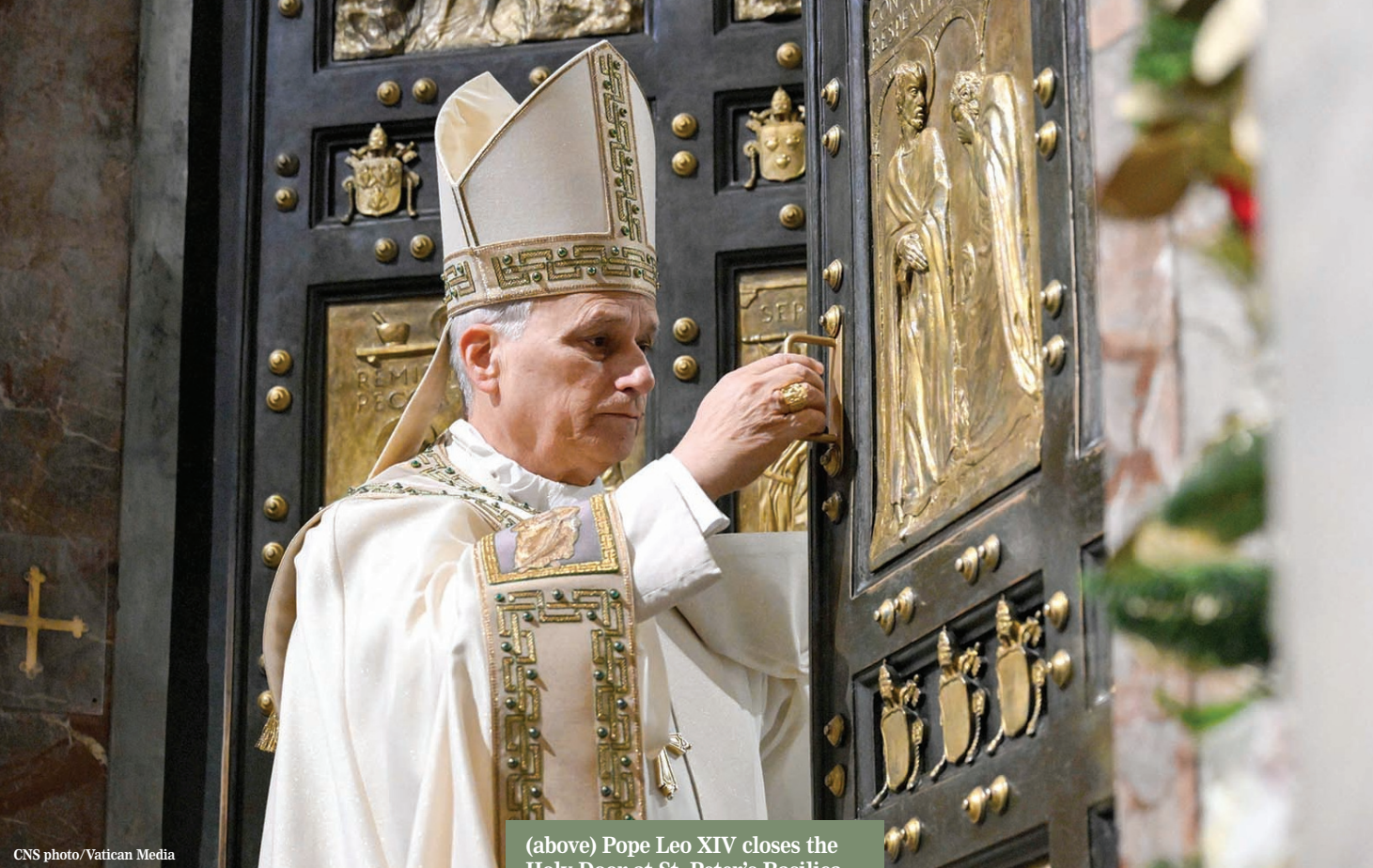


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CNS photo/Vatican Media



Bailey photo

(above) Pope Leo XIV closes the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica Jan. 6, 2026, at the Vatican, marking the official end of the Jubilee Year. Across the world and in the Diocese of Covington diocesan celebrations closing the Jubilee Year were held, Dec. 28, on the Feast of the Holy Family.

(right) Bishop Iffert in his homily reflects on the closing of the Jubilee Year and the Gospel reading. Emphasizing the Holy Family on their feast day, focusing specifically on Joseph, Bishop Iffert called those gathered to listen and hear God's plan for their lives.

(left) Bishop Iffert consecrates the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ through the mystery of transubstantiation at the Mass to close the Jubilee Year.



Bailey photo

## Jubilee Year comes to an end at closing Mass with Bishop Iffert

**Bella Bailey**  
*Multimedia Correspondent*

Bishop John Iffert celebrated the closing Mass for the 2025 Jubilee Year: Pilgrims of Hope, Dec. 28, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. The Jubilee Year was opened by Pope Francis one year prior on the eve of Christmas, with the opening of the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica, Rome. This, in a special way, connected the Jubilee Year and the celebration of the first coming of Christ at Christmas.

The Jubilee Year called the faithful to focus on the indulgent love of Christ and the pouring out of his love onto his people, said Bishop Iffert, in the same way that God's love was brought into the world through the Christ child.

"The celebration of the Jubilee shares something with the Christmas celebration ... Every day we remember that the Lord Jesus dwells with his people, comes to us and empties out his love for us every day. And Christmas, we remember that in a particularly poignant way," said Bishop Iffert.

It is this indulgent love of Christ that Pope Francis called into focus through the jubilee theme, "pilgrims of hope." The theologi-

cal virtue of hope, Bishop Iffert said, "is certainty in the mercy of God and in his victory over the Kingdom. That's what this Jubilee Year has been for us, a walking in that confidence in the divine love to strengthen our community."

"Even though we don't live in the fulfillment, the perfection, of that kingdom right now, even though we live in a time where that kingdom has been introduced by the first coming of Jesus, we await the second coming of Jesus for its perfection and fulfillment, even now, because we are people of hope," said Bishop Iffert.

Though the Jubilee Year has ended, the message and invitation it espoused, to follow God, and trust in his infinite wisdom, still rings true.

"The Jubilee celebration draws our attention and focus to the indulgent mercy of God; it doesn't control that mercy. In closing out the Jubilee we do not end the river of God's mercy that flows down upon us. God's mercy is constant," said Bishop Iffert. "This Jubilee year has been for us a walking in that confidence in the divine love to strengthen our community as we journey together throughout the world."



