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Advent 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As I plan to enter the holy season of Advent, I am still basking in the glow of the National Catholic Youth Conference. During the three days of that conference (Nov. 19-22) I was in Indianapolis with more than 360 young people from the Diocese of Covington and more than 16,000 from around the country.

We all loved participating in the live digital dialogue with Pope Leo who confirmed for us that he only wears "White Sox." (Maybe the only joke I've every heard from the Vicar of Christ. Certainly, the first baseball joke.) Participants attended workshops on topics like how to distinguish God's voice from our own thoughts and outside noise, living life as a vocation, and the blessing and challenge of family life. They exchanged funny hats, played games, and tried to secretly tag one another with decorated clothespins sporting favorite Bible verses or fervorinos.

When I asked young people about their favorite part of the weekend, some mentioned the dialogue with the Holy Father as impressive and helping them feel seen and loved by the Church. However, 100 percent of the young people I talked to put Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the holy Mass or the sacrament of Reconciliation at the top of their list of most meaningful moments. Connecting with Jesus through the sacraments of the Church was the highlight of these days of celebration. I heard it from every young person I spoke with.

This answer inspires me as I start to think about how to enter my own Advent journey this year. It is a season during which we will prepare and send Christmas cards, shop for gifts and wrap them with care. It is important for me to remember that all these activities and traditions have developed to remind us of one truth — the greatest gift we have ever received and ever will receive is the opportunity to encounter Jesus. He is the reason, not just for the season, but for everything.

I have been re-reading a document produced by CELAM (the bishop's conference of Latin America). In 2007, they met in Aparecida, Brazil. The meeting began with a visit by Pope Benedict XVI and produced this document under the editorial guidance of Cardinal Gorge Bergoglio (later, Pope Francis). *Gift* is a key theme of the document. The Latin American bishops speak of the gifts of the Church in Latin America. They highlight the gifts of life itself, the Christian faith, the Eucharist, God's grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The ultimate gift that gives life and a new horizon to Christians, they say, is the **encounter with Jesus Christ**. This meeting and knowing Jesus — friendship with Him — is the source of new life and joy. "Knowing Jesus is the best gift that any person can receive: that we have encountered Him is the best thing that has happened in our lives, and making him known by our words and deeds is our joy" (Aparecida 29).

These two witnesses — the crowds of NCYC participants who find meaning in giving their full attention to Jesus, along with the teaching of my brother bishops Jesus Himself is the ultimate gift — sets the tone for my own Advent preparations this year. To prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, I must make room for him and rededicate myself to spending time with him at significant moments of each day. From that relationship — that encounter with the Lord — is born the joy and urge for peace that my life and our community so desperately need.

Months ago, diocesan staff helped me pick a picture for this year's Christmas card. It is a picture of the Baby Jesus in the manger taken at the Cathedral Basilica last year. He fills the whole front of the card. It is a reminder to me to let Jesus fill my life. Whatever greetings, gifts or meals we prepare and share, the love and joy we find in encountering Jesus motivate it all and are the only things of value we have to offer. He is the greatest gift we have received, the only gift that matters and the only gift of any consequence that it is our joy to share with our neighbors.

May your Advent season be a time of drawing close to Jesus, the only and ultimate source of goodwill toward all.

Bishop John Iffert

+ 

Diocese of Covington



Photo by Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash

First Sunday of Advent, Nov. 30





# NCYC sendoff Mass encourages students to surrender their hearts to God at conference

Bella Bailey

Multimedia Correspondent

Before their departure to the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis, 400 Diocesan attendees gathered in the gymnasium of Covington Catholic High School, Park Hills. Together, they prayed and celebrated Mass, before loading into busses and traveling to Indianapolis for a weekend of prayer and rejuvenation of faith.

The National Catholic Youth Conference brings together high school-aged teenagers and their adult chaperones from across the nation to celebrate and live their faith. The three-day experience draws tens of thousands of students to what has become one of the largest Catholic youth events in the United States.

“To me, thousands of youths growing in their faith and love for Jesus is inspiring,” said Father Michael Hennigen, parochial vicar of St. Timothy Parish, Union, who cele-

brated the sendoff Mass.

Father Hennigen had attended NCYC six times as a priest, prior to his most recent trip. He also attended once as a seminarian and twice as a high school student, giving him a well-rounded understanding of the impact the conference can have.

“There is a beauty as we celebrate Mass together each day, adoration, different breakout sessions and talks, meeting people across the country and booths you can visit about different ministries and vocations,” he told those gathered at Covington Catholic.

“Also, there are different games and activities,” he said. “That is one of the two places I will be most of the weekend, in the nine square playing, and hearing confessions — pray and play.”

Closing his homily, Father Hennigen encouraged students, “in the midst of the conference let us take time to reflect and pray. Stop at the Adoration chapel in the con-

vention center to give Jesus your highs and lows, good and bad, and respond to his mercy, grace and peace.”

For students Serrie Lawrie, Kaylie Maddox and Elise Yung, growing deeper in their relationship with Christ was the central theme of their excitement.

“I’m super excited,” said Serrie, “because I get to meet new people and get closer to God.”

Kaylie shared in her excitement saying, “I’m really excited, I’ve been looking forward to this for a while, getting closer to God and meeting many new people.”

Elise, as she was boarding the bus, said, “I’m really excited to meet new people and get closer to God.”

As NCYC drew to a close Nov. 22, students and chaperones have made their way back to the Diocese, each with a renewed passion for Christ.

(See related article page 6.)



(above left) One of 320 students attending NCYC kneels on the floor of Covington Catholic’s gymnasium with hands raised in praise of Christ, present in the Eucharist.

(above center) Two student attendees hug in anticipatory excitement during the sign of peace, waiting eagerly to board their bus to NCYC.

(above right) A group of students is all smiles as they walk with their luggage towards the bus that will take them to NCYC.

# Bishop Iffert and community leaders gather to break ground on newest Pope Leo Village home

Bella Bailey

Multimedia Correspondent

Habitat for Humanity of Greater Cincinnati broke ground on the rainy afternoon of Nov. 25, on the next phase of construction for its Pope Leo Village initiative. In attendance was Bishop John Iffert, Ron Washington, mayor of Covington, and friends of Habitat for Humanity of

Greater Cincinnati. The Pope Leo Village is a collection of nine houses in the Botany Hills neighborhood of Covington, rooted in a story of faith and charity.

The Pope Leo Village initiative was started in the American born Pope’s hometown of Chicago and has quickly spread across the country, before Habitat for Humanity of Greater Cincinnati caught wind of the project and was inspired.

“Two years ago, we started focused conversations with the City of Covington after a regional housing study ... showed a serious shortage of housing in Northern Kentucky,” said Joe Hansbauer, president and chief executive officer of Habitat for Humanity of Greater Cincinnati.

“We had the land here in Covington,” said Mr. Hansbauer, “so we began to move weekly. We began planning nine homes that would surround this block and help meet the need.”

The well-intentioned plans of raising houses for families in need quickly ran into an issue when a key piece of funding, “did not come through,” said Mr. Hansbauer. The team at Habitat for Humanity for Greater Cincinnati was




Joe Hansbauer, president and CEO of Habitat for Humanity Greater Cincinnati, addresses those gathered at the groundbreaking for the newest Pope Leo Village House.

not dismayed, however; and “took a leap of faith and began construction anyway,” he said.

After construction was already underway at two of the nine houses, an anonymous donor stepped in.

“The donor was moved by the example of Pope Leo the 14th, the first American born Pope, and his call to serve others,” said Mr. Hansbauer. “Pope Leo Village is bigger than just us, bigger than these nine homes. We are proud

(Continued on page 4)



**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 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



# Give the gift of textbooks this Giving Tuesday asks one Diocesan grade school

**Bella Bailey**  
*Multimedia Correspondent*

New this year to the Diocese of Covington is participation in the online national day of giving, Giving Tuesday. This day of giving is the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving, Dec. 2, and is meant to help put into action those feelings of thanks brought around this time of year. In the Diocese of Covington, 54 organizations have registered through Give Catholic NKY to be able to receive donations on Giving Tuesday. Those organizations include parishes, schools, diocesan offices and other diocesan sponsored organizations.

