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Knochemann photos



As restoration of the exterior of the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, continues, two gargoyles return to the southwest corner the week of Thanksgiving. Tradesmen at Trisco Systems continue to work as weather permits to complete the restoration project.

## Gargoyles begin their return to the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption

Laura Keener  
*Editor*

The week of Thanksgiving saw the tradesmen of Trisco Systems mounting the first newly restored gargoyle, Nov. 24, then adding a second on Nov. 26. Both are located on the southeast corner of the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. There are a total of 32 gargoyles projecting from the sides of the Cathedral, all of which are being completely replaced.

According to Don Knochemann, diocesan director, Buildings and Properties, who is overseeing the \$7.56 million Cathedral restoration project, it takes one day for each gargoyle to be installed. It's a complex process of attaching the terra cotta pieces to the Cathedral's limestone walls. Two 16-inch rods are drilled into the back of each gargoyle, which is then driven eight inches deep into the Cathedral wall and secured with epoxy. All the gargoyles are scheduled to be back in their respective places by Jan. 17. Then

placement of the chimera will begin.

"Cold weather is starting to create a little bit of problems with that, but, hopefully later in December, it would be great if we can get above 40 degrees," said Mr. Knochemann. While it is possible to obtain products that will work in freezing temperatures, "it's just harder on the workers, it slows things down, but they seem to be doing okay," he said.

Additionally, structural repair to the area above the center colonnade is underway. Crews are replacing rusted steel supports.

"They're cutting all of those out. It's pretty significant. It's going to provide the structural integrity not only for the center colonnade, but also the bridge that connects the two towers," said Mr. Knochemann.

Not to be confused with chimera, which are the mythical creatures that sit atop the Cathedral, gargoyles are the vertical crea-

(Continued on page 6)



NORTHERN KY'S ONLINE DAY OF CATHOLIC GIVING  
DECEMBER 2, 2025

2025 Giving Tuesday Commitments		
\$381,671.74	727	62
Raised	Donors	Organizations

## Diocese's first Giving Tuesday campaign sees outpouring of generosity

Staff report

Giving Tuesday, Dec. 2, was a resounding success with over \$380,000 being donated in just 24 hours.

Begun in 2012 to counter the consumerism of Black Friday, the 92nd Street Y and its Belfer Center for Innovation & Social Impact in New York City encouraged people to support charities through volunteerism or financial support on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, dubbed #GivingTuesday. This is the first year that the Diocese of Covington has created a diocesan-

(Continued on page 14)





December 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On the weekend of December 13 and 14, our parishes will take up the annual collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious. This important annual appeal benefits more than 20,500 senior sisters, brothers and religious order priests who have dedicated their lives in service to the Church.

These faithful servants have long been a source of inspiration and support in our communities. I am personally grateful for the religious who helped shape my own faith journey. Perhaps you, too, have known an elderly sister, brother or religious order priest whose quiet dedication, prayerful presence or selfless acts left a lasting impression on your life.

Today, the challenges many of these senior religious and their communities face in meeting their retirement needs are greater than ever. Most received little to no pay for their service, and their communities struggle to cover rising health care expenses and the increasing cost of day-to-day eldercare. The financial burdens continue to grow, and the need is urgent.

Gifts to the Retirement Fund for Religious make a real, tangible difference to these many women and men religious. Contributions directly support their ongoing care today and help ensure that their communities can plan wisely for their future.

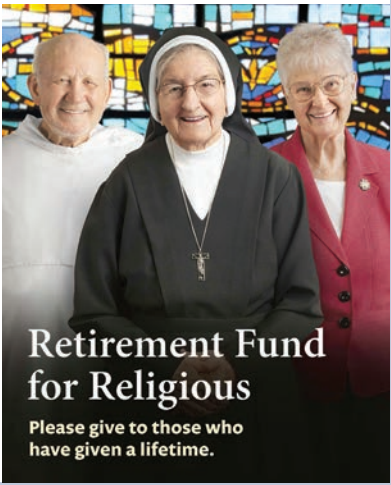
I know you are asked to support many worthy causes, and I thank you for the many ways you give. Please consider making a gift to this year’s collection if you are able — and continue to pray for all our elderly religious. They also remember us daily in their prayers.

May God bless you and your loved ones abundantly with peace and health.

Yours Devotedly in Christ,

*+ John C. Iffert*

Most Rev. John C. Iffert  
Bishop of Covington



Second Sunday of Advent, Dec. 7



Now, in her retirement, she stays busy making art and enjoying life at St. Walberg Monastery, Villa Hills. At 97 years old, however, Sister Emmanuel finds herself in need of additional healthcare, living at the onsite infirmary at St. Walberg Monastery.

Like Sister Emmanuel, tens of thousands of retired religious find themselves in need of additional healthcare, with the median age of nuns in the United States reaching 80 years old. As the aged and infirmed population is on the rise, religious orders are facing difficulties with the increasing cost of additional healthcare. Because of this, over 260 religious communities rely on funds from the Retirement Fund for Religious. The retirement fund for religious has given over \$1,000,000,000 to retired religious since their inception in 1988. This year, there will be a second collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious at Masses, December 12-14, so they can continue to provide for those retired religious in need.

“I think I have a wonderful life,” said Sister Emmanuel, “I thank God every morning for a new sunrise and a new day to live in his wonderful world.”

Her vocation story began at baptism, when she was named after her aunt who was a Benedictine Sister. She carried this with her throughout her life. “All my life I had an inclination to enter the monastery,” she said. Sure in her vocation, Sister Emmanuel entered the Order of St. Benedict at 17 years old, where they allowed her to continue her passion for art. She holds both her Bachelor and Master of Fine Arts from the University of Notre Dame, Indiana.

“I think I was born with a love of beauty, anything beautiful just attracts me so strongly,” she said of her affinity for the craft. Her artwork can be seen at Holy Cross District High School, Covington; St. Henry District High School, Erlanger, and Thomas More University, Crestview Hills.

She shared her love of art with the students she taught, whether in grade school or high school. “My favorite part was seeing how kids could develop,” she said, “seeing people catch on to something, be able to do it, be satisfied with themselves.”

Donating to the second collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious will help more sisters like Sister Emmanuel continue their ministry into retirement. Providing funds to those religious communities in need of help to offset healthcare costs.



To donate scan the QR code.

Sister Emmanuel Pieper spends most of her days in the art room at St. Walberg monastery, connecting with Christ and others through art.

# The Retired Fund for Religious helps retired religious and their communities with rising healthcare costs

Bella Bailey

Multimedia Corresponding

Benedictine Sister Emmanuel Pieper dedicated her life

and ministry to students through art. Teaching grade school and high school art classes, Sister Emmanuel saw firsthand the impact that one person can have on another.





# Future Deacons take a big step

Bishop John Iffert, Diocese of Covington, accepted the petitions for “candidacy” of nine men taking the first formal step in deacon formation. With the support of their wives, they were admitted as Candidates for Ordination to the Diaconate at a Mass, Nov. 23. The Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Robert Casey of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati at Mt. St. Mary Seminary and School of Theology, Cincinnati.

The candidates and their wives are: G. Michal and Juliette Bezold, St. Mary Parish, Alexandria; Jeffery and Susan Bier, St. Henry Parish, Elsmere; Kevin and Judine Hooker, St. Paul Parish, Florence; Juan Carlos and Julia Montes, Cristo Rey Parish, Florence; Thomas and Jennifer Paolucci, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington;

Gregory and Angie Smorey, St. Mary Parish, Alexandria; Jason Snapp, St. Augustine Parish, Augusta; Kevin and Mary Stamps, St. Timothy Parish, Union and Jerome (JJ) and Pamela Wurtz, St. Joseph Parish, Cold Spring.

In the candidacy ceremony, a man makes a public declaration of his resolve to complete his preparation for diaconate so as to give faithful service to Christ the Lord and his body — the Church. In turn, the sponsoring diocese receives the man’s declaration and expresses its joy and support.

Please continue to pray for the men in deacon formation and their wives as they continue to discern a call to diaconal ministry in the Diocese of Covington.



Nine men from the Diocese of Covington were accepted as candidates for the permanent diaconate, Nov. 23. Pictured with Msgr. Gerald Reinersman, director, Deacon Formation, the candidates are (from left): G. Michael Bezold, Jerome (JJ) Wurtz, Gregory Smorey, Thomas Paolucci, Juan Carlos Montes, Kevin Stamps, Jason Snapp, Jeffrey Bier, Kevin Hooker and Msgr. Reinersman.

# Franciscan Daughters’ turkey giveaway fed 558 families ahead of Thanksgiving

Maura Baker  
Staff Writer

An annual tradition, 558 families received turkeys, shelf-stable essentials, bread and produce from the Franciscan Daughters of Mary’s “Turkey Giveaway,” held Nov. 25 ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday. Alongside a team of volunteers, the sisters operated the giveaway out of their Rose Garden Mission, Covington.

Despite heavy rain on the day of the event, volunteers and sisters alike described it as both “peaceful” and “beautiful.”

“The Thanksgiving and Christmas giveaways have been part of our holiday season since our kids were babies,” said one volunteer. “We’re humbled to be a small part of the beautiful work the mission does to bring Christ’s love to the community.”

“I got home and was so sore, and it was the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen. I witnessed the loaves and the fish — the food just kept coming,” said another. “Each person got so much food with their turkey that they needed a volunteer to bring it to their car in a grocery cart.”



Nearly 600 turkeys were given away to families during the Franciscan Daughters of Mary’s Turkey Giveaway, Nov. 25. (above left) A volunteer stands with a cart of potatoes and pizzas to be given to families. In the background, carts filled with bread and other commodities can also be seen. (above right) Dressed in festive headwear, a volunteer and Sister Catherine Mary, FDM, stand together in front of a banner depicting the Divine Mercy.



