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MESSENGER

Serving the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky since 1926

Efforts of pastoral plan are 'bearing fruit,' says Bishop

Laura Keener
Editor

With just over a year of implementation of the "With One Heart" Diocesan Pastoral Plan, the *Messenger* sat down with Bishop John Iffert for an update.

Developed in 2023 and released in 2024, the Diocesan Pastoral Plan is the product of months of listening sessions at parishes throughout the diocese, focus group discussions among clergy, religious and parish leaders, and a diocesan-wide, 75-question Disciple Maker Index survey.

Led by Carla Molina and Brendan Menuey of the Catholic Leadership Institute, an 11-member Pastoral Planning Commission prayerfully reviewed the data and, working with Bishop Iffert, identified three priorities for the Diocese — Ongoing Faith Formation, Evangelization and Leadership Development — each with clearly defined and measurable goals.

One of the characteristics of leadership development and the reason Bishop Iffert said he wanted to establish a process of planning is to break out of a maintenance mindset to one focused on mission.

"Planning becomes an important piece of how we advance the mission," said Bishop Iffert. "It's all about responding to Jesus' call to go forth and baptize all nations. But we take that universal mission and then we have to ask ourselves, how does that apply here in the local? What's the next step here to take?"

A plan is like a budget, Bishop Iffert said. "You're never going to spend exactly what you say in the budget. You're going to spend more in some areas. You're going to spend less in others. You might save a little more than you thought, you might save a little less than you thought. But a budget is a roadmap, and a plan is a roadmap for how to go forward."

Overall, Bishop Iffert said that the pastoral plan is already "bearing fruit," especially in the areas of leadership development and faith formation. Evangelization, specifically the goal of evangelizing through a Campaign of Mercy, is an area that has "stumbled out of the gate."

"We asked diocesan employees, who already had full-time jobs and who already were facing great challenges, to carry the load of that without providing additional staff or resources to try to make that happen," said Bishop Iffert. "My intuition is that it's still a good strategy, but I think we need to evaluate that as part of the next round of the planning process and see, do we continue with that strategy?"

A highlight for Bishop Iffert has been the response of several parishioners who, after attending the Parish Missionary Disciples workshop, have been inspired to share

what they have learned at their parish and with other parishes in the diocese and meet regularly to encourage and support each other.

"Parish Missionary Disciples was only intended to be a six-session program," Bishop Iffert said. "But there were a group of people who said, I need continuing support. So they've kept meeting and exchanging ideas and talking about what's working and what's not working."

In the course of their meeting, a parishioner from St. Patrick Parish, Taylor Mill, shared how a program following the book "Return: How To Draw Your Child Back to the Church," by Brandon Vogt, had a positive impact at their parish. The group picked up that idea and now over 50 parents from throughout the Diocese are meeting, learning and praying on how they can invite their adult children back to the Church.

The same group also has distilled the Parish Missionary Disciples six-session program down to a three-session program and is making the program available to parishes. The shortened program was presented at Mother of God with 30 participants from 10 different parishes. St. Mary Parish, Alexandria, will be offering the program soon.

"That's a direct fruit," said Bishop Iffert. "It comes from a creative ministry experience in a particular parish and then gets magnified through the diocese because of the leadership development that happened as part of the pastoral plan. That's exactly why we do this. I think it's a great example of the kinds of successes that we've had."

Bishop Iffert said that the Diocese's partnership with the Franciscan University's Catechetical Institute and its "Franciscan At Home" library of educational workshops has been another success.

"There are 400 or more people who are actively engaged in learning at any given time. That's a great success," he said.

During Lent 2026, a follow-up Disciples Maker Index survey will be taken up in parishes throughout the Diocese. The results of this second DMI survey will provide quantitative data on how effective the efforts of the With One Heart pastoral plan have been. That data will be reviewed, discussions will begin again, and adjustments will be made to the plan or a new plan developed.

"We learn lessons and we move on and update the plan. I hope that becomes the culture of the Diocese," said Bishop Iffert. "We must always be looking at how we are cooperating with the Holy Spirit. How are we advancing the mission?"

Inside this edition of the Messenger, starting on page 5, are articles on the implementation and successes so far of the With One Heart Diocesan Pastoral Plan.



Through his life Father Thomas Barnes sought to honor God

Father Thomas Barnes, a priest for the Diocese of Covington, died Oct. 28. He was 87 years old.

Thomas Charles Barnes (“Tom”) was born on May 23, 1938, the only child of Charles Joseph Barnes and Florence Evelyn Barnes (nee Simmons). He was born in Grace Hospital, Detroit Michigan. He was Baptized at St. Margaret Mary Church, LeMay Avenue, Detroit on June 26, 1938. He was Confirmed at Our Lady Queen of Peace, Detroit, on June 1, 1950.

Father Barnes attended grades K-8 at Finney Public School in Detroit. He then attended Austin Prep, a Catholic College Preparatory run by the Augustinian Friars in Detroit, for one year (1952-53). He attended St. Augustine Seminary in Saugatuck, Michigan, for his sophomore year, where he met Robert Francis Prevost (later Pope Leo XIV). Father Barnes returned to Austin Prep for his junior and senior years, graduating in 1956.

In 1956, Father Barnes spent the summer at St. Sylvester Benedictive Monastery in Detroit and attended St. Benedict College, Acheson, Kansas, for three semesters, working toward a Bachelor of Science Degree.

On April 1, 1958, Father Barnes entered Gethsemani Monastery in Central Kentucky, where he remained for two years under the guidance of Father Louis Merton (Thomas Merton). Despite his love for monastic life, he decided to leave after two years, maintaining good friendships.

Father Barnes’s experience at Gethsemani profoundly influenced his spiritual life, particularly his commitment to reading and developing an interior life of prayer.

“He had a great respect for Catholicism and the interior life,” said Father Mark Keene, a close friend and vicar general of the Diocese of Covington.

After leaving Gethsemani, Father Barnes returned to Detroit, attended the University of Detroit, and worked on an assembly line for Ford. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree and later enrolled at the Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies (PIMS) at the University of Toronto, where he earned a Master of Arts degree.

Father Barnes then attended Western Michigan University, earning his Master of Business Administration (MBA). Despite his MBA, his interest in religious life led him to try the Order of Friars Minor. After a few years, he decided he wasn’t called to this life and separated from the Franciscans.

From 1966 to 1968, Father Barnes worked for Mid-American Publishing’s Ultra-Van Division in Hutchinson, Kansas. From 1968 to 1970, he taught business at Kansas State University, Pittsburgh, Kansas. Former students thanked him for his teaching.

“He just seemed to positively change so many people’s



Father Thomas Charles Barnes

lives,” Father Keene said.

From 1970 to 1972, he directed the Wichita Art Association. In 1972, he joined Citizens Union National Bank in Lexington, Kentucky, as executive vice president of the Trust Division, where he developed and expanded the clientele. He was also involved in civic organizations like the Lexington Council for the Arts.

Father Barnes left his position at the bank and Lexington to enter the seminary to study for the Catholic Priesthood in the fall of 1983. It was there that he met, then seminarian, Father Jeff VonLehman, pastor, St. Patrick Parish, Taylor Mill, who remembers Father Barnes as an “active contemplative, he spoke out of a very contemplative mindset,” he

said. “You never had a dull conversation with Father Barnes.”

Prior to entering the seminary, Father Barnes’ mother had spoken to him about how he had done so many things in his life and been successful at them except for the one thing that he really wanted, which was to be a priest. Father Barnes figured at his age he probably only had one more chance. He explored the idea with some priests he knew and other friends and decided to try.

At a luncheon at a Chinese Restaurant with some clients of the bank, after he had decided to try the seminary, his fortune cookie at the end of the meal read simply: “You have made the right decision.” Father Barnes taped that fortune into his Christian Prayer Book. It is still there.

Father Barnes studied for the Catholic Priesthood as a seminarian for the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky. He always had a natural gift for counseling people, and so his working toward and achieving a master’s degree in Pastoral Counseling came very naturally.

Father Keene remembered him as a “great listener to people, sort of wedding the spiritual life and emotional growth and maturation of people. He was able to see that as one reality in a pretty neat way.”

Father Michael Hennigen, who succeed Father Barnes’ as pastor in 2019 before moving onto other roles, said, “Father Barnes really cared for people. He was a beautiful listener, and he loved to listen, really a counselor in many ways to many people.”

Father Barnes was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Covington on May 30, 1987. After ordination, Father Thomas Barnes served as a parochial vicar at St. Pius X Parish, Edgewood, for a year. Bishop Hughes asked if he

would move to Holy Cross Parish, Latonia, to help Msgr. Elmer Grosser, who had come out of retirement to serve as an administrator of Holy Cross. Father Barnes served as parochial vicar for several years. In 1992 Father Barnes was named pastor of Holy Cross Parish, where he served as pastor until 2019.