# At Christmas, Bishop Iffert tells congregation the image of a cow at the Nativity relates to transformative divine love

Maura Baker  
Staff Writer

A peaceful Christmas morning, Dec. 25, the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, welcomed parishioners and guests alike to celebrate Midnight Mass for the Nativity of the Lord.

The Cathedral’s pews were full for the celebration — and music filled the Cathedral, decorated with greenery, as the Bishop’s Choir and a string quartet performed songs until the Mass began.

Bishop John Iffert celebrated the Mass, and served as homilist, as well.

In his homily, Bishop Iffert recalled an encounter with the diocesan chancellor, Jamie Schroeder: “I mentioned that I especially like the way that she had positioned the cow just behind the crib, nudging up toward Jesus in a way that was particularly attentive to the baby,” Bishop Iffert said.

To which Mrs. Schroeder replied, according to Bishop Iffert, “That’s the way I was taught. I was told that the cow warmed the baby Jesus with her breath.”

Continuing, he said that, “The idea that this lovely creature recognized the Lord of Heaven and earth — her Creator — and the great gift of love born for the redemption of the world. And, in spontaneous reaction to this love, loves in return ... to respond to the love of God with her very breath.”

“Love inspires love,” said Bishop Iffert. “It is the source of holiness. It is the source of wisdom ... That’s the story of Christmas, isn’t it? ... He emptied himself out being born in human likeness, joining our nature to his and accepting all our limitations, even temptation, even death, so that we might know that we are loved.”

“We are loved so much so that our God will not remain separated from us,” he continued, “even when we have made ourselves God’s enemies — even then he comes to love us. Love transforms. Love inspires love in return.”

He concluded, saying, “From now on, I will set up my nativity scene with the cow hovering closely to the baby Jesus. Practically touching. And I will imagine her, with her big brown eyes, breathing warm against the chill of the night.”

“And it will remind me,” said Bishop Iffert, “that being loved by Jesus changes everything. Who will accept the gift of divine love? That love transforms us. It is our training. It is the path to holiness. It is the path to peace.”



(above left) With his hands raised, Bishop Iffert prays over the gifts during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The altar, which is decorated with poinsettia flowers, is also decorated with a statue of the infant Jesus in a manger.

(above right) Bishop Iffert anoints the Jubilee cross with incense.

(below) As Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve begins, Bishop John Iffert kneels to pray before the crèche situated among the Cathedral’s sanctuary.

Baker photos



(above) Prior to the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption’s Midnight Mass, Dec. 25, the Bishop’s Choir, joined by a quartet of musical instruments, regaled the gathering congregations with liturgical Christmas music.

Gillespie and Keener photos



**An Epiphany blessing**  
(left center) Bishop John Iffert ascended a step ladder, Jan. 6, to mark the traditional Epiphany blessing (left) 20+C+M+B+26 this year — above the doorway of the St. Paul Oratory at the Curia. The initials — C+M+B — represent the Magi: Casper, Melchior and Balthazar. They also represent the Latin blessing *Christus mansionem benedicat*, which means “May Christ bless this house.” The numbers at the beginning and end mark the year — 2026. (far left) Before inscribing the doorway, Bishop Iffert blesses the chalk that is used.



Statement of the Bishops of Kentucky on the Feast of the Epiphany  
January 4, 2026

In November 2025, the Catholic Bishops of the United States issued a Special Message on the growing concern for the current situation facing many immigrants and refugees in our country. In continuity with that message, and with our joint statement in December 2024 with the bishops of Tennessee, as we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord and recognize Jesus Christ as the light that guides all nations on earth, we now wish to address ourselves specifically to the immigrant members of our Kentucky communities.

Nations have a right and responsibility to control their borders and to enforce laws meant to protect the population, but all laws must be enforced in a just and predictable manner that respects the God-given dignity of each human person. Pope Leo reminded us of this when he stated, “No one has said that the United States should have open borders...I think every country has a right to determine who and how and when people enter.” The Holy Father then added that “we have to look for ways of treating people humanely, treating people with the dignity that they have.”

Accordingly, we are increasingly concerned about the rapidly developing challenges facing immigrants, whether documented or undocumented. Regular reports of immigrants with legal status having that status arbitrarily revoked; increasing incidents of political leaders

vilifying immigrants; the elimination of sanctuary protections for churches, hospitals, and schools; and proposals at the state level targeting the ability of immigrants to live and pursue their dreams in Kentucky, combine to create an understandable climate of hostility, anxiety, and fear. We oppose all efforts to stigmatize immigrants as a group or to spread fear based on national or ethnic origin.

We stand with all of our immigrant brothers and sisters who have been victimized by unjust government action or by harmful rhetoric and vilification. We call on all of our political leaders to work to reform our broken immigration system in a way that allows for the peaceful and orderly migration of people who are searching for peace, stability, religious freedom, and economic opportunity, as well as one that respects family unification and a realistic possibility of potentially obtaining citizenship.

We reiterate the call and commitment we made with our brother bishops in Tennessee: “We invite the whole Catholic community...to learn more about the plight of immigrants, to understand the values that form our Catholic Teaching on the matter; and to join us in advocating for just and comprehensive laws and policies that respond to the requirements of human rights and dignity and reflect the desire for the common good in our nation. We stand ready to be a part of bringing this about.”



Most Reverend  
Shelton J. Fabre  
Archbishop of Louisville

Most Reverend  
John C. Iffert  
Bishop of Covington

Most Reverend  
John Stowe, OFM Conv.  
Bishop of Lexington

Most Reverend  
William F. Medley  
Bishop of Owensboro

Jason D. Hall  
Executive Director  
Catholic Conference of Ky.

Nos Solidarizamos con Nuestros Hermanos y Hermanas Inmigrantes  
Declaración de los Obispos de Kentucky en la Fiesta de la Epifanía  
4 de enero de 2026

En noviembre de 2025, los Obispos Católicos de los Estados Unidos emitieron un Mensaje Especial ante la creciente preocupación por la situación actual que enfrentan muchos inmigrantes y refugiados en nuestro país. En continuidad con ese mensaje, y con nuestra declaración conjunta de diciembre de 2024 junto con los obispos de Tennessee, mientras celebramos la Epifanía del Señor y reconocemos a Jesucristo como la luz que guía a todas las naciones de la tierra, deseamos ahora dirigirnos de manera especial a nuestras comunidades de Kentucky.

