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**'Emmanuel — God is with us'**

The *Messenger* staff wishes you and your loved ones a very merry Christmas and a blessed New Year. This is our final issue of the year. Our next issue — the first issue of the 95th edition of the *Messenger* — will be Jan. 10.

The Curia offices will be closed from Dec. 23 – Jan. 6 for the Christmas season. Many staff members will have limited access to their e-mail during the holiday.

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Missed an edition? Current and back issues of the *Messenger* are available online at [covdio.org/messenger](http://covdio.org/messenger).



Christmas 2024

Greetings to all who rejoice to remember the birth of Christ on Christmas Day and who long for his coming again in glory. Blessings and peace.

I am writing to you today in the afterglow of our diocesan gathering to light the Christmas tree in St. Mary Park and bless the Bambinelli — the images of the Christ child that will be the center of our nativity scenes this Christmas. I love to meet you and your families and to discover the diversity of ways we picture and honor the Word made flesh.

This year you brought at least a dozen blond-haired, blue eyed models of Baby Jesus molded from plastic by Fischer-Price. This is an image of Jesus built to survive the rigors of a child's room, and even play. There were dozens of Fontanini-style figures, even a couple of heirloom pieces carefully transported in boxes layered with packing peanuts, bubble wrap and tissue paper. Your nativities represented cultures from around the world — the Holy Land, Kenya and Japan were among them. There were even abstract images, less-formed bits of clay with a line here and a hint there suggesting more than depicting a child swaddled with loving care.

St. Teresa of Avila writes of books she read that counseled against such images, even to represent the humanity of the incarnate Jesus. These would-be spiritual advisers argued that attachments to images, even of Christ, were a hindrance to contemplative prayer. The saint attempted to follow this advice but found it lacking. Teresa came to learn that such images that stir our connection and devotion to the humanity of Christ were not a hindrance, but a great help for growth in holiness.

"I thought the humanity was an impediment [to prayer] ... I had been so devoted all my life to Christ, ... and then I always returned to my custom of rejoicing in this Lord, especially when I received Communion. I wanted to keep ever before my eyes a painting or image of Him since I was unable to keep Him as engraved in my soul as I desired. Is it possible, my Lord, that it entered my mind even for an hour that You would be an impediment to my greater good? Where have all my blessings come from but from you?"

Teresa records this episode in her life, she says, to help us understand how great the error of renouncing these images of Jesus can be and how it can impoverish our prayer.

Christmas is filled with opportunities to encounter the image of Christ — in art, nativities, on Christmas cards, in the praying community adoring at the manger and the altar, in the faces of our poor neighbors and those who serve them with charity, and most perfectly in the Most Holy Eucharist.

In whichever ways we encounter something of his face this Christmas, may Christ be engraved on our souls. May we be more deeply conformed to the holy one who comes to be our love and our light. May our families and communities overflow with his presence and redound to the glory of his name.

My prayer for you this Christmas Day is the same that I offered for each person and family at the Blessing of the Bambinelli on the Third Sunday of Advent. May Christ be always in your heart and in your home.

Merry Christmas! As we celebrate the birth of the Word made flesh, let us love one another.

Yours in the Joy and Love of Christmas,

+ Bishop John Iffert  
Diocese of Covington

**Fourth Sunday of Advent, Dec. 22**

**Fourth Sunday of Advent**

Hope in the Lord! Hold firm, take heart and hope in the Lord! —Psalm 27:14



# Third annual Baminelli blessing and fifth annual diocesan Christmas tree lighting brightens St. Mary’s Park

**Maura Baker**  
Staff Writer

St. Mary’s Park, Covington, welcomed once more guests from around the diocese to the 2024 Baminelli and Christmas tree blessing, Dec. 14. More than 150 visitors brought their families and “Baminellis” — the baby Jesus’s from their home nativities — to be blessed by Bishop John Iffert — as well as to share in a night of live choir music, cookies, hot chocolate and comradery on the third Sunday of Advent.

The night began, as Mass at the nearby Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption concluded, with the crowd

gathering in the park to the sound of Christmas carols sung by members of the St. Cecilia Parish, Independence, Children’s Choir. Although it was a gloomy evening, the rain waited enough to allow for the crowd to gather and for the tree lighting and blessings to take place.

Bishop Iffert expressed gratitude, saying, “We’re very grateful that we have a little respite here to light the tree and bless the baby Jesus,” before lighting the tree to break up the night.

“Thank you for being here,” he continued, “I love this evening, and I’m so grateful that you are all here.”

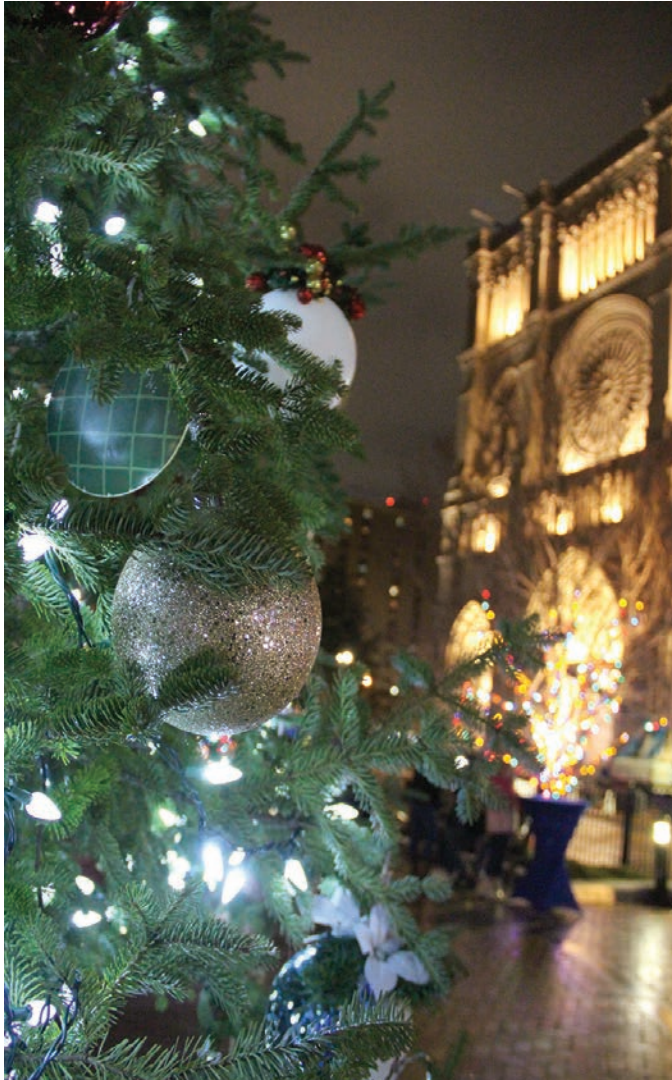
As the evening progressed, high schoolers from St.

Patrick High School Choir took over the stage, while Kathy Nienaber, principal, St. Augustine School, Covington, shared the nativity story to children in Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium.

The night ended with Bishop Iffert individually blessing every family’s Baminelli — praying over them and anointing them with Holy Water.

*To watch a related video where guests at this year’s Baminelli talk about their own Baminellis, scan the QR code on page 14.*

Baker photos



(above left) The Cathedral lights glow behind the newly lit and blessed Christmas tree at St. Mary’s Park, Covington. (above center) Bishop Iffert blesses the Christmas tree at the 2024 Baminelli. (above right) Bishop Iffert inspects a particularly miniature figure of the infant Jesus. (below left) Members of the children’s choir from St. Cecilia Parish, Independence. (below center) Bishop Iffert blesses the “baminellis,” or baby Jesus’s, of two children. (below right) Children listen as Kathy Nienaber, principal, St. Augustine School, Covington, reads the nativity story.



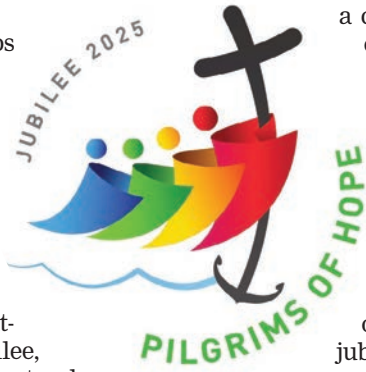
# Solemn opening of the jubilee with procession, Dec. 29, replaces Holy Doors in dioceses worldwide

Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — While bishops around the world are asked to designate their cathedrals or other significant churches as special places of pilgrimage and prayer for the Holy Year 2025, the Vatican is not asking them to dedicate and open a “Holy Door” at those churches.

The Dicastery for Evangelization, which is coordinating the celebration of the Jubilee, issued a note Aug. 1 praising “the pastoral and devotional motivations” of bishops who wanted to designate a local Holy Door but saying the only holy doors will be at the basilicas of St. Peter at the Vatican, St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major and St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome and, perhaps, at a prison.

In “Spes Non Confundit” (“Hope Does Not Disappoint”), the papal bull officially proclaiming the Holy



Year, Pope Francis wrote that “in order to offer prisoners a concrete sign of closeness, I would myself like to open a Holy Door in a prison, as a sign inviting prisoners to look to the future with hope and a renewed sense of confidence.”

In Catholic tradition, the Holy Door represents the passage to salvation — the path to a new and eternal life, which was opened to humanity by Jesus.

The tradition goes back more than 600 years. Pope Martin V, in 1423, opened the Holy Door in the Basilica of St. John Lateran — the cathedral of the Diocese of Rome — for the first time for a jubilee. Later, Pope Alexander VI had Holy Doors opened at the four main basilicas in Rome for the Holy Year of 1500.

The doors are formally closed at the end of a Holy Year and then bricked up by masons.

Starting in the 16th century, the ceremony to open the door in St. Peter’s Basilica included the pope reciting verses from the Psalms and striking the wall covering the Holy Door with a silver hammer three times.

The designation of a Holy Door in every diocese and at many shrines around the world was an innovation Pope Francis made for the celebration of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy in 2015-2016.

In his bull of indiction proclaiming the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis asked the world’s bishops to open Holy Doors so that their dioceses and eparchies would be “directly involved in living out this Holy Year as an extraordinary moment of grace and spiritual renewal,” ensuring the Jubilee would be “celebrated both in Rome and in the Particular Churches as a visible sign of the Church’s universal communion.”

In its note Aug. 1, the Dicastery for Evangelization pointed out that the pope did not make such a request of bishops for the Holy Year 2025.

Instead, Pope Francis asked bishops to celebrate the solemn opening of the jubilee on Sunday, Dec. 29, and suggested that “a pilgrimage that sets out from a church chosen for the ‘collectio’ and then proceeds to the cathedral can serve to symbolize the journey of hope that, illumined

(Continued on page 12.)

## New Beds, Same Mercy

With the Emergency Shelter of Northern Kentucky



### Campaign of Mercy

As part of the Diocesan wide Campaign of Mercy, the Messenger has been highlighting a different work of mercy each month. For the month of December, the focus is on the corporal work of mercy, sheltering the homeless also referred to as harboring the harborless. In 2023 the Kentucky Housing Corporation K-Count reported 4,766 people in Kentucky as homeless. In the 14 counties that make up the Diocese of Covington, 345 people were counted among the homeless. The K-Count is a “point-in-time” count of persons experiencing homelessness on a single night in Kentucky. The count is typically held the last Wednesday in January.

The Emergency Shelter of Northern Kentucky has been sheltering the homeless since its inception in 2011. In July of 2024, 17 volunteers helped the Emergency Shelter of Northern Kentucky build new beds to replace the old ones. This ensured that those without shelter had the best conditions possible as they worked to find permanent housing.



### Crosier Guild — building a community

At the invitation of Jim Hess, director, Stewardship and Mission Services, about 20 members of the Crosier Guild gathered at the St. Agnes Parish chapel, Dec. 9, for Mass with Bishop John Iffert (pictured left). Begun in 1997, the Crosier Guild are benefactors who have gifted \$1,000 or more for seven years to the Diocese of Covington’s Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal. There are currently 1,250 Crosier Guild members.

This year, Mr. Hess has updated the “thank you” gift for new Crosier Guild members to include a coffee mug and crosier-shaped lapel pin. Additionally, he has scheduled several social and spiritual events, where Guild members can get to know Bishop Iffert and each other.

In his role, Mr. Hess said, he doesn’t want to be seen as simply an appeal coordinator but instead,

“I want to build relationships with those that support the Diocese and are the lifeblood of the good works that the diocese is able to do in our churches and our community. The Crosier Guild is a way for myself and this very generous community of supporters of the Diocese, to get together regularly throughout the year, to pray together, to get to know one another better, and for them to get to know Bishop Iffert better as well.”

Based on gifts to the 2024 DPAA, in 2025 the Stewardship and Missions Office will add 50 new Crosier Guild members.

Keener photo

### Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption 2024 Christmas Season Mass Schedule

<p><b>Tuesday, Dec. 24</b> <b>5:30 p.m.</b>, Mass of the Vigil of Christmas Music: Organ, Violin, and Cantor</p>	<p><b>Wednesday, Dec. 25</b> <b>10 a.m.</b>, Mass of Christmas Day Music by the Cathedral Bishop’s Choir</p>	<p><b>Wednesday, Jan. 1</b> <b>10 a.m.</b>, Mass of the Solemnity of Mary, The Holy Mother of God (Holy day of obligation)</p>
<p><b>Wednesday, Dec. 25</b> <b>12 a.m.</b>, Pontifical Midnight Mass; doors open at 11 p.m. Prelude Music begins at 11:30 p.m. Music: Organ, Cathedral Bishop’s Choir Midnight Mass will be live streamed online at <a href="https://cov-cathedral.com">https://cov-cathedral.com</a> and broadcast live on The CW at 12 a.m.</p>	<p><b>Saturday, Dec. 28, 4:30 p.m.</b> and <b>Sunday, Dec. 29, 7:30 a.m., 10 a.m., and 5:30 p.m.</b> The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph</p>	<p>Confessions will be heard: Friday, Dec. 13, 12–1 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 14, 3–4 p.m. Friday, Dec. 20, 12–1 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 21, 3–4 p.m.</p> <p>The Cathedral will be closed after 10 a.m. Mass on Christmas Day and after 10 a.m. Mass on New Year’s Day. The Cathedral Parish Office will be closed on Dec. 20, 2024 – Jan. 1, 2025.</p>
<p><b>Tuesday, Dec. 31</b> <b>5:30 p.m.</b>, Mass of the Vigil of the Solemnity of Mary, The Holy Mother of God (Holy day of obligation)</p>		



### Bishop’s Schedule

- Dec. 22**  
Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 10 a.m.
- Dec. 23–Jan. 3**  
Diocesan Curia offices closed in observance of the Solemnity of Christmas and the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
- Dec. 24**  
Christmas Midnight Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 11:59 p.m.
- Dec. 25**  
Christmas Day Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 10 a.m.
- Dec. 29**  
Opening Mass Jubilee 2025, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, gather at St. Mary’s Park for opening procession, 2 p.m.
- Jan. 5-9**  
Region V Bishops retreat
- Jan. 6**  
Diocesan Curia Offices re-open 8:30 a.m.
- Jan. 11**  
Vigil Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 4:30 p.m.

