ribbon Ceremony,’ honoring community members united in mission of preventing child abuse

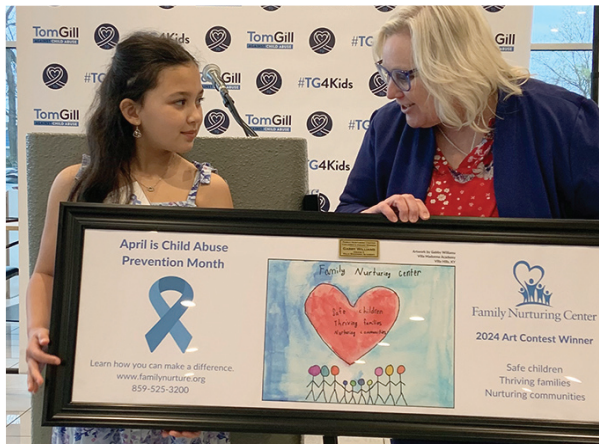
Maura Baker
Staff Writer

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month nationally, and the Family Nurturing Center, a Northern Kentucky non-profit dedicated to preventing child abuse and providing support to children affected by it, held its Blue Ribbon Ceremony on a rainy afternoon, April 5, at Tom Gill Chevrolet, Florence.

This event is the non-profit’s “kickoff” event for the month, during which a middle school student is declared the winner of its Children’s Art Contest — which asked students to draw how they envision safe children, thriving families and nurturing communities. This year, the contest’s winner was Gabby Williams, a student at Villa Madonna Academy, Villa Hills.

2024 is also the 20th year that the Family Nurturing Center has held this event at Tom Gill’s dealership. Mr. Gill was thanked for his service to the community and for his support by both Jane Herms, president and CEO of the Family Nurturing Center, and Mayor Julie Metzger Aubuchon of Florence. Mayor Aubuchon declared April 6 as Tom Gill Day in the city of Florence as a show of appreciation.

Kyle Rowland, a foster parent whose soon to be adopted foster son is a survivor of child abuse, was the featured speaker at this year’s ceremony. Mr. Rowland recalled the challenges that arose for both his foster child, and for him, and the support he received from the Family Nurturing



(above left) Father Richard Bolte, pastor of St. Timothy Parish, Union, leads an opening prayer at the Family Nurturing Center’s Blue Ribbon Ceremony, April 5. (above center) Gabby Williams, a student at Villa Madonna Academy, Park Hills, holds up a plaque featuring her artwork for the 2024 Children’s Art Contest with Mayor Aubuchon.

(above right) Tom Gill, owner of Tom Gill Chevrolet, receives a street sign with his name from Mayor Julie Metzger Aubuchon, mayor of Florence. Florence City Council is looking to rename a street nearby to Mr. Gill’s dealership to “Tom Gill Way,” in appreciation for his service to the community.

Center.

Despite the struggles, Mr. Rowland expressed how, with the help of the center’s trauma therapy programs, his foster son is now “able to recall and speak about his past trauma in a healthy and safe way,” and will be the “first person in his immediate family to graduate from high school.”

“For the love and support” given by the Family Nurturing Center, Mr. Rowland said he was “forever grateful.”

“Today’s event is more than just a ceremony,” said Ms. Herms, “it’s a testament to the difference that one person can make when they stand up for what’s right. It’s a show

of a community that cares deeply for the well-being of children, and a rallying cry for all of us to get involved.”

Ms. Herms mentioned the statistic that only 20 percent of children disclose abuse when it happens, “more than half wait at least five years and many never, ever tell.”

“Reclaim power by changing the conversation about abuse,” Ms. Herms encouraged guests at the ceremony. “... thank you all for being part of a community that cares. Let’s continue to raise our voices, to take action and never waver in our commitment to our children’s well-being. Together we can ensure that every child grows up in a safe and nurturing environment.”

With confidence in the grace of God, Diocese of Honolulu thanks people of the Diocese of Covington for gift to fire relief

Staff report

Bishop Larry Silva of the Diocese of Honolulu and James Severson, president, Hawai’i Catholic Community Foundation, thanked the people of the Diocese of Covington for the “generous gift of \$105,527.37 in support of the Maui Wildfire Relief Efforts.”

Their gratitude was expressed in a letter, March 17, addressed to Bishop John Iffert.

“Your generous gift will be used to help those affected by the fire to rebuild their families, their livelihoods and the physical structures that were lost,” Bishop Silva and Mr. Severson wrote.

In August 2023, Bishop Iffert asked that all parishes take up a second collection for those “affected by the devastating wildfires of the island of Maui.” Fueled by high winds and dry conditions, four fires ripped through Maui and Hawai’i Island. One-hundred-one people died in the fires, which also saw the destruction of 2,207 structures and caused \$5.5 billion in damages.

“We have all witnessed the devastation of the wildfires that have destroyed and ravaged our Maui community,” wrote Bishop Silva and Mr. Severson. “Within the Catholic communities worldwide we have witnessed Jesus in the generosity of so many of you as funds have been pouring

in to aid and support our sisters and brothers in Hawai’i ... Let our faith guide us as we navigate the challenges ahead, knowing that with the grace of God, all things are possible.”

Bishop Silva and Mr. Severson ended their letter asking for continued prayers and assuring the people of the Diocese of Covington the same.

“We will remember you in prayer as well, and may God bless you and your loved ones abundantly,” they wrote.



Bishop’s Schedule

April 12
High School Senior Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 10 a.m.

April 14
Mass, Cathedral Basilica, 7:30 a.m.
Serra Club Servers awards, Cathedral Basilica, 2 p.m.

April 15
Good Shepherd’s Dinner, Pontifical College Josephinum, Columbus, 6 p.m.

April 16
Board of Trustees meeting, Pontifical College Josephinum, 8:30 a.m.

April 17
Mass for Newport Central Catholic High School, Cathedral Basilica, 10 a.m.

Building Commission meeting, 2 p.m.
Sacrament of Confirmation, Cristo Rey Parish, Florence, 7 p.m.

April 18
ACUE donors appreciation lunch, Prince of Peace School, Covington, noon
Priest Holy Hour, Cathedral Basilica, 3 p.m.

Sacrament of Confirmation, St. Paul Parish, Florence, 7 p.m.



Tai’s Captures photo Unsplash

Diocesan Public School Baccalaureate Mass

High school seniors attending public schools or homeschools, and their families, are invited to attend a Baccalaureate Mass with Bishop John Iffert **May 1, 5:30 p.m.** at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. Following Mass there will be a reception (which is optional) at the Curia.

RSVP at covidio.org/youth (or by utilizing this QR code) for the reception by April 17.



Covington Lenten pilgrimage growing in participation and practice

Laura Keener
Editor

Parishioners of St. Henry Parish, Elsmere, were among the estimated 300 people who participated in the second annual Covington Lenten Pilgrimage, March 23. The pilgrimage route included stops at five Covington churches — Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Mother of God Church, St. Augustine Church, St. Benedict Church and St. John Church. Each pilgrim received a booklet, which included historical information about each church and a map of the pilgrimage route. At each stop, pilgrims

received a shell sticker to paste to their booklet.

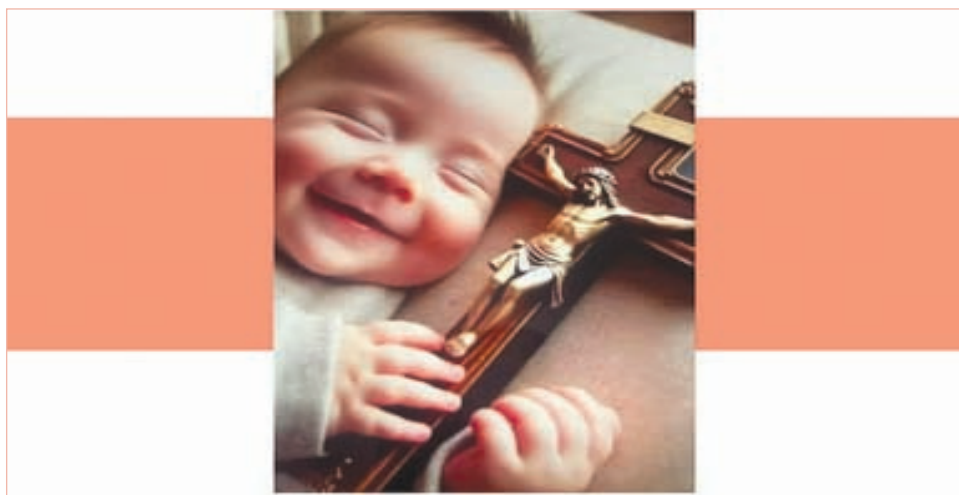
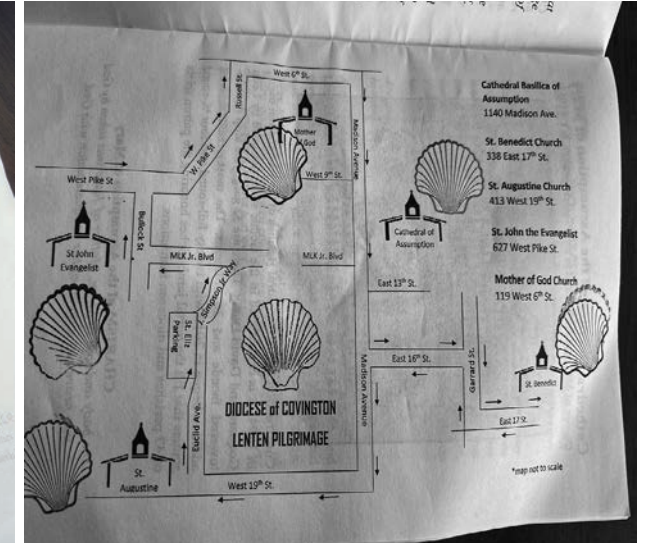
Plans are already being made for next year's pilgrimage. "We are hoping this will become a yearly diocesan event to be held every Saturday before Palm Sunday to prayerfully usher in Holy Week, just as the Jewish pilgrims made their way to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover every year," said Margie Springelmeyer, parishioner, St. Barbara Parish, Erlanger and one of the pilgrimage's organizers.