Each participating organizations has detailed, through GiveCatholic NKY.org, what projects they are raising



funds for. For many parishes, new sound systems and church bells are at the top of their wish list. For some schools it is new air conditioning, STEM labs or classrooms. St. Edward School, Maysville, is requesting funds to update its social studies textbooks for grades K-5.

“We don’t have a lot of money, but we’re trying to have a good school and we appreciate the help,” said Mark Hatmaker, principal.

The social studies textbooks being used now are “starting to get a little age on them,” said Mr. Hatmaker. “They need to be replaced with a newer version.”

At the end of the 2024-2025 school year replacement textbooks for reading were purchased, with social studies being the next subject due for new books. The total amount listed for the project is \$7,500.

“We appreciate whatever help people may be able to give us,” said Mr. Hatmaker. For a list of all the Catholic giving opportunities visit [givecatholicnky.org](http://givecatholicnky.org), then check back on Dec. 2 and watch the leaderboard for your favorite project.

# Congregation of Divine Providence Sister reflects on ministry and retirement ahead of fund collection

**Bella Bailey**  
*Multimedia Correspondent*

As religious communities continue to age, many congregations are faced with the rising costs of healthcare and retirement, costs which many are unable to front on their own. The Retirement Fund for Religious aims to offset those rising costs with its annual collection, having distributed \$1 billion since the collection began in 1988. This year the fund will be collecting donations via a second collection at parishes the weekend of Dec. 13-14.

Congregation of Divine Providence Sister Grace Schmursal will be celebrating 60 years of religious life next year; her vocation and ministry has been deeply woven with the lives of retired religious. Now, in her own retirement, she finds ways to stay busy and support religious in retirement homes.

Her vocation story began as a young girl, with two great aunts and a sister who were sisters of the Congregation of Divine Providence. “I always think my one great aunt prayed me into the convent,” said Sister Grace with laughter. “They were a great influence of even knowing that was a possibility,” she said.



Sister Grace Schmursal (pictured far right) leads retired religious at St. Walburg Monastery in an activity.

Throughout her ministry Sister Grace served religious organizations including as sacristan at the National Shrine, as a cook for seminarians in Washington and Baltimore, and more recently as an activity coordinator for retired religious. Working with retired secular at Carmel Manor before moving on to the adult day program with the Sisters of Charity. Following that Sister Grace coordinated activities for the retired religious of Mother Margaret Hall Nursing in Mt. St. Joseph, Ohio.

Though it has been 11 years since Sister Grace has been “gainfully employed,” she said, “I’m committed to my volunteer jobs.” These jobs consist of more activity planning for retired religious at St. Walburg Monastery, Villa Hills, and the Congregation of Divine Providence at St. Anne Convent, Melbourne. Sister Grace also delivers the Eucharist to those currently at St. Elizabeth Hospital, Florence.

“I told the Lord, as long as I could keep on walking, I will try very hard to bring Communion to the people in the hospital in Florence,” said Sister Grace.

Her experience working with retired religious has taught Sister Grace much over the years. “If I can get them excited about something to talk about besides each other, that’s a big thing,” she said. “I tried very hard for them to make as many choices as possible when I do any kind of project, because I think it’s so important that they can keep their own personal independence.”

In the Diocese of Covington many of the religious communities have a retirement system set up for their aged and infirmed. Additionally, many choose to utilize the St. Charles healthcare system. The Congregation of Divine Providence has Holy Family Home, where they provide personalized, intensive healthcare and hospice to sisters

in need.

The Congregation of Divine Providence is one of 266 religious communities who receive funds from the Retirement Fund for Religious. “Our congregation has received great benefits from it. I know they give it to congregations that are in need,” said Sister Grace.

“It really goes towards healthcare: medicine, nurses, rehab, that kind of stuff. It goes towards the need of the retirement,” said Sister Grace. “I know the sisters are grateful that they have been helped along the way with the folks that support this religious fund. I know we pray for benefactors on a regular basis every month,” she said.

Many retired religious have given their lives to serve their community, donations through the Retirement Fund for Religious are a way for the community to serve them in return.



## Bishop's Schedule

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Dec. 2</b><br>Priest Formation Day,<br>Sterling Event Center,<br>St. Barbara Parish, Erlanger,<br>9 a.m.                 | <b>Dec. 6</b><br>Foundation Planning<br>Committee, 9 a.m.<br><br>Visit to Athenaeum of Ohio,<br>5:30 p.m.  |
| St. Elizabeth Healthcare<br>annual Bishop’s dinner,<br>Ft. Mitchell Country Club,<br>5:30 p.m.                              | <b>Dec. 7</b><br>Mass, Cathedral Basilica of<br>the Assumption, Covington,<br>7:30 a.m.                    |
| <b>Dec. 3</b><br>Diocesan Pastoral Council,<br>6 p.m.   | Advent Lessons and Carols,<br>Cathedral Basilica of the<br>Assumption, 3 p.m.                              |
| <b>Dec. 4</b><br>Thomas More University<br>Board of Trustees meeting,<br>Thomas More University,<br>Crestview Hills, 1 p.m. | <b>Dec. 8</b><br>Curia Offices closed in<br>observance of the Solemnity<br>of the Immaculate<br>Conception |
| <b>Dec. 5</b><br>Diocesan staff service<br>awards, Summit Hills<br>Country Club, Edgewood,<br>11:30 a.m.                    | Solemnity of the Immaculate<br>Conception Mass, Cathedral<br>Basilica of the Assumption,<br>7 p.m.         |

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.



# Newest Pope Leo Village home

(Continued from page 2)

to join 20 Habitat affiliates across the country and be a part of the Pope Leo Village.”

“This home means the world to me and my children,” said recent Habitat homebuyer, Ayana Turner. “It represents stability, safety and the place we can forever call our own.”

“I truly believe that the gift we received when we took

our leap of faith here in Covington was the Holy Spirit sending us a message and today is just the start of what becomes possible when one person is inspired. Their action can spark a movement that builds momentum and changes lives,” said Mr. Hansbauer.

Bishop Iffert was invited to bless the newly minted construction site, with only a foundation poured. “The work begun today enlivens our faith and makes us grateful,” he

said. “We know the familiar Psalm, ‘If the Lords does not build the house, in vain do its builders labor,’ whenever we look to the interest of our neighbor or the community and serve them, we are, in a sense, God’s own coworkers.”

Following the blessing, a group of volunteers braved the rainy skies and lifted the first wall of the future duplex, “reminding us that we can build when we work together,” said Mr. Hansbauer.

Bailey photos



(above left) Bishop Iffert smiles as he blesses the construction with holy water.



(above center) Bishop Iffert reaches for a top beam on the wall that was raised as part of the event. On the beam he wrote 20+C+M+B+25. The CMB stands for the Latin prayer “Christus mansionem benedicat,” translated “May Christ bless this house.” The 2025 is the calendar year.



(above right) Volunteers and friends of Habitat for Humanity raise the first wall of the duplex.

## Deacon’s wife remembered for ‘lifelong mission’ of kindness and compassion

Teri Ann ( nee.Wiesman) Hardebeck, 66, passed away on Nov. 3, at her residence in Ft. Thomas, Ky. She is the wife Deacon Charles Hardebeck, St. Thomas Parish, Ft. Thomas.

Teri was born on June 21, 1959, to Barbara (nee. Schreiber) and William Wiesman and was the eldest of three daughters and a loving big sister to Debbie Wiesman and Jenny Shelton.

From an early age, Teri had a natural gift for caring for others, a quality that guided both her personal and professional life. Following her passion, she attended Booth Hospital School of Nursing and began her career at St. Elizabeth Medical Center, where she met her future husband, Charles Hardebeck.

Together, Teri and Charlie raised four wonderful daughters: Ashley, Christina, Courtney and Lindsay. Teri was a devoted and creative mother who dedicated herself to making life fun and memorable for her family. She especially loved planning elaborate Halloween and birthday parties, always finding joy in bringing people together.

Teri had many talents that she generously shared in countless ways. She was active in her community, lending

her time and energy to helping raise funds for various causes and events. Her willingness to help others and her enthusiasm for making a difference left a lasting impact on everyone she worked with.

As a grandmother, Teri’s love only grew. She adored her grandchildren — Estella, Cormac, Holden, Bowie and Eleanor — and was known as the “funny, energetic grandma” who filled their lives with laughter, love and the very best gifts.