# Bishop Iffert and students at St. Joseph Pre-K delight in the story of Christmas

Bella Young

Multimedia Correspondent

Bishop Iffert visited St. Joseph Parish, Camp Springs, to spread Christmas cheer and read to the three- and four-year-old Pre-Kindergarten students, the story of Christmas. Sitting in a chair with the students gathered around, Bishop Iffert asked if they had ever heard the true story of Christmas.

The small heads bobbed up and down as one student pointed Bishop Iffert in the direction of the manger scenes they had colored earlier in the week and one student excitedly saying, "We have that story!"

Bishop Iffert, having grown up on a farm in rural Illinois, took time out of the story to explain the significance of what a stable is.

"I grew up with barns ... A stable is a place where they keep the animals, it is not a place for human beings ... This innkeeper saw that Mary was pregnant and they were expecting a baby, and he said 'Well, you can stay with my animals,'" Bishop Iffert said.

Pointing out the many animals surrounding the Holy Family in the illustrated book, Bishop Iffert engaged the children and asked them if they knew what sounds donkeys and cows made. Having grown up in Camp Springs, which amassed 38,744 acres of farm land in 2022, the children knew what sounds cows made. A series of "moos" erupted from them, sending a wave of laughter from Bishop Iffert to the children.

Once the story was finished and the children had exhausted all the questions they had, Bishop Iffert reached his hand into a stocking and pulled out candy canes. The delighted children swarmed around Bishop Iffert as he doled out the hook shaped treats. As the children and Bishop Iffert parted ways with a resounding goodbye, the children still buzzed with excitement over the Christmas Story.



(above) Bishop Iffert reads to attentive students.



(right) Bishop Iffert shows the cover of the version of the "Christmas Story" he shared with students.

# Joyful Days

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DCCH CENTER  
 for Children & Families

# Be Witnesses

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

## Religious Communities in the Diocese of Covington

- Benedictine Sisters of St. Walburg Monastery [www.stwalburg.org](http://www.stwalburg.org)
- Brothers of the Poor of St. Francis [www.brothersofthepoorofstfrancis.org](http://www.brothersofthepoorofstfrancis.org)
- Passionist Nuns [www.erlangerpassionists.com](http://www.erlangerpassionists.com)
- Sisters of Divine Providence [www.cdpkentucky.org](http://www.cdpkentucky.org)
- Sisters of Notre Dame [www.sndusa.org](http://www.sndusa.org)
- Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker [www.ssjw.org](http://www.ssjw.org)

## Public and Private Associations

- Franciscan Daughters of Mary [www.fdoofmary.org](http://www.fdoofmary.org)
- Missionaries of St. John the Baptist [www.msjb.info](http://www.msjb.info)

# Love God. Love Your Neighbor. Change the World.

**Notre Dame Sister Marla Monahan**  
Contributor

Love God. Love Your Neighbor. Change the World. I recently saw this message on the electronic signage outside one of our Catholic schools. I was entering the school for an archery tournament.

I talked to three students I know, two seniors and a sophomore. Two of the students shared a story: they had been at Skyline, noticed an older gentleman eating alone, and paid for his meal. They told me how he cried when he found out.

I reminded them of the signage I had seen outside their school and told them they were doing that, they were “loving God, loving their neighbor, and changing the world.” The third student added: “Yes, one coney at a time!” And that’s how we all do it.

Our Catholic secondary schools were all founded by or first staffed by religious communities. We are so blessed that their influence lives on. And so blessed by what our children continue to teach us as they share their goodness and gifts, nurtured in their families and in our schools.

Later, I asked these same three high school students what they thought was the meaning of life. One said, “To do God’s will.” Another, “To use the gifts God gave us to make the world a better place.” And the third, “To have fun.”

All three were full of wisdom. We may be skeptical of the third response, but it reminds me of the poem, “Enjoy Me,” by St. Theresa of Avila. It reminds me that we have a God who is kind and good beyond imagining, a God who shares joy even in the midst of the challenges and hardships and suffering of our lives. A God who calls us to love.



CNS photo/Crosiers

St. Teresa of Avila is depicted in a church in Troyes, France. In Castilian Spain, Teresa was born to a wealthy family and educated in an Augustinian convent. Eschewing marriage, she entered the Carmelites in 1536. She began to practice contemplative prayer during a long illness, and grew dissatisfied with the bigness and worldly distractions of her convent. After a “second conversion” in 1555, she founded the reform-minded Discalced Carmelites and wrote several books. For her contribution to mystical theology and Christian spirituality, in 1970, Teresa was the first female to be named a doctor of the church.

Just these two words He spoke changed my life.

### “Enjoy Me.”

What a burden I thought I was to carry — a crucifix, as did He.  
Love once said to me, “I know a song, would you like to hear it?”  
And laughter came from every brick in the street.  
And from every pore in the sky. After a night of prayer,  
He changed my life when He sang, “Enjoy Me.”

— St. Teresa of Avila

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

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COMMENTARY

# God's peace!

"In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains." (Isaiah 2:2, Micah 4:10) As the liturgical year comes to an end, you hear many Scripture readings about mountains. "Who may go up the mountain of the Lord? Who can stand in his holy place? (Ps 24:3-5)

Recently, I read an article about a mountain, it was written by Simone Knego who made it to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro, a dormant volcano in Tanzania and the highest free-standing mountain above sea level in the world. What intrigued me at first was the title, "Climbing a Mountain Changed My Life," then reading, "My only goal was to get to the top."

I was hooked! The more I read, the more it reminded me of the spiritual life and how it too can be like climbing a mountain.

Last year I began to use a walker some of the time. When asked about it, my usual reply is, "This walker is just a sign that I'm not made for this world." You see, if this world were all there is, then my knees and the rest of my members wouldn't be failing me. But I am on my way somewhere.



Mother Seraphina Quinlan

As a child I learned that I was created to know and love God, so to be united with him for eternity. When we experience adversity in any form, how we think of it is extremely important. We can feel sorry for ourselves, complain to others or even blame God for our ills. Or we can make a choice to keep our eyes on the goal, to get to the top and keeping our focus on heaven, similar to what the author stated in her article.

Keeping her eyes on getting to the top of the highest mountain on earth is what helped her to face grave challenges that cause many to turn back. Challenges like the below-freezing temperatures, oxygen deprivation at higher altitudes that can lead to altitude sickness, trekking for up to 14 hours a day, ice rain, having to navigate random rock falls or avalanches, exhaustion due to lack of sleep, having no restrooms or running water, etc.

Climbing a huge mountain like Kilimanjaro is not something one does merely for recreation — one must train very seriously for a long time so that, when necessary, it is possible to "push yourself out of your comfort zone," to keep going in spite of occasional setbacks.

To grow in relationship with the Lord is also not something you do casually. The Church teaches us that practicing virtue is important in growing our relationship with

the Lord. Virtues teach us to make a habit of doing good and to give others the best of ourselves. For instance, Prudence helps us to find the good in every situation and doing it, Fortitude gives us the strength to resist temptation, overcome obstacles and conquer fear, etc.

All of this takes dedication and focus, it demands conscious effort to stay focused on the goal, with a knowledge that even when I have setbacks and make mistakes, the God who made us for Himself will forgive each person who comes to him who would apologize and make amends. It would be the same for any other relationship, if I offend someone, I must apologize and make amends if I want to keep that relationship.

This is why I love the Sacrament of Reconciliation! You have an opportunity to apologize to God and have the knowledge and surety of forgiveness, and are blessed with grace, the spiritual strength to avoid sin.

Climbing a mountain taught the author, "that it's not about what I can do, it's about what I want to do. If you want to do something in life that seems impossible, figure out how you can do it."

If being a saint, which is simply getting to heaven seems like an impossible task, keep your eye on the goal, and don't look back, just figure out how you can do it.

*Mother Seraphina Quinlan is mother superior for the Franciscan Daughters of Mary, Covington.*

## Doing the 'work' of Advent

An Advent tradition in our small parish grade school was lighting the Advent wreath each morning in our front hall together. I loved the songs and prayers and wanted to be a part of it. I volunteered to light a candle. Looking back, I still don't know how second-grade me convinced the teacher that I had the faintest notion of how to light a match. I guess it never entered my mind that I couldn't do it. Let me assure you, it did not end well! I turned up the match straight down (FYI-don't do that!), burned myself, dropped the match and set the plastic wreath ablaze. It melted all over the desk it was sitting on. I don't remember how they put it out. My best friend has never let me forget it and will not, to this day, allow me to light a match in her presence.

The fervor I felt for Advent was not burned out that day, pardon the pun. It has grown over the years to bring a sort of calm to the unsettling practices of "doing Christmas" in our very secularized society. Preparation in our modern world is an external act that is accompanied by an endless list of "obligations" that are really just putting more space between each of us and the real meaning of Christmas.

In the Bible we are told to "wait" and to "watch." In these, we are both building anticipation and jubilation for the birth of our Lord and preparing ourselves for this blessed event. We must take a step back from the hustle and bustle in order to do the work to prepare a place in our hearts for Christ to be born within us.

"We're waiting for Jesus like Mary," was a lyric to a song by Marianne Misetch, SNJM, that we sang at our parish growing up. I always loved the song, but until I was a mother myself, I did not truly understand what that meant. As a mother, I know that feeling of waiting.

Waiting is active, not passive. You are living the fear, the expectation, the joy. With the passage of time the excitement grows as we await something new and special.

Now imagine that you are Mary, not only bringing new life into the world, but the life that would save all lives. It was as if hope was growing inside her. Through Advent we can share in this experience with Mary.

Preparation happens within. Mary fully understood this. It was not about material things, but about her readiness and willingness to do whatever it took to bring her child into the world.

Not only had she agreed to be the Mother of God, but she had also agreed to the life that came with it. A life where she would travel away from her home to give birth in a stable, a life where she would see her son killed, a life where she would see him rise again.

She was steadfast in her faith knowing that even in a barn, her needs would be provided for. Her calling was not easy, but she prepared for whatever she encountered knowing that God was always in control of the plan. I can only imagine how Mary felt waiting to see the fullness of God's plan for her son.

What does it mean to "watch" for our Lord? We know that in both Luke and Matthew we hear Jesus speak about keeping lamps lit in anticipation of a return — in Luke for the master and in Matthew for the bridegroom — both represent our Lord. We are being told to be active and not idle as we prepare for Jesus' coming. Prayer and penance are both ways that we can ready ourselves.

I distinctly remember Father David Shockey, our parish priest when I was young, telling us to, "live a life of prayer." He explained that everything you do could be prayer, as long as you keep God with you. When you

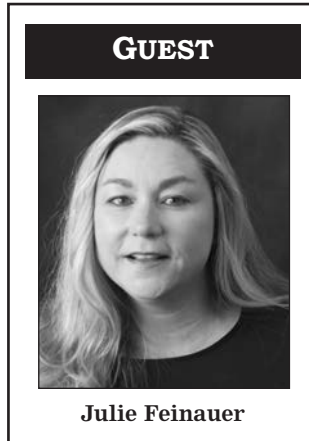
work, when you play, when you are with others or alone. Not only does it give you the opportunity to ask for help and guidance, but also to review your choices and decisions with him.

In conjunction with prayer, penance is necessary to make changes when we stray away from what is right and good. By receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation we can examine the ways in which we have separated ourselves from God. In Isaiah 40:3 we are told to "prepare a way for the Lord". In confession we are in a very real sense straightening the pathway between ourselves and Jesus. It is a great gift to be able to remove the barriers that sin creates in our relationship with God.

It is not too late to prepare! Do the work of Advent and experience the true joy of the season by welcoming Jesus, not just sitting idly or worrying about material things.

So, remember, wait and watch! Make straight a highway for our Lord! And, for heaven's sake, learn to light a match!

*Julie Feinauer is director of the Safe Environment Office, Diocese of Covington, Ky.*



GUEST

Julie Feinauer

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## Christmas cribs

As the Christmas season begins and the crèches are assembled, the delicate figures invite reflection. There is Mary in a clean blue dress, her head neatly veiled. I run my finger down her gown and note that it is wrinkle free.



Sister Fidelis Tracy, C.D.P.

She has a calm, placid, reverent look on her fine features. Joseph also is calm and reverent before the new-born child. While the hay-covered ground hints at the situation of a stable, there is no evidence of recent animal habitation. There is also no evidence of a recent birth other than the child who is the object of the gaze of Mary and Joseph. How am I to find inspiration and models to follow in this picture-perfect scene when my life is filled with struggles? I

tend to be filled with anxieties, impatient with life's messiness and apt to tidy up my surroundings.

Some will assert that this birth was different. After all, it is the birth of Jesus who is God incarnate. The conception was miraculous, so the birth was pain free and perfect, the stable clean and free of animal soil. But, nevertheless, I venture to put my foot on the road of "what ifs." What if I take seriously the full humanity of Jesus? What if Jesus was truly like us in all things but sin? I try to imagine how these figures might accurately portray the lives of Mary and Joseph at the time.

News reaches Mary and Joseph about a decree requiring them to make a ninety-mile trip on unpaved roads. Anxiety, fear, frustration, anger follow in quick succession as the reality of the task ahead sinks in. There could not be a more inconvenient time.

Joseph is frantically calculating the provisions they will need and wondering how they will be able to prepare. The village is very poor. His income is limited and now he will not be able to work for a span of time. Mary recalls the words of the angel, "You have found favor with God." Is this how God favors or fulfills? Where is the promised land, free of foreign domination, flowing milk and honey?

They set out, Joseph on foot unsuccessfully tries to direct the donkey's feet away from the ruts and gullies in the dusty road. Bump, bump as the donkey trudges along. Despite Joseph's efforts, the ride is uncomfortable for a woman about to give birth. Kick, kick, kick. The child in her womb demands her attention. The baby's nudge, which has brought joy and laughter to her face, now warns of an imminent birth. Anxious questions arise. Will she give birth on the side of the road?

Bethlehem nears promising a place to rest, perhaps to sleep. Joseph approaches each inn, requests lodging and asks if there is a midwife in the area. Kindly one offers room in a stable that will provide both space and a measure of privacy. It is a stable. The space is filled with hay that still has the evidence of animal occupation. It is hardly neat and clean. The birth is not comfortable. The crèche depiction is deceptive.

However, the hearts of these parents are filled with trust in God, faith in God's promise, peace and reverence. Ah, then, the figures do not represent the weariness that is real, the hair matted with straw, the clothing soiled from the journey and childbirth, the brows furrowed with worry. What they portray is the spirits of Mary and Joseph — faith in a loving God who keeps promises. Perhaps, the figures are an appropriate representation of the scene after all. I pray that in the midst of the daily struggles of my life, I, too, will be able to quiet my spirit and live in certainty of God's care for me. Faith will not end the struggles and dilemmas of daily life, but it will change the way I see and respond.

Whatever our situation, may our faith bring us to see the bright stars in the night sky inviting us to a place of new life and joy. May the air be with the songs of angels announcing good news. May the people we meet be wise people who offer us the wisdom we need for all our journeys. May our hearts be filled with reverence for all the life around us — our families, our faith, our good earth. Christmas blessings!

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

## How does this happen to me that the Lord God should come to me?

The readings for the fourth Sunday of Advent — Cycle C — are: Micah 5:1–4a, Hebrews 10:5–10 and Luke 1:39–45.

"When Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me ...'" Let us stop there for a moment and let us consider this great truth we celebrate, but that may not register deeply enough: The Incarnation is the greatest revelation and revolution not just in world history, but in the cosmos.

As the theologian, Tracy Rowland has pointed out, "when the word became flesh a new era of grace began, redemption from the effects of the first sin became possible, and humanity found itself in a sacramental cosmos."

This is one of the many profound things we contemplate and that we petition when we pray in our opening collect, "Pour forth we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may be His Passion and Cross be brought the glory of His Resurrection."

As Christ has entered into our common humanity — uniting divinity and humanity — and has entered into the very cosmos created through Him — there is a grace, a meaning, a purpose, and a truth — which we call the Logos — that lies within the very substance of being and existence itself.

As a result of that profound realization, we cry out with Psalmist, "... let us see your face and we shall be saved." Precisely because of the Incarnation, we can see the face of God in Christ. However, we can do more than just "see." We can be joined to Him in a cosmos charged with His grace and life, entering into that divine life through the extension of His Incarnation in time — the Church — and the sacramental order that communicates his grace and life to us.

Precisely because the Incarnation is the greatest revolution in world history, the claim of Jesus to be the way, the truth, and the life is not just some optional "religious" perspective on the world, any more than quantum physics is just some optional notion about how matter is constituted.

The cosmic consequences of the birth of this baby in Bethlehem should be obvious from the declaration in St.

John's Gospel that all things were made through Him, and that in Him is life, and the life was the light of men. This divine life and light of the God-Man is the Logos become flesh. Apart from this Logos become flesh, there would simply be no meaning because without this unity of humanity and divinity there is no purpose within existence. There would be no sanctification and eternal life. Existence, ultimately, would be just one thing after another.

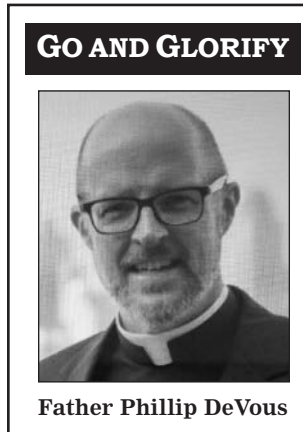
When we speak of the Gospel being the "Good News" surely this revelation of meaning within the cosmos and of divine purpose in our personal existence is a big part of it. It recalls that beautiful prayer the priest says quietly while mixing the water into the wine: "By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled Himself to share in our humanity." Right there you have a tidy summation of what we mean

when we say a sacramental cosmos has been revealed and revolution is in our midst.

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ is the definitive answer to the crisis of meaning which afflicts our age. In my analysis, the crisis of meaning has largely been brought about by a worship of money as the sole mark of "success," the exultation of power and influence as the sole validator of our existence, the reduction of the perception of the human person to that of time-bound pleasure maximizing machine, a suffocating philosophical materialism that decimates the possibility of meaning, and a contemporary Church often enamored of a beige worldliness, fearful of forcefully proclaiming and living the grace of the Incarnation, with all that such a glorious grace demands.

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ establishes for each of us the direction, purpose and priority of our lives because it reveals to us something extraordinary: We are God's priority. How does this happen to me that Lord God should come to me? Our answer to that question is the very substance of our faith and THE message of mercy, hope, redemption and salvation for the whole world. Merry Christmas!

*Father Phillip W. DeVous is the pastor of St. Charles Borromeo, Flemingsburg, and St. Rose of Lima, May's Lick.*



Father Phillip DeVous

## Pilgrimage of Faith — NCYC

Plans are underway for the upcoming National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis, Nov. 22–22, 2025. Attendees will be taking part in the premier Catholic youth event in the nation.

NCYC provides high school students with an unparalleled opportunity to connect with their Catholic faith through dynamic worship, powerful speakers, and meaningful prayer. Vibrant liturgies, adoration, and personal testimonies help teens experience the beauty and depth of their relationship with God.

Being surrounded by thousands of young Catholics from across the country also helps them realize they are part of a much larger, diverse and vibrant Church. This communal experience fosters a sense of solidarity and inspires them to see themselves as a part of the global Catholic family.

Attending NCYC as both a diocesan and parish or school group fosters a sense of unity and belonging through travel, small group discussion, shared meals and prayer. Last year, the Diocese of Covington took 195 youth and 65 adults.

Plan now! The Youth Ministry Office is coordinating the overall pilgrimage, including tickets, hotel, transportation, food, and preparatory gatherings. Parish and Catholic High School group leaders manage their group, collect money, and chaperone their participants. Currently, the following parishes are committed to attend-

ing, Blessed Sacrament, St. Mary, Alexandria; St. Joseph, Cold Spring; St. Joseph, Crescent Springs; St. Pius X, Edgewood and St. Thomas, Ft. Thomas.

The following High Schools are coordinating groups, Bishop Brossart, Covington Catholic, Notre Dame Academy, Newport Central Catholic, and St. Henry District High School. New groups are welcome and young people who want to attend, but are not associated with a group, will be connected to an existing group.

The early bird ticket price of \$310 ends on April 15, 2025. So please plan now both financially and spiritually. Encourage high school students in your life to add this pilgrimage to their 2025 calendar and let's do everything that we can do to get them there.

Every teenager needs the opportunity to experience NCYC at least once in their lifetime. It is a powerful, transformative Holy-Spirit, Pentecost-type moment in time, yet it has a lasting impact on individuals, families, parishes, schools, the Church and the world. A Eucharistic Revival is taking root among our young people at these events. The future of the Church is full of hope and promise with our young people. Join them, support them, pray for them. Together we thrive!

Contact Angie Poat, diocesan youth minister for additional information at [apat@covdio.org](mailto:apat@covdio.org).

*Angie Poat is the diocesan youth minister for the Diocese of Covington, Ky*



Angie Poat



THOMAS MORE  
UNIVERSITY

Make It **More.**

### About Thomas More University

Founded in 1921, Thomas More University stands as a beacon of academic excellence and innovation, challenging students to Make It More. Deeply rooted in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, this timeless foundation supports a transformative educational experience as students looking to Be More are guided in the pursuit of knowledge, ethical leadership, and the integration of faith and reason. Through the high-quality, liberal arts education provided at Thomas More, students examine the ultimate meaning of life, their place in the world, and their responsibility to others which leads to the ability to think critically and contribute meaningfully to the world. Serving more than 2,000 students, Thomas More takes its place as the premier Catholic university in the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky region, being named one of the 2024 Best Colleges in the U.S. by the Wall Street Journal. To find out more, visit [thomasmore.edu](http://thomasmore.edu).

## Cultivating an authentic Catholic culture on campus: How Hannah Keegan is lighting the path for TMU

Submitted by Thomas More University

*In early 2024, Hannah Keegan was appointed as the inaugural director for a new initiative at Thomas More University — the Center for Faith, Mission, and Catholic Education. With a mission of cultivating an authentic Catholic culture at Thomas More, the Center was launched to serve as a catalyst for transformative faith experiences, intentional mission integration, and creative Catholic educational programs on campus and in the wider community. In this Q&A, Keegan reflects on her first year at the helm of the Center, and provides an early look at what's to come in 2025.*

**Q: What have your top priorities been since being named inaugural director of the Center for Faith, Mission, and Catholic Education?**

Keegan: I would say my first priority was to understand better who are the people who make up this great community — to understand a lot of the history of the University, which is rich and long in 100 years, and also to understand who are the people that are making big contributions in all kinds of areas — administrative (and) regarding students' curricular contributions to the community.

(I'm) trying to get a better lay of the land, because the goal of the Center is to integrate the Catholic identity into all aspects of campus. In order to do that, I have to understand and better know all aspects of campus. The role of the Center, for me, is to valorize and to bring to life the things that are already good, true and beautiful happening around the University, and to try to integrate all of the things that are already fruitful and giving life to our community — to integrate them into our mission ... to be a Catholic institution in the Diocese of Covington and the wider region.

**Q: What are some of the events that you have planned for the Thomas More community in 2025?**

Keegan: That's a great question. The idea we have for the year 2025 is to do more interdisciplinary initiatives. For community involvement, I really have a heart for trying to bring together departments — to have events on campus with students from different areas of study to come together for a common conversation.

Some examples that we did this year are: the Massimo Robberto event on the James Webb Space Telescope that happened in the spring — this event brought together the physics and the theology departments, and other students as well; we just had the papal astronomer come and that was a beautiful event to again bring together the science and humanities a little bit more; and, we (had) a Flannery O'Connor film screening — drawing together two different pieces of the humanities. For

2025, we hope to do more of this.

We want to have a series of events leading up to (Thomas More University's) sustainability days that focus on a broader conception of sustainability that has in mind what Pope Francis calls integral ecology — the whole person — and our personal involvement with all of creation. We'd (also) like to have some events on different social topics like immigration.

The Wm. T. (Bill) Robinson III '67 Institute for Religious Liberty (IRL), which is a facet of the Center, has a whole series of St. John Paul II events, and one event that we would like to do for the Center is one on ecumenism — the dialogue between the different denominations of Christianity and the Catholic Church. What does it mean that we all recognize in our brothers and sisters in Christ? What is the unity among all of the faithful Catholics and protestants? St. John Paul II wrote a great encyclical on ecumenism, so in light of this moment for him and the series at the University, we would like to contribute to that conversation as well.

The goals of the Center for the Thomas More community, for me, are to continue to bring people into conversation from different pockets and different questions, to have everyone have a seat at the table be able to make a contribution.

**Q: What would you like current or future students at Thomas More to know about the Center for Faith, Mission, and Catholic Education?**

Keegan: I want them to know that I want their involvement and contributions to the Center because it's at the service of the University, and the University exists to serve the students ... their questions, their passions, their skepticisms. Their contributions are really essential for the Center, to be useful for them and in order to serve them, I need to know them more.

I'm really interested in having the Center be a place of academic rigor where we think through deep questions about life and faith, but it also has more than an academic component. It has a community component — the community of Thomas More and also the wider community. I think there are different tiers that the Center is operating in, the local reality of the faculty, staff, and students, the wider reality of the Diocese and the culture at large.

Regarding students, I'm super interested in what they're interested in. I want to know what they're passionate about and the more things I discover that they're passionate about, the more I can show glimpses of how their passions are relevant to the passion of the Church, which is for their destiny, for their ultimate horizon and happiness.

You can watch the full interview with Hannah Keegan at: [tmuky.us/keegan](http://tmuky.us/keegan). Learn more about the Center for Faith, Mission and Catholic Education and find events throughout the year at: [tmuky.us/CFFMCE](http://tmuky.us/CFFMCE).



Hannah Keegan

### Upcoming Events at Thomas More University

**Mon, Dec 23**

11:30 a.m.–12 p.m.

Mass at Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel

**Thu, Jan 2**

11:30 a.m.–12 p.m.

Mass at Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel

5:30 p.m.–7:30 p.m.

Thomas More University Women's Basketball vs Walsh University (Ohio) at Connor Convocation Center  
7:30 p.m.–9:30 p.m.

Thomas More University Men's Basketball vs Walsh University (Ohio) at Connor Convocation Center

**Fri, Jan 3**

11:30 a.m.–12 p.m.

Mass at Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel

**Mon, Jan 6**

11:30 a.m.–12 p.m.

Mass at Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel

**Tue, Jan 7**

11:30 a.m.–12 p.m.

Mass at Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel

**Wed, Jan 8**

11:30 a.m.–12 p.m.

Mass at Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel

**Thu, Jan 9**

9 a.m.–11 a.m.

Thomas More University Men's Volleyball vs Roberts Wesleyan at Connor Convocation Center

11:30 a.m.–12 p.m.

Mass at Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel



PEOPLE AND EVENTS

December, as recommended by Pope Francis, is that this Jubilee Year strengthen our faith, helping us to recognize the Risen Christ in our daily lives, and that it may transform us into pilgrims of Christian hope.

**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.

**Immaculate Heart of Mary parish, Burlington, will be hosting TGIF (Thank God it's Free)**, Dec. 22, in Britt Hall, 2–4 p.m. The hall will be open to the public during this time for people to take what they need. Volunteers will be collecting donations of used items (clothes, linens, toys, furniture, appliances, bikes, books, shoes, coats, etc.) Dec. 16–20 from 4–7 p.m. in the Knights of Columbus parking lot.

**Retrouvaille – hope for couples going through difficult times in their marriages.** Retrouvaille is a program of healing and renewal consisting of one weekend and six follow-up sessions over the course of two months. For confidential information or to register for the upcoming program beginning with a weekend on Jan. 3-5, call (513) 486-6662 or visit [www.HelpOurMarriage.org](http://www.HelpOurMarriage.org)

**The Diocese of Covington, in partnership with Franciscan University's Catechetical Institute, is offering three FREE in-person Mentor Training workshops** to discuss the meaning of personal vocation and the pressing need for integrating personal vocation into all Catholic formation. Workshop date is Dec. 21, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Covington. Register at <https://covdio.org/register/>. Questions? Contact Isaak A. Isaak, Office of Catechesis and Evangelization, (859) 392-1529.

**Newport Central Catholic Men's Stag**, Jan. 11, 7–11 p.m. in the school gym. Cost \$20; \$10 seniors (65+) — cash at the door. Come enjoy the fellowship while watching the NFL Wild Card game and UK basketball game on the big screens. Admission includes beer, soft drinks and coney. There will be split the pot, a bourbon raffle and other raffle items.

**REVIVE! Worship Night and Mass**, Jan. 12, 7–9 p.m., Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel, Thomas More University, Crestview Hills. TMU invites the local community to an encounter with Jesus and others through music and confession, followed by Mass at 8 p.m. Contact Josh Osertag, campus minister, at [ostertagj@thomasmore.edu](mailto:ostertagj@thomasmore.edu).

**Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, Winter Preview Day for prospective students and families**, Jan. 16, 4–5:30 p.m. This small-scale event is a great opportunity to connect with the welcoming community atmosphere at Thomas More. Guests enjoy a presentation on the academic majors, scholarship offerings, and what it means to be a Thomas More Saint pursuing a values-based, liberal arts education. Campus tour follows the presentation.

**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.

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

**The Diocese of Covington, in partnership with Franciscan University's Catechetical Institute is offering FREE in-person Mentor Training Workshops.** These workshops will take place through February 2025. Register at <https://covdio.org/register/>. For information contact Isaak A. Isaak, Office of Catechesis and Evangelization, (859) 392-1529 or [iisaak@covdio.org](mailto:iisaak@covdio.org).



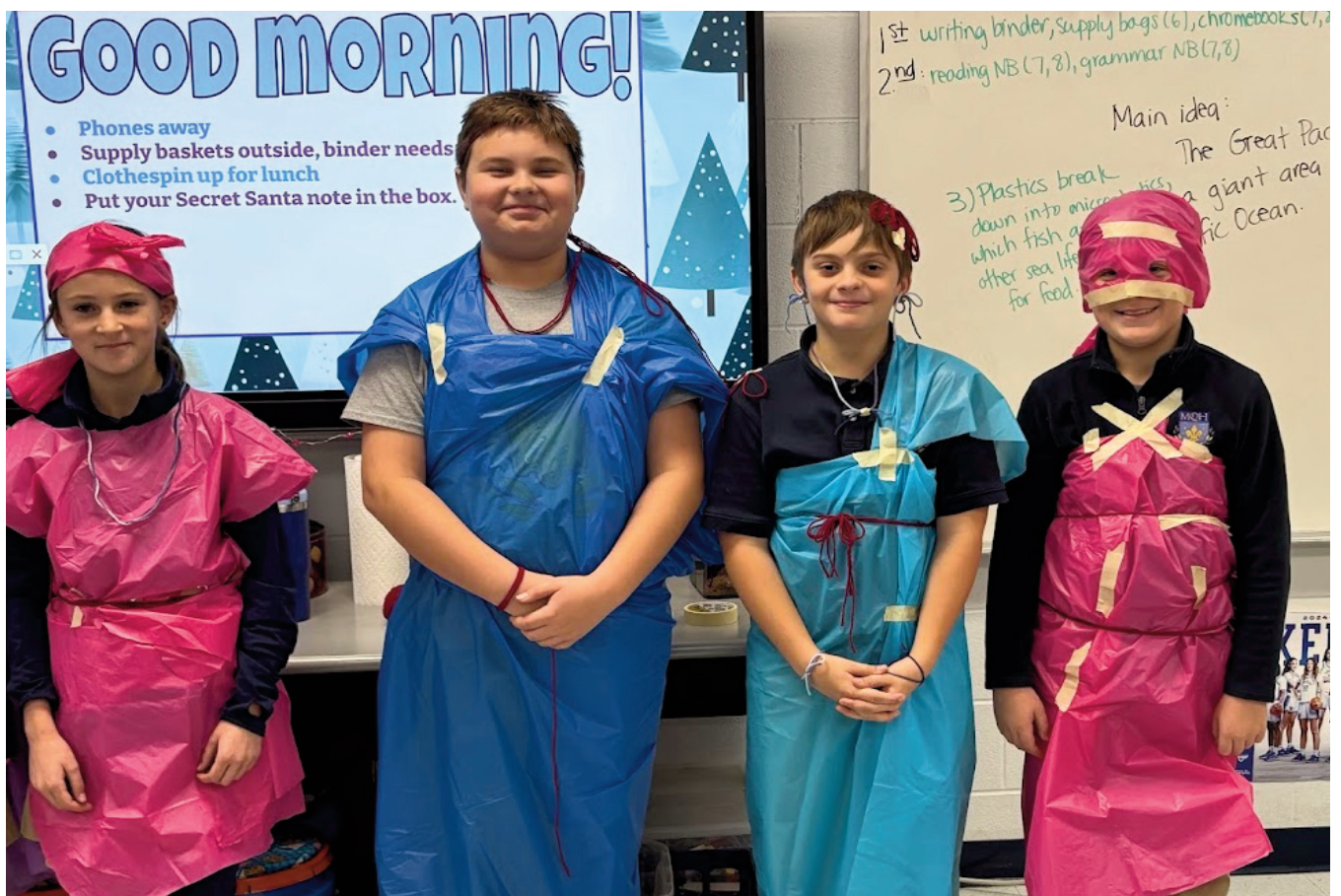
The St. Therese Men's Prayer Group meets bi-monthly at St. Therese undercroft, Southgate. However, every December the group brings breakfast up to their leader, Paul Mohr at Carmel Manor. Joining them were resident priests Father James Quill and Father John Agapito from Owensboro.

**That Man is You, fall 2024 and spring 2025 schedule:** Mon., 8 p.m., Blessed Sacrament Parish, Undercroft, [Justin.jehn@thinkchamplin.com](mailto:Justin.jehn@thinkchamplin.com); Tues., 6 a.m., Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish at Linneman Funeral Home, [blind@covcath.org](mailto:blind@covcath.org); Wed., 6 a.m., Mary Queen of Heaven Parish, gym, [tim@ryanlandsurveying.com](mailto:tim@ryanlandsurveying.com); Wed., 6 a.m., St. Agnes Parish, Murphy Hall, [hebsfarm@gmail.com](mailto:hebsfarm@gmail.com); Thurs., 6 a.m., Blessed Sacrament Parish, undercroft, [bill@deltarealtyusa.com](mailto:bill@deltarealtyusa.com); Thurs., 7 p.m., Divine Mercy/St. Bernard Parishes, Garvey Hall, Dayton, [dmsb.nickolas@gmail.com](mailto:dmsb.nickolas@gmail.com).

**Catholic Charities volunteer opportunities:** Volunteer Receptionist — Be the welcoming face for visitors and clients. Most shifts are four hours long. Mason County Jail Ministry Volunteers - Prayer/Scripture Ministry — Join a group of inmates in the detention centers for prayer and Scripture discussions during scheduled

evening sessions. Commitment is flexible; volunteers are not required to attend every week. Visit <https://covingtoncharities.org> and click on the volunteer tab, or e-mail [jwalch@covingtoncharities.org](mailto:jwalch@covingtoncharities.org).

**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.



Sixth graders from Mary, Queen of Heaven school, Erlanger, have been working on descriptive writing with sensory details. To practice, they held a fashion show, where they constructed outfits from plastic tablecloths. Student groups designed, constructed and modeled the ensembles, and then students wrote descriptive paragraphs about the outfits.

# A Christmas story

Sir Stephen Enzweiler  
Cathedral Historian

In the cold, grey afternoon of Dec. 27, 1910, two priests in a Model T automobile traveled along Lexington Pike heading south toward the town of Ft. Mitchell. A half foot of snow blanketed the ground, the result of a Christmas Day storm that struck northern Kentucky, bringing with it snow and record low temperatures. Beneath the snow, the ground was frozen solid.

Ruts hard as rock made the going rough, and the automobile's driver, 42-year-old Rev. James L. Gorey, was careful to keep it slow. In the front seat beside him, bundled in a long, black, winter coat, his collar up and hat pulled low against the cold was his charge — the Rt. Rev. Camillus Maes, the 64-year-old Bishop of Covington to whom he had been assistant and secretary for more than a decade. As they reached the center of the town, the Model T turned slowly onto a narrow road (today Orphanage Road) which led a short distance further to their destination — *St. John's Orphan Asylum*.

The Orphanage was at the end of the road, down a long drive that ran along the crest of the ridge. At the end was a modest cluster of plain, brick buildings with a steeped chapel situated on 64 acres of rolling landscape above Horse Branch Creek. The location had once been the site of the Preparatory College of St. Aloysius, until it was purchased in 1868 from Covington's first bishop, the Rt. Rev. George Carrell, by the St. John's Orphan Society of Kenton County for \$17,000.

Dedicated in the spring of 1871 and called the *St. John German Orphan Asylum*, it was entrusted to the Sisters of St. Benedict and initially housed nine girls. In 1876, a larger and more ample brick structure was erected to replace the old wooden buildings. It included a chapel, a spacious first-floor dining room with a kitchen, scullery, and a dormitory and living quarters for the five resident Sisters on



St. John's Orphan Asylum as Bishop Maes knew it in 1910. The main building at left was erected in 1876; the first floor was where the Christmas celebrations took place; the chapel occupied the second floor; at right is the girl's dormitory. (Courtesy of DCCH)

the lower level.

The Orphanage had always been for girls only. But after Bishop Maes arrived in the diocese in 1885, he opened its doors to include boys. Within seven years, the number of children had grown from 30 to 45, requiring an additional three-story annex that included classrooms, a boy's dormitory, and ample new living space for the Benedictine Sisters and a resident physician.

As the Bishop and Father Gorey carefully made their way up the front steps and went inside, they came into the warmth of the Orphanage's "big hall" where they were met by the sight of a large crowd busy mixing and chatting over punch and refreshments. "In the big hall at St. John's Orphanage this afternoon the Christmas spirit reigned supreme..." reported the *Kentucky Post*. In truth, the Christmas Orphanage celebration was perhaps the grandest of any social affair of the season.

In attendance were politicians, city officials, police and firemen, members of the clergy, men of business, judges and lawyers, donors great and small, and just plain folks. Covington's Mayor John J. Craig was there, along with Chief of Police Schuler, Fire Chief J.T. Swann, the orphanage Directors and Board of Trustees, its chaplain, Rev. Frederick Bocklage, house physician Dr. James Averdick, and the orphanage's superintendent, Sister M. Eduarda, O.S.B. with her staff.

The orphans themselves — 27 girls and 48 boys — stood together gawking at the "great tree" dominating the end of the hall. Standing 20 feet high, it was magnificently decorated with garlands, tinsel, electric lights, and ornaments that were hand-made by the orphans themselves. Beneath it were collected the presents meant for each orphan, festively wrapped with colorful bows and ribbons to be presented to them after dinner by the kindly Bishop of Covington himself.

Bishop Maes made it a point to always attend the Orphanage celebrations each year, setting aside his heavy

duties to visit the children of St. John's. The children of the orphanages and other institutions in the diocese were a special concern of his, and where a children's day or other special occasion was held, he always tried to be present, often bringing little gifts or souvenirs to present to each child with a kind and fatherly word of encouragement and a word about the faith.

For the young, growing soul, the Bishop's interest was "the keenest and kindest imaginable," according to the 1917 history, *Character Sketches of the Rt. Rev. C.P. Maes*, written by Sister Mary Camillus O'Brien, C.D.P. "He entered fully into their youthful dreams and hopes, his very interest stimulating their endeavors while it tempered them in the way of looking to God for approval and blessing: so he taught them to pray."

His love of children, and especially of the orphan, was well known throughout the Diocese among Catholics and non-Catholics alike. And he knew a great deal about being an orphan, having been one himself.

As a 15-year-old teen growing up in Courtrai, Belgium, his world had revolved around his father and mother; his siblings and cousins, and his deep Catholic faith. But in 1861, his father died unexpectedly at age 45, followed 11 months later by his mother. It shattered his world and left him traumatized and despondent.

He rarely ever spoke of the experience to anyone except to close friends; perhaps he felt it unnecessary, or just too painful. Yet everyone who knew the Bishop understood it was a truth that was both pleasing and painful to him — pleasing because God had ordained the path he would take that eventually brought him to the people of Covington; but also painful because of the growing numbers of children he saw in the orphanages and other institutions whose suffering and confusion he knew too well.

Sitting in the crowded hall amid the holiday revelers, perhaps even sipping on an egg nog, Maes enjoyed himself as he chatted informally with the orphans who came up to him. They had become like his own children. He loved each one of them with joy and was grateful for their affections toward him.

He was especially appreciative to them for helping make his Silver Jubilee as the Bishop of Covington so memorable. He remembered well and fondly the grand parade given by the city in his honor earlier that July and of all the St. John's orphans who marched in it in his honor. Earlier in April, "a splendid program was arranged by the little orphans for the Bishop who was their guest," the *Kentucky Post* reported. "The Bishop delivered an address to the little charges who afterward enjoyed a feast."

Now at the end of the year he was among them again. The formalities began with addresses by the Orphanage



Bishop Camillus Paul Maes and his secretary Rev. James L. Gorey in 1910. (Cathedral Basilica Archives)

Society trustees, the chair of the Board of Directors, select local politicians and then Bishop Maes. This was followed by an ample dinner and the distribution of gifts to the children.

“In the big hall at St. John’s Orphanage this afternoon,” reported the *Post*, “the Christmas spirit reigned supreme when the many lights on the tree were sparkling and the tots filed past the Bishop and were given their presents from the tree.” He took his time with each orphan, calling them by name, speaking gently and with kindness, telling them of the Christ child and reminding them to always “obey Almighty God; obey His commandments; never offend Him.”

There were 75 orphans who filed past Bishop Maes that evening, many of them recent arrivals with hard stories in whom he took special interest, such as the three Shawbeck children. They had been placed at St. John’s by Judge Cleary’s court because their parents simply could not care for them.

“The mother and father broke down as the children were led away, and they cried to return to their parents,”

the *Kentucky Post* reported. Other recent arrivals who filed past the Bishop were brothers Clifford and Carl Williams (ages 6 and 4), who had “been living with their grandmother in Latonia. But the grandmother has grown old and feeble and is unable to take care of her little charges any longer.” Such cases were especially grievous to Bishop Maes, who knew their suffering and could see the sadness and uncertainty in each of their faces. But as grievous as many of them were, there were those orphans who grew up and returned to him in later years.

One such case was of a girl grown to womanhood who had been engaged to be married, but who suddenly found her engagement broken off and her dreams of a happy wedded life shattered. A friend in whom she confided, unable to console her, advised her to go see Bishop Maes, assuring her that he could help her find some consolation. Surely, the woman lamented, the Bishop must have forgotten about her long ago . . . how could he possibly be interested in her sad story? Although doubtful, she went to see him anyway. Calling at his residence, Bishop Maes received her warmly, and she was surprised that he had not forgotten

her after all! Within moments, a conversation developed and she began pouring out her heart’s grief to him, mourning her broken engagement and the loss of her happiness. But then she collected herself.

“Oh Bishop!” she cried. “How selfish I am and how thoughtless! Here I am taking your precious time and detaining you with all this. It must seem little to you!”

Bishop Maes leaned forward and asked her, “Is it little to you, child?” She answered him in a burst of tears. “No! No! It’s my very life!”

“And for that reason,” he said to her, “it’s everything to me.”

Bishop Maes attended three more Christmas celebrations at St. John’s Orphanage before his death in 1915; and each time, he tried to bring a little joy to their world, gladdening them with his presence, his fatherly ways, and giving a little gift to each child he knew by name.

*The author wishes to thank the Diocesan Catholic Children’s Home (DCCH) for their assistance in the preparation of this article.*



(above) The south annex built by Bishop Maes in 1892 to house the boy’s dormitory and living quarters for the resident chaplain, house physician, and Benedictine Sisters. (Courtesy of DCCH)

(below) Interior of the Orphanage Chapel. It occupied the second floor of the main building and served the area as *The Congregation of St. John* until Blessed Sacrament Church was erected in 1920. (Courtesy of DCCH)



### Volunteer at DCCH Center for Children and Families

As part of the diocesan-wide Campaign of Mercy, the Messenger has been highlighting a different work of mercy each month. For the month of December, the focus is on the corporal work sheltering the homeless, this includes the children in our local foster care and adoption system at DCCH Center for Children and Families. Nearly everyone can help shelter a child in need at DCCH. Here are some of the volunteer opportunities available.

#### Direct Care Opportunities

**Care for Foster Care Meeting**  
Volunteers provide childcare during the Therapeutic Foster Care support group meetings. These 2-hour meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month.

**Guardian Angels School Tutor**  
Volunteer at the Guardian Angels School, which is located on the DCCH grounds. You can support them in a myriad of ways, including reading with students, providing art or music lessons, and even clerical work. The school asks for set days and times. Follows Beechwood Independent School calendar.

**Apartment Volunteer**  
To assist the residential staff during regularly scheduled activities, including things like tutoring, arts and crafts, daily living skills, and more. Will never be left unattended with residents. Must be at least 18 years of age and able to volunteer consistently, one time a week, for a minimum of 6 months.

**Mentor**  
To support the residents in developing appropriate relationships with adults other than DCCH staff. Able to visit with your mentee regularly (2-4 hours, 1x weekly) and willing to build a long-term relationship. The commitment is for the duration of the youth’s stay at DCCH. Must be 21 years old and have a valid driver’s license and proof of auto insurance.

**Host a Movie Night**  
You and your family, friends, or work peers can provide a meal for the kids at DCCH during their movie night. We can coordinate a date for the movie—you bring the meal, drinks, and stay for the show!



### Campaign of Mercy

#### Indirect care opportunities

**Kitchen Volunteer**  
Lunch: Kitchen volunteers assist in the cafeteria with serving lunch to the residents and staff. 1.5-hour shift.

Dinner: Assist with preparing and portioning food for each apartment and assist in delivering each food cart. 1.5-hour shift.

**Special Events**  
Assist in special events, such as Swing into Spring and Fall Festivus. Opportunities include set up, tear down, and event volunteer.

**Grounds/Maintenance**  
Volunteers are needed for cutting grass, landscaping, and housekeeping. Also, there are situations in minor capital projects and seasonal projects, where volunteer assistance is needed.

**Administrative**  
Regular and substitute volunteers are needed for the front desk/reception area of DCCH. Regular volunteers are on a weekly schedule of 2-4 hours. This is a first impressions volunteer position; therefore, the ideal candidate will have a pleasant phone voice and a “can do” attitude.

#### Join a group

**Equine Sessions**  
Volunteers can participate in horse care, horse training, or sessions. They can choose to participate in one or all three volunteer areas. All equine volunteers must be at least 18 years of age and have experience in handling and caring for horses. Must be able to complete stable cleaning tasks

and have the ability to lift up to 40 lbs.

**Flea Market**  
The DCCH Flea Market is open on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays (3rd

Saturday only in the winter months) and offers a wide variety of merchandise/clothing both new and gently used. Items donated by the community are cleaned, sorted, priced, and then sold. All Flea Market profits go directly to supporting the children at DCCH. The flea market depends on volunteers. Hours are 8:30am-12pm. Some activities require the ability to lift up to 40 lbs. Working at the counter requires dealing with customers, helping them find an item, receiving payments, and bagging purchases.

**HALO League**  
The HALO League meets on the third Monday of the month at 7 p.m. to plan monthly events for the DCCH residents. The monthly events are a mixture of on-campus and off-site activities. There are opportunities for direct and indirect care within the HALO League.

**Club 1848**  
Club 1848 is a group of dedicated individuals from diverse backgrounds, who are committed to enriching the lives of children and families served by spreading the word about who we are, gaining donors through amazing events, and forging partnerships with individuals, families, and corporations to ensure a lasting impact for DCCH Center for Children and Families.

**To learn more about DCCH and how you can help visit <https://www.dcccenter.org>.**

# Jubilee doors

(Continued from page 3.)

by the word of God, unites all the faithful.”

The Apostolic Penitentiary, a Vatican court dealing with matters of conscience and with the granting of indulgences, issued a document in May spelling out how Catholics can receive the traditional Holy Year indulgence, which the church describes as a remission of the temporal punishment a person is due for their sins.

The document said that bishops should designate their cathedral or another church or sacred place as local sites for Holy Year pilgrims. “Bishops will take into account the needs of the faithful as well as the opportunity to reinforce the concept of pilgrimage with all its symbolic significance, so as to manifest the great need for conversion and reconciliation,” the Vatican court said.

Pope Francis will open the Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica Dec. 24 and at St. John Lateran Dec. 29. The Holy Door at St. Mary Major will be opened Jan. 1, he said, and at St. Paul Outside the Walls Jan. 5.

## Diocese of Covington Opening Jubilee Mass

In the Diocese of Covington, Bishop John Iffert will open the Jubilee 2025 year with Mass, Dec. 29, 2 p.m., at St. Mary’s Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington.

The procession will begin at St. Mary’s Park, directly across the street from the front entrance of the Cathedral. Representatives from every parish will participate as they join the procession carrying the parish banner.

The designated Jubilee Cross will lead the procession. All Mass attendees are encouraged to gather at St. Mary’s Park to join-in the procession. For more information visit [www.covdio.org/jubilee](http://www.covdio.org/jubilee).

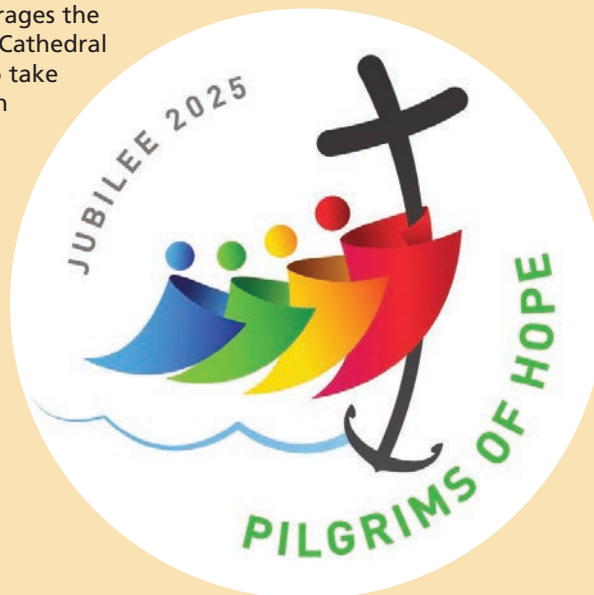
## Local Pilgrimages

Going on a pilgrimage during the Jubilee 2025 is a way to work toward obtaining a plenary indulgence. In the Diocese of Covington, Bishop John Iffert has identified several local pilgrimages for the people of the Diocese of Covington to take part.

### Pilgrimage to the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption

Individually, or in parish groups, Bishop Iffert encourages the faithful of the Diocese to make a pilgrimage to the Cathedral Basilica during the Holy Year. Tours are scheduled to take place after 10 a.m. Mass on the following Sundays in 2025:

- January 19
- February 9
- March 23
- May 18
- June 15
- July 13
- August 24
- September 14
- October 12
- November 9
- December 14.



Other than these scheduled tours, all guided tours, as well as self-guided tours of groups of ten or more, must be scheduled in advance by contacting the Cathedral Parish Office at (859) 431-2060.

### Annual Lenten Pilgrimage

Take part in the annual Lenten Pilgrimage of five historic Churches in Covington. This takes place on the Saturday of Palm Sunday weekend, April 12, 2025. You start or end your journey on foot or by car at any of the five participating Covington Churches — Cathedral, St. Benedict, St. Augustine, St. John the Evangelist or Mother of God.

For more information visit [www.covdio.org/jubilee](http://www.covdio.org/jubilee).

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Hello humankindness

# Register now for Parish Missionary Disciples training Cohort 2 and ‘go make disciples’

Laura Keener  
Editor

As Kim Dehlinger loaded her cart of groceries onto the conveyer belt for checkout, the cashier greeted her cheerfully and began to scan her items. Looking up, she asked the young lady a typical question, “How are you today?” She was surprised when the cashier replied with a smile, “Terrible.”

Inquiring further, Mrs. Dehlinger learned that the cashier fell on her way into work and bruises were already beginning to appear on her arm.

“I’m going to pray for you right now,” Mrs. Dehlinger replied to the cashier. “And I held her hands and I prayed for her. I have no idea where the words came from, they just came out. When I opened my eyes, I saw she was crying,” she said recounting the experience.

Mrs. Dehlinger’s encounter at the grocery store highlights the deep emotional connection that can be formed through acts of faith and prayer. And, Mrs. Dehlinger said, this encounter would never have happened in this way if she had not been attending Parish Missionary Disciples (PMD) training.

Part of the With One Heart initiative and a strategy of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, PMD is a training program designed to equip parishioners with the skills needed for effective evangelization. The training is led by consultants from the Catholic Leadership Institute and is being offered to members in the Diocese of Covington at no charge, thanks to generous donations from benefactors committed to promoting evangelization efforts in the diocese. A cohort of 60 people completed PMD training in April 2024. Cohort 2 will begin training in Spring 2025 (see box).

Before PMD, Mrs. Dehlinger said she would have continued her conversation the grocery clerk with “small talk.” “I would said, ‘I’m sorry and I hope your day gets better,’” she said. This grocery store experience, Mrs. Dehlinger said, has given her the courage to pray with others more frequently.

Mrs. Dehlinger was a part of the PMD Cohort 1. She and her husband, Bill, along with PMD participants, Jerry and Bridget Otto, are so committed to growing their own and others evangelization skills that they have created the GYMM, Growing Your Missionary Discipleship Muscles. Each month, the couples invite PMD participants to a monthly workshop to practice the skills, like praying with others, learned at PMD.

Additionally, members of Cohort 1 expressed an interest of meeting quarterly with diocesan leaders to share experiences and encourage one another. Deacon Jim Fortner, chief operating officer and Jamie Schroeder, chancellor, hosted the second quarterly meeting, Dec. 7 at St. Joseph Parish, Cold Spring.

“As we finished up, I think so many of us had had such a great experience throughout the weeks of PMD, and as we wrapped up, we could see that we were at risk of just going back to our old ways,” said Mrs. Dehlinger. “We just decided we were going to practice what we had learned in PMD and just take all of the exercises a little deeper.”

PMD training encourages members to share the faith by showing participants that Jesus’ commission to “go and make disciples of all nations,” (Matt 28:19) was not only directed to his 12 apostles for the people 2,000 years ago but is relevant today and directed at every Catholic Christian. Then, over four weekends, participants learn how to identify and share their personal witness of how Jesus has made a difference in their life and to pray with others. As missionary disciples begin to apply these evangelizing skills, Jesus begins to touch individuals and makes himself known through these disciples.

“Parish Missionary Disciples teaches us, don’t count the numbers. It’s meeting people one on one and making a difference in their lives,” said Deacon Tom Murrin.

Deacon Murrin also attended PMD Cohort 1 and has been attending the GYMM and the quarterly PMD follow-up meetings. He has seen how small changes have made a difference at his parish, St. Philip Parish, Melbourne.

This year as part of religious formation at St. Philip School, the students have been watching Bishop Barrons “Catholicism” series. The school is small, 75 children attend. At the beginning of the year, 16 students were non-

Catholic. Deacon Murrin said that on Dec. 8 he would baptize two more students, bringing the number of non-Catholic students down to 10.

