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(left top) A young couple celebrating their first year of marriage hold hands in the pew prior to receiving their blessing. Among couples celebrating their anniversaries, a healthy handful were celebrating their first, with several also expecting their first child.

(above) Bishop John Iffert greets a couple celebrating their 60th anniversary with a handshake.

(left bottom) As they renew their vows as part of the Anniversary Vespers, a wife looks up to her husband affectionately.



(above) From the pulpit, Bishop John Iffert preaches his homily where he comments on the "witness to the goodness of God" given by the couples celebrating their anniversaries.

(left) An elderly gentleman references the program for the 2025 Anniversary Vespers. Sitting beside him is a simple boutonniere given to the celebrating couples by the organizing Office of Catechesis and Evangelization.



To hear Bishop John Iffert's message to the couples about the grace of marriage at the wedding anniversary vespers event, Sept. 7, scan the QR code.

God strengthens love and witness among families, Bishop Iffert says at Wedding Anniversary Vespers

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Nearly 100 married couples celebrated their anniversaries with Vespers, Sept. 7, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. This special annual service commemorates those celebrating milestone anniversaries — 1 year, 25 years, 50 years and 60 years or more — with prayer, renewal of vows and a blessing from Bishop John Iffert.

"None of us can claim to have done the good things that God has worked in our lives on our own," Bishop John Iffert began in his homily addressing the couples present. "Whatever God works in us, whatever good comes out of life, whatever good fruit is born out of life and the things we do, we remember that without God, we could do none of it." He said, "Only with God's grace are we capable of reflecting the love that God has poured out on us."

"Look what God has done today," Bishop Iffert remarked, "to be witness to the goodness of God in so many lives, so many families,

so many marriages and so many relationships ... God has done great things for me. That is the witness we are gathered here to share with one another and the world outside today."

"God forms us together in families and in the family of the Church," he said, "so that we might be for one another a school of charity, a place where we learn how to love God and others — where we learn how to put aside our self-centeredness and our focus on only ourselves." Bishop Iffert continued, "The nihilism that is so present in our culture today, that is such a temptation for us. To set aside that self-centered stance and to learn to serve one another, to serve God in one another — in your families and in your married lives — this is a grace God strengthens in you."

"May God continue to grace you," Bishop Iffert told the couples gathered, "and may the end of your life find you ready to greet him after having known the love of your children and your children's children."

For a list of couples celebrating their anniversaries, see page 4.

From ‘Under the Sea’ to Radio City Music Hall, St. Timothy School students to open for Rockettes this Christmas season

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

An ensemble cast of 50 middle school students from St. Timothy School, Union, was selected to perform, Dec. 4, at Radio City Music Hall, New York, as the opening act for the Radio City Rockettes “Christmas Spectacular.”

Andrew Mason, an eighth-grade teacher at St. Timothy School and music minister at St. Timothy Parish, saw the show last year in New York with his family and was inspired when he saw another school open the show.

“There was a group up there that sang to open the show, and they were good, and I thought ‘give me a couple of years, my kids will be there, I really want to apply to that,’” said Mr. Mason.

However, it did not take a few years for the kids to

become ready for this opportunity. Their quick progression throughout the course of “Little Mermaid Junior,” their spring musical, led Mr. Mason to believe now was the time to send in the audition tape.

“We had such a good show, so after we came off the show, I sent an email to all the parents. We sent in a 30-second to a minute-long audition tape, Madison Square Garden group vetted us and said, ‘you’re in,’” said Mr. Mason.

“It was exhilarating,” said eighth-grade student, Molly, about when the cast found out they had been selected.

“There were people jumping in the hallways, super excited,” said Johnny, another eighth-grade student.

To tell the students about their exciting selection, Mr. Mason had arranged a scavenger hunt at St. Timothy’s open house. The game led each student back to Mr. Mason, where he was able to tell them the exciting news.

The group of 50 students consists of those who participated in the “Little Mermaid Junior” production and others who are interested in singing.

“We’re very passionate about this. We love to sing, and it’s great that we get to share our talents with them,” said Molly.

Johnny echoed the sentiment, saying, “All of us love singing, we love performing, and especially seeing the Rockettes. It’s a great opportunity.”

The students will spend the next several months learning to perform five Christmas classics: “Somewhere in My Memory,” “O Holy Night,” “Christmas Canon,” “A Child is Born in Bethlehem,” and “Angels We Have Heard on High.”

Mr. Mason, despite being the one to organize the auditions and applications, credits the students for this opportunity. “It’s really all of their work and how well they have grown and how much work they’ve put in,” said Mr. Mason. “That’s what really makes this special is the growth from where they were to where they are now.”



“Once they found that out, it was big news around here,” said Ashley Rehkamp, principal. “Lots of screams, and giggles, and parents are just as excited.”

Eighth-grade student Emily said, “There wasn’t that big of a chance that we would get it, so it was really exciting that we actually did. We worked really hard for this; I think we deserved it.”



(left top) Several members of the ensemble cast were shocked to learn the true size of the stage at Radio City Music Hall, which will be larger than St. Timothy Church.

(left bottom) Andrew Mason, in part due to the student’s disbelief in the size of their venue, showed the students the view of Radio City Music Hall from the stage. Pointing out where their parents and loved ones will sit, the students were once again shocked to learn there will be around 6,000 people in attendance.

(right) The cast and Andrew Mason warm up for their first practice of Somewhere in my Memory.

(below) A group photo of the ensemble cast which was selected to open for the Rockettes.



Prayer service for migrants is a place to ‘show compassion’, says Notre Dame sister

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

In celebration of the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, and along with National Migration Week — Set. 22 through Sept. 28 — a prayer service will be held at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, Sept. 26,

7 p.m.

For over 40 years, the Catholic Church has celebrated National Migration Week. Historically held around the time of the epiphany, using the example of the three wise men as migrants themselves, the date has been changed to September in recent years.

Every year, Notre Dame Sister Maria Francine Stacy participates in this celebration. A member of the Intercommunity Peace and Justice Committee, who has worked with migrants in the community and as a Spanish teacher at Notre Dame Academy, Sister Maria Francine was part of the committee putting together this prayer service. With it, she invites everyone to join in the celebration.

“The Church says when you welcome a stranger, you welcome me,” Sister Maria Francine said. “I want to invite people to pray for and open their hearts to the migrant.”

“It’s a place to show compassion and to learn to feel Jesus’s presence,” she said, “as we are honoring the immigrant, which is something that I think Jesus would do.”

Diversity will be a big part of the prayer service, as well — with readings and songs to be included in Spanish and English. “That sort of gives you the experience of a migrant,” Sister Maria Francine said, “We want to give glimpses of that experience.”

Sister Maria Francine also said that she was “moved” by the attendance of people at the two immigration and social teaching presentations earlier this year, seeing that the topic of immigration is “important to people.”

“I really like that we’re able to come together and work together and do something that I think people are responding to,” she said.



OSV News photo/Daniel Becerril, Reuters

A Venezuelan migrant is seen from Piedras Negras, Mexico, Sept. 30, 2023, as he thanks God while walking through the Rio Grande in an attempt to cross into Texas to seek asylum in the United States.

New young saints encourage faithful to live life to the full, pope says

Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service

The greatest risk in life is to waste it by not seeking to follow God's plan, Pope Leo XIV said, proclaiming two new saints — two young laymen of the 20th and 21st centuries.

"Sts. Pier Giorgio Frassati and Carlo Acutis are an invitation to all of us, especially young people, not to squander our lives, but to direct them upward and make them masterpieces," the pope said Sept. 7.

"The simple but winning formula of their holiness," he said, is accessible to everyone at any time. "They encourage us with their words: 'Not I, but God,' as Carlo used to say. And Pier Giorgio: 'If you have God at the center of all your actions, then you will reach the end.'"

Before canonizing the first saints of his pontificate, Pope Leo greeted the more than 80,000 faithful who had gathered early in St. Peter's Square because he wanted to share his joy with them before the start of the solemn ceremony.

"Brothers and sisters, today is a wonderful celebration for all of Italy, for the whole Church, for the whole world," he said before the Mass.

"While the celebration is very solemn, it is also a day of great joy, and I wanted to greet especially the many young people who have come for this holy Mass," he said, also greeting the families of the soon-to-be saints and the associations and communities to which the young men had belonged.



Tapestries depicting St. Pier Giorgio Frassati and Carlo Acutis hang from the facade of St. Peter's Basilica during the Mass for their canonization at the Vatican Sept. 7, 2025.

Pope Leo asked that everyone "feel in our hearts the same thing that Pier Giorgio and Carlo experienced: this love for Jesus Christ, especially in the Eucharist, but also in the poor, in our brothers and sisters."

"All of you, all of us, are also called to be saints," he said, before leaving to prepare for Mass and paying homage to a statue of Mary with baby Jesus and the reliquaries containing the relics of the two young men.

In his homily, the pope underlined Jesus' call in the day's Gospel reading "to abandon ourselves without hesitation to the adventure that he offers us, with the intelligence and strength that comes from his Spirit, that we can receive to the extent that we empty ourselves of the things



Pope Leo XIV receives the offertory gifts from Antonia Salzano, mother of St. Carlo Acutis, and her family — Carlo's dad and twin siblings — during the canonization Mass in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sept. 7, 2025. From left to right are Francesca Acutis, Salzano, Andrea Acutis and Michele Acutis.

and ideas to which we are attached, in order to listen to his word."

That is what the two new saints did and what every disciple of Christ is called to do, he said.

Many people, especially when they are young, he said, face a kind of "crossroads" in life when they reflect on what to do with their life.

The saints of the church are often portrayed as "great figures, forgetting that for them it all began when, while

(Continued on page 8)

Habitat for Humanity of Greater Cincinnati comes to Covington with The Pope Leo Village campaign

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

Habitat for Humanity of Greater Cincinnati, thanks to the generous donation of an anonymous donor, is building in Northern Kentucky for the first time in six years. Their chosen sites are located in the Botany Hills neighborhood of Covington. The construction of these nine new homes, is rooted in faith with the campaign donning the name, "The Pope Leo Village Campaign."

"An anonymous donor came forward who was very inspired by Pope Leo's commitment to serving others and decided to give a generous gift to Habitat for Humanity of

Greater Cincinnati," said Sarah Reynolds, marketing and communication officer for Habitat for Humanity of Greater Cincinnati.

Ron Washington, mayor of Covington, said, "The Pope Leo Village Campaign in Botany Hills will not only provide nine families with safe and affordable homes, but will also strengthen the fabric of our neighborhoods."

With homelessness on the rise in Kenton County, increasing steadily over the past three years — from 167 persons in 2023 to 234 persons in 2025 according to the Kentucky Housing Corporation's annual K-Count. Rates of homelessness are also significantly higher than those of

neighboring Northern Kentucky counties — 67 and 39 persons in 2025 for Boone and Campbell Counties, respectively. These nine Habitat for Humanity homes will mean new beginnings for the families who purchase them.

Ms. Reynolds spoke to one of the intended residents, "for her, this home means stability," she said. "Now that she is building and buying a home with Habitat, she feels like this will give her and her three children the stability that they'll need to have a better life."

The nine homes being built will stand on infill plots of land, where once historic homes stood. Each house will be slightly different to accommodate the land; however, each will have at least three bedrooms. Two of the homes will be joined together to form a duplex, while the other seven will be stand-alone homes with either one or two stories depending on the plot of land.

"We decided to build homes in Covington, even though we didn't have funding for them, because we know that there's such a need for affordable housing in the community," said Ms. Reynolds, "We took a leap of faith and started building and then this anonymous donor came forward to

(Continued on page 8)



The Pope Leo Village, nine new homes being built in Covington's Botany Hills neighborhood, will don the architectural styles of surrounding homes.



Bishop's Schedule

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

Sept. 17
TMU Executive Committee meeting, Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, 8 a.m.

Sept. 17 (continued)
Bishop Brossart High School all-school Mass and athletic field blessing, St. Mary of the Assumption Church, Alexandria, 12:30 p.m.

Couples celebrating milestone anniversaries

All Saints Parish, Walton
William and Kathryn Farwick, 65

Blessed Sacrament Parish, Ft. Mitchell
Barry and Margaret Buckley, 70
Jerome and Johanna Stegman, 70
Ronald and Olivia Dermody 66
Robert and Joan Trame, 65
David and Carol Hentz, 64
Thomas and Janet Holocher, 60
James and Joan Noll, 60
Anthony and Clare Ruehl, 50
Marc and Jessica Wendt, 25
Nick and Paige Nieporte, 1
Sean and Katherine Thornton, 1

Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington
Dan and Elaine Groneck, 50
David and Laura Custer, 25
Brett and Gina Bauereis, 1

Divine Mercy Parish, Bellevue
John and Barbara Rossi, 60
Clayton and Stephanie Johnson, 1

Holy Cross Parish, Latonia
Ken and Jan Roenker, 50

Holy Spirit Parish, Newport
Robert and Kimberly Bramel, 25
William and Mary Hofacre, 25

Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington
Terry and Dee Gaffney, 62
Donald and Pamela Schanding, 50
Thomas and Rebecca Hackman, 25
Steven and Holly Mason, 25

Mary, Queen of Heaven Parish, Erlanger
Gerald and Lois Biedenbender, 69
Thomas and Roberta Ackley, 50
Jerry and Carol Lux, 50
Gary and Mary Risch, 50
Richard and Kathleen Flesch, 25

Mother of God Parish, Covington
Dcn. Thomas and Carol Dushney, 60
Donald and Virginia Altevers, 50

Our Savior Parish, Covington
Richard and Gail Michalack, 60
St. Agnes Parish, Park Hills
Robert and Christine Ruschman, 50

St. Augustine Parish, Covington
Tom and Elena Hood, 1
Joseph and Samantha Wuestefeld, 1

St. Barbara Parish, Erlanger
Jeffrey and Vicki Jehn, 50
Thomas and Virginia Kirst, 50
Bob and Sharon Salyers, 50

St. Benedict Parish, Covington
Randolph and Margaret Norris, 50

St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Ft. Thomas
Ronald and Carol Ewing, 67
Jeff and Andrea Starzec, 1

St. Cecelia Parish, Independence
Joshua and Stephanie Bornhorn, 25

St. Henry Parish, Elsmere
Edward and Jane Aitcheson, 64
Wade and Jolene Powers, 50
Stephen and Barbara Scott, 50

St. John the Evangelist Parish, Carrollton
Eloy and Yazmin Fuentes, 25
Beery and Kimberly Miller, 25
David and Jeanne Stevenson, 25

St. John the Evangelist Parish, Covington
Ted and Marlene Robinson, 60

St. Joseph Parish, Camp Springs
Linus and Ruth Ann Enzweiler, 62

St. Joseph Parish, Cold Spring
Edward and Ruth Rawe, 69
Larry and Gayle Voet, 64
Robert and Nancy Barbian, 50
Denny and Sarah Dirr, 50
Stephen and Marianne Fieger, 50
Jim and Theresa Snodgrass, 25
Nicholas and Elizabeth Rust, 1

St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs
Jerry and Mary Lou Schneider, 71
Douglas and Harriet Overmann, 50

St. Mary of the Assumption Parish, Alexandria
Daniel and Kathy Bertram, 50
Stan and Susie Clark, 50
Bernerd and Connie Henke, 50
David and Mary Irwin, 50
William and Pamela Phillips, 50
Daryl and Ruth Schout, 50
Gregory and Angela Smorey, 25

St. Paul Parish, Florence
Martin and Mary Ann Cahill, 60
Benjamin and Carol Ross, 60
J. Dutton and Connie Aylor, 50

St. Philip Parish, Melbourne
Philip and Laura Sauerbeck, 50
Jack and Kathy Schneider, 50

St. Pius X Parish, Edgewood
Robert and Martina Durrett, 69
Phillip and Mary Landwehr, 60
Raymond and Colleen Michael, 60
Paul and Nancy Kubala, 50
James and Sharon Laughlin, 50
Thomas and Lois Marsh, 50
James and Paula Volz, 50
Todd and Mary Jo Sova, 25
Steven and Elaine Lameier, 60

St. Therese Parish, Southgate
Greg and Pam Meyers, 50
Ronald and Jeanette Seibert, 50
Thomas and Kathleen Wagner, 50
Gregory and Kimberly Ziegler, 50

St. Thomas Parish, Ft. Thomas
Thomas and Beverly Messmer, 65
Robert and Lois Pikar, 62
John and Janice Paolucci, 60
Ronald and Carolyn Ketterer, 50
Herman and Peggy Lauer, 50
Griff and Karen Jones, 25
Todd and Tracy Whitney, 25
Jerry and Alexandrina Mitcham, 1

St. Timothy Parish, Union
Gregory and Mary Deborah Curtin, 50
Thomas and Shelley Goetz, 50
Thomas and Deborah Murray, 50
John and Jill Staff, 50
Kenny and Nicole Ford, 25
Christopher and Vanessa Moorman, 25

Sts. Boniface and James Parish, Ludlow
Stephen and Ruby Hacker, 50

With 113 years of marriage between them, these couples share what makes a marriage strong

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

The Diocese of Covington Office of Catechesis and Evangelization hosted the annual Wedding Anniversary Vespers, Sept. 7, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. Married couples celebrating major anniversary milestones — 1, 25, 50 and 60-plus years — are invited to attend the Vespers where Bishop John Iffert meets with and blesses each couple.



Linus and Ruth Ann Enzweiler meet with Bishop Iffert at the Wedding Anniversary Vespers. The couple met when they were 18 and 21, both were working at Newport National Bank in Newport, they got married after three years of dating.

This year, the *Messenger* spoke with three couples who were in attendance. Linus and Ruth Ann Enzweiler, parishioners at St. Joseph Parish, Camp Spring, were celebrating their 62-year wedding anniversary. Eloy and Yazmin Fuentes, parishioners at St. John the Evangelist Parish, Carrollton, were celebrating 25 years of marriage. Josh and Stephanie Bornhorn, parishioners at Holy Cross Parish, Latonia, were also celebrating 25 years of marriage.

Each of the couples had valuable

insight on what makes a marriage. For the Fuentes, it is a firm foundation rooted in faith. “Make sure that God is always first before anything else,” said Mrs. Fuentes, using her, Christian, son as a translator.

For Mr. and Mrs. Bornhorn, the key to a strong marriage is communication, “You need to remember to not just talk, but truly communicate with each other. Don’t assume that the other knows how you’re feeling, or what you’re thinking, tell them,” said Mrs. Bornhorn.

Mrs. Enzweiler emphasized the importance of community, recalling the time they were planning their wedding.

“We didn’t have any money,” she said, “every time we turned around somebody was helping us. His mother baked our cake, the catering was family, I wore my sister’s wedding dress.”

Despite having very little, however, the Enzweilers were rich in love for one another, “we had no money, but we were in love and wanted to get married,” said Mrs. Enzweiler:

Mr. and Mrs. Fuentes while rich in love, emphasized the importance of having a Christ centered marriage, “make sure you go to church on obligation days, and have some type of a role inside church,” said Mrs. Fuentes.

Her son, followed up on the importance of a Christ centered family, “my mom was a lector and reader; as siblings we have always been altar boys and altar girls. To them, it’s just one thing is always helping church and being there.”

For the Bornhorns, faith is also an important aspect of family life, “we both knew we wanted to raise our kids in the Catholic Church and have tried to show the importance of our faith with our kids through our relationship.”

When asked what piece of advice she would give to newlyweds, Mrs. Enzweiler thought for a moment, remembering her 62 years of marriage, before saying, “You need to know how to have give and take. I think that’s a big thing, sometimes you might do something with them that you don’t care for; but you do it anyways, and they do it back to you.”

Mrs. Bornhorn tells couples, that marriage is more than the choice you make on the day you say, “I do,” it is a choice you make every day.

“Marriage is a choice you both have to make. It’s not always easy, and it’s not always fun, but it’s always worth it to put in the effort,” Mrs. Bornhort said. “You have to choose each other every day.”

Mrs. Fuentes said, “try to do prayer together.” Christian added, “that’s what they do. When my dad leaves for work, they always do a prayer together and dedicate that time together in the morning.”

With 113 years of marriage between the three couples, Mr. and Mrs. Enzweiler; Mr. and Mrs. Fuentes and Mr. and Mrs. Bornhorn, speak from experience on what makes a marriage strong: trust, patience, communication and a marriage rooted in faith and love of Christ.

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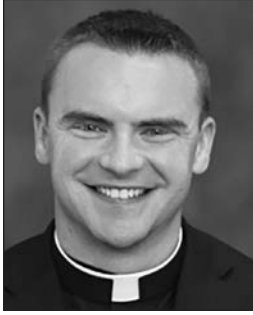
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The triumph of the Holy Cross

The readings for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross — Cycle C — are: Numbers 21:4b–9, Philippians 2:6–11 and John 3:13–17.

This Sunday is a rather unique Sunday, because instead of celebrating the Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, we celebrate a Feast that happens to fall on Sunday — the Exaltation of the Cross, also known as the Triumph of the Holy Cross.

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Michael Elmlinger

Now, crucifixion in the ancient world, especially the Roman Empire, was considered to be the most brutal form of torture, reserved for the worst criminals. Not only that, it was a very public execution, a sign to all in the empire of what happens when you rebel against Caesar. “Stay in line, or you will suffer this same torture.” Not only is it probably the most painful way to be executed, but it was also a total humiliation.

The empire would use crucifixion to make an example of you.

When we consider this, why is it that we hold the Cross in such high regard as Catholics? What is it about the Cross that drove St. Helena to search for it? Why is it that this ancient torture device is considered to be so central to Christianity? The reason is because by his Crucifixion and Resurrection, our Lord, Jesus Christ, has turned what was originally our greatest defeat into the greatest victory ever known in history.

Our Gospel for this Sunday is the famous John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” John delivers this line in the context of Jesus’ discourse to Nicodemus in the night, where he tells Nicodemus, “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” (3:14)

Indeed, the very mission of Jesus Christ was that he would come into the world to give the gift of eternal life to those who would believe in him and follow him. However, the means by which he would accomplish this wondrous act would be through a means that Nicodemus and all of Jesus’ disciples would not expect — the Cross, the very means of execution reserved for the worst of the worst. In fact, St. Thomas Aquinas teaches in his *Summa Theologiae*, “His body was endowed with a most perfect constitution” (*Third Part*, Question 6), meaning the pain that he endured would likely have been magnified compared to how we may experience it. But what drives Jesus on towards Calvary? The very love that God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has for humanity. He loves humanity so much that he is willing to send his son to endure this awful torture as a means of reconciling the world to himself.

The truth is God could have chosen another means to reconcile the human race; it would have been completely within his power. But this is the way that he chose — the Way of the Cross. He chose to empty himself, “taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness... becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.” (Phil 2:7-8)

He chose to endure the most brutal means of execution ever known, and what drove him? His love for each and every single one of us. Indeed, by going through this crucifixion, Jesus takes what would have been our greatest defeat — our Savior being brutally murdered — into the greatest victory, victory over sin and death. It is by his Crucifixion that he becomes a sin offering for each and every one of us, where he bears our sins and offers them to the Father so that we may be forgiven entirely.

This is a love that we cannot earn. This is a love that he freely gives to us, a love that drove him to Calvary, a love that cries out to us, “I thirst.” (Jn 19:28) Indeed, he truly thirsts for each and every one of us to accept his

God love us, even in our imperfections

A few weeks ago, on the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, my husband and I woke up early to attend morning Mass. We arrived early and entered the pew, and I knelt to pray. As I finished my prayers and went to sit down, I

VIEWPOINT



Faye Roch

smoothed my dress and felt something odd, my pockets were sticking out. I had my dress on inside out.

I was horrified, as there really was nothing I could do. The chapel did not have a restroom, and changing in the parking lot would be inappropriate and Mass was going to start any minute.

As I sat there, I realized I had a choice to make, I could sit through the entire Mass distracted that

people were going to notice my mistake, or I could prayerfully proceed in my worship knowing that God wants me there, even in my imperfection. If having my dress on inside out was the most imperfect thing about me, I was lucky. I settled myself feeling the Holy Spirit say, “It’s okay that you are not perfect, I’m glad you are here.”

After Mass was over and my husband and I had some good laughs, I thought of all those encounters we have with others who struggle attending Mass and receiving the Eucharist because they feel that they are not worthy or perfect enough.

As I have mentioned in many of my writings, the quest for perfection is daunting and social media does not do anything to help our anxiety of being flawed or broken. We are being told we must have a perfect appearance, perfect

spouses, perfect job, perfect children, perfect homes and the list goes on. But perfection is not what God wants from us. His desire is for us to know we are loved and to love.

St. Paul witnessed his own imperfections and encourages us in our daily lives, showing us that our journey to holiness is a process of growth and God’s grace is at work in the lives of imperfect and broken people.

“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor 12:9-10)

Our imperfections and brokenness remind us of our humanness, and our failures and weakness remind us of how we can rely on God to succeed and make us strong again. We need to lean on our humility and let go of the standards we set for ourselves and know that our struggles and weaknesses are an invitation for God to love and care for us in difficult times.

God wants us to know we can come to him as we are and just be in his presence. He longs for us to let go of all those feelings of unworthiness to come spend time with him. No matter how broken or imperfect we may be, he has his arms open welcoming us to experience the peace and joy of his presence at Mass and in the Eucharist.

“Then Jesus said, ‘Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.’” (Matt 11:28-30)

Faye Roch is director of the Pro-life Office, Diocese of Covington, Ky

Team Youth Ministry!

What is your favorite team? It is football season, and attention is focused on teams. I just saw a game show in

GUEST



Angie Poat

which contestants were tasked with matching team logos with their name and city. I played along and only got one correct. I have never been good at recognizing team logos or playing sports.

I am not the least bit competitive or athletically inclined. However, I appreciate the value of team sports. Sports draw people together who share a common interest. Fans celebrate victories, mourn losses and follow players by name. Team members

develop bonds, skills and learn valuable life lessons.

Pope Leo referenced this and the “moral quality” of team sports in May when he met with the Napoli football team who won the Italian league title. The Pope told the club that, in the past, when a team won a trophy, attention was paid to the performances and skills of individual players. Today, however we recognize that “it’s the team who wins the championship ... the players, the manager and his staff, and the sports club” as a whole, the Pope noted. He emphasized, “the example of a team — in the broad sense — that works together, with individual talents put at the service of the whole.” (vaticannews.va May 27, 2025)

Following such wisdom, the With One Heart Diocesan Pastoral Plan includes the development of ministry teams who discern and utilize their talents in service to the Lord and diocese.

The Youth Ministry Office has developed such teams. Which one might be your fan favorite? Which one could benefit your family or parish? Which one might you sponsor in prayer or financially?

Team CONNECT — Middle school ministry and CON-NECT days.

Team Service and Mission — Service and evangelization days and retreat.

Team SUMMIT — Eucharistic retreat for high school youth in February.

Team T.E.C. — Teens Encounter Christ retreat for high school juniors and seniors and college students. It is based on the Cursillo method.

Team Intern — For young adults who desire to learn and implement ministry skills.

In addition to teams who provide direct service and ministry, there are three critical support teams that undergird the others:

Team Prayer — Pray for general and specific needs and events.

Team Finance — Sponsor a team or teens who are in need financially and on waiting lists to attend events (e.g. 12 youth currently need scholarships for the National Catholic Youth Conference in November).

Team Parents and Guardians — Provide a welcoming smile, watchful eye and set of hands at events.

Pope Leo closed his talk by appealing to parents and coaches to pay close attention to the moral quality of the sporting experience. What’s at stake,” he warned, “is the human development of young people.” The same can be said of our diocesan Youth Ministry teams. Please join us in this effort. Together we win. Together we thrive.

To learn more about a ministry or support team, contact Angie Poat at apoat@covdio.org or visit www.covdio.org/youth.

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

love and to use him as a bridge to the Father.

This love is truly the triumph of the Cross. “We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You, because by your Cross, You have redeemed the world!”

Father Michael Elmlinger is a priest of the Diocese of Covington, Ky. Father Elmlinger is currently studying Canon Law at the University of St. Paul, Ottawa, Canada.

Painter from diocesan community returns to Greater Cincinnati to show his works and efforts after Florence art academy

Elizabeth Zalla photos



Maura Baker
Staff Writer

“Persone e Paesaggi” — an Italian title translated loosely in English to “People and Places” — was the name chosen for an exhibition of art by painter Daniel Zalla, currently on display at the Art Gallery on the campus of Xavier University, Cincinnati.

Mr. Zalla grew up in the Diocese of Covington, having graduated from Covington Latin School in 2016. Following, he pursued his first degree at Xavier University before continuing his education at the Florence Academy of Art in Italy. Open through the first week of October, the exhibition is free and open to the public Wednesday through Friday.

The exhibition itself is, “in a big way,” according to the artist, a record of the ending of a chapter of Mr. Zalla’s artistic career. This chapter, which has been characterized by “training, practicing, learning proportion and training the eye” has culminated into this show, which features charcoal drawings, oil paintings and a sculpture displayed roughly chronologically in the gallery hall.

“I’ve done this big body of work the last five years in Florence,” Mr. Zalla told the *Messenger*, “and I wanted something to show for it. There are a few galleries locally ... but I liked the idea of being at Xavier ... so it was a little

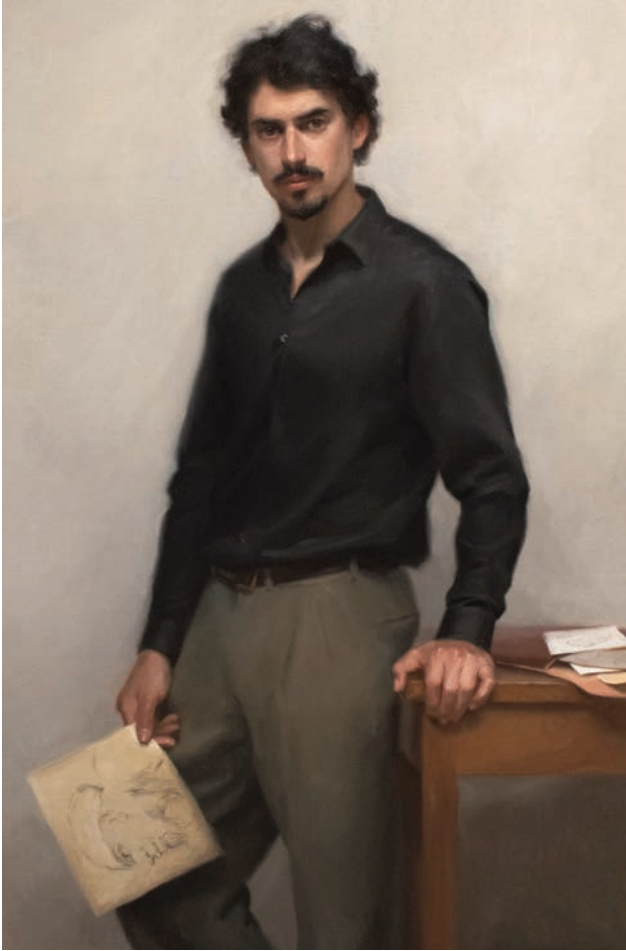
(above) A view of the gallery at Xavier University displaying artist Daniel Zalla’s exhibition, “Persone e Paesaggi” — loosely translated as “People and Places.”

(right) A life-sized portrait painting titled “The Print collector” by Daniel Zalla. The piece was done as a final project at the Florence Academy of Art, Italy.

bit like coming full circle, because right before I left for Florence, I had my show for my senior thesis there.”

The title, “Persone e Paesaggi,” comes from the subjects of the past five years of training Mr. Zalla undertook — with subjects ranging primarily between landscapes and portraiture. The exhibition “takes the viewer through some of the big projects” that Mr. Zalla made at the Florence Academy, and ending with his most recent commission — a large-scale painting done for St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs, featuring St. Joseph and Jesus in a carpentry workshop. This is the second commission that Mr. Zalla has completed for a diocesan parish, with a previous piece done of St. Augustine for his namesake parish in Covington, which is also on display at the Xavier University gallery.

Moving forward, Mr. Zalla’s art focus aims to shift to more emotional compositions, as the young artist has recently accepted a fellowship in Seattle, Washington —



where he will be moving at the beginning of the next year.

The residency program, called the Seattle Prize, has Mr. Zalla working in a studio space with six other classically trained painters working loosely under the theme “transcendent re-humanism” — which focuses on bringing humanity, healing and human connection into artwork. As Mr. Zalla describes, it is the “truth of living a human life, as far as emotions that everyone can relate to.”

Mr. Zalla thanks his family, who supported him throughout his journey and working towards the exhibition, calling them “extremely supportive.”

“I’m grateful for them,” he said, “and also for the show.”

Notre Dame Sister Erin Nagy makes first profession of vows

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

Notre Dame Sister Erin Nagy made her first profession of vows, August 17, at the Sisters of Notre Dame mother house in Chardon, Ohio. This public profession of vows comes after three years of formation, as a postulant and novice, where Sister Nagy practiced the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Now, as a professed member of the Sisters of Notre Dame, Sister Nagy has promised to live these vows for one year — before her profession of perpetual vows.

About her first profession, Sister Nagy said, “Making first profession means I am committing more intentionally to living my life in this way. It is also a reminder to me that God promises to provide for me giving me the strength and support I need to be able to give myself as a gift in this way.”

Born to Marty and Trudy Nagy in Perrysburg, Ohio, Sister Nagy grew up with a brother and sister, all of whom were present for her first profession of vows. Sister Nagy graduated from the University of Toledo with a bachelor’s in communication and a minor in religious studies. Currently, she is attending Loyola Marymount University for a master’s in theology.

“I want to become my most authentic self in God, not for my sake,” said Sister Nagy, “but for the sake of those who I will be ministering to and with, and for the sake of bringing about God’s kingdom on earth.”



(above left) Sister Margaret Gorman, mother superior of the Sisters of Notre Dame, places a ring on the hand of the newly professed Sister Nagy. The ring acts as a sign of Sister Nagy’s everlasting covenant with God, and symbolizes fidelity, love and the total gift of self to Christ.

(above) With Sister Nagy, the other Sisters of Notre Dame raise their hands as they renew their own vows and call Sister Nagy to walk with them into her future with the congregation.

(left) Notre Dame Sister Erin Nagy poses for a photo with her parents, Marty and Trudy Nagy, following her first profession of vows.



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/>.

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!

“Unreconciled,” a webinar for survivors of sexual abuse and those who care for them, Sept. 15, a powerful, :30–8 p.m. CDT. Presented by Jay Sefton, Unreconciled is a hilarious and heart-breaking story of courage, family and reclaiming your voice. Register at https://archspm-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_7w9u955BSpCo8w3gjyxrZA#/registration.

Notre Dame Urban Education Center, Covington, needs volunteer tutors for its Education Center’s Homework Plus Program (Grades K-8). Contact Brandi at (859) 630-9475 or blenihan@nduec.org.

The Diocese of Covington will celebrate the World Day of Migrants and Refugees with a prayer service on Friday, Sept. 26, 7 p.m., at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. Bishop John Iffert is presiding. All are welcome.

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.

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: Session 1 Sept. 13 – Session 2. Isaiah: Nov. 1 – Session 1 and Nov. 15 – Session 2. Cost \$35 per session, cash or checks at the door. Register at covdio.org/bible-workshops.

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. Joseph Church, Camp Springs, annual Oktoberfish Fish Frys, Oct. 3 and 10, 4–7:30 p.m. Dine-in or carry-out options available. To place a carry-out order, call (859) 635-2491 or visit stjosephcampsprings.org.

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



A legacy in motion

At the Diocese of Covington Invitational on September 6, Covington Catholic Cross Country celebrated a multigenerational moment. Pictured were 11 alumni-turned-parents — now cheering on their 15 sons who proudly wear the Cov Cath blue. Adding to the legacy, two coaches guiding the team are also alumni of the program.

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.

St. Henry High School’s Craft Show will be held Saturday, Oct. 18, 9 a.m.–3 p.m. Located at St. Henry Athletic Complex (SHAC) at 35 Cavalier Boulevard, 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 \$5.00 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.s

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.

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., Thomas More University’s Ziegler Auditorium, Academic Center. Register by Oct. 29, at covdio.org/register/. Questions? Contact Isaak A. Isaak at iisaak@covdio.org or (859) 392-1529.

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Fall registration is now open for Mount St. Mary’s Seminary and School of Theology. Evening and weekend 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. 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.

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

Parish festivals		
Sept. 12–13	Sept. 19–21	Sept. 26-28
St. Barbara Parish, Erlanger	St. Timothy Parish, Union	St. Agnes Parish, Ft. Wright
Sept. 19–20	Sept. 21	
St. Benedict Parish, Covington	St. Matthew, Kenton	

Local pilgrims share experience of canonization of Carlo Acutis and Pier Girogio Frassati

Kathy Whittle
Contributor

It was a hot day in Rome, Sept. 7, but the heat did not stop the many pilgrims from arriving as early as 6:50 a.m. for a 10 a.m. Mass, where Pope Leo was to canonize two men, blessed Carlo Acutis and blessed Pier Girogio Frassati.

“The first thing I noticed once I got through security was how many young people (college age) were there,” said Kristina Pugh, parishioner, All Saints Parish, Walton. “It was neat being there with the first American Pope.”

Mrs. Pugh was traveling with her daughter Victoria for the canonization.

The Vatican plaza was filled to capacity, with attendees standing shoulder to shoulder during the Mass. “It was really amazing to experience the universality of the (Catholic) Church. I could hear many languages being spoken, but during the Latin part of the Mass, those who participated ALL spoke in Latin,” said Mrs. Pugh.

Another takeaway from the experience was the close-up of Carlos Acutis’ mother on the big screen. “The whole crowd cheered,” said Mrs. Pugh. “When Pope Leo pronounced the men saints, he appeared to be close to tears. You could tell that it was a real blessing for the Pope to be officiating at the canonization.”

Kathy Whittle is a parishioner at St. Agnes Parish, Ft. Wright, Ky. She and her daughter, Zaylee, were in Rome at the time of the canonization of Carlos Acutis and Pier Girogio Frassati.



Local pilgrims (from left) Kathy Whittle, Zaylee Whittle, Kristina Pugh and Veronica Pugh, pictured here at St. Peter’s Basilica, Sept. 6, were in Rome during the canonization of Carlo Acutis and Pier Girogio Frassati.

New young saints encourage faithful

(Continued from page 3)

still young, they said ‘yes’ to God and gave themselves to him completely, keeping nothing for themselves,” the pope said.

“Today we look to St. Pier Giorgio Frassati and St. Carlo Acutis: a young man from the early 20th century and a teenager from our own day, both in love with Jesus and ready to give everything for him,” he said.

Pope Leo then dedicated a large portion of his homily to sharing quotes from the two and details of their lives, which is something Pope Francis had shifted away from, preferring to focus more on the day’s readings.

“Pier Giorgio’s life is a beacon for lay spirituality,” Pope Leo said.

“For him, faith was not a private devotion, but it was

driven by the power of the Gospel and his membership in ecclesial associations,” he said. “He was also generously committed to society, contributed to political life and devoted himself ardently to the service of the poor.”

“Carlo, for his part, encountered Jesus in his family, thanks to his parents, Andrea and Antonia — who are here today with his two siblings, Francesca and Michele,” he said, as the crowd applauded, and Antonia smiled shyly at the camera.

St. Acutis also encountered Jesus at the Jesuit-run school he attended and “above all in the sacraments celebrated in the parish community,” he said. “He grew up naturally integrating prayer, sport, study and charity into his days as a child and young man.”

The pope said the new saints “cultivated their love for God and for their brothers and sisters through simple acts, available to everyone: daily Mass, prayer and especially Eucharistic adoration.”

St. Frassati was born April 6, 1901, in Turin and died there July 4, 1925, of polio at the age of 24. St. Acutis was born to Italian parents May 3, 1991, in London and died in Monza, Italy, Oct. 12, 2006, of leukemia at the age of 15.

The pope said that “even when illness struck them and cut short their young lives, not even this stopped them nor prevented them from loving, offering themselves to God, blessing him and praying to him for themselves and for everyone.”

The Pope Leo Village campaign

(Continued from page 3)

help cover some of those costs ... it was answered prayers.”

Despite not being a Catholic organization, Habitat for Humanity of Greater Cincinnati is rooted in Christian faith. Beginning as a grassroots effort, they relied on churches for support. Thirty years later, many of those churches still contribute to their mission.

“We have a huge faith involvement to begin with, and so, when we share about the Pope Leo Village with those groups, they’re just really excited,” Ms. Reynolds said.

It is the community involvement, Ms. Reynolds said, that sets this initiative apart from the rest. “We’ve seen a lot of excitement, we have seen lots of people wanting to come and volunteer, wanting to learn more, and calling, reaching out to us in that way ... the outpouring of support from the community ... is really inspiring,” she said.

Mr. Washington shared the sentiment of inspiring community support.

“After seeing Habitat for Humanity of Greater Cincinnati’s impact during last year’s Rock the Block event, it’s inspiring to now see the first new Habitat homes built in Northern Kentucky in six years — and right here in Covington. This project reflects the power of collaboration and community, and we are proud to support it,” he said.

Construction on the nine homes will be completed in 2026 with two already being near completion. Once the homes have been constructed, they will stand tall as a reminder of God’s providential love and Pope Leo’s commitment to serving others; giving nine families newfound stability.



The Pope Leo Village homes, built by Habitat for Humanity, are income restricted, with potential buyers may only make 30-80 percent of the median area income.



TMU welcomes St. Catherine of Siena students

Father Stef Bankemper, pastor, St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Ft. Thomas, celebrated Mass, Aug. 27, at Thomas More University’s Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel with the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th grade students from St. Catherine of Siena School to kick off a field trip. The students enjoyed a beautiful day filled with faith, fellowship and fun. The day included praying the rosary at the Blessed Virgin Mary Grotto, playing with TMU’s student athletes, and swimming at Five Seasons Family Sports Club. This memorable day of spiritual enrichment and recreational fun was organized by 2nd grade teacher, Nancy Kelly, with the generous support of Mike Jacks, principal, Terry Connor, athletic director and vice president of TMU, and Matison Perry and the staff at Five Seasons.



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Crying out to God can be sign of hope, not crisis of faith, pope says

Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service

Crying out to God during moments of extreme trial does not mark a crisis of faith but can reflect an act of total surrender to and enduring trust in God, Pope Leo XIV said.

“In the journey of life, there are moments in which keeping something inside can slowly consume us,” the pope told thousands of people huddled under umbrellas or dressed in rain gear in St. Peter’s Square Sept. 10 for his weekly general audience.

“Jesus teaches us not to be afraid to cry out, as long as it is sincere, humble, addressed to the Father,” he said.

“A cry is never pointless if it is born of love, and it is never ignored if it is delivered to God,” he said. “It is a way to not give in to cynicism, to continue to believe that another world is possible.”

During the audience, the pope offered special greetings to Arabic-speaking faithful, especially those from the Holy Land.

“I invite you to transform your cry in times of trial and tribulation into a prayer of trust, because God always listens to his children and responds at the moment he deems best for us,” he said.

Pope Leo also asked the faithful to find inspiration in Sts. Pier Giorgio Frassati and Carlo Acutis, the two young men he canonized Sept. 7, and, like them, “learn from Christ the cry of hope and the desire to open our hearts to the will of the Father who wants our salvation.”

In his main talk, the pope continued his series of reflections on lessons of hope from the Gospel stories of Jesus’ last days, focusing specifically on the crucified Christ’s cry to God and his death on the cross.

Before he cried out on the cross, Pope Leo said, Jesus asked “one of the most heart-rending” questions that could ever be uttered: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

“The Son, who always lived in intimate communion with the Father, now experiences silence, absence, the abyss. It is not a crisis of faith, but the final stage of a love that is given up to the very end,” the pope said. “Jesus’ cry is not desperation, but sincerity, truth taken to the limit, trust that endures even when all is silent.”

“We are accustomed to thinking of crying out as something disorderly, to be repressed,” the pope said. However, “the Gospel confers an immense value to our cry, remind-



CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Pilgrims and visitors hold umbrellas as rain falls in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican at the end of Pope Leo XIV’s weekly general audience Sept. 10, 2025.

ing us that it can be an invocation, a protest, a desire, a surrender,” even an “extreme form of prayer, when there are no words left.”

Crying out can express “a hope that is not resigned,” he said. “One cries out when one believes that someone can still hear.”

“Jesus did not cry out against the Father; but to him. Even in silence, he was convinced that the Father was there,” Pope Leo said. “And, in this way, he showed us that our hope can cry out, even when all seems lost.”

