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MESSENGER

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CNS photo/Robert Duncan

Participants at the 2025 Builders AI Forum gather at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome Nov. 6-7, 2025, to discuss how emerging technologies can serve the Church’s mission. The event highlighted Pope Leo XIV’s call to place artificial intelligence at the service of evangelization and human dignity. Dr. John Rudnick, professor, Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, Ky.

Pope Leo XIV urges Catholic technologists to spread the Gospel with AI

Robert Duncan
Catholic News Service

Pope Leo XIV said artificial intelligence should support the church’s mission of evangelization, urging Catholic technologists and venture capitalists gathered in Rome to build systems that help spread the Gospel.

“Whether designing algorithms for Catholic education, tools for compassionate health care, or creative platforms that tell the Christian story with truth and beauty, each participant contributes to a shared mission: to place technology at the service of evangelization and the integral development of every person,” the pope wrote.

Pope Leo’s message was read aloud Nov. 7 by Jesuit Father David Nazar during the 2025 Builders AI Forum, a two-day summit for idea-sharing and collaboration hosted at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

Since the beginning of his pontificate, the pope has emphasized the need for ethically grounded AI, but his message to the confer-

ence marked the first time he directly linked the technology’s promise to the church’s missionary work.

Forum organizers said the stakes are high, as AI tools increasingly shape how people seek meaning online.

“There are billions of people who do not yet know Christ and the truth that Christianity fully possesses,” said Matthew Sanders, a Catholic AI developer and one of the event’s organizers. “If the church’s guiding hand is not there, this technology has the power to do unimaginable harm, amplifying confusion and despair.”

Registration materials listed roughly 200 participants, including software engineers, venture capital partners, Catholic media producers, bishops, Vatican communications officials and Dr. John Rudnick, professor, Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, Ky. (See related story below.) The forum was structured as a working summit rather than a public conference, with most discussions held in small-group workshops.

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Thomas More University professor takes part in Vatican-sponsored AI Builders Forum

Laura Keener
Editor

A Catholic cruise with Catholic Answers has found Dr. John Rudnick, a year later, at a completely unexpected destination — the Vatican-sponsored AI Builders Forum. (See related article top of page 1.)

“Catholic Answers reached out to me knowing that I was working in higher education and asked me what we were doing in artificial intelligence,” said Dr. Rudnick. “They thought it sounded interesting,” and offered Dr. Rudnick an invitation to the Forum.

When Catholic Answers extended the invitation and he accepted, Dr. Rudnick said he had no idea where the Forum was being held. The awe of being at the Vatican and among 200 like-minded Catholic leaders — educators, healthcare workers, innovators, priests, bishops and others — has left Dr. Rudnick on an “academic and spiritual high.”

“It was a wonderful time. The people that I met were just as kind and as welcoming and giving and sharing as one could have. It was

(Continued on page 15)



Dr. John Rudnick speaks at the Vatican-sponsored AI Builders Forum held in Rome, Nov. 6–7. The Forum gathered international Catholic leaders, clergy, educators and innovators to examine how artificial intelligence can be responsibly integrated to reflect the Church’s mission, identity and commitment to human dignity.

Together with community, sisters pray for national immigration reform

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

As the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops continued their sessions of the Fall Plenary Assembly in Baltimore, faithful nationally were called to pray in solidarity with migrant communities and for the reform of laws surrounding immigration, Nov. 12, on the vigil of the Feast of St. Frances Cabrini—the first canonized American saint and an Italian immigrant.

The Intercommunity Sisters Peace and Justice Committee led the prayer service at St. Mary’s Park, Covington, joining with a sizeable crowd of sisters and laity for prayer and the recitation of the Rosary.

Divine Providence Sister Kay Kramer, a member of the committee, quoted Pope Leo XIV, saying, “Migrants and refugees remind us and the whole Church of her pilgrim dimension, perpetually journeying towards her final homeland, sustained by hope that is a theological virtue.”

“Hope should be our big resounding feeling today,” said Sister Kay, “Not despair, not sadness, but hope ... We know with gratitude that so many of our clergy, consecrated religious and faithful already accompany and assist immigrants in meeting their basic human needs ... We pray that the Lord may guide the leaders of our nation, and we are grateful for past and present opportunities to dialog with public and elected officials.”



(above left) Members of the Intercommunity Sisters Peace and Justice hold signs outside of St. Mary’s Park, Covington. On Nov. 12, the committee invited community members to join faithful nationally in praying for immigration reform in the United States.



(above right) A program for the prayer and rosary service depicts St. Frances Cabrini, the first canonized American saint and an Italian immigrant. The service was held on the vigil of her feat day.

U.S. Bishops issue a ‘Special Message’ on immigration from Plenary Assembly in Baltimore

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

As the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) gathered for their Fall Plenary Assembly in Baltimore, the bishops issued a Special Message addressing their concern for the evolving situation impacting immigrants in the United States. It marked the first time in 12 years the USCCB invoked this particularly urgent way of speaking as a body of bishops. The last one issued in 2013 was in response to the federal government’s contraceptive mandate.

Under the regulations pertaining to statements and publications of the Conference, a “Special Message” may only be issued at plenary assemblies, and they are statements which the President of the Conference, the Administrative Committee, or the general membership consider to be appropriate in view of the circumstances at the time. To show the consensus of the body, a Special Message must receive two-thirds of the Conference members present and voting at the plenary in order to pass. In a vote of 216 votes in favor, 5 votes against, and 3 abstentions, the bishops overwhelmingly approved the Special Message, with sustained applause of the body following the vote.

The full text of the bishops’ Special Pastoral Message follows:

As pastors, we the bishops of the United States are bound to our people by ties of communion and compassion in Our Lord Jesus Christ. We are disturbed when we see among our people a climate of fear and anxiety around questions of profiling and immigration enforcement. We are saddened by the state of contemporary debate and the vilification of immigrants. We are concerned about the conditions in detention centers and the lack of access to pastoral care. We lament that some immigrants in the United States have arbitrarily lost their legal status. We are troubled by threats against the sanctity of houses of worship and the special nature of hospitals and schools. We are grieved when we meet parents who fear being detained when taking their children to school and when we try to console family members who have already been separated from their loved ones.

Despite obstacles and prejudices, generations of immigrants have made enormous contributions to the well-being of our nation. We as Catholic bishops love our coun-

try and pray for its peace and prosperity. For this very reason, we feel compelled now in this environment to raise our voices in defense of God-given human dignity.

Catholic teaching exhorts nations to recognize the fundamental dignity of all persons, including immigrants. We bishops advocate for a meaningful reform of our nation’s immigration laws and procedures. Human dignity and national security are not in conflict. Both are possible if people of good will work together:

We recognize that nations have a responsibility to regulate their borders and establish a just and orderly immigration system for the sake of the common good. Without such processes, immigrants face the risk of trafficking and other forms of exploitation. Safe and legal pathways serve as an antidote to such risks.

The Church’s teaching rests on the foundational concern for the human person, as created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). As pastors, we look to Sacred Scripture and the example of the Lord Himself, where we find the wisdom of God’s compassion. The priority of the Lord, as the Prophets remind us, is for those who are most vulnerable: the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the stranger (Zechariah 7:10). In the Lord Jesus, we see the One who became poor for our sake (2 Corinthians 8:9), we see the Good Samaritan who lifts us from the dust (Luke 10:30–37), and we see the One who is found in the least of these (Matthew 25). The Church’s concern for neighbor and our concern here for immigrants is a response to the Lord’s command to love as He has loved us (John 13:34).

To our immigrant brothers and sisters, we stand with you in your suffering, since, when one member suffers, all suffer (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:26). You are not alone!

