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



These *Messenger* file photos were taken at the first annual Mass of Belonging hosted by the Fire Foundation of Northern Kentucky, held in September of 2024. As its mission, the Fire Foundation seeks to make Catholic schools truly inclusive, focusing specifically on students with learning difficulties or special needs. This year the Mass of Belonging will be held Sept. 9, 6 p.m., at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption. All are invited to attend. An ice cream social will follow the Mass at St. Mary's Park.

Second annual Mass of Belonging hosted by Fire Foundation of Northern Kentucky to take place Sept. 9

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

The Fire Foundation of Northern Kentucky will host its second annual Mass of Belonging at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, Sept. 9, 6 p.m. All are welcome.

The work of the Fire Foundation of Northern Kentucky is firmly rooted in the belief that all children are deserving of a high-quality, Catholic education, focusing specifically on students with learning difficulties or special needs. Through fiscal support of teacher training, funding for salaries or partial salaries of special education teachers and paraprofessionals, and the acquisition of adaptive technology, the Fire Foundation of Northern Kentucky seeks to make Catholic schools truly inclusive for all.

"The Fire Foundation of Northern Kentucky makes it possible for Catholic schools to create an environment where students of all abilities learn, grow and thrive ... it will allow students with special needs to share in unique opportunities that only our Catholic schools can offer children," said MaryKaye McDaniel, board member.

As a partner of the Diocese of Covington, the Fire Foundation of Northern Kentucky was started by a group of moms, all of whom wanted more for their children with special needs. Spurred by a desire to have all their children attend school together, as a family, the Fire Foundation of Northern Kentucky was born.

Mrs. McDaniel said, "This foundation was really driven by that, wanting to keep families together in our Catholic schools, learning and growing educationally, spiritually and together."

As a way to help the students they serve, the Fire Foundation of Northern Kentucky hosts an annual Mass of Belonging, where those with special needs and their families are invited to celebrate Mass as a community.

"It's about bringing our community together as a whole and saying, 'You belong,'" said Mrs. McDaniel. "We all belong to this beau-



The Fire Foundation of Northern Kentucky Second annual Mass of Belonging

Sept. 9, 6 p.m., Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington.
All are welcome.

tiful Catholic faith, in this beautiful Catholic community."

The Mass this year will be a sensory-friendly event, so more people are able to enjoy the celebration of the Eucharist. "It really is a night to celebrate, to celebrate Jesus, to celebrate the Eucharist, to celebrate our community, and to come together," said Mrs. McDaniel.

Following Mass, there will be an ice cream celebration in St. Mary's Park, Covington, across the street from the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, where the community can gather and engage in fellowship. "Once we celebrate the Eucharist, celebrate our faith in Mass, and then afterwards be able to make those connections with other families," said Mrs. McDaniel on the merit of the ice cream social.

The Fire Foundation of Northern Kentucky emphasizes inclusion among Catholic schools, said Mrs. McDaniel, "so that students, teachers and all staff can more fully live out our Catholic faith on a daily basis."

Official diocesan youth ministry charter hopes to inspire youth ministry on a smaller scale, according to diocesan minister Angie Poat

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Youth ministry in the Diocese of Covington is launching into its “next phase,” according to Angie Poat, the diocesan youth minister who has been building up the structure of youth ministry since joining the Curia in 2023.

Building up from the With One Heart pastoral plan, and skill sets obtained from the “Tending the Talents” programs via Catholic Leadership



Angie Poat, diocesan youth minister, speaks to youth ministry leaders during a meeting to officially charter newly established youth ministry teams, Sept. 2.

Institute, the Youth Ministry office has chartered four official “teams” led by existing youth ministry leaders, which will tackle different youth ministry needs in the diocese.

The first team, called the Youth Commission Evangelization Team (YCET), is the most familiar team in the diocese already and was active in ministry previously. Under the official charter, YCET will be led by Hannah Ubelhor, a parishioner of St. Timothy Parish, Union. An active youth minister — Ms. Ubelhor has previous experience as a retreat director and worship leader. YCET will also be led in conjunction with Mark Johnson, from St. Thomas, Ft. Thomas, where he is the current youth minister and catechetical leader.

Bradley Barnes, campus minister of Newport Central Catholic, will be spearheading two of the other youth ministry teams — middle school ministry, and the intern team which assists youth ministry faculties in the youth ministry summer internship.

As for the fourth team, Service and Mission, Carrie O'Connor — a member of

the Regnum Christi movement — will be leading.

Each team leader, along with their teams, average 20 hours a month in service to the diocese — leading meetings and events throughout.

The primary goal of devising these teams for youth ministry lies in the importance of sustainability, Mrs. Poat said, to earn the ability to maintain youth ministry function long term — but also to “empower volunteers and lay people in the diocese to use their leadership skills.”

This year, the youth ministry leaders are being “put into action,” but Mrs. Poat hopes that their example will be “models for youth ministry teams,” which she hopes will form throughout diocesan parishes and communities.

“Whether you have a full-time youth minister or a part-time youth minister or no youth minister,” Mrs. Poat said, “you can have a successful youth ministry in every parish.” This is accomplished through teamwork and collaborative ministry, she explained, saying that “not one isolated person can run a ministry on their own.”

Mrs. Poat encourages all lay people to involve themselves in youth ministry, starting with “getting the word out to the young people in their parish” and getting them to attend diocesan events. “They can sponsor their way to attend these events, or they could simply show up and be present,” she said. Additionally, Mrs. Poat says they can “let diocesan events and teams be a springboard to chartering their own youth ministry involvement in their own parish, whether it’s big or small.”

Childhood dreams coming true for newly appointed Diocesan Choir director

Laura Keener
Editor

Since he was three years old, Matt Spencer has watched and listened in awe as Dr. Robert Schaffer, and now Dr. Greg Schaffer, play the organ and lead the Bishop’s Choir at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. Now, Mr. Spencer will share the bench at the Cathedral’s historic Wick’s pipe organ, as he has been named the next director of the Diocesan Choir:



Matt Spencer

“It’s pinch me,” said Mr. Spencer in an interview with the *Messenger* about his new position. “It was the Cathedral music program that inspired me to want to do this, and so to be able to work somewhat alongside Greg Schaffer, I’m star struck ... And now I get to sit on the same bench and make music in the same space.”

The Diocesan Choir was established in July of 2014, with Katie Barton as its first director. “She’s done an amazing job.

It’s big, big, big shoes to fill,” said Mr. Spencer. “I studied organ and conducting and choirs with Katie at Northern Kentucky University. I’ve been a member of the Diocesan Choir for nine of those years, so she definitely trained me. My focus is to uphold the really good stuff that she did with the Diocesan Choir ... to provide some continuity and consistency from her excellent leadership.”

The Bishop’s Choir, led by Dr. Schaffer, is the Cathedral’s principal choir and provides music for Sunday liturgies and other regularly scheduled pontifical celebrations. The Diocesan Choir, made up of choir members from parishes throughout the diocese, provides music for diocesan liturgical celebrations, like Vesper services and Masses for special occasions, like the annual Pro-Life Mass and the annual wedding anniversary Vespers.

Mr. Spencer said that the Diocesan Choir is currently seeking choir members. Rehearsals are designed to work around choir members’ existing commitments to their parish choir. Rehearsals are project-based meeting once a week, a couple of weeks before a scheduled event. Choir members can also choose which events best meet their schedule.