Next year the Catholic Church will celebrate the

Jubilee Year 2025 and Pope Francis has announced as its theme "Pilgrims of Hope." We will definitely be pilgrimage-ing and tying into this theme," said Mrs. Springelmeyer.

Organizers were especially pleased by the availability of the sacrament of reconciliation at a few of the churches this year and hope that continues. "And we will be encouraging more shepherds to lead their flocks along the way as Father Ryan Maher (Cathedral rector) so beautifully did," she said.

Staverman photos



The Franciscan Daughters of Mary and the Friends of the Rose Garden Mission invite you to be our guest at our annual

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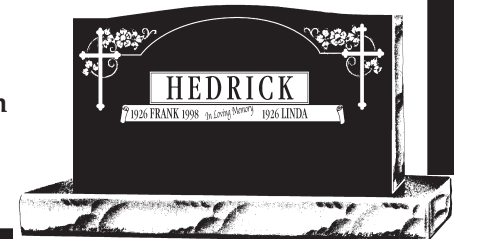
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Our responsibility to others — mission and service in today’s college environment

Contributed by Thomas More University

As a mission-driven university, Thomas More strives to instill in young and older adults who attend a sense of purpose and the desire to make a positive impact on their communities. As the Catholic liberal arts University of the Diocese of Covington, students are challenged to examine the ultimate meaning of life, their place in the world and their responsibility to others.

So just how is the concept of responsibility to others instilled into a person’s psyche as they navigate life’s challenges?

At the student level, reinforcing the positive impact personal actions have on the outcomes of others creates a strong desire to do more. Over the past three years, with the introduction of Saints Serve (2021), the entire Thomas More community comes together on a designated date each fall to assist regional non-profits and partners.

In fall 2023 alone, over 1,100 Saints participated in 70 different service projects at 45 unique organizations. Students had the opportunity to not only see their actions directly affect others, but also to see the wide variety of agencies in our region who serve those in need at the most fundamental levels.

Opening their eyes to the need in their immediate community, and to the ease with which they can volunteer, is one step to reinforcing that their service to others is necessary in the world.

Saints Serve Day is just one example of the many acts of kindness students perform as athletic teams and academic classes create relationships that provide service to area non-profits such as Special Olympics (SOKY), Be Concerned, and The Clay Alliance, to name a few.

A decade-long relationship between Thomas More athletics and Special Olympics provides a location and the manning needed for the SOKY Regional Flag Football Tournament, plus athletes have expanded to include bowling with and cheering on Special Olympians at other events, not to mention participation in the Polar Plunge where teams take on a philanthropic role to raise funds for SOKY.

In the classroom setting, service is incorporated into curriculum as Professor Cari Garriga (foreign languages) demonstrates by having her students who minor in Spanish serve at the non-profit Be Concerned in conjunction with the Esperanza Latino Center in Covington. Students used their Spanish skills to assist Hispanic neighbors in need to navigate the agency’s food pantry and fill shopping requests.

In like fashion, Professors Ellie Megerle (sociology) and Kirk Mayhew (art) collaborated to create a learning community of students who participated in the Clay Alliance’s 24th Annual Empty Bowls Fundraiser held in November 2023. Students created pottery which was donated to use at the Empty Bowls event with proceeds benefitting Kids Cafe of the Freestore Foodbank. These are just a few examples of the service encouraged by faculty.

On a more international scale, Professor James Camp’s Border Studies class, which includes service work on the U.S./Mexico border, celebrates 25 years in 2024. Professor Camp explains how the class came to fruition after the first field trip in 1999, “I was there for less than 24 hours and came to the conclusion that we needed to create a course and make this a more permanent experience for students.”

The for-credit course focuses on the application of Catholic social teaching to the issues of immigration, labor rights, primacy of family, stewardship of the environment, with the field experience providing in-person context.

“The goals of the course are to foster greater awareness of self, the other (the immigrant), critical thinking (concerning the structural nature of social injustice), and a cultural/materialistic humility,” explains Professor Camp.

Over 200 individual students have participated with close to 40 making the trip several times.

In the same spirit of international service, Divine Providence Sister Kay Kramer takes a group of students to assist at the border each year. As a featured speaker at the 2024 Thomas More Women’s Conference, Sister Kay presented a compelling reflection on their latest trip and how Catholic social teaching has informed this work with migrants along the U.S./Mexico border.

Sister Kay, a certified nurse-midwife, family nurse practitioner and educator, asserts that a key pillar of our responsibility to others is to be informed on issues surrounding poverty, immigration and human dignity.



(top) Saints athletes take their positions as the Special Olympics Kentucky Regional Flag Football Tournament gets underway on Republic Bank Field at the Crestview Hills, Kentucky campus.

(center) Professor James Camp and a group of students overlook the U.S./Mexico border as they prepare for a day of service as part of the Border Studies class field work.

(bottom) Thomas More students receive instructions from a representative from ORSANCO as they prepare to sweep the Ohio River banks and remove debris during Saints Serve 2023.

“What we want to do is to transform the world, right?” Sister Kramer asked the audience. “We want to love people enough that the world is transformed.”

The 2024 Women’s Conference was centered around the theme of “Our Responsibility to Others” and highlighted that a sense of responsibility to others does not stop for Thomas More alumni at graduation.

In addition to Sister Kay, Thomas More alumna Danielle Amrine, class of 2020 and chief executive officer of Welcome House of Northern Kentucky, spoke at the Conference about faith-centered service. Ms. Amrine reflected on how a personal interaction with a social worker at a formative age sparked her passion and career in nonprofit work, culminating in her leadership position for Welcome House. Her sense of service to others has taken on more than a volunteer aspect for her life, guiding her to a career dedicated to battling homelessness in the region.

Wherever you look, you will find Thomas More students and graduates acting upon their sense of responsibility to others as they serve their neighbors locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. The concept of responsibility to others is well documented in Matthew 25:40: “And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of Mine, you did it for Me.’”

The result of a mission-driven education makes for a caring community which strives to create a world that is a better place for all.

He saw the cloths and believed

The Gospel for Easter Sunday is from St. John's account of Easter morning (John 20:1-9). We are told that Mary Magdalene arrives at the tomb very early in the morning while it is still dark. She has come to anoint the body of the Lord, which had been buried in haste because of the onset of the Passover.

She spies the great stone rolled back and assumes that the body has been stolen. So she runs immediately to Simon Peter and the other disciples: "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." She doesn't yet believe in the Resurrection, for she is operating still within a con-



Bishop Robert Barron

ventional framework.

The two disciples, Peter and John, make a mad dash toward the tomb, the younger John outpacing the older Peter. What an odd detail, by the way — so peculiar in fact, that it led the novelist Graham Greene to accept the historicity of the account.

Upon coming to the open tomb, John looks in and sees "the burial cloths." Then Peter arrives and spies the same cloths, as well as the cloth that had covered his head "rolled up in a separate place."

Have you ever wondered why there is such an emphasis on the burial cloths? The most obvious reason is that their presence is peculiar. If the body had been stolen, why would the thieves have bothered taking the elaborately wound cloths off, and why in the world would they have taken the time and effort to fold the head cloth up so

carefully?

But might they also be mentioned so prominently because they were treasured by the early Church? And might at least the principal cloth exist to this day?

I'm speaking, of course, of the famous Shroud of Turin, which for centuries has been revered as a relic of the Crucifixion. I had a chance to see the shroud in 2010, when I was a visiting scholar in Rome and the cloth was exposed briefly for public display.

It is remarkably long — long enough indeed to have covered a body front and back. On it can be seen, plainly enough, rust-colored markings that suggest the frontal and dorsal sides of a man about thirty years of age. Marks of violence can be seen on him, wounds from whipping and, quite clearly, from crucifixion — great gashes in the wrists and feet, as well as a gaping wound in the side of the torso.

However, the most remarkable feature of the shroud was revealed only in 1898, when it was photographed for the first time. When the photographer, a man named Secondo Pia, developed the film, he noticed that the negative of the photo revealed an exquisitely detailed depiction of the man of the shroud, anatomically exact to a degree that no artist could have produced.

So, what we see of the shroud, he concluded, is itself a kind of photographic negative. And when scientists pored over the detailed version, what they saw took their breath away. Not only was the anatomy perfectly correct, but the details of the wounds were telling, corresponding to the very sort of scourges that ancient Romans used.

The "crown" of thorns was more of a cap, and the wound in the side gave evidence of both blood and pericardial fluid: the blood and water that St. John spoke of. Furthermore, traces of coins, bearing the inscription of Pontius Pilate, could be seen covering the eyelids. Also, seeds and pollen from the Middle East were found within

the strands of the fabric.

How was the image formed? Here, the scientists were truly stumped, for absolutely no trace of paint or pigment could be found, and the marks did not work their way down into the fabric but colored only the very surface of the shroud.

The closest they could come to naming it accurately was to refer to it as a "scorch," something caused by an intense burst of radiation — which would furthermore explain the photographic negative quality of the image.

What in nature would produce such a phenomenon? Nothing that we know. Does it indicate the fact of the Resurrection, when in a great burst of light and energy, the body of Jesus was brought back to life?

The extraordinary and mysterious Shroud of Turin speaks to us a great Easter truth — namely, that at the heart of Christianity stands, not a myth or a legend or a symbol, but a fact, the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

It was this historical truth that sent the first Christians careering around the world to announce the "Gospel," which means "good news." They were not trading in philosophical abstractions or spiritual musings; rather, they were grabbing their interlocutors by the shoulders and telling them that something had happened.

When St. John entered the tomb and saw the burial cloths, he "saw and believed." There was something about those wrappings that convinced him. I wonder whether the same thing is true today in our hyper-skeptical age. We, too, can see the cloth in which Jesus' body was wrapped, and we understand it far more thoroughly than St. John ever could have. Does it cause us to "see and believe?"