We note with gratitude that so many of our clergy, consecrated religious, and lay faithful already accompany and



OSV News photo/Brian Snyder, Reuters

Eight-year-old Zuanny arranges luminaries with messages about her mother, a DACA “Dreamer,” herself and her sisters during a vigil at La Colaborativa in Chelsea, Mass., Oct. 10, 2025, for the community affected by raids and detentions by Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

assist immigrants in meeting their basic human needs. We urge all people of good will to continue and expand such efforts.

We oppose the indiscriminate mass deportation of people. We pray for an end to dehumanizing rhetoric and violence, whether directed at immigrants or at law enforcement. We pray that the Lord may guide the leaders of our nation, and we are grateful for past and present opportunities to dialogue with public and elected officials. In this dialogue, we will continue to advocate for meaningful immigration reform.

As disciples of the Lord, we remain men and women of hope, and hope does not disappoint! (cf. Romans 5:5)

May the mantle of Our Lady of Guadalupe enfold us all in her maternal and loving care and draw us ever closer to the heart of Christ.

Bishops issue pastoral message on immigration, elect USCCB secretary, approve ERDs

OSV News

Immigration took center stage once more at the U.S. bishops' fall plenary assembly in Baltimore.

On Nov. 12, during the half day that was the second public session of the gathering, the prelates approved a "special pastoral message on immigration," voicing "our concern here for immigrants" at their annual fall plenary assembly in Baltimore. (For the complete message see page #.)

The statement came as a growing number of bishops have acknowledged that some of the Trump administration's immigration policies risk presenting the Church with both practical challenges in administering pastoral support and charitable endeavors, as well as religious liberty challenges.

In another action, the bishops elected a new secretary for their conference: Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana. They also elected a successor for Bishop Rhoades as chair of the Committee for Religious Liberty, and selected chairmen-elect for five standing committees.

The bishops overwhelmingly approved an updated version of their guiding document on Catholic health care, with substantial revisions that include explicit prohibitions against so-called "gender-affirming" care. They also gave the green light to hold the 11th National Eucharistic

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Paul Scherz, the Our Lady of Guadalupe professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame, speaks during a Nov. 12, 2025, session of the fall plenary assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore.


OSV News photo/Bob Roller



The Bambinelli and Christmas tree blessing returns for a fourth year, celebrating the local church

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

The Bambinelli and Christmas tree blessing is back for another year, Dec. 13, at St. Mary's Park, Covington, immediately following the 4:30 p.m. Mass at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. This will be the fourth of what has become an annual diocesan tradition, where Bishop John Iffert blesses the bambinelli (infant Jesus) of home nativities and lights the diocesan Christmas tree.



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




In this *Messenger* archive photo, Bishop John Iffert blesses the small baby Jesus, gently cradled in a young girls hands.

Jubilee Year Closing Mass

Dec. 28, 10 a.m.

Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington

Join Bishop John Iffert and the Diocese of Covington as we joyously end the 2025 Jubilee Year with a procession during the Cathedral's 10 a.m. Mass.



Correction

In the Nov.14 edition of the *Messenger*, it was incorrectly reported that the Latonia branch of the Kenton County Public Library has a donation bin available for the Holy Cross Elementary Shoe Drive. All donations should be dropped off at Holy Cross Elementary School. The *Messenger* apologizes for this error.



Bishop's Schedule

Nov. 21–22 National Catholic Youth Conference, Indianapolis	Nov. 25 St. Paul Parish feasibility study meeting, 9:15 a.m.
Nov. 23 Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 5:30 p.m.	Habitat for Humanity Pope Leo's Village blessing, 11a.m.
Nov. 24 Confirmation, St. Augustine Parish, Covington, 7 p.m.	Catholic Charities meeting, 1 p.m.
	Advisory Council meeting, 3 p.m.
	Nov. 26–28 Diocesan Curia closed in observance of Thanksgiving

The Christmas tree will stand tall in St. Mary's Park as a representation of the local church of Covington, as churches and schools decorate the ornaments which adorn the tree. While the blessing of the bambinelli is an active participation in the local church, "it's a way to celebrate together," said Jamie Schroeder, chancellor.

"It reminds us of the reason for season, which is the spirit of it. We're celebrating the birth of our savior, Jesus Christ," she said. The blessing of the bambinelli is a tradition popularized by St. Pope John Paul II in 1969. He invited children to bring their bambinelli to St. Peter's Square where he blessed them. Now, the tradition lives on in the local church of Covington.

"It's a beautiful way to celebrate the season, it's kind of like the Curia's gift to the diocese. It's one way for us to show our gratitude and appreciation for the people of the diocese," said Mrs. Schroeder.

This year, the Bambinelli and Christmas tree blessing will feature a performance by the St. Thomas Childrens Choir and the reading of a classic Christmas story by Bishop Iffert. Also available will be cookies, homemade by Curia staff members, as well as hot chocolate and hors d'oeuvres.

So far, the event as yielded an average attendance of "250 to 300 people who come each year," said Mrs. Schroeder. "It lifts your heart," she said, "to see how many people are out there. It's just exciting."

There is no registration required for the event, "all are welcome to come and be with us, to celebrate the season of Advent and to have their little baby Jesus blessed," said Mrs. Schroeder. Like last year, small bambinelli will be provided so all may be included in the blessing.

Give Catholic NKY provides opportunity for young adults to attend World Youth Day

Bella Bailey

Multimedia Correspondent

The Office of Stewardship and Mission Services in the Diocese of Covington has introduced to the people of the diocese a new way to give, inviting them to participate in a worldwide day of giving, Giving Tuesday. This annual day of giving promotes donations to any of the fifty-four registered diocesan organizations on December 2. The organizations have each submitted specific funding requests, which donors can peruse via the “shopping cart system,” on the Give Catholic NKY website.

Of these projects are new STEM Labs, air conditioning units, bell systems, classrooms, technology and more. Each organization has picked a project intended to improve the lives of their students, parishioners and community. The Office of Young Adult Ministry is no different, requesting donations for the upcoming 2027 World Youth Day, in Seoul, South Korea. “What we hope will happen is we will raise \$20,000 toward scholarships for young adults who want to go,” said Jamie Schroeder, chancellor. Currently, the cost to attend world youth day at the diocesan rate is \$5,500, a cost that is unattainable to most young adults.



“Most young people don’t have those kinds of resources without help from family, friends,” said Mrs. Schroeder, “we just want to make this as accessible as possible for those who want to go and that’s what all of the proceeds would go toward, helping them with the expenses of travel.”

So, far the diocese has 5-10 young adults interested in attending World Youth Day. The “once in a lifetime opportunity,” said Mrs. Schroeder, “is a worldwide gathering of youth,” that is held once every three to five years. The host country rotates, with the United States last hosting in 1993. It is a wildly popular, multiday event, that “brings together thousands, if not millions of people,” she said. The 2023 World Youth Day, held in Lisbon, Portugal, saw 1.5 million young adults gather to celebrate their faith.

“It grounds you in the fact that we’re all one body, no matter where or how many you are. It’s a uniting event,” said Mrs. Schroeder.

Donations made to Young Adult Ministry through Give Catholic NKY on Giving Tuesday, December 2, will be used solely to help offset the cost of attending World Youth Day for those interested in attending.

“We want people to seriously consider going,” said Mrs. Schroeder, “anytime you’re a young adult and you can attend something where you recognize that you’re not alone, that you’re part of a larger whole, it just grounds you in the fact that we’re all one body.”

Bishops’ pastoral message

(Continued from page 3)

Congress in the summer of 2029.

The bishops also heard a report from the conference’s budget chair, Archbishop James F. Checchio, outgoing chairman of the Committee on Budget and Finance. He said the USCCB is on solid financial footing for now, having restructured some operations while weathering the end of key federal refugee resettlement contracts, but he added that changes in resource allocations may be on the horizon.

Regarding the special statement on immigration, Archbishop Richard G. Henning of Boston told OSV News in an interview that the feeling “we have to say something” on the subject of showing solidarity with immigrants has been “kind of bubbling up from the bishops.”