“We’d love to have everyone join as often as they can,”

said Mr. Spencer, noting that it’s understood that not every choir member can make every event. “Maybe you can do the event that’s in September, but you can’t do the event in October, that’s okay,” said Mr. Spencer. “The rehearsals are structured to accommodate that type of flexibility for members.

In addition to his new position, Mr. Spencer is associate director of Worship and music director for St. Gregory the Great Family of Parishes/Guardian Angels Catholic Church, Cincinnati, Ohio, and choir teacher and organist at Covington Latin School, Covington. He got his start in liturgical music as a fourth grader at Mary, Queen of Heaven School, Erlanger. One day, the pastor announced that due to an unexpected and lengthy illness, there would be no music for school Masses. Having had piano lessons and knowing a few church songs, the young Mr. Spencer raised his hand and volunteered to lead the music. The pastor agreed.

“He took me up to the organ and sat me down. He said,

‘Just play what you know,’” said Mr. Spencer.

He played the popular hymns Silent Night and Joy to the World. “We were in the season of Lent,” Mr. Spencer confides with a grimace. “But rather than saying that was horrible. He handed me a hymnal and told me to learn some more songs. I think he knew that there was something there, and that little bit of encouragement has always stuck with me.”

Mr. Spencer strives to share that same encouragement with the youth he works with.

“Anytime I’m working with youth, I always think, how can I be encouraging to them? How can I support them if this is something they want to explore? I had one person who took that chance, so I always look for those opportunities to encourage and support them.”

To learn more about the Diocesan Choir’s upcoming schedule and to apply as a member, scan the QR code.



Sisters of Divine Providence Jubilarians

The Congregation of the Sisters of Divine Providence, Melbourne, recently celebrated milestone jubilees (from left) 70-year jubilarians: Sister Armella Pietrowski, Sister Jackie Schack and 60-year jubilarians: Sister Marie Rose Messingschlager, Sister Janet Carr and Sister Madonna Kling.

Grandparents and elders are ‘signs of hope’ — remember them on the upcoming Grandparents’ Day

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Breakfasts, shared Masses and games together — these are just some of the ways that schools in the Diocese of Covington celebrate their grandparents. These celebrations coincide with National Grandparents’ Day — celebrated this year on Sept. 7.

While celebrated internationally on various days, such

as the July World Day for Grandparents and Elderly established by Pope Francis in 2021, this national holiday celebrated during the school year is a tradition where schools invite students’ grandparents to join them.

The importance of grandparents and elders in a community is not to be understated — and it is Pope Leo XIV who calls the elderly “signs of hope” in his 2025 message for World Day for Grandparents and Elderly. “In the Bible, God repeatedly demonstrates his providential care by turning to people in their later years. This was the case not only with Abraham, Sarah, Zechariah and Elizabeth, but also with Moses, who was called to set his people free when he was already 80 years old,” Pope Leo said. “God thus teaches us that, in his eyes, old

age is a time of blessing and grace, and that the elderly are, for him, the first witnesses of hope.

“The life of the Church and the world can only be understood in light of the passage of generations. Embracing the elderly helps us to understand that life is more than just the present moment and should not be wasted in superficial encounters and fleeting relationships. Instead, life is constantly pointing us toward the future.”

In his last message for World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, Pope Francis also referred to elders as “the firm foundation’ on which ‘new’ stones can rest, in order to join in erecting a spiritual edifice.” In fact, throughout his time as pope, Pope Francis often spoke on the importance of the elderly, specifically in the context of their relationship to young people — as stewards and teachers to one another.



(left) St. Anne educates Mary while St. Joachim watches in this engraving by Pierre Imbert Drevet after Jean-Baptiste Jouvenet. Sts. Joachim and Anne are celebrated as the patron saints of grandparents.

(above) In this file photo from 2024, students from St. Joseph school, Cold Spring, play a bingo game with their grandparents as a celebration of Grandparents’ Day.

Child Abuse Awareness
Jane Hermes, executive director of the Family Nurturing Center of Northern Kentucky, presented Bishop John Iffert with a thank-you gift, Aug. 26, for the Diocese of Covington’s participation in the Light Up Blue campaign last April. April is Child Abuse Awareness Month, and blue is the color for Child Abuse Awareness. Last April, the Family Nurturing Center encouraged businesses, faith communities and individuals to show their dedication to ending child abuse by displaying blue ribbons, blue pinwheels and blue lights. At the Diocesan Curia, St. Mary’s Park was bathed in blue lights. Through education, counseling and training, the Family Nurturing Center is committed to ending the cycle of child abuse by promoting individual well-being and healthy family relationships.



Bishop’s Schedule

- Sept. 7**
Wedding Vespers, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 2 p.m.

Sept. 9
Presbyteral Council meeting, 1:30 p.m.

Mass, FIRE Foundation, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 6 p.m.
- Sept. 10**
Building Commission meeting, 2 p.m.

Sept. 11–15
Investiture 2025: Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher

Correction

In the August 29 edition of the *Messenger*, the article entitled “Major donors to Restored in Christ capital campaign spend evening with ‘Gargoyles and Gratitude,’” the name of the chimera struck twice by lightning is Horned Goat Demon, not The Goat. The *Messenger* apologizes for the error.

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COMMENTARY

Overcoming presumptions

The readings for the twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C, are: Wisdom 9:13–18b, Philemon 9–10, 12–17 and Luke 14:25–33.

A sabbath dinner, Jesus is at the home of a Pharisee. Jesus heals a man, a scandalous miracle on the sabbath. He justifies the act by saying that of course he should’ve healed the man, that anyone would do the same for his son or even for cattle. What’s strange or wrong, he

GUEST



Father Joshua J. Whitfield

asks, about this wondrous work? He leaves them speechless (Lk 14:1-6). The miracle, anyway, was meant to give way to talk about the kingdom, which is basically what the rest of Luke 14 is about.

Jesus first tells a parable about humility, about presumption. Remember that he’s talking to Pharisees, to people assuming they were at the front of the line, exclusively elect. “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Lk 14:11). “But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the blind” (Lk 14:13).

He’s teaching not just a moral lesson here but also a theological one, an eschatological lesson. Earlier in Luke, his Blessed Mother sings this truth, about how God “has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree” (Lk 1:52). Here, Jesus makes it dinner conversation; at table, the Lord it seems can’t help but teach.

Next comes the parable of the “great banquet.” It is a story about the kingdom of God, about how “many” are invited. Yet many make excuses. “I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it.” “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.” The excuses made are worldly, involving possessions or the flesh. That’s why the master in the story says, “Go out to the highways and hedges.” He means to invite anyone free enough to come.

Again, remember that he’s talking to people presuming that simply by being who they are guaranteed them a place in the kingdom, to people who may have grown too accustomed to rely on notions of status or success or ethnicity or election, believing such things by themselves merited the kingdom of God. But that presumption is precisely the problem; awkwardly at a Pharisee’s dinner table, that’s precisely what these stories are getting at, that such presumption is not a sure bet.

And then, in this Sunday’s reading, Jesus repeats the lesson he’s been teaching for several chapters (Lk 14:25–33). He is trying to pry his disciples and would-be followers from relying on everything they are normally accustomed to rely on. Religious identity and status? Stop. Possessions? Definitely stop. Family status? Stop relying even on that. Putting it in the starkest terms possible, talking about “hating” even family members, what Jesus is calling his disciples and potential disciples to accept is that they are to renounce every instance of earthly reliance for the sake of following him.

Jesus is not ultimately saying his disciples should erase or ignore all family bonds, but that they should be decisively subordinated to their following Jesus. He is calling his disciples to consider a truly radical reordering of their lives. Which is why Jesus suggests his would-be disciples think about it a little, that they “count the cost” (Lk 14:28). Because there really is no such thing as a part-

(Continued on page 12)

The pathway to peace

As a Maryknoll Lay Missioner, we are encouraged to attend a yearly spiritual retreat. This year, as my retreat site, I chose to visit the shrine of our Lady of Kibeho in Rwanda and the memorial sites of the genocide that took

GUEST



Theresa Glaser

place there in 1994. Returning to my home in Kitale, Kenya just before the opening of Holy Week, the Palm Sunday Gospel describing the passion of Christ took on parallels with the Rwandan history in which themes of “group- think” and “forgiveness” emerged.

The horrors of that 90-day period in which one million people were murdered were largely a result of propaganda provoking hatred and distrust between average people — sometimes family members against family members, neighbor against neighbor. Unthinkable crimes were committed against innocent people by some who had been stirred to hatred by an insidious groupthink.

Listening to the Palm Sunday narration of the Passion of Christ, I envisioned the crowd who hailed Christ’s entrance as he rode into Jerusalem and later joined the chant to “crucify him.”

But what stood out for me in my visit to Rwanda was the recovery of unity and peace that the Rwandan population has experienced a mere 30 years after the genocide.

A hand to hold through life’s struggles

Let’s face it — everyone struggles. At different times in life, and sometimes consistently, we all wrestle not only with vices or temptations but also with academic challenges, emotional difficulties or deep questions about life and faith.

VIEWPOINT



Chris Goddard

The Bible gives us a powerful image of this truth. In Genesis 32:23–29, Jacob wrestles with an angel through the night. By morning, he is blessed and given the new name Israel, meaning “one who struggles with God.” Jacob emerges wounded but transformed. His struggle is not a sign of rejection but an intimate encounter with God,

showing us that even our ‘wrestling’ can be the very path to blessing.

Stories and parables remind us of the same lesson. In the story of the emperor’s moth, a person tries to help the creature by cutting open its cocoon. But without resistance, the moth’s wings remain weak, and it can never fly. Challenges in our lives — though often painful — become the very means by which God strengthens us for resilience, freedom and grace.

This universal reality of struggle connects directly to the lives of our children. Students in Catholic schools face numerous challenges, including academic pressures, social and emotional hurdles, and questions of identity and faith. Just as Jacob emerged with new strength, we want to help students emerge from their struggles with resilience, hope and faith.

That is why Catholic Charities is thrilled to launch

I learned from talking to Rwandans that the country’s leadership has emphasized forgiveness and unity. The beauty and current prosperity of the country was evidence of this.

During my week of retreat, I reread the book by Immaculée Ilibagiza, “Left to Tell.” In it, the author describes her experience of having hidden in a tiny bathroom with six other women for three months to escape death during the Rwanda genocide. She found peace only when she realized that, like herself, the people who were hunting her to kill her were children of God. When she prayed as fervently for them as she did for herself, she felt God’s presence.

Forgiveness in the face of unthinkable wrongdoing was demonstrated by Christ’s prayer to the Father from the cross.

We all know how difficult it is to truly forgive from the heart. It is something that can’t happen on demand but only develops from a struggle within the heart of an individual who makes a choice to do so.

In the Gospel reflections offered by Bishop Robert Barron, he often makes statements to the effect that it is Satan who scatters; God always gathers. We learn from Jesus’ teaching and example that whether it be the healing of a country from a lethal divisiveness or the reuniting of family members suffering alienation, making a choice to forgive is our pathway to unity and peace.

Theresa Glaser is a parishioner of St. Anthony Parish, Taylor Mill and a lay missionary for Maryknoll Lay Missioners. In January 2024, she began a three-year mission in Africa and will be sharing updates with Messenger. For photos see page 12.

CARES — the Catholic Approach to Resilience, Engagement, and Support. Beginning in the 2025–2026 school year, CARES will expand its counseling services to include not only intensive support but also universal and targeted interventions, addressing the academic, behavioral, social-emotional and mental health needs of all students.

In 2025–2026, CARES will serve all 400 students at Holy Cross, Holy Trinity, and Mary Queen of Heaven elementary schools — at no cost to families or schools. In its second year, 2026–2027, the program will expand to St. Philip, Prince of Peace, St. Agnes, St. Joseph Crescent Springs, St. Anthony, St. Augustine, Immaculate Heart of Mary and Sts. Peter & Paul. With full implementation across all eleven partner schools by 2026–2027, CARES will ultimately reach more than 1,900 Catholic elementary students in our diocese, eventually making it one of the most comprehensive school-based counseling initiatives in the nation.

This expansion is the result of a 2024 survey of diocesan schools, in which 29 of 36 schools responded that students require more counseling support than current resources can provide. CARES was born to meet that call.

Just as Jacob’s wrestling led to transformation, we believe that every student’s struggles can become opportunities for growth when met with care, guidance, and faith-filled support. Through CARES, Catholic Charities is not only responding to the needs of our schools but also living out our mission to walk with the vulnerable, strengthen families, and serve the whole person in body, mind, and spirit. By helping students build resilience, compassion and hope, we are preparing a generation to live lives firmly rooted in Christ — transforming not only their future but the future of our Church and community.

Chris Goddard is executive director for Catholic Charities, Diocese of Covington, Ky

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Salvation comes from being strong enough to ask God for help, pope says



Pope Leo XIV sits on a modified BMW R18 motorcycle presented to him by members of the Jesus Bikers, a motorcycle club from Germany, and representatives of Missio Austria, the pontifical mission societies in Austria, in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sept. 3, 2025. The bike will be auctioned by Sotheby's and Missio Austria will use the money to help build a school for children who work in the mica mines in Madagascar.

Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

The human longing for love is not a sign of weakness but demonstrates that no one is completely self-sufficient and that salvation comes from letting oneself be loved and assisted by God, Pope Leo XIV said.

“No one can save themselves. Life is ‘fulfilled’ not when we are strong, but when we learn how to receive,” the pope told tens of thousands of people gathered in St. Peter’s Square Sept. 3 for his weekly general audience.

During the audience, the pope offered special prayers for all the students and teachers who recently returned to school or were about to start a new school year.

“Pray for them, through the intercession of the Blessed — and soon saints — Pier Giorgio Frassati and Carlo Acutis, for the gift of a deep faith in their journey of maturation,” the pope said just days before he was scheduled to preside over the canonizations of the two young Italians.

In his main talk, Pope Leo continued his series of reflec-

tions on lessons of hope from the Gospel stories of Jesus’ last days and focused specifically on the 19th chapter of the Gospel of John where Jesus on the cross says, “I thirst.”

“If even the son of God chose not to be self-sufficient, then our thirst too — for love, for meaning, for justice — is a sign not of failure, but of truth,” the pope said.

Jesus’ thirst is not just physical, the pope said; it is “above all the expression of a profound desire: that of love, of relationship, of communion. It is the silent cry of a God who, having wished to share everything of our human condition, also lets himself be overcome by this thirst.”

By not being afraid to ask for something to drink, Jesus “tells us that love, in order to be true, must also learn to ask and not only to give.”

At a time when most societies seem to reward self-sufficiency, efficiency and performance, the pope said, “the Gospel shows us that the measure of our humanity is not given by what we can achieve, but by our ability to let ourselves be loved and, when necessary, even helped.”

Jesus’ cry of thirst, he said, “is ours too. It is the cry of

a wounded humanity that seeks living water. And this thirst does not lead us away from God but rather unites us with him.”

Admitting the need for help, “our fragility is a bridge toward heaven,” he said.

“There is nothing more human, nothing more divine, than being able to say: I need,” Pope Leo told the crowd. “Let us not be afraid to ask, especially when it seems to us that we do not deserve. Let us not be ashamed to reach out our hand. It is right there, in that humble gesture, that salvation hides.”

After the audience, members of the Jesus Bikers, a motorcycle club from Germany, and representatives of Missio Austria, the pontifical mission societies in Austria, presented Pope Leo XIV with a modified BMW R18 motorcycle, which he autographed and then sat on.

The bike will be auctioned by Sotheby’s, and Missio Austria will use the money to help build a school for children who work in the mica mines in Madagascar.

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/>.

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.

Come watch Season 5 of The Chosen at Mother of God Church, Covington, Thursdays, Sept. 4–Oct. 23, 10 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. It is a lot of fun to watch it in a group and discuss ... even if you have seen it before. Free and open to all. Bring a friend!

Miracles happen all the time at the dinner table. From the formation of values and character to bonding over shared successes, challenges and stories. Oh, what stories ... Father Leo, a renowned chef, speaker, and author, founded PlatingGrace.com to promote family bonding over dinner. Father Leo will do a cooking demonstration as he prepares our dinner and discusses the transformative power of food and faith. The event is sponsored by the St. Michael the Archangel Council Knights of Columbus. Tickets are \$20, to be held the evening of Sept. 10. Visit the following address to watch a promo video and to purchase tickets. <https://www.stmichaelkofc.org/event-details-registration/miracles-at-the-table#about>

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

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.

The Office of Catechesis and Evangelization is offering workshops on Books of the Old Testament, presented by Father Timothy Schehr, retired biblical scholar and former professor at Mount St. Mary’s School of Theology at the Athenaeum of Ohio. Workshops are all held Saturday morning, 10–11:30 a.m., Diocese of Covington, Curia Office. 2025 Workshops – Psalms: Sept. 6 – Session 1 and Sept. 13 – Session 2. Isaiah: Nov. 1 – Session 1 and Nov. 15 – Session 2. Cost \$35 per session, cash or checks at the



The SPX MEN group at St. Pius X, Edgewood, show off their new t-shirts at the conclusion of Holy Hour at the parish’s quarterly Catholic Men’s Night. A spiritual message was delivered by Father Matthew Summe and was followed by a Rosary dedicated to the men’s families. Fellowship followed downstairs in Milligan Hall. The group’s motto is “Gather, Pray, Serve.”

door. Register at covdio.org/bible-workshops.

Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, presents: A Heart of Service: Simple Solution to World Hunger, Sept. 11, 7 p.m. in Ziegler Auditorium. “A Heart of Service: Simple Solution to World Hunger,” features Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, founder of the global school-feeding charity Mary’s Meals, alongside Catholic musician Steve Angrisano. This event is free and open to the public; no registration is required.

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>.

On Saturday, Sept. 27, Bishop Brossart Boys Basketball Program will have a Euchre Tournament. Doors open at 5:30 and cards will begin at 7:00. Cost is \$25 if you pre-register by 9/26. Limited walkups may be available. Food included. There will also be a bourbon raffle, basket raffles and split the pots. E-mail bbhsboysbasketballeuchre@gmail.com or call (859) 760-8228. More information available on bmustangs.com website.

New Beginnings is an 8-week program that provides the opportunity to heal and move forward despite a complicated situation. Led by facilitators who have been through their own personal losses, this program invites participants to move toward their own new beginnings. Registration is required. To register, visit <https://covdio.org/new-beginnings-2/> or call (859) 392-1529. Next session will be held on consecutive Thursdays, Oct. 2–Dec. 4, 7–8:30 p.m. at Catholic Charities, Covington.

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.

Brady Webb, webmaster of the Catechetical Institute at Franciscan University, will present a hands-on workshop exploring Franciscan University’s Catechetical Institute’s website, Oct. 25, 9:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m., Thomas More University’s Steigerwald Hall, Saints Center, Crestview Hills. This training is for everyone using the CI Website for learning the Catholic faith. Register by October 15, 2025, at covdio.org/register/. Questions? Contact Isaak A. Isaak at iisaak@covdio.org or (859) 392-1529.



Blessed Sacrament, Ft. Mitchell, students had a thrilling Pep Rally with special appearances by local favorites like Mr. Redlegs, Gary from FC Cincinnati and the Chick Fil A cow. Even some of our teachers and administrators joined in on the fun. The Pep Rally was just the beginning of the excitement for the school’s upcoming Color Run on September 19. Students will be running through bursts of green, pink, yellow and blue to show their love for our school.

Parish festivals		
Sept. 5–7	Sept. 12–13	Sept. 21
St. Patrick Parish, Maysville	St. Barbara Parish, Erlanger	St. Matthew, Kenton
Sept. 6–7	Sept. 19–20	Sept. 26-28
St. Anthony Parish, Taylor Mill	St. Benedict Parish, Covington	St. Agnes Parish, Ft. Wright
	Sept. 19–21	
	St. Timothy Parish, Union	

From Final Four fame to 106: Sister Jean still cheering Loyola on

John Knebels
OSV News

It's been more than seven years since Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt became a household name virtually overnight.

Then — five months shy of turning 99 — Sister Jean captured the hearts of college basketball fans when, as team chaplain, she inspired Loyola University of Chicago to a Final Four berth in the 2018 NCAA men's basketball tournament. Known for her constant positivity and even offering strategic game-day suggestions, she was quickly embraced by appreciative players and staff as an honorary assistant coach.

Seven years later, the sister of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who entered the order in 1937, continues to elevate the hearts and minds of the young and old alike.

On Aug. 21, Sister Jean celebrated her 106th birthday. Still officially listed as team chaplain but no longer able to attend most games due to health issues, the former high school basketball player from San Francisco's St. Paul's High School shared a heartfelt but practical message on Loyola's website. She thanked supporters for standing by her through a nine-decade ministry of education, civil rights awareness, spiritual guidance, and outspoken advocacy for love, service and gratitude.

Apologizing for her absence, she encouraged the Loyola community to "enjoy the treats and the new Sr. Jean pin." Then, turning to the students, she offered her trademark encouragement: "Make new friends. Talk to your old friends. Enjoy your move-in and your preparations for class," she said. "I will be with you in spirit and love and prayer. These things are very important in your life as you adjust to your new 'home away from home' at Loyola University.

"Your parents have entrusted you to our care. We appreciate that trust. We know that you will live by it and that you will become the people that you want to be, the people that God has decided you will be. Yes, you have to be yourself."

Recognizing her nearly three decades at Loyola as "wonderful," she urged students to let their faith guide their future: "Let your dreams become reality," she said. "Don't let anybody stop you. You are the future leaders of our churches, our schools, our country, and our world."

Loyola president Mark Reed described her ongoing impact, highlighting that the community celebrates "not only this remarkable milestone, but also the wisdom, hope,

and joy Sister Jean shares so generously with us," Reed said. "Her ministry of presence has touched thousands of lives — students, faculty, staff, alumni. We are deeply grateful."

Her birthday brought thousands of greetings from around the world, including many from abroad. Messages poured in through Loyola's board, Facebook and even sports platforms.

One admirer shared, "You inspired me to have a career helping people be healthy in mind and body." Another revealed she had been named after Sister Jean. A 2018 Loyola graduate cited the aforementioned basketball season with a simple, "You had a direct line to God."

That legendary 2018 tournament still stands as a highlight of Sister Jean's ministry of presence. Entering the NCAA playoffs as an 11-seed, Loyola stunned the basketball world with dramatic upsets over Miami, Tennessee and Nevada by a collective four points before defeating Kansas State to reach the Final Four for the first time since their 1963 national championship season. Though their storybook run ended against Michigan, it felt to many like something greater than basketball was at work.

Since then, Sister Jean's influence has only grown. From a Sister Jean bobblehead that fetches hundreds of dollars online to "Sister Jean pins" and her bestselling memoir, "Wake Up With Purpose," tangible reminders of her legacy surround the Loyola community.

In Loyola's Gentile Arena, a banner hangs as a tribute to both her spirit and the program she loves. Its unequivocal message is short and clear: "Worship, Work, Win."



OSV News photo Brett Davis-USA TODAY Sports via Reuters

Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt, longtime chaplain of the Loyola University Chicago men's basketball team and campus icon, gives a thumbs up after the team defeated the Nevada Wolf Pack in the semifinals of the South regional of the 2018 NCAA Tournament in Atlanta. On Aug. 21, 2025, Sister Jean celebrated her 106th birthday.



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USCCB-hosted synod event tackles the dignity of work, role of unions

Kimberley Heatherington
OSV News

The somewhat arcane title of a recent gathering at the headquarters of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington — “Third Synodal Meeting Fratelli Tutti: North-South Socio-Environmental Dialogue” — might not



A worker carries lumber at a highway construction site in Stony Brook, N.Y., Aug. 30, 2022.

immediately reveal its very practical purpose. The aim of the July 28-29 event was to examine interconnected current and future challenges to dignified work, integral human development and care for our common home. But just what is a “Synodal Meeting” — and what does it have to do with “Fratelli Tutti,” Pope Francis’ third encyclical? The Synod on Synodality — initiated by Pope Francis in October 2021 and concluded in October 2024 — was a process designed to enhance the mission of the Church through inclusive conversation at diocesan, national and continental levels. Culminating with two global Vatican assemblies — where both clergy and laity collaborated at literal round tables — synodality was proposed as a template for Church discussion and decision-making. In “Fratelli Tutti” — released Oct. 3, 2020 — Pope Francis decried a “throwaway” world whose “way of discarding others can take a variety of forms,” including “an obsession with reducing labor costs with no concern for its grave consequences, since the unemployment that it directly generates leads to the expansion of poverty.” The pontiff also asserted “there is no poverty worse than that which takes away work and the dignity of work.” The July 28-29 USCCB-hosted event — which included more than 40 organized labor groups from North, Central and South America, as well as representatives of international organizations and ecclesial networks — was convened by the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council, known as CELAM, and the Vatican’s Pontifical Commission for Latin America. “Participants committed to strengthening intersectoral North-South cooperation and collaborating with the agenda of Pope Leo XIV and the Episcopal Conferences,” a post-meeting statement reported, “contributing proposals to consolidate the role of organized labor in building a more just and sustainable economy.”

Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas — who was elected a member of the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod by members of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican in October 2024 — said synodality is critical to such an objective. “Synodality has a large aim of strengthening the communion of the local Churches with each other,” Bishop Flores told OSV News. “And you can’t do that unless you’re talking and listening and thinking and praying together — and seeing what we can do together for the witness of the Church.” Bishop José Reginaldo Andrietta of Jales, Brazil represented the South; Bishop Flores represented the North; and Msgr. Juan Antonio Cruz Serrano, permanent observer of the Holy See to the Organization of American States, represented the Vatican. “Whenever you’re dealing with issues of work and the economy and the condition of workers,” said Bishop Flores, “you’re looking at different parts of the world that have different factors influencing that. There’s a lot of particular circumstances, but it’s important that we understand those — because increasingly, they’re having a global effect.” It’s not, however, a new concern. “It basically goes back to one of the fundamental principles of the social teaching of the Church,” Bishop Flores emphasized, “which is that the economy, economic structures, economic dynamics, and so forth, are for the sake of the human person — not the human person for the sake of economic dynamics.” “It’s the issue of human dignity and family dignity,” he continued. “Especially for those who aren’t in a position to make decisions at the upper echelons of government and economic entities — that they have a voice, and that their voice is heard. And that, that’s the only way you can pursue the common good” — which, he added, “is one of the most traditional things in terms of the Church’s whole moral perspective on the social order.” The synodal model, Bishop Flores noted, provided the “Synodal Meeting Fratelli Tutti” participants “a chance for some serious listening to what the circumstances are in other parts of the Americas — in terms of the condition of labor; technology, how it’s affecting people, how it’s affecting life — so that we in the North could understand that, but also, so that those in the South could understand what we’re facing here in terms of similar dynamics.” A shared urgency was felt, it seems, to remind humankind of some essential truths. “I think there’s obviously a consensus about the need to articulate — for this new world we’re living in — the basic principles of justice for workers and for families, but also the issue of putting human dignity first,” said Bishop Flores. “I go back to this very fundamental principle: The just treatment of workers is not only a pragmatic thing because it makes the economy work better; it’s a primary thing because of human dignity. “The Church,” he explained, “has to continue to find the language to speak that to the modern, current circum-

stance. And I think these sort of gatherings help a lot.” Chuck Hendricks — president of the Catholic Labor Network and director of national contracts and internal support for Unite Here International Union — said he “thought the gathering was really good...having this group of people thinking and talking about what amounts to the future of labor and social justice in the Church. If I’m with just labor organizers — even labor organizers from the Church — that’s just one perspective. It’s really good to have a dialogue of people from broad perspectives.” Hendricks was particularly impressed by the words of Archbishop Shelton J. Fabre of Louisville, Kentucky. “He at some point was talking about the struggles of ordinary priests in responding to things like labor issues — how lots of people come to priests with lots of agendas, and it’s really hard for priests to figure out how to engage,” recalled Hendricks. “And it’s only when you get to the ‘enfleshment’ of the issue — having workers and people affected by the issues talking with the priests or talking with the bishops about the actual issues — that you’re able to put flesh on the issue. And,” he added, “make it real so it can’t be another agenda to deal with later, but a real agenda to deal with now.” ? Some Americans, Hendricks suggested, literally can’t afford to wait. Many of the airport workers represented by Unite Here “have a second job at the airport — they work one shift for a company serving food, and then they get off and they go work for another company serving food, or pushing a wheelchair, because the wages are not enough,” said Hendricks. “Service sector workers, particularly, can’t afford a normal life — they have to have two full-time jobs, or one and a half full-time jobs.” ? Nor do some feel they can have children. “We definitely know — particularly younger people — that say, ‘I can’t afford to start a family.’ And so they don’t. Especially now that you have states cutting Medicaid, and employers not providing affordable health care, if you can’t get Medicaid. It doesn’t feel,” Hendricks suggested, “like a family values country.” Dan Graff, director of the Higgins Labor Program at the University of Notre Dame — who was invited to the “Synodal Meeting Fratelli Tutti” but unable to attend — nonetheless had some thoughts to share. “What’s important is that the Church is invested in that kind of stakeholder process. Catholic social teaching is really adamant that participation matters, for all members of society,” Graff stressed. “And if you use the dignity of each individual human person as the basis for that participation, then that requires workers in unions and other solidarity groups to have a role in helping shape the economy.” “It’s great and logical to see the Catholic Church — in this case, the bishops as well as the Vatican — sponsoring this. Because at the heart of Catholic social teaching is, how do we bring different perspectives together to the table, and that everyone deserves a seat there. In some ways,” reflected Graff, “it’s almost countercultural to the American economy these days.” It’s a point with which Bishop Flores agrees. “Synodality, at the heart of the matter, is an openness to actually keeping it real. Keeping it real is you really do have to listen to people, and you really do have to talk to people,” said Bishop Flores. “You can’t sit somewhere in an office and sort of plan the global economy.”

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Pope talks about what St. Augustine has given him and taught him

Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

“So much of who I am I owe to the spirit and the teachings of St. Augustine,” Pope Leo XIV told his Augustinian confreres and their benefactors who were celebrating the saint’s feast day in Philadelphia.

As Cardinal Robert F. Prevost, the pope had been scheduled to be in Philadelphia for the celebration Aug. 28 and to receive an award. But in May he was elected pope.

So instead, Augustinian Father Robert P. Hagan, prior of the order’s Province of St. Thomas of Villanova, based outside Philadelphia, presented the St. Augustine Medal to Pope Leo in July in Castel Gandolfo where the pope was taking a summer break.

The presentation was filmed along with a long video
(Continued on page 12)

CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Leo XIV holds the St. Augustine Medal, which was presented to him by Augustinian Father Robert P. Hagan, prior of the order’s U.S. Province of St. Thomas of Villanova, during a meeting July 18, 2025, at Villa Barberini in Castel Gandolfo, Italy. The pope recorded a video message of thanks, which was played in Philadelphia Aug. 28, 2025.



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Hello humankindness

Add your prayers to this spiritual bouquet for Pope Leo XIV’s 70th

OSV News

Pope Leo XIV turns 70 on Sept. 14, and OSV News is celebrating by gathering a host of prayers into a very special “spiritual birthday bouquet” for the Holy Father. The best part? Everyone can participate.

In partnership with Pray More Novenas, Relevant Radio, the Daughters of St. Paul, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Pontifical Mission Societies, Sing the Hours and more, OSV News is encouraging an outpouring of prayer for Pope Leo and his intentions leading up to his milestone birthday — and his first birthday as pope.

Called “Pizza and Prayer,” the spiritual bouquet will be made up of a variety of prayer options from a full novena to a Holy Hour to a rosary. Each prayer effort will be noted, collated and sent to the pope. OSV News is also encouraging participants, when possible, to pray together and then grab a slice of pizza in honor of one of the Chicago native’s favorite treats. The name of every person and organization who participates in this spiritual bouquet will be included on the card OSV News will send to the Vatican.



CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Pope Leo XIV greets visitors and pilgrims from the popemobile as he rides around St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican before his weekly general audience Sept. 3, 2025.

“One of the most important things that we can do as Catholics is pray for the pope and for his intentions,” said Gretchen R. Crowe, editor-in-chief of OSV News. “The modern Petrine ministry is one of the most challenging roles in the world. As Pope Leo XIV prepares to celebrate this special birthday, we want him to be surrounded by prayer, and we hope everyone will participate in this special effort.”

Partners around the United States and the world are participating.

“We are so happy to join the OSV News Spiritual Bouquet for Pope Leo’s birthday!” said Father Francis (Rocky) Hoffman of Relevant Radio. “From Thursday, September 4 to Sunday, September 14, we will offer our Family Rosary

Across America on Relevant Radio at 7 pm CT for the Holy Father, and we expect we will be sending him around 1 million rosaries.”

The Daughters of St. Paul, also known as the Media Nuns, also are looking forward to participating.

“As Daughters of St. Paul, our mission is to bring Christ to the world through every means of communication,” said Sister Tracey Dugas. “What greater joy than to join our voices in prayer for the Holy Father on his 70th birthday! We are grateful for the opportunity to unite with so many others in offering Pope Leo XIV the gift of prayer and presence, along with a little pizza to celebrate his life and vocation.”

“The most important present we can give Pope Leo for his 70th birthday is praying for him, his health and intentions,” said Msgr. Roger Landry, national director of the Pontifical Mission Societies USA. “September 14 is a Sunday this year and so it’s a great opportunity for his spiritual family to pray together at Mass and then to celebrate him afterward in a Sunday meal. I’m sure he’d be really pleased if we invited the poor, like he recently did at Castel Gandolfo.”

To add your prayers to the pope’s spiritual birthday bouquet, please note your prayer offering at osvnews.com.

Happy birthday, Pope Leo. You are in our prayers.

Bishop blesses hospitalized 12-year-old Annunciation shooting victim

Joe Ruff

The Catholic Spirit, OSV News

Blessing her forehead and both hands with holy water from Lourdes, France, as she lay unconscious in a hospital bed in Minneapolis, Auxiliary Bishop Michael J. Izen of St. Paul and Minneapolis prayed for 12-year-old Sophia Forchas, left in critical condition with head injuries when bullets tore through Annunciation’s church in Minneapolis one week before.



OSV News

This is a screenshot from the GoFundMe page of 12-year-old Sophia Forchas, left in critical condition with head injuries when bullets tore through Annunciation Church in Minneapolis Aug. 27, 2025.

“Just ask people to pray. We’re going to win this,” Forchas’ father told Bishop Izen Sept. 2 at Hennepin Healthcare in Minneapolis.

Seventeen other students at Annunciation’s elementary school were wounded when a person wielding three guns began shooting through stained-glass windows into the church, which is next door to the school. Forchas’ brother was in the church, too, but he was not injured in the Aug. 27 shooting.

Of the other injured students, only Lydia Kaiser remained in the hospital Sept. 2, and she was steadily improving, Bishop Izen said. Three adults were wounded in the shooting. The suspected shooter died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound at the scene, police said.

Separate GoFundMe pages for the girls sought financial assistance for their family’s medical bills, trauma counseling, lost income and other expenses. Both girls have undergone surgeries and the need for medical care will continue, according to posts on the website describing their situations.

Lydia Kaiser was injured while protecting her little “buddy” during the Mass, which was the first all-school Mass of the school year, the Kaiser family’s post said.

Her father, Harry Kaiser, the school’s gym teacher, was in the church during the shooting. He “helped secure the room, to keep children safe, and stuck with them until they were reunited with their families, even while his daughter was entering the emergency room,” the post said. “Lydia and Harry are two heroes in our midst,” the post said.

Bishop Izen said Forchas’ mother and her brother were in the hospital room when he visited the family. The GoFundMe post said that while Forchas’ brother was not physically injured, “the trauma of witnessing such a terrifying event — and knowing his sister was critically injured — is something no child should ever experience.”

In addition, Forchas’ mother is the head of the pediatric intensive care unit at Hennepin Healthcare, Bishop Izen said. She arrived at work Aug. 27 to help the injured before knowing it was her children’s school that was attacked and that her daughter was critically injured, the GoFundMe post said.

The Forchas family belongs to St. Mary Greek Orthodox

Church in Minneapolis, which included a link on its website to the GoFundMe post and noted that Sophia Forchas is a member of the parish’s Greek dancing troupe.

The parish stated on its website that its Minneapolis Taste of Greece Festival Sept. 5-7 would collect donations to help the victims of the shooting at Annunciation and their families. Multiple parishioners of St. Mary were at the all-school Mass, the post said.

“For decades, the Forchas family has been the heart and muscle behind the Taste of Greece,” the post said. “We are aching without them here this weekend. This year’s festival honors the love, faith and service that the Forchas family has poured into our parish and this event, year after year.”

Bishop Izen said that in addition to the two girls, he has

visited with other Annunciation families and students, both at the school and at a counseling site. Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis and Auxiliary Bishop Kevin T. Kenney have done the same, day in and day out since the shooting. They also held three public prayer services in the days after the shooting and spoke with the media, all the while urging the faithful to find their strength in Christ.

Bishop Kenney graduated from Annunciation Catholic School and grew up as part of the parish. He was at St. Olaf in Minneapolis, where he is pastor as well as bishop, and he immediately went to Hennepin Healthcare to be present for families as they gathered.

“It was very emotional, and I knew the Church needed to be present and represented,” Bishop Kenney said in an email. “I sat with parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents as they awaited news of their children and then were directed to various waiting rooms.

“I was able to sit with the family of Sophia (Forchas) for a while” and he visited with Lydia Kaiser, the bishop said, while noting priests and others also helped people through the days after the shooting.

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(above) A statue of Our Lady of Kibeho stands at the center of the village. The Blessed Mother made her first appearance to three young visionaries in 1981, 13 years before the genocide took place. The girls received visions of Rwanda descending into hatred and violence.

(below) The Apparition Chapel in Kibeho, Rwanda.



Overcoming presumptions

(Continued from page 5)

time disciple. Being a Christian can’t be a side gig. Being a fake Christian can, but not a real one.

The questions, therefore, which these stories and this Sunday’s reading bring to the fore are questions about false reliance and presumption. Do we rely solely on ourselves and on our wealth, chasing after the security we think money or worldly success offers? That’s as much a problem today, and an eternal danger, as it was then; we should beg for the gift of faith.

Or do we think our religious status affords us a guaranteed ticket to the kingdom? Congratulations, you were baptized a Catholic and went to Catholic school, but do you know the Lord? Just outside the doors of the heavenly kingdom, will the Lord say he knows you on that day? “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven,” Jesus says (Mt 7:21). You see

what’s at stake here?

When reading the Gospels, I always ask myself if I can identify not just with the saint but also with the sinner in the story, or the ignorant or the villain; often I can. It’s always a sobering but ultimately helpful spiritual exercise. Would I have been an offended Pharisee were I there listening to this radical rabbi tell his stories? Would I have been upset by Jesus’s stories, so pointed that they seemed to target me?

I’ll be honest, I think in many ways I would have been shocked, hurt a little or maybe a lot. But maybe that’s the point. Maybe that’s the beginning of my redemption, seeing where I need to repent.

Father Joshua J. Whitfield is pastor of St. Rita Catholic Community in Dallas and author of “The Crisis of Bad Preaching” and other books.

Pope talks about St. Augustine

(Continued from page 10)

message by Pope Leo, reflecting on St. Augustine and the religious order inspired by him, which the future pope joined in 1977. The video was played in Philadelphia Aug. 28.

St. Augustine, who lived 354-430, “was one of the great founders of monasticism; a bishop, theologian, preacher, writer and doctor of the church,” the pope said. “But this did not happen overnight. His life was full of much trial and error; like our own lives.”

“But through God’s grace, through the prayers of his mother, Monica, and the community of good people around him, Augustine was able to find the way to peace for his restless heart,” he said.

St. Augustine recognized that “we all have God-given gifts and talents,” the pope said, “and our purpose, fulfillment and joy comes from offering them back in loving service to God and to our neighbor.”

That service, he said, includes ministering to immigrants.

The friars in the United States, he said, “stand on the shoulders of Augustinian friars like Father Matthew Carr and Father John Rossiter whose missionary spirit led them in the late 1700s to go forth (from Ireland) and bring the good news of the Gospel in service to Irish and German immigrants searching for a better life and religious tolerance.”

“Jesus reminds us in the Gospel to love our neighbor, and this challenges us now more than ever to remember to see our neighbors today with the eyes of Christ: that all of us are created in the image and likeness of God,” he said.

As Christians and as people inspired by St. Augustine, the pope said, “we are called to go forth to be peacemakers in our families and neighborhoods and truly recognize God’s presence in one another.”

“Through friendship, relationship, dialogue and respect for one another,” Pope Leo said, “we can see past our differences and discover our true identity as sisters and brothers in Christ.”

“Peace begins with what we say and do and how we say and do it,” the pope said.

And listening is an important part of peacemaking, he said.

“St. Augustine reminds us that before we speak, we first must listen,” the pope said, “and as a synodal church, we are encouraged to re-engage in the art of listening through prayer, through silence, discernment and reflection.”

“We have the opportunity and responsibility to listen to the Holy Spirit; to listen to each other; to listen to the voices of the poor and those on the margins whose voices need to be heard,” Pope Leo said.

St. Augustine taught the faithful “to listen to the inner teacher, the voice that speaks from within all of us. It is within our hearts where God speaks to us,” he said.

Learning to hear that inner voice, the pope said, is especially important in a world filled with noise where “our heads and hearts can be flooded with many different kinds of messages,” which “can fuel our restlessness and steal our joy.”

“As a community of faith, striving to build a relationship with the Lord,” Pope Leo encouraged people to “strive to filter the noise, the divisive voices in our heads and hearts, and open ourselves up to the daily invitations to get to know God and God’s love better.”

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Vatican official warns of AI’s hidden costs to environment, work and society

Sarah Mac Donald
OSV News

Bishop Paul Tighe, a top official at the Vatican’s Dicastery for Culture and Education, is urging caution on artificial intelligence — warning that its hidden environmental costs, impact on jobs and broader social risks can’t be overlooked.

Speaking at a European theology congress in Dublin Aug. 23, Bishop Tighe, who is the secretary of the dicastery, highlighted AI isn’t the silver bullet — it comes with a price, starting with the environment.

Bishop Tighe highlighted more attention needs to be paid to the “actual environmental cost of AI” as he warned against “techno optimism” promoting AI as the means of tackling the environmental crisis.

Speaking to OSV News after his address, “Theology and Mission in an Age of Artificial Intelligence” to the Congress of the European Society for Catholic Theology at Trinity College, the Irish prelate said that “addressing climate change requires a human response and a change in our patterns of consumption and use.”

He said American professor of theology Noreen Herzfeld had drawn his attention to the fact that cloud technology “is not a metaphysical reality.”

“The cloud is wires, power, a huge energy consumption, so that AI itself has a very significant cost in terms of energy, in terms of water to cool the plants, and even in the use of some raw materials extracted from very vulnerable parts of our world. We need to be attentive to the actual environmental cost of AI itself.”

He told the gathering of theologians from across Europe that while the industry admitted that AI would result in reduced employment, insufficient attention was being paid to the commercial inequalities which are likely to emerge as AI becomes more pervasive and the social cost of fewer people in work.

“My concern is that a lot of people are saying there will be significant loss of employment. They say don’t worry about that because AI will generate such wealth that we will be able to share that wealth and give people benefits without them having to work,” he told OSV News.

“But that is a very unilateral way of thinking about

work.”

Work in Catholic tradition — and beyond it — Bishop Tighe said, is a “place where we find meaning, purpose, identity and value to express our dignity and creativity. I would be concerned that something could be lost there.”

Another factor he highlighted is that traditionally, work for many people is “the primary place of socialization, where you grow and learn with others in a community.” AI and digitalization, he underlined, are contributing to the fracturing of working relationships; people no longer have a job but a task and compete with others to do that task.

According to Bishop Tighe, who was ordained for the Archdiocese of Dublin in 1983, AI and the social issues that it gives rise to — will be a priority for Pope Leo XIV.

“He has very clearly put it at the top of the agenda in terms of his choice of name and the link with ‘Rerum Novarum,’ and he explicitly said that reading the signs of the times this is something that we need to engage with,” the bishop said.

He added that the pontiff’s training as a mathematician gave him a feeling and a competence for these types of issues.

He revealed in his address that a dialogue between the



OSV News photo/Sarah Mac Donald

Bishop Paul Tighe, a top official at the Vatican’s Dicastery for Culture and Education, poses while speaking to OSV News following his address, “Theology and Mission in an Age of Artificial Intelligence” to the Congress of the European Society for Catholic Theology at Trinity College Dublin Aug. 23, 2025.

tech companies and the Vatican has been taking place on AI and other technological developments.

AI, he said, is forcing us to ask questions about the meaning and purpose of life, about the value of life, about where we want to go as a society, and what society is.

Bishop Tighe told OSV News that the dialogue with tech companies has been “intensifying” and that “an element of trust has emerged which means that people know we are trying to search together for the best outcomes and for the best possibilities. In that context, the trust itself permits a more open dialogue.”

There is “still a commitment and a desire to have that conversation” which has involved Vatican departments such as the Pontifical Academy for Life, the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, and the Dicastery for Culture and Education.

“But there hasn’t been a cohesive Vatican approach. I think it would be very helpful if Pope Leo were in a position to put a structure there for engagement internally and with external stakeholders.”



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National/World

Decline in Nicaragua church attacks attributed to clergy, religious not allowed to report them

MANAGUA, Nicaragua — A new report said attacks on the Catholic Church in Nicaragua have dropped sharply in 2025 — but the decline doesn’t mean the government has eased its crackdown. Exiled lawyer and researcher Martha Patricia Molina, who issued the report, “Nicaragua, a Persecuted Church,” said only 32 aggressions have been documented this year, compared with more than 300 in 2023. Since 2018, she has counted over 1,000 incidents, ranging from harassment of clergy to seizures of schools and charities. Molina said the decline in the number of attacks in 2025 does not mean “a cordial relationship is being established” between the dictatorship and the church. Instead, she said, “under no circumstances can the clergy report the abuses and daily surveillance to which they are subjected.” Hundreds of clergy and religious remain in exile, including four bishops. In August, Pope Leo XIV received three of them in a private Vatican audience, a gesture observers said reaffirms papal support for Nicaragua’s embattled bishops. The Catholic Church has faced intense persecution since 2018, when parishes and universities sheltered protesters in the premises from police and paramilitaries, later accompanying the families of political prisoners.

Irish missionary freed after monthlong kidnapping in Haiti amid worsening gang violence

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — An Irish missionary held hostage in Haiti has been freed after nearly a month in captivity. Gena Heraty, who has served in Haiti for three decades, was taken on Aug. 3 when armed men stormed the Saint-Hélène orphanage near Port-au-Prince. Heraty and several others, including a 3-year-old child with disabilities, are now safe and receiving medical and psychological care. Agenzia Fides, a news branch of the Dicastery for Evangelization, confirmed the release Sept. 1. Heraty leads the orphanage, part of an international network serving vulnerable children across Latin America. Her family expressed “deep gratitude” for the

global prayers and efforts that secured her release, while asking for privacy as she recovers. Irish Deputy Prime Minister Simon Harris had called for her immediate release, praising her lifelong dedication to Haiti’s poor when she was kidnapped. The abduction highlights the worsening crisis in Haiti, where gangs control most of the capital and millions face severe hunger. Church leaders warn that escalating violence is crippling ministry and humanitarian work. Between the beginning of April and the end of June, armed violence in Haiti has killed 1,520 people and injured 609 more, according to a new report on human rights in Haiti which was released on Aug. 1 by the U.N.

Law enforcement officials arrest Alabama man after alleged threats to California church

ORANGE COUNTY, Calif. — Law enforcement officials arrested an Alabama man after he allegedly made criminal threats against an Orange County church, and a cache of ammunition and body armor was found in his vehicle, authorities said Sept. 2. The Orange County Sheriff’s Department said its investigators were contacted Aug. 28 by a priest “regarding suspicious, threatening emails” sent to the Norbertine order’s St. Michael’s Abbey in Silverado Canyon. They said the suspect, Joshua Michael Richardson, 38, an Alabama resident, “first sent emails that were interpreted as threatening,” before visiting the church “in person and made additional threats.” The Diocese of Orange did not immediately respond to a request for comment from OSV News. The Orange County Sheriff’s Department said its investigators and deputies “quickly located and detained Richardson for criminal threats,” and that they subsequently found body armor, high-capacity magazines, brass knuckles, and knives after searching his vehicle. “We are grateful to the authorities for their quick action in ensuring the safety of our parish community,” said Jarryd Gonzales, head of communications for the Catholic Diocese of Orange. Noting the recent mass shooting at a Minneapolis Catholic church, he added, “Our parishes and schools continue to strengthen security efforts.”

Norway: Bishops ‘troubled’ by growing support for euthanasia

OSLO, Norway — Norway’s Catholic bishops are raising alarms over growing public support for euthanasia, calling it a dangerous trend that undermines the dignity of human life. In a pastoral letter released Aug. 30, ahead of the country’s Sept. 8 parliamentary elections, the bishops said every person — from the unborn to the elderly, refugees, and victims of violence —

must be protected. Signed by Bishop Erik Varden of Trondheim and Bishop Fredrik Hansen of Oslo, the letter stressed that while the church does not endorse political parties, Catholics should weigh their choices carefully at the ballot box. The bishops argue that euthanasia and assisted suicide, both illegal in Norway, represent “no help at all” to those who suffer, urging instead greater investment in care and support for patients and families. They also reminded Catholics of their responsibility to promote solidarity beyond Norway’s borders, especially in a time of global conflict and uncertainty.

Annunciation Church to be reconsecrated before Mass there resumes

ST. PAUL — Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis will be reconsecrated before it again holds Mass after an Aug. 27 shooting during a Mass for schoolchildren left two children dead and 18 other victims wounded. “The church does make provision” for reconsecrating a church building after a desecration, Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda told OSV News Aug. 28. “I’ve never had to do that, but I think it will be an important time. Here, where the church is still a crime scene and where there’s been substantial destruction, I think it’s probably going to be a while before we’re able to do that.” While there are other places on the campus of Annunciation Catholic Church and Annunciation Catholic School that could hold Mass in the interim, “my understanding is that the church’s tradition is that no Mass or sacrament would be celebrated in there until there is that rite of reconsecration,” Archbishop Hebda said. “You hope that it will be an opportunity, whenever that occurs, for some healing.”

Pope to inaugurate Borgo Laudato Si’ during Season of Creation

VATICAN CITY — Two months after celebrating a new Mass “for the care of creation,” Pope Leo XIV will return to Castel Gandolfo to formally inaugurate Borgo Laudato Si’, a place of education, ecology and spirituality in the papal summer estate. Famed tenor Andrea Bocelli and his son Matteo will sing during the late afternoon prayer service Sept. 5, the Laudato Si’ Center for Higher Education announced Aug. 25. The prayer service and inauguration of the center take place during the ecumenical Season of Creation, a time of Christian prayer and commitment that runs from Sept. 1 through the Oct. 4 feast of St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of ecology. Borgo Laudato Si’ is dedicated to living out the vision of Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical, “Laudato Si’, on care for our common home,” an effort that he said must combine care for the earth with care for the poor.



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