Most recently, Teri served as a valued member of the Southgate Fire Department Auxiliary and a board member at the Rose Garden Center for Hope and Healing,

where she wore many hats including scheduling staff for the health ministry, supporting as a receptionist and cheerfully accepted the role of party chairwoman where she was loved.

She continued her lifelong mission of helping others. Her kindness, humor, and compassion brightened the days of all who knew her.

Teri had a pure heart, a generous spirit and an infectious sense of joy. She leaves behind her loving family and countless friends — because everyone who met Teri couldn’t help but love her.

One of Teri’s favorite songs was “My Way” by Frank Sinatra, and that certainly was true of her. She lived life on her own terms, with courage, compassion and an unwavering sense of self. Teri will be deeply missed and forever remembered by all whose lives she touched

Teri is survived by her husband of 42 years, Deacon Charles J. Hardebeck, daughters, Ashley (Jason) Nye, Courtney (Donovan) McCarty, Christina (Jack) Hardebeck-Humason & Lindsay (Alex) Wolfe. Also 5 Grandchildren, Estella, Cormac, Holden, Bowie , Eleanor and sisters, Debbie Wiesman and Jenny Shelton.

Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Nov. 10 at St. Thomas Church, with interment at St. Mary Cemetery Ft. Mitchell.



Teri Ann Hardebeck

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# Ready or not, here I come!

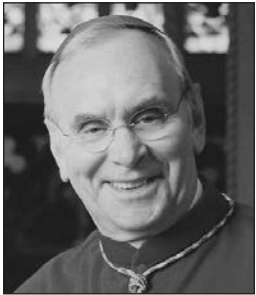
The readings for the First Sunday of Advent — Cycle A — are: **Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14 and Matthew 24:37-44.**

Perhaps you remember playing the game Hide and Go Seek as a child. Whoever was “IT” had to close their eyes and count, usually to 100, while all the game participants would hide. The first one found then became “IT.” Once everyone was found, the process was repeated. Obviously, if one of the participants could not hide before the person who was “IT” finished counting, it was too late! And

too bad, because that person was automatically “IT.”

We begin today the liturgical Season of Advent, a preparation for the celebration of Christmas. And this is no game! It is a serious time to prepare ourselves to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is a time of great expectation, a time of hope and excitement.

GO AND GLORIFY



Bishop Roger J. Foy, D.D.

St. Paul tells us in the second reading that it is the “hour now ... to awake from sleep. Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand.” He instructs us to “throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” (Romans 13:11-12)

In the Gospel passage, Jesus tells us to “stay awake! For (we) do not know on which day the Lord will come.” (Matt 24:36) Further, He says we “must be prepared, for at an hour (we) do not expect, the Son of Man will come.” (Matt 24:44)

The message of the Advent Season becomes clearer. The Lord will come one day at the end time. But He has already come into the world, at His birth. He will also come again at the end of time. And sometimes overlooked is the fact that the Lord is indeed present now.

In the Mass, the celebrant or the deacon prays as part of the penitential rite: “Lord Jesus, you came to gather the nations into the peace of God’s kingdom. You come in Word and Sacrament to strengthen us in holiness. You will come in glory with salvation for Your people.”

The Lord comes to us in Word and Sacrament! He is present here and now. The question we need to ask ourselves is whether we are taking advantage of His presence. If not, Advent is a good time to remedy that.

If we have become lax in regular attendance and participation at Mass, now is the time to change that. If we have not been to confession for a long time, Advent presents us with that opportunity. If we have not availed ourselves of all that our parish offers to prepare this Advent for the Solemnity of Christmas, now is the time to do so.

Taking advantage of the Lord’s presence in our midst now will prepare us for the Lord’s final coming — whether that coming is the end of the world or the end of our lives when the Lord calls us home.

Of one thing we can be sure — now is indeed the time to stay awake! Now is the time to prepare. Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

Ready or not, here the Lord comes!  
*Most Rev Roger J. Foy, D.D. is Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Covington, Ky*

# Cold in Kitale

I’m not exaggerating, but this has got to be the longest, coldest, rainiest winter season in the recent history of Kitale, Kenya where I serve as a Maryknoll lay Missioner.

For months, now, we have awakened to finger-numbing cold mornings and have been spared continuous downpours for only a few hours a day. Hand-washed laundry, with only a small window of opportunity to dry, threatens mildew in seams and edges. You can imagine the inner grumbling that accompanies the thought of stepping into a wood-fire heated shower which may or may not fall far short of a blazing hot temperature.

But on the tail of the inner grumbling, I

remember my students who return to their family homes on the weekend. I’ve been to those homes: constructed of mud; leaking roof, dirt floor; jerrycans for seating, a scarcity of recognizable furnishings. I have not seen behind the curtain that divides the small space into two parts to see the actual sleeping quarters, but I have seen the clay figures shaped by the students in my classroom, where inevitably, a molded infant lies sleeping on a tiny clay coffee table.

I remember that, in the protection of the brick walls of my one room cottage, I will be able to prepare a queenly

breakfast for myself. My students’ families will have “chai” (milk tea) if they are one of the lucky ones but will wait to have the first and only meal (rice and beans) for dinner. There will be no shower for family members: a basin of water, as cold as the outside temperature will serve to wash the body.

I am here on Mission; I am witness to the lives of my families of poverty whose daily life includes none of the comforts that I have always taken for granted. But what would it be like to live in the unforgiving space of their homes, struggling against the cold, the damp, the mud, with a gnawing hunger always present? And the questions never leave me: why me? Why them?

The start of the week brings our students back to the St. John Bosco Rehabilitation Center where they will stay in residence until the following weekend. Here, they experience a God-centered, stable environment: a bed to sleep in; healthy, regular, meals; housing secure against the rain and cold. Here they attend “informal school” classes, preparing them for entry into the formal school system of Kenya. It is a million-dollar opportunity for the lucky ones, selected by our social worker, to change the pattern of their lives of extreme poverty. Our “graduates” have become teachers, social workers, nurses and other professionals. At some point in the future lives of our students, they may even ask the question: why me?

*Theresa Glaser is a parishioner of St. Anthony Parish, Taylor Mill and a lay missionary for Maryknoll Lay Missioners. In January 2024, she began a three-year mission in Africa and will be sharing updates with Messenger. For photos see page 13.*

# Joy in simplifying

A few years ago, Marie Kondo, a Japanese organizing consultant, established a career by encouraging people to declutter:

“What gives me joy?” she told us to ask ourselves. If it doesn’t give you joy, out it goes.

I’ve repeated that little mantra, often with a touch of sarcasm, as I prepare our old house for a major interior paint job. Everything comes off the walls and shelves, nothing remains on the counters.

We’re stripping rooms to only the furniture the painters can easily cover. Everything else migrates to the attic, where I ask the inevitable question, “Where does all this stuff

come from?” Photos, clothes, knick-knacks, piles of books, souvenirs. Gifts, family memorabilia.

Moving everything around has propelled me to want to declutter. Organize. Get rid of “stuff.” And deciding — what’s treasure and what’s “stuff?”

During this season leading up to Thanksgiving and Advent, this project becomes spiritual as well as material.

I have a spot by the window where I pray in the morning, and the approach of autumn — and now winter — stirs something within me.

Maybe in part it’s the turmoil in our country and world right now. It’s a time of seeing things pass, of letting go, of feeling a sense of uncertainty. I watch the lush green foliage that climbs up my neighbor’s garage. It turned bright red, then its leaves wilted and fell. Now only the naked stems remain.

This is the cycle of life, I remind myself. Things pass away. I feel that cycle now more clearly as I get older. I

don’t say that in a gloomy way; I see opportunity in the paring down, the digging through the junk to the essentials, whether in my overburdened attic or in my overburdened soul.

And my faith teaches me to remember that seeds are falling into the dormant soil, seeds of rebirth.

Lately, I have begun praying each morning with the day’s Scripture. I read slowly, and I stop when something touches me specifically. Some days, I find the readings less inspiring or more difficult than other days, but I dig for the nuggets, and I let the prayer follow.

St. Paul tells me, “The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit intercedes with inexpressible groanings.”

I sense that groaning as the darkness encroaches and the air grows colder. I sense it as I peruse my attic room. How can I connect my morning prayer to this room, this collection of my life? How can I know what to let go?

