

MESSENGER

Serving the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky since 1926

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(far left) Vice Principal Elaine Wagner at Immaculate Heart of Mary School, Burlington, walks with a student from drop off to the doors of the school as the excitement builds in anticipation of a new school year.



(left) Two students from Immaculate Heart of Mary School embrace with palpable joy upon their reunion before the first day of school.



(below) Students at Immaculate Heart of Mary School wait to be taken to their new classrooms, having fun together before school begins.



(left) The seniors at St. Henry District High School were treated to a pre-school breakfast by the senior parents. Pictured is one of the seniors joining their classmates for breakfast.

(right) St. Henry District High School principal Grant Brannen fist bumps a student as she walks through the doors of school, ready to begin the new year.



(below) A group of students at St. Henry District High School, Erlanger, walk into school on the first day.

Bailey and Keener photos



(above) Parents excitedly capture the attention of their students at St. Edward School, Cynthiana, taking the annual first day of school pictures.

(far left) Teachers at St. Edward School greet parents and students at the doors of the school as they arrive for the first day of school.

(left) Father Joseph Rielage, parochial administrator, St. Edward Parish, Cynthiana, sits with a nervous student in the cafeteria, easing her nerves, as students file in for the first day of school.

The Deanery Pastoral Council serves as one facet of the body of the Church, said Bishop Iffert at DPC orientation

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

The annual Deanery Pastoral Council orientation took place August 9, in Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington, where new members of the Deanery Pastoral Council learned more about their role as members of the council.

Each parish in the Diocese of Covington is organized into one of five deaneries based on their geographical area: the Cambell County Deanery, the Covington Deanery, the Northern Kenton County Deanery, the Southeast Deanery and the Southwest Deanery. Leading each of these deaneries is a dean, a member of the clergy from within that region appointed by Bishop John Iffert.

The Deanery Pastoral Council is a quarterly meeting of two representatives from each parish within a deanery. Members of the council serve three-year, renewable terms. From each Deanery Pastoral Council, two people are selected by their council peers to represent their deanery at the Diocesan Pastoral Council, which meets quarterly with Bishop Iffert.

The goal of the Deanery Pastoral Council is to discuss and advise Bishop Iffert on issues via their representatives to the Diocesan Pastoral Council. Bishop Iffert likened the hierarchical structure of these councils to that of the body. With the head, in this case himself as the head of the church of the Diocese of Covington, needing to listen to the lungs and heart in order to function properly.

“The head has to listen to the body. The head has to be responsive to the needs of the body. That’s what these councils are all about, to make sure that we are listening to one another and, even more importantly that we are discerning the Spirit of God together,” said Bishop Iffert.

Bishop Iffert recalled a story from his time as a parish pastor, when he provided counseling to married couples. It became to clear him, he said, that these couples did not want to be counseled, rather, the men wanted him to take their side.

“It happened over and over again,” said Bishop Iffert, “and usually they would throw out this thing about the man is the head of the household. They would say the man is to be the head of the household.”

To which Bishop Iffert would respond to them saying, “yes, that works to exactly the degree to which you are a saint,” he said.

“If we’re not saints and we insist on that kind of tight control, we have the potential of giving into our manipulative selves,” he said. Which is why the Deanery Pastoral Council and Diocesan Pastoral Council are structured in such a way, so that the head can easily listen to the heart and lungs.

“All authority in the church is to be exercised as servant leadership. All authority in the church is to be exercised as foot washing, with a gentleness to it, with a servant’s heart. That means we have to take the time to listen. We have to take the time to check our motivations. We have to make sure that we’re considering the good of others in as complete and full way we can,” said Bishop Iffert.

The meetings of the Deanery Pastoral Council are open to the public so that parishioners can voice their concerns and opinions, which will then be taken under advisement by

the council. This pipeline from those in the pews to Bishop Iffert through the Deanery and Diocesan Pastoral Councils, allows him to listen to the body of the church of Covington.

“That’s my vision,” said Bishop Iffert, “that we are a family of faith together; our pastors are clearly the heads of those parish families, but none of us are saints, and so we need to be listening to one another and being gentle with one another and being about the work, not listening to my opinions about what things are, but for me, listening to the way the Spirit is speaking to me through the people of God.”



(above) New members of the Deanery Pastoral Raise from the Southwest Deanery their hands to be identified at the Deanery Pastoral Council orientation, August 8.



(above left) A member of the Southwest Deanery reinforces a point made by Bishop Iffert, “I can tell you from experience,” he said, “that the ears are wide open at the Diocesan level, and Bishop is very good about wanting to know.”



(above right) Bishop Iffert leads those in attendance through a spiritual reflection.



(above) The Covington Deanery, joined by Bishop Iffert, deep in discussion on the spiritual reflection led by Bishop Iffert moments prior.

Red Mass encourages legal professionals to embrace love and mercy, welcomes faithful to pray for them

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Beginning in the 13th century, a “Red Mass” was held at the beginning of the judicial year in European cities. Called a Red Mass for the red vestments worn by the celebrant, representative of the flames of the Holy Spirit, the Mass celebrated officials working on justice — from lawyers, to judges and other public servants.

In the Greater Cincinnati area, the Thomas More Lawyers Guild has been hosting a Red Mass in the area annually since the 1990s. Alternating yearly on either side of the Ohio

River, this year’s Red Mass will be held in the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, on Sept. 18 at 6 p.m. — all are welcome to join in praying for those in the legal profession and to participate in the reception following in the Cathedral courtyard.

Joel Jensen, the chair for the planning committee of this year’s Mass, has been involved in the guild and the planning for more than a dozen years — having served as co-chair previously in 2020. “It’s not just about asking God’s blessing,” Mr. Jensen said about the Red Mass, “It’s about when you look at the terms of the law — denial, approval, judgement, verdict,

evidence — there’s no emotion to any of these words. The Red Mass is for providing the people who are participants in the justice system — whether judges, attorneys, or everybody else — with the fact that everyone involved in the system is the face of Jesus. Through the Red Mass, we change our words and focus to mercy, love and forgiveness.”

Through the prayers at the Red Mass, officials are called to “see the people coming before the courts as humans, and not just a technical thing,” said Mr. Jensen. “We’re not standing in judgement of others ... we judge their acts, but not who they are.”



An image of St. Thomas More, patron saint of lawyers, politicians and civil servants. He is described on the website for the Cincinnati Red Mass as a “renowned counselor of law, statesman of integrity, merry martyr and most human of saints.”

Deacon Durkee remembered as a man who embraced and shared the transformative love of God

Laura Keener
Editor

Steven Irving Durkee, age 76, of Covington, Ky., died Tuesday, July 22. Born on Feb. 7, 1949, in Spokane, Washington, he was the son of Donald and Winifred Durkee (nee Stevens). He was a permanent deacon for the Diocese of Covington for 26 years. Bishop John Iffert celebrated the Funeral Mass, Aug. 2, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington.

A lifelong learner, Deacon Durkee attended St. Clare Elementary ('64), Cincinnati; St. Meinrad Seminary (1964-65), Indiana; Roger Bacon High School ('67); University of Cincinnati ('71), where he earned a bachelor's in accounting; Athenaeum of Ohio ('88), earning a master's in religion; and Xavier University ('96), earning an M. Ed. in Community and Agency Counseling.

During a Teens Encounter Christ retreat his senior year at Roger Bacon High School, Deacon Durkee met Kathy, the woman who would be his devoted wife for 54 years. His daughter, Stephanie Specter, recalled her parents' first meeting in her comments about her father at the beginning of the funeral Mass.

"The cute young woman who was pouring milk caught Dad's eye. He kept drinking milk and asking for more so that he could talk to her," she said.

The young couple attended local colleges, he at the University of Cincinnati as an accounting major and she at Good Samaritan School of Nursing. They married during Deacon Durkee's senior year.

"They continued on in their married life, Mom sharing her gifts in a variety of nursing positions and Dad sharing his gifts in an even larger variety of all sorts of jobs," said



Deacon Steven Irving Durkee

Deacon Durkee cherished his time at Covington Catholic High School, which led him to pursue a degree and career in counseling and eventually, to the permanent diaconate.

"Deacon Durkee was always a good, steady, quiet, leadership presence," said Msgr. Gerald Reinersman, who ministered with Deacon Durkee at Covington Catholic's Christian Awakening Retreats. "He could lay down the law when he had to, but for the most part, he was patient with folks and understanding of their faults and weaknesses. We were there to share and encourage or awaken people to the presence of Christ in their lives. That was a very big thing for him."

Known for his generosity and commitment to service, he dedicated time as a volunteer at the Kenton County family courts and was a long-term participant and cook for the

Mrs. Specter.

One of those jobs was as a religion teacher and swim and dive coach at Covington Catholic High School, Park Hills.