“We come into the world crying: it is also a way of staying alive,” he said. “One cries when one suffers, but also

when one loves, one calls, one invokes. To cry out is saying who we are, that we do not want to fade away in silence, that we still have something to offer.”

When the hour of extreme trial comes, he said, “let us learn the cry of hope,” which is not a cry meant to hurt or to shout at someone, “but to entrust ourselves” and “to open our hearts.”

If one’s cry is genuine, it can usher in a new beginning, he said. “If it is made manifest with the trust and freedom of the children of God, the suffering voice of our humanity, united with the voice of Christ, can become a source of hope for us and for those around us.”

St. Francis’ ‘Canticle of the Creatures’ at 800 endures as vision of redeemed creation

Maria Wiering
OSV News

Eight centuries ago, St. Francis of Assisi composed a poem that remains familiar today, inspiring hymns, art and the titles of two of the late Pope Francis’ teaching documents on integral ecology.

“The Canticle of the Creatures” includes tributes to “Brother Sun,” “Sister Moon and Stars,” “Brother Wind” and “Sister Water,” all of whom give glory to God, their creator. Though perhaps less cited, it also praises “Sister Death.”

With the poem’s vivid imagery, what is not apparent is that St. Francis composed it a year before his death in 1226 around age 44, in weakened health and losing his sight. Despite his physical condition, he was believed to have

been granted a great spiritual grace: the ability to see the world, including creation, in its redeemed form, elevated by the Incarnation.

The Franciscan order is celebrating the 800th anniversary of “The Canticle of the Creatures” throughout 2025. Meanwhile, the church is marking the annual Season of Creation from Sept. 1 to Oct. 4, St. Francis’ feast day.

Pope Leo XIV’s prayer intention for September is for “our relationship with all of creation.” “Let us pray that, inspired by St. Francis, we might experience our interdependence with all creatures who are loved by God and worthy of love and respect,” he said in a video presenting the prayer intention.

The “Canticle” is often misunderstood “as a nice little ditty about ‘how beautiful is the sun, is the moon,’” said

Franciscan Father Murray Bodo, a poet and author deeply inspired by St. Francis. “The reality of the poem goes much deeper than that. It’s in the sounds, and it’s in the symbolism of the poem.”

A native of Gallup, New Mexico, Father Bodo, 88, ministers in a Cincinnati parish and to the people in the city suffering homelessness; but he has also spent decades leading pilgrimages to Rome as well as Assisi, Italy, where St. Francis spent most of his life. His most recent book of poetry is the forthcoming “Brother Wind and Air,” with its “Canticle”-inspired title.

“Part of my teaching was always on ‘The Canticle of the Creatures,’” he told OSV News. “First of all, it’s the first great Italian poem. It wasn’t really written down — it was sung by St. Francis.”



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(Continued from page 10)

In 1224, St. Francis traveled about 70 miles north of Assisi to the mountain town of La Verna, where he ultimately received the stigmata, or the miraculous gift of the physical wounds of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion. When he came down from the mountain, he was practically blind and hemorrhaging from the wounds, Father Bodo said. He was also suffering mentally and perhaps depressed, because he was dismayed about the Franciscans’ direction.

“He felt that they were abandoning Lady Poverty and weren’t living the poverty of Christ that was the great inspiration of Francis,” Father Bodo said.

The saint spent around two months in a little hut near the monastery of St. Clare of Assisi, the woman who followed his model of religious life and founded a community of likeminded religious sisters. St. Francis was sick — field mice ran over him, and he may have had tubercular leprosy, Father Bodo said. During this time, St. Francis was attended by Brother Leo, one of his closest religious brothers.

“He was so ill,” Father Bodo said. And then, “on one of these dark, dark days, he had this vision.”

St. Francis had cried out to God for help. Father Bodo described what came next: “He heard a voice that said, ‘Tell me, brother; (what) if in compensation for your sufferings and tribulation, you were given an immense and precious treasure: The whole mass of earth changed into pure gold, pebbles into precious stones, and the water of the rivers into perfume? Would you not regard the pebbles and the waters as nothing compared to such a treasure? Would you not rejoice?’”

St. Francis said, “Yes, Lord, of course I would rejoice in that.”

The Lord went on to tell him to rejoice in his infirmities, Father Bodo said, and told St. Francis, “As of now, you live in peace as if you were already sharing in my kingdom.”

From then on, for the remainder of his life, St. Francis lived with a vision of the natural world as redeemed in Jesus Christ. As he received that vision, “spontaneously he broke into this song of ‘The Canticle of the Creatures,’ praising God for all of creation,” Father Bodo said.

Notably, Father Bodo said, “it was sung in the Italian Umbrian dialect, and ... you could see the greatness of the poetry. He used assonance, especially — variation of vowels and the sounds of vowels — to bring out the praise of God through creatures.”

The praise — which begins, in the Italian dialect, “Laudato Si’,” includes the four classical elements: earth, water, fire and air.

“He called them his brother and sister,” Father Bodo said, noting that the elements represented the full medieval cosmology. “He joins all of creation, and he a part of that, and praises God in one spontaneous song that



OSV News photo/Sam Lucero, CNS

A hunter’s moon rises behind a statue of St. Francis of Assisi on the grounds of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion in Champion, Wis., Oct 8, 2022

even Dante (the great late medieval Italian poet) said was the first great Italian poem.”

St. Francis later added new stanzas to the original poem — one on forgiveness, directed at the feuding bishop of Assisi and the city’s mayor; and — as he approached his final days — one on death that begins, “All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Death, From whose embrace no mortal can escape.”

St. Francis saw himself as a troubadour, or a medieval poet-musician, Father Bodo said.

“He would use troubadour songs on courtly love to preach, and he would sing one of the songs and then tell them (his followers), ‘This is the spiritual meaning of this song.’ And then he would go through and explain it,” the priest said. “And yet, he was not a learned man ... but he was a man whose gift was inspiration. It came from God, and it came from a life lived in the Spirit. But you can see in the poem his love for words.”

In the “The Canticle of the Creatures,” St. Francis “reveals that he has become an extremely integrated person,” Father Bodo said.

“People thought he was nuts, because he was so poor

and begging and gave up so much in order to walk in the footsteps of Christ,” he said. “But he ends up being one of the most integrated Christians.”

The poem resonates today, he said, because it leads people to examine their own relationship to creation.

“It’s a call to reverence for all of creation,” he said. “We are singers in our own way of God’s love as it is expressed in every creature, and to sever our relationship with the Earth or become indifferent to it is to break our relationship with God, because in this poem, God is revealed. Everything that is made has been redeemed by the life of Christ.”

Fittingly, the poem has been tied to environmentalism and care for creation, Father Bodo said, inspiring the name for Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical on integral ecology, “Laudato Si’” (“Praised Be”) and the 2023 apostolic exhortation “Laudate Deum” (“Praise God”).

But ultimately, “The Canticle of the Creatures,” Father Bodo said, “is about the growth of an individual into what we could call holiness, someone who is transformed into an intimate and beautiful love of people and of God.”

White House launches prayer campaign as part of nation’s 250th anniversary celebration

Kate Scanlon
OSV News

The White House has launched an initiative calling for prayers for the nation as part of the celebration of the upcoming 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States.

President Donald Trump announced the initiative Sept. 8 during remarks at the Museum of the Bible for a hearing by the Department of Justice’s Religious Liberty

Commission.

The effort, according to the White House, will seek 1 million Americans who will dedicate “one hour a week to praying for our country and our people.”

“America has always been a nation that believes in the power of prayer,” Trump said during his remarks at the hearing. “And we will never apologize for our faith. Ever; ever; never; never. We will never surrender our God-given rights.”

Catholic entities participating in the “America Prays” effort include the prayer and meditation app Hallow.

Alex Jones, CEO of Hallow, said in a statement, “Every great renewal begins with prayer. Our country was born through prayer, and by God’s grace, will be renewed through it. What an honor and a joy it is to help invite us to come together as a nation in prayer. May the Lord bless us and keep us.”

Other organizations partnering with the White House are Catholics for Catholics and CatholicVote, both Republican-aligned advocacy groups that do not operate with any formal approval from the Catholic Church.

Kelsey Reinhardt, president of CatholicVote, said in comments on the group’s blog that “Nothing is more important than winning back the soul of America. Prayer is the essential weapon in this battle.”

“We are grateful to President Trump for leading the way and inspiring citizens of all faiths to once again turn their hearts and minds toward God as our country marks the milestone of the 250th anniversary of her birth,” she said, adding, CatholicVote “joins the President’s call to change the heart of the nation — not through politics as usual,” she said, “but through prayer, sacrament and surrender.”

Critics said the effort blurred lines between church and state.

Rachel Laser, president and CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said in a statement, (Continued on page 12)

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White House launches prayer campaign

(Continued from page 5)

“Once again, President Trump is using religion to promote his self-aggrandizement and political agenda, all the while perpetuating the lie that America is a Christian nation and that religion is under attack.”

Robert Schmuhl, professor emeritus of American studies at the University of Notre Dame, who critically observes the modern American presidency, told OSV News, “Much of Donald Trump’s base of political support has a strong element of Christian nationalism.”

“America Prays’ will appeal to that segment of the society,” he said.

But Schmuhl also noted the effort “comes at a time when there are questions about the president’s previous conduct

that challenge this call to religious devotion,” such as questions about the nature of Trump’s relationship with Jeffrey Epstein — the late multimillionaire and serial sexual predator who was found dead in prison of an apparent hanging in 2019 — and the state of the U.S. economy, among other issues.

“Of late the public has seen many more pictures of the president in the company of Jeffrey Epstein than photos of Trump attending church,” he said.

“In the eyes of some people, he’s an imperfect messenger for spiritual guidance,” Schmuhl said about differences in public opinion on the perception of Trump’s approach to religious freedom issues. “When Jimmy Carter talked

about faith, there was an authenticity in what he said and practiced as a Sunday school teacher. That isn’t the case today — when everything seems to be political and the society so polarized.”

During his remarks at the same event, Trump also said the Department of Education would issue guidance on protecting the right to prayer in public schools. Neither Trump nor the department shed light on what that guidance may include. The Trump administration previously reduced the workforce at the Department of Education and stated its intent to downsize the department.

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- Thursday, Oct. 9, 9 –11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Thursday, Oct. 9, 6 –8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Tuesday, Oct. 14, 6:30 –8 p.m., Diocesan Catholic Children’s Home, Miller Building Training Room, Ft. Mitchell
- Wednesday, Oct. 22, 9 –11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

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- Tuesday, Nov. 11, 9 –11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
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Obituary

Sister Mary Paul Ann Hanneken, SND
Helen Margaret Hanneken was born on Jan. 15, 1932, the fourth of five children born to Alma and Harry Hanneken. She attended St. John Elementary School and then Notre Dame Academy, Covington, Ky. In her senior year, Helen joined the Sisters of Notre Dame. At her investment as a novice, she received the name Sister Mary Paul Ann. Sister professed her first vows on Aug. 16, 1952. Two years later, her younger sister, Alma Ann, followed, becoming known as Sister Mary Paulla. The two were inseparable.

As a second-year novice, Sister Mary Paul Ann embarked on her teaching career, dedicating herself to elementary education. Her ministries included St. Joseph, Cold Spring, and St. Stephen, Newport, Ky. She then went on to St. Aloysius Orphanage and St. Columban



Sister Mary Paul Ann Hanneken, SND

School in Ohio. She enjoyed teaching the little ones and preparing them for their First Holy Communion.

Sister Mary Paul Ann served her SND community in a variety of roles: as Postulant Directress, Novice Directress, and Local Superior/Coordinator to the sisters. Many recall the supportive guidance and patience she showed during her leadership service.

She found her greatest fulfillment in ministering to the young women at Notre Dame Academy. Sister faithfully served as a guidance counselor, admissions director and work study coordinator. Together with Sister Mary Rachel Nerone, she led the Work Study Program for more than 25 years. Their management of the program not only made a Notre Dame Academy education accessible to more families but also instilled in

the young women a lifelong sense of pride and ownership in their school. Even in retirement, Sister remained a continued presence, encouraging and supporting her NDA students.

Sister Mary Paul Ann passed away peacefully on the morning of Sept. 3, 2025. She was preceded in death by her parents, her brothers, Arthur and Paul, and her sister, Sister Mary Paulla, SND. Sister leaves behind her sister, Rose Mary O'Brien and dearest friend, Sister Mary Rachel Nerone, and many beloved nieces and nephews.

Sister Mary Paul Ann was cherished for her kindness, joy and fun-loving spirit. Whether cheering on her adored NDA Pandas from the stands, greeting students in the hallways, or offering prayers for families in need, she lived her vocation with grace and joy. She was the best of the best — an extraordinary servant leader whose life reflected the heart of the Sisters of Notre Dame. Sister Mary Paul Ann profoundly impacted countless lives. She will remain in our hearts forever.

May Sister Mary Paul Ann rest in the love of our good and gracious God.

Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Sept. 11 at St. Agnes Church, Ft. Wright, with interment following in the convent cemetery.

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Obituary

Sister Deborah Harmeling, OSB
Sister Deborah Harmeling was born on December 24, 1946 to George O. Harmeling and Ella Mary Holt, and given the name Mary Jo. She was the older of two children; her brother George followed.

Mary Jo entered St. Walburg Monastery in 1964 and became a novice in 1965, receiving the name Deborah. First profession followed in 1966, perpetual in 1972, silver jubilee in 1991 and golden in 2016.

Sr. Deborah received her BA in Secondary Education and History at Thomas More College in 1970 and her MS in Library Science from the University of Kentucky in 1973. She taught at Blessed Sacrament School, Villa Madonna Academy, and No. Ky. UK Extension, and served as librari-



Sister Deborah Harmeling, OSB

an at Thomas More College (now University) and then for 28 years as librarian at the Athenaeum of Ohio. She served on the formation team at the Athenaeum, as development/communication director and archives oversight at St. Walburg Monastery.

Deborah was a skilled writer and a voracious reader. The Word flourished in her words as she composed collecting prayers for the Liturgy of the Hours, articles for Leaven and other publications. At home in any library, she tapped sources far and wide.

The medieval world long held Deborah's interest, whether it be Benedictine saints, doctors of the Church, or dragons. She loved dragons, stuffed or ceramic, fierce or funny. She frowned if someone spoke ill of them. Deborah loved cats nearly as much. Cheddar and Chutney were familiar names to the sisters.

Deborah was asked once what she valued about community life. Her answer: "Community life makes me a better and more open person. Community life constantly challenges me to grow and look beyond myself and my own interests. Community life has taught me to value collaboration and to let others help me create and discern. The women of this community have shown me how to be gracious, generous, open-handed and supportive."

Deborah is preceded in death by her parents George and Ella Harmeling. She is survived by her brother, George W. Harmeling, Memphis, Tenn., friends and the Benedictine community. Mass of Christian Burial was held Sept. 8 at St. Walburg Monastery. Memorials are suggested to St. Walburg Monastery, 2500 Amsterdam Rd., Villa Hills, KY 41017; www.stwalburg.org.

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NEWS BRIEFS

National/World

Pope erects new diocese in China, names new bishop

VATICAN CITY — Pope Leo XIV formally suppressed two dioceses in China and erected a new one, which already had been operating without the Vatican’s consent. “With a desire to promote the pastoral care of the Lord’s flock and to attend more effectively to its spiritual well-being,” Pope Leo decided to suppress the dioceses of Xuanhua and Xiwanzi and to erect the new diocese of Zhangjiakou, the Vatican press office said Sept. 10. The Vatican press office said Pope Leo had made the decision July 8, the same day he had nominated as bishop of the new diocese Father Joseph Wang Zhengui, “having approved his candidacy within the framework of the provisional agreement” between the Vatican and the Chinese government.

Pope meets Israeli president, discusses ‘tragic’ situation in Gaza

VATICAN CITY — As Israeli military operations in Gaza continued, Pope Leo XIV met with Israeli President Isaac Herzog at the Vatican. The meeting Sept. 4 came just a week after Pope Leo appealed again for Israel and Hamas to stop the violence and for Hamas to release the hostages it has held since attacking Israel in October 2023. With the pope and with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, Herzog discussed “the political and social situation in the Middle East ... where numerous conflicts persist, with particular attention to the tragic situation in Gaza,” the Vatican said. “A prompt resumption of negotiations was hoped for so that, with openness and courageous decisions, as well as with the support of the international community, it would be possible to secure the release of all hostages, urgently achieve a permanent ceasefire, facilitate the safe entry of humanitarian aid into the most affected areas, and ensure full respect for humanitarian law, as well as for the legitimate aspirations of both peoples,” the Vatican said.

Polish prelate calls for peace after ‘reckless’ Russian drone attack violates country’s airspace

WARSAW Poland — Poland is on high alert after its military shot down 19 Russian drones that crossed into Polish airspace early Sept. 10 — the most serious cross-border incident since the war in Ukraine began. Debris landed in several provinces, damaging one home’s rooftop, though no injuries were reported. Prime Minister Donald Tusk called the attack a “large-scale provocation,” while President Karol Nawrocki said it marked “an unprecedented moment” for both Poland and NATO. Warsaw has invoked Article 4 of the NATO treaty, prompting urgent consultations among allies. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte condemned Russia’s “reckless behavior” and vowed that every inch of alliance territory will be defended. Primate of Poland, Archbishop Wojciech Polak of Gniezno reacted to the news with stating firmly that if until now there were “any doubts” about addressing the topic of peace and seeking paths to peace, they are now “dispelled.” “These provocations affect not only Ukraine or the Holy Land, but also us,” he said, adding that “we’re all the more obliged to call for peace and search together the paths of peace.” The attack came as Russia launched more than 400 drones and 40 missiles across Ukraine overnight, killing at least 24 civilians. Poland’s Primate, Archbishop Wojciech Polak, urged renewed commitment to peace ahead of a major peace summit in Gniezno he organizes that starts Sept. 11.

Poll: France highly values Catholic schools, even as political turmoil swirls around them

PARIS — A new poll out of France shows Catholic schools remain highly valued — even as scandals and political turmoil swirl around them. According to a Sept. 2 survey by IFOP, two-thirds of French citizens want to preserve the freedom to choose between public schools and Catholic schools under state contract. That support is especially strong among conserva-

tives, but it’s also significant across the political spectrum — even among parents with kids already in public schools. This comes as Catholic education faces renewed scrutiny after the “Bétharram affair,” a decades-long abuse scandal tied to clergy and lay staff, and more recent revelations in Nantes. The controversy added to former Prime Minister François Bayrou’s resignation. Still, Catholic schools enroll over 2 million students nationwide, which is about 17% of France’s school population. Analysts said the institutions remain prestigious, but their explicitly Catholic identity matters far less to today’s families than the educational options they provide. A new secretary general for Catholic education for the French bishops’ conference, layman Guillaume Prévost, took office Sept. 1, reiterating his desire to collaborate with the public authorities to combat potential abuse in schools. He also underlined, however, that Catholic education needs Catholic parents to be “witnesses and disciples of Christ” in the school environment.

Jubilee event to honor modern martyrs as symbols of hope

VATICAN CITY — In a Jubilee year dedicated to hope, Pope Leo XIV and

Christian leaders will commemorate “new martyrs and witnesses of the faith” — people whose lives were signs of hope to the people around them and who died firm in the hope of being welcomed into God’s presence, said the secretary of the Vatican Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. Archbishop Fabio Fabene, dicastery secretary, told reporters Sept. 8, “Pope Leo hopes the blood of these martyrs will be seeds of peace, reconciliation, fraternity and love.” Like St. John Paul II did during the Holy Year 2000, Pope Leo will preside over an ecumenical prayer service Sept. 14 for the Jubilee 2025 commemorating Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants who died for their faith between 2000 and 2025. The ceremony will recognize 1,624 Christians whose names were submitted by bishops’ conferences, religious orders and nunciatures from all over the world.

Catholic networks: Push for profits, power threaten peace, climate justice

VATICAN CITY — The fossil fuel, weapons and financial industries thrive on instability and cronyism, and they obstruct efforts toward climate justice and peace, top leaders of three Catholic networks said. The crises of climate change and global security “are not only linked, but also born of the same short-sightedness, immorality and flawed logic,” the leaders said in a joint statement. “For decades, the pursuit of profit over people has shaped global systems, placing power in the hands of those who benefit from destruction and division,” it said, adding that the principles of Catholic social teaching provided practical guidelines for building a better world. The joint statement, titled “Pilgrims of Hope for a Just and Peaceful World,” was signed by: Alistair Dutton, secretary-general of Caritas Internationalis, the Vatican-based umbrella organization of national Catholic charities; Josianne Gauthier, secretary-general of CIDSE, a Brussels-based group of 18 Catholic agencies from Europe and North America; and Martha Inés Romero, secretary-general of Pax Christi International. The statement was released during an online webinar Sept. 8 as part of the Jubilee Year of Hope and the Season of Creation, and ahead of the 2025 U.N. Climate Change Conference, commonly known as COP30, which is set to take place in Belém, Brazil Nov. 10-21.

At canonization Mass, two mothers stand out as giants of confidence in God

VATICAN CITY — The Catholic Church has its first millennial saint. At a packed canonization Mass in Rome Sept. 7, Pope Leo XIV declared Blessed Carlo Acutis a saint, moving thousands, especially his mother, Antonia Salzano. The pope remembered St. Carlo, who died of leukemia at just 15, as a teenager who naturally blended prayer, school, sports and charity into his daily life. The miracle needed for his sainthood was front and center during canonization Mass. Valeria Vargas Valverde of Costa Rica, 24, who nearly died from a traumatic bike accident in 2022, prayed in thanksgiving for her healing. Her recovery, which doctors called medically inexplicable, followed her mother’s desperate prayers at Acutis’ tomb in Assisi. “Carlo’s death was an extraordinary loss for Antonia. Like any mother she deeply grieved his passing,” said Father Patrick Briscoe, newly appointed head of communications of the Dominican order. But Carlo gave her a new source of confidence, said the priest, one of hundreds of concelebrants of the Mass. Valverde’s mother had that confidence when she prayed that her child’s life would be saved after the accident. “Valeria’s mother prayed with a sincere faith. Her prayer wasn’t intricate or informed by a complex theology. She was simply praying with the heart of a mother who was looking to aid her daughter,” Father Briscoe said.

Peace comes from dialogue, not ‘walls and barbed wire,’ pope says

VATICAN CITY — The future Christians hope for and must build “is not one of walls and barbed wire, but one of mutual acceptance,” Pope Leo XIV told young adult Catholics from more than a dozen Mediterranean countries. Coming from different cultures, speaking different languages and representing both Latin-rite and Eastern Catholic churches, the young people “are proof that dialogue is possible, that differences are a source of wealth and not a motive for opposition and that the ‘other’ is always a brother or sister and never a stranger, or worse, an enemy,” the pope said. Pope Leo held a private audience Sept. 5 with members of the Youth Council of the Mediterranean, a group coordinated by the Italian bishops’ conference but made up of young people appointed by bishops’ conferences from around the Mediterranean basin, including Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.



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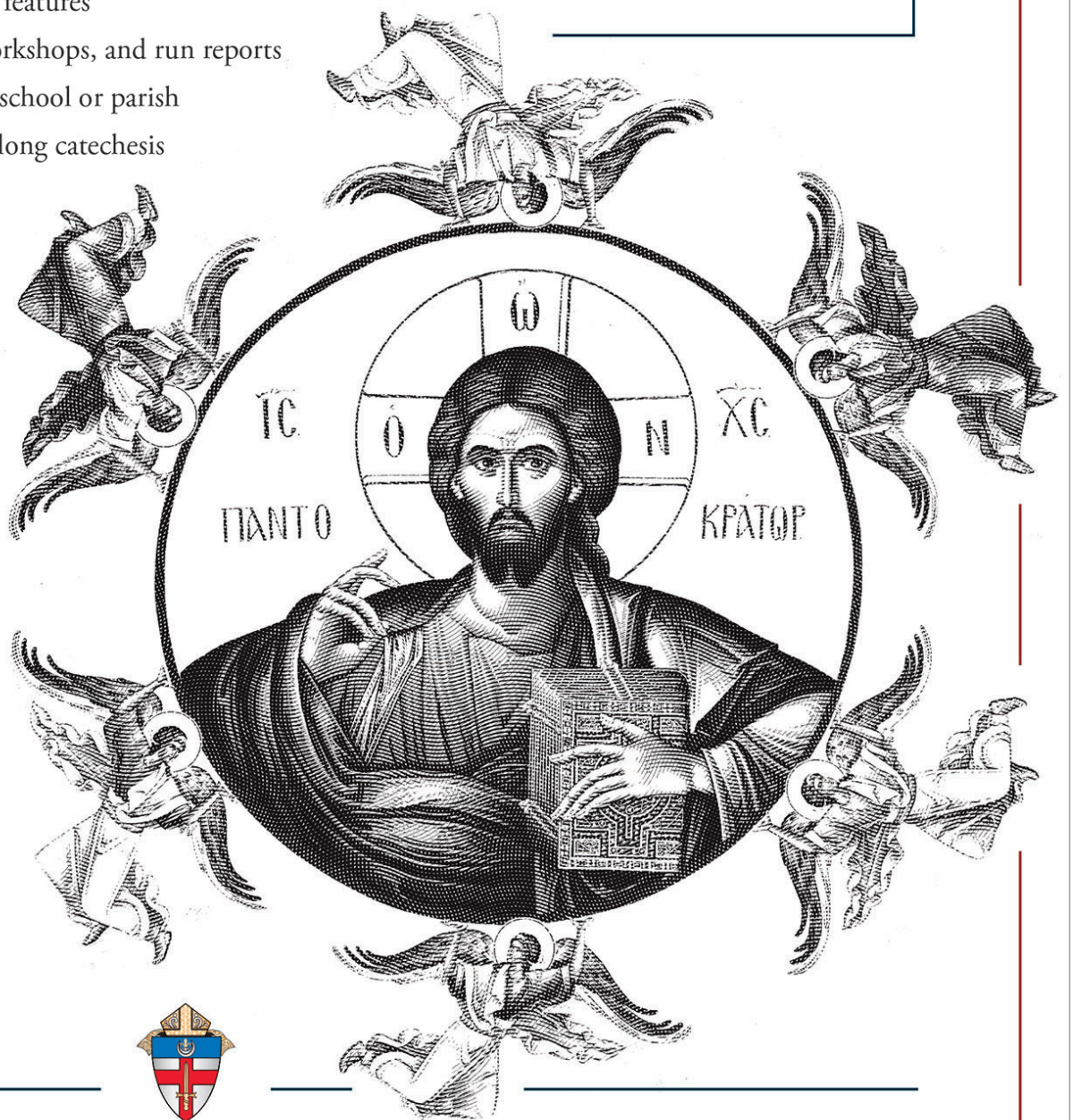
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The Schedule:

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

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