Las naciones tienen el derecho y la responsabilidad de controlar sus fronteras y hacer cumplir las leyes destinadas a proteger a la población, pero todas las leyes deben aplicarse de manera justa y predecible, respetando la dignidad dada por Dios a cada persona humana. El Papa León nos lo recordó cuando afirmó: «Nadie ha dicho que los Estados Unidos deban tener fronteras abiertas ... Creo que todo país tiene derecho a determinar quién entra, cómo entra y cuándo entra». El Santo Padre añadió después que «debemos buscar maneras de tratar a las personas humanamente, tratarlas con la dignidad que les corresponde».

En consecuencia, estamos cada vez más preocupados por los desafíos que se desarrollan rápidamente y que enfrentan los inmigrantes, ya sean documentados o no. Informes frecuentes de inmigrantes con estatus legal a quienes se les revoca arbitrariamente ese estatus; el aumento de incidentes en los que líderes políticos vilipendian a los inmigrantes; la elimi-

nación de protecciones de santuario para iglesias, hospitales y escuelas; y propuestas a nivel Estatal que buscan limitar la capacidad de los inmigrantes para vivir y perseguir sus sueños en Kentucky; se combinan para crear un clima comprensible de hostilidad, ansiedad y temor. Nos oponemos a todo esfuerzo por estigmatizar a los inmigrantes como grupo o por difundir miedo basado en el origen nacional o étnico.

Nos solidarizamos con todos nuestros hermanos y hermanas inmigrantes que han sido víctimas de acciones gubernamentales injustas o de una retórica dañina y deshumanizante. Llamamos a todos nuestros líderes políticos a trabajar para reformar nuestro sistema migratorio roto de una manera que permita una migración pacífica y ordenada de las personas que buscan paz, estabilidad, libertad religiosa y oportunidades económicas, y que respete la reunificación familiar y una posibilidad realista de poder obtener la ciudadanía.

Reiteramos el llamado y el compromiso que hicimos junto con nuestros hermanos obispos de Tennessee e invitamos a los católicos y a todas las personas de buena voluntad a «conocer más sobre la situación de los inmigrantes, comprender los valores que fundamentan nuestra enseñanza católica sobre este tema y unirse a nosotros para promover leyes y políticas justas e integrales que respondan a las exigencias de los derechos humanos y la dignidad, y que reflejen el deseo del bien común en nuestra nación. Estamos dispuestos a ser parte de este esfuerzo».

# 2025 — A year in the life of the Diocese of Covington

Items are listed in the month they occurred; in several cases, the news appeared in the *Messenger* the following month.

January

St. Augustine Parish, Covington, dedicate a new altar for the more than 100-year-old church.

In a joint statement by the Sisters of Notre Dame and St. Charles Community, the two organizations announce that they “reach a preliminary agreement for an expansion of the St. Charles’ ministry to take place on the Dixie Highway campus of the SND.” St. Joseph Heights, Park Hills, is acquired by St. Charles Community, and will be razed.

A contingency of college-aged students from Northern Kentucky University’s Catholic Newman Center and Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, attends the SEEK25 conference in Salt Lake City, Utah — joining more than 17,000 young Catholics.

Our Savior Parish, Covington, upholds a long-standing tradition by hosting the annual Martin Luther King Discussion Breakfast. Father John Judie, humanitarian and retired priest from the Archdiocese of Louisville, serves as keynote speaker.

On the eve of the inauguration of President Donald Trump

— who promises mass deportations that could include even birthright citizens — Holy Spirit Parish, Newport, hosts a Know Your Rights presentation by the Immigration and Refugee Law Center (IRLC), Cincinnati.

Save the Date  
The 3rd annual Kentucky March  
for Life  
Wednesday, March 11

The Diocese of Covington is organizing an adult/family bus.

Mass, 9:30 a.m., Good Shepherd Parish, Frankfort for Mass

Following Mass is a rally at the State Capitol including a walk to the Historic Frankfort Cemetery and to the Memorial of the Unborn (bus transport to the cemetery is available).

Buses return to Northern Kentucky by 4:30 p.m.

More information and registration to come.



Bishop's  
Schedule

Jan. 11–15  
Region V bishops retreat

Jan. 17  
Cursillo, St. Walburg  
Monastery guesthouse,  
Villa Hills

Jan. 18  
Mass, 9 a.m. and 11a.m.,  
Sts. Peter and Paul Parish,  
California

Jan. 19  
Diocesan Curia Closed in  
observance of the Martin  
Luther King, Jr. holiday

Jan. 20  
Confirmation, Holy Cross  
Parish, Covington

Villa Madonna Academy celebrates the restoration of its iconically domed Center Building. Blessing the building,  
(Continued on page 4)



(Continued from page 3)

Bishop John Iffert says, “We dedicate this new building to the education of young people, to the progress of this renewed building, to the progress of the sciences and learning...Bless this new building and all who will use it, make it a center where students and teachers, imbued with the words of truth, will search for the wisdom that guides the Christian life and strive wholeheartedly to stand by Christ as their teacher.”

Brother Gregory Morris, OSB, a native of Ft. Thomas, professes solemn vows as a Benedictine Monk of St. Meinrad Archabbey in the Archabbey Church in St. Meinrad, Indiana, Jan. 25.

Catholic Schools Week remains a long-standing tradition and national celebration of Catholic education. Bishop Iffert celebrates the annual Catholic Schools Week Mass, where students, faculty and staff from all Catholic schools in the Diocese gather.

**Official Assignment**  
Deacon James J. Bayne to St. William Parish, Williamstown and St. John Mission, Dividing Ridge

**February**  
Religious brothers and sisters throughout the Diocese of Covington gather in celebration with Mass and breakfast for the World Day of Consecrated Life.

In 2010, Msgr. William Neuhaus, then rector of the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, publishes a 360-degree digital tour of the cathedral using panoramic photography. More than 10 years later, the digital tour updates with new imagery of Covington’s iconic cathedral.

About 40 people complete the five-series “Mentoring

Workshops,” offered by the Franciscan University’s Catechetical Institute.

The Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal (DPAA) commences with the solicitors luncheon.