“We’re pastors,” he said. “We care about the people we serve, and what we’re hearing from them is fear and suffering. So, it’s hard not to want to respond to that.”

In releasing the text of the statement late in the afternoon, a USCCB press release said it was “the first time” in 12 years the bishops’ conference “invoked this particularly urgent way of speaking as a body of bishops. The last one issued in 2013 was in response to the federal government’s contraceptive mandate.”

“As pastors, we the bishops of the United States are bound to our people by ties of communion and compassion in Our Lord Jesus Christ,” said the statement, which was approved by the vast majority of voting bishops and was met with a standing ovation.

Ahead of the afternoon public session, Archbishop Nelson J. Pérez of Philadelphia and Montse Alvarado, president and chief operating officer of EWTN News, spearheaded a press conference about Pope Leo XIV and the upcoming National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis. The pope is going to enter into a unique digital encounter Nov. 21 with young people attending the conference. EWTN News is the event’s exclusive multicast provider.

Archbishop Pérez told reporters that the encounter “reflects the Holy Father’s desire to connect with young people” and it “represents a virtual visit of the Holy Father to them.” During the gathering, the pope will address an expected crowd of about 15,000 young people ages 14-18. He will engage in a 45-minute dialogue with the attendees at Lucas Oil Stadium, marking the first time in history a pope has been a part of a digital encounter with American young people.

Alvarado emphasized the importance of “an authentic experience” for Pope Leo and the young people, “so that the Holy Father can see the young person asking him the

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VOL. 95

MESSENGER

No. 40

Official newspaper of the Diocese of Covington

Cathedral Square • 1125 Madison Ave. • Covington, Ky. 41011-3115
Telephone: (859) 392-1500 E-mail: messenger@covdio.org
www.covdio.org

(UPS-403-650) Published by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, Ky.; 44 issues a year (weekly except from June 1 to mid-August, when published every other week; not published the week after Easter and two weeks at Christmas/New Year's). Subscription rate: \$19 per year; \$40 foreign. Periodical Postage paid at Covington, KY 41012 and additional mailing office Cincinnati, Ohio 45203. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MESSENGER, 1125 Madison Ave., Covington, KY 41011-3115.

Advertising deadline: Wednesday noon, 9 days prior to publication date.
Editorial deadline: Friday noon, 7 days prior to date.
Subscriptions, address changes: Contact Circulation Dept. at above address.

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The Kingdom of Christ or Dictatorship of the Worldly

The readings for The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe — Cycle C — are: 2 Samuel 5:1–3, Colossians 1:12–20 and Luke 23:35–43.

“Almighty ever-living God, whose will is to restore all things in your beloved Son, the King of the universe ... that the whole creation, set from slavery, may render your majesty service and ceaselessly proclaim your praise.”

These words of our opening collect for the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, unequivocally state that it is the will of God to restore all things in Christ, that creation is to be set free from slavery,

and that the purpose of the entirety of creation is to render the majesty of God service and ceaselessly proclaim praise to God. This, of course, is true, however we must grasp that this statement of truth is also poses some deeply personal questions to us: Do we want to be restored in Jesus Christ? Do we want to be set free from slavery? Do we even want to see how it is we might be enslaved in various ways by the forces of the world, the flesh and devil?

It is quite easier than we think to become apathetic about the holiness of one’s life. Saying Christ is King may fall easily from our lips, but it is much harder to acknowledge that kingship with the ardor of our lives. It is easy to go the way of the world, but quite difficult to live in confrontation with the dictatorship of the worldly, which comes about as the consequence of rejecting Jesus Christ as King. The temptation is always to be more social than truthful, negotiating for our comforts within the confines of the worldly dictatorship, rather than accepting Jesus Christ as the Lord and King of our lives.

To live under the kingship of Christ is to be the target of the world’s animus. It is important to grapple with the depth of world’s hatred of those who belong to Christ. The theologian, Cardinal Jean Daniélou, describes it well:

“If I keep faith with Christ, I must incur the world’s reproach, it is impossible for me to be on good terms with the world . . . ‘The world’ [here] means the whole collection of those human tendencies that go against the Spirit of Christ, vanity, pride, hardness of heart, concupiscence; of which Christ himself said, ‘I am not praying for the world.’ [John 17:9] A Christian cannot agree with the spirit of this world, because there is a direct incompatibility between it and the spirit of Christ. So, it is natural for the Christian to be thoroughly disliked; his whole behavior is a living reproach. He has no love for the world’s ideals; this in itself is an intolerable position, because it amounts to a judgement and sentence passed upon the world. Therefore, the world hates him.”

That the world hates the Christian, because it first hates Jesus Christ, can be clearly seen in the Gospel: “the rulers sneered at Jesus ... soldiers jeered at him ... one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus.”

The rulers, the soldiers and the criminals in the crucifixion scene represent a Christological constellation of divine revelation: the scope of worldly powers opposed to the kingship of Christ. The rulers represent the forces of cynical political power; then and now, which understands power to be self-justifying by those who wield it. The soldiers represent the forces of egoism-those who get what they want by various forms of violence, believing that might makes right. Finally, the criminal gives voice to the

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Grace in a season of need: The generosity lifting our neighbors

As families across our region prepare for Thanksgiving and the coming season of Advent, Catholic Charities is witnessing a remarkable outpouring of generosity — one that reflects the very heart of the Gospel. In a year marked by unexpected hardships, including the

government shutdown and the loss of SNAP benefits for many vulnerable households, longtime benefactors and new supporters alike have stepped forward with a spirit of compassion that shines Christ’s light on real human need.

In recent months, the demand for food assistance has grown dramatically. Our mobile food pantries — serving Bracken, Grant, Gallatin, Mason, Owen and

Pendleton counties — have seen a 41% increase in the number of families seeking help in the past month. Each month, these pantries provide a week’s worth of groceries to individuals and families who might otherwise go hungry. Over the course of a year, Catholic Charities distributes approximately 400,000 pounds of food, and we conservatively estimate that this year alone, we will serve more than 6,200 households and 17,000 individuals.

Yet for every challenge, God has sent grace in abundance.

One longtime benefactor reached out simply to ask, “Can we help?” Already familiar with our mobile food pantry and the strain caused by recent government budget cuts, this donor quickly rallied friends, colleagues, and neighbors. Together, they raised more than \$10,000 — enough to supplement our TEFAP (The Emergency Food

Assistance Program) for every household we serve this December. Thanks to this generous act of faith, hundreds of families will gather around their tables with both food on their plates and hope in their hearts.

Another donor, moved by the stories of individuals who recently lost employment due to the shutdown, quietly mailed an unsolicited \$10,000 check with a simple note: “To be used for individuals who are struggling because of lost income.” This gift will allow those facing sudden financial strain to receive direct assistance when uncertainty can feel overwhelming.

Our advisory board has likewise responded with conviction, voting to allocate additional funds from reserves to ensure that no family is turned away during this challenging period. Their leadership embodies the mission of Catholic Charities — to stand with those on the margins and accompany them with dignity, respect and love.

As we approach Advent, the Church invites the faithful into a season of preparation marked by conversion, sacrifice and renewed hope. Advent is not merely a countdown to Christmas; it is a spiritual wake-up call. It reminds us of Christ’s first coming in humility, his presence among us now — especially in the Eucharist — and his promise to come again in glory. It asks us to open our hearts, to repent and to offer ourselves for the good of others.

The generosity we are witnessing today is Advent lived out loud.

In the face of growing need, our benefactors — old and new — are embodying the call to prepare the way of the Lord through acts of mercy that uplift our brothers and sisters. Their kindness is a reminder that God continues to work powerfully through His people.

This Thanksgiving and Advent, we give thanks for them, and for the countless ways Christ’s love is made visible in our community.