## 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

## 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.



## Bishop’s Schedule

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Dec. 6</b><br>Foundation Planning Committee meeting, 9 a.m.<br>Visit to Athenaeum of Ohio, Cincinnati 5:30 p.m.                                                                                             | <b>Dec. 10</b><br>Religious Superiors Christmas luncheon, Ft. Mitchell Country Club, Ft. Mitchell, 12 p.m.                                                                   |
| <b>Dec. 7</b><br>Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 7:30 a.m.<br>Advent Lessons and Carols, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 3 p.m.                                                   | <b>Dec. 11</b><br>Presbyteral Council meeting, 1:30 p.m.<br>Serra Club Priest Appreciation dinner, Blessed Sacrament Parish, Ft. Mitchell, 5:30 p.m.                         |
| <b>Dec. 8</b><br>Curia Offices closed in observance of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception<br>Mass for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 5:30 p.m. | <b>Dec. 12</b><br>Blessing and ribbon cutting, Newport Central Catholic High School, 9:30 a.m.<br>Mass, Our Lady of Guadalupe Feast Day, Cristo Rey Parish, Florence, 7 p.m. |
| <b>Dec. 9</b><br>Finance Council meeting, 2 p.m.                                                                                                                                                               | <b>Dec. 13</b><br>Vigil Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 4:30 p.m.<br>Bambinelli blessing/Christmas tree lighting, St. Mary’s Park, Covington, 5:30 p.m.          |

## Correction

In Bishop’s Schedule in last week’s *Messenger*, the Mass time for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Dec. 8, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption was incorrect. The correct time is 5:30 p.m. The *Messenger* regrets the error.



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COMMENTARY

Hope that grows even in charred fields

The readings for the Second Sunday of Advent — Cycle A — are: Isaiah 11:1–10, Romans 15:4-9 and Matthew 3:1–12.

A farmer once walked through his field after a wild-fire had swept across the land. Everything was black and lifeless. He stood there in silence, heartbroken at the loss. But a few weeks later, as he walked the same path, he noticed tiny green shoots pushing up through the

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Suraj Abraham, CMI

charred soil. Surprised, he knelt down and whispered, “Fire doesn’t destroy the promise of life; it prepares the ground for new things.” On this second Sunday of Advent, this is exactly the kind of hope the prophet Isaiah offers us (Isaiah 11:1–10). Israel, too, felt like a burnt and barren field, cut down, exhausted, discouraged. Yet the Lord promises: “A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse.” (Is 11:1) From what looked dead, God brings forth the Messiah.

The early Church loved this image. St. Jerome wrote, “From a root that seemed without life, Christ springs forth with divine power.” The season of Advent invites us to believe that God can bring new life from the “burned fields” of our own hearts and situations.

St. Paul (Rom 15:4-9), tells us where such hope is strengthened: In the Scriptures; “Whatever was written ... was written for our instruction, that we might have hope.” (Rom 15:4) The Catechism explains Paul: “The Holy Spirit gives a spiritual understanding of the Word of God to those who read or hear it, according to the dispositions of their hearts, so that they can live out the meaning of what they hear; contemplate and do in the celebration.” (CCC 1101)

Advent is therefore not only a season of waiting; it is a season of listening and allowing the Word to wash over us and renew our hearts. Advent is not just a countdown to Christmas; it is a school where God teaches us hope, unity and encouragement.

Then in the Gospel (Matt 3:1–12), John the Baptist stands before us not as a harsh figure, but as a friend of the Bridegroom, who wants us truly ready for Christ. His message is honest and freeing: “Repent! Make straight the paths.”

Repentance is not shame, it is healing. Not punishment, but an invitation. The Catechism says: “It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life.” (CCC 1427) John points us to Jesus, who baptizes “with the Holy Spirit and fire,” the fire of love that purifies and renews our hearts. John wants our hearts cleared, ready and open, so that Christ may plant something new within us.

Dear friends, may this Advent help us recognize the “green shoots” God is already raising in our lives. And may the Lord, who brings life out of ashes, prepare our hearts to welcome His Son with renewed hope and joy. Let us “Bear fruit worthy of repentance.”

Father Suraj Abraham, CMI, is Parochial Vicar at Blessed Sacrament Parish, Ft. Mitchell.

Happy holi-daze!

It’s still too early for me to wish you a Merry Christmas — a fact I hope we’re all aware of as Catholics.

GUEST



Maura Baker

It’s like vegetables before dessert — you can’t skip Advent! Even so, I suppose now’s my chance to talk about the season, even if the time for silver bells and decking the halls is still weeks away.

The holidays (which I’ll define as the period of Thanksgiving through the New Year) are a time, for me, of rapid acceleration before slowing to a crawl. I think many can relate to that feeling — it starts around Thanksgiving, with Black Friday, and consumes our December as we busy ourselves with the pre-Christmas consumeristic rush. (While every priest in every parish calls to us desperately from the pulpit, “Slow down! It’s Advent!”) It’s easy to get lost in the shopping, the parties, the

decorating, the planning, all the things and everything. Me just telling you to pump the brakes doesn’t help much, either — although taking time to reflect on the Advent Season is hardly a bad thing.

I can share this, though — I spend this time of hustle and worrying excited for what I know is to come. It’s the cooldown, the stillness, snow on the lawn on a cold winter morning. More than that, it’s the sweet sleeping Christ child, swaddled in the manger. It’s the promise of Christ. Advent is a time of waiting for these things. Amidst the everything, what I look forward to, more than anything, is him.

I spend so much time (and I’m sure you do too) stressing myself about what will never be as important as what I’ll find on Christmas Eve. During Midnight Mass, I scamper behind the greenery and see his image first through a camera lens, and then through my eyes. It’s then that it all melts away.

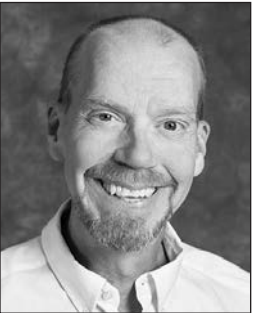
Keep your eyes on the prize, folks — that’s the best advice I can give as we navigate this busy season. Don’t worry about a perfect Christmas, the joy of the season is in your heart and with you always.

Maura Baker is a staff writer for the Messenger, the Catholic newspaper for the Diocese of Covington, Ky.

Prayer — we’re pretty good at it!

One of the things that we as Catholics seem to enjoy doing is praying for peace. It’s evident in how frequently we do it. It’s right up there with bingo and split-the-pot. I’d say, we’re pretty good at it. It’s a good thing to do, to pray for peace.

BELIEVE, TEACH, PRACTICE



Deacon Timothy Britt

But I wonder if our timing might be a little bit off. What I mean to say is that we pray more fervently, more passionately and with greater urgency after war breaks out. We wait until after there’s an uptick in violent crime, we wait until the coup or the riots have started and then we get down on our knees or pick up our rosaries. “Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families.”

Maybe even worse, we pray for peace when war and violence is in the news. When the news people stop talking about it, it falls off our radar and, well, there you go.

But the thing is, there’s always another coup or riot or war coming.

When I was a boy there were a lot of westerns on television and in the movies. Shows like Gunsmoke and Bonanza and stars like John Wayne and many others. In some of these there’d be cattle rustlers or bank robbers, and the sheriff would organize a posse to go out and get them and bring them to justice. Of course, the bad guys already had a head start and the only way the good guys could catch up with them was to “head ’em off at the pass!” They used that phrase so many times that I remember it still, today. It was always considered a good plan and — if memory serves — it always worked!

I wonder if that plan might work when we’re praying for peace.

I heard about a woman who prays for her granddaughter’s husband every day. At first, I thought that this woman’s granddaughter must be quite the handful if she

has to pray for her husband every day. Then I learned that her granddaughter isn’t married. She isn’t even engaged or dating anyone. This woman’s granddaughter is, in fact, still in elementary school.

Even though this woman has no idea who her granddaughter’s future husband will be, she knows that he’s out there somewhere and she knows that God knows who he is. She prays that God forms him into a good man, a virtuous man, honest, hardworking, faithful, gentle and kind — to be a good husband for the granddaughter she loves.

It made me think that the best thing we can do in praying for peace is to pray a prayer that prevents acts of war and violence in the future. “Head ’em off at the pass.” The best thing we can do is to get to them — whoever they are — before they get to the tipping point, where they see violence as the only option.

We can pray for leaders the same way that the woman prays for her unknown grandson-in-law. Because we know that there’s somebody out there, some world leader, who’s planning to invade a neighboring country. We don’t know who, but God knows exactly who it is and we can pray for that world leader that God will turn his heart away from thoughts of war.

There might be somebody out there somewhere who is right now making a fist and planning to use it to beat down a co-worker, a neighbor or maybe even a family member. We don’t know who, but God knows exactly who it is and we can pray for that person and God will turn his heart away from anger.

There might be somebody out there who’s right now loading ammunition into a weapon or making a bomb in his basement that he’s preparing to do some unspeakable act of violence. We don’t know who, but God knows exactly who and we can pray for that person that God can heal that person of whatever evil he’s holding in his heart.

We usually don’t pray for those people after they do whatever violence, hatred or cruelty they do; but if we pray for them now, if we pray for them before, there might not be an after.

Let’s pray for peace. We’re pretty good at it. Deacon Timothy Britt is assigned to St. Mary Parish, Alexandria, Ky.