"The course of Dad's life pivoted and elevated, allowing him to grow into the person that most people knew. During his time at CovCath, Dad discovered he had the gifts for teaching, explaining religion in a relevant and thoughtful way, and for helping young men come to know God and God's love for all of them," said Mrs. Specter. "No one was more surprised than Dad when he took on the role of swim and dive coach at CCH. Dad never actually participated in competitive swimming and diving, maybe even hadn't had lessons, and yet he had a special way of motivating and encouraging his swimmers."

Thursday Morning Men's Non-denominational Prayer Breakfast. Deacon Durkee enjoyed golfing, traveling, reading and engaging with the St. Charles Community. Deacon Durkee loved attending Xavier University basketball games.

As a deacon, Deacon Durkee held assignments at Mother of God Parish, Covington (1999-2016) and St. John Parish and St. Ann Mission, Covington (2016-2025).

"Deacon Steve was a welcome addition to the St. John and St. Ann communities," said Father Aby Thampi, pastor. "His insightful homilies and the ability to connect with people were his greatest gifts. He loved and talked about his time at Covington Catholic High School. His love of Saint X basketball was a topic of conversation in the sacristy during basketball season. During that season Deacon Steve could often be seen in a Xavier jacket and shirt under his alb. He was a big fan. During his work at the Men's Non-denominational Prayer Breakfast he found out that he was assisting another minister's son in preparing to become Catholic and they became friends during the process. Deacon Steve was missed during this past year when he was not able to assist at Mass, parishioners at both parishes were asking for updates. A sign of the impact he had at these parishes. He will be missed."

He was an avid supporter of his children and grandchildren.

(Continued on page 13)



Mother Clare appointed FDM superior, requests prayers

On Friday, August 8, the Franciscan Daughters of Mary — missionary sisters who serve the poor of the Diocese of Covington through ministries such as the Rose Garden Home Mission and the Center for Hope and Healing — held its general elections. Mother Clare has been elected the Mother Superior of the Franciscan Daughters for the upcoming year, succeeding Mother Seraphina Quinlan. Commenting on the election, Mother Clare had one simple request of the people of the diocese, "Pray for me."



Immigration
The Catholic Perspective

Immigration: The Catholic Perspective, part 2
Hosted by the Intercommunity Sisters Peace and Justice Committee

August 18, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

No pre-registration required

Presentation includes a deeper dive into Catholic Social Teaching related to immigration, including a presentation from immigration lawyer, Jessica Ramos. All are welcome.



Bishop's Schedule

Aug. 17
Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 10 a.m.

Aug. 19
Spanish community at St. Timothy's Parish, Union, 5 p.m.

Aug. 20
All-school Mass and dedication of signage, Holy Cross District High School, Latonia, 10 a.m.

Catholic Charities Board meeting, 1 p.m.

Aug. 21
Monthly Priest Holy Hour, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 3 p.m.

DPAA celebration event, Bishop Howard Memorial Hall, 6 p.m.

Aug. 22
All-school Mass followed by classroom blessing, St. Mary of the Assumption School, Alexandria, 8:30 a.m.

"Gargoyles and Gratitude" donor reception, Bishop Howard Memorial Hall, 7 p.m.

Aug. 23
Vigil Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 4:30 p.m.

Aug. 24
Catholic Charities CassBa Event, Drees Pavilion, Covington, 3 p.m.

IN-PERSON WORKSHOP *with the* FRANCISCAN UNIVERSITY'S CATECHETICAL INSTITUTE

at the THOMAS MORE UNIVERSITY, STEIGERWALD HALL, SAINTS CENTER

SATURDAY,
OCTOBER
25
9:30-3:30pm

Join catechetical leaders, mentors, and parish volunteers across the Diocese for an interactive day of formation, practical training, and community. Whether you're new to the Franciscan University Catechetical Institute (CI) or looking to better support your learners and mentors, this in-person workshop will equip you with the tools, tips, and vision you need to succeed.

- **Learn** how to onboard learners, leaders, and mentors
- **Explore** CI dashboards, reports, and diocesan features
- **Understand** how to track progress, submit workshops, and run reports
- **Discover** how CI supports formation in your school or parish
- **Connect** with others building a culture of lifelong catechesis



presented by

Mr. Brady Webb, M.A.

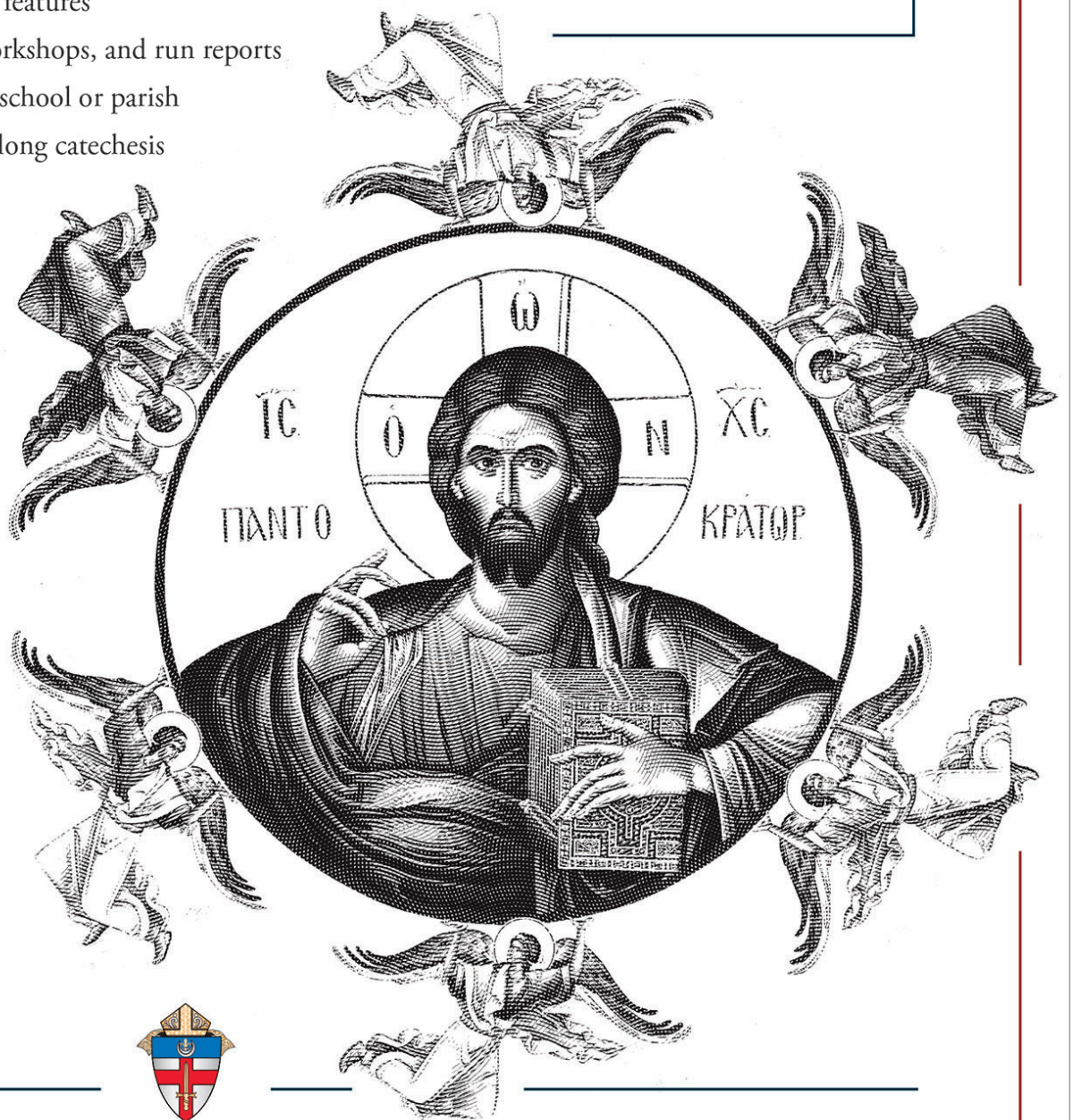
Webmaster of the Catechetical
Institute at Franciscan University

The Schedule:

9:30am	Welcome & Prayer
11:30am	Mass
12:15pm	Lunch
1pm	Onboarding Learners & Leaders & Mentors
2:45-3pm	Resources, Tips, Related Initiatives, & Conclusion
3:30pm	Closing Thoughts & Prayer

Please register by October 15,
at covidio.org/register/

Audience: This training is for everyone who uses the Franciscan University's Catechetical Institute Website for Learning the Catholic Faith!



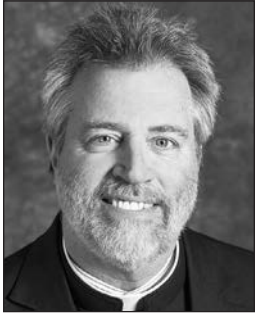
DIOCESE of COVINGTON
OFFICE of CATECHESIS AND EVANGELIZATION

Be who God meant you to be, and you will set the world on fire

The readings for the twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle C — are: Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10, Hebrews 12:1-4, and Luke 12:49-53.