Just this morning, I gave a friend some old issues of a Catholic magazine. I still had them tucked away as I was going to “finish” them — someday. She was delighted. Move on, I remind myself. The next issue will be in the mailbox soon.

Simplify, my prayer tells me. As Christmas beckons, I face the inevitable shopping list, and I pray about how to pare down, to simplify, to make gifting more about experiences than about more plastic and more stuff. This is an environmental and moral issue.

Sort, throw, save, give away. Make room for those things valued most. As I write these words, I see how they pertain both to the clutter and detritus of my material goods, but also to the clutter of my interior life, my soul.

Buy less. Give more. Worry less. Pray more.

There’s peace in sitting in the morning silence, seeing the naked stems of a once flourishing plant and realizing this, too, brings me joy.

*Effie Caldarola is a wife, mom and grandmother who received her master’s degree in pastoral studies from Seattle University.*



# Teens from Kentucky parish share about impact of their first NCYC

Natalie Hoefer  
The Criterion

INDIANAPOLIS, Ind.—For anyone who has not attended the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis, the number of young Catholic participants can be overwhelming.

A group of four first-timers from Cristo Rey Parish in Florence, Ky., certainly thought so.

Not only were the 16,000 youths at this year’s Nov. 20-22 event more Catholics than the four teens had seen at one time, but the number was equal to half the population of their entire hometown.

Henry Cruz stood in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis taking in the scene on Nov. 20.

“It’s pretty exciting,” said the high school freshman on the first day of the conference. “The environment is filled with a lot of energy, and you can feel God present.”

This was not just the first time he and his three friends—Joseph Barragan, Brian Domingo-Simon and Alan Orzco— attended NCYC. It was the first time their parish had ever sent a group to the youth-focused event.

Cristo Rey was founded in the Diocese of Covington,

Ky, in 2004. The Hispanic faith community did not have its own church until about 10 years ago.

“It means a lot for them to be here because they are kids who don’t see anything but just what’s within our [faith] community,” said the group’s chaperone Maricela Cruz. Cruz, Henry’s mom, helps with the formation of the parish’s confirmands.

“We are called the universal Church,” she continued. “But when we don’t go out there, we don’t know what that means. Here [at NCYC], they can get to interact with other people and see that our Church is not just our parish.”

The four teens were chosen from among Cristo Rey’s youths to attend the conference based on their service within the parish, Cruz explained. The group’s registration and expenses were paid for by the parish and with scholarships through the Diocese of Covington.

Because he was selected, “I think it’s a blessing to be here,” said high school junior Alan Orozco on Nov. 20. “It’s a big opportunity for me.”

Cristo Rey’s parochial administrator Father Roberto Becerra Reyes was not able to join the group.

But speaking by phone, with Cruz interpreting in

Spanish and English, he said he was glad for the boys “to be part of this great thing of our Church.”

The priest didn’t send the teens with a specific task in mind. But he hoped they might return with a desire “to strengthen the Church and the growth of the parish in spirit, and to keep going with the mission of growing the Church as young adults.”

‘Best experience I ever had’

By the end of the conference on Nov. 22, the teens had moved from excited to ignited.

“It was incredible,” Henry said about the experience, with Alan adding it was “really powerful, really beautiful.”

“I met a lot of people,” said Brian, a high school freshman. “We traded bracelets and just started talking about where they’re from, what church they go to.”

Joseph, a high school junior, also appreciated getting to “talk to other people who feel and think about religion like I do.”

Hearing Pope Leo XIV address the 16,000 teens during a live digital session in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis was a highlight.



(above left) Maricela Cruz, left, Brian Domingo-Simon, Alan Orozco, Joseph Barragan and Henry Cruz, all of Cristo Rey Parish in Florence, Ky., pose in the interactive exhibit hall in the Indiana Convention Center on Nov. 20, the first day of this year’s National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis.

(above right) Deacon Robert Beyke of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis explains a game to Brian Domingo-Simon, second from left, Henry Cruz, Joseph Barragan and Alan Orozco, all members of Cristo Rey Parish in Florence, Ky., on Nov. 20 during the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis.



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formance earlier in the evening.

“Everyone coming together praising with music, jumping, singing—it was cool seeing all the youth come together and sing their hearts out to the Lord,” he said.

Joseph was one of those lending his voice in praise during adoration.

“I was singing my heart out and able to let myself adore [Christ] without worrying about getting judged, because other people were doing the same thing,” he said.

As the teens talked about the impact of their NCYC experience, it seemed like Father Reyes’ hopes might come to fruition.

“I want to do more things to help my church or help start a youth group and get young people involved in it,” said Joseph.

Henry feels called to do the same.

“I definitely want to make a youth group here [at Cristo Rey] and involve the younger people more in our church, get them to come to adoration and get together to praise the Lord as a young group of kids,” he said.

The theme of NCYC this year in English and Spanish was “I AM/Yo Soy.” As the teens from Cristo Rey reflected on their experience, they developed their own “I AM” statements to capture their post-conference feelings.

Henry: “I AM chosen.”

Brian: “I AM loved.”

Alan: “I AM Jesus Christ’s son.”

Joseph: “I AM called.”

Joseph had one more statement to add about NCYC: “It was the most amazing, best experience I ever had.”

Natalie Hoefer is a reporter for The Criterion, the Catholic newspaper for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, Indiana.



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/>.

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**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](http://www.hchscov.com) or **contact Karen Bunton at [karen.bunton@hchscov.com](mailto:karen.bunton@hchscov.com)**.

**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](mailto: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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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/RCActivitiesInc7/NKYMensConference>. Questions? E-mail [bill@deltarealtyusa.com](mailto:bill@deltarealtyusa.com) or [hebsfarm@gmail.com](mailto:hebsfarm@gmail.com).

**Please join the Mother of God music ministry for a Lessons and Carols concert** Dec. 20, 3 p.m., Mother of God Church, Covington. Experience the joy of the season through Scripture and song, with organist, Meg Booker, and special performances by violin, piano and trumpet.



Recently, three Diocese of Covington schools participated Socktober. Socktober is an annual event to raise socks for the less fortunate in the Northern Kentucky area. St. Pius, Edgewood, St. Joseph, Crescent Springs, and St. Cecelia, Independence, collected more than 10,000 pairs of socks. The socks were distributed to The Parish Kitchen, The Emergency Shelter of Northern Kentucky, The Life Learning Center and The Brighton Center. One of the classrooms that collected the most socks, pictured here, is Mrs. McElfresh’s third grade class from Saint Cecelia during their pizza party.

**The Diocese of Covington is offering 63 FREE in-person adult Catholic faith formation workshops**, June 8-11, 2026, at Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, Administration Building (Library classrooms). All workshops are broken into two parts and scheduled for two consecutive days, 1.5 hours per day. Instructors will provide topical information, video content, and time for open discussion. Create a free account under your parish or school to access these and 200+ additional workshops at <https://franciscanathome.com>. The workshops are open to everyone who wants to learn more about their Catholic faith. There is something for everyone. Visit <https://covdio.org/register> or contact Isaak A. Isaak at (859) 392-1529 or [iisaak@covdio.org](mailto:iisaak@covdio.org).

**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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://www.covingtoncharities.org/volunteer) or contact Jill Walsh at (859) 581-8974 [jwalch@covingtoncharities.org](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:Pickettscorner23@gmail.com) and give your name, address and phone number.



# St. Cecilia, patron saint of the diocesan youth choirs

Matt Spencer  
Contributor

I rarely find a Catholic who doesn't already know that St. Cecilia is the patron saint of musicians. In many instances, her image is contained within stained glass windows over a choir loft; In fact, you can find this in a number of parishes in our own diocese like St. Agnes in Ft. Wright and St. Anthony in Taylor Mill to name a few.

Our Diocese is very blessed with many fine musicians who work tirelessly, as an integral part of the liturgical celebration. However can you imagine if you came to your parish on Sunday and you didn't have a musician? It would be a very sad experience of liturgy. Programs to train and prepare the youth in this sacred art are necessary now more than ever. It's not uncommon for a church to list a position for a musician and not receive applications. There are many factors surrounding this but at the heart of the issue, there just aren't enough people trained in this min-



istry. The Church truly envisions the Mass as a sung celebration. Every part of the Mass can be sung and the Church does provide us with simple melodies for all the parts in order for us to sing. Often, when musicians approach the musical needs of Mass, we often strive for the heights of artistry or the most popular styles. Sometimes musicians who work in the church push the artistic boundaries with their choirs and instrumentalists to a point that we are not engaging the congregation in full, conscious, and active participation. (I can sometimes be guilty of this). The Church also reminds musicians of our call to foster active participation both internally and externally. When this participation is achieved, vocations can be fostered and cultivated. Another way that a vocation to liturgical music ministry may be fostered is through a choir program.