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# National Catholic Youth Conference provides opportunities for deepening relationships with Christ


Bella Bailey  
Multimedia Correspondent

Four hundred students and chaperons made their way back to the Diocese of Covington, Nov. 22, following the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC), Indianapolis. The annual conference has become the premier destination for young Catholics to grow and reignite their faith, while growing in relationship with Christ and others. While there, the students participated in all the conference had to offer, Adoration, confession, prayer, games, break-out sessions, and most notably, a conference wide dialogue with Pope Leo XIV.

Covington Catholic senior, Brayden, had the unique opportunity to be part of the group of students from around the country to give input on the discussion topics for Pope Leo.

Even though the students gathered were from across the country, the central themes for their desired dialogue were the same. “Relationships, friendships, discussing things like technology, and things like that,” said Brayden. “We all have the same overarching ideas about our faith and the struggles with our faith and the things we go through in our daily lives.”

“It’s really cool to see how many different people can come together and share ideas and be able to hear different perspectives on things from people around the country,” he



To hear from students and Bishop John Iffert about their favorite part of NCYC scan the QR code.

said.

Young Catholics uniting and forming relationships is a common theme of NCYC. One Notre Dame Academy, Park Hills, student, Noelle, said, “I really didn’t expect there to be a lot of people my age ... but going out there and seeing all these young teenagers around my age and trying to grow deeper in their faith really inspired me to grow deeper in my faith as well.”

While the attendees form relationships with their peers from across the country, the true focus of the National Catholic Youth Conference is forming a strong relationship with Christ.

“I remember something that Pope Leo said and it really stuck with me,” said Noelle. “He basically said you have to deepen your relationship with God and want to have that relationship with him in order to give him your problems or struggles.”

Both Brayden and Noelle identified the Friday evening

adoration at Lucas Oil Stadium as one of the most impactful moments of the conference in growing their relationship with Christ.

“Our entire diocese was able to sit down on the main floor of the stadium and so we were basically circled around the monstrance and Eucharist ... the focus that people had on the Eucharist was amazing for me,” said Brayden.

Being down on the main floor of the stadium meant that there were approximately 16,000 other Catholics filling the stands of the stadium during Eucharistic adoration. But for Noelle, there was only one person she was focused on.

“I was surrounded by a huge crowd, but I was so zoned in on the Eucharist that I honestly forgot, I forgot everyone else was there, almost like it was just me and God in that instant,” she said. “Staring up at the host really got me feeling a lot about my faith, and very emotional. It brought me to tears a bit.”

The 2026 National Youth Conference will be held in Long Beach, California, and will return to Indianapolis in 2027.

“If you’re ever thinking about going to the conference, go in with an open heart and open arms, wanting to get the whole experience,” said Noelle.

# That Man is You conference invites fathers to reflect on their roles and relationships

Maura Baker  
Staff Writer

The Northern Kentucky Men’s Conference, through That Man is You (TMIY), is inviting men to a special event — titled “Where Have All the Fathers Gone?” — on Dec. 13.

The conference — spearheaded by talks from Deacon Joe Grote of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and Father Michael Hennigen, parochial vicar of St. Timothy Parish, Union, and chaplain at Covington Catholic High School, Park Hills — will discuss fatherhood in America through a Catholic context, including the “challenges, consequences and results.”

Held in the morning, starting at 8:15 a.m. with an 8:30 a.m. Mass, the event will include coffee and breakfast alongside the talks, as well as opportunities for confession and fellowship.

“I really try to encourage men to know that they have three roles,” said Deacon Grote, speaker, who introduces himself as a father of four and a husband of 47 years. “That is being a husband, being a father and being a friend. If they’re able to get those three roles right, their life will be much easier because each of those three things helps the other.”

Deacon Grote also encourages men to participate in men’s groups like TMIY, saying that they can “strengthen



relationships with their wives, their kids and their friends.” Events, such as this one, can help fathers with their Catholic identity, and to “strengthen their thoughts on fatherhood.”

To register for “TMIY: Where Have All the Fathers Gone,” scan the QR code. Registration is \$25 for adults and \$15 for students.



## Gargoyles begin their return

(Continued from page 1)

tures that protrude from the sides of the Cathedral. In medieval construction, gargoyles functioned as waterspouts, deflecting water away from buildings. While the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption’s gargoyles do not function in that way, their presence is in keeping with the French Gothic architecture envisioned by Bishop Camillus Maes, Covington’s third bishop, who began building the Cathedral in 1894 and saw its dedication in 1901.

While there has been evidence of small repairs to parts of the exterior of the Cathedral, and in 1949 and 2000 significant water leak repair, tuckpointing, storm window installation and cleaning projects, this is the Cathedral’s largest all-encompassing exterior restoration project.

“A big part of the reason for the project was that we had water coming in,” said Mr. Knochelmann. “But probably more than anything was safety. We had pieces of stone that were falling.”



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PEOPLE AND EVENTS

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

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

**The Knights of St. John Commandery #94 based at Mother of God Church, Covington, will organize the Diocesan Nativity once again** at St. Pius X Church, Edgewood. Setup is planned for Dec. 6, weather permitting. Live Nativity dates are: Dec. 20 (after 4:30 p.m. Mass until 8 p.m.), and 21, 22 and 23, 5–7:30 p.m. This baby goats will be a special feature.

**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. Dec. 11.

**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 [dkittyallen@gmail.com](mailto:dkittyallen@gmail.com) or text (859) 957-7595.

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

**“Where Have All the Fathers Gone?”** an inspiring men’s conference about fatherhood in America, the challenges, the consequences and the results, Dec. 13, St. Agnes Parish, Ft. Wright. Mass, 8:30 a.m., followed by breakfast. Speakers are Father Michael Hennigen and Deacon Joe Grote and will wrap up by noon. Register at <https://www.cognitoforms.com/RCActivitiesInc7/NKYMens> Conference. 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.

**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



**St. Anthony students hit an historic note**  
Students from St. Anthony School visited, Nov. 19, the historic Matthias Schwab pipe organ in the west gallery of the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. Each student played a key on the organ. All students sang informally before leaving. The craftsmen of the shop of German immigrant Matthias Schwab constructed every piece of the instrument ca. 1857-59, when it was installed in the new St. Joseph Church (12th St., Covington). Almost all action is entirely mechanical. As are all pipe organs, this instrument for worship is a beautiful testament of stewardship by the parishioners of St. Joseph. It was saved from the wrecking ball in 1970 and remains one of the oldest functioning organs of its size in this region, possibly North America. Basic information is available at [CathedralConcertSeries.org](http://CathedralConcertSeries.org).

[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).



**New liturgical year = new Breaking Bread books!** Thanks to students at St. Henry Catholic School, Erlanger; over 450 Breaking Bread books were switched out in the church within 18 minutes. The process involved taking the old books out of the covers, placing the new books into the covers and taking the old books to the recycle bin.



# The St. Patrick School community rallied to pack 5,000 bags of food for children overseas

Bella Bailey  
Multimedia Correspondent

Students, families, faculty and staff at St. Patrick School, Taylor Mill, were abuzz with feelings of gratitude and giving, Nov. 21, as they participated in an on-campus service project, Feed the Need. As students packed meals to send overseas, smiles filled the room while they scooped, poured and sealed 5,000 bags of food.

“They [Feed the Need] take meals mostly to third world countries. Most of the food we pack will go to Bangladesh to feed the people there. Then they take them the message of the Gospel along with the meals,” said Pam Nunnelley, principal.

Simon, sixth grader at St. Patrick School, said, “It’s an organization that helps kids get food.”

Fifth grader, May, explained that “Everyone gets a scoop of vegetables, vitamin powder, rice and lentils. We put it in a bag and then we measure to make sure it’s 380 to 400 grams. Then we seal the bag and put it in boxes.”

Together the school community packaged enough meals “to feed a student for a whole school year,” said Mrs. Nunnelley. “I was just trying to find a way to have the kids outside of themselves and to do something for other people,” she said.

Feed the Need provided St. Patrick School with all the packing supplies, food and event management, but they could not provide the excitement and spirit the students brought.

“They’re excited about being able to do something to help other people,” said Mrs. Nunnelley. “I’m excited to see the excitement on them. Some of them, since the day we talked about doing this ... they’ve been asking every day ‘when do we get to do this?’”

Tristin, a fifth-grade student, said about his experience, “I just don’t want kids feeling hungry, especially in the wintertime when they can’t grow crops or anything.” Tristin wants people to remember that “You’re a human and they’re human, they just have a different life than you.”



(above left) A student measures diligently to make sure that the bag is not too full, ensuring that there is enough food to fill all the bags.

(above right) A father and son seal the bags together before they are officially counted and put in boxes.

(below left) One student stands up tall to reach just over the edge of a box of lentils, ready to dump his next cupful into a bag.

(below right) A young student carries all he can to fill the boxes with the newly packaged food.



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# Diane Donathan breaks barriers with her bare hands

Cindy Duesing  
Contributor

In a world full of noise, the most powerful messages often come cloaked in quiet. Diane Donathan is a perfect example of this as she interprets the Mass in American Sign Language (ASL) at Mother of God Church, Covington, on Sunday mornings. Though she doesn't speak a word, her face is alight with expression, and her fingers fly to keep up with the passionate pace of a homily or the steady beat of a song. The effect is mesmerizing, inviting the congregation to experience the Word of God on an entirely different level.

On Thanksgiving Day, Ms. Donathan celebrated 40 years of making the Good News more accessible to the deaf community at Mother of God and building a culture of inclusion in the Catholic Church.

Ms. Donathan's first exposure to ASL interpretation was a fluke, she says. "I was friends with Judy Kinman. It was September 1985, and Mary Ann Barth, who directed the Deaf Ministry Office for the Diocese of Covington, was teaching ASL classes at St. Paul's Church in Florence. Judy and I decided to take the class. It was very informal — there were no grades or tests. A couple of months after we signed up, Mary Ann asked if Judy and I would be interested in interpreting at Mother of God. My first day was Thanksgiving 1985. We didn't know what we were doing, but that didn't stop us."