We have from Scripture many images of God that are comforting — Jesus as the Good Shepherd (John, chapter 10), who leads us safely through death and darkness

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Stephen Bankemper

(Psalm 23); Jesus, come not as judge but savior (the famous John 3:17); and many more. There are also many passages in Scripture that show a different side, so to speak, of God, with which we are not so comfortable, for example, God who destroys the wicked (Psalms 101 and 92), raining down brimstone and fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). The image we hear in the Gospel for this weekend

— the image of fire — is hard to put in one or the other category, but it is worthwhile to contemplate both its “positive” and “negative” aspects.

“I have come to set the earth on fire,” Jesus says to his disciples, “and how I wish it were already blazing!” What is this fire our Lord desired to set?

In his book God and the World, Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, wrote, “When Jesus talks about fire, he means in the first place his own Passion, which was a Passion of love and was therefore a fire; the new burning bush, which burns and is not consumed . . .” (p. 222) This is a fire with which we can feel comfortable, the fire of God’s love that saves and frees us. And yet, it is a fire, as Benedict continues, “that is to be handed on. Jesus does not come to make us comfortable; rather he sets fire to the earth; he brings the great living fire of divine love, which is what the Holy Spirit is, a fire that burns.” (ibid.)

This is a fire that, as Jesus says in today’s Gospel, brings, not peace but division. This is a fire that makes us uncomfortable because it divides, not just “three against two and two against three,” but even divides us from ourselves. When we accept God as our God, we allow into ourselves and our lives a “consuming fire,” (Hebrews 12:29) a “devouring fire, a jealous God,” (Deuteronomy 4:24), a God who desires all of us, who wants to be our first love (“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength . . .”) a God who consumes anything in us that is not of God, because in his presence no evil can abide. Do we want this fire?

We tend to think and talk of heaven, hell, and purgatory as three different “places,” but in the last few years I have found myself thinking of them as one place: the presence of God. (I am not claiming this to be Church teaching; it is only an idea, an image.) God, who is all Love, burns eternally with this love. Those who resolutely refuse to let themselves be changed by this love and cling to their sin and selfishness and other loves, are only made miserable by this flaming love, and are thus in eternal hell. Those who desire to be transformed but struggle to abandon themselves to love, who still hold on to some of their own will and other loves, experience God’s love and presence as consuming flames, as purgatory, until they are able to let go of all in themselves that is not God. But those who have given themselves over to God,

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Let the little children come to me

For the first time in nearly two decades, St. Paul parish hosted a vacation Bible school. Growing up, my mother was the director of vacation Bible for a decade, and my siblings and I were there with her every year, either as attendees or volunteers. This year, as I volun-

VIEWPOINT



Sarah Torres

teered alongside my mother and sister, I got to watch two of my little girls experience the joy I did all those years ago for the very first time. Things were, of course, different — they attended from 6 p.m.–8 p.m. rather than 8 a.m.–11 a.m., and twenty years ago, my mother’s program reached a peak of over 200 students and 100 volunteers, and our group this year was small but mighty at around 40 attendees and over a

dozen volunteers, a wonderful turnout for a program revival.

As my girls ran down the hallway ahead of us at the end of the night, me walking along with my mother and my 5-month-old sitting on my hip, my mother commented on how wonderful it was to see the next generation of children beginning to think of church as their second home. The thought made me happy, but after a few minutes, my heart hurt. There were always lots of us kiddos running around before and after VBS — and at fish fry, and at festival, religious education night and Donut Sundays. There was hardly a week when we weren’t at the church for some event or another. Most of my friends were the kids of other volunteers, and we knew the church and school building inside and out.

So often, I feel as parents, we are so scared to let our children be children because we have been given the impression that our children are a burden to those around us. I have watched, with a bit of a giggle to myself, how the pews my family, with a combined 4 children four and under; sit in on Sundays have now become a bit of a “children’s section” with a few other families sitting nearby. Most of the older generation parishioners who sit around us are all smiles and waves at all the little ones, but it breaks my heart as I also watch some other parents worry over every little sound their children make. The children are not disruptive; they are just being children struggling to sit still through the homily and eager to sing loudly with the rest of us. This concern that our children are a bother, or even unwelcome, may have a hand in why we don’t see as many young parent volunteers.

We are very blessed at St. Paul to have a DRE who not only welcomed my children to “help” around VBS, but never backed an eye at the idea of the youngest one joining me to teach religious education. I know not all parents of littles have felt quite as welcomed in other places. My mother always said her favorite group when she was a young, new mother of four was the Mother’s Club at Immaculate Heart of Mary. Children were welcome at everything and expected, encouraged, to behave like children. When we open our hearts to our youngest parishioners, not just those adorable little babies that sleep the hour away, but the rowdier toddlers and preschools just learning how to kneel and not jump in the baptismal font, we will find the parents feeling more welcome as well. Let us strive for the goal that every child and parent feels that the church is their second home, because they are not just the future of the Church, they are the Church.

Sarah Torres is the archivist for the Diocese of Covington, Ky

Faith’s family tree

Our Catholic faith doesn’t appear out of thin air, and it plays out incarnationally and across history. Faith comes from somewhere, and often, that somewhere is a someone, often visibly woven into our personal genealogies.

CALLED TO HOLINESS



Jaymie Stuart Wolfe

Everyone wants to claim some connection to our first American-born pope: Dolton, Illinois — the suburb just outside the southern limits of Chicago where the Prevost children grew up; Villanova University in Philadelphia where their youngest son went to college; St. Louis, where he entered the Augustinians; Chiclayo, Peru where

Msgr. Prevost served as a missionary priest, and then bishop. Even Rome had a legitimate claim long before the name Robert Cardinal Prevost was announced from St. Peter’s loggia.

So, it comes as no surprise that there’s been a lot of Louisiana chatter about our new Holy Father’s Creole roots. The news of the pope’s ancestry flooded New Orleans news outlets within a few days of his election.

More recently, the story was published by the *New York Times* and Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. presented a copy of the pope’s lineage to him at the Vatican.

But here in New Orleans, a well-researched and fascinating exhibit showing Pope Leo’s maternal family tree has drawn many to the Old Ursuline Convent Museum in

the French Quarter. There, visitors can explore seven generations of the Holy Father’s New Orleans ancestors, leading back to the years just after the city’s founding in 1718. Supported by sacramental records still held in the cathedral archives, the story Pope Leo’s family tree tells is a uniquely Catholic and American one.

The pope’s family includes immigrants from Bohemia, France, Italy, Cuba, Haiti, Guadeloupe and Canada. Also among his predecessors are numerous men and women identified as people of color — some free and others born enslaved.

It appears, in fact, that perhaps the only woman ever buried inside St. Louis Cathedral was one of the Holy Father’s forebears: a young woman of color who died in childbirth in 1799 and was interred near the Mary altar along with her baby. Family marriages and baptisms, too, can be found in New Orleans church records, some of which may have been thrown out of the windows during the famous Good Friday fire of 1788 by Père Antoine to save them.

In any case, what Pope Leo’s family tree reveals is the largely untold history of Black Catholics in colonies that eventually became part of the United States. This information, however, leaves us all with an unanticipated gift: the opportunity to recognize that the pope so many of us are excited about would not be who he is apart from the sad history of the African Diaspora caused by transatlantic slave trade and the complex racial history that followed in the wake of it.

If the Holy Father’s great-grandparents, Eugénie Grambois and Ferdinand Baquié, had not been baptized at the font in St. Louis Cathedral, (the only part of the church that survived the 1788 fire), chances are he would

(Continued on page 13)

Sisters of Notre Dame rejoice as Sister Nicole M. Varnerin makes perpetual vows

Staff report

Sister Nicole Marie Varnerin made profession of perpetual vows, Saturday, August 2, with the Sisters of Notre Dame. The ceremony, celebrated by Father John Blazek, CSC, was held in the chapel of the Sister’s motherhouse in Chardon, Ohio. Notre Dame Sister Mary Ann Culpert,

superior general, accepted her vows. Her parents, Bruce and Debbie Varnerin, presented the gifts. “My vocation is an expression of the outpouring of God’s love for me,” wrote Sister Nicole in the program for the celebration. “That magnanimous love fills me to the brim — and the only response is to allow that love to over-

flow into the world.” Sister Nicole is from Connecticut and met the sisters while studying at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, where she earned a degree in engineering.



(left) Sister Nicole.
(above) Sister Nicole is surrounded by women that are part of the intercommunity formation of women religious. These young women contemplating a religious vocation with various religious communities share the journey and support each other.
(right) Bruce and Debbie Varnerin prepare to present the gifts for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
(below right) Sisters of Notre Dame who have accompanied Sister Nicole during her discernment are (from left) Sister Marla Monahan, former novice director; Sister Josephe Fernandez, director of temporary professed; Sister Margaret Gorman, provincial superior; Sisters of Notre Dame USA and Sister Nicole.