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

VIEWPOINT



Chris Goddard

MUSINGS



Sister Fidelis Tracy, C.D.P.

Waiting. We spend much of our life waiting. Perhaps, there is more waiting than enjoying the pleasure or experiencing the pain of various events. Maybe we are missing life as we are focused on what is to come.

At times we wait with eager anticipation and other times with dread. I distinctly remember as a small child waking early on the morning we were scheduled to go on the “Island Queen” to Catholic School Day at Coney Island. (You are certainly old if you remember the “Island Queen.”) I awoke feeling

that the time to get up and dress would never come. Time dragged on and on.

I also remember waiting in fear for various test results. Did I pass? Will I recover from an illness? Sometimes the future seems threatening. When will this storm be over? Will there be war, what is going to happen to the economy? Life is full of waiting.

Parents surely remember waiting for the birth of a child. Every student itches for graduation. Some waiting, as the end of our years of education, is ambiguous. What will future employment entail? Will there be a fulfilling job or a frustrating pursuit?

Are we always waiting? Do we ever just rest in the moment? Even prayer can focus on waiting. There is

Waiting

prayer for an end to political tension, for safety when weather threatens, for the future health of a loved one, for healing after a disaster. We ask and we wait.

During her prayer, Julian of Norwich heard God assure her “all shall be well, all shall be very well, all manner of things shall be very well.” Was this God’s invitation for her to be still in the moment and rest in the present? The most delightful moments of prayer are those in which we know ourselves as surrounded, encased in God’s love. Moments when we desire nothing, regret nothing, await nothing. These are precious moments of merely knowing we are loved with an infinite love.

We are approaching a liturgical season which is identified as a season of waiting. We await the remembrance of the historical event of the birth of Jesus. We also await the coming of Jesus into our hearts and the coming of Jesus at the end of time. We await the religious experience celebrated in our liturgies and prepare for various celebrations with family and friends.

There is a need to determine what gifts to give, what meals to prepare, with whom to gather. So much preparation for the near future. So many concerns. So much waiting.

Perhaps, this advent we are invited not to fret about the coming celebrations, the gift giving and gatherings but to take time to rest in the presence of the God who comes now. Rest without concern for the past or the future. Know God’s love surrounding you now. “Be still and know that I am God.” What a consoling invitation!

Divine Providence Sister Fidelis Tracy is a retired theology professor at Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, Ky

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 Dec. 4 and 11.

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 dkittyalen@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.cognitoforms.com/RCAactivitiesInc7/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 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



The St. Pius X School community, Edgewood, gathered for a Eucharistic Procession concluding with the recitation of the rosary. Parents and grandparents joined for this communal activity.

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.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS 2025

SPECIAL SECTION OF THE *MESSENGER*
NOVEMBER 21, 2025



Photo credit: Neom via Unsplash

“Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

Matthew 17:20

Newly canonized saint reminds us of the “pure joy” found in nature

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

“Every day, my love for the mountains grows more and more. If my studies permitted, I’d spend whole days in the mountains contemplating the Creator’s greatness in that pure air.”

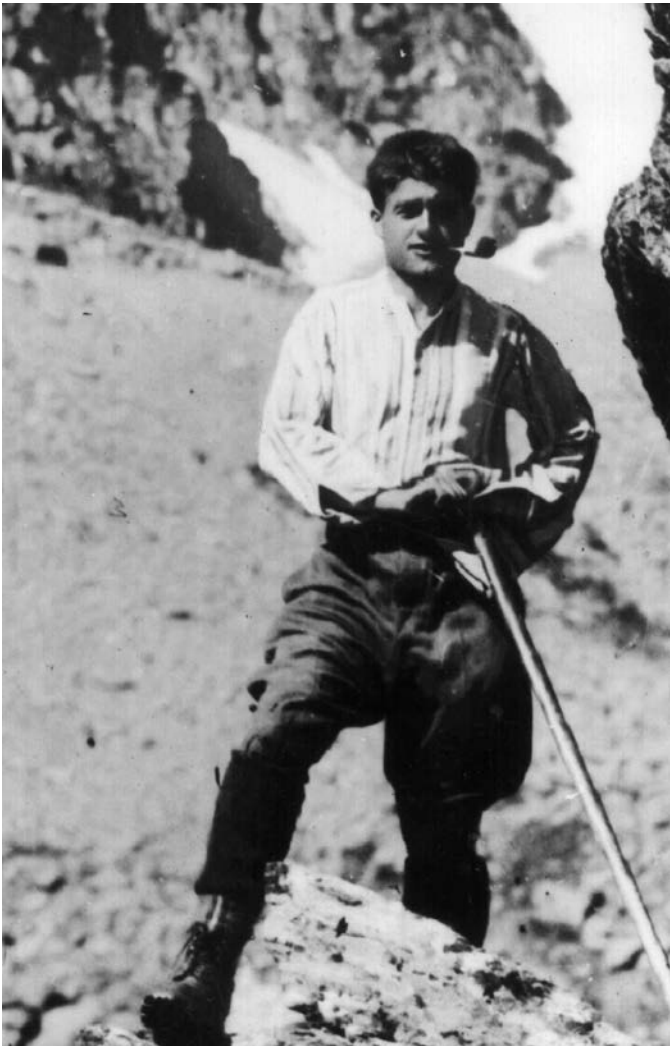
This quote, attributed to the young St. Pier Giorgio Frassati, who was canonized this September, speaks to a unique love of the saint — a love for the outdoors, for the mountains, for hiking and skiing. The hobbies he held in his lifetime as an outdoorsman have made him an unofficial patron of mountain climbers, skiers and similar athletes.

In another quote, St. Frassati described a “pure joy” that could be felt only in the mountains. The outdoors were a refuge to the young man during his life, a place where he felt “in tune” to himself and to the Lord.

An article from the Harvard School of Public Health quotes professor of nutrition and epidemiology Heather Eliassen, who explained that the outdoors and “exposure to green space” have been linked to “better sleep, lower blood pressure and reduced risk of chronic disease.”

“[Time spent outdoors] provides a combination of stimulation of different senses and a break from typical overstimulation from urban environments,” Professor Eliassen elaborated. “Exposure to green space results in mental restoration and increased positive emotions and decreased anxiety and rumination. Improved mindfulness can result from exposure to green space as well.”

Enjoying the outdoors is a net positive for an individual’s spiritual, physical and mental health — with St. Frassati as an example. You don’t have to climb any mountains to reap its benefits either — experiencing the outdoors can start anywhere from your local park, hiking trail or even your own backyard.



OSV News file photo

St. Pier Giorgio Frassati, an Italian who was a struggling student and who excelled in mountain climbing, is seen in an undated photo. He had complete faith in God and persevered through college, dedicating himself to helping the poor and supporting church social teaching. He died at age 24 and was beatified by St. John Paul II in 1990. Blessed Frassati was canonized Sept. 7, 2025, along with Blessed Carlo Acutis.

Caring for spiritual needs while you are in the hospital

Austin M. Schafer
Contributor

At St. Elizabeth Healthcare, our mission is to provide comprehensive and compassionate care that improves the health of the people we serve. Our team of dedicated hospital chaplains are professional spiritual care providers who play a pivotal role in the healing process, offering emotional and spiritual support to patients, families and healthcare staff alike.

As the Director of Pastoral and Spiritual Care, I have the sacred honor of leading a team of over 30 chaplains who serve across our six St. Elizabeth hospitals —

‘If you are in the hospital and would like communion or another sacrament, please request a visit from a hospital chaplain. With your permission, we will begin by reaching out to your parish community.’

Edgewood, Florence, Fort Thomas, Dearborn (IN) and Grant — as well as in specialty areas such as cancer care, palliative care, and hospice. Whether you or a loved one receives care at one of our facilities, we want to offer you the most holistic care possible on your healthcare journey with our chaplain services.