In the beginning, Ms. Donathan signed the congregation's responses, since the words don't change and can be rehearsed. She honed her skills over the next two years with more classes at St. Paul's and practice sessions with Mary Ann Taylor, a deaf friend who loves to talk, says Diane.

"I would go to her house, and before we'd start our conversation, she put a pen and piece of paper in front of me, saying that if I got to a place where I didn't know how to sign something, I could write it down," Ms. Donathan recalls. "But whenever I reached for the paper, she would lightly tap my hand and say, 'Figure it out.' That was an effective way of helping me improve."

Ms. Donathan expanded her ASL interpretation as a freelancer, helping people with physician consultations, job interviews and sessions with mental health providers — all situations that required confidentiality and building trust with her clients. She enjoyed that work, but she scaled it back in 1992 when she returned to college to get her master's degree in counseling.

Signing at Mass remained a constant though, and when the Deaf Ministry Office closed in the early 2000s, Mother of God's pastor, Father Raymond Hartman, decided to continue funding the ASL program for the parish.

Says Ms. Donathan, "It was, and is, an incredibly wonderful thing Mother of God has done by keeping the deaf ministry going. No one requested that they take it over. Leadership just stepped up, and now we are the only church in Northern Ky. to provide this service."

The role of the ASL interpreter is complex, especially at Mass.

"You have to interpret from your toes," Ms. Donathan explains. "It's not just spelling out words. You must convey intensity, emotion and tone of voice — all the nuances that make the meaning of the message clearer."

"Interpreting music is especially challenging. The lyrics contain a lot of metaphors — sometimes four to a verse, all related to one concept — that don't translate into ASL. I can repeat the concept four times, but that's boring. So, to make it more interesting, I think about what the metaphor relates to or what Scripture verse it's based on, which helps me to figure out how to sign it more creatively."

Making the message come alive requires a sense of abandon.



Duesing photo

Diane Donathan pictured interpreting the Mass in American Sign Language at Mother of God Church, Covington. On Nov. 27, Ms. Donathan celebrated 40 years of signing the Mass at the parish.

"When the deaf community sees certain songs on the Mass program, they smile because they know I'm going to dance" says Ms. Donathan. "I've seen photos of myself interpreting where I look somewhat deranged. But the more you can embody the message on your face and in your movements, the better it is."

For this reason, during the COVID pandemic, the signers pushed back on having to wear masks because block-

ing facial expressions and mouthing of words makes it harder to get the message across.

Ms. Donathan insists that her work as an ASL interpreter has returned far more to her than she has given to others.

"If all my dreams could come true, I would be in musical theater on Broadway," she says. "But that didn't happen. Interpreting fulfills a lot of that desire. It is terrifying, and I've made a lot of mistakes, but it has also helped me learn."

"I have to remember that I'm a conduit for information," she continues. "My mission is to get the intent and meaning of the words across clearly without adding or taking anything away. My own emotion is there, but I have to rein it in. It happens a fair amount of time when I'm signing that, suddenly, the meaning of the words will become clearer because the message is on my hands and not in my brain. It's like a spiritual lightning bolt, and it knocks my socks off. I am overwhelmed by the grace of getting to use my hands that way. I don't know where I'd be in life, in my faith, if I didn't have that."

## Communicating without Words

If you are wondering how you can get to know the Mother of God deaf community, Diane Donathan offers these tips:

Come and sit with them or wave and say hello. It is so appreciated and welcome.

Sign the alleluia and/or share the Sign of Peace at Mass. It's a wonderful way to model inclusion.

When an ASL class is offered, try it out. You will make mistakes, but the deaf don't care. During the Lord's Prayer, I once signed, "and follow us into temptation." They cracked up and teased me good naturedly.

If you want to have a conversation with a member of the deaf community, let a signer know, and they will interpret for you.

Be willing to step outside your comfort zone. It will be a blessing for both parties.

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# Catholic advocates raise alarm at Trump’s call to ‘pause’ migration from ‘Third World Countries’

Kate Scanlon  
OSV News

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said in a series of social media posts on Thanksgiving Day that he will “permanently pause” all immigration from what he called “Third World Countries,” prompting concern from Catholic immigration advocates.

Trump’s comments followed the shooting of two West Virginia National Guard members in the nation’s capital Nov. 26. The victims were 20-year-old Sarah Beckstrom, who died from her injuries Nov. 27, and 24-year-old Andrew Wolfe, who remained in serious condition Dec. 1. Authorities identified Rahmanullah Lakanwal as the suspect in the shooting, an Afghan national.

On Nov. 27, the State Department subsequently stopped the issuance of U.S. visas for all Afghan nationals, arguing on social media it was “taking all necessary steps to protect U.S. national security and public safety.”

Anna Gallagher, executive director of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc., or CLINIC, said in a Dec. 1 statement the organization “firmly rejects any call to ‘permanently pause migration.’”

“As we enter the Advent season, we remember that the Holy Family themselves were migrants seeking safety,” Gallagher said. “Catholic social teaching is clear: every person has inherent dignity, and those fleeing danger must be protected, not turned away. Proposals like this betray both our moral values and our nation’s long commitment to offering refuge.”

In his posts, Trump argued the action was part of an “aim of achieving a major reduction in illegal and disruptive populations.”

But J. Kevin Appleby, senior fellow for policy at the Center for Migration Studies of New York and the former director of migra-



OSV News photo/Michael Tewelde, Reuters

A South Sudanese asylum-seeker carries fortified biscuits received as part of WFP food assistance at the Matar refugee camp in Gambella region, Ethiopia, June 12, 2025. President Donald Trump said in a series of social media posts Nov. 27, 2025, that he will “permanently pause” all immigration from what he called “Third World Countries.”



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tion policy for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told OSV News Dec. 1, “The administration is using this tragedy as a political opportunity to advance its anti-immigrant agenda. It’s a page out of the nativist playbook: blame every immigrant for the action of one.”

“Placing collective guilt on an entire group — half of the world — for the act of one person is contrary to American principles of justice, not to mention Catholic moral teaching,” he said.

Catholic social teaching on immigration balances three interrelated principles — the right of persons to migrate in order to sustain their lives and those of their families, the right of a country to regulate its borders and control immigration, and a nation’s duty to regulate its borders with justice and mercy.

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# A Christmas tradition brings Bethlehem to the Ohio Valley

Kathleen M. Carroll  
*Contributor*

Each Advent, just a short drive from Covington across the river and over I-275, the hills of Anderson Township hide a little piece of Bethlehem. At the Comboni Mission Center on Nagel Road in Cincinnati, generations of families have made the Nativity Experience part of their Christmas tradition — a free, family-friendly way to slow down, pray and see the story of Christ’s birth come to life. This year marks the 78th year of the Nativity Experience. The display will be open nightly from 6–8 p.m., December 17–28, 2025, at the Comboni Mission Center, 1318 Nagel Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45255. There is a sneak preview at the Missionaries’ Breakfast in Bethlehem event on December 13, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. and daytime hours from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on December 17. The exhibit is closed on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Admission is free; visitors are invited (but not required) to bring nonperishable food items, which the Missionaries share with local food banks

The Nativity Experience began in 1947, when the Comboni Missionaries were still running Sacred Heart Seminary on their newly acquired property in what is now Anderson Township. In those early years, seminarians transformed the seminary’s carriage house into an Italian-style creche, carefully arranging rocks, moss, cardboard hills and a painted starry sky to evoke the landscape of the Holy Land. Imported figurines of Mary and Joseph, the Christ Child, shepherds, Magi, and villagers were brought to life with simple lighting and music that retold the Gospel story.

Over the decades, that humble display has grown into a room-sized animated diorama. Today’s visitors step into a darkened gallery where lights, motion and narration guide them from Nazareth to Bethlehem and on to the fields where angels announce the Savior’s birth. Moving figures draw the eye — shepherds tending their flocks, travelers on the road, and the Holy Family themselves — while layered scenery suggests the hills, villages, and caves of first-century Palestine. Local media outlets have rightly called it a Cincinnati Christmas landmark.

Children in particular are captivated by the movement and detail, while adults often appreciate the chance to see the familiar Nativity story unfold slowly and prayerfully before them. Narration is available in both English and Spanish.

The Nativity Experience is more than a beautiful display; it is also a doorway into the global mission of the Church. After the animated scene, guests are invited to wander through the Comboni Mission Museum, a collection of artifacts from the countries where the missionaries serve — in Africa, in Latin America, and the farthest reaches of the globe

Colorful textiles, religious art, musical instruments, tools and everyday objects give visitors a glimpse of the cultures where the Gospel is proclaimed. In a season when many Americans are focused on shopping and gift-giving, these displays gently remind us that the Church is one family spread across continents, languages, and economic realities.

Another popular stop is the hallway of nativity scenes from around the world. Here, the Holy Family is portrayed in a wide variety of artistic styles and cultural settings — carved in wood, molded from clay, woven from straw; Jesus, Mary, and Joseph depicted with the features, clothing, and surroundings of different peoples. Seeing so many interpretations side by side helps children (and adults) recognize that Christ truly comes for all nations.



(above) A family gathers around a display of artifacts at the Comboni Mission Museum.

(below) An animated diorama guides visitors from Nazareth to Bethlehem at the Comboni Mission Center’s Nativity Experience.



Visitors can also browse a small Comboni Christmas Market, where fair-trade and mission-related goods, along with modestly priced donated items, are available for purchase. Proceeds help support the Comboni Missionaries’ work in some of the world’s poorest and most unstable regions.