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PEOPLE AND EVENTS

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

Festivals, prayer services, etc. Parishes, schools and Catholic organizations of the Diocese of Covington can now have their event featured on the Diocesan online calendar. Submit your event at <https://covdio.org/calendar/>.

New Beginnings, an 8-week program that provides opportunity to heal for separated and divorced adults, returns to session Tuesdays from Aug. 19 through Oct. 7. For more information or to register, visit <https://covdio.org/new-beginnings-2/>.

Registration is now open for the 2025-26 school year at Notre Dame Urban Education Center, Covington, Early Learning Program (for 4- and 5-year-olds) and Homework Plus Program (Grades K–8). Each program requires a one-time \$100 registration fee, with no additional monthly cost. Programs begin Sept. 2 and run through May 14. For information, call (859) 261-4487, visit NDUEC.org, or e-mail Sister Maria Therese at smtherese@nduec.org. Registration available online at NDUEC.org.

Beginning in August the Bishop Brossart High School art gallery, Alexandria, will display the exhibit “Madeline,” works by BBHS and St. Joseph, Cold Spring, alum, Beth Lauer, every Sunday from 12-4 p.m.

St. Patrick Parish, Taylor Mill, annual Our Lady of Knock Novena, Aug. 14–22. Mass and novena prayer times are: Aug. 15, 7:35 a.m. and 7 p.m.; Aug. 16, 4:30 p.m.; Aug. 17, 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m., with Ancient Order of Ladies Hibernian and the Ancient Order of Hibernian Color Guard; Aug. 18, 7:35 a.m. and 7 p.m., Adoration (no Mass); Aug. 20, 7:35 a.m. and 7 p.m., Adoration (no Mass); Aug. 21, 7 p.m., Adoration (no Mass); Aug. 22, 7:35 a.m. The relic of St. Faustina will be available to inspire all in the works of Divine Mercy. For information, e-mail parishoffice@stpat.church, or call (859) 356-5151.

Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, California, picnic, Aug. 23, 3–11p.m.; dinner served 3–7p.m.

Newport Central Catholic High School announces its 2nd class of inductees into its Fine Arts Hall of Fame: Mary Kate Collopy Blank, ’06; Scott Froendhoff, ’80, (Inaugural Father Hinds /Riesenberg Service Award Winner); Cara Gilday Harker, ’95; Galadriel Stineman Joy, ’02; Danny Keller, ’94; Mike Murphy, ’66 and the “Show of Distinction,” the 2005 Production of “Footloose.” The induction ceremony is Aug. 23 at NCCHS, social hour, 5:30 p.m.; dinner and ceremony, 7 p.m. Cost \$35. Make reservations at <http://ncchs.com/events>.

Catholic Charities signature fundraising event, Cassba 2025, will be held Aug. 24, 3–7 p.m., Drees Pavilion, Covington. Enjoy breathtaking views while indulging in delicious food, desserts, an open bar and entertainment. Silent auction items and three raffles, with prizes up to \$10,000. Tickets are \$100 per person. Visit www.cassba.com.

St. Thomas Parish, Ft. Thomas, Seniors, upcoming events: luncheon, Aug. 28; social and game night, Sept. 25; luncheon and speaker, Oct. 21; dinner, Nov. 20. Find more details and online payment link: stthomasnky.org/seniors.

Newport Central Catholic High School 31st Family Fireworks Fest, Aug. 31. Food trucks, drinks, and fun will begin at 5 p.m. and will continue until the Big Blast. (No cans, bottles or coolers permitted.) Admission \$5; to purchase visit <https://gofan.co/app/school/KY6479?activity=Event%20School>. Limited parking passes guaranteeing you a spot on the hill cost \$10, purchase at <https://gofan.co/app/school/KY6479?activity=Event%20School>. Contact (859) 292-0001 ext. 528 or tkrebs@ncchs.com.

Do you have a bike no longer used? Donate it to Pickett’s Corner a ministry of Catholic Charities. Each bike makes a significant difference in the lives of those in need. Pick up available and all repairs are done at Pickett’s Corner. Simply e-mail Pickettscorner23@gmail.com and give your name, address and phone number.

Bishop John C. Iffert will celebrate Vespers at Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, to honor couples celebrating significant Wedding Anniversaries in 2025. Married couples celebrating their 1st, 25th, 50th, or 60+ Wedding Anniversary in 2025 are invited to a vespers celebration on Sunday, Sept. 7, 2025, at 2:00 pm. Anniversary couples RSVP by July 25, 2025, at covdio.org/wedding-vespers/ or contact Lisa Taylor at 859-392-1533 to register. Reservations are only required for anniversary couples; family members and guests are welcome to attend.

A Marriage Encounter Experience will be held on Sept. 19–21 at the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center in Norwood, OH. Sign up at wwme.org or call Andy and Melanie Reinersman at (859) 653-8464. Learn how to make your marriage better.

St. Thomas School, Ft. Thomas, Boosters golf outing, Sept. 27, Hickory Sticks Golf Club, 1 p.m. Shotgun Start. Register now, stthomasnky.org/golf.

Thomas More University Fall Preview Day, Sept. 27, Academic Center, TMU campus, Crestview Hills. The biggest fall event for college-bound high school students. Preview Day will introduce you to the vibrant academic and campus life that defines the Saints community. RSVP at <https://tmuky.us/preview25>.

Notre Dame Urban Education Center, Covington, needs volunteers for its Education Center’s Early Learning Program. As a volunteer, you’ll be an extra set of hands to help with learning activities, guide little ones through their routines, and bring joy and encouragement to each day. Contact Brandi at (859) 630-9475 or blenihan@nduec.org for information.

Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, California, stagette, Sept. 28, doors open at 12:30 p.m.; bingo starts at 2 p.m.

Adult Spirituality Institute is once again presenting four separate sets of four classes with Father Tim Schehr, Father Jeffry Kemper and Msgr. Bill Cleves. Classes are throughout the school year and run for four consecutive Mondays per topic. First class begins on Oct. 6 at 10 a.m. at Mount St. Mary Seminary, Bartlet Center, on Beechmont Avenue and features Father Schehr on Praying with the Psalms. Cost is \$40 for four classes. Contact Adult Spirituality Institute at (515) 231-2223, ext 143 or <http://www.spirituality-institute.com> for additional information or to register.

The Diocese of Covington, in partnership with the Franciscan University’s Catechetical Institute, is offering two FREE workshops in October and November: In-Person workshop “Exploring CI’s Website,” Oct. 25, 9:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m. at Thomas More University’s Steigerwald Hall, Saints Center. Brady Webb, M.A., will present a hands-on workshop exploring Franciscan University’s Catechetical Institute’s website. This training is for everyone using the CI Website for learning the Catholic faith. Register by Oct. 15, at covdio.org/register/.

An informative workshop on updates and resources on the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults/Children (OCIA/OCIC) will be presented by Dr. William Keimig, deputy director, Catechetical Institute at Franciscan University, Nov. 8, 9 a.m.–3:30 p.m., TMU’s Ziegler Auditorium, Academic Center. Register by Oct. 29, at covdio.org/register/. Questions? Contact Isaak Abraham Isaak at iisaak@covdio.org or (859) 392-1529.



Priests appreciation dinner
The Northern Kentucky Knights of Columbus recently held a clergy appreciation dinner for priests and deacons of the Diocese of Covington. The event was held at Fr. De Jacob Knights of Columbus Council, Alexandria. All were treated to a delicious steak or chicken cordon bleu dinner. The seminarians also attended and were given a special gift. Bishop John Iffert thanked the Knights for this outing. The evening was the Knights “thank you” for the clergy.

The St. Henry High School Craft Show will be held Oct. 18, 9 a.m.–3 p.m. at the Athletic Complex in Florence. Over 100 local craftsmen display unique handmade items in many different mediums. There is also the opportunity to purchase raffle tickets on exciting themed gift baskets. There is a \$5 admission fee for adults. All proceeds from the raffle and the admission fee support student activities at St. Henry District High School. Overflow parking is at Boone County High School.

Fall registration is now open for Mount St. Mary’s Seminary and School of Theology. Evening and week-end courses are available for busy adults who want to grow in knowledge and love of their faith. Earn a master’s degree, certificate, endorsement, CEUs, or take a class for personal enrichment. A 25 percent tuition discount is available to permanent deacons, lay ecclesial ministers, and Catholic school educators. Fall semester begins the last week of August, apply and enroll at www.mtsm.org. Call (513) 233-6118 for information.

The National Catholic Youth Conference is a pilgrimage for Catholic high school students, Nov. 20-22, in Indianapolis. Teens spend three days at the nation’s largest Catholic youth gathering and experience the transformative power of the Church and God’s presence through music, talks, community and sacraments. The Youth Ministry Office coordinates the overall pilgrimage (conference ticket, transportation, housing and food). Parishes and schools register as a group. For individuals not identified with a group, contact Angie Poat, apoat@covdio.org. Bus space is limited.