During his pastorate at Holy Cross he created a welcoming environment for students and parishioners, recalled Father VonLehman. “He was always so accommodating to me as the chaplain and to the school, to the students. He was always helping to just make a welcoming atmosphere for them,” said Father VonLehman.

Upon Father Hennigens arrival to Holy Cross Parish he remembers Father Barnes, “really stressing the community feel and aspect of Holy Cross. That community included the parish, the elementary school, the high school, Catholic Charities and also the Child Care and Learning Center.”

Parishioner Terry Foster wrote in a Facebook post remembering Father Barnes, “We joined Holy Cross in the summer of 1996. We really felt ‘at home’ and Father Barnes was very much a reason for that ... we felt very accepted at both the school and church.” Mr. Foster recalled in a *Messenger* interview that when he and his daughter joined Holy Cross Parish his daughter said, “Father Barnes makes going to Mass fun.” Father VonLehman said, “his humor always came out, he had a good sense of humor.”

While Father Barnes will be remembered for many notable things, perhaps most frequently mentioned by people has been that when you were with him you had his undivided attention.


“He was really genuine, he just seemed to really be able to pay close attention to people,” said Father Keene.

Father Barnes had a preternatural ability to see the potential in people and to then ask just the right questions to challenge people to see and believe what he saw in them. Many persons have commented how he “changed their lives.” This would include friends from his high school days, friends at the end of his life and Father Keene who said, “We met at a time in my life when I needed someone like him to be a mentor and really kind of challenge me in ways I needed to be challenged. That was kind of hard at times but I’m very grateful for it in hindsight now.”

Father Barnes’ interests and talents were many and varied. But, underlying it all was a desire to know God through life and to honor God by his life. He was insightful, compassionate, creative, intelligent and always with a great sense of humor. Friendships were always a priority in his life. He always worked hard to establish and maintain friendships that were deep and meaningful.

Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated Nov. 15 at Holy Cross Church, Latonia.

This obituary was written by Father Mark Keene and edited by the Messenger staff. The complete obituary is online <https://www.connleybrothersfuneralhome.com/obituary/reverend-thomas-charles-barnes/>.



Bambinelli Blessing and Christmas Tree Lighting

The Diocese of Covington invites you once again for an evening of Advent blessings.

Bring the infant Jesus from your nativity for a special blessing from Bishop John Iffert.

Hot chocolate, cookies and savory appetizers will be provided.

Dec. 13, 5:30–7:30 p.m.

St. Mary’s Park, Covington

5:30–5:45 Fellowship in the Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium

5:45–6:05 Music by the St. Thomas Youth Choir

6:10–6:30 Adult social and children’s story time

6:30–7:30 Outdoor blessing and tree lighting



The Cathedral Concert Series continues its 49th Season with the annual Advent Festival of Lessons

Sunday, Dec. 7, 3 p.m.

Scripture and sacred song foretell of the coming nativity. All are welcome to attend and participate. Bishop John Iffert will be the president. Choral pieces sung by the Basilica Bishop’s Choir and Advent hymns respond to seven readings. The Historic Matthias Schwab will be played by guest organist, Richard Redmon. Featured composers include Mendelssohn, Goudimel, Josquin, Vaughan-Williams, Hancock, and Schaffer.

All Cathedral Concerts are open to the public with no admission charge. A freewill offering is gladly accepted. Visit cathedralconcertseries.org for more information on the current season and series history.



Bishop’s Schedule

Nov. 15 Diocese of Covington Pastoral Council meeting, 10 a.m. Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 4:30 p.m.	Nov. 19–21 Province meeting, Knoxville
Nov. 16 Mass and Confirmation, Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, California, 11 a.m.	Nov. 21–22 National Catholic Youth Conference, Indianapolis
Nov. 17 Catholic Conference of Kentucky meeting, Louisville Nov. 18 Archbishop Checcio’s welcome Mass, New Orleans	Nov. 23 Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 5:30 p.m.
	Nov. 24 Confirmation, St. Augustine Parish, Covington, 7 p.m.

Eighth graders looking for a leg up to make shoe drive a success

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

Eighth graders at Holy Cross Elementary School, Covington, have organized a shoe drive within their school community in an effort to send 2,500 shoes to those in need across the world. Partnered with Funds2Orgs, a company which hosts shoe drive fundraisers, the eighth graders hope to make an impact this Christmas season.

Fundraising and charitable giving is not new to Holy Cross Elementary eighth graders, said Quinn, a leader of the shoe drive. “Every eighth grade has a fundraiser that they do. A couple of years ago they collected old phones, for us it happened to be a shoe drive.”

So far, the students have collected approximately 750 pairs of shoes but need help from community members to reach their lofty 2,500 pair goal.

“Everyone who reads the Messenger should have a very

thoughtful heart on why they should help. This is to help guide the heart to do more good,” said Quinn.

“There are other people out there who, unfortunately, are not as fortunate as many in the Holy Cross community. I feel like they should donate because there’s people who really need shoes out there and can’t afford them,” said Madison, also a shoe drive leader.

With the shoes being donated internationally, Quinn emphasized the importance of donating multiple pairs of shoes because, “There are some people in less fortunate countries who have no shoes per person, it’s like there’s one pair of shoes for three children. That’s not enough,” she said.

Quinn and Madison have been diligently emailing news agencies and potential partner organizations like the Lationa branch library and Catholic Charities, Covington. Their efforts have yielded many donation bins throughout

the Holy Cross campus. “We have donation bins everywhere,” said Madison.

“Most people donate them to the office. We also have a bin at the Holy Cross High School, and one at the Latonia branch library and we also have a bin at the Holy Cross Daycare closer to the gym,” said Quinn.

Once the shoes are donated, the team inspects them carefully for damage that would make them unwearable. “If they’re dirty that’s fine, but they can’t be beat up,” said Madison.

After they have been approved by the team the laces are tied together, or the pair is banded, so that they will not be separated, before being put in the bag for donations.

The shoe drive ends Dec. 2, just in time for the holiday season. “We are in dire need of help,” said Quinn. “It could be like a present from the community.”

Bailey photos



(above left) In order to keep the shoes together during transit the laces are tied together or the shoes are wrapped in a rubber band.

(above right) Eighth graders Quinn and Madison inspect each pair of shoes for damage before banding them together to be donated as part of the eighth grade shoe drive at Holy Cross Elementary.

Memento Mori — a visual reminder of death and what comes after

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

An image of a skull, bones or a coffin painted onto a canvas can be morbid imagery. Death is a common fear, and many people avoid the thought of it when they can. However, in many cases, the inclusion of these objects in artwork aim to do just that — to remind us not only of our mortality and death’s inevitability, but of the afterlife that follows.

From Latin meaning “remember you must die,” these images are referred to by art historians as “Memento Mori,” and they come in less visceral forms as well — hourglasses, clocks and wilting flowers are also examples of these symbols that carry their origins from early Christian art and the philosophers of antiquity.

The trend rose to prominence during the Medieval period, with Christianity’s strong emphasis on themes such as divine judgement, Heaven and Hell during that time period. Memento Mori, in its many depictions, represented the temporary aspect of life on Earth and emphasized the importance of focusing on what came after. We receive a similar reminder on Ash Wednesday — “you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Next time you see a skull in a painting, reconsider its meaning as more than the macabre — these are sacred reminders not just of the end of our mortality, but of the glory we find in death.



In these depictions of the Crucifixion, as seen in the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, a skull on the ground serves as an example of *Memento Mori* — an artistic reminder of the inevitability of death.

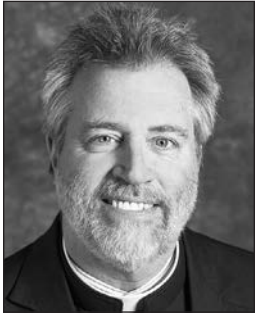


Constant gladness of devotion

The readings for the Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle C — are: Malachi 3:19-20a, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12 and Luke 21:5-19.

The readings of this 33rd Sunday in year C of the Church’s liturgical year are shadowed by the idea of endings: the “Day of the Lord” in the first reading, the “end

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Stephen Bankemper

times” in the second, and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in the Gospel. One thing that is interesting about all three of these readings is that there is nothing anyone can do about these endings, and the speakers – Malachi, Paul and Jesus – offer no solutions or remedies for them. There is, quite simply, nothing anyone can do to avoid or stop the Day of the Lord, the end times, or the difficulties of living an authentic

Christian life, including the seeming destruction of even those things we have held most dear to us in the Church.

To say that there is nothing one can do to stop or avoid these things, however, is not to say that there is nothing we can or should do when they happen. In fact, the speakers in all three readings give clear advice, and their messages are remarkably similar: Malachi prophesies that while the Day of the Lord will be destruction for “all the proud and all evildoers,” for those who fear God’s name the day will bring the rising of “the sun of justice with its healing rays.” In the Old Testament, to “fear God’s name” means to show deep reverence, awe, and respect for God. It is not fear of punishment, but a profound recognition of God’s power, holiness and sovereignty, which motivates a person to live in a way that is pleasing to Him. Paul, responding, in the opinion of many biblical scholars, to the attitude that some in the church of Thessalonica had, that since the end times were near or already upon them, they no longer had to work, exhorts them not to live in idleness, but to imitate him, Paul, who when he was with them worked “night and day.” In the line that follows what we hear at Mass, Paul urges them: “Brethren, do not be weary in well-doing.” And in today’s Gospel, Jesus’ advice to his disciples is not to prepare for coming persecutions, but simply to persevere in faith and trust.