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

No, Richard Dawkins, cultural Christianity is not enough

In a striking turn of events, renowned atheist and evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins recently declared himself a "cultural Christian" during an interview with Rachel S. Johnson of LBC. Dawkins' declaration was

sparked by his reaction to the Mayor of London's decision to celebrate Ramadan with 30,000 lights on Oxford Street rather than Easter.

Well-known for his critical stance on religion, Dawkins expressed dismay at promoting Ramadan over Easter. Surprisingly, he defended the cultural trappings of Christianity in England, which he perceives as a fundamentally Christian nation.

Dawkins' comments underscore a significant

but often overlooked conversation in the West. While Dawkins does not embrace Christianity's spiritual tenets, his appreciation for its cultural and moral contributions to society raises an intriguing paradox: Can the values and achievements attributed to Christianity in the West be preserved without genuine belief?

This question is particularly relevant for Catholics and the broader Christian community. It compels us to reflect on the depth of our commitment to our faith and its role in shaping our civilization.

Cultural Christianity, such as Dawkins identifies with, appreciates the aesthetic and moral fruits of the faith without embracing its heart — the belief that Jesus Christ is Lord and that a personal relationship with him matters. However, preserving Western values and achievements that Christianity has influenced — such as human dignity, moral responsibility and the pursuit of the common good — requires more than a superficial attachment to its traditions and moral outlook.

Christianity is a radical thing. The Gospel demands transformation, calling for personal conversion and a lived relationship with God. This transformation extends beyond individual lives, influencing societies through acts of charity, the pursuit of justice and the cultivation of peace.

Historical evidence abounds of the pivotal role Christianity has played in the development of Western institutions, including the concept of human rights, the foundation of hospitals and universities, and significant contributions to art, science and philosophy. These contributions were not merely the result of a cultural identity but flowed directly from belief in the Christian understanding of the world and our place in it.

Dawkins' reflections on the importance of Christianity, even as a cultural marker, illustrate the void

that would be left should genuine belief continue to wane. The cultural and ethical framework Christianity provides cannot be sustained in perpetuity without the nourishment of sincere faith. A culture detached from its spiritual roots gradually loses its vitality, becoming unable to defend the very values it cherishes against the erosive forces of nihilism and moral relativism.

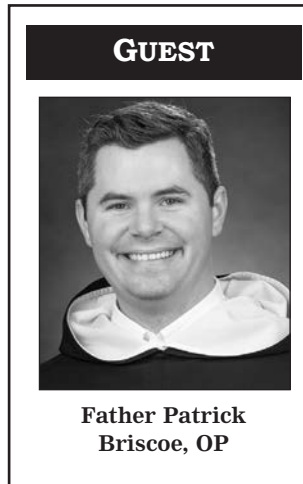
The challenge for Christians, then, is not merely to uphold a cultural identity but to live authentically according to the teachings of Christ. This requires a fundamental commitment to evangelization. We must continually enrich our understanding of the faith and reach out to others to invite conversions.

Cultural Christianity is insufficient for the preservation of the West's greatest values and achievements. Pope Benedict XVI once said, "The conviction that there is a Creator God is what gave rise to the idea of human rights, the idea of the equality of all people before the law, the recognition of the inviolability of human dignity in every single person and the awareness of people's responsibility for their actions."

Believing in God, or not, has consequences.

As Dawkins inadvertently highlights, the beauty, ethics and institutions shaped by Christianity are not merely historical artifacts to be admired but are manifestations of faith that will only continue to offer meaning and direction if people believe it to be true.

Father Patrick Briscoe, OP, is editor of Our Sunday Visitor. His column has been provided by OSV News.



Father Patrick Briscoe, OP

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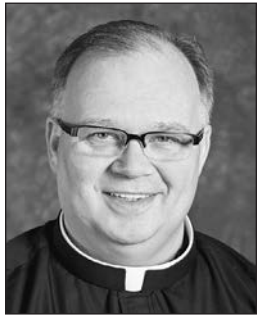
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We are an Easter people

The readings for the third Sunday of Easter — Cycle B — are: Acts 3:13-15, 17-19; 1 John 2:1-5a and Luke 24:35-48.

“No one sits by the campfire at night because they won’t unplug.” A few years ago, it seems like many years ago, I called a young man who moved to Utah. I have known him for many years. In high school there were a

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Gregory Bach

bunch of guys who called me God. This young man had me listed in his phone as God so anytime I would call him it would show up as God.

He was with his friends one evening sitting around a campfire and I called him. As the phone rang, he showed it to other young men who were there. God is calling! It was the perfect time since they were talking about religion when I called.

God was calling them around the campfire. Those guys were unplugged that night and were able to talk and listen to one another.

It’s hard for us to unplug these days and listen to God calling. I remember sitting around the campfire when I was in college seminary. It was as if I was mesmerized looking at the flames, seeing the fire dance around and the glow of light on the faces of those gathered.

I noticed the same thing this year at the Easter Vigil. The Easter fire was lit and the glow of the fire reached the faces of those gathered. As the Paschal candle was carried through the Cathedral the light, the fire, was shared by all as their own candles were lit. It was as if a wave of light was moving through the Cathedral, with their eyes fixed on their candle, unplugged listening to the voice of God.

“To enlighten the world, Father, you sent to us your Word as the sun of truth and justice shining upon mankind. Illuminate our eyes that we may discern your glory in the many works of your hand.”

We hear those words echo through the celebration of Easter. Illuminate our eyes, Father, that we can find you amidst the noise of this world and ring out the words, “we are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song!”

Father Gregory Bach is assistant to the Bishop and vice-chancellor, 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 Diócesis 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, coordinadora 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.”

There are a lot of exciting things happening at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. That means there have been a lot of things to do at St. Vincent de Paul.

March also kicked off one of the most enjoyable times of the year for me — track season! Finally, there is also, well, a very full life that brings its own everyday responsibilities. I have been intent on soaking up every minute.

For the most part, I have been energized by all the activity. I thought I was handling it well — my days were structured, lists made, tasks delegated at home and at work. Follow-ups scheduled.

However, as I sat down for dinner on Good Friday with my family, I realized I pilfered away one of the most sacred days of the year, wrapping up loose ends and running errands to prepare for Easter weekend. In fact, in my

fervent scramble to keep life under control with communication, priorities and schedules, I almost missed Lent altogether.

Then we went to Church together. For the first time in weeks, I allowed myself to take a breath. I stopped — planning, thinking, trying to control.

My husband insists on a front row seat at Church. We were blessed to get that front row seat on Good Friday. I watched as each individual approached the cross — close friends, familiar faces, new faces. The crowd crossed several generations — little children, teenagers, young adults, my era, and those who are older and wiser. Some approached tentatively, some rushed, some weeping. So many different people came to worship, to give thanks for the ultimate sacrifice.

The scene took my breath away. Christ surrendered. He bore unspeakable torture to save us. Jesus Christ loved everyone, regardless of circumstances and here we were, together, to honor Him. His death offers redemption for all.

VIEWPOINT



Karen Zengel

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This is Jesus

So, I surrendered at that moment. This is Our Church. This is Jesus. I saw Him.

I could hear my children next to me singing, “Were You There?” The music and the swell of voices that night weighed heavily in my chest — this is our Church. This is Jesus. I heard him.

I let my mind wander to the day before when my two younger children were discussing what Holy Thursday and Good Friday must have been like for Jesus and his apostles. I was reminded of a picture of my oldest daughter making palm crosses in her college cafeteria. This is our Church. This is Jesus. He was there. He is here, with me, every day. I just need to stop and recognize him.

I hope my Church family reads this, so I can thank you for that Good Friday experience you unknowingly shared with me. I was drifting away in my world (one that I thought was giving me all I needed) and my Church family brought me back.

I am privileged to work as part of St. Vincent de Paul where we strive to see the face of Christ in those we meet. Even considering this privilege, I realized how I could still get lost.

As Vincentians, we see the lost and forsaken. Often the lost and forsaken are the people we serve. Sometimes, the lost are the friends we make through this service. By our presence, our prayers and our actions we can reveal Jesus to everyone we encounter.

The Communion song on Good Friday was “In Remembrance of Me.” It’s a beautiful hymn, and the second verse stayed with me because it describes the work of St. Vincent de Paul that I am so blessed to see every day:

“In remembrance of Me, heal the sick.
“In remembrance of Me, feed the poor.
“In remembrance of Me, open the door.
“And let your brother in, let Him in.”

Our neighbors reach out to us in need, and we respond with a visit. They “let us in” their homes, their lives and experiences. In return, we “let Him in” by opening our hearts to their suffering, sharing encouragement and loving them.

That is what we are called to do — open the door and see Jesus. He’s there! Let’s not hesitate to let him in.

Karen Zengel is executive director, Society of St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky.

Where’s the lost and found?

How did Joseph lose Jesus? I don’t mean practically; I have four young children and I lose them — literally — all the time. However, when I pray about the story of finding

Jesus in the temple, another aspect of it stands out to me.

“Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom; and when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it.” (Luke 2:41-43)

Joseph left the Passover without Jesus, not only in his hand but also in his heart. If not, he would have been aware of the absence of the Christ-child in his life. Joseph lost sight of Christ.

Was he impatient, as I often am, in wanting to leave a place and rushed Mary and Jesus along and lost sight of what is most important? In Joseph, I see myself. How often do I leave Mass without Jesus, frustrated with spending most of my time in the back of the Church calming a crying child, or taking yet another child to the bathroom? How easy it is to lose sight of Christ.

In losing Jesus, Joseph must have been absolutely devastated. He was tasked with protecting and instructing

Jesus, and he had lost him. Imagine the heartbreak of knowing that he failed in the mission that God had given him.

It says in Luke 2:46-49, “After three days they found him in the temple ... and when they saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously.’ And he said to them, ‘How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’”

“How is it that you sought me?” An honest, and brutal question from Jesus, directed, undoubtedly to Joseph. Joseph, as the leader of the family, was looking for Christ everywhere but his Father’s house. Like Joseph, when I go to look for Jesus, when I feel lost, where do I go? How many distractions in life have taken me away from Christ? I have wasted far more than three days looking everywhere but the one place that I know that he dwells — in the Church, in his Father’s house.