Parish festivals		
Aug. 22–24 St. Augustine Parish, Augusta	Aug. 30–Sept. 1 St. Cecilia Parish, Independence	Sept. 19–20 St. Benedict Parish, Covington
August 22–23 Holy Cross District High School, Latonia	Sept. 5–7 St. Patrick Parish, Maysville	Sept. 19–21 St. Timothy Parish, Union
Aug. 23 Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, California	Sept. 6–7 St. Anthony Parish, Taylor Mill	Sept. 21 St. Matthew, Kenton
	Sept. 12–13 St. Barbara Parish, Erlanger	Sept. 26-27 St. Agnes Parish, Ft. Wright

Duties and responsibilities of employees and employers — part 2 of a 4-part series

Rev. Msgr. Gerald E. Twaddell, D.Phil., KCHS
Contributor

Turning to the second of the concerns noted at the beginning of his encyclical “Rerum Novarum,” namely the changes in the relationship between employers and employees, Pope Leo XIII, first observes that another great mistake in his day is the assumption that the owning class and the working class are necessarily in conflict. In reality, “capital cannot do without labor, nor labor without capital.”

Mutual agreement between the two leads to “the beauty of good order, while perpetual conflict necessarily produces confusion and savage barbarity.” The most effective intermediary in disputes is the Church’s teaching on the duties of each side to the other; “especially the obligations of justice.” (§ 19)

In Section 20, Pope Leo XIII catalogs duties flowing from the obligations of justice.

Workers duties are the following:

- to perform fully and faithfully the work equitably agreed upon;
- never to harm the property, nor outrage the person of the employer;
- never to resort to violence, riot or disorder in defending their cause;
- never to rely on people with evil principles who mislead them with empty promises and foolish hopes of impressive results that lead only to “useless regrets and grievous loss.”

Employers are duty-bound to the following:

- never to look down upon their workers as though they were in bondage;
- always to respect the dignity of every person;
- never “misuse workers as though they were things in the pursuit of gain,” because working for pay is honorable, not shameful, since it allows the person to earn a decent livelihood;
- never shamefully and inhumanely to value workers solely for their physical powers;
- keep in mind the good of the worker’s soul by seeing to it that workers

- have time to attend to their religious duties,
- are not exposed to corrupting influences,
- not be led to neglect home and family,
- not be led to squander their earnings;
- never overwork employees beyond their strength;
- never employ people in work unsuited to their sex or age;

- most importantly, the employer’s “great and principal duty is to give everyone what is just.”

This last point leads to the condemnation of several unjust practices regarding the fair remuneration of workers, namely:

- exercising pressure on the indigent and destitute for the sake of gain;
- gathering one’s profit from the need of others;
- defrauding anyone of the wages they are due;
- cutting down the worker’s earnings by force, fraud, or usurious dealing.

Each of these injustices “is a great crime which cries to the avenging anger of Heaven ... because the laboring man is, as a rule, weak and unprotected, and because his slender means should, in proportion to their scantiness, be accounted sacred.” (§ 20)

Beyond these demands of the natural law, the Holy Father reminds us that the Church proposes still higher

precepts rooted in the hope for eternal life brought by our Savior. Every person is called to use the things of this world, however abundant or scarce, out of a motive of virtue and in pursuit of merit. (§ 21)

“Riches do not bring freedom from sorrow and are of no avail for eternal happiness, but rather are obstacles.” The pope cites St. Thomas Aquinas who teaches that, “Man should not consider his material possessions as his own, but as common to all, so as to share them without hesitation when others are in need. Whence the Apostle says (1 Timothy 6:17): ‘Command the rich of this world ... to offer with no stint, to apportion largely.’” “It is a duty,” Pope Leo XIII proclaims, “not of justice (save in extreme cases), but of Christian charity” on which Christ will judge us. The person who has received an abundance of material goods or gifts of the mind from God’s bounty “has received them for the purpose of using them for the perfecting of his own nature, and at the same time, that he may employ them, as the steward of God’s providence, for the benefit of others.” (§22)

In contrast, those who lack the gifts of fortune learn from the Church “that in God’s sight poverty is no disgrace, and that there is nothing to be ashamed of in earning their bread by labor.” Christ, after all, “for our sakes became poor” (2 Cor 8:9) and labored much of His life as a carpenter: (§23) When we contemplate this divine Model, we see that “the true worth and nobility of man lies in his moral qualities, that is in virtue; that virtue is, moreover, the common inheritance of men, equally within the reach of high and low, rich and poor.”

When all people come to this realization, the pride of the well-to-do will be diminished and they will become generous to the less well-off, who in turn will moderate their desires. The separation and opposition between the two groups will tend to disappear in favor of friendly cooperation. (§24) The Church does her utmost to hand on these principles, relying on the tools given by Christ to reach people’s innermost hearts and consciences, to lead them to the love of God and their fellow human beings, to break down every barrier to virtue. (§ 26)

History displays evidence of such effects. For example, Christian institutions from the earliest centuries managed to renew civil society by the light of the Gospel message, lifting up and restoring life to the human race wherever it was proclaimed. Nothing so great had been known before. The only way society today can be healed of its class oppositions is by a return to Christian life and institutions that had been undermined and rejected in the name of



CNS/Crosiers

St. Stephen’s story is recounted in the Acts of the Apostles. He was among the first seven deacons chosen to serve the Hellenist Christian community in Jerusalem. The establishment of the diaconate is an example of one of the many means the Church offers relief from the poverty.

“enlightenment.” (§ 27)

The work that the Church undertakes goes beyond the spiritual to address also the temporal and earthly conditions of workers. She is particularly concerned that the poor be helped to rise above poverty and wretchedness to achieve a better life. Christian morality “powerfully restrains the greed of possession and the thirst for pleasure — twin plagues.” (§ 28)

In addition, the Church from the time of the apostles established many means to offer relief from poverty, whether the voluntary sharing of goods seen in the Acts of the Apostles, the establishment of the diaconate, or the collections gathered by St. Paul. (§ 29) The pope lamented that in his day many sought “to blame and condemn the Church for such eminent charity,” wishing instead to have the State supply such relief. (§ 30) The effective way to achieve the goal of reducing the effects of poverty would be to obtain the cooperation of all human agencies to be of one mind with the Church and act together according to each’s capacity. Part of that effort would be to look into what role the State should play. (§ 31)

In the next article the duties and responsibilities of the State that Pope Leo XIII discerned will be examined.



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Catholic family experts tie marriage to dropping US fertility rate

Katie Yoder
OSV News

To explain the dropping U.S. fertility rate, Catholic fertility and family policy experts are pointing to marriage.

“One of the biggest drivers of the American fertility drop is the decline of marriage,” Leah Libresco Sargeant, who has written about family policy and is the author of several books, including an upcoming book called “The Dignity of Dependence: A Feminist Manifesto,” told OSV News in emailed comments.

“Married fertility has declined somewhat, but it’s much more stable and much higher than unmarried fertility,” she added. “If people were getting married more often (and earlier) fertility would be a lot higher.”

She and other experts spoke about the U.S. fertility rate and how the Catholic Church should respond after a new report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Center for Health Statistics found that the rate dropped to a record low in 2024. The federal agency reported 53.8 births per 1,000 women ages 15 to 44 in 2024, a 1% decrease from 2023. That number translates to less than 1.6 children per woman, which falls below the 2.1 children per woman needed to maintain the national population without immigration.

The report also found the decline part of a larger trend: From 2007 to 2024, the fertility rate has decreased 22%.

“Political polarization between the sexes, the falling fortunes of men, and the digital revolution’s degradation of social skills and dating opportunities among young adults have made it more difficult for today’s young adults to mate, marry and have children,” Brad Wilcox, pointing to multiple factors, told OSV News in emailed comments.

Wilcox is a professor of sociology and director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia and the Future of Freedom Fellow at the Institute for Family Studies.

Like Libresco Sargeant, Patrick T. Brown, a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, tied the issue to marriage and called declining fertility rates a global issue.

“There’s so many factors that go into it, but the biggest one is the decline in marriage, decline in stable partnerships,” he said. “Particularly here in the U.S., where the biggest decline in fertility since the Great Recession — essentially 2007 or so — has been almost a 25% drop in birth rates among unmarried women.”

If people marry, he said, they’re still likely to have kids. “In some respects, it’s a half-cheer victory for people who were concerned about rising out-of-wedlock births for much of the 20th century,” he said. “But it’s not that people are getting married and having kids, they’re just not having kids at all.”

According to a report released by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2024, married-couple households made up an estimated 47% of all households in 2022, a significant decrease from 71% in 1970.