### Jubilarians 2025

#### Priests

Father Robert Henderson, 60 years  
Father Jeff VonLehman, 40 years  
Msgr. Dan Vogelpohl, 50 years

#### Deacons

Deacon Joseph McGraw, 25 years  
Deacon Thomas Nolan, 40 years

#### Congregation of Divine Providence

Sister Janet Carr, 60 years  
Sister Madonna Marie Kling, 60 years  
Sister Marie Rose Messingschlager, 60 years  
Sister Armella Pietrowski, 70 years  
Sister Jackie Schack, 70 years

#### Notre Dame Sisters

Sister Mary Patricia Bruemmer, 60 years  
Sister Ruth Agnes Delaney, 70 years  
Sister Mary Margaret Droege, 60 years  
Sister Pamela Mae Geiger, 50 years  
Sister Marge Mouch, 60 years  
Sister Kristel Noehring, 60 years  
Sister Mary Magdelyn Strittholt, 70 years

#### Dominican Sisters

Sister Maria Fidelis Gray, 25 years

Institute for Religious Liberty welcomes George Weigel, theologian and Distinguished Senior Fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center (EPPC), as keynote speaker for its presentation, “Pope St. John Paul II and Religious Liberty.” This presentation is first in a series by the IRL, commemorating the 20-year anniversary of the titular saint’s death.

Villa Madonna Academy, Villa Hills, as part of the Benedictine Colloquium, hosts students and faculty from St.

Benedict’s Preparatory School, Newark, New Jersey.

The Youth Ministry Office of the Diocese of Covington hosts a “Connect” retreat, for sixth, seventh and eighth graders at Thomas More University, Crestview Hills.

The second annual Kentucky March for Life, hosted by the Kentucky Right to Life organization, takes place on the steps of the state capitol building in Frankfort, where Hundreds gather.

**Official Assignment**  
Rev. John Paul, V.C. to Chaplain, Diocesan Catholic Committee on Scouting

**March**  
Thirty faithful of the Diocese of Covington board a bus with Bishop Iffert to participate in the first of four regional jubilee pilgrimages. This pilgrimage, to the shrine of St. Mother Theodore Guerin on the campus of St. Mary-of-the-Woods College, Indiana, serves as a way for these faithful to participate in the jubilee theme, Pilgrims of Hope.

Over 60 parish leaders gather for Mass and a day-long presentation on the newly released Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA).

The Serra Club for Vocations of Northern Kentucky distributes awards to nearly 200 parish altar servers at its annual celebration.

Dr. Mandy Sanchez, director of programming at Culture Reframed, an international nonprofit centered around addressing the harms of pornography to youth, returns to the Diocese of Covington, for a presentation titled Just a Click Away — Monitoring the Risks and Rewards of Gaming and Apps for Our Youth.

Thirty-four parishes gather across two separate ceremonies to celebrate the annual Rite of Election celebrated by Bishop John Iffert, the Rite of Election marks the moment catechumens and candidates are presented to the bishop.

Thomas More University announces an affiliation with Covington Latin School following a unanimous vote of its board of trustees, giving final approval for Covington Latin School to become a part of the university.

(Continued on page 6)

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VOL. 96

# MESSENGER

No. 1

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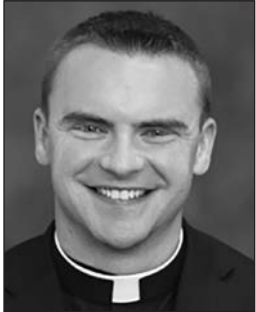
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# Fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness

The readings for the Baptism of the Lord — Cycle A — are: Isaiah 42:1–4, 6–7, Acts 10:34–38 and Matthew 3:13–17.

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Michael Elmlinger

As we celebrate the end of the Christmas season, we turn our attention to the event that marks the beginning of Jesus’s public ministry: His baptism at the Jordan River by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-17). While this gospel is rather brief, it contains so many important realities that help to reveal to the world who Jesus is and what he has come into the world to do. By this baptism, God reveals to John the Baptist that Jesus is indeed his own Son, and that he has come into the world to “fulfill all righteousness.”

That said, this scene can be a little confusing. Why is Jesus being baptized to begin with? What does it mean for Jesus to be baptized to “fulfill all righteousness”? After all, Jesus, being the Son of God, has no sin, and John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance (cf. 3:11), meaning those who were coming to him were doing so to turn their backs on the sins that they had committed. Why would Jesus need to do this when He has not committed any sin? He certainly is tempted throughout His life, but not once does He ever fall into sin. When we keep this in mind, I think that we can all understand and maybe even share in John’s confusion when he says to Jesus, “I need to be baptized by you, but you are coming to me?” (3:14). So what righteousness is Jesus fulfilling by being baptized by John?

The righteousness that Jesus is fulfilling is that He is identifying himself with us, who are sinners. This is an aspect of God’s plan for salvation, for Jesus’s kingly mission. He is to identify Himself with us, become one of us, and he is to take on our own sins as a sacrifice to the Father in the Holy Spirit in order to reconcile us to the Father; through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. What Jesus is showing here is His solidarity with sinful Israel, with each of us, who are sinners, by undergoing the same baptism as sinful Israel. This is a foreshadowing of what He is going to do on the Cross. “For our sake [the Father] made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God,” (2 Corinthians 5:21). “Sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3). His very mission as the Messianic King of Israel, anointed by the Holy Spirit and proclaimed by the Father Himself to be His “beloved Son, with whom [He is] well pleased” (3:17) is to identify himself with us in order to reconcile us to the Father.

By doing so, the Father has given us a wondrous gift: to become his adopted children through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. At our baptism, whenever it may have been, we are joined to the Paschal Mystery of Christ, where our old selves die in the waters of baptism, and we are reborn as the beloved sons and daughters of the Father. This is all accomplished for us by the fact that Christ was and is willing to identify Himself with us, by the fact that He, though never having committed sin, becomes the Paschal Lamb, Who was slain (cf. Revelation 5:12). This is the very reason that he was born into the world: to die, so that we might live. As Pope Benedict XVI says in Jesus of Nazareth, “Jesus loaded the burden of all mankind’s guilt upon his shoulders; he bore it down into the depths of the Jordan. He inaugurated his public activity by stepping into the place of sinners. His inaugural gesture is an anticipation of the Cross.” By this wondrous gift, the Father has given us all the opportunity to hear the same words that he proclaimed to Jesus: “You are my beloved son. You are my beloved daughter. With you, I am well pleased.”

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

# Just say no!

The tagline often associated with the “Say No to Drugs” campaign of the 1980s has become a phrase that I now repeat to friends, family and co-workers who, like me, are often singled out to do the tasks no one else will.

VIEWPOINT



Julie Feinauer

This is not because we are the best person for the job, or because we have the time. It’s because we are known as those who just can’t say no.

Saying no to things you don’t want to do, or don’t have the time or energy for, is not unchristian. For those of us afflicted with the inability to turn down any opportunity to “do,” we feel guilty or shameful when we decline an invitation. Jesus often said no when others’ demands did not align with God’s plan. He refused to perform at the Pharisees request. Miracles were not an on-demand service. He even declined to perform healings when he needed to pray, or to move on to another town.

Jesus was not being mean, spiteful or lazy. He understood that he could not say yes when it did not fulfill the calling of his Father. When we take on more than we can, or should, we often put God, the needs of our own family or even our own health on the backburner. In doing so, we are not aligning with the Lord’s will; rather, in many cases, we are people-pleasing. In Galatians 1:10, we are told to seek God’s approval, not validation from the world. Are we afraid someone will take our place, or do it better? Will we lose our popularity or status?

Whether our “yes” is coming from a place of wanting to be praised for our work, or because we lack the skill of wise boundary-setting, we are not being good stewards of our time or energy when we overcommit. This can be anything from being on yet another committee to telling a neighbor you would love to come to their 3-year-old’s birthday party on your only day off.

How can we fulfill God’s plan for us if we are filling our lives with endless tasks and obligations? You need not feel guilty for taking time for prayer, for your chil-

dren, spouse, or even for rest. You cannot pour from an empty vessel, and you must rejuvenate to be at your best!

Self-martyrdom — the “I have to, because no one else will” syndrome — is not saintly. Creating space for others to use their talents is virtuous. We need to recognize the skills of others without being jealous or comparing their work to our own. It is humbling to realize that the show can go on without us.

We cannot pretend that somewhere inside our desire to be the go-to person is not a self-serving component, no matter how much we would like to believe otherwise. Jesus encourages a life lived for eternal purposes, not temporary social status. It’s not wrong to want a good name. However, the motivation must be to honor God, not the self. The pursuit of popularity for its own sake is ultimately empty, leading away from the Father, and towards pride.

So how do we know when to say no? Of course, at the heart of our “no” cannot be laziness or lack of empathy for our fellow man. This must be the first consideration; as Christians, we are asked to sacrifice, but we must do this with wisdom and discernment. Reflect on what is being asked of you. Is this something that is specifically your area of expertise? Do you have time to give attention to the task without taking away from those things you have already committed to, such as your faith, family, physical health, care for your home or pets?

Next, prayerfully sit with the request or obligation. Ask yourself if you are taking it on because it will be a feather in your cap, or because it is good for you, your spiritual life, your loved ones, or your community. Is it aligned with what you are being called to do? Does it, at its core, make you a better person, or is it stretching you to mediocrity?

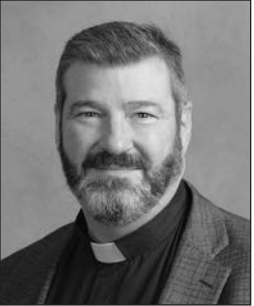
During her time working with the Just Say No campaign, Nancy Reagan was quoted as saying “If you can save just one child, it’s worth it.” I feel the same about saving even one precious hour. Time is our most valuable resource — so why would you give away something so precious? Something you could never earn back. Sometimes daring to say no, is saying yes where it really counts.

*Julie Feinauer is director of the Safe Environment Office, Diocese of Covington, Ky*

# The grace of receiving: Giving back God’s gifts freely

In Catholic teaching, everything we have and everything we are is an unmerited gift from God, the ultimate giver. As Scripture declares, “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above” (James 1:17).

BELIEVE, TEACH, PRACTICE



Deacon Scott Folz

From the intricacies of creation, “In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1), to our personal traits, talents and abilities, all reflect his intentional design and infinite love.

Life itself, natural gifts, spiritual graces, time and treasure are bestowed freely, with no merit on our part. We cannot take or steal these; we can only receive them as they are generously offered. And when we do, just look at

what happened to Adam and Eve. They took what was forbidden; they thought they knew better.

This divine generosity calls for a reciprocal response. What we do with these gifts becomes our offering back to God. He does not force or take; he receives only what we freely give. This dynamic of giving, receiving and not taking forms the heart of our relationship with God, transforming gratitude into stewardship and love.

The profoundest expression of this exchange unfolds in the Eucharist, the “source and summit” of Christian

life (CCC 1324). During the Preparation of the Gifts, simple bread and wine, “fruit of the earth and work of human hands,” are brought forward. God provides the wheat and grape; we, using our God-given talents, transform them through human effort. We offer these back to him, acknowledging their divine origin.

In an “admirable exchange,” as St. Augustine called it, God accepts our humble gifts and, through the consecration by the priest, in persona Christi, substantially changes them into the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ. We then receive holy Communion, the most intimate gift, freely given, not taken. Jesus offers himself completely, and we partake in this holy Communion only by gracious reception, “The Body of Christ.” “Amen.”

This Eucharistic pattern mirrors broader Catholic stewardship. We are not owners but stewards of God’s entrustments (U.S. Bishops’ “Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response”). Hoarding gifts stifles grace; sharing them, in service, prayer and generosity, multiplies it for the Church and our neighbor.

Jesus teaches this vividly in the Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-30). A master distributes talents according to each servant’s ability. Those who invest and multiply theirs hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant ... Enter into the joy of your master.” The one who buries his out of fear returns only the original, facing rebuke. These talents symbolize God’s varied graces and opportunities. Faithful cultivation leads to deeper union with God; fearful withholding breeds spiritual barrenness. Grace flourishes when shared, but withers when clutched.

In everyday life, receiving awakens gratitude, flowing

(Continued on page 14)



(Continued from page 3)

The 2025 Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal holds the first of two kick-off dinners at Blue Licks Battlefield State Resort Park, Carlisle.

Mary, Queen of Heaven Parish, Erlanger, kicks off fish fry season with the blessing of its newly erected Fry Hut. The permanent structure houses industrial-grade fryers.

Thomas More University honors three outstanding community members at the 27th Bishop William A. Hughes Award dinner. Honorees include Melissa Lueke, Kathleen Siobhan Barone, Ph.D., and Garren Colvin '86.

As part of a long-standing diocesan tradition, the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, is the site of the annual Scout Mass.

The top 20 finalists of the 2025 Pro-Life Essay Contest gather with Bishop Iffert and Faye Roch, director, Pro-Life Office, for an evening of celebration and to award the top three finishers. The essay contest is sponsored by the Knights of Columbus.

After 35 years of dedicated service to the Holy Cross District High School, Covington, community, Terese Meeks, religion teacher, campus minister and religion department chair, retires.

Every year, a class of students from Thomas More University travels south to El Paso, Texas. In conjunction with the Annunciation House, a nonprofit that serves migrants in the region, the students engage in what is known as a “Border Awareness Experience” — which delves deep into the realities of immigration and life on the borderlands of west Texas.

The St. Mary School community gathers in its new gym to surprise Tricia Richardson, kindergarten teacher, as Gold Star Chili names her the 2025 Teacher of the Year.

The second Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal (DPAA) Kick-off Dinner is held at Receptions Event Center, Erlanger, where 311 people gather. The theme of this year’s DPAA is Pilgrims of Hope, Missionaries of Mercy.

Notre Dame Academy’s Board of Directors announces the appointment of Lauren Hitron as the next president of Notre Dame Academy.

Student representatives from Holy Cross District High

School, Covington; Covington Catholic High School, Park Hills; Bishop Brossart High School, Alexandria; and Newport Central Catholic High School, Newport, are all invited to the American Sign Museum, Cincinnati, where they are gifted a pair of unreleased shoes by designer Phil Lipschultz.

About 80 middle school students participate in Light the Hill at Newport Central Catholic High School for an evening youth event gaining a deeper understanding of their talents and gifts and how God is asking them to be “light” for others.

As a continuation of its celebration of the 20th anniversary of the death of Pope St. John Paul II, TMU’s Institute for Religious Liberty welcomes Dr. Paul Kengor for his presentation “John Paul the Great: Seven Things Every Catholic Should Know.”

Official appointments

Dan Summe to Catholic Charities Advisory Board  
Peter Mooney to Catholic Charities Ad Hoc Finance Committee  
Dominic Woude to Catholic Charities Ad Hoc Finance Committee

April

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, and for the 21st year, the Family Nurturing Center kicks off the month with its annual Blue Ribbon ceremony at Tom Gill Chevrolet, Florence, April 1.

The Diocese of Covington’s Curia staff holds its second annual Day of Service, an extension of Bishop John Iffert’s “Campaign of Mercy.”

After a years-long capital campaign and ongoing construction, St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs, rededicates its church and consecrates the altar in a Mass celebrated by Bishop Emeritus Roger Foys.

After a brief time away following intense regional flooding, Father Britton Hennessey returns to St. Francis Xavier Parish,

Falmouth and celebrates a private Mass reestablishing the Blessed Sacrament at the parish church.

Over 100 people attend this year’s Memorial Mass for the Loss of Child at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington. The annual Mass is hosted by the diocesan Pro-Life Office. Bishop Emeritus Roger Foys is the celebrant and homilist.

A warm spring morning welcomes over 400 pilgrims who participate in the third annual Covington Lenten Pilgrimage.

People from every parish fill the pews of the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, to capacity on April 15 to celebrate the annual Chrism Mass. All priests and deacons of the Diocese of Covington gather as Bishop John Iffert, celebrant and homilist, blesses the holy oils and consecrates the sacred Chrism.

Following the death of Pope Francis, April 21, the Diocese of Covington concluded a trio of services commemorating the deceased pontiff with a Requiem Mass, April 26, at the Cathedral, celebrated by Bishop Iffert alongside many of the priests of the diocese, Bishop Emeritus Roger Foys was the homilist.

May

The first May edition of the *Messenger* is dedicated to Pope Francis highlighting the liturgical celebrations mourning his death and featuring his legacy and remembrances from local, national and international Catholics.

Seven men are ordained to the Order of the Diaconate: Dale Brockman, Christopher Freihofer, Jason Gibson, Thomas Kissel, Terry Mason, Eric Wehrman and Steven Winbigler — are all presented to Bishop Iffert at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington.

(Continued on page 8)



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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/>.

**A Survivors of Suicide Loss Support Group begins at Mother of God Parish, Covington,** for family members and friends of persons who have ended their own lives. Group meetings will be held on the first Wednesday of each month at the parish office in the St. Aloysius Conference Room. The first meeting was Jan. 7, 6:30–8 p.m. For information contact Jeff Duell at (859) 801-8213.

**The Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption will resonate with festive music as the Cathedral Concert Series brings this Season of Christmas to a close with “An Epiphany Epilogue” concert,** Jan. 11, 3 p.m. Seasonal selections from a wide variety of traditions make this program a treat for music lovers of all ages. The Seven Hills Brass Quintet returns as the featured guest ensemble. LeeAnn Kordenbrock, Cathedral cantor and soloist, and principal organist Greg Schaffer offer unique arrangements for voice, synthesizer and organ. All are welcome. There is no admission charge. A freewill offering will be accepted. Please visit <http://cathedral-concertseries.org>.

**Martin Luther King Jr. breakfast and community conversation, Our Savior Parish,** Covington, Jan. 17, 9:30–11:30 a.m. Join for a special morning of reflection and dialogue. Event highlights include documentary screening “Awaking to Justice.”

**Newport Central Catholic High School Men’s Stag,** Jan. 17 from 7–11 p.m. in the school gym. Cost \$25, \$15 Seniors (65+). Admission includes beer, soft drinks, coneys and turtle soup. Silent auction items and raffles. Cash only.

**Open House, Holy Cross District High School, Covington,** Jan. 18, 1 p.m. For information visit [www.hchscov.com](http://www.hchscov.com) or call (859) 431-1335.

**Wisdom and Creation: Advice for Harmonious Living** will be presented by Sister Fidelis Tracy, CDP, Jan. 21 at noon at the St. Barbara Sterling Event Center, Erlanger. Hosted by the Faith and Fellowship Committee. No RSVP needed.

**Support Group for Separated and Divorced begins Jan. 22.** New Beginnings, an 8-week program that provides the opportunity to heal and move forward despite a complicated situation. Led by facilitators who have been through their own personal losses. Registration is required. Visit <https://covdio.org/new-beginnings-2/> or call (859) 392-1529. The next session will be held on consecutive Thursdays, Jan. 22 – March 12, 7–8:30 p.m., Catholic Charities, Covington.

**Bishop John Iffert will celebrate Mass for the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life,** Feb. 7, 10 a.m. at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. A reception will follow in Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium. All are welcome.

**The Office of Catechesis and Evangelization is offering workshops on Books of the Old Testament, presented by Father Timothy Schehr,** retired biblical scholar and former professor at Mount St. Mary’s School of Theology at the Athenaeum of Ohio. Workshops are all held Saturday morning, 10–11:30 a.m., Diocese of Covington, Curia Office. 2026 Spring Workshops: Job, March 1, session 1; March 14, session 2; April 11, session 3 and April 18, session 4. Cost \$35 per session, cash or checks at the door. Register at [covdio.org/bible-workshops](http://covdio.org/bible-workshops).

**The Diocese of Covington is offering 63 FREE in-person adult Catholic faith formation workshops,** June



*Organizers impressed with first NKY Men’s Conference*

Approximately 150 fathers and sons attended the first NKY Men’s Conference, Dec 13, at St. Agnes Parish, Ft. Wright. The conference was hosted by That Man is You, an international men’s program dedicated to developing spiritual leaders. The host team, a group of leaders from TMIY, are Bill Dehlinger, Mike Hebbeler, Mark Horstkamp, Dave Nienaber, Tim Ryan and Mark Wormald. Featured speakers were Father Michael Hennigen and Deacon Joe Grote, with a testimony by Josh Randolph, pictured. TMIY is a yearlong program, from August to May, with two 14-week sessions held at several parishes in the Diocese. To learn more, contact Bill Dehlinger, [bill@deltarealtyusa.com](mailto:bill@deltarealtyusa.com).

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.



St. Anthony, Taylor Mill, students in fifth through eighth grade were challenged by Mr. and Mrs. Paul and Annie Naberhaus to memorize a beautiful and rather long poem about the beauty of God’s creation. The poem, “The Wonderer” by Robert William Service has much to teach us about the beauty in each one of us, and in all of creation. These four students rose to the challenge of not only memorizing, but also presenting the poem after a weekday Mass to the parishioners and the entire school.



(Continued from page 6)

Bishop Iffert speaks to four local news stations following Pope Leo XIV’s first papal address from the Loggia of Blessings. Bishop Iffert highlights what he believes will be the hallmarks of a Cardinal Prevost papacy, namely human dignity and economic disparity.

The Diocese of Covington Youth Ministry Office celebrates the growth of the Youth Commission Evangelization Team (YCE/T), with co-directors Mark Johnson and Hannah Ubelhor, under the direction of diocesan youth minister, Angie Poat. Graduating YCE/T members are recognized for their spiritual gifts and leadership.

Bishop Iffert celebrates the election of Cardinal Robert Prevost as Pope Leo XIV with a Mass of Thanksgiving for the new pontiff.

The installation of the With One Heart Diocesan Pastoral Plan continues with the completion of Cohort 2 of Parish Missionary Disciples training.

In coordination with the Diocese of Covington Pro-Life Office, the Pregnancy Care Network of Northern Kentucky hosts the annual Community Baby Shower. Twenty-seven community agencies come together to help 140 new and expectant mothers.

Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, celebrates another graduating class with a Baccalaureate Mass, presided over by Bishop Iffert.

Long-time, once retired, principal of St. Edward Elementary, Cynthiana, Mary Grable, retires for the second time at the conclusion of the 2024-2025 school year. Her dedication is recognized during the Rose and Candle Ceremony.

St. Elizabeth Healthcare unveils two new departments aimed at bridging the gap between healthcare and the community — the Department of Community Health and Partnerships and Department of Culture and Belonging.

Thirteen catechists from schools and parishes are recognized for excellence in religious education. Each catechist shakes hands with Bishop Iffert before receiving a reward.

Campaign of Mercy

As part of the Campaign of Mercy, the *Messenger* highlights members of the community who exemplify the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, following a chosen theme for each month. In May, organist Tony Beyer is highlighted for his continued good work of praying for the living, playing and praying for each state and its citizens.

Jubilee Year

Franciscan Daughter of Mary Mother Seraphina speaks with the Messenger following a peaceful prayer gathering outside of a Planned Parenthood facility. The Franciscan Daughters of Mary join many in prayer for the unborn as part of the Helpers of God’s Precious Infants ministry.

Obituaries

Sister Mary Reinette Kroeger

June

St. Vincent de Paul of Northern Kentucky launches its annual Summer Breeze program.

Bishop Iffert ordains Father Joshua Heskamp a priest for the Diocese of Covington.

The 20th annual Cross the Bridge for Life event takes place once again at the Purple People Bridge, Newport, with guest speakers Bishop John Iffert and newly installed Archbishop Robert Casey.

Bishop Iffert and Julie Feinauer, director of the Office of Safe Environment, visit The Family Nurturing Center, Florence.

Community members gather alongside Bishop Iffert at the St. Patrick Cemetery, Maysville, for the groundbreaking of a life-size Stations of the Cross.

Bishop Iffert confirms 59 candidates from 16 parishes at the Adult Confirmation Mass at the Cathedral.

As part of the 2025 Jubilee Year, the Diocese of Covington Office of Stewardship and Mission Services organizes a series of regional pilgrimages in honor of the jubilee theme Pilgrims of Hope. Bishop Iffert and a bus full of pilgrims travel to the Abbey of Gethsemani in Trappist, Ky.

Notre Dame Sister Marla Monahan is honored as the 2025 Helen Carroll Champion of Education Honoree by the NKY Chamber.

St. Joseph Heights, convent to the Sisters of Notre Dame, is razed to accommodate the changing needs of the aged and infirmed Sisters of Notre Dame in the Diocese of Covington. The demolition makes way for St. Charles Community facilities.

The Diocese of Covington and the Intercommunity Sisters Peace and Justice Committee hold a presentation titled “Immigration: The Catholic Perspective.” The collaboration sees major success with nearly 200 attendees and the appearance of local news stations.

The Serra Club for Vocations celebrates the women religious of the Diocese of Covington with a luncheon at Devou Park Golf and Event Center, Covington. Bishop Iffert thanks the women religious for their many years of ministry.

St. Augustine Parish, Augusta, celebrates 150 years of the Sisters of Notre Dame with a Mass and reception. Father Joey Shelton, pastor, St. Augusta Parish, thanks the sisters and recalls fond memories of their helpfulness during his transition to pastor.

Campaign of Mercy

Holy Cross District High School’s baseball team participates in a Pure Life Project event to bring clean, fresh drinking water to their community at Cincinnati’s Freestore Foodbank.

In highlighting the corporal work of giving drink to the thirsty, the *Messenger* visits Thomas More Biology Field Station, California. There, director of the Field Station, Chris Lorenz, speaks on the Field Station’s role in purifying Ohio River water for drinking.

Official Assignments

Rev. Gregory E. Osburg to continue as Defender of the Bond, Diocesan Tribunal

Rev. Michael A. Black to Parochial Administrator, St. John the Baptist Parish, Wilder; Instructor, Covington Latin School

Rev. Augustine K. Aidoo to Pastor, St. Patrick Parish, Maysville, St. James Mission, Minerva, and Holy Redeemer Parish, Vanceburg

Rev. Eric L. Andriot to Parochial Vicar, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington

Rev. Michael E. Comer to Pastor, Our Savior Parish, Covington; continues other duties

Deacon William R. Theis to retire after 15 years of dedicated service

Rev. Michael K. Elmlinger to Canon Law Studies, University of St. Paul, Ottawa

Rev. Michael C. Hennigen to Parochial Vicar, St. Timothy Parish, Union

Rev. Damian J. Hils to Pastor, All Saints Parish, Walton

Rev. Niby Kannai to Pastor, St. Augustine Parish, Covington

Rev. A. Conor Kunath to Pastor, Sts. Boniface and James Parish, Ludlow

Rev. Joseph C. Rielage to Parochial Administrator, St. Edward Parish, Cynthiana

Very Rev. Daniel L. Schomaker to Pastor, Blessed Sacrament

Parish, Fort Mitchell

Rev. Joshua D. Heskamp to Parochial Vicar, St. Patrick Parish, Maysville

Rev. Gregory J. Bach retired after 26 years of dedicated ministry in the Diocese of Covington

Rev. Roberto Becerra to Parochial Administrator, Cristo Rey Parish, Florence

July

The Sisters of Notre Dame hold their final Fourth of July festival, ending a 103-year tradition.

On the Feast of Corpus Christi, St. Anthony Parish, Taylor Mill, makes strides in their With One Heart Diocesan Pastoral Plan, holding an intercultural celebration and ending a parish-wide initiative on the education of the Eucharist.

St. Ann Mission, Covington, holds its 138th annual St. Ann Novena. On each night of the Novena, guest speakers speak on the major Church councils.

Our Savior Parish, Covington, celebrates the installation of its new historical state marker. The marker is championed by the now retired Divine Providence Sister Janet Bucher.

The Diocese of Covington Office of Youth Ministry hosts the annual High School Summer Retreat at Thomas More University.

The Alliance for Catholic Urban Education kicks off its summer mission collection. The money raised is used for tuition assistance for students at ACUE schools.

Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, gains full membership to Division Two of the National College Athletic Association.

Mayor of Covington, Ron Washington, declares July 4 as Father Dan Schomaker Day, in recognition of his accomplishments and service to St. Augustine Parish, Covington.

Over 200 members of the Diocese of Covington gather to celebrate Bishop Emeritus Roger Foys’ 80th birthday at St. Mary’s Park, Covington.

Jubilee Year

Throughout the 2025 Jubilee Year, specific days highlight groups within the Church. The Jubilee of Young People takes place between July 28 and August 3. The Jubilee of Young People highlights the young adults of the Church between the ages of 18 and 35, inviting them specifically to continue their journey as pilgrims of hope.

Fifty-three parishioners from Mother of God Parish, Covington, inspired by the 2025 Jubilee Year: Pilgrims of Hope, attend a parish-organized pilgrimage to the Basilica of St. Joseph Protocathedral and to the Abbey of Gethsemani.

Official Assignments

Very Rev. Britton C. Hennessey, V.F. to Chaplain, Fire Foundation of Northern Kentucky

Deacon Dale Brockman to St. Timothy Parish, Union

Deacon Scott Folz to Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington

Deacon Christopher Freihofer to Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington

Deacon Jason Gibson to St. Cecilia Parish, Independence

Deacon Tom Kissel to St. Pius X Parish, Edgewood

Deacon Terry Mason St. Patrick Parish, Taylor Mill

Deacon Eric Wehrman to Blessed Sacrament Parish, Fort Mitchell

Deacon Steve Winbigler to St. Joseph Parish, Cold Spring

Rev. Michael D. Barth to Judge, Diocesan Tribunal

Sister Margaret Stallmeyer, C.D.P. to Judge, Diocesan Tribunal

Rev. Barry M. Windholtz to Judge, Diocesan Tribunal

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(Continued from page 8)

- Msgr. William B. Neuhaus to Promoter of Justice, Diocesan Tribunal
- Msgr. Kurt H. Kemo to Defender of the Bond, Diocesan Tribunal
- Rev. Gregory E. Osburg to Defender of the Bond, Diocesan Tribunal
- Msgr. John R. Schulte to Defender of the Bond, Diocesan Tribunal
- Msgr. Gerald E. Twaddell to Defender of the Bond, Diocesan Tribunal
- Betsy Djordjevic to Ecclesiastical Notary, Diocesan Tribunal
- Karen Guidugli to Ecclesiastical Notary, Diocesan Tribunal

Official Appointment

Robert J. Hagedorn to Diocesan Finance Officer

Obituary

Sister Marie Anna Sand, SND

August

Jane Hermes, executive director of the Family Nurturing Center, presents Bishop Iffert with a thank-you gift for the Diocese’s participation in the Light Up Blue campaign in April. Notre Dame Sister Erin Nagy makes first profession of vows at the Sisters of Notre Dame motherhouse in Chardon, Ohio.

Bishop John Iffert celebrates Mass to commemorate the new 2025-2026 school year with faculty and staff from schools across the diocese in attendance.

As part of the With One Heart Diocesan Pastoral Plan, St. Bernard and Divine Mercy Parishes seek to strengthen parish-ioner involvement. The fruit of this goal comes to bear as the young adult ministry of the parishes spreads its enthusiasm through the rest of the parish, enlivening the parishioners.

Bishop Iffert commissions new and returning principals ahead of the 2025-2026 school year, mobilizing them for his mis-sion and ministry in education. Each of the eight new princi-pals receives a Bible inscribed by Bishop Iffert, as a symbolic reminder of their role in this ministry.

To dedicate the new Immaculate Heart of Mary Technology Center, Bishop Iffert travels to Ghana, Africa, where the center is erected thanks to donations by Immaculate Heart of Mary parishioners. The international trip serves a dual purpose for Bishop Iffert: to bless and dedicate the new space, and to meet the families of the African priests serving in the Diocese, learning and immersing himself in their culture.

The new chimera which will sit atop the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, arrive. