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Building blessing

The Jubilee year acclaims that the source of all hope is God's mercy, says Bishop Iffert

Laura Keener
Editor

As instructed by Pope Francis and together with archdioceses and dioceses around the world, Bishop John Iffert and over 300 faithful of the Diocese of Covington celebrated Mass and the opening of the Jubilee Year 2025, "Pilgrims of Hope," Dec. 29, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. The Jubilee Year officially began on Christmas Eve with Pope Francis opening the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

In accordance with ancient tradition, the Church celebrates an ordinary Jubilee — a year to forgive sins, debts and extend universal pardon — every 25 years so that every generation may experience that moment of grace and mercy in their life. In the Bull of Indiction, "Spes Non Confundit" ("Hope Does Not Disappoint"), Pope Francis said that "Hope is also the central message of the coming Jubilee ... For everyone, may the Jubilee be a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the 'door' (cf. Jn 10:7.9) of our salvation, whom the Church is charged to proclaim always, everywhere and to all as 'our hope' (1 Tim 1:1)." Pope Francis will close the Holy Door and the Jubilee Year will end Jan. 6, 2026, the solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord.

At the Cathedral's opening Mass, representatives from each parish of the diocese processed through the Cathedral carrying their parish banner as a sign of the journey of hope of the pilgrim people. To begin the procession, near the threshold of the Cathedral, Bishop Iffert elevated the designated Jubilee Cross three times with the congregation proclaiming, "We adore your Cross, O Lord, we praise and glorify your holy Resurrection, for behold, because of the wood of a tree, joy has come to the whole world."

During the opening procession, which included many priests of the Diocese, Bishop Iffert sprinkled the congregation with Holy Water, "a living remembrance of Baptism which is the gate of entry in the journey of sacramental initiation and into the Church." (The Rite of the Opening of the Jubilee Year) The procession ended with the Jubilee Cross being placed in a stand to the altar's left and will remain there during the entire Jubilee year.

Focusing on the Jubilee theme "Pilgrims of Hope," Bishop Iffert began his homily saying, "Hope, we know, is the theological virtue, that supernatural virtue, by which we desire and expect from God both eternal life and the grace we need to obtain eternal life ... the theological virtue of hope protects us both from despair and from the sin of presumption," the sin of expecting salvation without making the necessary effort to obtain it.

There are two "kinds of knowledge" that are needed to "really engage with and live in this virtue of hope," said Bishop Iffert. The first is the knowledge that the goal is attainable. "We have to know that

(Continued on page 7)



Keener photos



(top) Bishop John Iffert sprinkles the congregation with Holy Water during the opening procession of the 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope Mass, Dec. 29, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington.

(above) Representatives from each parish of the Diocese processed around the Cathedral carrying their parish banner as a sign of the journey of hope the pilgrim people.



(above, left) Near the threshold of the Cathedral, Bishop Iffert raises the Jubilee Cross for the congregation to adore.

(above, center) During the Liturgy of the Word Deacon Joshua Heskamp incenses the Gospel.

(above, right) At the consecration, Bishop Iffert raises the chalice; the Jubilee Cross can be seen in front of the altar. The Jubilee Cross will be present at every liturgical celebration during the Jubilee Year.



(left) A young family presents the gifts to Bishop Iffert. The Jubilee Mass was held on the Feast of the Holy Family.

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Congregation spends a sleepless midnight at Christmas Mass, reminded of hope — Jesus Christ

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

As the night of Christmas Eve drew close to Midnight, and the celebration of Christmas, the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, found its pews filled and altar decorated in greenery and light.

The congregation was greeted with the sound of the organ and hymns from the Cathedral's choir as they ushered into the cathedral — overflowing the pews into additional seating set up for the Mass.

The celebrant for the Midnight Mass was Bishop John Iffert, in choro with Bishop Emeritus Roger Foys and concelebrated with Father Ryan Maher, the cathedral's rector, and vice-rector Msgr. Kurt Kemo.

Bishop Iffert opened his homily telling the story of a past parishioner on Christmas morning, who approached him with a particular problem — that he “didn't get much sleep last night.”

Bishop Iffert, after asking him what happened, learned that the parishioner's grandson had spent the night and spent the evening looking out the window at the red light on a tower, thinking it might have been Rudolph's, Santa's reindeer, nose.

“He said,” Bishop Iffert recalled, “he laid there in bed for hours, and he stared at this thing... Father, I can't remember the last time I lost sleep because I was eager. I can't remember the last time I lost sleep because I was hopeful, because I was filled with a desire and a yearning for some good thing. He asked the question,” said Bishop Iffert, “Why is that, Father?”

Although the parishioner knew that, at Mass on Christmas morning, he was there to celebrate and receive “the greatest gift that can be given,” which, Bishop Iffert noted, was “the reason we celebrate today,” he wondered why he could fall asleep so easily.

“I've been thinking about that conversation this Advent,” Bishop Iffert said, “because there's one story that I've been following.” He mentioned his interest in the stories of NASA and space exploration, and especially the Europa Clipper. The Clipper, a satellite, is launched for Jupiter's moon Europa. Bishop Iffert said that Europa is believed to have interior seas, and that the conditions might be right to sustain life.

“The last story I heard about it,” he said, “maybe two weeks ago, said that this Europa Clipper mission was designed, the announcer said, to help answer the question of are we alone in the universe? And yes, I heard that story, and I thought, we got the answer to that question 2,000 years ago, right? That's what we celebrate today.”

“And yet,” he said, “we don't lose sleep. Hope does not carry us away, we grow used to the mystery. Comfortable with the awe of it all.” Bishop Iffert said that when the angels came to the shepherds, tending to their sheep, the angels announced that “You are not alone in this universe. You are not alone in the search for salvation.”

In Rome, Pope Francis opened the first Holy Door of the Jubilee Year, and inaugurated the Jubilee Year — the pilgrimage of hope.

“Today,” said Bishop Iffert, “on the feast of the Nativity of the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh, we remembered what hope is. It is not simply eagerness, it is not curiosity, it is not good thoughts ... Hope is a particular virtue, a supernatural uplifting of courage that takes its stand on the solid foundation that Christ, Jesus, has been born to us.”

“Hope is not simply wishful thinking. It's not soft-headedness, it's not mushy. It is the clarity and the courage to take one's foundational stand on that truth, to know that God is asking for our salvation, to let it form the way we live, day in and day out.”

Baker photo



(top left) Members of the congregation pray during the Midnight Mass at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington.

(top right) During the procession, Bishop John Iffert pauses to pray before the nativity scene.

(above left) A string trio joins the Bishop's Choir for hymns prior to Christmas Eve Mass at the Cathedral.

(above right) A family sings from the Mass's worship aide.

(below) With the servers kneeling before the altar, decorated with seasonal poinsettia flowers, Bishop Iffert raises the host during the consecration.



Bishop's Schedule

Jan. 11
Vigil Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 4:30 p.m.

Jan. 12
Mass for the rededication of St. Augustine Church and consecration of the Altar, St. Augustine Parish, Covington, 11 a.m.

Jan. 12 (continued)
Confessions at REVIVE event, Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, 7 p.m.

Jan. 14
Deans meeting, 1:30 p.m.
Jan. 15
2025 DPAA message videotaping, 11 a.m.

Jan. 16
Monthly priest Holy Hour, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 3 p.m.

Jan. 20
Curia closed in observance of the Martin Luther King holiday

Bishop Iffert names three local churches as sacred sites for Jubilee 2025

Staff report

With every Jubilee year, the Pope grants the faithful the opportunity to receive indulgences. In the Decree for the Granting of the Indulgence During the Ordinary Jubilee Year 2025, Pope Francis calls the indulgence “a Jubilee grace.”

The gift of the indulgence, Pope Francis says, “is a way of discovering the unlimited nature of God’s mercy. Not by chance, for the ancients, the terms ‘mercy’ and ‘indul-

gence’ were interchangeable, as expressions of the fullness of God’s forgiveness, which knows no bounds” (Spes Non Confundit, 23).

For the 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope, Pope Francis has declared three ways the faithful may obtain a Jubilee indulgence — by making a pilgrimage, through performing works of mercy and penance and by visiting sacred sites designated by the local bishop.

“...the faithful can obtain the Jubilee Indulgence if, individually or in a group, they devoutly visit any Jubilee site and there, for a suitable period of time, engage in Eucharistic adoration and meditation, concluding with the Our Father, the Profession of Faith in any legitimate form, and invocations to Mary, the Mother of God.” (Decree for the Granting of the Indulgence During the Ordinary Jubilee Year 2025)



JOHN CURTIS
BY THE GRACE OF GOD
AND THE FAVOR OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE
BISHOP OF COVINGTON

DECREE

Designating Sacred Jubilee 2025 Sites

Our Holy Father Pope Francis has established the Ordinary Jubilee Year 2025, calling on all Christians to be pilgrims of hope and inviting everyone “to an intense experience of the love of God” (*Spes non confundit*, 6).

The Apostolic Penitentiary, in the decree establishing the norms of the Jubilee Indulgence (May 13, 2024) emphasizes that the Indulgence is a *gift*. It is a “Jubilee grace.” The Indulgence “is a way of discovering the unlimited nature of God’s mercy.” (*Spes non confundit*, 23).

For the benefit of the People of God, the norms allow the diocesan bishop to designate Sacred Jubilee Sites within his diocese. At these sites the faithful, *pilgrims of hope*, will be able to obtain the Jubilee Indulgence granted by the Holy Father if they undertake a pilgrimage or pious visit to any one of these sites, while fulfilling the usual conditions.

I, therefore, John C. Iffert, Bishop of Covington, declare that the following sites are designated as Sacred Jubilee Sites for the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025:

the **Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption**
in Covington, Kentucky;

the parish church of **Saint John the Evangelist**
in Carrollton, Kentucky; and

the parish church of **Saint Patrick**
in Maysville, Kentucky.

Four things are necessary to gain this Plenary Indulgence.

1. A pilgrimage or pious visit to the Sacred Jubilee Site. This may be fulfilled by devoutly participating in Holy Mass, any public liturgy of the Church (even some part of the Liturgy of the Hours offered privately), confessing and receiving mercy in the Sacrament of Penance, the Way of the Cross, the Rosary; or by a meaningful period of Eucharistic adoration and meditation (exposition is not required), or at least the praying of the Our Father, the Apostles’ or Nicene Creed, and a Marian prayer or antiphon.
2. Sacramental confession.
3. Eucharistic Communion
4. Prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father.

The conditions of confession, Communion and prayer for the Pope’s intentions may be fulfilled several days before or after the pilgrimage or pious visit.

The norms also provide that the faithful who are prevented by the cloister, imprisonment, illness or another legitimate and important cause, can obtain the Jubilee Indulgence under the same conditions if, united in spirit with the faithful taking part in person, they recite the Our Father, the Profession of Faith in any approved form, and other prayers, while offering up their sufferings or the hardships of their lives.

This Decree is effective from the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, January 5, 2025, to the Solemnity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, November 23, 2025.

Given at the Diocese of Covington, in the City of Covington, Kentucky, on the Fifth day of January, in the Year of Our Lord, Two Thousand and Twenty-Five.

Most Rev. John C. Iffert
Bishop of Covington

Mrs. Jamie N. Schroeder
Chancellor

Official Assignments

Effective Jan. 1, 2025

Rev. Kevin J. Kahmann

Elected to Presbyteral Council, Diocese of Covington, by his brother priests and affirmed by Most Reverend John C. Iffert
Term: Three years
Continues other duties

Rev. Ivan P. Kalamuzi

Elected to Presbyteral Council, Diocese of Covington, by his brother priests and affirmed by Most Reverend John C. Iffert
Term: Three years
Continues other duties

Official Appointment

Derek Haught

To: Board of Trustees, St. Elizabeth Healthcare
Term: Three years

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

Jamie N. Schroeder
Chancellor



Campaign of Mercy — BBHS delivers Christmas cheer
Every year, Mark Messmer, a Catholic Charities jail ministry volunteer, works with the Campbell County Detention Center, Newport, to get permission for jail ministers to bring a bag of Christmas cheer to each inmate and guard at CCDC. Each November, Bishop Brossart High School hosts a Turkey Bowl gathering donations for a variety of charities. In addition to the generous donations collected, the Turkey Bowl provides awareness of the people being served by the various ministries. This year, CCDC was added to the BBHS list of ministries. BBHS generously responded with over 600 individually wrapped snack cakes and ChapStick for every inmate. Jail ministers had the privilege of personally handing out each bag individually. The inmates responded with great joy and thanks, grateful that people are remembering them. Jail ministers at CCDC lead weekly Bible studies. Catholic Charities, Diocese of Covington can always use more volunteers. It’s an important ministry of hope and comfort. Contact Jill Walsh at (859) 581-8974 or jwalch@covingtoncharities.org.

In the Diocese of Covington, Bishop John Iffert has designated three churches as sacred sites where pilgrims can visit and receive the Jubilee indulgence (see decree below). They are the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington; St. John the Evangelist Church, Carrollton and St. Patrick Church, Maysville.

The Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption is the Mother Church of the Diocese of Covington. The Cathedral is open for visitors Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Mass and Sunday 11:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Mass. Pilgrims visiting the Cathedral will find the Jubilee Cross, which will be displayed during every Mass throughout the Jubilee year.

St. John the Evangelist Church is the Diocese’s western-most church. St. John the Evangelist Parish was established in 1854. Its current church building took 14 years to build and was dedicated on June 25, 1916, by Bishop Ferdinand Brossart. The gothic structure was designed by Leon Coquard, the same architect that designed Covington’s Cathedral, and has been fondly referred to as “the cathedral in the cornstalks.” Mass times at St. John the Evangelist Church are: Saturday 4:30 p.m.; Sunday 9:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. Spanish (11:30 a.m. during summer); Monday and Wednesday 6:30 p.m.; Tuesday and Thursday 6:45 a.m. and 8:00 a.m.; Friday noon. Adoration with closing Benediction is held Wednesdays, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. and First Friday, 11 a.m. to noon.

St. Patrick Parish, Maysville, was established in 1847 and predates the establishment of the Diocese of Covington (1853). The current St. Patrick Church building was dedicated June 26, 1910, by Bishop William Maes. Mass times at St. Patrick Church are: Saturday 8 a.m., 5:15 p.m.; Sunday 8 a.m., 11 a.m., 1p.m. (Spanish); Monday thru Friday 8 a.m. Adoration is held Wednesdays, 8:30 a.m.–6 p.m.

2024 — A year in the life of the Diocese of Covington

Items are listed in the month they occurred; in several cases, the news appeared in the *Messenger* the following month.

January

The *Messenger* publishes its “Restored in Christ” special edition, covering the ongoing restoration of Covington’s historic Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption.

The 27th Safe Haven Baby Box in the state of Kentucky is installed and blessed at the fire station in Edgewood, Ky. These boxes, protected under Safe Haven laws, allow for parents of newborns to anonymously surrender their infants in a safe location.

Bishop John Iffert requests the resignation of Rev. Shannon Collins as pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish. Rev. Sean Kopczynski is removed as Parochial Vicar. Both priests are members of the Missionaries of St. John the Baptist. Additionally, for both priests the faculties to teach, preach or celebrate the Sacraments of the Church are suspended. The Board of the Missionaries of St. John the Baptist own the Our Lady of Lourdes church building and the Missionaries of St. John the Baptist consider it the chapel of their public association. They are no longer willing to permit the Diocese or Our Lady of Lourdes Parish to use the building. Bishop Iffert works to resolve these difficulties and to provide faithful and true pastoral leadership for Our Lady of Lourdes Parish.

In a letter to parishioners of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Bishop Iffert announces that St. Ann Mission, Covington, will welcome Our Lady of Lourdes Parish to share its church building and that Father Matthew Cushing will celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass according to the 1962 Missale Romanum.

Northern Kentucky University students join 22,000 college students from across the country at the SEEK conference in St. Louis, Missouri.

Newport Central Catholic High School celebrates the blessing and dedication of its newly renovated third floor — the first project of its \$13 million multi-project “Looking Up Capital Campaign.” Over 100 people gathered at the newly renovated space, which includes the state-of-the-art Science Learning Center.

Standing in for Jeff Jehn, leadership gifts chair for the 2024 Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal, Linda Rawe, general chair, welcomes leadership gift solicitors to the annual Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal luncheon.

Notre Dame Sister Pamela Geiger, after 30 years of committed service to the DCCH, celebrates her retirement.

The Diocese of Covington’s Schools office celebrated Catholic Schools Week in a January special edition — a special Mass was held at the Cathedral in commemoration of the week.

Ten days following the removal of the pastoral leadership of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Bishop Iffert meets with over 200 parishioners to answer questions and to gather their thoughts and energies to preserve the parish.

Digital media

Restored in Christ: Video promotes the campaign to restore the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington — inviting all to protect the diocese’s heritage.

In Episode 5 of *Around the Diocese*, Bishop John Iffert speaks with Sam Krebs, a senior at Newport Central Catholic High School.

Official assignments

To Presbyteral Council, three-year term, continues other duties:

Rev. Michael T. Grady
Rev. Niby Kannai
Rev. V. Ross Kelsch
Very Rev. Daniel L. Schomaker

Very Rev. Ryan L. Stenger, J.V.

February

250 from the Diocese attend the Kentucky March for Life in Frankfort.

Bishop John Iffert celebrates the World Day of Consecrated Life with a Mass at the Cathedral. This was the first year that Bishop Iffert has held a special Mass for this celebration.

Each year, National Marriage Week USA and World Marriage Day provide an opportunity for the Catholic Church to focus on and celebrate the vocation to marriage and family life. The *Messenger* celebrates with a special edition.

Angie Poat, diocesan youth minister, and specially trained leaders from THRIVE host the diocese’s first Junior High “Connect Retreat,” at Thomas More University.

The Diocese announces its collaboration with the Franciscan University of Steubenville’s Catechetical Institute.

In two ceremonies held at the Cathedral, Bishop Iffert accepts as the elect 107 catechumens and 108 candidates at this year’s Rite of Election. These catechumens and candidates were sent by their pastors from 33 parishes and Thomas More University.

The first of two DPAA kick-off dinners was held at the Limestone Center, Maysville. The theme for this year’s DPAA is “Zeal for Your House Will Consume Me.” Bishop Iffert, Linda Rawe, general chair and Jeff Jehn, leadership gifts chair, welcome about 100 people.

The Diocese’s “With One Heart: Empowering Priests. Igniting Parishes. Enlivening the Faithful.” initiative expands to its next strategy — the training of Parish Missionary Disciples.

Five Covington parishes welcome, for the second year running, pilgrims to walk together on a Lenten pilgrimage.

In a letter to parishioners Bishop Iffert announces that he is actively negotiating with the Missionaries of St. John the Baptist and its Board to return Our Lady of Lourdes Parish to Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Park Hills.

The William T. (Bill) Robinson III ‘67 Institute for Religious Liberty, hosts an interfaith dialogue bringing individuals from different religions together for a night of friendly, intercultural discussion.

Men aspiring for the diaconate, alongside their wives, gathered for a day of reflection with talks given by Father Matthew Summe, LC.

Digital media

Coverage of parish Fish Frys from across the diocese began with the new series “Dine in or Drive Thru, a Fish Fry.”

Official appointments

Suzanne Deatherage
To: Catholic Charities Advisory Board, three year term

March

The Pro-Life Office welcomes 20 eighth graders who were finalists in this year’s diocesan Pro-life Essay Contest to the Pro-Life Essay banquet.

Thomas More University appoints Hannah Keegan its inaugural director for the Center of Faith, Mission and Catholic Education.

Members of the Youth Commission Evangelization Team (YCE/T) meet for an orientation welcoming and introducing the new members to the team.

Men studying for the permanent diaconate are instituted to the Ministry of Acolyte by Bishop Iffert.

Scouts across the Diocese — including Scouts of America, American Heritage Girls and Girl Scouts — receive faith awards at annual Scout Mass.

The annual Catholic Charities Appreciation dinner honors Dick and Rosalie Hen, recipients of this year’s Marcella Strategier Angel of Hope award and the Rotary Club of

Covington, the recipient of the Community Partner Award.

In 1903, Bishop Maes commissioned Kentuckian Frank Duveneck to paint a mural for the new Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption in Covington, Kentucky. Cecelia Dorger, Ph.D., delved into the iconic paintings in an article published this month.

Bishop Iffert celebrates Palm Sunday Mass. The congregation gathered first at St. Mark’s Park, where palms were blessed — then, with palms in hand, the congregation processed to the Cathedral.

The Cathedral announces that it will again host a display of an exact copy of the Shroud of Turin and Sudarium of Oviedo during Easter Week.

The Cathedral is filled to capacity for the annual celebration of the Christ Mass.

The Lenten season ends and the Easter season begins with the Easter Vigil, celebrated in the Holy Night by Bishop Iffert at the Cathedral.

Invited by Jim Dressman, St. Paul parishioner and co-leader; NKY Men Missionaries, Bishop Iffert, accompanied by Dr. Dave Johnson, vice president of mission, St. Elizabeth Healthcare and Dr. James Camp, professor and Sociology and Criminal Justice chair for Thomas More University, make a trip to Mustard Seed Communities, Jamaica.

Bishop Iffert announces that Our Lady of Lourdes Parish will resume the celebration of the traditional Latin Mass at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Park Hills, beginning Easter Sunday. Father Matthew Cushing is appointed administrator.

April

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month nationally, and the Family Nurturing Center, a Northern Kentucky non-profit dedicated to preventing child abuse and providing support to children affected by it, held its annual Blue Ribbon Ceremony.

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

Calling its mission a “hallmark of the pro-life movement,” Bishop Iffert blesses Madonna House of Northern Kentucky.

Senior high school students from every diocesan high school join together with teachers, administrators, parents, supporters and friends for a Mass celebrating their accomplishments as the school year draws to an end — and with it, the high school career of these students.

Over 100 people attend this year’s Memorial Mass for the Loss of Child at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington, organized by the diocesan Pro-Life Office.

The With One Heart Core Team meets for an update on the initiative.

With a commitment to providing advanced learners an innovative, college preparatory, classical, Catholic education, Bishop Iffert announces the exploration of an affiliation between Covington Latin School and Thomas More University.

Servers, pastors and parents gather at the Cathedral to celebrate Solemn Vespers and the Serra Club of Northern Kentucky Server Awards.

Joshua Heskamp speaks on his vocational journey in preparation for his ordination to the transitional diaconate.

The Alliance for Catholic Urban Education (ACUE) welcomes benefactors for its annual donor appreciation luncheon.

Men and their wives are invited to attend an information meeting about the permanent diaconate.

Over 60 students from the diocese are accepted to participate in Governor’s Scholars (GSP), Governor’s School for the Arts (GSA) and Governor’s School for Entrepreneurs (GSE).

The Pro-Life Office hosts a Community Baby Shower at St. Joseph Parish, Cold Spring, offering aid and support to families in need.

(Continued on page 6)

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Let us pray

On Christmas Eve, Pope Francis officially opened the 2025 Jubilee Year with the theme Pilgrims of Hope. This 2025 Jubilee Year is a special year to encourage a renewed focus on hope, serving as a time for spiritual renewal, reconciliation and experiencing and extending God's mercy.



Deacon Scott Folz

Appropriately, Pope Francis declared 2024 to be a Year of Prayer in preparation for the Jubilee Year. As faithful Catholics, we begin everything with prayer. We start our day with morning prayers, we begin our meetings with prayer, we pray before eating meals and we begin each week with Mass – the greatest prayer.

The Apostle Paul exhorts us to pray without ceasing, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circum-

stances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thess 5:16-17)

Praying without ceasing holds significant importance for us Catholics, as it is deeply rooted in our theology and spiritual life. Praying without ceasing keeps us in constant communion with God, maintains our faith, grounds us in inner peace, guides us in the Spirit and provides intercession for our brothers and sisters.

However, praying without ceasing isn't something that comes natural to us. We are selfish creatures by nature, preoccupied with our own needs and tasks. Posted around my office, and even in my car, are several reminders to pray – to keep my focus on God in all I do.

I preach a good game, encouraging others to pray, yet I stumble and fall short frequently. When I skip that so-important moment of praise, gratitude and petition, I often find myself struggling, falling into impatience, frustration, forgetting my true objective – peace, joy and fellowship.

Praying without ceasing truly is a skill requiring development. I begin my day with prayers and devotionals. This

didn't happen all at once but instead developed over time, with the help of my prayer partner, my wife.

We started with Liturgy of the Hours. Then added a Eucharistic devotional, then a devotional to the Saint of the Day, then a devotional for our marriage. We then started reading a book, each of us reading just a few minutes a day, alternating days. What started as a few minutes almost ten years ago has grown to nearly an hour today. It helps that we are both early risers. What has developed is an intimacy that only accentuates our relationship with each other and with our Lord and Savior.

Everyone's prayer life is personal and unique. Everyone has a relationship with our Lord and Savior and with each other that can only be sustained by prayer, which is simply intimate communication, a conversation within and through our hearts.

Catholics have many ways to pray and so many prayers ready at our fingertips. We can pray the rosary, the Liturgy of the Hours, the Divine Chaplet of Mercy or the Stations of the Cross. We can pray for the intercession of any of the angels or saints. Every time we bless ourselves with the Sign of the Cross we are at prayer. We can make a Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament, placing ourselves in the very presence of Jesus. We can also simply talk to God, the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit. My favorite recitation is simply, “Jesus, I trust in You.”

I am still developing my prayer life. Practicing unceasing prayer helps in all aspects of my daily life. It is well worth my time and effort and has positively impacted my work, my ministry as a deacon and especially in my relationships with family – my dad, my children and grandchildren and especially my wife. And although I am not perfect in my prayer life, practicing unceasing prayer makes for a continuously better life in the Spirit.

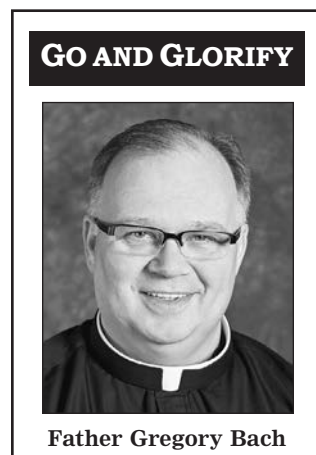
During this Jubilee Year of Hope, I pledge to pray for our Holy Father's intentions for a renewed focus on hope, spiritual renewal, reconciliation and experiencing and extending God's mercy. I pledge to continue practicing unceasing prayer. And I pledge to pray for everyone in this diocese that we all may come closer to each other and to our Lord and Savior who desires us to be with Him into eternal life.

Deacon Scott Folz is assigned to St. Paul Parish, Florence, Ky

With you God is well pleased

The readings for the Baptism of the Lord — Cycle C — are: Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7, Acts of the Apostles 10:34-38 and Luke 3:15-16, 21-22.

One of my nieces recently had a baby. The first time I saw the baby was at a recent family gathering. The way she was being held you could see one of her ears. The most perfect and small ear I have ever seen. What a blessing to see the beauty of God's creation in a little child.



Father Gregory Bach

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

Jesus waits until the last person is being baptized to make his way through the water. Jesus goes to John the Baptist. When Jesus is baptized the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus and a voice was heard, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

John was sent by God to prepare for the coming

of the Messiah. He preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He taught them all that was foretold by the prophets concerning the birth of the Christ. He baptized them so that they might live a life of a new beginning to become a child of God. The same words come down upon us at our baptism, “You are my son/daughter; with you I am well pleased.”

We are called to repentance for the forgiveness of our sins. To continually confess our sins and receive the grace of the sacrament through the forgiveness of sins. We have the opportunity to replenish ourselves with the grace of the Eucharist through reception and adoration of the Body of Christ Jesus.

Jesus tells us to “become holy as your heavenly Father is perfect.” We constantly strive to reach the goal placed before us by Jesus. He calls us to a new union with him where we will be made perfect. Allow the love of God to heal us, bring us grace and strength, to make ourselves a new creation willing to serve the Lord.

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

The gift of memories

My fingers are curled through the chain link fence as I wait for Dad to take his at bat. It is a balmy Sunday afternoon, and it seems to me



Julie Feinauer

that most of our small parish has turned out for the Holy Name League game at the California Crossroads baseball field. There's a smell of french fries and burgers wafting out of the small kitchen across the road, and I know that I will spend the money Mom gave me on an ice cream and a few frames of electronic bowling. Life couldn't be better!

I have so many wonderful memories of my childhood. It wasn't perfect, but we had love, and lots of laughter. These days passed by too quickly, as it seems that all childhoods do. Yet it isn't only our childhoods that pass us by, but all the beautiful moments in life. All those rites of passage that we looked forward to for so long simply slip away in a breath. Memory, though, is the stuff of wonder. We can remember, literally recreating the moment, traveling through time to be present once again.

My cousins joke that if they want to verify their memory, they'll just ask me. Yes, I can remember giving my cousin Jimmy butterfly kisses before leaving family events when we were very small, as well as which cousin got in trouble in school, why the swing set flipped over on

someone, every funny thing that happened in class, and who cheated Grandma in Slapjack. (it was me by the way — she knew, but never cared!) If I was there, I probably remember the who, the what and the why! My mind is full of days-gone-by fragments that I look back on nostalgically, and sometimes it makes my heart hurt just a little.

Memory is a funny thing. It is so magical to be able to recall these special times, but it can cut you like a knife when you remember someone who has passed and realize you won't see them again in your lifetime. It is poignant and painful, yet blissful, because for a moment, they are there with you in the memory.

JM Barrie, author of Peter Pan, is quoted as saying, “God gave us memories so we might have roses in December.” What a beautiful thought! God yet again gives us such an amazing gift! The ability to remember grants us the opportunity to relive meaningful times.

When I am low, living a “December” in my life, and especially when I miss my Mom and Dad who have passed, memory gives me the ability to be with them in my mind's eye. Seeing them dance, sing and have fun with family and friends through the years gives me the courage to be and do as I must, even without them present. They are my “roses,” and I remember that we will be together again one day.

“One of God's great gifts to the human spirit without which neither life nor experience could have any meaning” is how Howard Thurman describes the gift of memory in his 1973 book “The Mood Of Christmas and Other Celebrations.” Without it, you would be starting from scratch with every new day. Even generationally we

learn, passing on knowledge we have attained to our children. Memory gives us the ability to make our lives and our world better.

His book reminds us to use our memory positively. Do not use it to recall past hurts, or our mind is poisoned with hate. If our mind is used for positive memories then it can be used to build us up and get us through the hardships of life. We are able to learn and grow from the most difficult experiences of the past.

Not all memories are good, but that does not mean they do not have value. As we look back over our lives, we can see how far we have come. Many times we think we will not survive the moment, but as we appraise it from the distance of time, we realize the hardship was nothing more than another hill we have climbed in the journey of our life. These hills are not just the trials and tribulations of life. They are the blessings with which we learn about faith, and the love of the Father. Unless we face challenges, we will never learn of God's enduring love for us.

As you look back over the beautiful, though sometimes bruised and battered story of your life, remember that God is with you through it all. He knows your heart and what it needs. Through your memories, He's giving you the gift of learning and growing. He's giving you the gift of finding comfort and solace. And sometimes, God knows the gift you need is once again being seven years old, eating an ice cream and watching your Dad play baseball.

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

2024 — A year in the life

(Continued from page 4)

At its annual new members luncheon, Jeff Jehn, president, and Mark Guilfoyle, secretary, Serra Club for Vocations of Northern Kentucky, welcome potential new members; Father Rob Jack, host of Sacred Heart Radio's "Driving Home the Faith," is the keynote speaker.

In a press release, it was announced that UK HealthCare, Lexington, will acquire St. Claire HealthCare, Morehead, with a targeted close date of July 1.

Official assignments

Rev. Roberto C. Becerra
To: Parochial vicar, Cristo Rey Parish, Florence
From: Service in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati

Official appointments

To Alliance for Catholic Urban Education Development Advisory Board, two-year term:

Mary Ciafardini
Michael Haas
Clare Ruehl
Andrew Vandiver
John Walcutt

Effective July 1, 2024
To Diocesan Catholic Children's Home Board of Directors, six-year term:

Matthew Bain
Matthew Verst

May

The Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker celebrate the order's golden jubilee; Bishop Iffert celebrates Mass at All Saints Parish, Walton.

For the first time in its history, the Diocese of Covington celebrates a baccalaureate Mass commemorating senior high school students in public schools and homeschool.

The "Campaign of Mercy" kicks-off with an ice cream social following the Corpus Christi procession and Mass.

A new altar is dedicated in the Oratory of St. Paul, Curia. Bishop Iffert ordains Joshua Heskamp — a student at St. Vincent Seminary in Latrobe, Penn — to the transitional diaconate.

In a presentation entitled, "Human Trafficking; what it is and what to look for — a parent's guide to keep their children safe," Det. Eric Higgins, Independence Police Department, shares warning signs of human trafficking.

Bishop Iffert celebrates a Baccalaureate Mass for the graduating seniors at TMU at the Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel.

The *Messenger* congratulates the graduates of the Class of 2024.

In a letter to school parents and caregivers, Laura Hatfield, director, School Lunch Program, announces that the USDA will once again be offering its summer meal program, "Sun Meals."

Kendra McGuire, superintendent of Catholic Schools, announces that, on behalf Bishop John Iffert and Father Ryan

Maher, pastoral administrator, Dr. Rachel Noll has been appointed acting head of school for Covington Latin School for the 2024-2025 academic year.

Members of the Diocese of Covington FIRE Foundation Board meet to continue the process of bringing the FIRE Foundation's programs and processes to Catholic schools.

Campaign of Mercy

The Campaign of Mercy is announced as part of the With One Heart pastoral plan.

Official assignments

Rev. Eric L. Andriot
To: Pastor, All Saints Parish, Walton
From: Parochial vicar, St. Paul Parish, Florence

Rev. Michael D. Barth
To: Pastor, Mary, Queen of Heaven Parish, Erlanger
From: Pastor, St. Joseph Parish, Warsaw and St. Edward Mission, Owenton

Rev. Matthew A. Cushing
To: Pastor, Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Park Hills; residence, St. Agnes Rectory, Ft. Wright
From: Pastor, All Saints Parish, Walton; Parochial administrator, Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Park Hills
Continues as chaplain to Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker

Rev. Michael C. Hennigen
To: Vocations promoter, Diocese of Covington; residence, St. Barbara Rectory, Erlanger; Chaplain, Covington Catholic High School
From: Pastor, Holy Cross Parish, Latonia

Rev. Kevin J. Kahmann
To: Pastor, Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, California and Immaculate Conception Mission, Stepstone
From: Pastor, Mary, Queen of Heaven Parish, Erlanger

Rev. Trinity P. Knight
To: Parochial Administrator, Holy Cross Parish, Latonia
From: Parochial Vicar, St. Agnes Parish, Ft. Wright

Deacon Joseph E. McGraw
To: Assistant chaplain, Thomas More University, Crestview Hills
From: Deacon, St. Therese Parish, Southgate

Rev. John K. Opoku
To: Parochial vicar, St. Agnes Parish, Ft. Wright
From: Parochial vicar, All Saints Parish, Walton

Rev. James P. Schaeper
To: Parochial administrator, St. Joseph Parish, Warsaw and St. Edward Mission, Owenton
From: Faculty, Covington Latin School; residence, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington

Rev. Jacob Varghese, V.C.

To: Recalled to the Vincentian Congregation, India
From: Pastor, Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, California and Immaculate Conception Mission, Stepstone

June

The Solemnity of Corpus Christi is celebrated at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, beginning with prayers and a Eucharistic Procession. Coinciding with the solemnity this year was the beginning of the diocesan-wide Campaign of Mercy, encouraging participation in Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.

This year the 19th annual Cross the Bridge for Life event brought 1,500 participants, despite not being able to walk the traditional route due to the ongoing questions surrounding the structural integrity of the Purple People Bridge, Newport.

Priests from across the Diocese came together, not only to celebrate Solemn Vespers but also to celebrate their brother priests' jubilees. Father Thomas Robbins celebrated his Golden Jubilee (50 years), Father Mark Keene celebrated his Ruby Jubilee (40 years) and Fathers Gregory Bach and Samuel Owusu celebrated their Silver Jubilee (25 years).

The Serra Club for Vocation's yearly picnic for women religious was set on the water as 105 women religious joined Serrans, priests, seminarians and Bishop John Iffert on a riverboat cruise over the Ohio River aboard BB Riverboat's *River Queen*.

Twenty-two women join hundreds of others in the ministry of "Spiritual Motherhood" during a ceremony at St. Pius X Parish, Edgewood.

50 years of service on behalf of the Parish Kitchen is celebrated in a special edition of the *Messenger*.

50 volunteers — including 29 youths and 21 adults — visit Pikeville, Ky, for a mission trip.

Campaign of Mercy

The Campaign of Mercy began following the celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi.

Digital media

For the opening of the Campaign of Mercy, Bishop Iffert and three volunteers share their joy in helping others.

July

The St. Elizabeth Ann Seton route of the historic National Eucharistic Pilgrimage makes its way through the Archdiocese of Cincinnati enroute to Indianapolis for the National Eucharistic Congress. The *Messenger* interviews Christoph Bernas and Zoe Dongas, two of the six perpetual pilgrims, and several diocesan parishioners that attended the pilgrimage.

The "Restored In Christ" campaign passes its initial goal of \$6 million dollars with \$6,020,917 from 1,892 donors. This covers

(Continued on page 7)



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The Jubilee year

(Continued from page 1)

eternal life with God is obtainable. That God has made this possible through His death on the cross for our salvation ... If we don't know that our goals are obtainable, we won't have any reason to work for them."

"Our goal is obtainable because God's mercy is indulgent," Bishop Iffert said. "Our goal of eternal life, and our hope even for life in this world, is obtainable only because we know that God is reliable. We know that God is trustworthy. We know that God is merciful."

The second knowledge, Bishop Iffert said, is "to know that we might fail, in fact, the sinfulness of our lives, the sinfulness of our human nature, our tendency towards sin inclines us towards failure. It is only through God's grace — that solid place — where we can expect success in our endeavor."

The message of the Jubilee, Bishop Iffert said, is "God's mercy is indulgent. God's mercy is abundant. God's mercy is prodigious. This Jubilee year is a reminder to all of us that God is eager to pour that mercy out on us. That mercy alone, that grace of God, that action of God, on our part, is the fulcrum where the lever of faith can be applied, the steady place, the source of all our hope."



(top, left) The Franciscan Daughters of Mary were among the over 300 faithful attending Mass opening the Jubilee Year.
 (top, right) Bishop Iffert preaches the homily.
 (above, left) Priests of the Diocese of Covington concelebrate and (above, right) join in the procession.

2024 — A year in the life

(Continued from page 6)

the estimated cost of most of the Cathedral's restoration work.

Be Witnesses features an interview with Benedictine Sister Emmanuel Pieper on understanding art and beauty.

Novice Abe Reeder, Park Hills, Ky., is invested with the monastic habit at St. Vincent Archabbey, Latrobe, Penn.

Nearly 450 attend the Serra Club night at the Florence Y'all. Divine Providence Sister Leslie Keener, Deacon Thomas Murrin and Joanie Lecoy throw out the first pitches.

At the first National Eucharistic Congress in 83 years, over 60,000 Catholics, including Bishop John Iffert and many people of the Diocese of Covington, gather at Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis, to celebrate the Eucharist.

High school students gather at Thomas More University, for the Fully Alive! High School Retreat sponsored by the Diocese of Covington Youth Ministry Office.

Seventeen priests from across the diocese attended the Good Leaders, Good Shepherds retreat, a part of the With One Heart Pastoral Plan.

We Choose Life: The life story of Paul Campion Briggs, son of Aideen Briggs, who died soon after birth from brittle bone disease, which was diagnosed in utero during routine ultrasound.

On the occasion of his golden jubilee, the City of Taylor Mill honors Father Thomas Robbins.

Sisters of Charity Community welcome Karina Montes-Ayala, parishioner, Cristo Rey Parish, Florence, as a novitiate.

St. Ann Mission, Covington, celebrates its 137th novena to St. Ann.

Holy Cross Parish, Latonia, opens a perpetual Adoration chapel.

Campaign of Mercy

Begin with prayer to help identify gifts and talents that lead to where you can best serve.

Digital media

College students Ellie Dierker, Eastern Kentucky University and Paul Allison, University of Kentucky encourage incoming freshman to connect with the Newman Center.

Ken Oleynik, parishioner, St. Pius X, Edgewood, organizes 17 people to remove old and set up new bunk beds at the Emergency Shelter of Northern Kentucky.

Obituaries

Brother John Richard Lemker of the Marianist St. Leonard Community, Centerville, Ohio, July 4.

Notre Dame Sister Mary Joenita Schlueter, July 30.

August

The Diocese of Covington's Office of Catechesis and Evangelization begins a session of New Beginnings a ministry for separated and divorced Catholics.

The Serra Club for Vocations, Northern Kentucky brings a monstrance blessed by Pope John Paul II to the Cathedral and

St. Agnes Church, Ft. Wright, for adoration.

Bishop Iffert celebrates Mass with the Sisters of Notre Dame in honor of their 150 years in the Diocese of Covington.

As the Diocese of Covington, in collaboration with the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, begins a 3-month long campaign in support of Amendment 2, Kendra McGuire, superintendent of Schools, encourages teachers to support the legislation at the opening school year professional development day. Amendment 2 would allow Ky. legislators to develop financial programs for all students attending any school, public or non-public school.

(Continued on page 12)

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Catholic Schools in Action

Catholic Schools in Action

As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, if that is the case, then what is a video worth? The achievements and communities of diocesan Catholic schools cannot be captured in a single photo — and so, this year, in collaboration with the Diocesan Schools Office, the *Messenger* invites readers to watch and learn what makes each school unique, while accomplishing a common mission — educating students in the image of Christ. Each month different schools will be highlighted — look for your school in the coming months. Scan the QR codes and discover more about this month’s featured schools.



Holy Cross District High School provides a quality Catholic education for all of its students through the deeply rooted commitment of the Holy Cross school community to education, diversity, family and religion. Through the call of Jesus in loving service to one another, Holy Cross stresses dedication to a vibrant faith-life through programs of service, community worship, spiritual days of reflection, and traditional instruction in the faith.



The mission of Immaculate Heart of Mary School, Burlington, is to partner with parents in providing a quality education to students regarding their spiritual, physical, emotional, social and educational development. Together we work to foster Catholic values that guide students to become responsible citizens and who embrace the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.



St. Henry Elementary School, Elsmere, is a place where students learn, grow, and become Disciples of Christ by embracing the Gospel message. Students work toward our full potential each day in order to demonstrate respect for the sacrifices made by the entire St. Henry community to ensure our success. Students remain connected to God and others, gain confidence in academic, social and physical abilities, and contribute to the community through service and leadership.



It is the mission of St. Joseph School, Cold Spring, to inspire students to embrace the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, to be and do their best, to be lifelong learners, to live their Catholic faith. The primary purpose at St. Joseph School is to nurture and embrace Gospel values; inspire lifelong learning so that students can do and be their best academically, spiritually and individually; and encourage students to reach out in Christ’s name to the community to better the world.

PEOPLE AND EVENTS

January, as recommended by Pope Francis, is For the right to an education. Let us pray for migrants, refugees, and those affected by war; that their right to an education, which is necessary to build a better world, might always be respected.

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.

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.

Auditions and informal singing Jan. 11 and Feb. 1, 2:30–3:30 p.m., or by appointment. Location will be given to participating families. Northern Kentucky Youth Choir (NKYYC), a regional choir serving people ages 7 to 17 and their families. Rehearsal schedule will be Saturdays or Sundays — best day for all/most — through Feb. 22. The final Saturday (required) is the Choir Festival American Federation Pueri Cantores, when choirs from across the region join in a full day of singing and Festival Mass at Cincinnati's Cathedral Basilica of St. Peter in Chains. The repertory is beautiful, exciting and challenging. Directors Carly Robinett and Pierre Joseph are experienced teachers completing degree work (CCM/Music Ed/Masters and Ball State Univ. Music Ed/Baccalaureate). Singers ages 7-17, be prepared to sing a simple song that you know well and also sing a few notes we will give you. Bring a copy of your music only if you have it. Singers do not need to be Catholic to participate. For information e-mail: nkyYouthChoir@gmail.com or text/call, Rebecca Wells, (859) 240-3738. Facebook: Northern Kentucky Youth Choir.

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.

The Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption will resonate with festive music as the Cathedral Concert Series brings the Season of Christmas to a close with "An Epiphany Epilogue" concert Jan. 12, 3 p.m. Seasonal selections from a wide variety of traditions make this program a treat for music lovers of all ages. The Seven Hills Brass Quintet returns as the featured guest ensemble. LeeAnn Kordenbrock, Cathedral cantor and soloist, and principal organist Greg Schaffer offer unique arrangements for voice, synthesizer and organ. Traditional adornments of the Nativity scene, poinsettias, and evergreen enhance the stunning interior of the Basilica while the music and sacred art surround the listener. All are welcome. There is no admission charge. A freewill offering will be accepted.

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.

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus is central to the Christian faith. **In this series of talks, Father Michael Comer takes us deeper into the mystery of Jesus' Passion, from Gethsemani to Jesus' crucifixion and death, by exploring the "Passion Narratives."** In the "Resurrection Narratives" Father Comer will take us from the tomb to Jesus' victory over death and the promise of eternal life. Free and open to all. Come and bring a friend. All talks are held at Mother of God Church, Covington, 10:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. on the following dates:



Journey to Bethlehem

The Men's Prayer Group of St. Therese Parish, Southgate, sponsored a pilgrimage to Bethlehem exhibit at the Holy Spirit Center in Norwood, Ohio, during the Christmas season. Visitors commented that the exhibit was very well done and inspirational.

Passion Narratives, Jan. 23, 30, Feb. 6, 13 and 20. Resurrection Narratives, March 6, 13, 27, April 3 and 10. If you missed Father Comer's talks on the Infancy Narratives find them at mother-of-god.org under Father Mike's Talks.

St. Augustine Church, Augusta, bingo social, Jan. 26, 1–5 p.m., Clooney Community Center, Augusta, bingo, pull tabs, split the pot raffle, drinks and snacks. \$10 entry fee at the door, additional bingo cards optional. Must be 18 or over to participate. Meal following for players. Weather permitting.

The Diocese of Covington will honor our women and men religious with a Mass Feb. 1, 10 a.m. at the Cathedral. Bishop John Iffert will be the celebrant. A reception will follow in Bishop Howard Memorial Hall. All people are invited.

Newport Central Catholic High School announces its 24th class of inductees into its Athletic Hall of Fame: Tony Bacigalupo, '00; Dr. Grady Gibson, '72; Greg Ladenburger, '67 (posthumously); Drew McDonald, '15; Kristen Schreiber Fayne, '15; and Kaitlin Smith Marks, '08. Also being honored as the "Team of Distinction" is the 2010 Football Class 2A State Champion Team. Additionally, Dan Wagner, '78, will receive Coach Jim Connor Award and Dr. Richard Schuck will receive the Fr. John Hegenauer Community Service Award. The induction and award ceremonies is Feb. 15, Newport Central Catholic gymnasium, social hour, 6 p.m.; dinner and ceremony at 7 p.m. Cost \$30. Reservations accepted prior to Feb. 1 online at <https://ncchs.com/events>. For information call (859) 292-0001.

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.

That Man is You, fall 2024 and spring 2025 schedule: Mon., 8 p.m., Blessed Sacrament Parish, Undercroft, Justin.jehn@thinkchamplin.com; Tues., 6 a.m., Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish at Linneman Funeral Home, blind@covcath.org; Wed., 6 a.m., Mary Queen of Heaven Parish, gym, tim@ryanlandsurveying.com; Wed., 6 a.m., St. Agnes Parish, Murphy Hall,

hebsfarm@gmail.com; Thurs., 6 a.m., Blessed Sacrament Parish, undercroft, bill@deltarealtyusa.com; Thurs., 7 p.m., Divine Mercy/St. Bernard Parishes, Garvey Hall, Dayton, 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.

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.



St. Joseph and St. Edward food pantries

The food pantry at St. Joseph Parish, Warsaw, Dec. 12, served 188 people in 70 households. A group of volunteers arrives early to set up the food pantry, which is open 11 a.m.–1 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month. Father James Schaper, pastor, opens the pantry with a prayer. In addition to canned goods, nuts, cheese, fish, pork chops, chicken, and a variety of fruits and vegetables are available. St. Edward Mission, Owenton,

Annual Report of the Finances for the

The annual report of the Diocese of Covington shows the financial position and results of operation of the Diocese for the years ended June 30, 2024, and 2023. The financial statements of the Diocese of Covington are audited by the certified public accounting firm of VonLehman & Company, Inc. The auditors' report on the financial statements includes an unmodified opinion that the statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Diocese of Covington and the related affiliates. An unmodified opinion is the highest level of assurance given by a public accounting firm.

The financial information presented herein includes the Diocese of Covington Curia offices which are fiscally responsible to, and under the direct control of, the Bishop of the Diocese. This includes the central administrative offices, program offices and departments of the Diocese, its cemeteries and retreat centers, the Diocesan/Parish Annual Appeal, seminarian recruitment and education, the care for elderly and infirmed priests, the Diocesan-wide secondary school support program, the Alliance for Urban Catholic

Education (ACUE) school operations, and the Diocesan-wide self-funded employee health insurance program.

Various religious orders, lay societies, religious organizations which operate within the Diocese, parishes, parish elementary schools, secondary schools and other related institutions are not included in the accompanying financial information.

Results of Operations

During this past fiscal year, total revenues increased from the prior year by 8.0%. This is due mostly to increased health insurance billings (14.1%) and investment income and gains (16.4%) offset by reductions in miscellaneous other income (-10.9%).

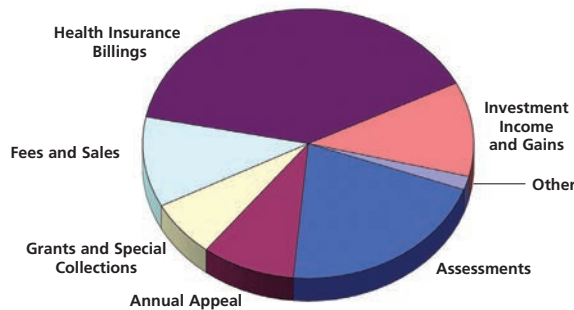
Total expenses decreased by 3.5% due to decreases in priest post-employment benefits (45.7%), programmatic expenses (4.7%), fundraising expenses (6.3%) offset by increases in interest (11.8%) and secondary school fund grants (8.8%).

Operating Revenue

During the fiscal year ended June 30, 2024, the Diocese received operating revenue from the following sources which it used to fund its various ministries and services.

Health insurance billings	\$ 11,657,540
Assessments	6,181,618
Fees and sales	3,204,139
Investment income/(losses)	3,363,823
Diocesan/Parish Annual Appeal	2,700,959
Grants and special collections	2,007,674
Other	479,115
Total Operating Revenue	\$ 29,594,868

DIOCESAN INCOME



- Parish assessments are comprised of three taxes on the parishes of the Diocese. The first two are applied to assessable income, which is defined by diocesan policy and includes offertory, net fundraising, school tuition, and bequest income. A 6.75% tax on the assessable income of all parishes provided \$3,056,282 of income to fund the administrative offices of the Diocese. A 5% tax on the assessable income of the parishes of Kenton, Campbell, Boone, and Mason counties provided \$2,291,696 of support for the secondary and urban schools of the Diocese. Lastly, in lieu of operating individual inner-city schools as parochial schools, the parishes of the inner-city core of the Diocese provide a subsidy to the Diocese to operate those schools as a consortium under the auspices of the Alliance for Catholic Urban Education (ACUE). This subsidy amounted to \$833,640.

- The Diocesan/Parish Annual Appeal for 2023 (ended on March 31, 2024; adjusted to fiscal year ended June 30, 2024) raised an amount totaling \$4,243,448. Of this amount \$1,542,489 was returned to parishes as rebates for use in local ministries.

- Grants, special collections, and contributions represent: 1) grant monies received which are distributed to Diocesan parishes and missions, 2) the seminary collection used for seminarian education and 3) bequests received by the Diocese.

- Fees and sales represent the following for the 2024 fiscal year:

ACUE tuition and fees	\$ 1,098,997
Cemetery fees and sales	1,092,579
Newspaper ads and subscriptions	254,396
Education office fees	276,408
Departmental fees and fundraising	481,759
Total Fees and Sales	\$ 3,204,139

- Health insurance billings are premiums the Diocese and its entities charge themselves to fund the self-insured medical fund. This fund pays for the health insurance claims from doctors, hospitals and prescription drugs for Diocesan employees and covered dependents.

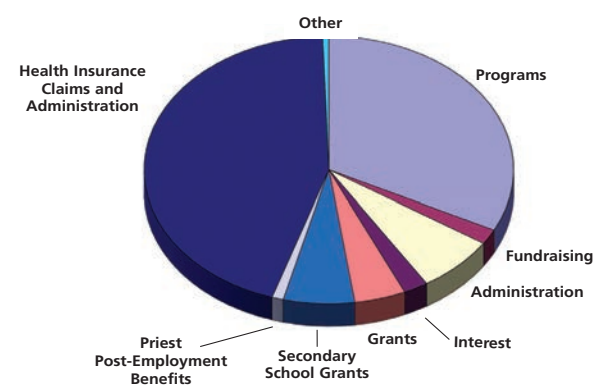
- Investment income/(loss) is the accumulation of interest, dividends, realized and unrealized gains/(losses) on investments held by the Diocese.

Operating Expense

During the fiscal year ended June 30, 2024, the Diocese incurred programmatic costs, grant-making and departmental expenses as follows:

Health insurance claims/administration	\$ 11,797,715
Program expenses	8,599,486
Episcopal administration	1,830,799
Secondary school grants	1,652,001
Diocesan Grants	1,192,163
Interest expense	565,138
Fundraising expenses	481,299
Priest post-employment benefits	264,438
Other expenses	145,511
Total Operating Expense	\$ 26,528,550

DIOCESAN EXPENSES



Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, Diocesan CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION

June 30	2024	2023
Assets		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$ 7,100,000	\$ 7,100,000
Restricted Cash for Perpetual Care Fund	1,000,000	1,000,000
Accounts Receivable, Net	8,000,000	8,000,000
Loans Receivable, Net	6,000,000	6,000,000
Notes Receivable, Net	1,000,000	1,000,000
Unconditional Promises to Give, Net	25,000,000	25,000,000
Cemetery Property Held for Sale	12,000,000	12,000,000
Investments	25,000,000	25,000,000
Restricted Investments for Perpetual Care Fund	3,000,000	3,000,000
Property and Equipment, Net	12,000,000	12,000,000
Other Assets	1,000,000	1,000,000
Right of Use Assets - Operating Leases	1,000,000	1,000,000
Total Assets	65,000,000	65,000,000
Liabilities		
Accounts Payable and Accrued Expenses	1,000,000	1,000,000
Claims and Reserve for Incurred but not Reported Benefit Claims	1,000,000	1,000,000
Special Collections Payable	4,000,000	4,000,000
Pledges Payable, Net	11,000,000	11,000,000
Deposits Payable	6,000,000	6,000,000
Notes Payable, Net	3,000,000	3,000,000
Advances and Deferred Receipts	4,000,000	4,000,000
Priest Postretirement Liability	29,000,000	29,000,000
Operating Lease Liabilities	1,000,000	1,000,000
Total liabilities	29,000,000	29,000,000
Net Assets		
Without Donor Restrictions	24,000,000	24,000,000
With Donor Restrictions	11,000,000	11,000,000
Total Net Assets	35,000,000	35,000,000
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 65,000,000	\$ 65,000,000

See accountants' report and accompanying notes.



January 5, 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Blessings in this New Year!

I am pleased to present you with the audited financial statements for the Diocese of Covington for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024. As you review these reports, you will see that an independent public accounting firm has again issued an unmodified opinion that these statements present an accurate and thorough picture of Diocesan finances for the year. This is the highest level of assurance attainable. The Diocesan Finance Council reviewed these statements in December 2024. Now it is your turn to review them for yourself.

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the members of the Diocesan Finance Council and the staff of the Diocesan Finance Office. Their advice and diligence promote sound management of the resources you entrust to the Church. In doing so, they improve our ability to serve Christ and his mission.

As I have written in other places, there seems to be a renewed awareness in the Church Universal, as well as the Diocese of Covington, that the Church is in essence the living mission of Jesus Christ.

This mission is carried out in the time, talent and treasure - the selfless gifts — that we all return to the Lord from grateful hearts. We each have a spiritual need to make a return to the Lord to acknowledge and rejoice in the fact that all we have and are, is received as a gracious gift from God.

The Diocesan management team and I strive to be trustworthy in shepherding responsibly the gifts that flow from such a sacred trust. In the columns of this report, you will discover the story of how we are working together to teach, heal and sanctify, through the proclamation of God's kingdom of mercy.

As we begin this new year, I thank God for each of you and entrust you to His loving care. Be assured of my prayers. Please, pray for me and for our beloved Diocese of Covington.

In the Joy of the Jubilee Year,

+ John C. Iffert

Most Rev. John C. Iffert
Bishop of Covington

The Diocese of Covington – June 30, 2024

• Health insurance claims and administration are the hospital and doctor bills and the prescription drugs costs for employees and their dependants who receive coverage under the Diocesan self-insured health insurance plan.

• Program expenses represent expenditures for carrying out the various ministries for the Diocese. These expenses include personnel salaries and benefits as well as direct expenses of the ministry. Program expenses are categorized as follows:

ACUE expenses	\$ 3,265,221
Catholic Schools	994,052
Diocesan properties	985,112
Cemeteries	890,023
Messenger	824,407
Community and pastoral services	781,486
Seminary studies, vocations and deacon formation	436,078
Clergy	423,107
Total Program Expenses	\$ 8,599,486

• Secondary school grants are made to the Diocesan urban and secondary schools for operating, scholarship, and capital purposes from the secondary school assessment of parishes.

• Grants are made to various parishes, schools, and other Diocesan institutions from the Annual Appeal and from other Diocesan revenues as follows:

Priest Retirement Fund	\$ 275,000
Cathedral Operations	273,987
Catholic Charities	262,500
Inner city grants	212,500
Educational assistance	110,000
Holy See	22,000
Mission Outreach	9,794
DPAA pledges	4,649
Other grants	21,733
Total Grants	\$ 1,192,163

• Priest post-employment benefits are the actuarially calculated cost of insurance for all retired priests as well as the costs of nursing care and assistance to infirmed priests.

Donor Restricted Assets

As of June 30, 2024, the Diocese holds net assets which are donor restricted or endowed. Donor restricted assets are subject to a specific purpose or the passage of time. For endowed assets, only the income may be used for the intended purpose of the endowment, the principal may not be expended. These funds are classified as follows:

Restricted for a Specific Purpose/Time Period

Diocesan Annual Appeal	\$ 2,923,227
ACUE	1,763,910
General Education Need	300,689
Other Restrictions	532,923
	<u>\$ 5,520,749</u>

Endowed Assets

Educational	2,485,218
Accumulated Net Appreciation	2,293,417
Property maintenance	942,386
Diocesan Annual Appeal	52,504
Social concerns	16,374
ACUE	3,200
	<u>\$ 5,793,099</u>
Total Donor Restricted Assets	\$ 11,313,848

Special Collections

The people of the Diocese of Covington have been extremely generous with their support of various agencies and relief efforts in our country and around the world. The following table is a listing of these Special Collections.

Religious Retirement Collection	\$ 157,573
Mission Cooperative (ACUE)	154,821
International and Domestic needs	148,907
Hawaii Wildfires	76,450
Holy Father collection for worldwide charities (Peter's Pence)	70,171
Opportunities for Life	19,479
Other special collections	9,803
	<u>\$ 637,204</u>

Respectfully Submitted,



Dale Henson, CPA
Chief Financial Officer
Diocese of Covington

San Curia POSITION

2024	2023
\$ 7,267,439	\$ 7,781,847
21,360	22,727
646,751	639,141
8,182,498	4,429,950
6,193,686	6,072,189
1,832,724	1,937,065
314,621	342,133
25,106,016	23,054,314
3,293,757	3,194,904
12,234,134	12,654,988
667,611	763,477
128,999	-
65,889,596	60,892,735
1,958,853	1,903,846
1,100,000	799,279
543,602	584,120
442,030	542,381
11,951,477	10,409,043
6,212,374	6,057,254
3,318,108	3,387,008
4,337,775	4,378,907
128,162	-
29,992,381	28,061,838
24,583,367	21,953,731
11,313,848	10,877,166
35,897,215	32,830,897
\$ 65,889,596	\$ 60,892,735

Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, Diocesan Curia CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES

Year Ended June 30	2024			2023
	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total	Total
Revenues, Gains and Other Support				
Parish Assessments	\$ 6,181,618	-	\$ 6,181,618	\$ 5,873,547
Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal	-	2,700,959	2,700,959	2,660,387
Dividends and Interest	1,096,889	79,317	1,176,206	921,917
Grants and Special Collections	5,753	394,432	400,185	468,116
Realized Gains on Investments	1,079,966	562,102	1,642,068	1,350,685
Unrealized Gains / (Losses) on Investments	400,259	145,290	545,549	618,299
Contributions and Bequests	243,517	1,363,972	1,607,489	1,638,450
Self-Insurance Premium Retention	414,365	-	414,365	471,172
Fees and Sales	3,204,139	-	3,204,139	3,118,339
Health Insurance Billings	11,657,540	-	11,657,540	10,216,284
Other Income	64,750	-	64,750	66,439
Total revenue, Gains and Other Support	24,348,796	5,246,072	29,594,868	27,403,635
Net Assets Released From Restrictions	4,809,390	(4,809,390)	-	-
Total Revenue, Support, Gains, and Reclassifications	29,158,186	436,682	29,594,868	27,403,635
Expenses				
Programs	8,599,486	-	8,599,486	9,025,763
Fundraising	481,299	-	481,299	513,435
Management and General:				
Episcopal Administration	1,830,799	-	1,830,799	1,757,579
Settlements, Legal Fees and Counseling				
Related to Sexual Abuse	55,177	-	55,177	86,351
Grants Made by Diocese	1,192,163	-	1,192,163	1,200,328
Interest	565,138	-	565,138	505,336
Priest Post Employment Benefits	264,438	-	264,438	486,830
Secondary School Grants	1,652,001	-	1,652,001	1,518,601
Health Insurance Claims and Administration	11,797,715	-	11,797,715	12,302,514
Contributions and Assessments	90,334	-	90,334	102,063
Total Expenses	26,528,550	-	26,528,550	27,498,800
Change in Net Assets	2,629,636	436,682	3,066,318	(95,165)
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	21,953,731	10,877,166	32,830,897	32,926,062
Net Assets at End of Year	\$ 24,583,367	\$ 11,313,848	\$ 35,897,215	\$ 32,830,897

See accountants' report and accompanying notes.

Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, Diocesan Curia CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF CASH FLOWS

Year Ended June 30	2024	2023
Cash Flows From Operating Activities		
Change in Net Assets	\$ 3,066,318	\$ (95,165)
Reconciliation of Change in Net Assets with Cash Flows From Operating Activities		
Depreciation	717,568	718,554
Amortization of Debt Issuance Cost Included in Interest	15,163	15,163
Credit Loss Expense (Recovery)	33,749	(69,203)
Realized Gains on Investments	(1,642,068)	(1,350,685)
Unrealized Gains on Investments	(545,549)	(618,299)
Interest credited directly to deposits	187,400	150,842
Changes in:		
Accounts Receivable, Net	1,813	16,697
Unconditional Promises to Give, Net	104,341	(364,818)
Cemetery Property Held for Sale	27,512	43,725
Other Assets	95,866	(215,469)
Right of Use Assets - Operating Leases	39,329	-
Accounts Payable, Accrued Expenses and Other Liabilities	(195,894)	21,438
Claims and Reserve for Incurred but not Reported Benefit Claims	300,721	261,501
Operating Lease Liabilities	(40,166)	-
Cash Provided by Operating Activities	2,166,103	(1,485,719)
Cash Flows from Investing Activities		
Purchases of Property and Equipment	(254,366)	(293,007)
Purchases of Investments	(10,556,528)	(4,420,667)
Proceeds from Sales and Maturities of Investments	10,593,590	8,035,767
Issuance of New Loans	(4,030,282)	(988,344)
Payments Received on Loans	234,562	119,446
Cash (Used) / Provided by Investing Activities	(4,013,024)	2,453,195
Cash Flows from Financing Activities		
New Deposits Received	3,916,160	2,332,808
Withdrawals of Deposits	(2,561,126)	(3,492,340)
Payments on Notes Payable	(23,888)	(23,478)
Cash Provided / (Used) by Financing Activities	1,331,146	(1,183,010)
Net change in Cash and Cash Equivalents	(515,775)	(215,534)
Cash, Beginning of Year	7,804,574	8,020,108
Cash, End of Year	\$ 7,288,799	\$ 7,804,574

See accountants' report and accompanying notes.

2024 — A year in the life

(Continued from page 7)

Bishop Iffert celebrates opening school year Mass at the Cathedral with all teachers and administrators.

Bishop Iffert accepts Michael Schulte as a candidate for the priesthood for the Diocese during the Rite of Candidacy.

The Office of Catechesis and Evangelization host the annual Catechist Ministry Day for all catechists.

The Diocese of Covington School Lunch Program announces that Holy Trinity, St. Anthony and St. Augustine schools are recipients of the federal Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) grant funded and regulated by the USDA.

The Spiritual Motherhood for Priests, a prayer ministry, welcome 40 new members; it is announced that a Spiritual Fatherhood for Priests will begin in the Diocese.

Bishop Iffert visits the newly formed Covington Catholic High School Srodowisko Club, a group devoted to visiting and learning the history of churches.

The Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker, Walton, accept Annie Suenram as a novitiate, taking the name Sister Philomena Marie.

The Diocese welcomes two interim principals – Dr. Rachel Noll, Covington Latin School and Anne Poe, St. Patrick School, Maysville.

Brother Thomas Pieper, a son of St. Paul Parish, Florence, celebrates 60 years of religious life as a Marianist.

Bishop Iffert celebrates the opening school year Mass for Covington Catholic High School, launching its 100th year of educating Catholic men.

Bishop Iffert distributes \$240,000 DPAA service grants to 42 community ministries.

Bishop Iffert celebrates Mass for Catholics Embracing ALL God's Children, a support group for parents and family members of gay, lesbian and transgender people.

A painting of St. Augustine, commissioned by Father Daniel Schomaker and created by Daniel Zalla, is installed and blessed at St. Augustine Parish, Covington

Bishop Iffert is recognized with the Duty to God Award by the Daniel Beard Council of the Boy Scouts of America.

With a new turf field and athletic complex, St. Henry District High School kicks off its first ever competitive football season with its first ever junior varsity game, making history with an out-the-gate win against the visiting Dayton Greendevils, 26-0.

Campaign of Mercy

August's theme is instructing the ignorant: The Office of Catechesis and Evangelization seeks mentors for Franciscan At Home, an online library of over 200 catechetical workshops available to everyone in the Diocese at no cost.

School volunteers Marci Schroder, St. Thomas School and Dave Schabell, Bishop Brossart High School, share their love for helping students.

Digital Media

For the Campaign of Mercy, staff at Notre Dame Urban Education Center share thoughts on what makes educating children rewarding.

Official assignments

Deacon Brian R. Cox
To: Mother of God Parish, Covington

Deacon Peter J. Freeman
To: St. Patrick Parish, Taylor Mill

Obituary

Benedictine Sister Denise Gough, Aug. 25.

September

Bishop Brossart High School begins public phase of fundraising for the completion of the Mustang Athletic Complex.

Bishop Iffert responds to criticisms for celebrating Mass with Catholics Embracing All God's Children.

In this month's "We Choose Life" feature, Betsy Greenwell offers advice to parents on talking to children on how everyone is created in the image and likeness of God to give and receive love.

St. Michael the Archangel Council of the Knights of Columbus host speaker Dan Schachle at its "It's a Miracle" dinner.

Father Jeffrey Von Lehmen, the Emergency Shelter of NKY, the Parish Kitchen and Mary Rose Mission are honored as Faces of Pro-Life awardees at this year's Life's a Ball.

The Office of Stewardship and Mission Services host a first of its kind event for the members of the Diocesan Crosier Guild, those who have given \$1,000 or more to the DPAA for seven or more years. Jim Hess, director, intends to host multiple social and spiritual events for the Crosier Guild.

Pastoral Plan: Parish Missionary Disciples, Cohort one, gathers for its first quarterly gathering. Members of Cohort one have also begun a monthly GYMM (Growing Your Missionary Muscles) for PMD graduates.

William "Bill" Donnermeyer, parishioner, Divine Mercy Parish, Bellevue, celebrates 100th birthday.

Bishop Iffert celebrates the First Friday Candlelight Mass with the intention for the Renewal of Culture at the Cathedral. The event is co-sponsored by the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization and the Angelico Project.

Bishop Iffert congratulates 122 couples celebrating milestone anniversaries at the annual Wedding Anniversary Vespers.

The newly establish Fire Foundation of Northern Kentucky, in partnership with the Diocese of Covington Schools Office, host a Mass of Belonging celebrated by Bishop Iffert.

Thomas More University celebrates the opening of its new 34,000 square-foot Academic Center. The facility is home to the Robert W. Plaster College of Business; the Dr. Anthony '65 and Geraldine '66 Zembrod Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation; the Center for Faith, Mission and Catholic Education and the Wm. T. (Bill) Robinson III '67 Institute for Religious Liberty.

In a partnership with Notre Dame Academy, TMU announces that beginning with the Class of 2025, NDA graduates will be offered direct admission.

Holy Cross District High School, Covington, has been awarded its first distinction as a National Blue-Ribbon School.

Father Sam Owusu, parochial vicar, Mary, Queen of Heaven Parish, Erlanger, celebrates his 25 years of priesthood.

This month's "Be Witnesses" features Notre Dame Sister Maria Therese Schappert and the Notre Dame Urban Education Center.

Bishop Iffert celebrates Mass with the St. Paul School, Florence, community opening its centennial year of educating



May – The newly ordained Deacon Heskamp, along with Bishop Iffert, hold up the consecrated Body and Blood.

children.

The Alliance for Catholic Urban Education awards faithful supporters: Pauline Baumann, "Outstanding Advocate Award"; Kathy Hubert Smith, "Faith, Hope and Inspiration Award" and Roger Keller, Sr. (remembered posthumously) as longtime donor and champion.

Campaign of Mercy

September theme, visiting the imprisoned: Deacon Bill Theis talks about his 15 years of jail ministry with Catholic Charities, Diocese of Covington. Benedictine Sister Dorothy Schuette shares her involvement in beginning jail and prison ministry in the Diocese and with Catholic Charities. Dave Capella shares how Catholic Charities jail and prison ministry serves both the incarcerated and the families of those incarcerated.

Digital Media

This year's Catholic Schools monthly feature page promotes videos of the diocese's Catholic schools. This month the schools highlighted are: Holy Trinity School, Bellevue; Notre Dame Academy, Park Hills; St. Pius X School, Edgewood and Villa Madonna Academy Elementary, Villa Hills.

Campaign of Mercy: Longtime Catholic Charities volunteer Chuck Faeth shares how his desire to find something meaningful to do after retirement led him to jail ministry.

Official appointments

To: Board of Trustees, Thomas More University
Frank Fritsch
Dr. James Horn
Scott McIntyre, Esq.

Obituary

Notre Dame Sister Ann Catherine Wehry, Sept. 17.

October

Pro-Life month begins with Bishop John Iffert celebrating the annual Pro-Life Mass, with Bishop Emeritus Roger Foy in choro, and Father Daniel Schomaker, homilist.

In response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Helene

(Continued on page 13)

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• FIREKING & PYREX MIXING BOWLS
• HADLEY & BYBEE
• & OVENWARE
• LEGOS
WE ARE PAYING FAIR MARKET PRICES—WE BUY COMPLETE & PARTIAL ESTATES AS WELL AS COMPLETE COLLECTIONS!

2024 — A year in the life

(Continued from page 12)

that wreaked havoc across the Southeast, Bishop John Iffert authorizes a second collection at parishes.

Bishop Iffert joins Father Joseph Gallenstein, pastor and Jennifer Geiman, principal, for the blessing and dedication of the St. Mary Stadtmiller Family Parish Activity Center.

In an open letter, Bishop Iffert encourages support for Amendment 2.

Bishop Emeritus Roger Foys celebrates Mass in honor of the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Franciscan Daughters of Mary.

Dr. Joseph Chillo honors recipients of the TMU 2024 Alumni Awards: Terry Connor, '92; Sierra OBryan, '13; Michael Gieske, '80, M.D.; Sister Barbara Rohe, CDP; John Cimprich, '71, Ph.D.; Scott McIntyre, Esq., '97; Kenneth Reis, '72 and Brian Ruschman, '00.

Bishop Iffert joins Ken Collopy, principal, and the NCHS community for the groundbreaking of its long-awaited athletic complex.

Tiny Saints offers online fundraising campaign for parishes and schools during October.

Sisters of Divine Providence responds to Pope Francis's challenge to protect our common home with The Season of Creation.

Women missionaries from St. Pius X Parish, Edgewood, accompanied by Father John Paul, parochial vicar, serve at "Gift of Hope Home," a Mustard Seed Community in Mandeville, Jamaica.

St. Henry Elementary School celebrates the opening of its newly renovated school library and media center during a blessing by Bishop Iffert.

Bishop Iffert and Notre Dame Sister Marla Monahan, vicar for religious, host a luncheon for 2024 jubilarians. 70 years: Sister Jean Ann Luken, SND; Sister Francis Margaret Maag, CDP; Sister Helen Riehle, SND; Sister John Margaret Walsh, CDP; Sister Martha Walther, OSB. 60 years: Sister Mary Bezold, CDP; Sister Catheryine Geoppinger, SND; Sister Barbara Hurlander, SND; Sister Stephanie Kileen, CDP; Sister Margaret Stallmeyer, CDP; Sister Mary Lourita Warken, SND. 50 years: Sister Patricia Marie Tyree, SND.

The Cathedral Concert Series opens its 48th season.

St. Elizabeth Healthcare question accusations of minor gender transitioning therapies leveled by Do No Harm, a watchdog group dedicated to "keeping identity politics out of medical education, research and clinical practice."

Seminary Ball draws record ground and features a video focusing on the new "Propaedeutic Year" of seminarian formation; kicks off Seminary Education Fund collection.

Bishop Iffert leads prayer services at St. John, St. Mary and St. Stephen cemeteries for the annual cemetery visitation day.

Bishop Iffert, Father Eric Andriot, Father Abby Champi and 35 pilgrims from the Diocese of Covington depart on a pilgrimage to Greece "In the Footsteps of St. Paul." In November, the *Messenger* catches up with a few pilgrims to share their experiences.

Jane Zembrodt, religion teacher, St. Pius X Parish, Edgewood and Diocese of Covington FIRE Foundation Board member, leads a workshop entitled "Inclusive Education Sacramental Strategies."

Deacons Jerry Franzen, Steve Durkee, Phillip Racine, Nick Schwartz and Bob Stoockle celebrate 25 years of ordination.

The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem promote five Knights and Dames from the Diocese of Covington: New Commanders with Star – Dame Patricia Enzweiler, Sir Stephen Enzweiler, Sir Nelson Rodriguez; New Commanders – Sir Dave Ledonne and Dame Suanne Ledonne.

With the help of benefactor, Paul Naberhaus, Father Ivan

Kalamuzi and the St. Anthony Parish community remedy a significant hillside slippage caused by deteriorating former school foundation.

Father Stef Bankemper blessed the new Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Atrium at St. Catherine of Siena School, Ft. Thomas.

TMU and the Angelico Project welcome Jesuit Brother Guy Consolmagno, director, Vatican Observatory, for a presentation on beauty and science.

Junior high students of the ACUE schools enjoy an Ohio riverboat cruise with Phil Lipschutz, founder and designer of UNHEARDOF brand. A collaboration by Adidas and UNHEARDOF, each student received a pair of tennis shoes featuring a design inspired by the John A. Roebling Suspension Bridge.

Bishop Iffert joins Diocesan Youth Ministry leaders at the recent King and Country, "Unsung Hero" concert.

St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky launches 24th annual winter coat drive.

Campaign of Mercy

Monthly theme – burying and praying for the dead: David Gibson, in his CNS article, states that prayer for the dead is undergirded by the Church's belief in the communion of saints. Michelle Braun, St. Henry Parish, shares how parish bereavement committees offer comfort and support to grieving families. All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day are holy days set aside specifically for prayer and remembrance of the deceased.

Digital Media

As the debate around Issue 2 heats up, Kendra McGuire, superintendent of Schools and Kathy Nienaber, principal, St. Augustine School, Covington, discuss what makes Amendment 2 necessary.

This month's highlighted Catholic Schools are: Newport Central Catholic High School; St. Edward School, Cynthiana; St. Therese School, Southgate and St. Thomas School, Ft. Thomas.

Campaign of Mercy: Mark Ruedebusch, foreman at St. Mary Cemetery describes the work of cemetery foreman.

Official assignments

Very Rev. Ryan L. Maher, V.F.

To: Vicar for Priests; continues other duties

November

Father Conor Kunath, director, Vocations Office, invites all prayer warriors to enlist in Memorare Army, praying daily for increase in vocations to the priesthood.

Tom Kissel, a local father whose daughter pursued a religious vocation, develops Parents of Vocations website, a min-

istry for parents with children in or pursuing religious life.

As part of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan's priority for better communication among parishes and the Curia, the Diocesan website updates with a new online calendar.

Pickett's Corner, a ministry of Catholic Charities, closes for the season logging the distribution of 747 bikes and locks since its inception in July 2023.

The Diocesan Pastoral Plan is officially released. The three priorities of the Plan are: Ongoing Faith Formation, Evangelization and Leadership Development.

The Pregnancy Care Network, spearheaded by the diocesan



June – Solemnity of Corpus Christi kick-offs the Campaign of Mercy

Pro-life Office, hosts a community baby shower at Covington Latin School, Covington, providing aid to 115 mothers and their families.

Father Martin Pitstick and parishioners celebrate 150th anniversary of Sacred Heart Church building.

Angie Poat, diocesan Youth Minister, welcomes 150 high school students for the SUMMIT 24 Eucharistic Retreat

In its latest project, Gone But Not Forgotten: MLB Unmarked Graves Project unveils the headstone for Robert "Bob" Clark of the 1891 Cincinnati Reds at St. Mary Cemetery, Ft. Mitchell.

In a letter, Bishop Iffert thanks parishioners for their generous donation of \$218,378.86 for Hurricane Helene relief. The funds are directed to Catholic Charities USA for direct support to those affected in North Carolina, east Tennessee, South

(Continued on page 16)



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Obituary

Divine Providence Sister Marilene Cullen (Sister James Marie) died peacefully at Holy Family Home on Dec. 18, 2024. She was a professed member of the Congregation of Divine Providence for 72 years.

Born in the Cumminsville neighborhood of Cincinnati, Ohio in 1933 to John and Mary Fischer Cullen, she made her first profession of vows in 1952 and professed her final vows in 1957.

Sister Marilene began her ministry of teaching in 1952 in Natick, Rhode Island. She was transferred to St. Aloysius School, Covington, Ky, the following year and for the next 31 years taught elementary grades or was principal at the following Kentucky schools: Christ the King, Lexington; St. Bernard, Dayton; St.



Sister Marilene Cullen, CDP

Francis of Assisi, Pikeville; Our Lady of the Mountains, Paintsville; St. Julian's, Middlesboro; and St. Francis de Sales, Newport.

From 1974-79 she was principal and teacher at Kalida Elementary in Ohio. In 1984 she moved to St. Anne Convent and began doing organic gardening until she left as a missionary to Ghana, West Africa in 1988 to help open a new secondary school for girls where she was the administrator for seven years.

She returned to St. Anne's and was plant supervisor, cared for the gardens and transportation needs until she moved to Holy Family Home in 2013. It was there that she was sacristan and librarian and volunteered at St. Philip School, Melbourne, as a tutor or helping to correct assignments.

She kept busy all of the time, crocheting,

painting, reading or visiting with family and friends. She was an artistic person, clever and witty, who amused her students with stories, her drawings, and her sense of humor. Sister Marilene was organized and dedicated to whatever she was responsible for be it in the classroom, school, chapel, gardens or library.

Students respected and appreciated her as someone who was fair and easy to be with. The sisters with whom she lived in community knew her to be a caring and generous person, thoughtful and happy.

She will be missed by her religious community, the Sisters of Divine Providence, and her many nieces and nephews. Her brothers, John and Joseph and her sister, Janet preceded her in death.

Mass of Christian Burial was held at Immaculate Conception Chapel, Holy Family Home, Melbourne Dec. 23, with burial in the convent cemetery.

Memorials suggested to the Congregation of Divine Providence, 5300 St. Anne Dr., Melbourne, KY 41059.

At age 116, religious sister from Brazil is the oldest person on the planet

OSV News

PORTO ALEGRE, Brazil — Teresian Sister Inah Canabarro Lucas from Brazil has become the world's oldest person, reaching 116 years and 210 days.

She now holds two groundbreaking titles: the oldest living woman and the oldest living person in the world, following the death of Japan's Tomiko Itooka on Dec. 29.

The record broken by the sister was confirmed Jan. 4 by LongeviQuest, a nonprofit that documents the world's oldest people.

Sister Inah, born on June 8, 1908, in Sao Francisco de Assis, Brazil, was originally considered too frail to survive childhood, Guinness World Records website said. However, she went on to lead a remarkable life, and she says it's thanks to the rosary she is seen holding in her hands on pictures that went viral since she was announced a record-breaker.

She lives a daily quiet routine at a convent of the Congregation of Teresian Sisters, located in downtown Porto Alegre, as the Brazilian daily newspaper Folha de

São Paulo described it. The sister — called the supercentenarian, a term for those over 110 years old — was recovering after a hospitalization at the end of 2024, the paper said.

The sister's nephew Cléber Canabarro Lucas told Folha de São Paulo, "She was in pain, so they did a lot of tests and found that she has no illness, that everything is a consequence of her advanced age."

The local paper said that while Sister Inah has difficulties speaking, seeing and hearing unless spoken to in close distance to the ear, she celebrated her 116th birthday on June 8. At the time Porto Alegre was recovering from massive floods that hit the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Sister Inah, Folha de São Paulo said, was attentive to the damage caused by the floods, including in the blocks near the convent.

"My aunt was already in poor health, but she prayed a lot. Her prayer is powerful," Canabarro Lucas said. "Knowing that Sister Inah was praying for everyone brought comfort to people."

Sister Inah began her religious journey when she was 16, in 1924, studying at Santa Teresa de Jesus boarding school in Santana do Livramento, Brazil, before moving to Montevideo, Uruguay, where she took her vows as a nun 10 years later. She was baptized at age 17 and confirmed in the Catholic Church when she was 21.



OSV News photo/Carlos Macedo/LongeviQuest, handout via Reuters
Brazilian Sister Inah Canabarro Lucas, 116, poses for a picture in Porto Alegre Feb. 16, 2024. As confirmed Jan. 4, 2025, by LongeviQuest, the soccer-loving nun is the

She returned to Brazil, where she taught Portuguese and mathematics in Rio de Janeiro for many years, later working at the Provincial House in Porto Alegre from 1980, the Guinness World Records website said.

In 2018, Sister Inah received an apostolic blessing from Pope Francis on her 110th birthday. According to LongeviQuest, Sister Inah is the last living person born in 1908 and one of just three people alive today born in the 1900s.

Sister Inah is also the second oldest nun in documented history, after Lucile Randon, known as Sister André of France, who died in January 2023 at 118 years and 340 days old.

Sister Inah is also known to be an avid soccer fan, LongeviQuest said, calling her "a devoted supporter of Sport Club Internacional."

"Whether rich or poor, it doesn't matter — it's for the people," she said in a news release on LongeviQuest's website.



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VIRTUS Training:

- Tuesday, January 14, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Tuesday, January 14, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Wednesday, January 15, 6–8:30 p.m., Bishop Brossart High School, Munninghoff Family Performing Arts Center, Alexandria

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

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

■ Thursday, February 13, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Thursday, February 13, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Wednesday, February 26, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Wednesday, February 26, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

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

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

■ Tuesday, March 11, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

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Note: If your Training Tab is missing or you cannot access your account, contact your parish, school or institution. For other difficulties, contact Marylu Steffen at (859) 392-1500 or msteffen@covdio.org

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2024 — A year in the life

(Continued from page 13)

Carolina, northwest Florida, St. Petersburg and Venice.

Bishop Brossart High School, Alexandria, officially breaks ground on softball and baseball fields to complete the Mustang Athletic Complex.

The artwork of Olivia Schuetz, senior, Bishop Brossart High School, Alexandria, is chosen for the front of Bishop Iffert's Thanksgiving card.

Bishop Iffert celebrates Mass at St. John the Evangelist Parish, Covington, with Father by Thampi and parishioners, in recognition of its centennial.

Bishop Iffert celebrates Mass, recognizing the 75th anniversary of Carmel Manor, Ft. Thomas and honoring the Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and Infirm for faithful service.

Campaign of Mercy

November's theme, "feeding the hungry": Food pantries highlighted include: Parish Kitchen, Covington; the St. Francis Food Pantry, Covington, a ministry of the Franciscan Daughters of Mary. St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky food pantry and parish conferences feed body and spirit. St. Augustine School, Covington, embarks on mission to put others needs first by making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to be distributed monthly to Parish Kitchen patrons before eating breakfast themselves.

Digital Media

This month's highlighted Catholic Schools are: St. Henry District High School, Blessed Sacrament School, Ft. Mitchell; St. Agnes School, Ft. Wright; St. Paul School, Florence and St. Timothy School, Union.

Campaign of Mercy: a video highlighting the work of Mary Rose Mission, Florence. The joy of the Rose Garden Home Mission, Covington, annual turkey give-away is captured on video.

Obituaries

Deacon Bernie J. Kaiser, Nov. 13.
Notre Dame Sister Mary Jana Foltz, Nov. 30.

December

The story of Brian Mendez and Joseph and how they became the 175th family through adoption facilitated by DCCCH Center for Children and Families.

Divine Providence Sister Carleen Schumacher shares the accomplishments of her religious vocation and thanks diocese for support of the annual Retirement Fund for Religious.

Dec. 13 is a special edition outlining the ways the Diocese will celebrate the Jubilee Year, including local and regional pilgrimages, an international pilgrimage to Rome and how the Campaign of Mercy and Jubilee Year connect.

The third annual Babinelli blessing and fifth annual diocesan Christmas tree lighting brightens St. Mary's Park.

Parishioners at St. Anthony Parish, Taylor Mill, used the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception to further implementation of its "With One Heart" Parish Pastoral Plan by hosting a bi-lingual rosary procession.

Parishioners of Cristo Rey, Florence, celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe with a traditional Las Mananitas celebration.

In union with Catholic Churches around the world, Bishop Iffert opens the Jubilee 2025 year with Mass, Dec. 29, at the Cathedral.

Campaign of Mercy

December's theme, "sheltering or harboring the homeless": DCCCH Center for Children and Families, Ft. Mitchell, receives



September — Holy Cross District High School is recognized as a National Blue-Ribbon School. Students hold up signs that spell out HCHS.

400 referrals a month for children that need a home; they also offer a plethora of ways to volunteer to help children and foster parents. Divine Providence Sister Barbara Patrick shares how El Centro, Covington, fulfills the commitment of the Sisters of Divine Providence's to serve local migrants.

Digital Media

This month's highlighted Catholic Schools are: Covington Lation Schoo; Prince of Peace School, Covington; St. Joseph Academy, Walton and St. Patrick Primary School, Taylor Mill.

Campaign of Mercy: The Emergency Shelter of Northern Kentucky has been sheltering the homeless since its inception in 2011. Seventeen parish volunteers help the ESNKY build new beds to replace the old ones.

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Pope condemns economy that ‘does not respect life,’ exploits children

Justin McLellan

Catholic News Service

While society is increasingly focused on pushing the limits of human achievement, it must not lose sight of its duty to protect the dignity of the vulnerable, especially children exploited by the “scourge of child labor,” Pope Francis said.

“Today we know how to turn our eyes toward Mars or virtual worlds, but we struggle to look into the eyes of a child who has been left on the margins and is being exploited and abused,” he said at his general audience Jan. 8.

The thousands of people, including many children, who gathered to see the pope in the Vatican audience hall also were treated to a short performance by members of the Circafrica, a circus troupe with animatronic elephants, acrobats and dancers from several African nations.

In his main audience talk, Pope Francis told the crowd that “the century that generates artificial intelligence and designs multiplanetary existences has not yet come to terms with the scourge of humiliated, exploited, mortally wounded childhood.”

Speaking about child labor, the pope said that “too many little ones are forced to work.”

“Everywhere on earth there are children exploited by an economy that does not respect life, an economy that, in doing so, burns up our greatest reservoir of hope and love,” he said. A child “who does not smile and dream cannot come to know or nurture his or her talents.”

All those who recognize themselves as children of God, especially those who share the Gospel with others, he said, “cannot remain indifferent, cannot accept that little sisters and brothers, rather than being loved and protected, may have their childhood taken from them, their dreams” and become “victims of exploitation and marginalization.”

Christianity’s respect for children is rooted in Scripture, the pope said, noting that the word “child” is the second-most cited word in the Old Testament after the name of God, “Yahweh.”

The Bible portrays both the joy children bring and the suffering they endure, he said. “Songs of joy resound, but the screams of victims also rise.”

“Children are a gift from God,” he said. “Unfortunately, this gift is not always treated with respect.”

Pope Francis pointed to the Gospel account of the threat to the newborn Jesus by “the blizzard of Herod’s violence, who slaughtered the children of Bethlehem: a dark drama that is repeated in other forms in history.”

King Herod, after learning from the Magi about the birth of a king, ordered the massacre of all male children aged 2 and under in Bethlehem and its vicinity. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph fled to Egypt after being warned in a dream.

As a result, the Holy Family experienced “the nightmare of becoming refugees in a foreign country, as happens even today to so many people, to so many children,” the pope said.

Pope Francis also noted how Jesus frequently presented children as models of faith and told his followers that those who do not convert and become like a child “will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

After his main speech, Pope Francis asked for prayers for peace in Ukraine, Nazareth, Israel and all nations at war. “War is always a defeat,” he said.



Pope Francis interacts with members of “Circafrica,” including a life-sized elephant puppet, during his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Jan. 8, 2019.

CNS photo/Vatican Media

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Pope opens Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica, launching 'Jubilee of Hope'

Cindy Wooden

Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — In the quiet of Christmas Eve, Pope Francis opened the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica, launching what he called a "Jubilee of Hope."

As the doors opened, the bells of the basilica began to peal.

After the reading of a brief passage from the Gospel of John in which Jesus describes himself as "the door," Pope Francis briefly left the atrium of the basilica, creating some confusion. But when the cardinals in the front row sat down, the others did likewise.

Three minutes later, the pope returned. He was pushed in his wheelchair up the ramp to the Holy Door. In silence, he raised himself from the chair to knock five times, and aides inside slowly opened the door, which had been framed in a garland of green pine branches, decorated with red roses and gold pinecones.

Opening the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica has been a fixture of the Catholic Church's celebration of jubilee years since the Holy Year 1450, the Vatican said.

Pope Francis chose "Pilgrims of Hope" as the theme for the Holy Year 2025, which began Dec. 24 and will run through Jan. 6, 2026.

The rite of opening the decorated bronze door began inside the basilica with the reading in different languages of biblical passages prophesying the birth of the savior "who brings his kingdom of peace into our world," as the lector explained.

Then, to emphasize how the birth of Jesus "proclaims the dawn of hope in our world," the Gospel of St. Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus was proclaimed.

Introduced with a blare of trumpets, the choir sang, "Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord."

"The steps we now take are the steps of the whole church, a pilgrim in the world and a witness of peace," the pope told the assembled cardinals, bishops, ecumenical guests and lay faithful in the atrium of the basilica.

"Holding fast to Christ, the rock of our salvation, enlightened by his word and renewed by his grace," the pope continued, "may we cross the threshold of this holy temple and so enter into a season of mercy and forgiveness in which every man and woman may encounter and embrace the path of hope, which does not disappoint."

Echoing the biblical jubilee themes of reconciliation and forgiveness, Pope Francis prayed that the Holy Spirit would soften hardened hearts so that "enemies may speak to each other again, adversaries may join hands and people seek to meet together."

"Grant that the church may bear faithful witness to

your love and may shine forth as a vital sign of the blessed hope of your kingdom," he prayed.

Normally the Holy Door, to the right of the basilica's center doors, remains sealed with bricks, a symbolic reminder of the barrier of sin between people and God. The 16 panels on the bronze doors illustrate key moments in salvation history, including the fall of Adam and Eve, the annunciation of Jesus' birth, Christ presented as the shepherd rescuing a lost sheep, the crucifixion and the risen Jesus appearing to the disciples.

Ten children from 10 different countries, holding hands with their parents, crossed the threshold after the pope and the altar servers, but before the cardinals and bishops. Then 54 people from 27 nations — including the United States and Canada, Australia, Tanzania and Togo, Venezuela and Vietnam — passed through. Many of them wore the traditional dress of their nations or ethnic groups.

Neither the Vatican press office nor the Jubilee press office released the names of the pilgrims or explained how they were chosen.

Also among the first to cross the threshold were representatives of other Christian churches. The Dicastery for Promoting



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Francis, after knocking on the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Dec. 24, 2024, waits for aides to open it as he inaugurates the Holy Year 2025.

Word made man," the note said.

However, it added, the ecumenical guests' participation "must not be interpreted as an attempt to associate them with elements of the jubilee, such as the jubilee indulgence, which are not in line with the practices of their respective communities."

In fact, the "selling" of indulgences helped spark the Protestant Reformation; the practice was later banned by the Council of Trent.

The Catholic Church believes that Christ and the saints have accumulated a treasure of merits, which other believers — who are prayerful and repentant — can draw upon to reduce or erase the punishment they are due because of sins they have committed. Making a pilgrimage, going to confession, receiving Communion and offering prayers to receive an indulgence is a key part of the Holy Year.

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Christian Unity said in an explanatory note, "Entering through the Holy Door expresses the willingness to follow and be guided by the only begotten Son of God."

Especially during the year that will see the celebration of the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which solemnly defined the basics of Christian faith, the ritual "is a manifestation of the faith that all Christians share in Jesus, the Eternal

National/World

Bishops issue statement supporting immigrants

PROVINCE OF LOUISVILLE — On the Feast of the Holy Family, Dec. 29, bishops of the Province of Louisville have issued a joint statement expressing prayerful support and solidarity to our immigrant sisters and brothers. “As we reflect upon the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and recall during this time their flight into a foreign land as migrants, the ongoing heightened discussion surrounding our migrant community has engendered fear and uncertainty. It is also a challenging time for the whole Catholic Church in the United States which has long included migrants from various parts of the world. The Catholic Bishops of Kentucky and Tennessee, together as the Metropolitan Province of Louisville, wish to first and foremost express our prayerful support and solidarity to our immigrant sisters and brothers. Please be assured that you are not forgotten and know that the Church stands with you. You and your families are a cherished gift to the world,” the statement read in part. To read the complete statement visit www.covdio.org.

Media literacy needed to counter polarization, narrow thinking

VATICAN CITY — Rather than supporting the growth of commercial technology and artificial intelligence, governments should be supporting families and educators in being the main channels of passing on culture and values, Pope Francis told ambassadors and other diplomats accredited to the Holy See. “Here we see the importance of media literacy education, which aims to provide the essential tools needed to promote critical thinking skills, to equip young people with the necessary means for their personal growth and their active participation in the future of their societies,” he said in a written speech delivered Jan. 9. “Scientific progress, especially in the area of information and communications technology, has brought undoubted benefits for mankind,” he wrote. At the same time, “it often contributes to polarization, a narrowing of intellectual perspectives, a simplification of reality, misuse, anxiety and, ironically, isolation, particularly as a result of the

use of social media and online games,” the pope wrote. This technology, which is strongly aligned with commercial interests, is “generating a culture rooted in consumerism.” “Parents, close relatives and educators must remain the main channels for the transmission of culture, for the sake of which governments should limit themselves to providing support for them in their educational responsibilities,” especially in promoting media literacy, he wrote.

As last major hospital lies in ruins, people of Gaza dying ‘slow death’

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — Gaza is facing a devastating health crisis after Israeli forces destroyed the last functioning hospital in northern Gaza, Kamal Adwan, on Dec. 28. Anton Asfar, head of Caritas Jerusalem, says the situation is beyond dire with basic medical supplies running out, and deadly diseases spreading fast. “It’s a slow death, one way or another,” Asfar told OSV News. With hospitals in ruins and resources scarce, Gaza’s people are being forced to flee south for any chance of treatment. The international community has responded, with the United Nations and Pope Francis condemning the attacks: “No more striking schools, hospitals; no more hitting workplaces!” the pope said. The World Health Organization slammed Israel’s actions as a “systematic dismantling” of Gaza’s health infrastructure, putting 75,000 lives at risk. Caritas Jerusalem continues to provide vital health care in southern Gaza but can’t access the north as it’s simply too dangerous. Asfar described the situation as a health collapse, with the most basic medications like fever reducers unavailable for the suffering community under constant bombardment. Despite the overwhelming odds, Caritas Jerusalem staffers remain committed and hope to reunite with their colleagues in Gaza soon.

LA Palisades Fire destroys Corpus Christi Catholic Church

LOS ANGELES — Multiple wildfires are ravaging the Los Angeles area and causing significant damage, since the fires broke out Jan. 7. One of the most devastating losses was Corpus Christi Catholic Church in Pacific Palisades, where only the church’s frame remained Jan. 8. The church, a landmark in an affluent neighborhood known for hosting celebrities, was built in the 1950s. The Palisades, Eaton and Hurst fires forced the closure of over 60 Catholic schools due to fire proximity, poor air quality, wind damage and power outages. Catholic school officials, including Superintendent Paul Escala, prioritized safety, with some schools remaining open to provide routine and care for students during the crisis. The fires, fueled by dry Santa Ana winds, have burned thousands of acres and destroyed around 1,000 homes. Two civilian deaths have been reported,

and many residents have suffered significant injuries. Local leaders, including Archbishop José H. Gomez, urged prayers for those affected. “My heart goes out to our neighbors who have lost their homes and livelihoods. Let’s pray for them and let’s pray for our firefighters and first responders,” he said.

The ‘Fastest Nun in the West’ moves closer to canonization

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Sister Blandina Segale (1850-1941), an Italian immigrant who lived through the Wild West, is one step closer to being canonized. Allen Sánchez, the petitioner of her cause, said at a Jan. 3 press conference in Albuquerque that Vatican historians recently have reviewed the “positio,” a vetted record of her life, and voted yes to advance her cause. She will soon be declared “Venerable.” “Jesus was her everything,” Santa Fe Archbishop John C. Wester added. Known for her courageous acts as a missionary, Sister Blandina befriended Billy the Kid, calmed a lynch mob, and testified in Congress on human trafficking. A member of the Sisters of Charity, she founded schools, hospitals, and homes for immigrants. Her diary, published in 1932, detailed her extraordinary life, which has been featured in books, magazines and on screen. The show “Death Valley Days” gave her the moniker “The Fastest Nun in the West.” Sanchez said there are 49 reported miracles linked to Sister Blandina; once a miracle is confirmed, beatification is the next step. He summed up the sister’s spirituality in one sentence: “Who are the vulnerable and what do they need from me?”

Federal court revives pro-life groups’ challenge to NY hiring law

NEW YORK — A federal appeals court Jan. 2 revived a challenge to a New York state law that critics alleged violates the hiring practices of churches and pro-life pregnancy centers. Supporters of the provision of the New York employment law, which prohibits workplace discrimination based on employees’ “reproductive health decision making,” argue it prohibits retaliation against employees who get abortions. But opponents, such as CompassCare, a faith-based pregnancy center with limited medical services across New York state, argue the law infringes on their ability to hire employees who agree with their core mission. A unanimous three-judge panel of the Manhattan-based 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the plaintiffs — which also include the National Institute of Family and Life Advocates, and First Bible Baptist Church — would be able to proceed with their challenge to the 2019 state law on the grounds of the First Amendment’s protections of expressive association. It directed a lower court to examine whether each group’s claim that the law infringed upon “the very mission of its organization” had merit.

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Baker photos

Bishop Iffert blesses new building for Catholic Charities supportive housing

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

On a chilly morning, December 19, friends of Catholic Charities and residents of its St. Joseph supportive housing came together for a blessing by Bishop John Iffert of a new building on the premises. Built with the skills of parishioners of St. Pius parish, Edgewood, the space will be used as additional storage for residents, as well as a communal space and office space for case workers.

The St. Joseph supportive housing consists of two apartment buildings in Elsmere, which are owned and operated by Catholic Charities of Northern Kentucky. The apartments provide permanent housing to individuals and families in need, as well as case support to help them achieve stability.

Bishop Iffert quoted Pope Francis as he prepared for the blessing, paraphrasing that "When we spend time with a neighbor who needs our help, we are making a pilgrimage to encounter the face of Christ in our daily lives." Afterward, he thanked the work of Catholic Charities, and the hospitality of the residents of the apartments for welcoming him.



(top left) Bishop John Iffert at the blessing of the new building at St. Joseph apartments, Dec. 19.
(left) Bishop Iffert anoints the building with holy water.
(right) Onlookers observe the blessing.

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