The Nativity Experience reflects the spirituality and history of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus, founded in 1867 by St. Daniel Comboni to serve “the

poorest and most abandoned” in Africa and around the world. After arriving in the United States in 1939, the missionaries were soon invited to Cincinnati, where they ministered in African American parishes and, by 1949, established Sacred Heart Seminary on newly purchased property in Forestville — today the Cincinnati Mission Center and headquarters of the North American Province. The province now includes communities in Cincinnati, Chicago, Los Angeles, New Jersey, and Canada, with missionaries frequently rotating between these houses and their assignments in Africa and Latin America.

For local Catholics, that means a visit to the Nativity Experience is also a chance to meet real missionaries, hear stories from the field, and learn how the Church is present in places like South Sudan, Uganda, or Peru. Often a priest or brother is on hand in the museum or chapel to answer questions and offer prayers.

For more information—or to schedule a bus group or parish visit—call 513-474-4997 or visit the Nativity page at [combonimissionaries.org/nativity](http://combonimissionaries.org/nativity).

*Kathleen M. Carroll is director of Communications for the Comboni Mission Center, Cincinnati.*

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# ‘You see what the heart is...’ — A year-long Advent leads to Christmas joy in Appalachia



Volunteers unload the annual Christmas truck in Paintsville, Ky., Nov. 5. The 70-year tradition started with Father Terence Hoppenjans and the generosity of people in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

**Edward Bauer**  
*Contributor*

The weeks before Christmas find people preparing for presents and parties rather than the Nativity. What is supposed to be the Season of Advent sometimes descends into a frantic swirl of shopping and sending.

Meanwhile, by early November, a group of dedicated volunteers in Minnesota could enjoy a few moments of peace. A year’s worth of Advent dedication culminated in the loading of the annual Christmas truck, sending blessings of the season to southeastern Kentucky.

After a two-day trip, the truck arrived in Paintsville on Nov. 5. Volunteers from St. Michael’s and four other area parishes, along with the help of Piarist School students and the Paintsville High School football team, unloaded the full-sized tractor-trailer. Boxes and bicycles were reloaded into U-Hauls, vans, and pickup trucks, which in turn delivered the loads to the parishes. There they were to be separated, and Christmas gifts prepared for hundreds of families.

And it all began, nearly 70 years ago, with Father Hop.

In the first years Father Terence Hoppenjans was assigned to work in Appalachia, he saw that many people could not afford Christmas presents. He had an idea.

“Father Hop went to the seminary in St. Paul,” said Denise Haaland, a member of the Council of Catholic Women in the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis, which coordinates the effort. “He had seen the wealth that was up in our area and had gotten to know some people. He made some contacts and asked for help. He sent the names of families — mom, dad, kids, their ages, if there were other relatives living with them. The people here packed boxes with Christmas items for the families, and then the boxes were driven to Kentucky. It started with Bob and Elaine Eberhart, who drove down cattle trucks filled with gifts those first years.

“About 20 years ago it evolved into supporting the parishes rather than individual families. It was hard to keep up with the ages of the kids, or who needed more than someone else. This now works out better because the families can pick out what their kids need or what they need themselves.”

Between the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis and the Diocese of Duluth, more than 200 parishes participate. In addition to purchased items, toys, and household prod-

ucts, more than 100 handmade quilts are included. A man from western Minnesota spends the year re-conditioning used bicycles, and this year delivered 39 of all different sizes.

Deacon Paul David Brown, who serves at St. Michael’s in Paintsville, coordinates the unloading and distribution.

“It happens in our parking lot, so the other four parishes bring pickups, trailers, vans, whatever they can find, and the presents, the items that are on the truck are divided between the five parishes,” he said. “I don’t know if you’ve ever seen a fully-packed 53-foot-long box trailer unloaded by hand, but it is a job. Now, in our case, the forklifts are the football team. The kids ... help us get it unloaded because a lot of the volunteers from each of the parishes, unfortunately, are older. It’s just difficult to unload it unless we have some young people.”

Deacon Brown has been involved with the project for 40 years.

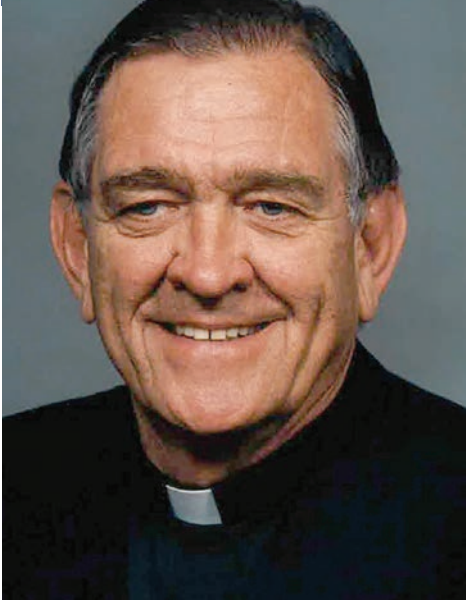
“When Father Hop was at St. Francis in Pikeville, St. Michael’s was one of the churches that went there to get some of the presents for our Christmas program,” Deacon Brown said. “Then when he moved to Paintsville 26 years ago, the drop-off changed and it’s been at St. Michael’s ever since.

“Last year we served right at 600 families just at St. Michael’s. For all the parishes, I think the last couple of years the number has been somewhere between 2300 and 2500 families total between the five churches.”

Amy Richwald and her family moved to the Campton area six years ago and have been volunteering for the past five. She recalled her first impression.

“When you see it from this middle part to when it makes its way to Campton, and then when you see the setup in the building with everything spread out, it’s overwhelming, the amount of generosity that you see coming in,” she said. “A lot of hands make it all happen, like the Christmas elves have come in.

“We’ve lived in different parts of the US, mostly around



**Father Terence Hoppenjans**

cities. You see different areas of poverty, but I had never seen anything like this where you have people living in homes without electricity and water. It feels like they’re a forgotten segment of society, people that are seriously struggling and having hardship. So, people from out of town doing something like this is really important.”

Dennis Rohrer, originally from Minnesota, came to Kentucky in 1980 (and “found a little piece of Heaven right here,” he said). He was a partner in a Pikeville construction company when he began volunteering in the late ‘80s.

“At one point, I remember having about 35 of my crew there unloading the truck,” he said. “It’s a connection for me, of course, from one part of the country to another. It’s a wonderful experience to be able to be involved in this. And the hearts...you see what the heart is. All those people in Minnesota are willing to take time throughout the summer to put stuff like this together. And I know it’s a big job to box all this. Then most of them don’t even get to see where it goes. I really, really praise those people.”

Father Mark Ouma is pastor of Queen of All Saints in Beattyville and Holy Family in Booneville.

“This is my third year participating, and I’m always impressed,” he said. “And I’m always thankful for the people in Minnesota. Besides the toys, there are winter jackets and warm clothing, boots for the winter, quilts. We even receive bikes for adults and children.

“Beattyville is one of the cities that suffered from the disappearance of coal, a city that depended heavily on coal. But since coal is now going under, there are people who are jobless. Things like Christmas shopping are low on the priority list when basic needs are required. So, this affects a lot of such families. They can afford to have a meaningful Christmas, and we are thankful for Father Hoppenjans for starting the whole program.”

*Edward Bauer is communications director for the Diocese of Lexington, Ky*



# The St. Nick Sock Drive: How a simple act of kindness warms hearts (and toes!) each Christmas

Kathleen M. Carroll  
Contributor

Every year, as the feast of St. Nicholas approaches, something special begins happening in Alexandria and the hills of Camp Springs. Boxes appear on porches. Kids help sort donations. Local businesses begin collecting. Neighbors drop by all hours of the day and night with bags of brand-new socks.

It's the annual St. Nick Sock Drive, now in its sixth year, and what began as a small gesture has grown into one of the most beloved — and most impactful — traditions at Little Rock Farm.

The drive is inspired by the example of St. Nicholas, whose feast day is Dec. 6. The fourth-century bishop became known for quietly helping the poor and giving secret gifts. One story from his life gave rise to the custom of hanging stockings on the eve of his feast day in hopes he might leave a gift.

Little Rock Farm put a twist on that tradition. As owner Stephanie Zink explains in the farm's newsletter: "Instead of hanging socks in hopes of a treat, we're collecting socks

to warm people's feet."

It's a simple idea — but simple is the point.

"There are so many people in need and so many things that need to be 'fixed' in the world," Ms. Zink says. "It can be overwhelming, but I believe a lot can be done through small, simple actions. That is what donating socks is — a small, simple action that anyone can easily participate in and appreciate the need for."

Over six years, the drive has collected approximately 6,700 pairs of socks. Some years the total has soared past expectations — as it did last year, when neighbors and local businesses helped bring in 2,170 pairs.

The socks are delivered to the Sisters of Divine Providence, who distribute them to people in need locally. When the supply allows, the Sisters send socks to other areas across the country where they live and minister. While no one really knows the full impact of the project, we know the effort stretches far beyond Kentucky each year. And we know it is appreciated. After all, Ms. Zink says, "Who doesn't love a warm pair of socks or understand how important it is to have warm feet during the

winter cold?"

This year's drive is already showing the same energy and generosity the community has come to expect.

A surprise anonymous delivery left on the farmhouse's rarely used front porch contained about 160 pairs of socks. Over the weekend, another 50 pairs arrived. Local partners like Four Mile Pig, 27 Strands Salon, and Guidugli Landscaping continue collecting.

Then came a major boost — 500 pairs from Jerry Reiner of Pro 5-2 Ministries. That donation alone pushed this year's total past 1,100 pairs within days.