For nearly six years, members of the Diocese of Covington staff have dreamt of having a Diocesan Youth Choir program. The Diocesan Youth Choirs will provide music for selected liturgies in the Diocese throughout the year; and the beauty of their music will be "for the glory of God and the sanctification of the people." We are currently seeking input from the faithful of the Diocese about establishing this program. Included with this article is a QR Code which will take you to a survey where you can let us know if you have children interested in being a part of this ministry. This form is not a registration form, but we hope to launch a program in Late Summer/Fall of 2026. We will be sending out information in January to those who complete the survey.

So last weekend, as we honor and celebrate St. Cecilia the patron of musicians, and by extension the patron of our Diocesan Youth Choirs. We pray that through her intercession our efforts will be successful in establishing this institution and inspiring vocations to serve the church in music ministry.

*Matt Spencer is associate director of Worship/Music director for St. Gregory the Great Family of Parishes/Guardian Angels Catholic Church, Cincinnati, Ohio; director for the Diocesan Choir, Diocese of Covington; and choir teacher/organist at Covington Latin School, Covington, Ky*

# US bishops' president calls for special collection for Catholic aid groups in Gaza

OSV News

The president of the U.S. bishops' conference called for a special collection to bolster the Catholic Church's response to a deepening humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip as the Israel-Hamas war continues to grind on.

In a letter to his brother bishops, Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, urged them to hold a "special collection to provide humanitarian relief and pastoral support for our affected brothers and sisters in Gaza and surrounding areas in the Middle East" through both Catholic Near East Welfare Association and Catholic Relief Services, the overseas humanitarian relief agency of the Catholic Church in the U.S.

Excerpts of the letter, dated Aug. 12 according to CNEWA, were released by both CNEWA and the USCCB Aug. 20.

"It is with great pastoral concern for the ongoing crisis in Gaza that I write to you today," the archbishop, who also heads the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, said in his letter. "Our Church mourns the terrible suffering of Christians and other innocent victims of violence in Gaza and surrounding areas who are struggling to survive, protect their children, and live with dignity in dire conditions."

In July, organizations including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the U.N. World Food Program, and UNICEF warned that a hunger crisis was deepening in the devastated area, exceeding famine thresholds, with more than one in three people going days at a time without eating.

## Collection for Gaza

Bishop John Iffert instructed parishes of the Diocese of Covington to conduct a second collection the weekend of Nov. 22 and 23, "to provide humanitarian relief and pastoral support to our brothers and sisters in need in Gaza."

These funds will support the activities of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in partnership with the local Church.

If you missed the second collection at your parish, donations can still be made online at <https://covdio.org/give/>.



OSV News photo/Dawoud Abu Alkas, Reuters

Palestinians wait to receive food from a charity kitchen in the Gaza Strip's Gaza City Aug. 15, 2025.

Archbishop Broglio noted Pope Leo XIV "continues to call for a ceasefire and for aid to enter the territory, noting with great sorrow that 'Gaza is starving.'"

He said both CNEWA and CRS have well-established partnerships in the region that allow the Catholic Church to deliver aid quickly and efficiently to the Gaza Strip.

"The situation in Gaza and across the Middle East cries out for assistance of the Catholic community of the United States," Archbishop Broglio wrote. "I ask that you take up this collection and send funds to CNEWA and CRS as soon as possible."

In the Diocese of Covington, Bishop John Iffert has instructed parishes of the Diocese of Covington to conduct a second collection "to provide humanitarian relief and pastoral support to our brothers and sisters in need in Gaza."

These funds will be used to support the activities of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in partnership with the local Church to meet the most urgent humanitarian needs facing the people in Gaza. Donations can also be made online at <https://covdio.org/give/>.



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# Catholic agencies strategize how to serve homeless amid major US policy change

Kurt Jensen  
OSV News

The Trump administration has issued plans for a complete turnaround in homelessness policy, which involves a two-thirds reduction in current funding used to place homeless people in permanent dwellings.

Nationally, it could make as many as 170,000 people — all of them either disabled, suffering from drug addiction, mental health issues, or otherwise “unable to pay the rent” — vulnerable to losing housing and being back on the streets, Brian Corbin, executive vice president of member services at Catholic Charities USA, told OSV News.

The statistic came from internal Housing and Urban Development documents obtained by Politico, which first reported the development Sept. 29.

The policy shift moves billions to short-term transitional housing programs that impose work rules, help police dismantle tent encampments, and require people experiencing homelessness to accept treatment for mental illness or addiction.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development detailed the changes in a 128-page notice issued Nov. 13. It involves more than \$3.9 billion in what are called Continuum of Care funds, and could affect people utilizing these services as soon as January.

“These are pretty substantial reductions,” Corbin said. “That’s where the flashpoint is.”

The “Housing First” approach taken by the federal government up to now has also drawn criticism over its effectiveness. Kevin Corinth, deputy director of the American Enterprise Institute’s Center on Opportunity and Mobility, argued for the Trump administration to strike a different course on homelessness in an Aug. 29 blog post that “unsheltered homelessness has increased every year for the past decade, reaching a record 274,224 people sleeping outside on a single night in January in 2024.”

“What we do know is that Housing First is expensive, providing indefinite housing and optional services to individuals without focusing on trying to help them overcome their underlying problems so they can move on with their lives and free up resources for others in need,” he argued. “Communities should be provided the flexibility to implement locally crafted solutions that focus on getting people off the street and into recovery.”

He added, “Bringing homeless people inside where they can get real help should be the ultimate goal.”

The major change in federal policy on homelessness and its potential impact on the people Catholic Charities agencies serve was among the issues discussed at a summit of Catholic Charities’ leaders and local politicians on Nov. 18.

Also discussed was the use of surplus church properties such as schools and hospitals to convert to emergency housing, an idea that’s been developed for more than a decade.

The 168 diocesan agencies within the Catholic Charities USA network supervise 38,000 housing units, Corbin said.

The consensus of most speakers was that homelessness would be best addressed through cooperation with local governments and CCUSA member agencies sharing ideas.



OSV News photo/courtesy Elias Kontogiannis, Catholic Charities USA

Leaders of local Catholic Charities agencies from around the country traveled to Washington for a Nov. 18, 2025 summit organized by Catholic Charities USA, to share firsthand insights and experiences in serving those experiencing homelessness in their communities.

“How do we help people stretch the resources that they have?” asked Mayor Alyia Gaskins of Alexandria, Virginia.

She pointed to an evening meal service for people in need provided by Catholic Charities as one example.

According to a diocesan spokesperson, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington, which includes the city of Alexandria, “has been offering an evening meal at Christ House every single night for more than 40 years. In 2025 alone Christ House has served more than 25,000 meals, a 25 percent increase over 2024.”

The mayor also emphasized the need for charities to stay involved in long-term municipal land planning, since “90 percent of what I’m focused on right now is land-use development.”

“Make local policymakers partners in your work,” advised Steve Berg, chief policy officer for the National Alliance to End Homelessness. “(Tell them) what the short-falls are, and what they can do to help.”

An important part of that communication, he added, “is to make clear that this is a long-term work. We’re not going to solve homelessness this year.”

As for repurposing church properties as homeless housing, Heather Huot, secretary for Catholic Human Services in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, called it “an interesting and complicated process. You’d think working with the diocese would be easy. It is not.”

“If you really want to use church property, it’s going to take a little time to get pastors and school administrators to see your vision,” she said. “Not every church property is going to be the best to use.”

“We are the largest provider of permanent housing in the state of Minnesota,” said Jamie Verbrugge, president and CEO of Catholic Charities Twin Cities, a part of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. “They recognize that we’re expert(s) at what we do, and we do it very well.”

Verbrugge explained that the average monthly income for those seeking housing under his agency is just \$500 a month.

He said the organization is “at a crossroads” when it comes to emergency shelters for adults and housing.

“We are challenged most financially to do this on an ongoing basis,” he said.