“I think, in four short months we’ve made a difference in six children’s lives,” he said.

About PMD training, Deacon Murrin said, “it’s a process and it’s not a comfortable process, you have to force yourself sometimes to be a little bit uncomfortable, but it’s well worth the time,” he said.



Bridget Otto (foreground and Kim Dehlinger (background) listen as participants share updates on ways PMD is advancing in their parishes.

## Parish Missionary Disciples Training

Cohort #2 of Parish Missionary Disciples (PMD) training is coming in spring 2025.

Part of the With One Heart initiative and a strategy of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, PMD is a powerful training program for Catholic believers designed to equip them with the skills needed for effective evangelization.

The program consists of six seminars spread over four weekends spaced several weeks apart. All sessions will be held in Kelley Hall at St. Joseph, Cold Spring. Exact dates and times are:

### First Weekend — “Love of God”

Friday, Feb. 21, 6-9p.m. and Saturday, Feb. 22, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

### Second Weekend — “Love of Neighbor”

Friday, March 14, 6-9 p.m. and Saturday, March 15, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

### Third Weekend — “Living Out the Mission”

Saturday, April 5, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

### Fourth Weekend — “Living Out the Mission”

Saturday, May 17, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

PMD is offered at no cost and is open primarily to parishes who were not represented in Cohort #1. Parishes who wish to participate may send three to four people until the capacity of 60 to 75 participants is reached. Participants must be available to attend the entire program and be committed to putting the training into practice in their parishes.

Contact Jamie Schroeder, [jschroeder@covdio.org](mailto:jschroeder@covdio.org), by Nov. 22 with questions and/or to indicate participation.

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# Jesus is the path and destination for Jubilee pilgrims, pope says

Justin McLellan  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis called on Catholics to focus their Holy Year 2025 pilgrimages on Jesus Christ, who is both the path and destination for Christian hope.

At his general audience Dec. 18, the pope began a new series of talks on “Jesus Christ our hope,” which he announced will be the theme for his weekly catechesis throughout the Jubilee Year, which is set to begin with the opening of the Holy Door in St. Peter’s Basilica Dec. 24.

Jesus, “is the destination of our pilgrimage, and he himself is the way, the path to be traveled,” he said in the Vatican audience hall.

Walking across the stage to his seat rather than using a wheelchair as he had previously done, Pope Francis stopped to pray before a relic of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the 19th-century French saint who was the subject of an apostolic exhortation published by the pope in 2023.

After aides read the genealogy of Jesus from St. Matthew’s Gospel in various languages, the pope explained that “the genealogy is a literary genre that is a suitable for conveying a very important message: No one

gives life to him- or herself but receives it as a gift for others.”

Unlike the genealogies in the Old Testament, which mention only male figures, St. Matthew includes five women in Jesus’ lineage, Pope Francis noted. Four of the women are united “by being foreigners to the people of Israel,” the pope said, highlighting Jesus’ mission to embrace both Jews and Gentiles.

The mention of Mary in the genealogy “marks a new beginning,” Pope Francis said, “because in her story it is no longer the human creature who is the protagonist of generation, but God himself.”

In St. Matthew’s Gospel, the genealogy typically describes lineage by stating that a male figure “became the father of” a son. However, when it comes to Mary, the wording shifts: “of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah.”

Through his lineage to David, Jesus is destined to be the Messiah of Israel, but because he is also descended from Abraham and foreign women, he will become the “light of the Gentiles” and



Pope Francis receives a Luce doll, the mascot for the Jubilee 2025, from Simone Legno, the character’s creator, at the end of his weekly general audience Dec. 18, 2024, in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican.



CNS photo/Vatican Media

“savior of the world,” Pope Francis said citing Scripture. “Brothers and sisters, let us awaken in ourselves the grateful memory toward our ancestors,” he said, “and above all let us give thanks to God who, through mother church, has begotten us to eternal life, the life of Jesus, our hope.”

In his greeting to pilgrims after his main talk, Pope Francis briefly reflected on his Dec. 15 daytrip to the French island of Corsica to close a theology conference on popular religiosity.

“The recent trip in Corsica, where I was so warmly welcomed, particularly struck me for the fervor of the people” who do not treat faith as a “private matter,” he said, as well as “for the number of children present, a great joy and a great hope.”

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### Bambinelli

The third annual Bambinelli blessing and fifth annual diocesan Christmas tree lighting event was held as young families gathered to have their baby Jesus figurines blessed by Bishop Iffert. Over 700 cookies were baked, 170 families attended, and countless memories were made. Kathy Nienaber, principal at St. Augustine School, Covington, read the story of Christmas to the young children in attendance as the school choirs from St. Cecilia, Independence, and St. Patrick High School, Maysville, sang classic Christmas songs. Experience the joy, scan the QR code and watch a video of the evening’s festivities.



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**Obituary**

**Marilyn Sue Foltz** was born in Park Hills, Ky., on Dec. 3, 1944. She was the third of four girls, including her twin sister, Mary Catherine. Her parents, Ralph and Rosina (Sonderman) Foltz, nurtured a beautiful family, raised on the values of faith and love.

Marilyn attended grade school at St. Cecilia, Independence and high school at Notre Dame Academy in Covington, graduating in 1962. She went on to graduate from nursing school as an LPN in 1966 and entered the Sisters of Notre Dame in September 1967. Sister Mary Jana made her first profession of vows on Aug. 9, 1970.

Sister Mary Jana ministered at St. Charles Community, Covington and St. Claire Medical Center (UK St. Claire) in Morehead until 1985. She decided to further her nursing career at Northern Kentucky University, attaining her nursing degree in 1988. She then worked in Lourdes Hall as a registered nurse and later as the Nursing Director. Sister supported her SND community with her many nursing talents for over 18 years.

In 2006, after many fulfilling years in nursing, Sister Mary Jana requested a change of pace and worked with Visiting Angels, helping seniors locally, bringing them joy and companionship. In 2008 Sister was again asked to help her community. She became the Provincial House Healthcare Nurse. She took sisters to doctor appointments, emergency room trips, and surgeries, and handled prescriptions and other medical needs. She became an advocate for healthcare. Sister Mary Jana continued her ministry until 2021 when she retired to the Lodge at St. Charles Community.

She was always willing to make personal sacrifices to help those in need. She considered it a true honor to share with others the gifts God had so generously given to her. Sister will always be remembered for her quiet nature, sincerity, and compassion.

Sister Mary Jana went home to God surrounded by her family and sisters on Nov. 30, 2024. She was preceded in death by her parents and sister, Teresa Theobald. She is survived by her sisters Mary Catherine Quitter and Rose Marie Burch. Sister also leaves behind a beloved niece and nephews.

Visitation was Dec. 4 at St. Joseph Heights Chapel. The wake service and the Mass of Christian Burial followed. Interment was in the convent cemetery after Mass.

May Sister Mary Jana Foltz now rejoice in the embrace of our good and loving God.



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*Celebrating cultures 'With One Heart'*

For the upcoming Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, parishioners at St. Anthony Parish, Taylor Mill, used this day dedicated to Mary for further implementation of its "With One Heart" Parish Pastoral Plan. Organized and led by the parish's burgeoning Guatemalan community, parishioners participated, Dec. 8, in an outdoor, bi-lingual rosary procession. At each mystery, the rosary prayers alternated between Spanish and English. The parish's With One Heart pastoral planning team identified creating a welcoming community as one of its three priorities, with organizing four cultural exchange events as a stated goal. The Immaculate Conception was declared the patron saint of Santiago de Guatemala in 1617. In celebration of their patroness, Guatemalans decorate a statue of Mary and sing and pray in processions to honor Our Lady on her feast day. "The Guatemalan community is going to help us to bring a little bit of Guatemala to Taylor Mill this morning after Mass as they show us how this procession is done in their own way," said Father Ivan Kalamuzi, pastor, in comments before his homily.



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

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**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](http://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](http://www.covdio.org) y marcando "Sexual Misconduct Policy."



# Celebrating the gift of salvation all Christmas season long

D.D. Emmons  
OSV News

The mysteries and miracles associated with God coming down from heaven and entering the world as a newborn babe exceed the understanding of the ordinary person. Certainly, it is more than we can fathom in a single day.

So, in addition to Christmas Day, our Church gives us not only the eight octave days following the Nativity, but much of January to allow our minds to grasp what has happened. There are feasts and events in the first month of the year that help us assimilate the miracle of Christmas Day and understand who this new child is, his divinity and the meaning of his birth.

### Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Octave Day of Christmas

In the world today, we associate numerous activities with Jan. 1. There are celebrations with family and friends, toasts to the coming year, hours and hours of college football, and the making of New Year's resolutions. For Catholics, it is also a holy day of obligation, meaning it is our duty to attend Mass. The Church commemorates several events on New Year's Day.

Jan. 1 is the Octave Day — or eighth day — following Christmas, and it is the day on which we celebrate the role of Mary in salvation history, when she said “yes” to the angel, willing to be God's handmaid and do his will. On this day, we are also reminded of Christ's circumcision and the day he received his name. Additional feasts proclaiming Christ's divinity are spread out over the coming days and weeks.

The honor given to Mary on Jan. 1 is known on the liturgical calendar as the solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. A solemnity, meaning “solemn” or “dignified,” is next to Sunday in the rank order of Church feasts and celebrations. Acknowledging Mary as the Mother of God is the oldest of all the Marian feasts and dates back to the first century.

A feast specifically honoring Mary on Jan. 1 was part of the annual Church calendar until the 13th century, when it was removed and replaced by the feast of the circumcision of Christ and octave of the Nativity.

In Genesis 17:10-14, God made a covenant with Abraham that every male descendent of Abraham should be circumcised: “Every male among you, when he is eight days old, shall be circumcised.”

This act would be the mark of God's chosen people, the Israelites. Mary and Joseph submitted Jesus to the Law. At Christmas, he became man; at his circumcision, he became a Jew. “He had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17).

Although divine, Jesus would comply with all the laws, thus identifying himself as one of the Jewish people.

In 1969, the General Norms of the Church declared Jan. 1 as the solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. Christ's circumcision, his humble acceptance of the Father's will, is still appreciated in the Mass of that day. “When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given to him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb” (Lk 2:21).

### Feast of the Holy Name

Jesus' name means “savior” or “God saves” and fully encapsulates who he is. St. Paul says it best: “At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil

2:10-11).

The Church has long dedicated the month of January to the Holy Name of Jesus. In the 15th century, there was widespread devotion to the Holy Name and, thus, Christ's divinity. By 1721, a feast had been assigned to Jan. 2 (or on the Sunday that fell between Jan. 2 and Jan. 5).

The Church's mood reflected that of the psalmist: “I will extol you, my God and king: I will bless your name forever and ever” (Ps 145:1). Our Church teaches us to keep always the name of Jesus on our lips especially at the time of our death.

The feast of the Holy Name remained on the calendar until 1969 when it, like the feast of the circumcision, was eliminated. In 2002, it returned as an optional memorial.

### Epiphany of the Lord

The Epiphany, or manifestation, of Jesus traditionally is held on Jan. 6 (and celebrated the first Sunday after Jan. 1). In the early Church, this was the date when the Nativity was celebrated. By the fifth century, most of the world accepted Dec. 25 as the birthdate of Christ. The Eastern church today emphasizes the baptism and the Cana miracle on the Epiphany; in the West, we focus on the visit of the Magi.

The Magi lived in Arabia or Persia, studied the heavens and noted a new star they believed heralded the birth of a king in Israel. God notified the Jewish shepherds of Christ's birth through the proclamation of angels. In a like way, he notified the Magi by a star and gave these non-Jews the grace to follow the star to Bethlehem. Thus, the birth of Jesus was not limited to the Israelites but manifested to all nations. The Magi recognized the child's divinity as they brought expensive gifts, and “They prostrated themselves and did him homage” (Mt 2:11).

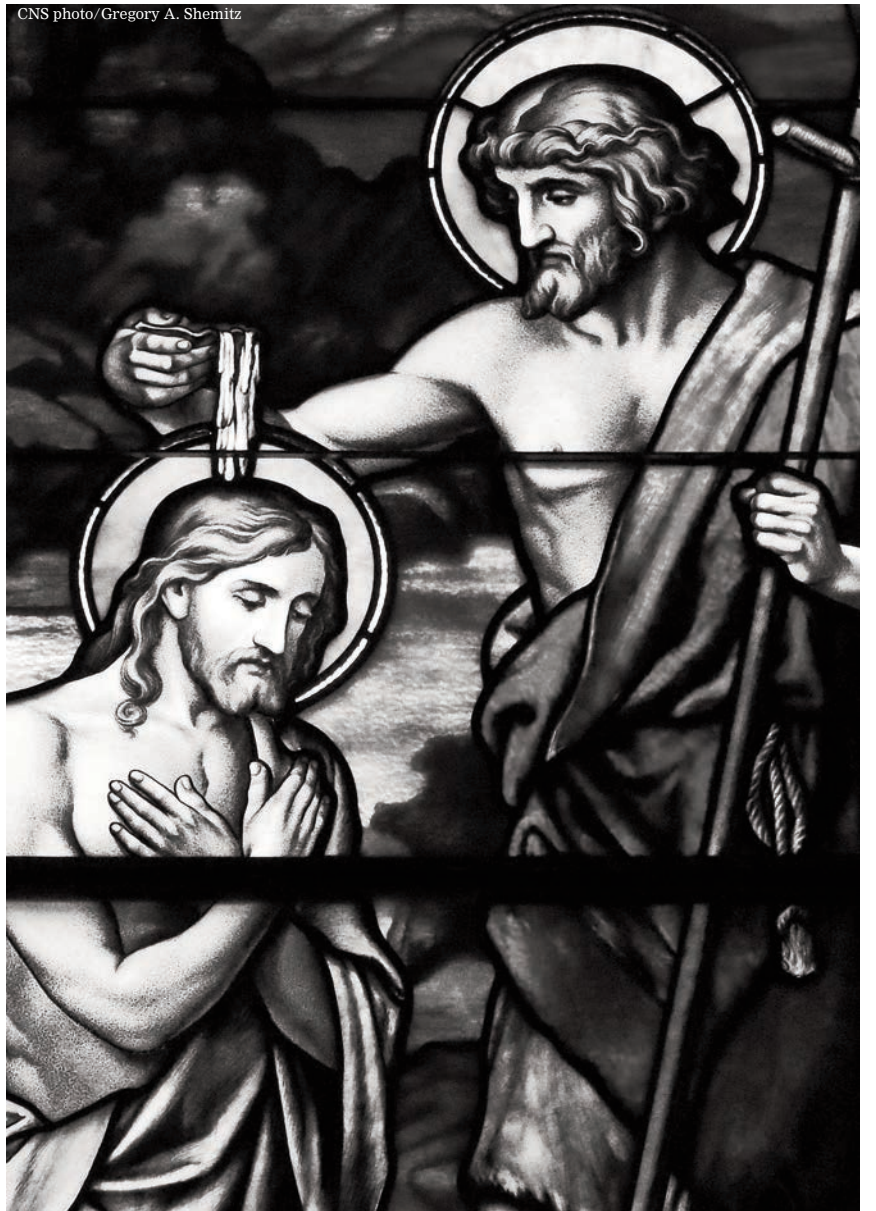
### Baptism of the Lord

On the Sunday in January following the Epiphany, we celebrate Our Lord's baptism, the day when his divinity was made known, when Jesus is identified as the Son of God.