The drive's motto, shared in Zink's newsletter, captures its spirit:

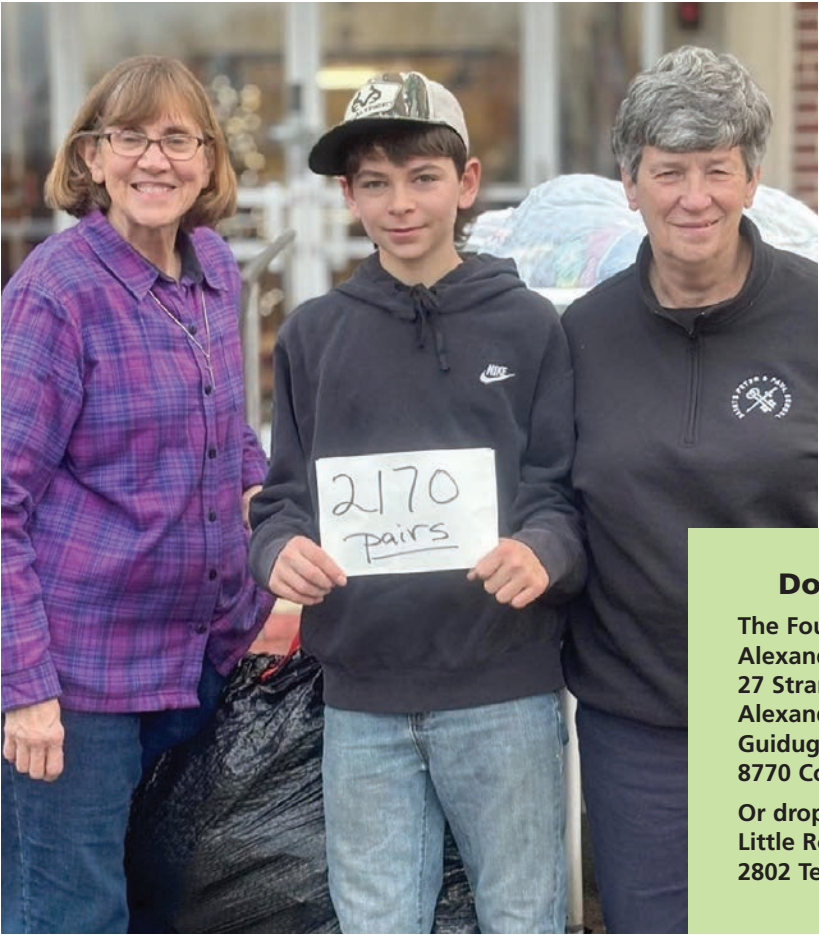
A simple pair of socks. A small act of kindness. Warm feet for someone who is struggling. Together we can make a difference.

Every year, one small act multiplied by many hands becomes something remarkable. One person buys a six-pack. Another drops off a dozen. Someone else ships a box straight to the farm. Children proudly choose a pair to donate. Volunteers cheerfully help count, sort and deliver.



(above) Look for bins like this one at The Four Mile Pig, 27 Strands Salon and Guidugli Landscaping Supplies, all in Alexandria, to donate. Or make a drop off anytime at Little Rock Farm, Camp Springs.

(above right) Flanked by Divine Providence Sisters Kay Kramer (left) and Lynn Stenken (right), a volunteer holds a sign displaying the record-breaking number of socks collected during the 2024 St. Nick Sock Drive. Sock donations are being accepted for this year's drive, now through Dec. 13.



This is what community looks like: many people doing something small that becomes something extraordinary. Last year's total was 2,170 pairs. This year, the goal is 2,500.

The drive accepts new socks in all sizes — men's, women's, and children's — through Dec. 13. If you can't help out this year, please mark your calendar for next year's drive!

*Kathleen M. Carroll is director of Communications for the Congregation of Divine Providence, Melbourne, Ky*

### Donation locations:

The Four Mile Pig, 7962  
Alexandria Pike, Alexandria  
27 Strands Salon, 7926  
Alexandria Pike, Alexandria  
Guidugli Landscaping Supplies,  
8770 Constable Dr., Alexandria

Or drop off at any time at:  
Little Rock Farm,  
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# Children, refugees victimized by AI-fueled human trafficking, says Vatican diplomat

Gina Christian  
OSV News

With human trafficking on the rise globally, the Vatican’s diplomatic mission to the United Nations is highlighting concerns for child victims and refugees — while warning of technological tools used by traffickers to expand their criminal activities.

Msgr. Marco Formica, counselor at the Holy See’s permanent observer mission to the U.N., spoke at a Nov. 25 high-level meeting on appraising the U.N.’s Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons.

Adopted in July 2010, the plan promotes international cooperation in tackling modern slavery, and advocates for the universal ratification of legal instruments to address the problem, such as the U.N.’s Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, issued in 2000.

The day prior to Msgr. Formica’s address, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a broad political declaration on the implementation of the global plan of action against human trafficking.

Yet “despite the progress made,” said Msgr. Formica, the number of trafficking victims worldwide “is growing.”

The U.N.’s Office on Drugs and Crime, or UNODC, estimates that as many as 50 million people worldwide “may be subject to various forms” of trafficking, especially sexual exploitation and forced labor.

Ilias Chatzis, acting head of UNODC’s organized crime branch, said at the Nov. 24 assembly vote that trafficking networks are “more violent” and “more difficult to dismantle.”

The majority of victims are women and girls, who are “overwhelmingly trafficked for sexual exploitation,” he said, noting as well that children represent “38 percent of detected cases” of trafficking.

At the same time, the crime is both underreported and underprosecuted.

Trafficking survivor Shamere McKenzie — now CEO of the nonprofit Sun Gate Foundation, which supports survivors in their recovery from exploitation — said at the Nov. 24 assembly that “human trafficking is succeeding because governments are moving too slowly.”

Reflecting on her own experience of being trafficked, McKenzie said, “My voice had been stolen. ... My worth had been reduced to dollars and violence.”

The UNODC notes on its website that “the true extent of the crime is difficult to ascertain,” and that human trafficking is “one of the fastest-growing crimes,” garnering an estimated \$150 billion in overall profits each year. Victims are typically trafficked from lower- to higher-income countries, said the agency.

In his Nov. 25 statement to the U.N., Msgr. Formica said that children are “increasingly affected, particularly those who are unaccompanied or separated from their families.”

He said that “while most girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation, boys are more often subjected to forced labor, criminal activity, and begging.



CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Mary Mugo from Nairobi, Kenya, wears a T-shirt that reads “Pray Against Human Trafficking” as she joins other young people in Rome’s central Santa Maria in Trastevere Square Feb. 6, 2024, to raise awareness about human trafficking.

Msgr. Marco Formica, counselor at the Holy See’s permanent observer mission to the U.N., spoke at a Nov. 25, 2025, high-level meeting on appraising the U.N.’s Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons.

“Both forms of exploitation undermine the God-given dignity of the victim,” said Msgr. Formica.

He stressed that “trafficking networks continue to exploit the vulnerabilities arising, among others, from poverty, underdevelopment and humanitarian emergencies.”

Msgr. Formica also commended the assembly’s “recognition of the greater risks faced by refugees and migrants,” adding that “when dealing with human trafficking, it is important to remember that the weakest are those who suffer the most.”

Quoting Pope Leo XIV’s Oct. 23 address to the World Meeting of Popular Movements, Msgr. Formica called for “a collective and united effort aimed at reversing the dehumanizing trend of social injustices and promoting integral human development.”

Msgr. Formica warned that “the increasing misuse of rapidly evolving technologies also facilitates the recruitment, control and abuse of victims.”

“Criminals are increasingly weaponizing AI to enhance their operations,” with the technology representing a “dangerous advancement” that enables traffickers to operate “at an unprecedented scale,” said the U.S. Department

of State in its 2025 Trafficking in Persons report.

Traffickers use AI translation tools to lure vulnerable persons, creating “culturally nuanced messages that resonate with victims in their native language,” and offering “unprecedented ability to target potential victims” by analyzing their social media data and developing “tailored exploitation strategies,” said the report.

Chatbots, along with generative AI images and audio, also permit traffickers to recruit and ensnare victims, the report said.

But AI “can also be a powerful prevention and intervention tool,” said the State Department in its report.

Echoing multiple calls from Pope Leo XIV and Pope Francis, Msgr. Formica said it is “crucial to reverse this trend and ensure that technology, including artificial intelligence, is used to serve human dignity, justice and the common good.”

Msgr. Formica commended the assembly’s political declaration on implementing the U.N. global plan of anti-trafficking action, which he said “rightly calls for the intensification of international and regional cooperation” to prevent trafficking, reunite families and “enhance criminal justice responses.”

However, he clarified the Holy See’s position on passages that contained “problematic language” — specifically, regarding the terms “gender,” “exploitation of surrogacy” and “sexual and reproductive health-care services.”

Msgr. Formica stressed the Catholic Church holds that humans are created male or female, and that the practice of surrogacy is “deplorable in any case, as it constitutes a grave violation of the dignity of both the woman and the child.”

He added that “the Holy See interprets the term ‘sexual and reproductive health-care services’ as referring to a holistic concept of health” that excludes access to abortion and abortifacients.

Concluding his address, Msgr. Formica again quoted Pope Leo XIV, citing a statement from the pope’s May 30 address to peace movements: “Amid wars, terrorism, human trafficking and widespread aggression, our children and young people need to be able to experience the culture of life, dialogue, and mutual respect.”

## Diocese’s first Giving Tuesday

(Continued from page 1)

wide platform for all its parishes and schools to participate in Giving Tuesday. Jim Hess, director, Stewardship and Mission Services, brought the idea to Bishop John Iffert and coordinated the effort with Give Central, the diocese’s online-giving partner.