To me, it seems like it wasn’t simply a physical finding of the location of Jesus. Rather, there was also a deeper awareness in Joseph’s heart of a presence. And the awareness of this presence changed everything.

Let us beg the Lord for this grace given to Joseph — that our awareness of Jesus’ presence will grow every single day. So much so, that he penetrates every aspect of our lives, even the most mundane like calming a crying child or sweeping the floor. Let us pray for this awareness to grow so that we do not waste even a moment in growing in our relationship with him.

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

VIEWPOINT



Jim Hess



Young photos



Bishop Iffert blesses Madonna House

Bella Young

Multimedia Correspondent

Calling its mission a “hallmark of the pro-life movement,” Bishop John Iffert blessed Madonna House of Northern Kentucky, April 5, so that all who have lived and will live there will find fulfillment and prosper.

What started in 1986 as a group home has grown into a “Christian not-for-profit living and learning shelter for motivated single mothers,” according to the Madonna House website.

The idea for such a house was formed when current board member Peggy Schutzman was doing work at a pregnancy center on the west side of Cincinnati. During this work she noticed a lack of support for mother’s post birth.

“We were getting this deluge of women that we were helping not to abort but ... there was nothing after the baby’s birth,” said Mrs. Schutzman. Compelled with a desire to help struggling mothers Mrs. Schutzman, along with her family, began Madonna House, aptly named after Mary the mother of Jesus.

Starting its mission in Newport, Mrs. Schutzman said it was not without growing pains, but since the beginning Madonna House has been faithful to its well refined mission for helping mothers.

“The women come in and they know they have up to a year to try and get to a point of sustainability,” said Mrs. Schutzman.

“They come in with their baby ... and while they’re here they work with our goals counselor, and she helps them set up their goals. The goal is that when they leave here, they are first and foremost responsible parents, and we hope that we can lead them to a path to God.”

(top) Bishop Iffert stands with the employees and board members of the Madonna House

(above right) Peggy Schutzman shows Bishop Iffert the amenities that come with the apartments.

(above left) Bishop Iffert blesses the Madonna House.

Since opening its doors 38 years ago, Madonna House has helped approximately 400 women get back on their feet.

With the move to Ft. Mitchell from Newport, Mrs. Schutzman says that the sense of community has continued to grow.

“Northern Kentucky is a generous community ... I think most people are proud we’re part of their community,” she said.

Following the blessing of the physical space, a reception was held in the children’s playroom where members of the community gathered to celebrate the blessing of such a noble mission.

Mrs. Schutzman called the blessing, “really special,” not just to the house but to the mission.

“To have the Bishop come, it really is a breath of fresh air,” she said.

Madonna House relies on the generosity of the community to continue its work in helping mothers and their babies.

“God calls us to try, so that is what we do,” says Mrs. Schutzman.



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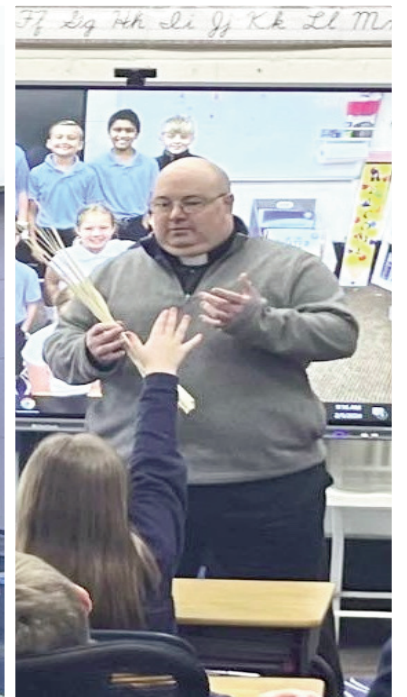
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Catholic Schools in Action

Catholic Schools in Action



(above left) Third-grade students at St. Cecilia School, Independence, made Easter bags for the residents at Regency Manor.
(above right) Seventh-grade students at St. Cecilia School made friendship bracelets with their first grade "buddies."



(above) Notre Dame Academy's "Rolling into Action Bike Drive" truly embodied the spirit of Lenten almsgiving. NDA students collected 64 bikes for Catholic Charities' Pickett's Corner Ministry, which will now refurbish the bicycles and distribute them to those in need of transportation. This is a perfect example of how NDA students are developing into servant leaders while also learning to collaborate with others who share their mission of making a difference in the world.

(above) In preparation for the beginning of Lent, Father Eric Andriot visited all the classrooms at St. Paul School, Florence, to talk about where the ashes used on Ash Wednesday came from, explaining how blessed palms received on the previous Palm Sunday were collected and burned to make ashes. Using old palms brought in by parishioners and students, the school gathered for a palm burning prayer service, creating ashes used at Mass on Ash Wednesday.



(above left) Sts. Peter and Paul's K-8 student body prays the Stations of the Cross together every Friday afternoon during Lent.
(above right) Seventh- and eighth-grade students from Sts. Peter and Paul School, California, came to school voluntarily after hours to make over 100 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the Emergency Shelter in Covington. After visiting the shelter in preparation for Confirmation, they wanted to do something to help.

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

PEOPLE AND EVENTS

The prayer intention for April, as recommended by Pope Francis, is that the dignity and immense value of women be recognized in every culture, and for the end of discrimination that they experience in different parts of the world.

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.

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

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

The Newport Central Catholic Drama Club will present The SpongeBob Musical, April 19–21 and April 26 and 27. The Gala Performance will be Friday, April 19. For more details visit: NCCGala24.givesmart.com. Additional performances: April 20, 7 p.m., April 21, 2 p.m., April 26, 7 p.m. and April 27, 7 p.m. To purchase tickets, visit: <https://link.edgepi-lot.com/s/3d801c0f/rc39T-HK0CC8M99mfNjMA?u=https://gofan.co/app/school/KY6479>. Tickets may also be purchased at the door by credit card.

"A Biblical Walk Through the Mass" video presentation by Edward Sri explores the extraordinary Biblical roots of the Liturgy and reveals what it all means and why it all matters. This fascinating tour of the Mass will renew your faith and deepen your love for and devotion to the Holy Eucharist. In the St. Barbara Parish Sterling Event Center, Erlanger, April 20, 11:30 a.m.–4 p.m. A light lunch will be served. Register at stbarbaraky.org click on Biblical Walk.

Bingo social, April 21, 1–5 p.m., St. Augustine Parish, Augusta. Entry fee \$10 to play, additional bingo cards optional. Must be 18 years old or over to play. Pull tabs, split-the-pot raffle available; drinks and snacks provided. After bingo, meal provided for players. Proceeds benefit the parish's Emergency Benevolent Fund.

Covington Latin School will host a College and Career Fair for all Diocese of Covington high school students, April 23, 5:30–7:30 p.m. in the school courtyard and cafeteria. Come learn about careers, programs and scholarships from popular colleges and local businesses.

Morality and Law will be addressed by Nik Nikas with the Catholic Bar Association, at the Undercroft at St. Agnes Church, Ft. Wright, April 24, noon–1 p.m. Attorneys and non-attorneys are encouraged to attend. A box lunch will be available for \$10. Call (859) 431-6111 or e-mail fredsumme@summelaw.com for reservations. Sponsored by Catholics United for the Faith, Clay Ministries, and NKY Right to Life.

Diocesan Catholic Children's Home, Ft. Mitchell, Foster Care/Adoption free **Open House**, May 5, 1:30–3:30 p.m. Learn more about the need for foster and adoptive parents, mentors and respite providers. There are many ways to support children. Visit DCCHCenter.org or call (859) 331-2040 but no registration is required.

It is time for Spring cleaning! **The Sisters of Notre Dame are in need of items for their 102nd annual 4th of July festival**. We are looking for services, sports items, jewelry, gift certificates, antiques, anything you can think of. Re-gift to the sisters. If you have items to donate call Margie at (859) 392-8229 or e-mail mschnelle@sndusa.org. Item drop offs during the day at 1601 Dixie Hwy, Park Hills or arrange a pickup.

Thomas More Summer Theatre Workshop, July 8-19, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. This two-week long workshop is for stu-

dents (grades 10-12) to explore and enhance their performing arts skills in a fun and supportive environment. The workshop will provide a unique blend of acting, voice, movement, and stagecraft workshops. Participants have the chance to collaborate with their peers, build confidence, and create lasting memories. To register, visit <https://form.jotform.com/240565535346055>.

Parents of Addicted Loved Ones, (PAL) is a support group that meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays, 6:30–8 p.m. at Catholic Charities, Latonia. It provides continuing education and support, at no charge, for parents with a son, daughter or spouse suffering from addiction to alcohol or drugs. No cost. Just come — 3629 Church Street, Latonia. For more information contact Client Care at (859) 581-8974.

Donate a bike — Change a Life! **Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Covington started a new ministry, Pickett's Corner in 2023**. The new ministry distributes and repairs bicycles to those in need in the area. Most people receiving a bike use it for transportation to work, store or doctor appointments. Adult-size bikes need. E-mail pickettscorner23@gmail.com if you have a bike to donate. The volunteer team will pick it up.



Ancient food blessing

Father Michael Hennigan, pastor, Holy Cross Parish, Covington, performs a centuries old blessing on a basket of traditional Slovakian Easter food. Inside the Easter basket there are foods centered around what people are to abstain from during Lent. Foods consisting of meat and dairy fill the basket so that on the day of Easter all can indulge in the traditional foods.



Great History Challenge

Four students from St. Agnes School, Ft. Wright, have qualified to compete for the Great History Challenge national championship in Chicago, May 24-26. Congratulations to Cooper, Caden, Austin, and Leo for advancing. A special congratulations, also, to Leo who earned the regional champion title.

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Behold, the Lamb of God

“Scenes from the Passion of Christ: The Agony in the Garden, the Crucifixion, and the Descent into Limbo” by Andrea di Vanni, 1380s, The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.



Dr. Jem Sullivan
USCCB

St. Augustine notes that Holy Week is unique in the Church’s liturgical calendar because we not only celebrate but “enact” the Lord’s Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

Jesus’ Paschal Mystery is remembered not only as a

central historical event but the means by which we share in the power of Jesus’ passing from life to death to new life with God. Jesus’ Suffering, Death, and Resurrection are offered as the pattern of our dying to sin and rising to new life in Christ. As we renew baptismal promises at Easter, we pass over, in imitation of Jesus’ Passover, to a new life of grace, begun at Baptism and nourished at every Eucharist.

An exquisite fourteenth-century triptych altarpiece offers a visual guide to walk with Jesus on his paschal journey. Completed by Andrea di Vanni, a prominent painter from Siena, Italy, the portable triptych was most

likely intended for personal use in a private chapel. Each figure is painted to evoke dramatic emotions as scenes unfold side by side. Against a brilliant gold background, vibrant shades of red, yellow, and blue draw us into Jesus’ Paschal Mystery. We read the painting from left to right for a visual catechesis that invites sharing in the sacred events of Holy Week.

On the left triptych wing, we see Jesus, in a pale red robe, kneeling in anguished prayer: Jesus’ agony was so extreme that his sweat turned to blood falling to the ground. He raises his eyes to heaven, where an angel holds out a chalice. And, with hands raised, Jesus offers his anguished prayer to his Father; “if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Below Jesus we find the disciples sleeping, and in the upper left corner, soldiers arrest Jesus, betrayed by Judas.

The central panel shows Jesus’ Death by crucifixion as he bows his head in self-giving love. Above Jesus’ head are the letters “INRI” conveying, in Latin, the title Pontius Pilate inscribed on the cross, Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews. Jesus is ministered to by angels as Mary, his Mother, faints into the arms of two women. Mary Magdalene venerates Jesus’ Body at the foot of the cross along with Saint John, the beloved disciple. And soldiers greedily cast lots for Jesus’ garment at the lower right.

The soul of the good thief is carried by angels to heaven, as Jesus promised him, “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Then soldiers break the legs of the other thief while a centurion on horseback glorifies God with a profound witness to Jesus, saying, “This man was innocent beyond doubt” (Luke 23:47).

On the right panel, Jesus is shown descending into hell, stamping the door of hell underfoot. Radiant golden light envelops him as he holds a banner evoking his victory over sin and death through the Cross. The multitudes are filled with hope as Jesus reaches out to liberate Adam. Above them, God the Father extends a divine blessing with the right hand. Then we see the victorious Jesus, heralded by the haloed John the Baptist, whose banner reads, “Behold the Lamb [of God].” This is the Easter faith we profess and celebrate at every Eucharist.

Jem Sullivan, Ph.D., is an associate professor of Catechetics at The Catholic University of America. She is the author of “Way of Beauty: Rekindling Eucharistic Amazement with Visio Divina”, Our Sunday Visitor Press, 2023.

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Through the lens of history and learning Divine Mercy parishioner finds a home in the Catholic faith

Laura Keener
Editor

During the Easter Vigil, at parishes throughout the diocese, 107 catechumens and 108 candidates became the newest members of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Covington. The Messenger is highlighting the stories of a few of these members. In this final in a series of articles, Michael Barrett-O'Quin, a candidate from Divine Mercy Parish, Bellevue, shares his path to the Church.

Michael O'Quin's path to the Catholic faith can best be described as an intellectual journey. A little over a year ago, the 25-year-old software engineer said he knew nothing about Catholicism. When he was a young boy, he attended an Evangelical church with his grandparents and had no exposure to any Catholics and did not have any relationship with practicing Catholics.

"I saw the papacy and clergy as a group of men claiming to speak on behalf of God and I could not understand why anyone would accept it as legitimate," he said. "I viewed the Church as an ultimately political institution rather than a religious one."

In college that changed, where through learning the history of Christianity he discovered that the Catholic Church had been given, and protects, the "Orthodox faith since the time of the apostles," he said.

"I immediately felt a strong desire to recover the aspects of the ancient faith that had been abandoned in the Protestant tradition I was accustomed to," Mr. O'Quin

said.

From there he met young Catholics who were practicing their faith, which led him to Divine Mercy Parish, Bellevue.

"I saw people who were living by the Church's teachings and their hearts and souls were prospering because of it," Mr. O'Quin said.

And he began to learn more. He read George Weigel's "Letters to a Young Catholic," which "gave me a greater appreciation for the Orthodox Catholic worldview."

"I now understand that the Catholic Church is the original Church, and that the papacy and clergy are the authoritative descendants of the Apostles and the early Church Fathers. I have a deep appreciation for the sacraments as vessels of God's grace. I have found a true respect for the history of the Church, its traditions and customs, and its teachings," said Mr. O'Quin pointing to the "endless supply of writings" from saints, theologians and others, "which can always give us a new perspective and help us to appreciate the 'why' behind our customs."

Mr. O'Quin said that he feels the Holy Spirit calling him to "serve the lowest among us." And is most looking forward to receiving Christ in the Eucharist and being Eucharist by serving others.

"I am eager to receive and partake more fully in the life of Christ (and) engage more deeply with the greater Catholic community in Cincinnati," he said.



Michael O'Quin

Old truth, new insight: Cardinal says human dignity text is result of growth

Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The 116 footnotes in the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith's declaration on human dignity reflect the fact that most of the content of the 12,700-word text is not new Catholic teaching.

But, as has been true with many documents issued during Pope Francis' papacy, there was plenty of reaction from people who had hoped to see significant changes in the Church's position, particularly on gender issues, and from people who claimed Pope Francis was overturning centuries of Church teaching, particularly on the death penalty.

Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the doctrinal dicastery, presented the declaration, "Dignitas Infinita" ("Infinite Dignity"), at a Vatican news conference April 8.

Pointing to all the footnotes, a journalist asked the cardinal why the document was necessary since it seemed to be just a list of things that had already been said about human dignity and the sacredness of human life and against abortion, surrogacy and sex-change surgery.

The declaration, he responded, summarizes "the most important teachings about human dignity and organizes them around a central point, which is the dignity of every human being 'beyond all circumstances,'" an affirmation from Pope Francis' encyclical "Fratelli Tutti, on Fraternity and Social Friendship."

The text takes "this principle that Pope Francis wanted to emphasize and develops the question around that principle — this is the novelty of the document," Cardinal Fernández said.

In a Church that values tradition, the idea of "novelty" strikes some people as strange, and another reporter asked the cardinal if people could expect that in another 80 years the teaching in the document would change again.

"I would not phrase it that way," Cardinal Fernández responded. "But I would say one could understand it better" as time goes on. "One can go deeper into that inexhaustible well that is the Gospel. The Gospel is an inexhaustible well. And we still have so much to find there, so much that we have not understood."

The idea, particularly as explained by St. John Henry Newman, is that while revelation does not change, the Church's understanding of it can grow and deepen or be phrased in new ways to respond to new questions.

"Human dignity is a central question in Christian

thought," Cardinal Fernández told reporters. "It has had a magnificent development over the past two centuries along with the (development) of the social doctrine of the Church."

The cardinal used the example of slavery, which was accepted in the Bible and by popes for centuries. In 1452, Pope Nicholas V allowed King Alfonso V of Portugal the right to enslave certain people, he noted. Then, in 1537 Pope Paul III "condemned with excommunication those who subjected others to slavery. Why? Because they are human. That was the only reason. Because they are human."

"See, only 80 years later, at a time of slow change and on such an important issue, a pope says virtually the opposite

of a previous pope," Cardinal Fernández said. "This is an example that shows how the Church's understanding of truth evolves."

Now, the cardinal said, a vocal group of critics claim Pope Francis cannot and should not say anything new and that the development of doctrine "was definitively closed with the previous popes."

But, he said, the Catholic Church continues to mature in its understanding of human dignity and the sacredness of all human life.

He pointed to St. John Paul II's decision in 1997 to amend the Catechism of the Catholic Church to reflect his

(Continued on page 21.)



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Why Water? Understanding the Importance of Providing Safe Water to Haiti's Poorest Families

Few of us think about water much. We want some, and we turn a tap. We drink it, and we expect to feel refreshed. Water isn't something we worry about, and with good reason. We are blessed to have safe, clean water at our fingertips.

Unfortunately, millions of families in developing countries — Haiti among them — are far less fortunate. For them, water must be found, it is rarely clean, and it can pose serious dangers if they don't take precautions before drinking it. This is because poor families often rely on collected rain or murky streams — water sources that are almost inevitably contaminated with bacteria and parasites that cause disease.

"That is why Father Glenn Meaux has made providing safe water to the people of Kobonal, Haiti, a priority," explained Jim Cavnar, CEO of Cross Catholic Outreach, one of the largest Catholic charities serving in Haiti. For years, Cavnar's ministry has partnered with Kobonal missionary Fr. Meaux to address the plight of the poor in Haiti by funding feeding programs, housing projects, educational outreaches, water projects and more.

"It may surprise some American Catholics, but providing safe water can literally be a lifesaving measure in a remote community. In fact, one of the first projects we did with Fr. Meaux involved capping a spring to bring clean water to a town that had lost a tragic number of children to illnesses caused by contaminated water," Cavnar said. "Fr. Meaux had seen them carrying a child's coffin down the hillside and was shocked to learn local families were losing babies and toddlers to unsafe water every month.

He contacted us to see whether something could be done, and we rallied support from American Catholics to fund the water project he needed. This gift to the community has probably saved dozens of lives since then."

The impact of unsafe water goes further, affecting older children and adults too, according to Cavnar.

"When an older child becomes ill, he or she often misses school. And sick adults can find it difficult to work steadily and secure a stable income. These may not seem like serious problems, but as sick days mount, the impact can be devastating. Children fall behind in their classwork or drop out of school entirely, losing the opportunities for advancement that an education can bring. Their parents struggle to make ends meet, sometimes even finding it impossible to provide food each day. Once that downward spiral begins, it can lead to families falling into extreme poverty — and a real sense of hopelessness."

Fortunately, modern technology can provide a solution if funding is available. Well-drilling rigs can be secured to reach safe water sources underground, and hand or solar pumps can be used to make water stations functional even when electricity isn't available.