The Church echoes these sentiments in the prayers of the Mass today, especially the Collect. In this prayer that “collects” and sums up the opening rites of the Mass, the Church prays that God may grant us the “constant gladness of being devoted to you,” for “it is full and lasting happiness to serve with constancy the author of all that is good.”

As we face our own troubles in both the world and the Church, let us remember the words we hear today and strive not to let ourselves be worried or shaken. Let us stay close to God, living a life devoted to God, persevering in serving him through Jesus, in the strength the Holy Spirit gives us. Let us strive to remain constant in our devotion to God and trust Him to guide us in what to say and do.

And let us help each other to do this.
Father Stephen Bankemper is pastor, St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Ft. Thomas, Ky

Who is the woman in Proverbs 31?

The woman described in Proverbs 31:10-31, is celebrated as the epitome of a virtuous wife. She is trustworthy, industrious and wise, managing her household with diligence and resourcefulness (vv. 11-19). Her compassion

BELIEVE, TEACH, PRACTICE



Deacon Scott Folz

shines as she cares for the poor (v. 20), and her strength and dignity enable her to face challenges with grace (v. 25). Her speech is marked by wisdom and kindness (v. 26), and her fear of the Lord defines her worth (v. 30). Her husband is prominent at the city gates (v. 23a), implying that she brings honor to her husband.

These virtues are timeless, especially as we look at the challenges we face in today’s world. A husband

and his wife are partners. They communicate freely and effectively, with mutual respect. They share in the responsibilities of running a household, leaning on each other’s strengths and resourcefulness, supporting each other in their weakness and struggles. They show compassion and generosity towards each other and their neighbors in need. They face challenges together. They prioritize their faith, bringing the other closer to God.

When viewed through a spiritual and supernatural lens, these virtues are revealed as characteristics of the Body of Christ — the Bride of Christ — called to be holy, industrious and devoted in its union with Jesus, the Bridegroom. By extrapolating the qualities of the woman in Proverbs 31, we can see how the Church, each of us, and all of us, embodies these virtues in its mission to reflect His glory, specifically as Christ’s hands and feet in this world, serving one another.

We can interchange “woman” with “the Church,” the Body of Christ. In doing so, we see our mission clearly and definitively: The woman is described as trustworthy,

bringing good to her husband. (Prov 31:11-12) Similarly, the Church, as Christ’s Bride, is entrusted with the Gospel, called to honor and glorify Him through faithful stewardship. Just as the wife’s actions benefit her household, the Church’s obedience, through preaching, serving, and loving, advances Christ’s kingdom and the world we all live in. This trust is rooted in a covenantal relationship, mirroring the eternal bond between Christ and His Church, sealed by His sacrificial love. (Eph 5:25)

Her industriousness stands out: she rises early, works diligently and manages resources wisely. (Prov 31:13-19) The Church, too, is called to labor tirelessly for God’s purposes. From global missions to local outreach, the Body of Christ is active, not idle, using our unique and comprehensive spiritual gifts to build up believers and reach the lost. Like the Proverbs 31 woman who spins wool and flax, the Church weaves together diverse members, ordained, consecrated and laity, into a unified tapestry, each contributing to the kingdom’s work. This diligence reflects a commitment to prepare for Christ’s return, ensuring that the Bride is ready, “without spot or wrinkle.” (Eph 5:27)

Compassion defines her: she opens her hand to the poor and extends help to the needy. (Prov 31:20) The Church embodies this by being Christ’s hands and feet, serving the marginalized and proclaiming justice. Whether through charity, advocacy or mercy ministries, the Bride reflects Jesus’ heart for the broken. This mirrors the selflessness of Christ, who gave Himself for humanity, calling His Church to love sacrificially.

Her strength and dignity shine in adversity. (Prov 31:25) The Church, too, stands resilient amid persecution and trials, clothed in the righteousness of Christ. This strength is not self-derived but flows from the Holy Spirit, empowering believers to face challenges with hope. Her speech, filled with wisdom and kindness (Prov 31:26), parallels the Church’s role in proclaiming truth with grace, teaching sound doctrine, and discipling nations.


The Proverbs 31 woman’s household praises her (Prov 31:28-31), and her fear of the Lord is her defining trait. Likewise, the Church’s ultimate aim is to glorify Christ,

(Continued on page 13)

A pastoral reflection on voting rights and the call to justice

In recent months, renewed attention has been given to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 — a landmark piece of legislation that helped secure the right to vote for Black

GUEST



Bishop Joseph N. Perry

Americans, particularly in the South, where discriminatory practices persisted even after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The Supreme Court recently heard a case that will have wide implications for how the Voting Rights Act is enforced. The court has the power to preserve the kinds of protections our faith motivates us to defend and must do so.

The Church consistently teaches that all persons have both a fundamental right and a responsibility to have their voice heard in the public square, to promote human dignity and build the common good of society. Pope Leo XIV reiterated as much in his recent exhortation, “Dilexi Te.”

As the Supreme Court revisits the Voting Rights Act,


we remember that the journey to that decision was long and hard. Black Americans labored tirelessly for civil rights, including the right to vote — a right that had been systematically denied.

One of the most pivotal moments in this struggle was the march from Selma to Montgomery. After two attempts, the third march drew over 25,000 demonstrators, including clergy and faithful men and women from diverse religious traditions. This powerful witness of solidarity — from so many people of faith — helped break the dam for the waters of justice. Soon after, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law on Aug. 6, 1965.

This history must be remembered, honored and protected. These rights were not freely given — they were won through sacrifice, courage and the unwavering pursuit of justice, which is in line with the Church’s foundational belief in the dignity of each person.

Today, we once again find ourselves at a crossroads. The Supreme Court has taken up Louisiana v. Callais, a case concerning Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. At issue is whether Louisiana’s newly enacted congressional map — with two majority-Black districts — adequately balances constitutional rights and preserves the protections of the Voting Rights Act. This case is not merely

(Continued on page 13)



In 2023, the “With One Heart” Diocesan Pastoral Plan was born. It’s the result of months of listening sessions at parishes, discussions among clergy, religious and parish leaders, and a diocesan-wide survey with 75 questions.

With just over a year of implementation and two and a half months left until the next survey, the Curia staff and the faithful who’ve joined them take a moment to share an update.

There’s a place for everyone in the plan — continuing faith formation, evangelization and leadership development. All are welcome to join the mission, With One Heart.

Preparing hearts for reflection: Disciple Maker Index returns Lent 2026

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

In 2023, at the beginning of the With One Heart diocesan planning process, every parish in the Diocese of Covington encouraged parishioners to participate in the Disciple Maker Index. Starting towards the end of February and continuing through March — spanning the Lenten season — the Disciple Maker Index (DMI) gave the diocese (and parishes) a “base-line” of feelings towards a variety of topics, such as com-




munity, communication, ministry and evangelization.

“Three years have gone by and we’ve done our pastoral planning, both on the diocesan and parish levels,” said Jamie Schroeder, chancellor. “It’s time to do a progress check, so we will be completing the DMI again during Lent of 2026.”

While official dates for naming and training Parish Point of Contacts have not been set, the timeline is projected to be similar to the 2023 survey. The diocese is hoping to get a temperature on the diocesan climate following the implementation of various aspects of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, with programs such as Parish Missionary Disciples, and the establishing of a dedicated diocesan youth minister and the many other programs and initiatives that have been implemented, many of which will be highlighted on the following pages.

“The results in 2026 will allow us to see if all the work that we’ve done through our pastoral plans and with the help that CLI (The Catholic Leadership Institute) has provided has made an impact,” said Mrs. Schroeder.



July 30, 2022
Bishop Iffert announces that he has contracted with the Catholic Leadership Institute (CLI) to lead a four-year strategic plan process, paid for by anonymous donors.

Aug. 16, 2022
Deacon Jim Fortner and Carla Molina, CLI, are introduced as project leads for the CLI project.

Aug. 20, 2022
For the first time the Core Team and Planning Commission are gathered; Deacon Fortner and Ms. Molina provide an overview of the project and define roles.

Sept. 30, 2022
On his first anniversary as Bishop of Covington, Bishop Iffert, the Core Team and Planning Commission host a party at St. Mary's Park launching the “With One Heart: Igniting Parishes. Empowering Priests. Enlivening the Faithful.” campaign. Many Catholic organizations and local businesses provided food, refreshments and entertainment.

Oct. – Dec. 2022
Priest, Deacon and lay leader Focus Groups and Deanery Strategy Sessions are held. The Strategy Sessions are open to the public.



The development of the Diocese of Covington's Strategic Pastoral Plan July 2022–November 2024

Jan. 10 and 11, 2023
Teams and parish leaders are trained on how to implement the Disciples Maker Index survey.


Lent 2023
The Disciple Maker Index survey is launched diocesan wide. Everyone in the Diocese is invited to participate.

April 2023
Parishes are chosen for the Virtual Disciple Maker Index and Next Generation Parish programs.

May 2023
Post Disciple Maker Index webinars begin. Parishioners are trained how to access, understand and take action on the data collected.

Dec. 2023
Parishes submit Parish Pastoral Plan to the Chancery.

Nov. 2024
Bishop Iffert and the Planning Commission unveil the Diocesan strategic pastoral plan.



Good Leaders, Good Shepherds cohort 2 priests find value in practical and pastoral leadership training

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

In 2024, the Diocese of Covington’s “With One Heart” pastoral plan was released, identifying three key focus areas: evangelization, ongoing faith formation and leadership development.

One of the primary goals of leadership development is the building up of priests to help them have more confidence as they serve the people God has put in their care. In a partnership with the Catholic Leadership Institute, Bishop John Iffert invited all priests to attend Good Leaders, Good Shepherds leadership training. So far, two cohorts — a total of 38 priests — have completed this leadership training, with great enthusiasm.

The program consists of five, three-day-long sessions, with each session taking place once a month. This allows the cohort of priests to get to know one another and grow with one another over the course of five months.

“To spend those several weeks with them was great because I got to know them better; I got to hear their experience in leadership ... I loved gathering that data and listening to their stories,” said Father A.J. Gedney, parochial vicar, St. Joseph Parish, Cold Spring.

Over the course of the leadership training, the priests learn a variety of practical leadership skills, like, “How do you have difficult conversations with people? How do you ask and give effective feedback? How do you motivate peo-

ple? How can you listen?” said Father Gedney.

However, the program is tailored to priests, so in addition to the standard leadership training one might find in a corporate setting, they learned pastoral and ministerial leadership skills.

“They came in with the understanding that our job is not just the role of the boss of a parish or some ministry, but ministry itself,” said Father Gedney.

For Father Joseph Rielage, pastor, St. Edward Parish, Cynthiana, said that one of his primary take-aways was the need to delegate.

“It lets me know that, with the right group, with the right task and with the right goals, that I am not going to be the one that has to micro-manage. I can let others take care of things and get back to me,” he said. “That’s going to help me free up my time for more pastoral things.”

“What I’ve already seen bearing fruit,” said Father



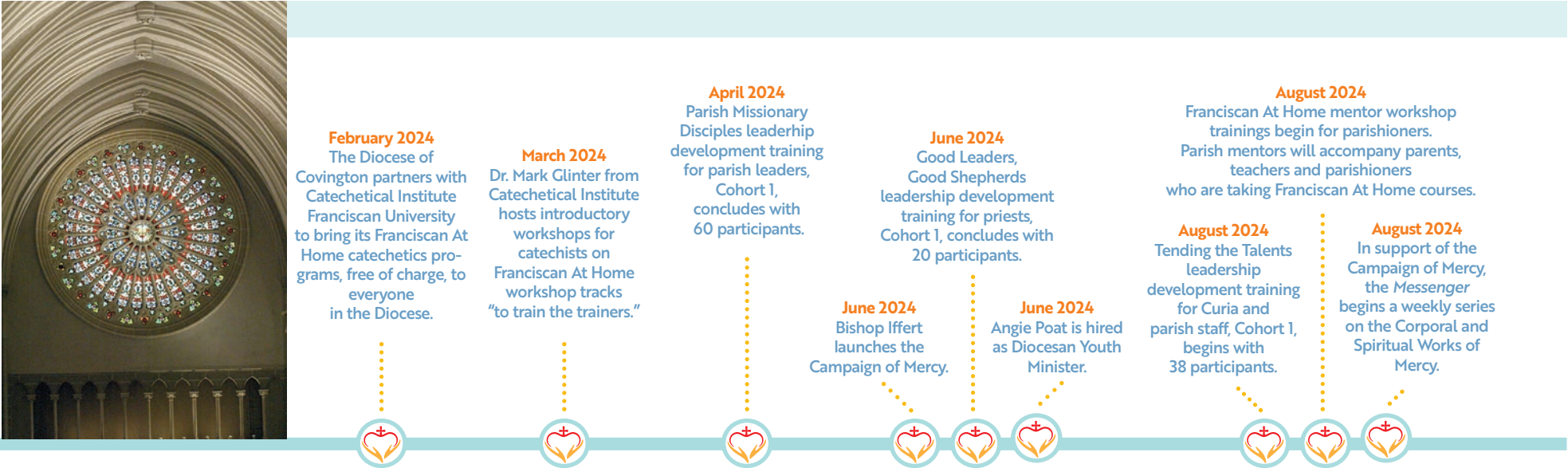
Gedney, “is being a better listener and receiving feedback better. Then, involving other people in solution and gathering solutions.”

A key aspect of Good Leaders, Good Shepherds training in the pastoral plan is the development of priests’ leadership skills. Father Gedney acknowledges the program’s success in this area.

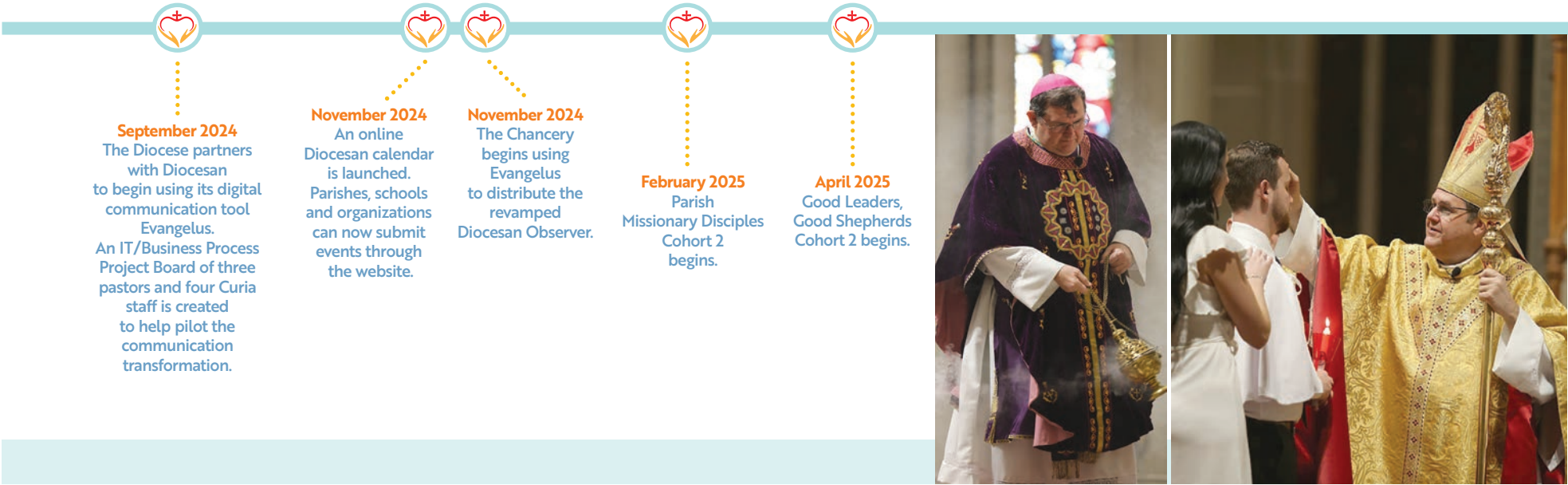
“It’s helping augment my leadership knowledge. This is very much intellectual; you could say book learning. We can’t always learn on the job, although it might be necessary, it’s nice to have a little of intellectual learning before you

apply it in real life,” he said.

Father Rielage said in appreciation of the training, “Good Leaders, Good Shepherd gives me the opportunity and the tools to be a good leader, be a good shepherd ... no matter how much you think you know, there’s a lot more out there to help that you don’t.”



The implementation of the Diocese of Covington's Strategic Pastoral Plan February 2024–November 2024



Tending the Talents empowers ministers of the local church to live out their ministry

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

As part of the With One Heart Diocesan Pastoral Plan much focus has been placed on the leadership development of those involved parish ministry — those being, deacons, religious sisters and lay ministers. These parish leaders have been invited to participate Tending the Talents, the sister program of Good Leaders, Good Shepherds, which is reserved for priests.

One cohort, consisting primarily of parish and Diocesan Curia staff, has completed Tending the Talents. Cohort two is preparing to start at the beginning of 2026, with those participating preparing to, “strengthen the talents God has given them so that they can be even more effective Catholic leaders,” as described in the Diocesan pastoral plan.

The parish staff of the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, completed cohort one of Tending the Talents and have been implementing what they have learned.

“It strengthened what they were already doing,” said Father Ryan Maher, Cathedral rector. “They (parish staff) already worked well together, but this just strengthened that.”

As part of Tending the Talents, each member of the staff underwent a D.I.S.C behavioral assessment which measures your, “personality in the workplace, how you

operate in the workplace,” said Sarah Wells, pastoral associate.

“The DISC instrument is really helpful, it helps someone to grow in greater self-awareness of who they are, who the Lord created them to be and where their gifts and talents lie,” said Father Maher.

The staff was encouraged to share their DISC assessment results with each other, to grow a deeper understanding of their colleagues. “It helped me grow in empathy for my coworkers,” said Ms. Wells. “Seeing the different priorities and values we naturally, innately, have and then learning that I can serve the other in that way.”

Cathedral secretary, Trisha Brundage, said “By understanding our various learning styles, it’s really helped us work as a team, knowing what our strengths are and who does what based on their strengths.”

“We’re more aware of each other, where each other is coming from and how we think about things,” said Mary Creech, facilities manager.

“I think there’s greater trust among the staff with each other. A deepening bond of trust that their work is supported by each other. The outcome would be a sense of the common mission, the common goal, that we are part of something greater than just what we do with the daily office work,” said Father Maher.

In addition to a deeper interpersonal understanding of the Cathedral team, Tending the Talents is also bearing

fruit in the day to day, ministerial work of the diocese’s Mother Church. Each team member recognized their key responsibility areas and set goals.

“We have a lot of pieces to our jobs, so it helps to get you focused on organizing those pieces,” said Mrs. Creech. “We don’t always think about our roles in the church that way but sometimes we need to because it gives us something to focus on and work towards.”

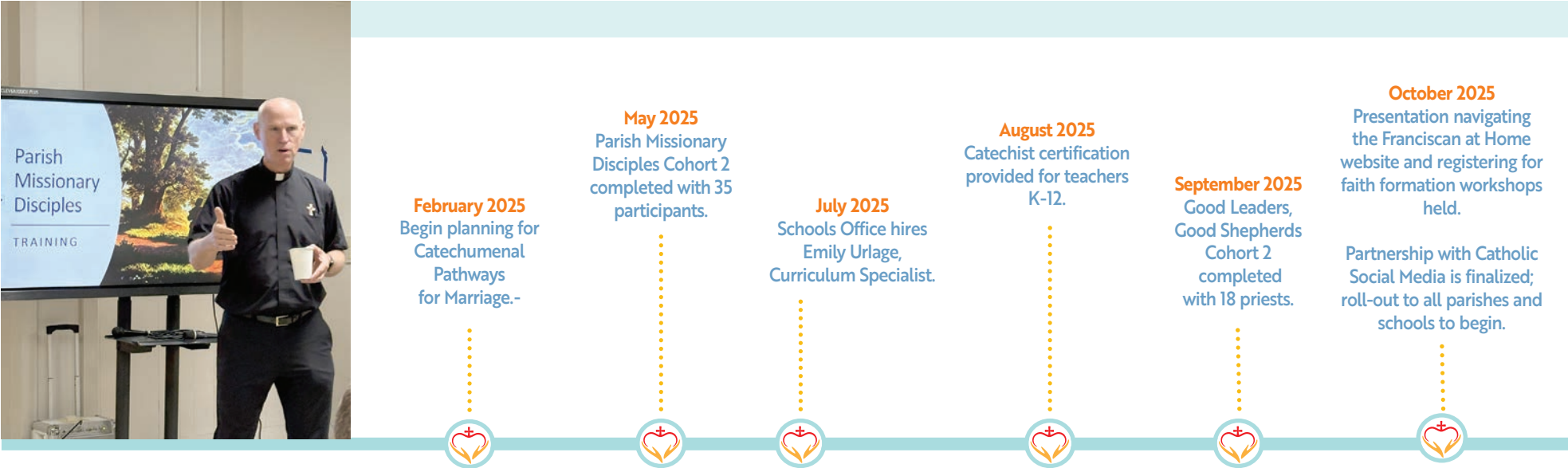
Ms. Wells said, “It definitely helped me organize my ministry, it helped me boil everything down and take it step by step.”

Mrs. Brundage said, “It identified what I’m doing and what I’m responsible for doing, and what goals that I have developed as a result of that.”

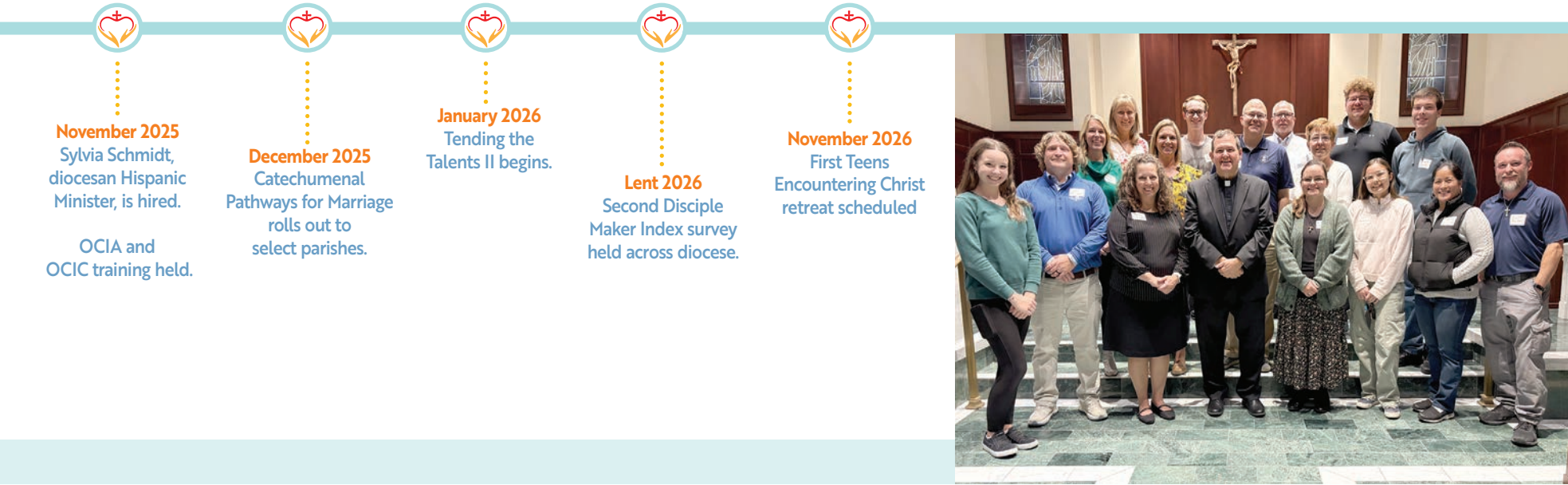
“The more we’re focused on the areas of our responsibility, the more we support each other in that work, that overflows through the parish life,” said Father Maher. “It’s helped them to see their work that really is ministry. No matter what work they do, it’s all related to the ministry of service to the Gospel.”

In reflection of her time at Tending the Talents, Mrs. Brundage said, “It is very motivational, it is very inspiring, I think it’s lifted me up, it was very energizing ... it’s positive.”

There is still time for parish leaders to register for the upcoming Tending the Talents workshop. Contact Deacon Jim Fortner at jfortner@covdio.org.



The implementation of the Diocese of Covington's Strategic Pastoral Plan February 2025–November 2026



Parish Missionary Disciples continue the mission of evangelization in the Diocese of Covington

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

This past spring concluded the second cohort of Parish Missionary Disciples (PMD) training — a program offering Catholic leadership skills to participants.

From the two cohorts since the beginning of the With One Heart initiative, individuals coming out of the trainings have taken what they’ve learned back to their parish and out to the rest if the diocese.

One of these individuals is Gerry Otto, a parishioner of Mother of God, Covington. Along with his wife, Bridget Otto, Mr. Otto felt a “calling” leading up to his retirement almost two years ago to involve a “significant amount of their time” into the life of the Church.

As part of Cohort 1, Mr. Otto said that PMD training “provided us a lot of tools and the opportunity to think about how to apply them as we, the laity, take more and more of an ownership of evangelization.”

Along with another couple, Bill and Kim Dehlinger from Blessed Sacrament Parish, the Ottos formed what they call the “PMD Laity Group,” to practice the skills they learned from their experience in the trainings — and, together established the “GYMM,” an acronym for “Growing Your Missionary Muscles.”

The monthly GYMM meetings, which are held every first Monday night, allow members of the PMD Laity Group to keep what they’ve learned from their training sharp, something that the Ottos and Dehlingers continue with to the present day.

Other successful initiatives of the group include the “Return” workshops, with 92 registrants at their most recent event, which provides resources for inviting fallen-away children back to the Church.