“I think it’s been an incredible and inspiring beginning of a new annual tradition of generosity for Catholics in Northern Kentucky and will only expand as we grow to include more parishes, schools and ministries,” said Mr. Hess.

Sixty-two schools, parishes and Catholic organizations in the Diocese participated. Gifts collected will be used to

help them with their chosen project. For current fundraising leader St. Cecilia Parish, Independence, with \$134,832 donated, the funds will go to facilities updates in the undercroft.

“I am very impressed at the number of donors and their generosity,” said Mr. Hess. “I also thank everybody who donated their time or donated their energy to make this Giving Tuesday a success.”

There is still time to give, as the donation page will stay open until Dec. 9. To donate, go to [givecatholicnky.org](http://givecatholicnky.org).





Protecting God’s Children for Adults Safe Environment Trainings

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**Step 2: Go to [www.virtus.org](http://www.virtus.org)** and click on Registration. Follow the prompts to create an account and to request a background check. Selection.com is a secure site; the background check is posted on your account and you receive a copy if you request it during the registration process. You will sign up for a VIRTUS training class during the registration.

**Step 3: Your account becomes active** when your background check, VIRTUS session and Acceptance Form are posted on your account. You will receive 12 bulletins per year. You will receive e-mail notices at [system@pub.virtus.org](mailto:system@pub.virtus.org) unless your computer program blocks them.

**Bulletins:**  
■ December bulletin: will post Sunday, Dec. 7; due Tuesday, Jan. 6.

The monthly e-mail reminder of a new bulletin posted will come from [system@pub.virtus.org](mailto:system@pub.virtus.org).  
**[www.virtusonline.org](http://www.virtusonline.org), enter your user id and password.** If your account is suspended contact your primary location

where you volunteer or are employed. Your primary location contact information is found under your Contact Tab.

**VIRTUS Training:**

- Wednesday, Jan. 7, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Wednesday, Jan. 7, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Tuesday, Jan. 27, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Tuesday, Jan. 27, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

- Monday, Feb. 9, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Monday, Feb. 9, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Tuesday, Feb. 17, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Tuesday, Feb. 17, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Tuesday, March 3, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

- Tuesday, March 3, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Thursday, March 19, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Thursday, March 19, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

**Note: If your Training Tab is missing** or you cannot access your account, contact your parish, school or institution.  
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The Diocese of Covington invites qualified, actively-practicing Roman Catholics to apply for the part-time (15 hours) position of Archivist. The Diocesan Archives contains instruments and written documents which pertain to the spiritual and temporal affairs of the Diocese, including specifically but not exclusively, non-current files from Diocesan offices, sacramental records, academic transcripts of certain closed schools, certain photographs, and other historical information of Diocesan archival significance. The Archivist maintains records of acquisitions, labels and houses files, updates inventory, responds to records requests, and performs research when requested by Diocesan or parish personnel. Qualifications include either a degree in history, archive certification, or archive or library experience. Interested candidates may send a letter of interest, resume or C-V with compensation history, and a list of references with contact email addresses to Stephen Koplyay, SPHR by email or by fax: [skoplyay@covdio.org](mailto:skoplyay@covdio.org), 859/392-1589.

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# Unity, dialogue, respect: On first trip, pope highlights paths to peace

Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Visiting two countries over six days on his first foreign papal trip, Pope Leo XIV preached unity, dialogue and respect for differences as the only paths to peace.

Spending time with Catholics, other Christian leaders and top Muslim clerics in Turkey Nov. 27-Nov. 30 and Lebanon Nov. 30-Dec. 2, the pope made formal speeches about how believing in God as the father of all means recognizing one another as brothers and sisters.

But he also set aside time in a packed schedule for private talks, lunches and late evening meetings with the leaders.

“The more we can promote authentic unity and understanding, respect and human relationships of friendship and dialogue in the world, the greater possibility there is that we will put aside the arms of war; that we will leave aside the distrust, the hatred, the animosity that has so often been built up and that we will find ways to come together and be able to promote authentic peace and justice throughout the world,” he told reporters flying back to Rome with him Dec. 2.

The three iconic moments of the trip were his prayer with top Christian leaders Nov. 28 at the site of the Council of Nicaea, his visit to the Blue Mosque in Istanbul Nov. 29 and his prayer Dec. 2 amid the rubble of the Beirut port explosion in 2020.

The whole trip was planned to commemorate the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea and its drafting of the Creed that mainline Christian communities still recite today.

Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople hosted the ecumenical prayer service and the common recitation of the Creed on a platform overlooking the ruins of a Christian basilica in Iznik, site of the ancient Nicaea, about 80 miles southeast of Istanbul.

With the Greek Orthodox patriarchs of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem or their representatives and with representatives of other Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant churches, Pope Leo said that at a time when humanity is “afflicted by violence and conflict,” the world “is crying out for reconciliation.”

“The desire for full communion among all believers in Jesus Christ is always accompanied by the search for fraternity among all human beings,” he said. “In the Nicene Creed, we profess our faith ‘in one God, the Father.’ Yet, it would not be possible to invoke God as Father if we refused to recognize as brothers and sisters all other men and women, who are created in the image of God.”

The desire to reach out and form relationships with others also was on display when Pope Leo, like his two immediate predecessors, removed his shoes and entered the so-called Blue Mosque in Turkey’s capital; he spent about 20



CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Pope Leo XIV looks up at the ceiling of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, more commonly called the Blue Mosque, in Istanbul during a visit Nov. 29, 2025. Kurra Hafız Fatih Kaya, the imam of the mosque, is to the right of the pope; Emrullah Tuncel, the mufti of Istanbul, is to the left of the pope; and Askin Musa Tunca, the mosque’s muezzin, wearing a suit and tie, is guiding the visit.



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Leo XIV kneels to speak to a boy holding a photo of a loved one lost in the deadly explosion in 2020 at the port in Beirut Dec. 2, 2025.



CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Pope Leo XIV processes alongside Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew following an ecumenical prayer service in Iznik, Turkey, Nov. 28, 2025. The ceremony commemorated the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which was held in the ancient city, historically known as Nicaea.

minutes inside but did not appear to pause for prayer as Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis had done.

Instead, he listened to Askin Musa Tunca, the mosque’s muezzin who calls people to prayer five times a day, explain the building, its construction and how Muslims pray. And the pope asked questions.

The Vatican press office said afterward that Pope Leo visited the mosque “in a spirit of reflection and attentive listening, with deep respect for the place and for the faith of those who gather there in prayer.”

On his last morning in Beirut, he laid a wreath, lighted a candle and prayed silently at a memorial to the more

than 200 people killed when improperly stored chemicals exploded at the port; the blast also injured some 7,000 people and left an estimated 300,000 people without homes.

Standing amid mountains of rubble, piles of burnt-out cars and heaps of tattered clothing and cloth, the pope was joined by family members of those killed and by people still bearing the scars of injuries they suffered that day.

They carried photos of the loved ones they lost and signs appealing for the government to seriously investigate who was at fault for allowing the chemicals to be stored there.

A young woman, crying, asked Pope Leo for a hug, which the pope gave her before putting his hand on her head and blessing her.

At Mass afterward, he said, “I prayed for all the victims, and I carry with me the pain, and the thirst for truth and justice, of so many families, of an entire country.”

And after Mass, before heading to the airport, he told the people, “During these days of my first apostolic journey, undertaken during this Jubilee Year, I wanted to come as a pilgrim of hope to the Middle East, imploring God for the gift of peace for this beloved land, marked by instability, wars and suffering.”

Even when it seems peace is far off, Pope Leo said, “I invite you to lift your gaze to the Lord who is coming! Let us look to him with hope and courage, inviting everyone to set out on the path of coexistence, fraternity and peace. Be artisans of peace, heralds of peace, witnesses of peace!”



# Why Mary is ‘honored by angels and men’

Carl E. Olson  
OSV News

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee!” Uttered by the heavenly messenger Gabriel to a Jewish maiden (Lk 1:28), these words, of course, make up the first phrase of the Hail Mary.

The second phrase of that great prayer comes from an earthly creature, Elizabeth, the cousin of Mary, who exclaims, “Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb” (Lk 1:42).

St. Bede remarks that this is fitting, since the two remarks show that Mary “should be honored by angels and by men and why she should indeed be revered above all other women.”

The reverence paid to Mary by Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox is bothersome to some Protestants (and even some Catholics!) who see in it undue attention given to a mere human. It is attention, they say, fitting to God alone.

This is an unfortunate misunderstanding, and one that is sometimes made worse by the inability of Catholics to explain the place and meaning of Mary in Catholic doctrine and devotion. Advent provides an opportunity to more deeply contemplate Mary’s life as she emerges so prominently on the stage of salvation history during this season of preparation and anticipation.

Msgr. Ronald Knox once observed that Advent and Christmas mark “a return to our origins.” Having been given the incredible news by the angel, Mary makes a return of sorts to her own origins, traveling to visit her beloved cousin — likely the closest living relative she had.

She journeyed three or four days to the “hill country, to a city of Judah” (Lk 1:39), filled with the joy of news that was undoubtedly still overwhelming and mysterious. Luke shows that those who are filled with the Holy Spirit are eager to tell others about Christ. And in his description of Mary greeting Elizabeth, he makes a similar point: Those filled with the Holy Spirit recognize their Savior — even when they cannot see him.

“And it came about that when Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting,” the Evangelist writes, “the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.” It is then that the older woman exclaims in wonder at the blessed state of her young cousin.

How blessed was Mary? It might seem a frivolous question considering that she carried the Incarnate Son in her womb. But in order to appreciate the reverence due to Mary, it should be noted that the phrase “blessed art thou among women” is the Jewish way of saying, “You are the most blessed of women!”