For many patients, a hospital stay — whether due to an emergency, surgery, or a life-altering diagnosis — can be overwhelming. In these moments of uncertainty, hospital chaplains serve as a beacon of peace and hope. They offer a listening ear, a calming presence and help patients connect with their own stories and spiritual resources. Through conversations about faith, illness and the human experience, chaplains help patients and families find meaning and comfort during some of life’s most challenging moments.

As part of your care team, our chaplains make regular rounds throughout hospital units. However, due to the volume of patients, we may not be able to visit everyone. That’s why, during the admission process, all patients are asked: “Do you have any religious or spiritual needs, or would you appreciate spiritual support during your admission?”

If the answer is “yes,” a referral is sent to our chaplain team. A chaplain will then visit to conduct a spiritual assessment, exploring your needs, spiritual resources, and whether you belong to a local faith community. If you’d like your parish to be contacted, we’re happy to assist with your permission.

Please note: being listed as “Catholic” in your medical chart does not automatically trigger a parish notification. Due to HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) privacy laws, your parish is not automatically notified of your hospitalization. If you would like a visit from your parish, you, your family or surrogate decision maker must contact them directly, or our hospital chaplains can also help facilitate this connection if you request it.

At our Edgewood Chapel, we celebrate Catholic Mass Monday through Friday at noon and on Sundays at 8:30 a.m. These services are broadcast live to patient rooms across all St. Elizabeth hospitals via our closed hospital TV network.

If you are planning a surgery or hospital stay, we encourage you to receive the Sacrament of the Sick from your local priest ahead of time. If you would like Holy Communion brought from your parish, please contact them directly. While we are blessed with five dedicated



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diocesan Catholic priests on our team, they are not stationed at every hospital or available 24/7. If you are in the hospital and would like communion or another sacrament, please request a visit from a hospital chaplain. With your permission, we will begin by reaching out to your parish community or we will help facilitate communion requests with one of our communion volunteers, as they are available.

If you are a trained Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, we invite you to consider volunteering with us. This ministry is vital in bringing the Eucharist to patients and families during their hospital stay.

In end-of-life emergencies, if your parish priest is unavailable, each diocesan deanery has a priest on call for emergency sacramental needs. These requests are initiated by you or your family to your nurse, who contacts our on-call chaplain, who then reaches out to the diocesan on-call priest. Please understand that response times may vary, as these priests also serve their parish communities.

In today's complex healthcare environment, the role of hospital chaplains is more important than ever. Their unwavering commitment to spiritual care, emotional support, and compassionate presence makes a profound difference in the lives of patients, families, and staff.

As medical technology continues to advance, the human touch remains irreplaceable. Hospital chaplains remind us that healing involves not only the body, but also the heart and soul. As a Catholic healthcare ministry at St. Elizabeth, we are deeply committed to your holistic care and the best possible patient experience. Thank you for choosing St. Elizabeth — it is a sacred honor and privilege to serve you. If you have any questions, feel free to contact our Edgewood Pastoral Care Office at (859) 301-2190.

Austin M. Schafer, D.HCML, BCC, Director of Pastoral and Spiritual Care, St. Elizabeth Healthcare, Edgewood.



Members of the St. Elizabeth Healthcare pastoral are team gather for a photo in the Edgewood chapel.

Catholic health care now and long ago

David Gibson
Catholic News Service

The Christian community's long tradition of providing hands-on care for the sick continues in today's complicated, ever-changing universe of medicine. It is a tradition rooted in very early church history.

This tradition always was motivated by the twofold goal of offering comfort and nurturing renewed health, while never losing sight of the suffering person's inner spirit and dignity.

The care the sixth-century "Rule of St. Benedict" mandated for sick monks in monastic infirmaries illustrates the importance attached to this tradition. "Care of the sick must rank above and before all else, so that they may truly be served as Christ," St. Benedict wrote.

He stipulated that "a separate room" must be "designated for the sick" and that they should be "served by an attendant who is God-fearing, attentive and concerned."

(Continued on page 10)



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Catholic health care

(Continued from page 9)

But care for the sick under church auspices dates back further than Benedict’s time. Hospitals serving both the sick and the poor were established in the fourth century.

One of the best known of these hospitals was a complex of buildings erected outside Caesarea, the capital of Cappadocia in today’s central Turkey. It came to be called the “new city.”

St. Basil the Great, as Caesarea’s bishop, was instrumental in bringing the new city into being around the year 369. Remembered down through the centuries as one of the Cappadocian Fathers of the Church and for his influence on Eastern monasticism, St. Basil took the Christian call to practice mercy with utter seriousness.

A severe drought in Cappadocia during his ministry only served to deepen his concern for suffering people.

Someone who steals a man’s clothes would be called a “robber,” he once observed. He then famously proposed that someone able to clothe the naked, but who refuses to do so, should be considered a robber too.

The new city established outside Caesarea was a “charitable multiplex for the sick, the paralyzed, lepers and strangers,” according to Peregrine Horden, a British scholar who studied such early hospitals.

In a funeral oration after St. Basil’s death in 379, another Cappadocian father, St. Gregory Nazianzen, praised the new city. It was St. Basil’s purpose, he explained, to tend to the sick, wounded people, those suffering from leprosy and

to the poor:

“Disease is regarded in a religious light” in the new city, and “sympathy is put to the test,” said St. Gregory.

But was hands-on medical care also practiced among Christians in the times of Christ and his earliest followers? Who then tended to physical wounds, set broken bones and did whatever possible to ease pain?

Many believe that Luke, writer of the Gospel of Luke and of the Acts of the Apostles, was a physician. Notably, the apostle Paul refers to him in the Letter to the Colossians as “the beloved physician” (4:14).

The New American Bible comments that “no Gospel writer is more concerned than Luke with the mercy and compassion of Jesus.”

Notice in the Gospel of Luke the kind of care the good Samaritan extended to an injured man he found along the road while traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho (Lk 10:29-37).

The parable of the good Samaritan says he “poured oil and wine” over the man’s wounds “and bandaged them.” Taking him to an inn, the Samaritan gave two silver coins to the innkeeper to provide for the man’s care, promising to check-in on the situation while returning from Jericho.

Luke often is described as a Syrian from the city of Antioch. The New American Bible says that his writing marks him as someone “highly literate both in the Old Testament traditions according to the Greek versions and in Hellenistic Greek writings.”

If, indeed, Luke was a physician, might he have been trained in practices linked to the ancient Greek physician

Hippocrates? Possibly Luke encouraged the preventive medicine of proper exercise and a good diet. Perhaps he prescribed purgatives, bandaged wounds, understood the toll exacted by human suffering and endeavored to comfort the sick.

The great distance in time from ancient Christianity to the 21st century might suggest that little similarity exists between the Christian community’s hands-on medical care now and that mandated by a Basil or Benedict.

It surely would astonish Luke to witness the science, technology and high costs of medical care today, coupled with the great expectations contemporary patients have of medicine.

Yet, these eras are not entirely unlike, particularly in their underlying goals. “A Shared Statement of Identity for the Catholic Health Ministry” posted on the website of the Catholic Health Association of the United States makes this clear:

It affirms that those working in Catholic health care “continue Jesus’ mission of love and healing,” hoping to “defend human dignity” and “attend to the whole person.” They “foster healing, act with compassion and promote wellness,” paying special attention to the “poor, underserved and most vulnerable.”

I suspect St. Basil the Great, given his strong desire to follow Christ by bringing mercy into the lives of real, suffering people, would feel quite at home with all of that.

Gibson served on Catholic News Service’s editorial staff for 37 years prior to retirement.

Love is key to Church’s mental health ministry, says bishop who lost family to suicide

Gina Christian
OSV News

“When the Church speaks tenderly about mental health, people listen,” said Bishop John P. Dolan of Phoenix, whose mental health advocacy draws on his lived experience of losing several family members to suicide.

Bishop Dolan delivered two addresses at the “Ministry of Hope Conference,” a global Catholic forum on mental health held Nov. 5-7 in Rome, organized by the International Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers with the patronage of the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy for Life.

The gathering drew Catholic mental health ministers, clinicians and other experts together for prayer, pastoral discussion and shared reflections to strengthen the Catholic Church’s engagement with mental health concerns.

Ahead of the conference, the Diocese of Phoenix collaborated with the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network — a pontifical society dedicated to mobilizing global prayer and action to serve the Church and humanity — in producing a video for Pope Leo XIV’s November prayer intention, the prevention of suicide.

Along with Pope Leo’s prayer that those struggling with suicidal thoughts would find love and support in their communities, the video — which was released Nov. 4 — fea-

tures several staff members from the Diocese of Phoenix’s pastoral center. Several segments were filmed at St. Francis of Assisi Mission in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Speaking at the Rome conference’s Nov. 5 plenary session, Bishop Dolan offered his personal reflection on Pope Leo’s November prayer intention, which he said “touches me personally and deeply.”

“I have walked the painful road of suicide loss within my own family,” said Bishop Dolan. “I lost my brother Tom, my sisters Terese and Mary, and my brother-in-law Joe to death by suicide.”

Such grief is shared by millions. According to the World Health Organization, more than 720,000 people die by suicide annually — 73% in low- and middle-income countries — with suicide the third leading cause of death among those ages 15-29. WHO also noted that “for every suicide there are many more people who attempt suicide.”

At the Nov. 5 conference session, Bishop Dolan recounted how suicide had wounded both his large Catholic family and his faith over the years. While just 13, he lost his brother Tom, then in prison, to suicide.

In his talk, Bishop Dolan noted, “Looking back, it is likely that he was struggling with an untreated mental-health disorder; but in the 1970s, we didn’t have the language or awareness to name it as such. We simply said he was ‘acting irresponsibly.’”

His sister Terese and her husband, Joe, died by suicide during Bishop Dolan’s seminary years, with the latter taking his life after learning of his wife’s death.

“It was Thanksgiving Day,” Bishop Dolan recalled. “The family gathered expecting joy and found only shock and sorrow.”

Ahead of his ordination, his younger sister Mary attempted suicide.

“It was then that I began to understand that what we were facing was not moral weakness but an illness affecting our whole family,” said Bishop Dolan,

adding his experiences of such grief prompted “deep questions about suffering, redemption and the mystery of the human mind.”

Yet the Church’s presence, even without formal mental health ministries at the time, could nonetheless be discerned, he said.

After his brother Tom’s death — which he later realized sparked the beginning of his call to both the priesthood and mental health ministry — he “found some comfort” in his parish community, through the “prayer, presence and love” of priests and women religious.

Following the deaths of his sister and brother-in-law, “faith became not an answer but a lifeline,” said Bishop Dolan. “Once again, the Church surrounded us through priests, sisters and parishioners who prayed, who sat in silence, who wept with us. They didn’t diagnose or prescribe. They simply loved. That love became, for me, the most credible sign of God’s mercy.”

Upon his appointment as bishop of Phoenix, “one of my first initiatives was to establish an Office for Mental Health Ministry,” which was “built upon three simple pillars: education, accompaniment and advocacy.

“I often tell people: we do not prescribe, we do not diagnose, we do not treat. We love,” he said.

During his Nov. 6 conference presentation, Bishop Dolan said that as a result of the ministry,” nearly every deacon, religious and most of our priests have received Mental Health First Aid training, along with many lay leaders.”

He stressed that the ministry’s formation offers not only psychological but theological awareness of mental health, instilling a “doctrine of human development, where psychology and theology meet in humility before the mystery of the person.”

Education is a key first step, he said, since “before the Church can heal others, she must understand the human person as a unity of body, mind and spirit.”



Seminarians are also being formed to “integrate emotional health with spiritual maturity,” and to regard the approach as “part of becoming shepherds after the heart of Christ,” said Bishop Dolan.

Accompaniment flows from such education, he said, through “Well Sessions” — meeting places in parishes, schools and Catholic outreaches that “allow people to talk openly about grief, anxiety and loss (including suicide loss) and to find support for loved ones living with mental-health challenges.”

(Continued on page 11)

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Grace for the awkward stages in our lives

Maureen Pratt
Catholic News Service

I’ve done many awkward things in my life. Coughed during a crucial conversation. Forgotten the name of someone I just met. Driven away from the store, leaving vital groceries behind. Other things too cringeworthy to write here.

Indeed, the redness of my cheeks has not always been due to a lupus malar rash but rather due to utter embarrassment. And my great red-face-inducing condition “du jour” is that I’m at yet another “awkward stage,” adjusting to sometimes precarious balance due to my diagnosis of autoimmune-cause poly-sensory neuropathy.

I’m making great strides (pardon the pun) in improving, thanks to a very patient physical therapist and lots of home exercises. But there are still times when I shake my head and think, “How geeky is this?”

Fortunately, along with my sense of determination to do all the good health care things my doctors prescribe, I frequently and broadly “exercise” my sense of humor.

The one-leg-standing reps that are a daily must have become my “inner flamingo” routine. The deliberate steps up and down the halls are my “great feats.” And if I improvise a pirouette instead of gliding around a corner? Well,

grace takes on many forms, especially when laced with laughter.

True, my propensity to laugh when combined with wobbly legs might make someone think I’m “laced” with something more potent than mirth. I know better; I don’t drink alcohol. But the ability to laugh kindly at one’s own embarrassment can bolster the spirit, taking the edge off of a reality that might otherwise be more biting.

Appropriately practiced, laughter can also help others cope with the illness, infirmity or challenge of a loved one. If we who have the ailment are capable of finding even a drop of humor in it, others might be less fearful, too. This creates a better emotional and spiritual atmosphere all around.

Besides laughing, there are other actions that I find helpful in dealing with the awkward moments (or longer stretches) in life. For example, I try again and again to improve. Practice might not make perfect, but it does build strength. Memory exercises, checklists and my now-infamous one-legged flamingo routine can and do make a difference!

Prayer continues to keep me grounded and focuses my attitude on humility and trust in God, whose balance is certainly perfect when mine is ragged. Facing reality is

vital, too. Without accepting where we are, we cannot possibly get to where we want to go.

It has always been difficult for me to ask others for help, but I am learning, baby step by baby step. Also, the metaphor of striving for balance is not lost on me.

I have a tendency to overschedule my days with multiple appointments and household chores, reading lists and epic “projects” like carpet cleaning.

This new normal for me is quite the antidote to overbooking. As my carpets remain uncleaned (although they’re not in terrible shape), I am more accepting that not all will or needs to be accomplished immediately. Those carpets will get cleaned. Sometime. This year!

Finally, one of the greatly comforting aspects of all the teetering is newfound resolve to mind the moment, the precious time now that God gives for us to strive for our best, and appreciate those seemingly small accomplishments that over time become sweet goals.

We never seem to outgrow awkward moments, although sometimes we exchange one type of them for another. The point is, I’m learning, to find the grace within and, while we do, keep believing and trusting that yes, it is there all along.

‘Forgiven’ and the need for confession revival

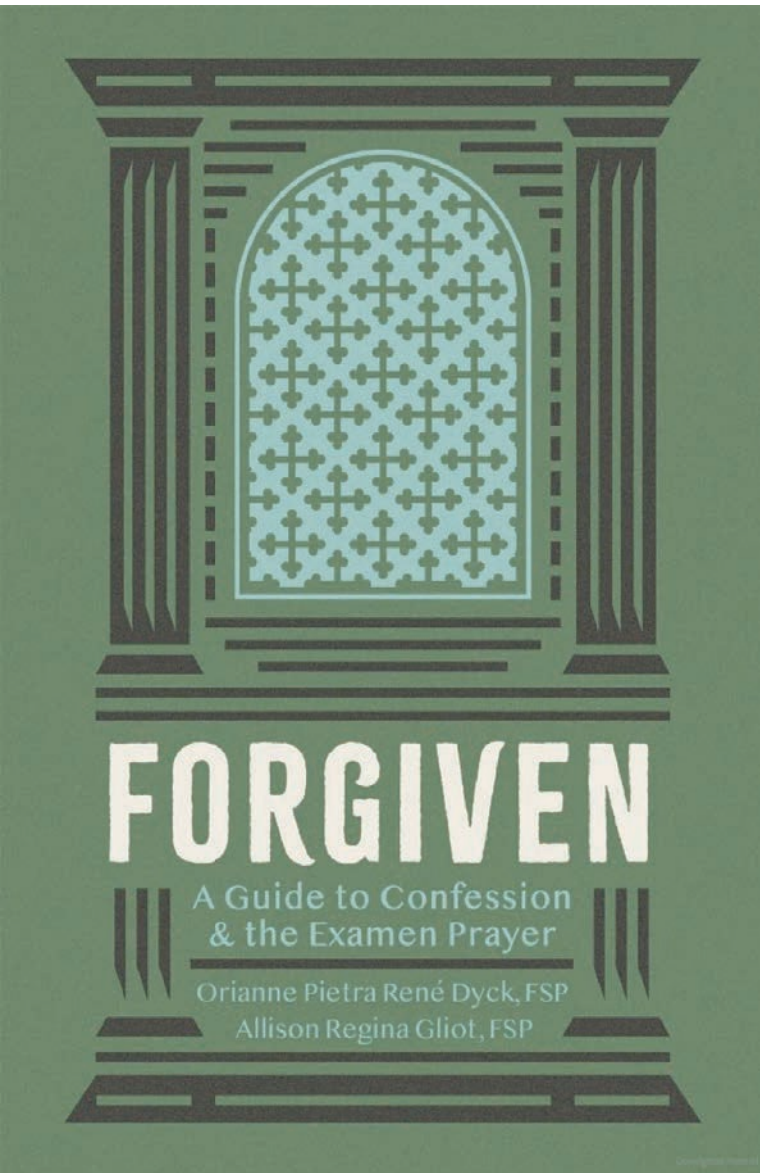
Michael R. Heinlein
OSV News

Over the course of the National Eucharistic Revival, I’ve seen several proposals that we need a “Confession Revival,” too. It’s hard not to agree. We’re all sinners in need of God’s grace. We all need the experience of God’s mercy in order to be people of mercy. We need all the help we can get as we press on to live Christ and give Christ.

I’ve personally noticed confession lines growing again in many nearby parishes. I hear priests preaching about the sacrament of reconciliation again. I see more resources for the faithful made available. The sacrament is vital, truly — for in it we encounter the life of the world, by whose dying we have been set free.

And they’re needed. It often seems like there’s an insurmountable gap in catechesis and praxis when it comes to confession. People hear about it. They had their training in first grade or OCIA, but there is not further consideration of the beauty, power and efficacy of the sacrament and its necessity for fruitful discipleship and growth in holiness.

And so I was very pleased to find in my hands the newly released “Forgiven: A Guide to Confession & the Examen Prayer” this summer. What a treasure-trove of material packed in just 133 concise pages. It features a thorough primer on everything related to confession: catechesis,



One minor suggestion I would’ve proposed to the authors is an additional section connecting confession and the Eucharist more concretely, as I’ve often found that we have much more to realize when it comes to the reciprocal tie between those two sacraments and it could contribute uniquely to the overall efforts to revive Eucharistic faith today.

“Forgiven” would make a great gift for any Catholic, or anyone considering becoming Catholic — best for those of high school age or over — because it is a book I’d like to think each Catholic would find useful. Such a handy, portable and practical resource like this can boost the confidence many Catholics need just to feel comfortable entering the confessional. It gives what’s needed to be fully prepared, and it can be brought into the confessional, too. The detailed outline of the rite itself is indispensable. But so, too, is the examination of conscience proposed so that one can be spiritually ready for confession. And the FAQ clarifies many lingering questions Catholics and non-Catholics alike might have about the sacrament who don’t have the benefit of sitting down for a chat with a priest or theologian to find out the answers.

Our faith is shaped by community, which is impacted by our sin. I think readers will greatly appreciate the quotes from saints and other holy people at the start of its various sections. It is a reminder that this sacrament is a gift to all God’s people and was a sure, steady, grace-filled means to holiness for the holiest among us. And for those of us who wish to follow their way, this book gives us the tools we need for overcoming sin and vice, but, more importantly, to becoming more conformed to Christ. Which makes its concluding section on prayer and Scripture quite valuable. Concise and carefully chosen, the biblical passages included, along with related prompts for reflection, reiterate the themes of the sacrament. And they compel us to more readily embrace those themes in our own discipleship and quest for sanctity.

All that makes “Forgiven” an important book for our time. I hope that dioceses, parishes and schools can find ways to make it available in bulk. We can all benefit from such a rich, convenient and useful resource to better prepare us for and deepen our experience of God’s forgiveness and mercy in the sacrament of penance and reconciliation.

Michael R. Heinlein is author of “Glorifying Christ: The Life of Cardinal Francis E. George, O.M.I.” and a promised member of the Association of Pauline Cooperators.

Love is key

(Continued from page 10)

FAQ, practical material for preparing to receive the

The ministry’s advocacy efforts have included meetings with Arizona’s governor and other elected officials with the aim of expanding mental health education and care in prisons, schools and the wider community. The Diocese of Phoenix has even teamed up with the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota, to enable psychology students to serve internships in diocesan parish schools.

In both his Nov. 5 and 6 talks, Bishop Dolan said that the mission of his diocesan mental health initiative was quickly tested, as his sister Mary — who after her earlier attempted suicide “continued to struggle for many years” — took her life two months after the office opened.

“Yet even in that darkness, I sensed that this ministry — born of suffering — was also born of grace,” said Bishop Dolan in his Nov. 5 address.

“We can say, honestly, ‘We understand, because we too have suffered,’” he said in his Nov. 6 talk. “Our grief has not closed us off; it has opened us wide. The Office for Mental Health Ministry is our way of transforming sorrow into solidarity, so that every person (no matter how fragile) knows that they are seen, valued, and loved.”

Gina Christian is a multimedia reporter for OSV News.

The cover of “Forgiven: A Guide to Confession & the Examen Prayer,” by Orianne Pietra Rene Dyck, FSP and Allison Regina Gliot, FSP.

sacrament and themed scriptural and prayer resources.

The book is very accessible and geared toward anyone who might be hoping to engage the sacrament more fully. Readers will find no stone unturned when it comes to all things confession. It accomplishes a great deal despite its small size in helping clarify confusion about the sacrament, dispel myths and lead the reader into a deeper experience and ease the anxiety that can often prohibit celebrating the sacrament.



St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky hosts record participants in 2025 Turkeyfoot Trot 5k

On November 15, over 800 participants joined for the 2025 Turkeyfoot Trot — a 5k race benefitting the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Northern Kentucky, on the campus of Thomas More Univeristy, Crestview Hills. Before the runners and walkers left the starting line, the fundraiser raised more than \$50,000 for the organization, whose ministries assist neighbors in need across the diocese. This year’s race was the largest so far since it began 18 years ago.



Baker photos



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The Kingdom of Christ

(Continued from page 5)

force of sin and transgression which believes it can revile Jesus Christ without consequence.