In addition, the same group has begun to share what they’ve learned to more laity in the Diocese of Covington. Together, information from the six three-hour sessions



Parish Missionary Disciples participants (Cohort 2) join in prayer as they are called to evangelization, at a training on May 17, 2025.

was condensed into three two-hour sessions, giving more opportunity for individuals to learn these skills. With assistance from the Curia in getting the word out, this program reached more than 30 participants from 10 different parishes in its first iteration at Mother of God Parish.

“Now is the time for the laity to engage,” said Mr. Otto, “No better time than now.”

Currently, the Ottos and Dehlingers are working to visit parishes to expand their “condensed PMD” programming, hoping that more parishes will host the training for their parishioners and the diocese at large. These trainings are

planned already for St. Mary Parish in January, and the word has been spread both in bulletins and in pulpit announcements.

“There are great opportunities to do so that are very practical and can fit into your busy life. Give it a try and we will support you, and you, from your experience, will teach us how to be better,” he said. “And so, there’s a two-way interaction in order that the laity can fulfill their place in the Church — and do it in a fun and exciting way — because there’s such an opportunity right now.”



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PEOPLE AND EVENTS

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

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

After Jesus, St. Peter is the most developed character in the New Testament. He is also, perhaps, the most human and most flawed, and the most courageous and remarkable of Jesus’ disciples. Peter’s story extends into the Acts of the Apostles, as we see him leading the early Jerusalem community, becoming the figure later known as the First Pope. **Join Father Michael Comer on a four-week series of talks on St. Peter,** Thursdays, 10 a.m. or 6:30 p.m., Mother of God Church, Covington. Dates are Nov. 20, Dec. 4 and 11.

In celebrating 10 years as an institute promoting civil dialogue surrounding religious freedom, **the Wm. T. (Bill) Robinson III ‘67 Institute for Religious Liberty at Thomas More University presents “Where are we now, 10 years later?”** The current state of religious liberty domestically and abroad,” Nov. 19, 7–9 p.m., Ziegler Auditorium, TMU, Crestview Hills, featuring keynote speaker, Rabbi David Saperstein, and guest speaker, Msgr. William Cleves. Free and open to the public.

Women’s One-Day Retreat “Beloved by the Father, Rooted in the Son, Renewed by the Spirit,” Nov. 22, 9 a.m.–5 p.m., Memorial Hall, St. Joseph Church, Cold Spring. \$25 registration fee includes continental breakfast, box lunch and retreat materials. Register by Nov. 16 at <https://stjosephcoldspring.com/church/view-only/adult-faith-formation-fall-retreats/> Questions? Contact Vicki Klocke at vklocke@stjoeeparish.net or (859) 927-2291.

The Holy Cross High School cheerleaders and coaches are sponsoring a Polar Express fun(d)raiser, Dec. 6, 6-9 p.m. in the Finn Center/Holy Cross gym, Latonia, for children ages 4+ (must be potty trained). Cost \$25 per child/\$50 family maximum. Wear pajamas, bring a blanket and pillow to enjoy the movie, snack, crafts and games. Register online www.hchscov.com or **contact Karen Bunton at karen.bunton@hchscov.com.**

“Reclaiming Original Grace: A Generative Narrative for Healing,” a webinar for survivors and those who care for them, Nov. 24, 6:30–8 CST. This presentation will explore the foundations of healing, both as observed and nurtured, in the context of accompaniment of survivor-victims. For information and to register contact Paula Kaempffer, coordinator for Restorative Practices and Survivor Support for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, kaempfferp@archspm.org.

Newport Central Catholic High School open house, Dec. 4. Come any time between 6–8 p.m. The open house will feature Academics in Action along with Fine Arts, athletic and extracurricular activity displays. Contact Stefanie Gray at sgray@ncchs.com or (859) 292-0001.

The Cathedral Concert Series annual Advent Festival of Lessons and Carols, Dec. 7, 3 p.m., with Bishop John Iffert presiding. Choral pieces sung by the Basilica Bishop’s Choir and Advent hymns respond to seven readings. The Historic Matthias Schwab will be played by guest organist, Richard Redmon. Open to the public with no admission charge. Freewill offerings accepted. Visit cathedralconcertseries.org for more information.

Advent REVIVE! Dec 9. at St. Thomas Church, Ft. Thomas, 6:30–9 p.m. High School youth and families invited for Mass. Adoration. Confession. Music. Social. Sponsored by the Diocesan Youth Ministry Office & St. Thomas Youth Ministry. RSVP appreciated, email youth-ministry@covdio.net.

Women’s Advent Day of Recollection at St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs, Dec.13, 9 a.m.–3 p.m. Features keynote speaker Anna Mitchell, co-host of Sacred Heart Radio Son Rise Morning Show. Lunch is provided. Free of

charge. To register email dkittyallen@gmail.com or text (859) 957-7595.

The Diocese of Covington’s Advent tradition — the Bambinelli Blessing — returns this year to St. Mary’s Park, Covington, Dec. 13, 5:30–7:30 p.m. Come together with the community for a free event including music, story time, hot chocolate and cookies — and stay for a special blessing of the Nativity infants from Bishop John Iffert.

“Where Have All the Fathers Gone?” an inspiring men’s conference about fatherhood in America, the challenges, the consequences and the results, Dec. 13, St. Agnes Parish, Ft. Wright. Mass, 8:30 a.m., followed by breakfast. Speakers are Father Michael Hennigen and Deacon Joe Grote and will wrap up by noon. Register at <https://www.cognitofrms.com/RCActivitiesInc7/NKYMensConference>. Questions? E-mail bill@deltarealtyusa.com or hebsfarm@gmail.com.

The Diocese of Covington is coordinating a pilgrimage to World Youth Day 2027 in Seoul, South Korea, for young adults ages 18 to 35. Bishop John Iffert hopes to join the pilgrims along with a few priests and deacons from the diocese. The estimated cost is \$5,500.00 per person and includes round-trip airfare, transportation, lodging, meals (from WYD) and tours. To reserve your spot, the initial payment of \$350 is due Dec. 31, 2025. The full amount must be paid by March 15, 2027. If you are interested in attending, leading a group, or making donations to help the young adults of our diocese attend, contact Isaak Abraham Isaak at (859) 392-1529 or e-mail iisaak@covdio.org.

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

The Holy Face of Jesus devotion, every Tuesday 6 p.m., St. Cecilia Church, Independence, with Benediction 7 p.m., for reparation of sins against the first three commandments: denial of God, blasphemy and the profanation of Sundays and Holy Days; includes praying the Litany of the Holy Face of Jesus, the Holy Face Chaplet, prayers of petition and silent devotion, all during Exposition.

Parents of Addicted Loved Ones, (PAL) is a support group that meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays, 6:30–8 p.m. at Catholic Charities, Latonia. It provides continuing education and support, at no charge, for parents with a son, daughter or spouse suffering from addiction to alcohol or drugs. No cost. Just come — 3629 Church Street, Latonia. For more information contact Client Care at (859) 581-8974.

Zoom Support Group for family, relatives and friends of victims of clergy sexual abuse, second Monday of the month, 6:30–8 p.m. CST; 7:30–9 p.m. EST. Most often family members, relatives and friends do not have anyone to talk with about their loved one’s abuse. They are considered secondary victims of abuse. These meetings are confidential and no one is forced to contribute unless they want to. The support group is not there to give answers but to share experiences. Participants are free to bring a friend if that makes them feel more comfortable. Everyone is welcome to attend no matter geographical location. For information contact



In commemoration of Veterans Day, Nov. 11, students at St. Pius X school, Edgewood, participated in a prayer service alongside veterans in their community.



The Crusader Classic basketball tournament, held at St. Henry School, Elsmere, kicked off the weekend of Nov. 8-9. it is the oldest season-opening tournament in the tri-state, and every game begins with prayer.

Paula Kaempffer, coordinator of Restorative Practices and Survivor Support, for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, at kaempfferp@archspm.org or call (763) 688-3978.

Are you interested in helping men and women change their lives? Catholic Charities **Jail Ministry Program is looking for people willing to volunteer to minister one of the county detention centers** (Boone, Kenton, Cambell and Mason Co). We are especially in need of Spanish-speaking volunteers in Boone County detention center. All training is provided. For information go to www.covingtoncharities.org/volunteer or contact Jill Walsh at (859) 581-8974 jwalch@covingtoncharities.org.

Catholic Charities volunteer opportunities: Volunteer Receptionist — Be the welcoming face for visitors and clients. Most shifts are four hours long. Mason County Jail Ministry Volunteers - Prayer/Scripture Ministry — Join a group of inmates in the detention centers for prayer and Scripture discussions during scheduled evening sessions. Commitment is flexible; volunteers are not required to attend every week. Visit <https://covingtoncharities.org> and click on the volunteer tab, or e-mail jwalch@covingtoncharities.org.

St. Mary’s Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, offers Veneration of a relic of the True Cross, on the first Friday of every month, from noon–1 p.m. Confessions are offered concurrently. The monthly veneration is held in silence and concludes with a blessing and the opportunity for the faithful to come forward to personally venerate the True Cross relic. The monthly veneration is sponsored by the Knights and Dames of the Covington-Lexington section of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

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 Diocesan Pastoral Plan — welcoming new and continuing the formation of the people the Lord calls his own

Laura Keener
Editor

The Catechesis and Evangelization Office has been working on the implementation of several goals following the priorities of Ongoing Faith Formation and Evangelization of the Diocesan “With One Heart” Pastoral Plan.

The grandest in scope has been faith formation and the Diocesan partnership with the Franciscan University’s Catechetical Institute. Through the Institute, the Diocese has been offering the complete Franciscan At Home library of courses and workshops free of charge to every person in the diocese. To date, over 1,100 learners have registered with Franciscan At Home. However, according to Isaak A. Isaak, director of the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization, 717 of those registered accounts are dormant.

“The challenge here is how to really engage all the people who are involved,” said Mr. Isaak.

To help engage learners, in October Mr. Isaak hosted an in-person workshop on how to navigate the Franciscan At Home website. The workshop was led by Brady Webb, the Catechetical Institute’s webmaster.

“He helped walk through the clutter of the website,” said Mr. Isaak. Mr. Webb also showed school and parish leaders where they can track the progress of learners and offered strategies on how to encourage them. “It was really helpful,” said Mr. Isaak.

Another way to help meet the engagement challenge is through the help of mentors. Currently, nearly 60 people from across the Diocese have been trained as mentors to help journey with learners taking the online Franciscan At Home courses. These mentors have been described as the “secret sauce” that differentiates Franciscan At Home from other online faith formation programs.

Additionally, the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization has developed and hosted 23 in-person courses for catechists and others. These courses were held during the summer of 2025. Mr. Isaak said, he is currently developing over 60 in-person courses to be held in the summer of 2026.

“We’re just trying to intensify our in-person workshops, because that’s a priority for the diocese. It brings people together, people network. They create friendships around faith formation,” said Mr. Isaak.

Another goal Mr. Isaak is working on is to boost implementation of the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA), formerly known as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). The two programs both are the process by which the Church welcomes new members and prepares them for the sacraments of initiation — baptism,



Keener photo

Dr. William Keimig, deputy director of the Catechetical Institute at Franciscan University, leads a workshop, Nov. 8, focused on revitalizing OCIA ministry and reigniting parishes. The goal of the catechist, Dr. Keimig said, is to teach to instill not just knowledge but desire.

Communion and confirmation. But, Mr. Isaak said, it is more than just a name change. “It’s even the way, the methodology, of transmitting the faith,” said Mr. Isaak.

Approved by the USCCB in 2021 for implementation starting in 2023, OCIA emphasizes the nature of the process as an “order” rather than solely a “rite” while retaining the core structure and purpose. A fundamental difference is that with OCIA, inquirers are welcome and encouraged to begin the process at any time, instead of waiting until the fall when the formal process would typically begin. And, it emphasizes continual spiritual formation as opposed to fixed checkpoints in a 10-month period.

Again, reaching out to its Franciscan University Catechetical Institute partner; the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization held two workshops, most recently on Nov. 9. Over 50 catechists and others attended the workshop led by Dr. William Keimig, deputy director of the Catechetical Institute at Franciscan University, focused on revitalizing OCIA ministry and reigniting parishes.

“OCIA becomes an instrument of renewal for the entire parish,” said Mr. Issak, “because the people who initiate OCIA are the entire community. It’s not just the ones who are involved on the OCIA team, and it’s not just the pastor’s

responsibility. The hospitality, the teaching, the witnessing of faith, it’s the entire parish’s responsibility to initiate.”

Mr. Isaak said that implementation of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan has been a time of renewal not just for the OCE but for the entire Curia.

“It helps us to really renew our office. How do we look at the things we’ve been doing in a new way?” he said. “I think the Diocesan Pastoral Plan came as a blessing to the Diocese, because every office is engaging with the people of the Diocese. We really are keeping the vision of the Bishop, which is the pastoral plan, and to make it alive in the parishes, to make it alive in the schools, to make it alive with our people and with whoever we meet.”

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New Marriage Catechumenal Pathways journeys with individuals from kindergarten through marriage to strengthen the home church

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

The Diocese of Covington’s marriage preparation program is currently undergoing a transformation in line with Pope Francis’ request for more intensive preparation and the ongoing With One Heart Diocesan Pastoral Plan. The new program, Marriage Catechumenal Pathways, is broken into four phases: Remote, Proximate, Immediate and Enrichment. These four phases intend to strengthen the sacramental faith formation and marriage preparation beginning in childhood and extending beyond the wedding.

Deacon Jim Fortner, diocesan chief operating officer and deacon assigned to Blessed Sacrament Parish, Ft. Mitchell, said, “Bishop Iffert laid out three strategies in the pastoral plan: faith formation, evangelization and leadership. This is faith formation.”

Marriage Catechumenal Pathways is not a new concept to those in the Church, said Deacon Steve Alley, St. Timothy Parish, Union, who is a member of the Marriage Catechumenal Pathways development team.

“The Catechumenal Pathways for Marriage was a request from Pope Francis. (The Pope’s concern) was that we, as a Church, don’t spend enough time training couples for sacramental marriage,” he said.

The first of the four phases is the Remote phase, where a stronger emphasis is placed on the age-appropriate edu-

cation of the sacrament of matrimony.

“I think the main focus for children is always on first Communion and confirmation. This is going to put emphasis also on marriage,” said Deacon Alley.

Starting in kindergarten through 12th grade, students will learn about marriage in a foundational way. The ideal will be that when students graduate high school, they will be equipped with the knowledge needed to discern what God asks of them.

This discernment is phase two of the Marriage Catechumenal Pathways, the Proximate phase. In this phase, high school graduates who have not yet found their vocation discern God’s calling for their life.

“They’re discerning whether they want to be married, be single, maybe go into some religious order. It’s that searching,” said Deacon Alley. “This is just a lot deeper, personal and faithful way to journey through life. When you come out of high school, you immediately start that discernment process.”

Phase three of the Marriage Catechumenal Pathways is the Immediate phase, which begins right after a couple’s engagement. One year prior to marriage, the engaged couple will receive a mentor couple from their home parish. This couple will journey with the engaged up to the wedding day and for the first five years of marriage.

“We marry couples, but then we don’t accompany them after they get married,” said Deacon Fortner. This new

structure will accompany the engaged and newly married on their journey. “Our hope is that once this program is set, it will be self-perpetuation. The couples graduating out of the five-year program would then become mentor couples for the next group,” said Deacon Fortner.

Also new in the Immediate phase is the betrothal ceremony where the engaged couple, in the presence of the priest, their family and friends, will receive a blessing as they make a commitment — a betrothal — to one another, said Deacon Alley.

Following the Immediate phase is the Enrichment phase, which is the first years of marriage, journeying with a mentor couple, to discover ways to practice the faith at home and to engage in parish life as a couple.

“The idea is that you become a community in your church, a community with other couples who may be dealing with the same things you’re dealing with as a couple,” said Deacon Alley. “The idea is that you have this small group of like-minded Catholic faithful couples.”

The formation of Marriage Catechumenal Pathways will change the way that the Diocese of Covington prepares couples for the Sacrament of Matrimony and marriage. Bestowing in them a renewed heart of spirit for the journey which lies ahead.

“The home church is the most important institution here. We have to form husbands and wives to create a strong home church,” said Deacon Fortner.

Diocese hires dedicated Hispanic minister — increases outreach to Hispanic communities

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Hispanic people play an important role in the life of the Church in the Diocese of Covington — making up large populations in parishes such as Christo Rey, Florence, and St. Anthony, Taylor Mill. Outreach to these members of the diocesan community was emphasized as a goal of the With One Heart pastoral plan — a goal that has culminated recently to the hiring of Silvia Schmidt as the new Hispanic Minister for the Diocese of Covington.

Mrs. Schmidt was the oldest of nine children in her family, growing up in city of Guadalajara, Mexico. Her grandparents were in the Cristero War — a targeted persecution of Catholics by the Mexican government in the 1920s — and held their faith strongly in their family even after the war. This background heavily influenced her faith as she grew up, and eventually came to the United States 30 years ago, where she started a family with her husband and two adopted daughters.

Previously, Mrs. Schmidt worked for the Couple to Couple League — an organization promoting fertility awareness and Natural Family Planning — for 25 years, but was inspired to apply for the role of Hispanic minister after seeing the role advertised in the *Messenger*.

“I thought, God, are you calling me?” Mrs. Schmidt said, having been the project manager of the Spanish-speaking arm of the Couple to Couple league. “I was at the point of asking, God, what do you want me to do?”

“In my heart, always, the Hispanic community has been there,” she said, reflecting on her time working for



Bishop John Iffert and Sylvia Schmidt, diocesan Hispanic Minister; (pictured behind Bishop Iffert’s left shoulder), recently met with Father Roberto Becerra, pastor, and the leadership of Cristo Rey Parish.

the Couple to Couple League. “That was one of the reasons I started working for the Couple to Couple League; I wanted Hispanic couples to know they have other options according to Church teachings.”

“My objective is to be the bridge between the Hispanic community and the Curia,” Mrs. Schmidt said, “Because there are two different cultures, and I understand them both. One I grew up with, and the other I married into ... I can understand both sides, and I can be that bridge that is sometimes hard to make. I want to facilitate things for

them. I understand some of their fears, some of their challenges with the language and the culture.”

Mrs. Schmidt’s first initiative in her role has been to introduce herself to the various parishes around the diocese with a Hispanic population.

“That’s part of the big picture that is my objective,” she said. “To be that bridge and that contact — that people feel comfortable calling me, texting me, meeting with me.”

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The woman in Proverbs 31

(Continued from page 4)

living in reverent awe of Him. As the Bride, the Church prepares for the wedding feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:7), adorning itself with righteous deeds. Her works, like those of the Proverbs 31 woman, are not for self-glory but to honor her Bridegroom.

In his apostolic letter “Mulieris Dignitatem” (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women), Pope St. John Paul II writes, “As the Redeemer of the world, Christ is the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride. The Eucharist makes present and realizes anew in a sacramental manner the redemptive act of Christ, who ‘creates’ the Church, His Body. Christ is united with this ‘body’ as the bridegroom with the bride.”

In extending the Proverbs 31 woman to the Bride of Christ, we see a call for all of us to holiness, service and devotion, each in our own unique way. The Church, as Christ’s beloved, is to embody these virtues, reflecting His love and preparing for eternal union with Him. Through trust, diligence, compassion, perseverance and reverence, the Body of Christ lives as the radiant Bride, awaiting her glorious Bridegroom.

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

Reflection on voting rights

(Continued from page 4)

about lines on a map; it is about representation, dignity and the enduring struggle against exclusion.

In oral arguments, we heard about how the Voting Rights Act has contributed to the development and appropriate representation of communities that reflect the rich diversity of the people of God.

One argument explains the potential consequences of weakening Section 2, saying that in Louisiana, “every congressional member who is Black was elected from a VRA opportunity district. We only have the diversity that we see across the South, for example, because of litigation that forced the creation of opportunity districts under the Voting Rights Act.” The right to vote has historically emerged in our society as fundamentally connected to citizenship and participation — two rights that historically were begrudgingly given to African Americans.

Over the decades, the bishops of the United States have consistently affirmed the importance of voting rights. From a 1965 testimony before Congress, to statements in 2013 and again in 2021, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has on several occasions reiterated that the right to vote for citizens and the right to civic participation are expressions of human dignity and essential means for fulfilling the duty to participate in decisions

that affect them.

In “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship,” the U.S. bishops’ teaching document on the political responsibility of Catholics, we affirm that “where the effects of past discrimination persist, society has the obligation to take positive steps to overcome the legacy of injustice, including vigorous action to remove barriers to education, protect voting rights, support good policing in our communities, and ensure equal employment for women and minorities.”

We recall the struggle for women’s suffrage, the ability of women to vote in our nation’s local and federal elections, the witness of Susan B. Anthony and others who eventually won this right for women.

As Catholics, our acts of solidarity must seek to uphold the sacred dignity of every person, and we must speak boldly when justice is at stake. Let us then, as people of faith, remain vigilant and prayerful. May we continue to walk alongside those who labor for justice, and may this decision protect existing rights and inspire renewed efforts to protect the rights of all God’s children — especially those whose voices were silenced for too long.

Bishop Joseph N. Perry is chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism. The ad hoc committee will transition to a permanent Subcommittee for the Promotion of Racial Justice and Reconciliation in mid-November.

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Obituary

Sister Mary Jo Hummeldorf, CDP (Sister Loretta Anne) died peacefully at Holy Family Home Nov. 6. She was a professed member of the Congregation of Divine Providence for 73 years. Born in Covington, Ky., in 1932 to Ray and Frances Sipple Hummeldorf, she made her first profession of vows in 1952 and professed her final vows in 1957.

Sister Mary Jo began her ministry as an elementary

teacher at St. Aloysius School, Covington, in 1952 and then moved to Winchester to begin a career as a secondary teacher at St. Agatha Academy, at Our Lady of Providence Academy, Newport and at St. Camillus Academy, Corbin.

From 1967 to 1971 she was involved in the community’s formation ministry assisting candidates as she continued teaching math and science at Our Lady of Providence Academy. Sister Mary Jo’s organiza-



Sister Mary Jo Hummeldorf, CDP

tional skills were recognized, and she became the province’s business coordinator from 1971 to 1973 and then was assigned as the administrator at Our Lady of the Way Hospital in Martin, Ky., where she served until 1979.

She was elected that year as the Provincial Vicar and served in this position until 1984. Upon the completion of that term, she went to the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, Cal., for some study and sabbatical time, followed in 1987 by a two-year course of studies in pastoral counseling at Loyola University, Baltimore. She then began clinical counseling for the

Diocese of Toledo and then for the Diocese of Lexington until 1995.

Sister Mary Jo then began her work as director of Moye Spiritual Life Center at St. Anne Convent, Melbourne, where she interacted with hundreds of guests, made various improvements in the facility and outdoor areas, and grew the retreat ministry until she retired to Holy Family Home in 2014. Her work continued there beautifying the outdoor spaces, gardens and courtyard, always planting, planning and weeding until her knees would no longer

allow her to get down on the ground and her stamina and physical strength waned. She loved creating beautiful gardens for others to enjoy and appreciate God’s natural world.

Sister Mary Jo was a gentle caring woman of deep faith and prayer. Her mild but direct manner strengthened others in counseling or in the on-going support of her sisters in community and ministry.

She was close to her family and often spoke of the loss of her mother at such a young age, her time at the orphanage, and the happy reunion of her siblings back home when her father remarried.

She will be missed by her religious community, the Sisters of Divine Providence and her many nieces and nephews. Her brothers, Raymond and James and her sisters, Elizabeth Hill and Frances Cassidy all preceded her in death.

Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated in Immaculate Conception Chapel, Melbourne, Nov. 11, followed by interment in the convent cemetery. Memorials to the Congregation of Divine Providence, 5300 St. Anne Drive, Melbourne, Ky. 41059.

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Youth ministry continues to grow in Diocese of Covington

Bailey photo

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

With children, teenagers and young adults surrounded by constant cultural and societal pressures, and a decreasing number nationally of young people in the pews, youth ministry became an emphasized demographic in the With One Heart pastoral plan — being a target area as determined by results from the 2023 Disciple Maker Index survey.

The Diocese of Covington responded quickly with the establishment of the diocesan Youth Ministry Office and hiring of Angie Poat as diocesan youth minister — now halfway through her third year in the role.

“I’m thrilled,” said Mrs. Poat about the progress of youth ministry in the diocese, “We’ve experienced an outpouring of generosity of people wanting to be engaged, to help, to participate.”

“The mission statement of the youth ministry office,” she said, “is ‘Planted in the house of the Lord, we shall flourish and bear fruit.’”

Testament to the growth of youth ministry include the rising attendance numbers to young ministry programs and retreats, and the recent chartering of official youth ministry teams this year — an idea consistent with the “With One Heart initiative of building grassroots ministries made up of team members from the community,” Mrs. Poat said.

The teams in particular target specific demographics,



Students participate in the Heart and Soul summer retreat, July 12–13, 2025 — one of many established by the diocesan youth ministry.

including middle school students, high school students and college-aged adults, as well as specific areas such as service projects and missions.

“Currently, the teams are in the process of filling their teams with a broad base of volunteers,” Mrs. Poat said on the current state of the youth ministry teams, “To implement ministry and programming ... we’re in the leadership formation stage of establishing our goals, building skills and networking and praying together.”

In addition to the formation of these teams, other recent successes of the youth ministry office include the establishment of a TEC (Teens Encounter Christ) retreat,

coming in November 2026, as well as the reignition and emphasis on Catholic scouting in the Diocese of Covington — with the recent establishment of an annual “Scout Mass.”

“I want to encourage all age groups — grandparents, parents, families — to build community and to integrate youth into existing ministries. You don’t have to have a dedicated youth minister to have an effective youth ministry in your parish,” said Mrs. Poat. “There are ways that volunteers can contribute to the ministry and to our teams and we will, in effect, return that blessing back to them and their parish.”

Diocese of Covington Youth Ministry

2025–2026 Events

Nov. 20–22

National Catholic Youth Conference

Dec. 9

Advent REVIVE

Retreat for high school students and family

Feb. 21

CONNECT retreat

Day retreat for middle school students

Feb. 27–Mar. 1

SUMMIT

Eucharistic retreat for high school students

March 15

Scout Mass and reception at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption

March 21

REVIVE

Games, music and adoration for middle school students

Apr. 2–4

Holy Week Missions

Jun. 27

CONNECT

Day retreat for middle school students

Jul. 11–12

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