And why has Mary been chosen by the Most High to be the mother of the Redeemer? Because of God’s grace and her faithful response to it, a fact that Elizabeth, herself a woman of great faith, recognized: “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord” (Lk 1:45).

Reflecting on Mary’s faith, the Catechism of the Catholic Church compares Mary to Abraham, who, “because of his faith, became a blessing for all the nations of the earth. Mary, because of her faith, became the mother

of believers, through whom all nations of the earth receive him who is God’s own blessing: Jesus, the ‘fruit of thy womb’” (No. 2676).

This promise of salvation is also found in Psalm 72: “May his name be blessed forever; as long as the sun his name shall remain. In him shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed; all the nations shall proclaim his happiness.”

In the original covenant made with Abraham in Genesis 12, the nomadic patriarch is told by God that he will be made a “great nation,” that his name will be made great, and he “shall be a blessing” to all the families of the earth.

So, what exactly does it mean to be blessed? The very first use of the word “bless” in Scripture is found in the creation account of the opening chapter of Genesis, which describes God looking upon the creatures of earth, blessing them and declaring, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gn 1:22).

Then, after creating man, he blessed Adam and Eve and said, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gn 1:28).

Blessing, then, is intimately connected to the gift of life. In the Old Testament, blessings were connected with prosperity, progeny and promise. Blessings and curses were central to the great covenants made with Abraham, Moses and David.

With Mary, the blessing also involves prosperity, progeny and promise — but uniquely so, for her Son encompasses all of those things and makes them available to all people for the remainder of time.

“For I say that Christ became a minister of the circumcision to show God’s truthfulness,” St. Paul writes, “to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, but so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy” (Rom 15:8-9). The promises made to Abraham are fulfilled in Mary; the Advent of the



CNS photo/courtesy of the Vatican Philatelic and Numismatic Office

In a 1.35-euro Vatican Christmas stamp, Mary holds the baby Jesus, a detail from the tapestry “Adoration of the Shepherds” by the 16th-century Flemish master weaver Pieter van Aelst.

Old Testament finds completion in the Son of the daughter of Zion.

The Second Vatican Council, in “Lumen Gentium” (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), declared that “this union of the Mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ’s virginal conception up to His death; it is shown first of all when Mary, arising in haste to go to visit Elizabeth, is greeted by her as blessed because of her belief in the promise of salvation, and the precursor leaped with joy in the womb of his mother” (No. 57).

Because of her perfect faith and cooperation with God’s grace, the council continued, Mary is Mother of God and “mother of men, particularly of the faithful” (No. 54). Mary is revered because she faithfully said “Yes!” to God and gave birth to the God-man. She is loved because she is our mother and the first disciple of her Son, our Savior.

During Advent all Catholics can emulate the example of Elizabeth, the cousin of Mary. Filled with the Holy Spirit, she anticipates her Savior before ever seeing him. She worships her Lord, even when he is hidden in the womb.

She reveres and embraces Mary, who brings salvation to her and to the entire world.

She hears the Magnificat and rejoices as Mary sings, “For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed” (Lk 1:48).



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NEWS BRIEFS

National/World

Pope Leo’s childhood home in Chicago suburb now a historic landmark

DOLTON, Ill. — Pope Leo XIV’s childhood home just outside of Chicago has been declared a historic landmark. The village of Dolton’s board of trustees approved a motion for the designation during a regular meeting Dec. 1 that began with a recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. Mayor Jason House described the property as one of the “most culturally and spiritually significant locations in the United States,” according to ABC-7 Chicago. The modest, one-story brick residence, located at 212 E. 141st Pl., was purchased by the village’s board in July for \$375,000, an amount that included all applicable realtor and auction fees. Weeks after the election of the first U.S.-born pope, the board had moved to acquire the 75-year-old home where the former Robert Prevost and his family lived until 1969. The site immediately became a tourist attraction and even a place of pilgrimage after Pope Leo’s papal election. Speaking during the board meeting ahead of the vote, House said the move represented “a very big moment for residents” of the village, noting the “target timeline” for developing the site is spring 2027 — but adding, “Hopefully it’s faster.”

UN report: Every 10 minutes, a woman is killed somewhere in the world

ROME — “Women speaking to us from El Fasher; the heart of the latest catastrophe in Sudan, tell of hunger; displacement, rape and bombardments.” With these words, Ginevra Anna Mutavati, regional director for East and Southern Africa at U.N. Women, recently described to journalists the situation in North Darfur’s capital. After more than 500 days of siege by Rapid Support Forces, widespread abuses — including summary executions and sexual violence — have been documented. Worldwide, the U.N. estimates that 840 million women — nearly 1 in 3 — have experienced physical or sexual violence by a partner, sexual violence by a nonpartner, or both, at least once in their lives. A new U.N. report noted that technology has also contributed to new forms of violence, including nonconsensual sharing of images and information, doxxing and deepfake videos created using artificial intelligence. The online world is now a major site of exploitation, said Maryknoll Sister Abby Avelino, the Rome-based international coordinator of Talitha Kum, the global, sister-led network against human trafficking. “End Digital Violence against Women and Girls” is the theme of U.N. Women’s 16-day UNITE campaign this year. The campaign began Nov. 25, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Ukraine’s religious leaders warn Russia will attack Europe if not halted

KYIV — As Russian attacks on Ukrainian civilians accompany U.S.-brokered peace talks, Ukraine’s religious leaders warn that failure to halt Russia and hold it accountable will expand the war, now nearing the 12-year-mark, to Europe. The Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations — whose members include Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church — issued a Nov. 29 statement condemning “another massive terrorist attack” on Kyiv and other regions of Ukraine. Ahead of meeting with a U.S. delegation Dec. 2, Russian President Vladimir Putin dismissed Europe’s conditions for ending Russia’s war as “not acceptable,” adding, “We are not going to fight with Europe. ... But if Europe wants to fight with us, we are ready to do so right now.” However, warned UCCRO in its statement, “if the crimes of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the Ukrainian people are not stopped and punished, other countries of Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe will inevitably become the next targets of Russian state terrorism.” UCCRO added that “this evil will also reach those countries that believe they are sufficiently protected or think that they can make agreements with Russia, trade with it, and that everything will be fine.” Yet “such a policy of appeasement does not lead to peace or good,” the religious leaders stressed. Rather, they said, “True peace is possible only when peacebuilding efforts are combined with strengthening Ukraine in accordance with the formula ‘peace through strength.’”

Supreme Court weighs appeal from New Jersey faith-based pregnancy centers

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Dec. 2 heard oral arguments in an appeal from a group of faith-based pregnancy centers in New Jersey challenging an investigation by that state’s attorney general alleging they misled people about their services and seeking information about their donors. First Choice Women’s Resource Centers operates five centers in the Garden State that provide some medical services, including ultrasounds, to women with unplanned pregnancies. In 2023, New Jersey Attorney General Matthew Platkin moved to launch a consumer protection probe investigating First Choice, alleging they misrepresented themselves to clients as if their services included referrals for abortion. As part of his probe, he issued a subpoena seeking information including about its donors — but before the expiration date, First Choice asked a federal court to intervene on its behalf, arguing the probe violated its First Amendment rights. A key question in the case is whether First Choice must first pursue its claims in state court or meet the legal threshold for the federal court. The First

Amendment issues at play in the case drew support for First Choice from a broad range of organizations.

Unspeakable tragedy of parents awaiting news of their kidnapped children in Nigeria

ABUJA, Nigeria — Church leaders in West Africa are pleading for the safe return of hundreds of children and teachers kidnapped from a Catholic school in central Nigeria. The Nov. 21 attack on St. Mary’s School in Papiri left the rural community reeling, with Bishop Bulus Dauwa Yohanna of Kontagora describing widespread trauma and confusion. As of Nov. 26, 265 people — including 253 children — remained in captivity, while about 50 students who escaped have been reunited with their families. Local residents say entire families were taken, and at least one parent died from the shock of learning his young children were abducted. Nigeria’s government has launched a military search-and-rescue mission, and Pope Leo XIV used his Nov. 23 Angelus address to call for the hostages’ release — as well as for the release of kidnapped clergy in Cameroon. Church leaders there warn they may shut down parishes and schools if abductions continue. “The frequent kidnapping of our priests and mission personnel has pushed us to the wall and we say that this should stop with immediate effect,” a Nov. 23 press release signed by Archbishop Andrew Nkea Fuanya of Bamenda said. “We think these people need to live in tranquility and peace,” he said.

175 lawmakers demand ‘robust’ investigation on risks of abortion pill

WASHINGTON — Congressional Republicans are demanding a “robust” investigation of federal safety standards and health risks connected to mifepristone, a pill commonly, but not exclusively, used for early abortion. The letter dated Nov. 20 and co-signed by 175 Republican lawmakers asks Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Martin Makary to investigate the “deleterious and grossly underreported effects” of mifepristone on women, prohibit mail shipment of the drug and immediately “reinstate the in-person dispensing requirement.” Released Nov. 24, the letter also condemned the Biden administration’s “egregious action to remove critical safeguards that once applied to abortion drugs.” The letter urged an end to the mailing of the drugs. It objected to “the FDA’s approval” in September of a new generic form of mifepristone and called on the Trump administration to provide more information about that approval. Signers of the letter include House Speaker Mike Johnson and Majority Leader Steve Scalise, both of Louisiana; Majority Whip Tom Emmer of Minnesota; and Rep. Lisa C. McClain, R-Mich, Republican Conference chairwoman. “Americans deserve straight answers about the risks involved,” signer Rep. Diana Harshbarger, R-Tenn., said in a separate statement. A licensed pharmacist, she is vice chair of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health.

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