"We have had a lot of experience solving water scarcity problems and developing water delivery systems in remote areas," Cavnar said. "The technology and skills are available if we can get the funding for the project work involved. That is why we are seeking support from American Catholics to help Fr. Meaux with his latest project — installing three new freshwater wells and repairing several other wells in his



In Haiti's rural communities, water is often collected from murky ponds or other contaminated sources. It can be tainted with animal waste or teeming with bacteria and harmful parasites. For the poor, who must rely on this water, one drink can lead to serious illnesses, and infants and very young children are at the greatest risk.

area." (See story on opposite page.)

As Cavnar has said, managing major water projects is one of Cross Catholic Outreach's areas of expertise, and he remains confident Fr. Meaux's wells will be built, benefiting families who pray for a safe drink.

"I believe we'll succeed because Catholics in America often rally to accomplish missions of mercy like this," he said. "They are eager to help others, particularly those with an urgent need. What matters to them is that their donations are used wisely and will produce an important, tangible benefit for the poor. They support water projects such as this one because they understand the value of safe water. They would want

that for their own families, and their hearts go out to poor parents who must give their sons and daughters contaminated water to drink. I believe they will want to end that suffering and support a committed Catholic leader like Fr. Meaux."

Readers interested in supporting Cross Catholic Outreach water programs and other outreaches to the poor can contribute through the ministry brochure inserted in this issue or send tax-deductible gifts to Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC03093, 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.

Cross Catholic Outreach Introduces Catalog of Merciful Gifts To Provide Families With Unique Easter Almsgiving Options

The long-held tradition of almsgiving during Easter 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 connect U.S. Catholics with families and communities in dire need.

This year, the respected relief and development ministry Cross Catholic

Outreach has offered a solution — its Easter Catalog of international mercy projects that need funded. Through the catalog, individuals, families and parishes can build homes, 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

span the globe, including missions of mercy in the Caribbean, Central and South America, Africa, and beyond.

"Just imagine the excitement of your children or grandchildren knowing they can help give another child a safe, new home," said Michele Sagarino, president of Cross Catholic Outreach. "It's so important as parents that we teach our little ones the importance of almsgiving and being God's helpers here on earth. It's a lesson that will bless them for a lifetime, and it also

will forever change the life of a person in need."

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.

"Easter gifts are a great way to share joy and love with family and friends," said Sagarino. "Why stop there when we can share Christ's light with the world?"

U.S. Catholics Rally Behind American Priest to Provide Safe Water in Rural Haiti

When Father Glenn Meaux and his missionary team arrived in Kobonal, Haiti, in 1989, he was deeply disturbed by the magnitude of poverty he saw there. Hardly anyone in this remote area owned the land their fragile huts occupied. No one grew gardens or raised animals. Very few employment opportunities existed for the unskilled, uneducated population, meaning very few families were able to earn money to buy food.

“There was no agriculture, there was no irrigation system, there was literally no hope at the time.”

Fr. Glenn Meaux
Kobonal Haiti Mission

During the rainy season, women and children would gather water from the plentiful streams and rivers — but the water was visibly tainted. During the dry season, people resorted to digging holes in the sand in order to find water.

In addition to suffering from hunger and thirst, the people were starving for spiritual guidance. Entrenched in superstition, few had ever heard the name of Christ.

“There was no agriculture, there was no irrigation system, there was literally no hope at the time,” Fr. Meaux recalled.

This is the challenging ground in which the Kobonal Haiti Mission took root. And over the course of 35 years, the mission has worked marvels, helping hundreds of families improve their lives. Still, Fr. Meaux’s heart breaks every time he sees a mother or child living in a dilapidated hut or gathering water from a murky stream.

“Fr. Meaux has already given the best years of his life to the people of Haiti (see story on opposite page), but he always has his eyes forward, looking for the next thing he can do to help relieve the people’s suffering and increase their opportunities in life,” explained Jim Cavnar, CEO of Cross Catholic Outreach, a leading Catholic relief and development ministry that has partnered with Fr. Meaux for more than two decades. “Many people are aware of the wonderful things he’s done to address urgent needs, but his ultimate goals are to help break the cycle of poverty in this part of Haiti, lead families to Christ, and forever change the future for those he serves.”

Fr. Meaux stated his objectives even more simply.



ABOVE: In Haiti’s rural communities, poor families are often forced to collect drinking water from unsafe sources, and they can suffer serious illnesses from waterborne parasites and diseases as a result. LEFT: Fr. Meaux has a plan to provide safe water, and American Catholics can support his efforts through contributions to Cross Catholic Outreach.



“As Catholics, we must extend our hands to help our brothers and sisters in need,” he said.

Currently, one of the mission’s main focuses is to bring clean water to the people of Kobonal, ending the need for families to collect unsafe water from remote sources.

“Women and children are often tasked with finding and collecting water, and the murky streams they draw from aren’t fit for animals, much less people,” Cavnar said. “At Cross Catholic Outreach, we work on many projects like this, obtaining donations from U.S. Catholics to pay for the equipment and organize the construction efforts involved. Our current goal is to help Fr. Meaux put in three clean-water wells and repair several existing wells. If we can accomplish this, it will positively impact 569 adults and 1,906

children who currently face the greatest challenges to their health and well-being. The people in these villages will use the water not only for drinking and cooking but also to sustain important gardens they depend on for food and income.”

According to Cavnar, the wells will make use of freestanding hand pumps, and the families in each community will choose a leader to oversee and perform maintenance on the equipment. Each well will have a cement wall around it for security, and it will be available daily during specific hours of operation. The water will be free, but the benefiting families will be encouraged to contribute a token

amount to a community fund that can be tapped whenever repairs are needed on the wells. Contributing in this way will give families a sense of ownership and pride in their community.

“Anticipation is mounting for this project, and volunteers have already stepped forward to offer their help with the construction of the wells. Now, all that’s needed are the funds for drilling, purchasing pumps, constructing a pump house to store supplies, and training community members to handle maintenance of the new facilities,” Cavnar said. “Our goal now is to make American Catholics aware of the project and gain their support.”

How to Help

To fund Cross Catholic Outreach’s effort to help the poor worldwide, use the postage-paid brochure inserted in this newspaper or mail your gift to Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC03093, PO Box 97168, Washington, DC 20090-7168. The brochure also includes instructions for 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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Fire ‘gave us all a boost,’ Notre Dame chaplain says as Paris prepares for cathedral’s reopening

Caroline de Sury
OSV News

PARIS — For some, the Notre Dame fire was a sign of devastation of faith and Christian values. But for many more in France, it meant awakening of faith on an unprecedented scale.

“The fire gave us all a boost,” Father Henry de Villefranche told OSV News, speaking of a “renewed vitality” encouraged by the Notre Dame worksite. “The church was asleep. Some people were behaving badly. In that respect, the fire was providential. It pushed us all to move forward and give our best.”

Few know it better than the chaplains of the iconic cathedral and Father de Villefranche is one of them, but the only one remaining from before the fire. A few yards from Notre Dame, in an old medieval street, on Ile de la Cité, he works on ensuring continuity of Notre Dame’s heritage with the new team, responsible for the liturgical life of the renovated cathedral.

Ile de la Cité is a famous island on the Seine River, one of two natural islands in Paris and the heart of the French capital. It’s where Notre Dame Cathedral is located and where hundreds of shocked Parisians watched as flames consumed the cathedral’s medieval roof April 15, 2019, praying that Notre Dame would be saved as the spire collapsed around 8 p.m.

The fire, which had broken out around 6.50 p.m. in the timbers of the roof, was overcome by about 3.30 a.m., according to the Paris fire department. Two-thirds of the roof was destroyed. It was Monday, the first day of Holy Week.

Noémie Teyssier d’Orfeuill, a young teacher, was there and since then, she has coordinated the “pilgrimage of living stones” through the streets of Paris every year on Holy Monday.

“The idea is that we are all the ‘living stones’ of the church,” she told OSV News. “Every stone is important, and the church is incomplete if one is missing.” The youth teams who work with Teyssier d’Orfeuill are striving to bring together Catholics from a wide variety of Paris parishes, those affluent and busy and those poorer and more isolated. The diocesan solidarity unit helps them involve members of Catholic charities, so that street people and disadvantaged populations have a privileged place during the event, as well as people with disabilities.

Teyssier d’Orfeuill also is working with hundreds of young volunteers to organize seven major pilgrimage routes to Notre Dame, across France, from July 28 to Sept. 14, in preparation for the Dec. 8 reopening.

The cathedral welcomed between 12 million and 14 million visitors every year before the fire. The influx is expected to increase after the reopening. With this in mind, Father de Villefranche and his team are setting up a didactic trail, designed to enable visitors to explore the essentials of Christian history and faith as they stroll around the cathedral. It’s for those searching for their faith and for those wanting to deepen it.

“Notre Dame is a holy place, just like Jerusalem,” Father de Villefranche pointed out. He speaks Hebrew and knows the Holy Land like the back of his hand. “Notre Dame, too, is a place that leaves no one indifferent, a place where God can be encountered,” he told OSV News.

The chaplains of Notre Dame designed a new itinerary and renamed the side chapels. The visitors’ route will



A tourist boat travels on the Seine River near the Notre Dame Cathedral March 31, 2024, as restoration work continues. The cathedral, heavily damaged by a fire April 15, 2019, will reopen to the public and to worship Dec. 8.

begin on the left as they enter. The aisle running along the left-hand side will be named the “Alley of Promise,” and will take visitors through seven chapels dedicated to the great witnesses of the Old Testament.

“Until now, those chapels were black with grime,” Father de Villefranche explained. Now they are cleaned up and are “superb,” he said, “but they need to be outfitted. There is nothing inside, and their white stained-glass windows tell no story.”

Visitors then will continue to the choir, and see the 14th-century statue of the Virgin and Child, evoking the incarnation of Christ, and the new reliquary for the crown of thorns, a reminder of the redemption.

They will then walk to the other side of the nave through the “Pentecost Alley,” which chapels will be dedicated to the church after Christ’s resurrection, including evocation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the saints.

“Furnishing these newly named chapels will take about 10 years,” Father de Villefranche said. “The looting and ransacking of the French Revolution in 1789 and the July Revolution in 1830 left us with few objects at our disposal. We will have to order new statues, tapestries and stained-glass windows, particularly to represent Pentecost.”

The chaplains also are working on new rituals for liturgical moments specific to Paris cathedral. The morning daily Mass logistics will be improved. “In the past, people entered through one of the side doors,” Father de Villefranche said. “From now on, they will enter through the large old central portal of the Last Judgment. The priest will be waiting for them at the entrance, as the door opens. They will pass through the baptistery and pray the Angelus, before proceeding to the altar for Mass.”

In Notre Dame, Masses and other services are celebrated while tourists continue to stroll around. “It is much better for the visitors,” Father de Villefranche pointed out. “A church is interesting when there is something going on!

Many are touched. This visit does not leave anyone unmoved.”

For Father de Villefranche, “culture and worship should not be separated, but rather linked. Worship is expressed in a culture, and culture enables us to understand the signs of worship. We hope that visitors who enter as tourists leave as pilgrims,” he explained.

With this in mind, the CASA Notre Dame guides association, for which Father de Villefranche is chaplain, trains teams of volunteer guides throughout the year to explain to tourists the elements of the Christian faith needed to understand the iconic cathedral.

Jean-Baptiste Bertrand recruits young people, often foreigners, for summer tours. Housed in Paris and trained on site as soon as they arrive, they guide the visitors for two weeks, while living a fraternal community life, structured by prayer.

This summer they will still be only offering tours of the cathedral’s exterior. “But it’s already a fascinating visit,” Bertrand said. “There’s so much to say about the cathedral’s exterior. And in the summer of 2025, they’ll be able to go inside,” he said, referring to when the cathedral will be reopened to tourists and pilgrims.

Father de Villefranche told OSV News that personally, he is “not very interested in the official ceremonies to reopen the cathedral, with the president of the republic and all the officials,” adding with a smile that for his part, he is “signing up to celebrate the first ordinary Mass of the week that follows. That is when everything will really begin.”

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St. Mary's Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption Parish and the Diocese of Covington invite qualified individuals to apply for the full-time position of Buildings and Property Foreman. We require a motivated, personable self-starter with the ability to direct others, who possesses practical maintenance and mechanical skills and abilities. Knowledge and/or experience with plumbing, electrical, carpentry, mechanical maintenance, painting, and general safety procedures are essential elements of the job. This position will have the maintenance and upkeep responsibility for the majority of the Cathedral Square properties, including the Cathedral Basilica and its grounds, the Cathedral Rectory, the Cathedral Parish offices, the Diocesan Curia offices, and St. Mary's Park. The Foreman will lead, direct, and supervise other maintenance and custodial staff in scheduled and unscheduled activities related to the ongoing functioning and usage of the properties. The workweek will ordinarily be Monday through Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. However, the nature of the position may require the Foreman to occasionally work outside of that schedule, in order to repair, or to arrange repair for, something that breaks or malfunctions and needs immediate attention. Interested candidates may contact Stephen Kopyay, SPHR by email at skopyay@covdio.org to apply.

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Take evil seriously, pope says at general audience

Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

While intense feelings or drive — passions — are natural, Christians know they must be tamed and channeled toward what is good, Pope Francis said.

The virtue of fortitude, “the most ‘combative’ of the virtues,” helps a person control their passions but also gives them the strength to overcome fear and anxiety when faced with the difficulties of life, the pope told visitors and pilgrims at his weekly general audience April 10.

Continuing his series of talks about virtues, the pope quoted the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions.”

Fortitude “takes the challenge of evil in the world seriously,” he said, and that is increasingly rare “in our comfortable Western world.”

Some people pretend evil does not exist, “that everything is going fine, that human will is not sometimes blind, that dark forces that bring death do not lurk in history,” the pope said. But reading a history book or even the newspaper shows “the atrocities of which we are partly victims and partly perpetrators: wars, violence, slavery, oppression of the poor, wounds that have never healed and continue to bleed.”

“The virtue of fortitude makes us react and cry out an emphatic ‘no’ to evil to all of this,” he said.

Fortitude, he said, helps Christians say “‘no’ to evil and to indifference; ‘yes’ to the journey that helps us make progress in life, and for this one must struggle.”

“A Christian without courage, who does not turn his own strength to good, who does not bother anyone, is a useless Christian,” he said.

At the end of the audience, Pope Francis asked people to pray for Ukraine and Palestine and Israel. “May the Lord grant us peace. War is everywhere,” he said. “Do not forget Myanmar,” where the military staged a coup in 2021 and fighting has continued since then. “Let us ask the Lord for peace and not forget these brothers and sisters who are suffering in these places of war.”



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Francis kisses a Ukrainian flag carried by a group of Ukrainian children attending his weekly general audience in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican April 10, 2024. The pope prayed during the audience for peace in Ukraine, in the Holy Land and in Myanmar.

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Virginia governor vetoes, approves abortion-related measures

Kate Scanlon
OSV News

Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin's office announced April 5 that among more than 100 pieces of legislation considered by the Republican governor, he had vetoed and approved a number of bills related to abortion. The state's Catholic bishops praised several of the governor's vetoes while calling on the General Assembly to "reverse the extremely harmful path it chose this year."

Youngkin vetoed so-called "shield" legislation that supporters said would implement legal protections for women and medical practitioners from potential extraditions from other states related to abortion, which is legal in Virginia up through the second trimester.

Youngkin said in a veto message that the U.S. "cooperative extradition system could collapse if individual states were to carve out crimes for which they would not recognize codified laws because of differing political positions."

In a move that surprised some political observers, the governor also signed separate legislation supported by abortion rights groups that blocks the use of search warrants, subpoenas or court orders to obtain digital menstrual health data, such as data stored in fertility or reproduc-

tive health monitoring apps. Some fear such data could be used to prosecute women suspected of having undergone abortions.

Youngkin's office said the governor vetoed 11 bills, "including bills that would put women's health at risk and weaken the Commonwealth's culture of life by undermining the oversight duties of the Board of Medicine."

In a joint statement, Virginia's Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of Arlington and Bishop Barry C. Knestout of Richmond, said they "welcome and are very grateful for Governor Youngkin's vetoes of SB 15, SB 716, HB 519, and HB 1539."

"These bills would have given abortion providers who violate other states' pro-life laws an unprecedented safe harbor in Virginia," the bishops said.

The pair added that Youngkin's "rejection of these bills respects decisions other states have made to protect life."

"Of particular importance, the Governor's action prevents abortion providers in Virginia from prescribing and mailing chemical abortion drugs to women and girls in other states without being subject to consequences for violating those states' laws," they said, noting that medication-based abortions are "now the most common form of

abortion in the United States."

"As Governor Youngkin's vetoes have made clear, it would be dangerous and wrong to give abortion and those who provide it an elevated protected status in Virginia law," they said.

The bishops called on the state Legislature to desist from advancing abortion and focus in future sessions on enacting "policies that would protect mothers and their children from the tragedy of abortion, and that provide pregnant women and new mothers and families the support they need."

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Human dignity text is result of growth

(Continued from page 13.)

teaching that capital punishment can be justified in only “very rare, if not practically non-existent” circumstances.

In 2018 Pope Francis ordered a further update to the catechism, noting that while the death penalty “was long considered an appropriate response to the gravity of certain crimes and an acceptable, albeit extreme, means of safeguarding the common good,” there now is “an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes.”

In addition, it says, because “more effective systems of detention have been developed” to keep the public safe without taking another life, “the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that ‘the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person,’ and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide.”

Cardinal Fernández used the evolution of the Church’s teaching on capital punishment to emphasize how seriously the Catholic Church takes the dignity of every human being created in the image and likeness of God.

“A firm rejection of the death penalty shows the extent to which it is possible to recognize the inalienable dignity of every human being and admit that he or she has a place in this world, because if I do not deny it to the worst of criminals, I will not deny it to anyone,” he said.

The cardinal also explained that in labeling the docu-

ment a “declaration” rather than a “note,” the dicastery was indicating it is “a text with a high doctrinal value.”

Declarations are rare, he said. “Dominus Iesus,” the doctrinal document affirming Christ as the only savior and the Catholic Church’s unique role in salvation, was a declaration issued in 2000 when the prefect was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who would go on to become Pope Benedict XVI.

Cardinal Fernández said the dicastery also labeled as a declaration “Fiducia Supplicans,” the text issued in December that opened the possibility for priests and other ministers to give non-liturgical blessings to gay and other couples not married in the Church.

While the subject matter of “Fiducia Supplicans” was “certainly less central, less important,” the cardinal said, it was issued as a “declaration” because “there was a magisterial innovation, an innovation in the way we understand blessings.”

Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, speaks at a news conference to present the dicastery’s declaration, “Dignitas Infinita” (“Infinite Dignity”) on human dignity at the Vatican press office April 8, 2024.



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Divine Mercy assures us that we will ‘never be abandoned,’ Bishop Iffert said

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Celebrated the second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday fell on April 7 this year. Vespers were held in the afternoon at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, led by Bishop John Iffert.

The Divine Mercy Vespers, which included Psalms, hymns and the praying of the Divine Mercy chaplet, was preceded by Adoration offered in the Cathedral, with the Sacrament of Reconciliation offered as well during this time — and for the length of the Vesper service.

“Today we celebrate the Feast of the Divine Mercy,” Bishop Iffert said in his homily at the Vespers. “The mercy of God that assures us again and again and again that we will never be left alone, that we will never be abandoned.”

Bishop Iffert asked those gathered to recall the person who “kept their hand on the back of your bicycle seat” when they first learned how to ride a bicycle. “Did that person, do you think, for a moment, ever regret the chance to catch you fall?” Bishop Iffert asked.

“If they responded in patience, it’s only because they learned it from their God,” he said, “who every time we fall, every time we slip, every time we err, every time we sin — calls out to us to turn back. Not with a desire to condemn, but as Jesus taught so clearly in his preaching, a desire to call all to salvation. All to mercy.”

“God uses even our sinfulness,” said Bishop Iffert, “to reveal his merciful nature. God uses even our errors to assure us of God’s love. This is God’s mercy. This is Divine Mercy.”



(above left) Prior to Divine Mercy Vespers, the Eucharist was set in a monstrance to allow for adoration. (above right) An image of Jesus as he appeared to St. Faustina, representative of Divine Mercy, is displayed in the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption on Divine Mercy Sunday. (top right) Bishop Iffert preaches the homily at the Divine Mercy Sunday Vespers. (below) Bishop Iffert raises the monstrance during Benediction.

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NEWS BRIEFS

National/World

Nigerian seminary celebrates centenary with a record number of clerics

ENUGU, Nigeria — The Bigard Memorial Seminary in Enugu, Nigeria is celebrating its 100th birthday in 2024. Officials say the sheer statistics warrant a big celebration: the institution has 780 clerics — a number not seen in years in seminaries across Europe and the Americas. Nigerian Christians are one of the most persecuted religious groups in the world, but the rector of the Bigard Seminary, Father Albert U. Ikpenwa, told OSV News the growth in vocations and of the church in Nigeria is a function of positive Christian teachings. “The church in Nigeria is growing not because of persecution, but because of the Christian values,” he said. As it celebrates 100 years, Bigard Seminary has “so far produced 4 Cardinals, 14 Archbishops, 35 Bishops and thousands of priests as well as prominent Nigerian, Sierra Leonian and Cameroonian citizens,” its website said. Nigeria shines as the beacon of Africa’s surge in religious vocations. Despite having fewer than half the number of Catholics as the United States — 31.5 million, counting for 15% of the country’s population in 2019 — Nigeria has shown a consistent rise in vocations since 1970. “Many young people enter the seminary and embrace the priesthood because they want to promote Christian values — the good news of salvation and the good aspects of our culture for the good of the body and soul,” Father Ikpenwa said.

Pope marks 800th anniversary of St. Francis of Assisi’s stigmata

VATICAN CITY — The wounds of Christ’s passion and death and the stigmata given to some Christians over the centuries are reminders of “the pain Jesus suffered in his flesh out of love for us and for our salvation,” Pope Francis said. But, the pope said, the stigmata also is a reminder that through baptism Christians participate in Christ’s victory over suffering and death because “it is precisely through his wounds that the mercy of the Risen, Crucified One flows to us as through a channel.” With a visiting group of Italian Franciscan friars from La Verna and from Tuscany April 5, Pope Francis joined celebrations of the 800th anniversary of St. Francis of Assisi receiving “the gift of the stigmata” after he had withdrawn to the hills of La Verna to pray and do penance in 1224. The friars also brought to Pope Francis a reliquary containing blood from the stigmata of St. Francis, a reliquary that is making a pilgrimage to different Franciscan communities.

Bishops in Rwanda express their closeness to 1994 genocide survivors

KIGALI, Rwanda — Rwanda marks 30 years since the 1994 genocide, the Catholic bishops in the country have expressed their closeness to survivors of the killings, while urging those convicted of crimes to seek forgiveness. The bishops spoke as the East African nation of 14 million people began a weeklong mourning period to remember nearly one million killed in 100 days of slaughter. “This crime caused misfortune and pain, the depth and breadth of which only God knows. Hearts still bleed, wounds are still fresh,” Bishop Anacleto Muvumvaneza of Nyundo, president of the Rwandan bishops’ Justice and Peace Commission said in a statement received by OSV News on April 8. He said he sends “a message of consolation and closeness to the survivors of the genocide in this moment of deep pain for the loss of their loved ones.” The massacre was triggered on April 6, 1994, when suspected rebels shot down a plane carrying Hutu President Juvénal Habyarimana. Ethnic Hutu extremists blamed the incident on the Tutsi ethnic group led by the Rwandan Patriotic Front and went on a killing spree, targeting ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus, eventually killing 800,000, but Rwandans say the genocide took more than a million lives and thousands of others were pushed out as refugees.

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Pope prays for all those affected by deadly quake in Taiwan

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis expressed his closeness to and solidarity with all those affected by a deadly earthquake in Taiwan. His prayers were with all those who had died, “the injured and all those displaced, as well as for the emergency personnel engaged in recovery efforts,” said a telegram sent April 4 to Bishop John Baptist Lee Keh-mien of Hsinchu, president of the Chinese regional bishops’ conference of Taiwan. The telegram, written on the pope’s behalf, was signed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state. Taiwanese officials said at least nine people were killed and 1,067 injured after an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.4 struck the island of Taiwan April 3 around 8 a.m. local time. Multiple aftershocks, including a 6.4 magnitude tremor, followed with more expected to hit in the coming days. Pope Francis was “deeply saddened” to learn of the loss of life and damage caused by the earthquake and “he assures everyone affected by this disaster of his heartfelt solidarity and spiritual closeness,” the telegram said. He also invoked “upon all the divine blessings of consolation and strength.”

Catholics donate nearly \$50,000 for emergency bridge relief appeal

BALTIMORE — Within 24 hours after Archbishop William E. Lori asked Catholics throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore to support twin emergency relief funds for those affected by the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse, nearly \$50,000 was raised in online donations. Donors contributed more than \$34,000 to the Francis Scott Key Bridge Relief Fund, which supports the ministry at Sacred Heart of Jesus-Sagrado Corazón de Jesús in Highlandtown. Redemptorist Father Ako Walker, pastor of the largely Spanish-speaking parish, has been providing pastoral support to the families of six construction workers — all of whom were from Mexico or Central America — who perished in the March 26 bridge collapse. The Key Relief Fund will also support the parish’s work with partners such as Catholic Charities-run Esperanza Center to meet the ongoing needs of the victims’ families and others in the city who face job losses. That could include assistance for housing costs, medical and mental health treatment, and replacement for lost wages.

Bishops visit Selma, Montgomery in ‘powerful encounter’ with legacy of racism

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — A group of Catholic bishops recently traveled to Montgomery and Selma, Alabama in what trip organizers called a “powerful encounter” amid the nation’s long-running reckoning with racism. Archbishop Shelton J. Fabre of Louisville, former chairman of the U.S. bishops’ Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism, and current committee chair Retired Auxiliary Bishop Joseph N. Perry of Chicago hosted a March 18-20 “Bishops’ Lenten Experience” in the two cities, which were the endpoints of a five-day, 54-mile nonviolent march led by civil rights leader and pastor the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in support of voting rights for Black Americans. The bishops’ visit to the sites had been coordinated by the committee on racism and the Washington-based Catholic Mobilizing Network, which works closely with the U.S. bishops to end the death penalty, promote restorative justice and advance racial equity. Touring the numerous historical sites commemorating the nation’s legacy of slavery, racism and mass incarceration was a profoundly moving experience, participants told OSV News. “I don’t think anyone can journey through the exhibits without registering great emotion in the face of the human devastation involved in our American history,” said Bishop Perry.

CRS workers remain in Gaza

JERUSALEM — Catholic Relief Services workers in Gaza are determined to continue their mission after seven members of World Central Kitchen were killed April 1 by a strike Israeli forces called a “grave mistake.” Now, “the overall humanitarian community is ... reeling from the news of the WCK incident,” said Jason Knapp, country representative for CRS in Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza. Knapp told OSV News he is “amazed every single day by the CRS colleagues who are providing assistance in Gaza. “The vast majority of our team is Gazan themselves and they are displaced,” he said. “Many of them have had family members lost. They have gone through really immense suffering and yet are finding quite significant hope in being able to serve those who are in need around them, even as they’re in need themselves.” The CRS Gaza team has “reached about three quarters of a million people since the beginning of the war.”

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In a hostile world, the vocation of Christians is to hope, pope says

Justin McLellan
Catholic News Service

Though the global situation risks plunging people into pessimism, Christians are called to pursue their vocation

of becoming “men and women of hope,” Pope Francis said.

“As individuals and as communities, amid the variety of charisms and ministries, all of us are called to embody

and communicate the Gospel message of hope in a world marked by epochal challenges,” the pope wrote in his message for World Day of Prayer for Vocations April 21.

Global challenges such as war; migration, rising poverty rates and climate change, in addition to personal difficulties encountered daily, “risk plunging us into resignation or defeatism,” the pope wrote in the message released March 19. He encouraged Christians to instead “cultivate a gaze full of hope and work fruitfully in response to the vocation we have received, in service to God’s kingdom of love, justice and peace.”

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For young people; That they may know the personal love of the Lord for them, and respond with open and generous hearts. We pray to the Lord.

To be “pilgrims of hope and builders of peace” means “to base our lives on the rock of Christ’s resurrection, knowing that every effort made in the vocation that we have embraced and seek to live out will never be in vain,” the pope wrote.

Pursuing a vocation, he explained, is not an imposed duty but rather “the surest way for us to fulfill our deepest desire for happiness.”

“Our life finds fulfillment when we discover who we are, what our gifts are, where we can make them bear fruit, and what path we can follow in order to become signs and instruments of love, generous acceptance, beauty and peace wherever we find ourselves,” he wrote.

The pope expressed his gratitude for the “hidden efforts” of those who consistently respond to their calls in life, namely parents, workers, consecrated men and women and priests, and he urged young people to make room for Jesus in their lives in order to discover their vocation.

“Let Jesus draw you to himself; bring him your important questions by reading the Gospels; let him challenge you by his presence, which always provokes in us a healthy crisis,” he told young people.

The pope also highlighted the “synodal character” of the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, noting how “amid the variety of our charisms, we are called to listen to one another and to journey together in order to acknowledge them and to discern where the Spirit is leading us for the benefit of all.”

Pope Francis encouraged people to prepare for the Holy Year 2025 by engaging in the current year of prayer, in which “all of us are called to rediscover the inestimable blessing of our ability to enter into heartfelt dialogue with the Lord and thus become pilgrims of hope.”

Prayer, he added, “is more about listening to God than about talking to him.”

The pope called on Christians to “open the doors of the prison in which we so often enclose ourselves, so that each of us can discover his or her proper vocation in the Church and in the world.”

“Let us be passionate about life and commit ourselves to caring lovingly for those around us in every place where we live,” he wrote.

Night to Remember

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