We see here the comprehensive rejection of the Kingship of Jesus Christ, which Jesus exercises not through political power or violence or lawlessness-the ways of the world-but in humility, sacrifice, and self-giving. The dictatorship of the worldly, with its cynicism, violence and free-form transgression is contrasted to the Kingdom of Christ, which is a “kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace.”

The proclamation of Christ’s kingship and kingdom places before us the stark choice to be slave to the dictatorship of the worldly or to be sanctified citizen of the Kingdom of God. Though assailed and tempted by the various forces of the world, luring us down the paths of cynical power, egoistic violence, and transgression, we make an act of profound trust in the Eucharistic Lord, knowing in my Holy Communion with Him, the Father has “delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Fr. Phillip W. DeVous is the pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Flemingsburg and St. Rose of Lima Parish, May’s Lick.

Spread the Gospel with AI

(Continued from page 1)

The registration list included representatives from Microsoft, Palantir Technologies and Goldman Sachs, alongside Catholic filmmakers and ministry leaders. Actor and producer Lorenzo Henrie — who is currently co-financing and starring as an apostle in Mel Gibson’s “The Resurrection of the Christ,” now filming in Italy — was also listed among those participating.

After opening remarks, participants broke into six working groups, each tasked with addressing a specific challenge. Topics ranged from AI in Catholic education to whether the church should attempt to devise a “Catholic Turing Test” for identifying signs of consciousness in advanced systems.

Interest appeared particularly strong in the “Building and Scaling Catholic AI” workshop, which drew about half of the forum’s participants, and was focused on using AI for evangelization.

“We’re starting to leverage AI to impart the truth of the Catholic faith,” Sanders told Catholic News Service Nov. 6. “But there’s more to the faith than just imparting truth. There’s the pastoral, human dimension,” he said.

A recurring concern was how to help people move from digital encounters with Catholic content into lived parish life.

Sanders noted that many users first encounter Catholic teaching through apps such as Hallow or Magisterium AI. Without support, he said, new believers may struggle to find a worshipping community.

“The question is how do we ‘off-ramp’ people from products like Magisterium AI and help ensure that they can find either a community or show them how the faith is lived,” Sanders said.

The goal, he added, is to connect people to a tradition or practice that resonates — whether Eucharistic adoration, charismatic Mass or the Latin Mass — so they are accompanied rather than left isolated.

In another workshop, “AI for Faithful Christian Storytelling in Media,” filmmakers, writers and digital creators discussed how AI might help broaden the reach of Catholic narratives.

For Eike Petersen of Aid to the Church in Need, the problem is not a lack of meaningful stories but a lack of visibility.

“From a communications perspective, there’s so much good work the church is doing for persecuted Christians around the world,” Petersen told participants. “But this is really something I think we can scale with AI.”

Petersen said he hoped the workshop would clarify “what the technology is that’s needed for that and how to approach it,” particularly in regions where digital outreach could expand awareness and solidarity.

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Bishops’ pastoral message

(Continued from page 4)

question, and the young people can see the Holy Father in this kind of a reaction.”

During the afternoon public session, the bishops’ approval of holding the 11th National Eucharistic Congress in the summer of 2029 came after a presentation by Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minnesota, chairman of the National Eucharistic Congress Inc., which will organize the event.

The location for the congress has not yet been made public. However, the possible cities have been narrowed down to three, according to Bishop Cozzens. The 2029 congress follows the successful 10th National Eucharistic Congress that took place in July 2024 in Indianapolis, as part of the larger three-year National Eucharistic Revival.

The bishops’ vote to approve updates to the “Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services,” or ERDs, came a day after a preliminary presentation on the changes by Auxiliary Bishop James Massa of Brooklyn, New York, chair of the USCCB Committee on Doctrine.

The ERDs — developed in consultation with medical professionals and theologians, and regularly reviewed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops — articulate ethical standards for health care in light of church teaching,

and provide authoritative guidance on moral issues encountered by Catholic health care.

Now, the seventh edition of the ERDs — endorsed by 206 bishops, with eight abstaining and seven opposing — incorporates guidance issued in 2023 by the USCCB’s Committee on Doctrine, which prohibited surgical or chemical interventions seeking to exchange or simulate the sex characteristics of a patient’s body for those of the opposite sex.

The faithful can expect a new edition of the Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the Divine Office, by Easter 2027, according to Bishop Steven J. Lopes, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Divine Worship, who made the announcement Nov. 11, during the bishops’ fall meeting.

Bishop Lopes, head of the Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter, expressed his gratitude to the body of bishops for their patience and their work over “what has been a 13-year process” from when the bishops first agreed to begin work on revising the Liturgy of the Hours in November 2012 with the aim of retranslation to “more accurately reflect the original Latin texts.”

Outgoing USCCB president Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for Military Services signed the decree of publication, moving the process to the publishers.

National/World

Believers must care for the poor and creation, pope says

VATICAN CITY — If people do not see themselves as “caretakers of the garden of creation, we end up becoming its destroyers,” Pope Leo XIV said. As the U.N. Climate Conference continued in Brazil, the pope dedicated his weekly general audience talk Nov. 19 to explaining how Jesus’ death and resurrection should lead Christians to “a spirituality of integral ecology,” which seeks the good of the human person and the planet. Believing in Christ does not isolate Christians from the world and its concerns, the pope said, but rather it motivates them to share with others how faith generates hope and action, including the kind of conversion needed to provide greater care for the poor and for the earth. Without concrete commitments, he said, “the words of faith have no hold on reality, and the words of science remain outside the heart.”

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Vatican-sponsored AI Builders Forum

(Continued from page 1)

very much a Catholic community and we were all rolling in the same direction,” Dr. Rudnick said. “You could say that our goal is to get each other to heaven, and our goal is to try to make sense of artificial intelligence in a positive way.”

Dr. Rudnick is a professor at the College of Business, Thomas More University, Crestview Hills. In addition to Thomas More University, other institutions of higher education with representatives at the Forum included Ave Maria College, Boston College, Catholic University of America and Notre Dame University.

His attendance at the AI Builders Forum is beneficial not only for TMU but also the Diocese of Covington. Already, Dr. Rudnick is working with Deacon Jim Fortner, chief operating officer, and Kendra McGuire, superintendent of Schools, to develop ways to share the information

and to develop AI best practices with educators and leaders throughout the diocese.

The Church now stands at a pivotal moment comparable to the introduction of the printing press — an inflection point calling not for hesitation but for imaginative, evangelizing leadership, said Dr. Rudnick. AI presents new possibilities to expand access to learning, deepen pastoral outreach and strengthen global mission impact. Rather than retreat, the Church is invited to guide the development of Christian digital humanism, ensuring that emerging technologies serve truth, beauty, justice and communion, he said.

During the AI Builders Forum, the 200 members broke into six workshop groups. These six groups are now forming global cohorts to continue discussing, evaluating and recommending policies on AI. Dr. Rudnick is part of the education cohort.

“We will try to help shape policies and guidelines in relation to guardrails, privacy, cybersecurity and how artificial intelligence can be applied in education to make

things more efficient and effective for faculty members and for staff, and to also be flexible and adaptive to the needs of diverse student learning types,” said Dr. Rudnick.

According to Dr. Rudnick, in the United States, Hollywood’s fascination and representation of AI, often as an antagonist in its movies, is a formidable hurdle to overcome in the general public’s understanding of AI.

“The Internet can be used for good things or bad things, and artificial intelligence can be used for good things or bad things,” Dr. Rudnick said.

The overarching theme at the Forum and one that will help guide the ongoing work of the cohorts is to leverage AI always with the dignity of the human person and the common good at the forefront. That, like with all human innovations, AI is a tool to be used by and for persons, not to replace persons.

“AI is changing hourly, and it’s something to be reckoned with,” said Dr. Rudnick. “But if we approach it with the foundation of truth, beauty and goodness, with regard to the need for the Catholic bias to be at the root, and for this to be aligned with our souls, then we’ll be okay.”

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