Participants at the CCUSA summit were also encouraged to recognize that, while they face a long road ahead, their milestones are in the differences they make with the people they serve.

“We need to celebrate the victories that we have,” said Curtis Johnson Jr., vice president of housing strategies for CCUSA. “We have to remind ourselves, ‘We have helped someone today.’ This is marathon work.”

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# Pope tells U.S. high school students their voice, ideas, faith matter



Pope Leo XIV waves at 16,000 young people gathered at the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis as he holds a livestreamed question-and-answer session with them from the Vatican Nov. 21, 2025.

Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

Pope Leo XIV urged U.S. high school students to be “intentional” with their screen time, their prayer time and their involvement in a local parish.

“One of my own personal heroes, one of my favorite saints, is St. Augustine of Hippo,” the pope told 16,000 young Catholics meeting in Indianapolis. “He searched everywhere for happiness, but nothing satisfied him until he opened his heart to God. That is why he wrote, ‘You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.’”

With a livestream connection, Pope Leo spoke for close to an hour Nov. 21 with participants at the National Catholic Youth Conference meeting at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

The pope responded to questions from five high school students: Mia Smothers from the Archdiocese of Baltimore; Ezequiel Ponce from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles; Christopher Pantelakis from Nevada; Micah Alciso from the Diocese of Honolulu; and Elise Wing from the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa.

The questions were developed in meetings with other students and adults and were sent to the pope in advance.

Pope Leo did respond to a question and comment posed by Katie Prejean McGrady, who was moderating the event. She mentioned that she had given the pope a pair of socks some time ago and said she wanted to know what he used as an opening word when he played Wordle each day.

“I just want to say I only wear white socks, and I use a different word for Wordle every day, so there’s no set starting word,” the pope said, before turning to the young people’s questions.

Pantelakis asked for the pope’s advice on balancing the use of smartphones and social media with “making faith

connections outside of technology.”

Pope Leo, using technology to address the students, listed many good things technology does. For example, “it lets us stay connected with people who are far away,” he said, and there are “amazing tools for prayer, for reading the Bible, for learning more about what we believe, and it allows us to share the Gospel with people we may never meet in person.”

“But even with all that, technology can never replace real, in-person relationships; simple things (like) a hug, a handshake, a smile — all those things are essential to being human and to have those things in a real way, not through a screen,” is important.

Pope Leo encouraged the students to follow the example of St. Carlo Acutis, who used technology to spread devotion to the Eucharistic but limited his time online and made sure he went to Mass, spent time in Eucharistic adoration and served the poor.

“Be intentional with your screen time,” the pope told the young people. “Make sure technology serves your life and not the other way around.”

Alciso asked for advice about using ChatGPT and other forms of artificial intelligence.

While Pope Leo has continued to push AI developers and governments to formulate ethical guidelines and include controls to protect young people, he told the high school students that “safety is not only about rules; it is about education, and it is about personal responsibility. Filters and guidelines can help you, but they cannot make choices for you; only you can do that.”

“Using AI responsibly means using it in ways that help you grow, never in ways that distract you from your dignity or your call to holiness,” the pope said. “AI can process information quickly, but it cannot replace human intelligence — and don’t ask it to do your homework for you.”

AI, he said, “will not judge between what is truly right and wrong. And it won’t stand in wonder, in authentic wonder, before the beauty, the beauty of God’s creation. So be prudent. Be wise. Be careful that your use of AI does not limit your true human growth.”

“Use it in such a way that if it disappeared tomorrow, you would still know how to think how to create, how to act on your own, how to form authentic friendships,” the pope said. And “remember, AI can never replace the unique gift that you are to the world.”

Responding to Wing, who asked about the future of the church, Pope Leo told the young people they are an important part of its present. “Your voices, your ideas, your faith matter right now, and the church needs you,” he said.

But, looking ahead, he asked them to ask themselves: “What can I offer the church for the future? How can I help others come to know Christ? How can I build peace and friendship around me?”

Smothers asked the pope if he ever finds it difficult to accept God’s mercy.

“All of us struggle with this at times,” the pope said. “The truth is that none of us is perfect.”

But, he added, it also is true that God always forgives.

“We may struggle to forgive, but God’s heart is different,” Pope Leo told the teens. “God never stops inviting us back. We experience this mercy of God in a special way in the sacrament of reconciliation; in confession, Jesus meets us through the priest. When we honestly confess our sins and accept our penance, the priest gives absolution, and we know with certainty that we are forgiven.”

“Do not focus only on your sins. Look to Jesus, trust his mercy and go to him with confidence; he will always welcome you home,” the pope said to applause.



# Unity in teaching, mission, and concern for immigrants resounds at bishops’ fall assembly

Peter Jesserer Smith  
*OSV News*

From the start of the U.S. Catholic bishops’ fall plenary assembly to its end, a resounding concern for the God-given dignity of immigrants, and for unity in teaching the faith clearly and renewing the country spiritually, dominated the days’ proceedings.

The first order of business for the bishops, at the start of the Nov. 10-13 gathering was to invoke the intercession of the Holy Spirit. More than 320 active and retired bishops joined the opening Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore Nov. 10.

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, president of the USCCB and archbishop of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, reminded bishops in his opening homily of “their duty to be servants of truth,” and shared the story of a young airman who asked him “how to be a saint.”

The fall meeting was also Archbishop Broglio’s farewell as USCCB president after leading the bishops for the past three years through a National Eucharistic Revival, its first National Eucharistic Congress in more than eight decades, the recently concluded Synod on Synodality, and the election of the first American pope.

In his final presidential address, he emphasized the need for the bishops to model unity and help “convince people to listen to each other” amid polarization.

“We have to draw on our unity to illustrate that civil discourse is not only possible, but the most authentically human way forward,” he said.

For Cardinal Christophe Pierre, the papal ambassador, it was his first opportunity to address the bishops as Pope Leo XIV’s representative to the U.S. since the pope’s election in May. On the theme of unity, he emphasized continuity between the late Pope Francis and Pope Leo’s pontificates, while encouraging them to look to the Second Vatican Council as their guide. As he has for the past several years, he encouraged them to develop a synodal culture that could help them unify the church at a time when many Catholics “identify more with tribes and ideologies than with the body of Christ.”

He said, “The synodal path invites us to a different way: a style of being church that makes communion concrete, allows dialogue to become discernment, and catholicity to become shared mission.”

The cardinal’s remarks about synodality, as a means to help the bishops bring about unity, were underscored by a Leadership Roundtable survey from the prior week. It showed that Catholics tend to give their parish pastors and parish high marks, yet a consistent “trust deficit” pattern prevails at the diocesan and national level.

The bishops elected new leadership for the next three years on Nov. 11, the first day of public meetings, choosing the conference’s secretary, Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, as their next president out of 10 possible candidates. Archbishop Coakley won on the third ballot in a close run-off with Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas. The bishops then decisively chose Bishop Flores, the conference’s former doctrine committee chair and its point man on implementing synodality in the U.S., as vice president, succeeding Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori.

The following day, the bishops elected Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana, as their next secretary. Archbishop Alexander K. Sample of Portland, Oregon, was selected to succeed Bishop Rhoades as chair of the Committee on Religious Liberty. The bishops then elected five other committee chairs: Archbishop Jeffrey S. Grob of Milwaukee, for Canonical Affairs and Church Governance; Auxiliary Bishop Peter L. Smith of Portland, Oregon, for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs; Bishop William A. Wack of Pensacola-Tallahassee, Florida, for Evangelization and Catechesis; Ukrainian Catholic Metropolitan Archbishop Borys A. Gudziak of Philadelphia, for International Justice and Peace; and Bishop Mark W. O’Connell, newly named bishop of Albany, New York, for Protection of Children and Young People.

While many of the elections were close contests, the bishops’ voice on major issues — from teaching on immi-

gration and gender ideology to public manifestations of Catholic witness and devotion — was overwhelmingly united in every vote.

On Nov. 12, the second public session of the gathering, the prelates approved a special pastoral message on immigration “to raise our voices in defense of God-given human dignity.” They amended the message on the floor to clearly condemn “indiscriminate mass deportation” alongside their call to end “dehumanizing rhetoric and violence, whether directed at immigrants or at law enforcement.”

The bishops applauded and many got to their feet after it passed with a resounding 216 votes in favor, five votes against, and three abstentions.