Jesus did not need to be baptized, but he was, by St. John the Baptist, in the Jordan River, in the midst of true sinners.

The Gospels according to Matthew, Mark and Luke all evidence the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus and a voice from heaven crying out, “You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased.”

John's Gospel describes the event from the eyes of the Baptist: “I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from the sky and remain upon him. I did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the holy Spirit.’ Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God” (1:31-34).



Christ's baptism by St. John the Baptist at the Jordan River is depicted in a stained-glass window at the Co-Cathedral of St. Joseph in Brooklyn, N.Y. The Sunday in January following the Epiphany, the Church celebrates the Baptism of the Lord, ending the Christmas season.

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# Why I'm spending Christmas in Bethlehem this year

Father Patrick Briscoe  
OSV News

This Christmas, while massive crowds of pilgrims will flock to Rome for the opening of the Jubilee year, I'll be spending the holy season in Bethlehem. For many, Rome's grand celebrations and newly polished piazzas are the obvious choice for the holiday. But for me, the small, struggling city where Jesus Christ was born holds a deeper urgency — and a quiet, heartbreaking beauty.

Today, Bethlehem is caught in the crossfire of war. The ongoing Israel-Hamas war has cast a long shadow over the entire region. According to my sources in Bethlehem, more than 60 Christian families have left the town in the last six months alone. Pilgrims are few, as fears of conflict and restricted access deter most visitors. Where Rome anticipates millions for the Jubilee, Bethlehem's holy sites expect only a few hundred brave souls.

For the Christians who remain, Bethlehem is both a source of pride and a heavy burden. Tourism, the backbone of the local economy, has all but dried up. Hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops stand empty. According to the UN, unemployment in the West Bank has nearly tripled in the past six months and is now at 32 percent. Even Christmas Eve, the most significant night of the year for this holy city, will likely see little respite.

Yet, amid these struggles, the Church of the Nativity

stands a steadfast witness to the mystery of faith. The remaining Christians continue in their vocation of stewardship, offering worship in these storied shrines on behalf of the rest of the Christian world.

For me, spending Christmas in Bethlehem is a way of standing in solidarity with the Christians who remain, holding onto their faith in the face of extraordinary challenges. I also want to share their story. The current events in Bethlehem remind us that the Nativity — when God entered our world as a vulnerable child — did not happen in comfort or ease. Christ's birth took place in a poor, occupied land, marked by hardship and uncertainty.

This year, I'll participate in Midnight Mass at St. Catherine's Church, adjacent to the ancient grotto where Jesus was born. I'll walk through the narrow streets of Manger Square, where the city's Christmas lights shine bravely against a backdrop of gray concrete walls and military checkpoints. I'll head to the fields where angels first proclaimed the Good News of Christ's birth to shepherds tending their flocks. I'll remember the magi who traveled from afar to pay homage to the newborn king. And I'll pray — not only for peace in Bethlehem but for the courage of Christians everywhere to remain steadfast in the light of faith, especially when the world feels dark.

A Nativity scene is displayed in the Church of the Nativity, on Christmas Eve, in Bethlehem, West Bank, Dec. 24, 2023.



Bethlehem's story this Christmas stands in stark contrast to what most Christians will experience during this Holy Year: Bethlehem struggles just to survive. But in that struggle, I see an extraordinary reflection of the Gospel — a call to love, hope and witness, even in the most difficult circumstances.

As we celebrate the Jubilee and the great joy of Christmas, let us not forget the place where it all began. Let us remember Bethlehem — not just as the city of Christ's birth, but as a Christian community still singing the ancient song promising peace and goodwill to all men.

## What is an indulgence?

(Continued from page 15)

deaths. While our simple prayers can always help the souls in purgatory, indulgences are an especially powerful means of providing this kind of spiritual assistance.

Indulgences work because we believe that many of the church's saints already prayed, sacrificed and patiently suffered enough during their earthly lives to have already been purified enough to enter heaven; and that all

their additional good deeds on top of what was needed for their own salvation created a kind of "surplus" of grace which the catechism refers to as "the Church's treasury" (CCC, No. 1476).

Because the Holy Father, as the successor to St. Peter, shares in St. Peter's power to "bind and loose" (Mt 16:19), the pope therefore has the power to distribute the extra

grace in the church's treasury to souls that need it. Indulgences are essentially the means by which the pope distributes these spiritual goods.

*Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News. Send your questions to CatholicQA@osu.com.*

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# Jesus' crown of thorns returns to Notre Dame Cathedral

Caroline de Sury  
OSV News

PARIS — Firefighters and police officers formed a human chain to rescue the crown of thorns from the inferno at Notre Dame on April 15, 2019. On Dec. 13, 2024, this holiest relic of Paris' cathedral was returned to its proper home on the Île de la Cité.

Though temperatures were cold, the facade of Notre Dame was sunny in the late afternoon, as the procession arrived on foot along the cathedral from Palais du Louvre, on the other side of the Seine River, where the treasure had been stored since the fire.

A knight of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, dressed in a large black cloak trimmed in red, held the crown of thorns, in its crystal circle frame, on a red velvet cushion. Over 400 members of the Order of the Holy Sepulcher, including 200 knights dressed in white coats marked with the red Jerusalem cross, participated in the procession. They have been the crown's honor guard since the archbishop of Paris entrusted it to their care in 1923.

The crown of thorns, placed on Jesus' head by his captors to cause him pain and mock his claim of authority, was acquired by St. Louis, then-King Louis IX of France, in Constantinople in 1239 for 135,000 livres — nearly half France's annual expenditure at the time, according to the BBC.

It was moved to Notre Dame's treasury from the magnificent Sainte-Chapelle in 1806.

A crowd of faithful and curious onlookers gathered on the forecourt of the cathedral as the relic made its way to Notre Dame. Among them was Bénédicte de Villers, a 50-year-old woman who had come to do some Christmas shopping in central Paris. "I was not far away, and realizing what was happening, I took the Metro to come," she told OSV News.

"I arrived in front of Notre Dame just as the procession was beginning to enter the cathedral through the central door. Hearing the organ and the singing, I begged the security guards to let me in, explaining that I am a practicing Catholic, and that praying in front of Christ's crown of thorns meant a lot to me," she said. "I had already come to venerate it at Notre Dame during Lent."

The lucky onlooker said that the guards let her in, and she was able to witness the ceremony from up close.

Once the crown of thorns had been placed on the main new altar inside the cathedral, Archbishop Laurent Ulrich of Paris addressed the 2,000-strong audience of faithful.

"We are moving from the time of Advent to the time of the Passion, but that is the way it is all the time in life, and in the Christian life," he said. "We come to adore the Lord in the gift he made of himself to all humanity, as the Son of God."

During the Passion reading that followed, the cathedral's rector-archpriest, Father Olivier Ribadeau Dumas, presented the crown to the faithful in a long, deep silence.

The procession of chaplains, canons and knights then made a complete tour of the cathedral through the side aisles, with the crown of thorns, while the choir sang the Litany of the Passion.

"It was a very slow, very contemplative tour, so that everyone could see the crown (of thorns)," Villiers recounted. "Everyone was silent, very respectful ... It was a solemn but joyful ceremony, with everyone in awe of the cathedral's beauty," she said.

Night had fallen by the time the procession reached the back chapel behind the choir, in the axis of the nave. Here, under a vault in which the blue color has been revived, the new reliquary of the crown of thorns has been placed.

It is the work of French designer Sylvain Dubuisson, and takes the form of an altarpiece in marble and cedar wood, with the altar wall 12 feet high and 10 feet wide. It evokes the iconostasis of Orthodox churches with its notched panels enclosing gilded bronze thorns. This serves as a reminder of the history of the crown of thorns. For several centuries, before St. Louis purchased it, it belonged to the Byzantine Empire.

The marble altar is lit by small candles, and the central part of the cedar wall is a gilded disk, adorned with 396 hand-crafted glass blocks that reflect the light. At its center, some 7 feet high, a blue niche, matching the chapel's vaulting and stained-glass windows, shelters the crown of



OSV News photo/Stephanie Lecocq, Reuters

Knights of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre surround the crown of thorns during a procession marking its return to Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris Dec. 13, 2024 — five-and-a-half years after a fire ravaged the Gothic masterpiece — as part of the ceremonies marking the cathedral's reopening after its restoration.

thorns.

Archbishop Ulrich blessed the new reliquary, and prayed for all those who will come to pray there.

Father Pascal Ide, one of the cathedral's chaplains, told OSV News he was mesmerized with the new design. "This new reliquary is all radiance," he said.

The relic of the crown of thorns will be displayed every Friday from Jan. 10, 2025, until Good Friday; on other days it will be stored in the safe inside the marble altar.

For Father Ide, Notre Dame is now entirely a "cathedral of light."

"Reopening day was a historic moment," he said. "I spent three hours discovering it (anew), and prayed in each of its 29 side chapels. The physical path around it is like a mystical itinerary, which allows you to inscribe your personal story in the great story of salvation."

See related story page 21.

## Merry Christmas!

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# With inaugural Mass, Notre Dame reveals ‘the Lord does not abandon his own’

Caroline de Sury  
OSV News

PARIS — Chilling rain and the “City of Lights” completely locked down due to high profile guests did not stop the crowds from arriving as close to Notre Dame Cathedral as possible for its inaugural Mass celebrated Dec. 8.

The first solemn Mass witnessed the consecration of the cathedral’s new bronze altar by Archbishop Laurent Ulrich of Paris, with France’s president and his wife watching in the first row.

After a spectacular evening reopening ceremony Dec. 7, the cathedral was illuminated by daylight this time, when the procession of 170 bishops entered Notre Dame Sunday morning, followed by more than 100 banner bearers representing all of Paris’ parishes, and seven priest representatives of the various Eastern Catholic churches.

The bishops wore vestments adorned with golden crosses, created by star French designer Jean-Charles de Castelbajac, who was inspired by the large golden cross at the back of the cathedral over its Pieta. Castelbajac is known for his friendship with the late Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, longtime archbishop of Paris.

The celebrants took their places in the carved oak stalls of the cathedral’s canons’ choir, whose 18th-century upper panels depict scenes from the life of Virgin Mary. They were placed on either side of the group of children of the Maitrise Notre Dame de Paris choir, dressed in blue albs.

The cathedral was packed when Archbishop Ulrich sprinkled the crowd with holy water, before blessing the altar, ambo and the lectern from which the texts of the Scripture were read.

Outside, on the quayside behind the Seine River, hundreds of worshippers gathered near the picturesque second-hand bookshops, closed at the time, to follow the Mass on a big screen, despite the rain.

“Whether you are in this building or in front of a screen, or outside in the rain, you are recipients of God’s benevolence,” the archbishop said at the beginning of Mass. He also paid tribute to those “who face the rigors of war,” and prayed for France, “which scans its future with concern,” referring to the political crisis the French are experiencing these days.

The French government was officially forced to resign Dec. 5, after parliament ousted the prime minister in a no-

confidence vote over his fiscal plans.

Given the large presence of political representatives, the archbishop of Paris addressed everyone in his homily, believers and non-believers alike.

“Do not be content to simply enjoy the pleasure of being here on such a special day when the cathedral of Paris regains its splendor; such as no one has ever known it before,” he told those gathered. “Whether you are believers or not, you are welcome to participate in the joy of the believers here who give glory to God for having found their mother church.”

“Do not only remain dazzled by the beauty of the stones found, but let yourselves be led to the greatest joys, to the most beautiful gift that God gives you and gives us of his loving presence, of his closeness to the poorest, of his transforming power in the sacraments,” Archbishop Ulrich said.

“This morning, the pain of April 15, 2019, is erased,” he said of the fire, which caused the cathedral’s spire to collapse, leaving Parisians in tears on the streets, praying for firefighters who went to battle the flames. The firefighters were applauded by a standing crowd for five minutes straight, as they walked through Notre Dame between dozens of heads of state, including President-elect Donald Trump and Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, at the reopening ceremonies Dec. 7.

“Even if the shock caused by the fire may have been lasting, the pain was already overcome when prayer rose from the banks of the Seine and from hundreds of millions of hearts around the world,” Archbishop Ulrich emphasized.

What happened with Notre Dame — a speedy 5-year res-



OSV News photo/Christophe Petit Tesson, Reuters  
Archbishop Laurent Ulrich of Paris inaugurates the celebration of the reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris by knocking on the doors with his pastoral staff, or crozier, in Paris Dec. 7, 2024.

urrection from the ashes — is not the only example of God’s grace through the centuries, Archbishop Ulrich stressed.

“Generation after generation — believers experience it — the Lord does not abandon his own,” he said. Even if “distress and violence do not cease throughout the history of men,” it is God and his disciples “who feed on his strength to show the way to the victory of life.”

The consecration of the new main altar was a central part of the inaugural Mass. The bronze modern structure designed by French artist Guillaume Bardet stunned anyone entering the renewed cathedral as an example of contemporary architecture gently completing the centuries-old design.

First, the archbishop placed the relics of five holy men and women inside the altar, three women and two men, whose history is linked to the church in Paris, including those of St. Marie Eugénie Milleret, St. Madeleine Sophie Barat, St. Charles de Foucauld and Blessed Vladimir Ghika. Among the relics were also those of St. Catherine Labouré, who was especially connected to the day of the altar’s consecration.

St. Catherine is known to the world for having received apparitions from the Virgin Mary in 1830 in her convent on rue du Bac, in Paris, after which the religious sister asked, following Mary’s request, that the Miraculous Medal, also known as the Medal of the Immaculate Conception, be struck. The feast of the Immaculate Conception ordinarily is celebrated Dec. 8 in the Roman calendar; this year, however, as it fell on the Second Sunday of Advent, it’s been moved to Dec. 9.

After a long prayer of dedication, Archbishop Ulrich anointed the altar with the blessed oil of the holy chrism, spreading it at length over the entire surface with his bare hands. Then, incense candles were lit at five points on the altar, on the five crosses engraved in bronze. Finally, the deacons covered the altar with the white cloth and lit the candles to continue with Mass, accompanied by the choir’s singing.

In a message sent to the archbishop of Paris on Dec. 7, the night of the reopening ceremony, Pope Francis said that soon Notre Dame will “be visited and admired once again” by huge crowds of people from all walks of life.

“I know, Your Excellency, that your doors will be wide open to them, and that you will be committed to welcoming them generously and freely, as brothers and sisters,” he wrote, making waves of comments in France that the pope himself spoke up against the cathedral’s entrance fee proposed by France’s Ministry of Culture.

“May they, lifting their eyes to these vaults that have regained their light, share his invincible hope,” the pope said of 15 million people expected to visit Notre Dame every year from now on.

(See related story page 19.)



OSV News photo/Sarah Meysonnier, Reuters

Clergy and altar servers process down the aisle led by Father Olivier Ribadeau Dumas, rector-archpriest of Notre Dame Cathedral, for the cathedral’s inaugural Mass. Father Dumas was carrying the relics of five Parisian saints and blessed that later were put inside the altar at Notre Dame Cathedral, five-and-a-half years after a fire ravaged the Gothic masterpiece, as part of ceremonies to mark the cathedral’s reopening after its restoration, in Paris, Dec. 8, 2024.

# Guadalupe pilgrimage brings Mary with a living flame from Mexico to New York

Gina Christian  
OSV News

An image of Our Lady of Guadalupe made its way from Mexico City to New York, accompanied by a living flame and bringing Mary to Mexican communities throughout the U.S.

"A little piece of home comes, and they can visit the image, say prayers and (bring) their intentions to God," Luis Garcia, one of the pilgrimage's local organizers in San Antonio, told OSV News.

Since 2002, the annual Carrera Antorcha Guadalupana pilgrimage has sought to unite families and communities across the U.S.-Mexico border under the patronage of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the title of a 16th-century Marian apparition to St. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatotzin in what is now Mexico City.

Appearing as a mestiza, a woman with Indigenous and European heritage, Mary spoke in Nahuatl, the region's native language, calling herself "the one who crushes the serpent." Missionary friars rendered the Nahuatl description into Spanish as "Guadalupe." An image of Mary, imprinted on St. Juan Diego's tilma (or cloak) as proof of the apparition, is now housed at the Basilica de Santa María de Guadalupe in Mexico City, with scientists still unclear as to the image's origin and lack of degradation after almost 500 years.

The Guadalupe apparition was approved by the Catholic Church in 1555. Our Lady of Guadalupe was declared the patroness of Mexico by Pope Benedict XIV. Pope St. John Paul II, who canonized St. Juan Diego in 2002, also formally named Our Lady of Guadalupe patroness of the Americas and of the New Evangelization, establishing her feast day as Dec. 12.

Because she appeared to St. Juan Diego as a pregnant woman, Our Lady of Guadalupe is also regarded as a patroness of the unborn.

The Carrera Antorcha Guadalupana pilgrimage's 3,000-mile route spans nine Mexican states and 14 U.S. states, with stops at parishes in numerous cities and towns, featuring liturgies, processions, blessings and traditional Mexican dances.

Local groups assist in coordinating the pilgrimage, including the Antorcha Guadalupana San Antonio, of which Garcia is coordinator, and the Asociación Tepeyac de New York, a nonprofit based in New York City which has assisted immigrants since 1997.

As the Guadalupana's image is transported in a specialized trailer — whose windows allow it to be viewed while it is in transit — runners carry the torch, which "represents the light of faith and the spirit of resilience among immigrants," local pilgrimage organizers in Texas said in an October press release issued by Antorcha Guadalupana San Antonio.

Garcia told OSV News that the flame is lit and blessed at the Basilica de Santa María de Guadalupe in Mexico City. During portions of the pilgrimage where safety concerns preclude runners carrying the torch, the flame is transferred to a candle inside the transport vehicle.

He estimated that so far "over 8,000 people have carried" the torch.

"You sense ... belonging and connection" as a result, said Garcia, who began participating in the pilgrimage 16 years ago as a runner.

Organizers work closely with U.S. Customs and Border Protection to coordinate the pilgrimage's entrance into the U.S., with the Mexican pilgrims transferring the image and torch to a waiting U.S. team, explained Garcia.

During its Oct. 21 stop in San Antonio, San Antonio Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller celebrated Mass at St. Margaret Mary Parish, whose pastor, Father Jimmy Drennan, said the pilgrimage evoked Mary's model of missionary discipleship.

"We bring the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe for those who cannot visit the image in Mexico," he said in the Antorcha Guadalupana San Antonio press release. "The torch, with its flame, illuminates the hearts of all who are called by Our Lady into the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ."

The pilgrimage eventually reached the state of Delaware by Nov. 28, according to a Facebook post that day by the Asociación Tepeyac.

In New York, the pilgrimage folds into the Archdiocese of New York's celebration of the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe Dec. 12. The 10 a.m. Mass that day will be celebrated at St. Patrick's Cathedral by Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York, with Auxiliary Bishop Francisco Figueroa Cervantes of the Diocese of Zamora, Mexico, as the homilist.

Antorcha Guadalupana San Antonio noted in its press release that, along with fostering devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the pilgrimage "brings awareness for safety and social justice throughout communities."



OSV News photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

A participant in the annual Guadalupe Torch Race ("Carrera Antorcha Guadalupana") arrives at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Staten Island, N.Y., Dec. 11, 2022, the eve of the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The annual torch relay run honoring the patroness of Mexico and the Americas begins at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City and concludes at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe Dec. 12.

Anthropologist Alyshia Gálvez, writing in her 2009 book, "Guadalupe in New York," noted that the Carrera Antorcha Guadalupana pilgrimage and the organizations that sustain it work to strengthen ties within Mexican communities, while enhancing their understanding of their rights as immigrants in the U.S.

Garcia echoed that perspective, telling OSV News that the pilgrimage is focused on both religious devotion as well as social justice.

"It started off as (raising) awareness among people that we're a nation of immigrants, that we need to take care of each other and fight for social justice and having equal rights," he said. "At the same time, for the immigrants that are working or that are afraid to travel, the Virgen de Guadalupe comes and visits her children ... us, the people."

For a related article on how the members of Cristo Rey Parish, Florence, celebrated the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, see page 24.

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National/World

**Catholics praised for ‘unwavering solidarity’ through 2024 natural disasters**

PHILADELPHIA — Catholics in the U.S. offered steadfast support to those impacted by natural disasters throughout 2024, Archbishop Nelson J. Pérez of Philadelphia told OSV News. The archbishop, who chairs the board of directors for Catholic Relief Services, reflected on the impact of Catholics’ assistance as communities around the world grappled with “devastating natural disasters” that included “landslides in Ethiopia, Hurricane Beryl in the Caribbean, and six successive typhoons in Southeast Asia.” As of Nov. 1, the past year saw at least 24 confirmed weather and climate disaster events in the U.S. alone “with losses exceeding \$1 billion each,” according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Among the disasters tracked by NOAA were “17 severe storm events, 4 tropical cyclone events, 1 wildfire event, and 2 winter storm events,” according to the agency’s website. Archbishop Pérez said the faithful in the U.S. have responded in the face of all these disasters “with unwavering solidarity through prayer, action, and generous giving.” Above all, he said, “They put their faith in action by following Christ’s commandment to love one another as He loves us.”

**Pope says there’s no religious justification for Russia’s war on Ukraine**

VATICAN CITY — In a letter to his nuncio in Russia, Pope Francis called out those who would claim Russia’s war on Ukraine had any spiritual justification. Saying he wanted to speak on behalf of the war’s victims, Pope Francis said that “their cry rises to God, invoking peace instead of war, dialogue instead of the din of weapons, solidarity instead of partisan interests, because one cannot kill in the name of God.” Russian leader Vladimir Putin and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow have both claimed God is on Russia’s side as they promoted the war as, in part, a fight against the “evil” West. The pope’s letter to Archbishop Giovanni d’Aniello, the nuncio in Russia, was dated Dec. 12 and printed on the front page of the Vatican newspaper Dec. 14.

**Supreme Court to hear Catholic agency’s religious exemption case**

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court agreed Dec. 13 to hear a case involving the Catholic Charities Bureau of the Diocese of Superior, Wisconsin, which argues that the Wisconsin Supreme Court wrongly denied it an exemption from the state’s unemployment insurance program. In March, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that the Catholic Charities Bureau, while inspired by Catholic teachings, does not qualify as a religious entity under state law because its operations are “primarily charitable and secular,” not religious. The state court found that the organization’s services would be the same regardless of its religious motivation. The Catholic Charities Bureau is seeking the exemption to participate in the Church Unemployment Pay Program, a state-approved alternative established by Wisconsin’s bishops in 1986. They argue the program offers the same benefits as the state’s unemployment system, but is more efficient. The group, supported by the religious liberty firm Becket, contends that penalizing it for its religious identity is unjust. Joshua Kaul, Wisconsin’s attorney general, argued against an exemption in documents filed with the U.S. Supreme Court, noting the Catholic Charities Bureau receives public funding, serves both Catholics and non-Catholics, and has paid the unemployment tax since 1972. The case is expected to be heard by the high court in the spring.

**Two women join Vatican council that implements synod, prepares next one**

VATICAN CITY — For the first time, women will serve on the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod, the committee that oversees implementation of the most recent synod and prepares the next assembly. The Vatican announced Dec. 13 Pope Francis’ nomination of four members to the 16th Ordinary Council of the Vatican synod office. Among his choices are: Consolata Missionary Sister Simona Brambilla, secretary of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and Maria Lia Zervino, a member of the Dicastery for Bishops. The pope also appointed to the council Cardinals Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg,

relator general of the Synod of Bishops on synodality, and Roberto Repole of Turin, Italy. Previously, ordinary councils were comprised solely of bishops, therefore the appointment of two women — a religious sister and a consecrated virgin — signals a departure from that custom. In October, the synod assembly elected 12 members to the ordinary council from among its ranks, leaving four places for papal appointees. Pope Francis also expanded the council’s size from 16 to 17 members to accommodate the head of the dicastery pertaining to the topic of the next synod. The Vatican has not said if the pope has chosen the topic for the next synod.

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# Standing room only at Cristo Rey Parish as the Las Mananitas tradition begins before dawn

**Bella Young**  
*Multimedia Correspondent*

The parishioners of Cristo Rey, Florence, filled the pews before dawn to celebrate the Dec. 12 Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe with a traditional Las Mananitas celebration. The Hispanic tradition celebrates the apparition of the Virgin Mary to Juan Diego in Mexico City, almost 500 years ago.

“The whole tradition is that every 12th of December, it is kind of like a birthday. So, Las Mananitas is kind of like a happy birthday song. It is like, waking up early and you are going to sing Happy Birthday to Our Lady of Guadalupe,” said Henry Cruz, parishioner at Cristo Rey. To aid in the singing of the traditional Las Mananitas song was a mariachi band.

“The whole purpose,” Mr. Cruz said, “is that everybody gives thanks to God for her intercession and give thanks to her, but also, the fact that a lot of people offer this day as a sacrifice. The people that have businesses, they offer their money. Today, in every Church where they do this, they are going to give free food.”

At Cristo Rey, the food being offered was sweet breads, pastries and hot chocolate; in the evening a full dinner was offered as the tradition continues from before the sun comes up to the time the sun goes down and beyond. “We sacrifice, or offer this, so that this way we have a full year of blessings,” said Mr. Cruz.

The celebration is not contained within the walls of Cristo Rey, it is a multinational celebration which includes a ceremonial torch lighting and carrying across the United States, Mexico border.

“The symbolism of the torch is that you to The Basilica [of Our Lady of Guadalupe], you light up the torch, then you take the flame and take it back to your church from where you are from,” said Mr. Cruz, “They do it as a pil-

grimage and kind of like a relay. In little towns, they will get a bus or two busses full of people. They go there to the Basilica in Mexico City, they light up the torch and they start like a little relay race back to their hometown. They’ll drop off people and then everybody gets a turn carrying the torch, running the torch. It is an amazing tradition. They do it from the Basilica, from the city of Mexico, they bring it up the border, cross it over; then hand it over to the American crew.”

From the border the torch is brought through the country to Atlanta where it splits, and a second torch is lit to be taken to Chicago. The Atlanta torch then travels to St. Patrick Cathedral in New York where the trail of the torch ends.

The all day Las Mananitas tradition, is beloved among the Hispanic community. There was standing room only at Cristo Rey as flowers from parishioners were presented to the statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the mariachi band sang the birthday song and other songs adoring Mary and breakfast foods were shared in the narthex of the church.

“As a Hispanic community, it is part of our culture and tradition. Even though we are the same religion ... it is not understood sometimes or known about. It is something that is great,” said Mr. Cruz.

*(For a related article, see page 22.)*



(above) The lead singer of the mariachi band looks out at the congregation as he sings the traditional Las Mananitas birthday song.  
(below) A statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe resides on the altar of Cristo Rey Parish adorned by flowers symbolic of the ones given to Juan Diego.



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