Brown identified the biggest factor driving declining fertility for both married and unmarried women as the “rising opportunity cost” — or what women have to sacrifice in order to have a child, such as educational or work-



OSV News photo/Emily Elconin, Reuters

A nurse checks the vitals of a newborn baby in the Family Birth Center at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Mich., Feb. 1, 2022. United States’ total fertility rate fell to a record low in 2024, dipping below 1.6 children per woman, according to new federal data released July 24, 2025, by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

place opportunities.

Libresco Sargeant also focused on opportunity cost. “As we become a more prosperous society, the opportunity cost of having kids (or an additional kid) goes up!” she said. “It’s more time away from work (where women command higher wages than they used to) and less disposable income for both parents to consume food, performances, travel, etc., when the range of things you can do has never been wider.”

“I’m not rooting for us to become a poorer, narrower society to raise the fertility rate,” she added. “But I think it’s worth thinking about how to lessen the hit parents take — that’s why I favor a baby bonus paid out after birth to smooth the income shock parents undergo.”

Other experts addressed factors such as infertility, a common problem in the U.S., according to the CDC. Around 1 in 5 U.S. married women ages 15 to 49 with no prior births struggle with infertility or are unable to get pregnant after one year of trying.

“The long-term social and scientific drivers of infertility have not been studied at a population level,” Anna Halpine, the CEO of FEMM, a comprehensive women’s health program that offers a fertility app, said in emailed comments. “What we do know is how to support women who want to conceive, so that we can optimize their own fertility and health in order to maximize a healthy conception and live birth.”

Many experts also shared how the Catholic Church — which emphasizes the importance of family and children to the church and society — should respond to the dropping fertility rate.

“This moment gives new legitimacy to the Catholic

Church’s longstanding celebration of marriage and parenthood,” said Wilcox, who is also the author of “Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization.”

“Priests and lay religious leaders should underline the ways in which Catholic teaching speaks to the challenges of our depopulating moment,” he recommended. “They should also seek to find new ways to help young adults socialize and date.”

Libresco Sargeant also wanted the church to take an active role and connect young adults.

“I think the church should do more to help young men and women meet (beyond wine and cheese singles nights) and help shape deliberate dating with an eye to marriage,” she said. “Apps and online dating are much worse than meeting people through your community, but those intrapersonal connections have waned.”

She also encouraged the church to help cohabitating couples discern marriage. She gave the example of a program run by a Protestant church in Texas.

“They cover the cost of a cheap-ish wedding + reception (and also second rent for one partner to move out for six months) to help people afford to tie the knot the right way,” she said. “They also pair young couples with mentor couples. I’d love to see more experiments like this.”

Brown also spoke about encouraging people, including couples who are living together, to recognize the unique benefits of marriage. The church should not only talk about the sacramental reality of marriage but also the cultural and economic benefits of it, he said.

He expressed particular concern over reaching Americans who work blue-collar jobs or have no degree beyond a high school diploma. They’re not getting married, he said.

“It’s hard to know how to reach them because often-times they’re the ones who aren’t as active in the church necessarily, especially the men,” he said. “So finding who they’re listening to in the culture and finding ways to kind of explain the beauty of marriage.”

More broadly, he called for restoring “the ability and the appeal of people getting married earlier in life.”

“It’s not just the Catholic Church, it’s not just the U.S., it’s everybody all over the globe figuring out ways to help men and women pair off earlier in life and successfully do so,” he said. “I think that’s a big — perhaps the big — challenge of our time.”

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What is your

Thomas More Story?

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My faith began at Thomas More

Father Jeremy Hiers
Contributor

Whenever we examine our lives, we have an opportunity to discover how God has been present in the various people and circumstances we have encountered along the way. This is certainly true anytime I reflect on my experience as a Thomas More student.

I was not even Catholic when I arrived for my freshman year in 1999. I chose Thomas More not for its Catholic identity, but rather for the scholarship it offered me to study computer programming and mathematics. Little did I know then how God was about to use the Thomas More education I would receive to lead me to the Catholic faith and to become a priest and Augustinian brother of the future Pope Leo XIV!

Every student was required to take nine credits of theology. That is where I met Msgr. (Ronald) Ketteler. His class introduced me to the life and witness of St. Thomas More and Catholic Social Teaching, revealing the beauty of the Church’s teaching on the dignity of all human people.

As we read the encyclicals of Popes Leo XIII, John XXIII, and John Paul II, we were doing so at a time when the world was shifting. Technological advancements were rapidly changing how we lived our lives while 9/11 sparked a new era of global conflict. In this time of national and global instability, I found the wisdom of the Catholic Tradition relevant and inspiring.

One day in class, we were discussing the impact Pope John Paul II was having on Poland. One of my classmates asked, “Do you think we will ever have a pope from the U.S.?” What followed was an interesting discussion that led us all to conclude, “It’s possible, but not likely.” I would never have guessed 20 years later this memory would come to mind as my Augustinian brothers and I gathered to hear the announcement our brother Robert Prevost would be the next pope.

I graduated Thomas More in 2003 with a heart for service and decided to pursue a career as a civilian employee of the U.S. Army. As I did so, the seeds of faith that had been planted during my time at Thomas More continued to grow. Six years after my graduation, I was received into the Roman Catholic Church.

As a 29-year-old new Catholic, I began to discern, “What kind of Catholic am I called to be?” This question often led me to reflect on



Father Jeremy Hiers

the faithful witness I had experienced during my four years at Thomas More: observing the faculty and staff go to Mass each day; observing Msgr. Twaddell frequently taking a walk on campus with a book in hand as he stopped to talk with students; the kind religious sister who gifted me with my first rosary and taught me how to pray it as I coped with anxiety; and the many service experiences I participated in with my peers.

Reflecting on these experiences helped me discern I was called to become a religious priest. In 2015, at the age of 34, I entered [the Order of St. Augustine] the Order of the future Pope.

I believe the role Thomas More had in my vocation story bears witness to the words then-Cardinal Prevost spoke in 2023 to the Augustinian Order: vocations come when we “live the good

news” and walk “with Christ in communion with each other.”

Now, as the Augustinian vocation director, it is my turn to “pay forward” the gift of a Thomas More education as I walk with students on the campus of Villanova University, as so many had done with me almost 25 years ago on the campus of Thomas More.

With the election of Pope Leo XIV, I therefore look to the future with great optimism. I have been blessed to meet him a few times prior to his election and not only witness his dedication to our faith but also experience his thoughtful, prayerful and welcoming presence. I therefore have no doubt that just as Pope Leo XIII led the Church through the Industrial Revolution, the Holy Spirit will enable Pope Leo XIV to lead us through the challenges changing our world today.

Thank you, Thomas More, for remaining as a school open to people of all faiths and offering me a liberal arts education that has become so important to my Christian journey.

That is my story. I hope everyone reading this finds the inspiration to tell theirs.

Father Jeremy Hiers ’03 studied computer information systems and mathematics at Thomas More. He currently serves as vocation director and director for the Office of Justice and Peace for the Augustinian Province of St. Thomas of Villanova in Pennsylvania.

Save the Date — Upcoming Events at Thomas More University

“A Heart of Service: Simple Solutions to World Hunger”
Friday, Sept. 12, 7 p.m.

Founder and CEO of Mary’s Meals, Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, returns to Thomas More’s campus alongside Catholic musician and speaker Steve Angrisano. This event is free and open to the public in Ziegler Auditorium and is sponsored by the Center for Faith, Mission and Catholic Education.

Fall Preview Day
Saturday, Sept. 27, 10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Join us for Fall Preview Day, our biggest fall event for college-bound high school students! Preview Day introduces you to the vibrant academic and campus life that defines the Thomas More University community. RSVP at thomasmore.edu/preview.

Homecoming Weekend 2025
Oct. 1-4

Save the date! From the Homecoming football game to the 50-year Reunion for the Class of 1975, there’s something for all friends and alumni of Thomas More to enjoy as we gather our community for a weekend of celebration. Visit thomasmore.edu/homecoming for the full schedule of events.

Hope is knowing God is always ready to forgive, pope says at audience

Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

God never gives up on anyone, even when the person betrays God’s love, Pope Leo XIV said.
Christian hope flows from “knowing that even if we fail, God will never fail us. Even if we betray him, he never stops loving us,” the pope said Aug. 13 at his weekly general audience.

Arriving in the Vatican audience hall, Pope Leo welcomed the visitors in English, Spanish and Italian and explained that the audience would be held in two parts — in the hall and in St. Peter’s Basilica — so people would not be forced to stay outside under the very hot sun.

Pope Leo was scheduled to leave the Vatican after the two-part audience to return to the papal villa at Castel Gandolfo where he had spent part of July. The Vatican press office said he would stay until Aug. 19 in the town, which is about 15 miles southeast of Rome.

Greeting English speakers in the basilica, the pope wished them “safe travels” and prayed that God’s grace would “accompany you and fulfill in your hearts that desire that we all share to live an authentic conversion, to walk united in the church, to renew our faith and to be authentic witnesses of Jesus Christ and his Gospel throughout the world.”

In his main audience talk in the hall, Pope Leo continued his series about Jesus’ final days, looking specifically at Jesus’ revelation during the Last Supper that one of the disciples would betray him.

Jesus does not make the statement to condemn or embarrass Judas in front of the others, the pope said, but does so “to show how love, when it is true, cannot do without the truth.”

In the Gospel, each of the disciples responds, “Surely it is not I?”

The question, the pope said, “is perhaps among the sincerest that we can ask ourselves. It is not the question of the innocent, but of the disciple who discovers himself to be fragile. It is not the cry of the guilty, but the whisper of him who, while wanting to love, is aware of being able to do harm. It is in this awareness that the journey of salvation begins.”

To be saved, he said, a person must recognize that he or she is in need of salvation.


But, at the same time, a disciple of Christ also should feel “beloved despite everything” and know that “evil is real but that it does not have the last word.”

“If we recognize our limit, if we let ourselves be touched by the pain of Christ” at being betrayed, “then we can finally be born again,” Pope Leo told the crowd. “Faith does not spare us from the possibility of sin, but it always offers us a way out of it: that of mercy.”




CNS photo/Vatican Media


Pope Leo XIV gestures in greeting to a young girl holding a sign that reads, “Dear Papa, lovely greetings from St. Joseph’s Congregation, Germany,” as he meets pilgrims inside St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican Aug. 13, 2025, following his weekly general audience.



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You will set the world on fire

(Continued from page 5)

seeking only His will, and who have let themselves be purified and love God with all their hearts, souls, and strength, rejoice in the Fire, because they themselves are on fire, burning joyfully with God, and are, as Benedict puts it, made “bright and pure and free and grand.”

Many of the saints not only knew about this consuming and purifying fire but experienced it and desired it. Read, for example, St. Thérèse of Lisieux’s experience of God’s fire of love. In her *Act of Oblation to Merciful Love* she expresses her desire for this love, even as she knows it will destroy her: It is telling that she uses the word “martyr” in her prayer; and “holocaust” — not “sacrifice”: in a sacrifice, part of the animal was consumed by fire, while as a holocaust the entire animal was consumed. The following is a short excerpt:

“In order to live in one single act of perfect love, I offer myself as a victim of Holocaust to your merciful love, asking you to consume me incessantly; allowing the waves of infinite tenderness shut up within You to overflow into my soul, and that thus I may become a martyr of Your Love, O my God!”

Another saint worth consulting in this context is St. Gemma Galgani, a 20th-century Italian mystic, who described her heart as “all on fire with the love of Jesus.” In a letter to her spiritual director, St. Gemma describes her experience of God’s love as an actual physical burning: “For the last eight days I have felt something mysterious in the area of my heart that I cannot understand. . . this fire has increased, oh so much, as to be almost unbearable. I should need ice to put it out, and it hinders my eating and sleeping. It is a mysterious fire that comes from within, then goes to the outside. It is, however, a fire that does not torment me, rather it delights me, but it also exhausts and consumes me . . . Great God, how I love You! Oh, how I love You!”

Her spiritual director related that “When I questioned her about it, Gemma herself had to acknowledge that the suffering that she felt from this mysterious fire, although it was a joy to her; was really very painful. She said to me: ‘In order to get some idea of it, imagine a red-hot iron, kept constantly heated in a furnace, has been placed into the very center of this poor heart. Thus I feel myself

burning’. And yet she would not have exchanged this excruciating torture for all the delights of the world. For while she thus suffered in her body, the sweetness it caused in the depths of her soul was truly beyond all description. Thus in ecstasy she exclaimed, “Come then, Oh Jesus! Your heart is a flame and you wish mine to be turned into a flame as well . . . Jesus, I feel I must die when you are throbbing so in my heart.”

Jesus expressed the desire that the fire of his Passion and love was already blazing. It will blaze if we surrender to His love and allow ourselves to burn with it. One of the invocations in the chaplet of St. Michael is, “By the intercession of St. Michael and the celestial choir of Seraphim, may the Lord make us worthy to burn with the fire of perfect charity.” May we be willing to let that love consume us, so that we may spread that fire to others.

Father Stephen Bankemper is pastor, St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Ft. Thomas, Ky

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At 80th anniversary Mass in Nagasaki, people urged to bring Christ’s love, peace to world

Mark Zimmermann
Catholic Standard, OSV News

In his homily at a solemn Peace Memorial Mass Aug. 9, Archbishop Peter Michiaki Nakamura of Nagasaki, Japan, issued a passionate plea to the world.

Deacon Durkee remembered

(Continued from page 3)

dren’s activities, celebrating their milestones and achievements with great pride.

Deacon Durkee is preceded in death by his parents and his sister, Jennifer S. Hall. He is survived by his wife, Kathleen Cheryl Durkee (nee Keck), along with their daughters, Paige (Alex Doty) Durkee and Stephanie (Matt) Specter. He was a cherished brother to Richard Durkee and a proud grandfather to Faith Specter, Sydney Doty, Mars Specter, Robby Specter and Hannah Specter.

In his homily at the funeral Mass, Bishop Iffert reflected on the beatitude “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

“To be loved and cherished and forgiven and incorporated into God’s plan for our salvation, that’s the virtue; that’s the value of God’s kingdom. That is love,” Bishop Iffert said. “You have known this love and so you are blessed.

“Today, we rejoice because we have known and seen this love in Deacon Steve. A man who, as a counselor, worked to reconcile people to one another; to help them be healed of the worst kinds of addictions and pain. Who did not draw away or remain separate, but reached out and touched and came close and saw these men and women as brothers and sisters to him and to the Lord ... His ecumenical work at that Thursday morning prayer breakfast, where he made himself a servant, not standing on his own rightness, but inviting his brothers and sisters to know one another; to have fellowship with one another; to dialog with one another; and to share everything they had in common in the love Jesus ... In these ways and more, you saw Deacon Steve respond to the call of the vision of Jesus Christ. So blessed are you. You can see what the transforming love of Christ does for a man and for a life.”

Faith’s family tree

(Continued from page 5)

not have grown up Catholic. Nor would his maternal grandparents, the Martinez family, have likely chosen to make their home in Chicago without the Great Migration of 6 million people of color who left the American South for the promise of more economic opportunity and less racism at the beginning of the 20th century.

Our family histories vary widely. But all of us share a lineage of spiritual fathers and mothers whose words and deeds also make us what we are.

This summer, we observe the 1700th anniversary of the closing of the Council of Nicaea. Called by the unbaptized Emperor Constantine, the 318 bishops who gathered in Asia Minor defined what constituted Christian faith. Perhaps even more importantly, they determined what laid beyond the boundaries of orthodoxy. If they had not done so — or if the Arians had prevailed — the past 17 centuries would have been different.

The faith we profess today in the Nicene Creed remains the dividing line between what is Christian and what isn’t. Every ecumenical council since has influenced the course of history and added to the family tree of our faith.

Our task as Catholics is not only to recognize where we have come from, but to hand on what we have received. Most of us do that in the ordinary rhythms of family life, as the Holy Father’s ancestors did. Some of us, like the Fathers of Nicaea, embrace the mission by making choices that have an impact far greater and more universal than even they imagine.

Jaymie Stuart Wolfe is a Catholic convert, freelance writer and editor, musician, speaker, pet-aholic, wife and mom of eight grown children, loving life in New Orleans.

“We must abandon the fists, weapons, and tools of violence we hold in our hands, and stop creating and using nuclear weapons. Let us use our hands to love and embrace others,” he said.

The Mass was offered at Urakami Cathedral in Nagasaki on the exact day that 80 years ago the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb on that city — which followed by three days the Aug. 6, 1945, U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan.

At the Mass, Japanese Catholics were joined by four U.S. prelates — two cardinals and two archbishops — and by Catholic university leaders and students from the United States who were participating in a “Pilgrimage of Peace” to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the bombings and to pray together for peace and for a world without nuclear weapons.

In an English translation of Archbishop Nakamura’s homily, which he had delivered in Japanese, he recounted the horror that the nuclear bombing unleashed on that city.

“Eighty years ago, on August 9, 1945, at 11:02 a.m., an atomic bomb exploded approximately 500 meters above Urakami in Nagasaki. The city was reduced to a wasteland. At that time, 74,000 of Nagasaki’s 240,000 residents lost their lives. In Urakami alone, more than half of the 12,000 parishioners, totaling 8,500 people, lost their lives. The Urakami Cathedral, once hailed as ‘the largest cathedral in the East,’ was almost completely destroyed,” he said.

Before the Mass, a new bell donated by U.S. Catholics rang out for the first time in one of the two bell towers of Urakami Cathedral, replacing a bell that had been destroyed in the bombing.