The bishops’ plenary assembly heard a report on the immigration situation in the U.S. under the Trump administration, as well as a new initiative of solidarity with migrants called “You Are Not Alone.” In a press conference, Bishop Rhoades also revealed that the issue of the ability of Catholic immigrants in ICE detention to receive sacraments “is now at the top of our concerns.”

“Obviously, the beliefs of the church have political consequences, but they’re not political in the usual sense of the word,” Archbishop Richard G. Henning of Boston told OSV News, explaining the bishops’ special message was “a pastoral address to our people rather than an attempt to lobby.”

The bishops also heard about promising signs of progress in their ongoing efforts to resolve backlogs for religious worker visas with the Trump administration. Close to 90 percent of the nation’s Catholic dioceses rely on foreign-born clergy and religious.

The bishops also heard a presentation on revisions to their “Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services,” which they approved the following day. They approved the new ERDs — 206 bishops voted yes, with eight abstaining and seven opposing — with substantial revisions from the previous version. They incorporate 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 bishops also learned that a new English version of the Bible will be called The Catholic American Bible, which aims to unify American Catholics’ reading of Scripture from the Bible they use in the home to the readings they pray with in the liturgy. They also learned that the Vatican approved the new English edition of the Liturgy of the Hours — concluding a 13-year process of revision — and it would be available for everyone by Easter 2027.

As the U.S. marks its 250th anniversary next year, the



OSV News photo/Bob Roller

**Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, outgoing president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, gives his final presidential address during a Nov. 11, 2025, session of the fall general assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore.**

bishops voted to consecrate the nation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 2026, during their spring assembly in June, which concludes on the solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Before the bishops concluded the second and final day of public proceedings — the last day, Nov. 13, was spent in executive session — they approved holding an 11th National Eucharistic Congress in the summer of 2029 following a presentation by Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minnesota. Bishop Cozzens, chairman of the National Eucharistic Congress Inc., which will organize the event, said Nov. 12 that a “Revival Impact Study,” which will be made public in December, has shown that a great deal of fruit resulted from the National Eucharistic Revival effort, which included the 2024 National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis.

Bishop Cozzens said one of the gifts of the National Eucharistic Congress is the unity it brings to the whole church — something he saw at the 2024 event.

“I think we’ll experience that again in 2029,” he told OSV News. He said a theme is in development and the 2029 National Eucharistic Congress itself will be “a beautiful experience of the power of the Holy Spirit.”



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# Children suffer the most in past and present attacks on Ukraine

Gina Christian  
OSV News

Across the U.S. and Canada — and from Kyiv, Ukraine, to the Vatican — thousands have gathered in recent days to recall millions of Ukrainians killed in an artificial famine under Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin.

The remembrances have taken place as Russia’s attacks on Ukraine, launched in 2014 and accelerated in 2022, approach the 12-year mark — with Ukrainian faithful recalling the chilling parallels between Stalin’s crimes and current atrocities inflicted by Russia under its president, Vladimir Putin, and with children bearing the greatest suffering, said several bishops.

“A new genocide is being inflicted upon the Ukrainian nation, 90 years after the last,” said Bishop Paul P. Chomnycky of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Stamford, Connecticut.

Bishop Chomnycky joined Metropolitan Archbishop Borys A. Gudziak of the Archeparchy of Philadelphia, Ukrainian and U.S. officials, and hundreds of participants Nov. 22 at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, which for some four decades has hosted an annual prayer service for victims of the Holodomor.

The gathering took place on Holodomor Remembrance Day, celebrated each year on the fourth Saturday of November.

Named for the Ukrainian words signifying “hunger” and “death,” the Holodomor claimed approximately 4 million Ukrainian lives — with some estimating as many as 7 million to 10 million slain — in tandem with a brutal Soviet policy of collectivization, theft, terror and abuse that sought to erase Ukrainian cultural and political identity.

The Holodomor has officially been recognized as a genocide by more than 30 countries, as well as by over 30 U.S. states.

In two joint reports issued in 2022 and 2023, the New

Lines Institute and the Raoul Wallenberg Center for Human Rights declared Russia’s latest attacks had violated the Genocide Convention.

On Nov. 22, the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin — celebrating a Mass at the Church of Sant’Andrea della Valle in Rome for Holodomor victims — condemned ongoing Russian attacks on Ukraine, saying that “every action that deprives the civilian population of the possibility of living in dignity is an offense against humanity and an outrage against God, who is light, life, and mercy.

“We cannot remain indifferent to those who suffer from hunger; uncertainty, war; winter cold, imprisonment, and exile,” said the cardinal.

Speaking at the St. Patrick’s service, Bishop Chomnycky reflected that “it is always the children, the most innocent, who suffer the most from man’s acts of inhumanity towards his fellow man.”

That sentiment was echoed by a visibly moved Metropolitan Antony Scharba of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA.

He stressed that “the most vulnerable and most numerous” of the Holodomor’s victims were “the children of Ukraine.”

“One-third of those who perished in the Holodomor were young children, young lives extinguished before they could fully bloom,” said Metropolitan Antony.

He described the Holodomor as “an assault not only on bodies,” but on Ukrainian cultural and religious identity and, fundamentally, “our God-given dignity as human



Children place symbolic wheat stalks before a candle during a Nov. 22, 2025, prayer service at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York commemorating millions of Ukrainians killed in the Holodomor, an artificial famine engineered by Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin in 1932-1933.

beings.”

Metropolitan Antony lamented the “children too young to understand why bread disappeared ... who watched their parents grow weaker and weaker day by day,” with “families, once the strong and sacred foundation of Ukrainian village life ... torn apart.”

Today, that same threat has resurged, Metropolitan Antony, Bishop Chomnycky and other speakers at the service warned.

Throughout the 11 years of its war on Ukraine, Russia has systematically deported at least 19,546 Ukrainian children, subjecting them to “patriotic reeducation” designed to erase their Ukrainian identity, as well as abuse and forced adoption by Russian families.



(above) Donated Christmas gifts for students at SJBRC. Each family will receive a beautiful blanket.

(below) Father David Kiprono of St. Patrick’s Missionary Society celebrates Mass at St. John Bosco Rehabilitation Center for the closing of the 2025 school year.



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Obituary

Sister Mary Claire, SND

Rose Marie Engbersen was born on Oct. 7, 1936, the third child of Clarence and Ann Engbersen. She attended St. Cecilia School and Parish in Oakley, Ohio. After completing grade school, it was no surprise to Rose Marie or her family that she felt called to a religious life. She often said she felt at home when she attended Notre Dame Academy while living at St. Joseph Heights as an aspirant. On Feb. 2, 1954, Rose Marie entered the Sisters of Notre Dame and professed her vows on August 20, 1956. At that time, she received the name Sister Mary Claire.

Sister Mary Claire earned a BA from Villa Madonna College (now Thomas More University) and an MA from the University of Kentucky in Lexington. She began her teaching career at St. Agnes School in Bond Hill in September 1956 and primarily taught the lower grades in schools throughout the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and the Diocese of Covington, as well as in Lexington, Kentucky, and Birmingham, Alabama.



Sister Mary Claire, SND

Sister Mary Claire's longest and most cherished ministry was at Holy Trinity Parish and School in Harlan, Kentucky, where she served as a primary teacher and principal. Soon after arriving, she and the other sisters recognized the deep needs of the Harlan community. In response, they transformed the convent's front porch into a pantry providing food, diapers, clothing and funds for medicine — never turning anyone away.

When the convent in Harland closed in 2004

Sister Mary Claire said she would hold tight to her 23 years of memories of the people, the church, the school and her students in Harlan County. "I'll take them all with me in my heart," she said.

Sister Mary Claire returned to Covington, Ky., where she continued to teach as a second-grade teacher at Holy Trinity Elementary in Newport, Ky. She also supported her community by playing the organ at St. Joseph Heights Chapel, a role she fulfilled until her retirement in 2017. Sister Mary Claire will be remembered most for her joyful spirit and the infectious smile she shared with everyone around her.

Sister Mary Claire passed away peacefully on the evening of Nov. 13, 2025. She was preceded in death by her parents and her sister Joanne Buchman. Sister leaves behind her sisters, Sister Caroline Engbersen, OSC, and Rita Murphy, along with her beloved nieces and nephews.

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

Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Nov. 17 at St. Agnes Church, Ft. Wright with interment in the convent cemetery.

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NEWS BRIEFS

National/World

Pope issues apostolic letter on the Creed, marking anniversary of Nicaea

VATICAN CITY — When Christians recite the Creed, it should prompt an examination of conscience about what they truly believe and what kind of example of faith in God they give to others, Pope Leo XIV wrote. “Wars have been fought, and people have been killed, persecuted and discriminated against in the name of God,” he wrote. “Instead of proclaiming a merciful God, a vengeful God has been presented who instills terror and punishes.” Publishing “In Unitate Fidei” (“In the Unity of Faith”) Nov. 23, Pope Leo marked the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea and its Creed. He said he wanted it released in anticipation of his visit to Turkey Nov. 27-30 to celebrate with Orthodox and Protestant leaders the anniversary of the Creed Christians share. The Creed “does not formulate a philosophical theory,” Pope Leo wrote. “It professes faith in the God who redeemed us through Jesus Christ. It is about the living God who wants us to have life and to have it in abundance.”

Pope urges ‘immediately release’ of over 300 kidnapped children and teachers from Nigerian Catholic school

PAPIRI, Nigeria — During the Nov. 23 Angelus prayer, Pope Leo XIV appealed for the release of over 300 children and teachers abducted from a Catholic school in central Nigeria. “I make a heartfelt appeal for the immediate release of the hostages and urge the competent authorities to take appropriate and timely decisions to ensure their release,” Pope Leo said. The number of children abducted from a Nigerian Catholic school on Nov. 21 has been updated to 303 schoolchildren, the Christian Association of Nigeria said Nov. 22. Twelve teachers also have been taken by gunmen. Earlier reports indicated that 215 schoolchildren had been abducted. The abducted students were both male and female and

ranged in age from 10 to 18, CAN said in a statement. A Catholic diocese in central Nigeria is appealing for prayer and calm after gunmen stormed St. Mary’s Catholic Primary and Secondary School in Papiri, Niger State. The Diocese of Kontagora said the attack happened between 1 and 3 a.m. local time, leaving security personnel seriously wounded. Bishop Bulus Yohanna said the Church is working closely with security agencies and community leaders as rescue operations continue. Nigeria’s police confirmed they’ve deployed tactical units and military partners to comb nearby forests, aiming to bring the hostages home safely. The Christian Association of Nigeria also condemned the assault, calling it part of a disturbing rise in violence against Christian communities. The kidnapping follows a string of recent attacks on churches and schools across northern Nigeria, which advocacy groups warn reflect an escalating campaign of persecution targeting Christian leaders and families nationwide.

Silence around kidnapped American missionary pilot in Niger is disturbing

NIAMEY, Niger — A month after the abduction of American pilot Kevin Rideout in Niger’s capital, Niamey, Church and missionary sources in the West African country say the silence surrounding his disappearance is disturbing. Rideout, a 50-year-old pilot with Serving in Mission, was taken Oct. 21 by three unidentified men from his home in a secure neighborhood near the presidential palace. What’s unusual, missionaries say, is that no group has claimed responsibility or issued demands — a break from past kidnappings in the Sahel. Father Augustine Anwuchie, a Nigerian priest serving in Niger, told OSV News the lack of information has left “apprehension, fear and uncertainty.” Rideout has served in Niger since 2010 alongside his wife, Krista, and their four children. The kidnapping comes as Niger faces escalating extremist violence and a rise in abductions targeting foreigners and Christians. Church leaders say the crisis is deepening the sense that the Sahel region has become “an endangered place for missionaries.” Niger faces an explosive humanitarian and security crisis, in the form of intercommunal violence and caused by the entrenched terrorist groups, affiliated with the al-Qaida global ter-

ror network and the Islamic State group. Pope meets young people returned to Ukraine from Russia VATICAN CITY — Thanks to a handful of countries, including the Vatican, some 1,600 Ukrainian children forcibly taken to Russia have been reunited with family members in Ukraine. Four of the young people met Pope Leo XIV at the Vatican Nov. 21 to express their thanks and to ask for a more formal, systematic effort to facilitate the return of at least 19,000 Ukrainian children believed to be in Russia. The young people were accompanied by family members; Iryna Vereshchuk, an official in the office of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who is working on the project, “Bring Kids Back Ukraine”; Andrii Yurash, Ukraine’s ambassador to the Holy See; and U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn.

Two Catholic priests freed in Belarus after visit of papal envoy to the country

MINSK, Belarus — Two Catholic priests long considered political prisoners in Belarus were freed Nov. 20, a move church leaders are linking to an October visit from Cardinal Claudio Gugerotti, Pope Leo XIV’s envoy and a former nuncio to the country. Oblate Father Andrzej Juchniewicz and Father Henrykh Akalatovich had been serving harsh sentences handed down earlier in 2025 on charges widely dismissed as political. Belarus’ bishops said the release came after President Alexander Lukashenko granted a pardon “as an expression of mercy and respect for the Pope.” Cardinal Gugerotti called the moment an example of what dialogue can achieve. Belarusian journalist Ruslan Szoszyn told OSV News the release is a real victory for the Church — but likely came at a hidden cost, and many Catholics remain in prison. Among the most prominent are Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski and Sakharov Prize winner Andrzej Poczobut, whose release observers say is far less likely. “I don’t think Lukashenko will decide to release key political prisoners,” Szoszyn said. “These people are considered a threat to his regime, but he also considers them his most valuable commodity when it comes to his trade with the West,” because Lukashenko uses political prisoners to “to lift sanctions, to ease restrictions,” imposed on his country.

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# Institute for Religious Liberty celebrates 10 years of interfaith dialogue — reminds us that we are all ‘children of Abraham’

Maura Baker  
Staff Writer

Ten years ago, Thomas More University established the William T. Robinson III Institute for Religious Liberty. The celebration of this occasion began, Nov. 19, with an event and presentation titled, “Where are we now, 10 years later? The current state of religious liberty domestically and abroad.”

The event welcomed speakers integral to the institute’s history, including David Armstrong, TMU’s 14th president who ran his term during the institute’s establishment, Msgr. William Cleves, “president emeritus” of the University and a previous president and professor and Rabbi David Saperstein, a lawyer and rabbi who was present at the Institute for Religious Liberty’s first ever event.

Mr. Armstrong, who spoke on the history of the institute and its founding, spoke about the Institute for Religious Liberty as “essential” in the modern climate, among religious oppression such as the overturning of protections for Catholic healthcare workers refusing to administer abortions.

“We need this Institute for Religious Liberty,” Mr. Armstrong said. “It needs to continue on, and we need it to be vocal and lead to protect our religious freedoms, because they are under attack ... The Institute for Religious Liberty is needed to protect our rights, our God-given rights, our inalienable rights to believe.”

As the evening’s keynote speaker, Rabbi Saperstein also shared perspectives on the positive out-

comes of efforts towards religious liberty, especially in the United States.  
“People are free to choose their faith, change their faith, speak about their faith to others, teach their faith to their

children. They’re free to build places of worship, worship alone or in the fellowship of others ... What President Armstrong was describing, interfaith cooperation flourishes. Religious communities contribute significantly to social welfare, and they serve as a moral compass to their nations,” he said

Rabbi Saperstein shared the statistic that three quarters of the world’s countries have “no serious problems for religious freedom” — but the bad news is that “15 of the 20 largest countries” have severe restrictions impending religious freedoms from the government.

Despite these troubles, Rabbi Saperstein stated that the “one thing (he) knows, is that one of the antidotes to divisiveness is the interfaith communities working together to show respectful ways, to try to find common ground and compromise among religious communities — working together to try and show that together we can do things none of us can do alone. That’s what this institute represents to me.”

Msgr. Cleves also weighed in, saying that, “We are all children of Abraham.”

“As the sacred Synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham’s stock. One day I know it will all be revealed, all will be one,” Msgr. Cleves said.

(top left) Rabbi David Saperstein (left) shares dialogue with Msgr. William Cleves during the 10-year anniversary presentation of the Institute for Religious Liberty titled, “Where are we now, 10 years later? The current state of religious liberty domestically and abroad.”  
(left) David Armstrong, former president of Thomas More University, joined for the presentation. Mr. Armstrong, the university’s 14th president, served in the role during the formation of the Institute for Religious Liberty.



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