Urakami Cathedral was rebuilt in 1959 with one of the original bells recovered in the rubble of the original cathedral. As a sign of solidarity and faith from U.S. Catholics, the Nagasaki Bell Project raised funds for the casting and installation of the new bell, which rang together with the recovered bell at 11:02 a.m. — the moment when the atomic bomb exploded over the city in 1945.

As the Peace Memorial Mass at Urakami Cathedral began, Archbishop Nakamura blessed with incense two damaged religious artifacts that had been recovered in the rubble of the original cathedral after the bombing — the head of a wooden statue of Mary and a wooden crucifix with the figure of Jesus missing his head and limbs.

Those two items were displayed near the altar during the



OSV News photo/Mihoko Owada, Catholic Standard

After a Peace Memorial Mass at Urakami Cathedral in Nagasaki, Japan, on Aug. 9, 2025, the 80th anniversary of the U.S. atomic bombing of that city, people participate in a torchlit procession to Nagasaki Peace Park. The head of a statue of Mary recovered from the rubble of the original cathedral was carried in the procession. Participants included U.S. college students in Japan on a “Pilgrimage of Peace” commemorating the anniversaries of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Mass, and the archbishop framed his homily around them. He told the story of a church in Germany damaged by bombing during World War II, and the arms of Jesus on its cross were missing. After the war, they kept the cross where it was, and in the place of the cross beam where Jesus’s arms were missing, they put an inscription in German that read, “I have no hands but yours.”

“A similar thing happened here in Nagasaki. The head, hands and feet of Jesus on the cross that you see next to this altar are also missing. Mary’s head is still there, but her face is blackened, and her eyes are gone. It was our hands that started wars and created weapons of mass destruction,” Archbishop Nakamura said.

Noting that people use their hands, feet and minds to hurt others, Nagasaki’s archbishop said, “We must work together with the hands of Jesus. More than that, we must live as the hands of Jesus. ... Our hope lies in God’s hands. Let us live as God’s hands.”

Concluding his homily, Archbishop Nakamura said, “Our peace depends on what we do. ... Our peace depends on how we walk. It depends on our feet, our way of thinking, our perspective, and our way of life. In other words, our peace depends on living like Christ. This means thinking, speaking, acting and loving like Christ.

“For that reason, let us once again begin our true journey by gazing upon Jesus and Mary who survived the bombing, and considering how they became like this out of love for us.”



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NEWS BRIEFS

National/World

Petition filed at Supreme Court seeks overturn of landmark same-sex marriage ruling

WASHINGTON — About a decade after the Supreme Court issued its landmark ruling in Obergefell v. Hodges, which legalized same-sex marriage nationwide, the justices have been directly asked to overturn that ruling in a case they will have to decide whether or not to take up in the fall. Kim Davis, the former Kentucky county clerk who sparked a national controversy in the wake of that ruling in 2015 when she declined to issue marriage licenses to a same-sex couple on religious grounds, sought to appeal a federal jury’s decision that she should pay \$100,000 in damages — and \$260,000 for attorneys fees — to a couple to whom she denied a marriage license. In a petition for writ of certiorari filed in July, Davis and her attorneys argued the First Amendment should protect Davis from personal liability for denying marriage licenses, since the suit was filed in her personal rather than official capacity. But Rick Garnett, a professor of law at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, told OSV News, “It is very unlikely that the Court is going to review a jury’s damages verdict in a case with these facts.” If the Obergefell ruling were to be overturned, it would not render void existing marriage licenses due to the 2022 Respect for Marriage Act.

Trump federalizes DC police force, says homeless encampments will be removed

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Aug. 11 he will place the District of Columbia’s Metropolitan Police Department “under direct federal control,” activate the National Guard, and “get rid of the slums” in what he called an effort to combat crime in Washington. “I’m announcing a historic action to rescue our nation’s capital from crime, bloodshed, bedlam and squalor and worse,” Trump said at a press conference at the White House. “This is Liberation Day in D.C., and we’re going to take our capital back.” Crime in the nation’s capital has declined from a pandemic-era increase, with an analysis of police data by *The Washington Post* showing homicides are down 32% year-to-date. Trump also said he would be targeting people suffering homelessness for removal during his press conference. “We’re going to be removing homeless encampments from all over our parks, our beautiful, beautiful parks, which now a lot of people can’t walk on,” he told reporters. “They’ve been very, very dirty — got a lot of problems — but we’ve already started that,” he said. “We’re moving the encampments away, trying to take care of people.” Asked for comment, a spokesperson for the Archdiocese of Washington directed OSV News to data about the archdiocesan Catholic Charities’ work with those experiencing hunger and homelessness. The organization said in its 2023-2024 annual report it provided 1,035 beds to shelter guests each night.

Catholics hail new California law to protect older teens from sex trafficking

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Catholics have lauded the recent signing of a state law that makes it a felony to procure sex from a 16- or 17-year-old minor in California. The state already made it an offense punishable by imprisonment for minors below the age of 16, but starting January 2026, “if you solicit a 16- or 17- year old, that is no longer a misdemeanor. It’s no longer just two days in jail. That’s a felony and it’s a \$10,000 fine,” said the California Catholic Conference’s Molly Sheahan, associate director for healthy families. “Sixteen- and 17-year-olds are children,” she said. Gov. Gavin Newsom on July 30 signed Assembly Bill 379, which amends California’s penal code for soliciting sex from minors, making the felony an offense punishable by up to three years in prison. The felony would apply if the adult procuring sex from a minor was more than three years older than that minor at the time of the criminal offense. It also reinstates the classification of loitering “in any public place with the intent to purchase commercial sex” as a misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail. Fran Eskin-Royer, executive director of the Good Shepherd National Advocacy Center based in Silver Spring, Maryland, emphasized that 16- and 17-year-olds are just as much at risk and in need of care as minors who are younger. She said the new law “works to get to the heart of sexual exploitation, the buyers.”

Advocate pleads for Vatican aid as Russian adoption database shows Ukraine’s children

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian child advocate Mykola Kuleba is pleading for the Vatican’s assistance, after publicly highlighting what he said was one of several databases used by Russian occupation officials to market abducted Ukrainian children to Russian foster and adoption families. Those databases — about which Yale School of Public Health researcher Nathaniel Raymond testified before the United Nations Security Council in December 2024 — are part of a decade-long coordinated effort by Russia to remove and “renationalize” thousands of Ukrainian children, in violation of multiple international laws. “We need a strong position from the Vatican, and pressure on Russia to give all information about Ukrainian children in occupied (Ukrainian) territories or who have been transferred to Russia — to help us identify and know their condition of health, of life, to be able to talk with these kids,” Kuleba, founder of child advocacy organization Save Ukraine and Ukraine’s child ombudsman from 2014-2021, told OSV News. Kuleba described one database — which allows users to specify the gender, age, hair and eye color of the children they wished to select — as “like a slavery market.” Raymond — whose research has informed Vatican-mediated efforts to return the children — has said previously Russia’s illegal transfers of Ukrainian children constitute “the largest kidnapping that has happened in 80 years, since World War II.”

Salvadoran Catholic leaders speaking out more amid worries over democratic erosion

SAN SALVADOR — In El Salvador, Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas used the country’s biggest Catholic feast to deliver two bold appeals to lawmakers: scrap a law reopening mining, and restore the constitutional ban on presidential reelection. His Aug. 6 homily warned that constitutional reforms require public consultation. The comments come as President

Nayib Bukele pushes reforms allowing indefinite reelection and has advanced elections to 2027. Critics, including Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chávez and the Jesuit-run Central American University, say democracy, human rights and free speech are eroding under Bukele’s party, which dominates the legislature. Bukele remains popular for his gang crackdown and record-low homicide rates, but rights groups point to mass arrests, fear among citizens and laws restricting NGOs. Church leaders have also criticized his agreement to jail foreign detainees from the U.S. Bukele remains popular, according to analysts, but a June survey from the Central American University found nearly 60% of respondents fearful of criticizing him, saying it was likely they would suffer “negative consequences.”

Green card policy change may leave immigrants seeking legal status vulnerable to deportation

WASHINGTON — U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services reportedly closed off a pathway for citizenship for immigrants who apply for green cards through a spouse or other family members, raising the prospect of deporting them and breaking up their families. NBC News reported that new guidance issued by the USCIS made a change to its policy manual stating that federal immigration authorities may begin removal proceedings for those seeking legal status through a spouse or other relative. “Petitioners and alien beneficiaries should be aware that a family-based petition accords no immigration status nor does it bar removal,” the guidance said. In an Aug. 1 memo, USCIS said it “must ensure that qualifying marriages and family relationships are genuine, verifiable, and compliant with all applicable laws.” Dylan Corbett, executive director of the Hope Border Institute, a group that works to apply the perspective of Catholic social teaching in policy and practice to the U.S.-Mexico border region, told OSV News, “The administration continues to insist that they are simply targeting criminals in immigration enforcement operations, but that’s not what is happening.”



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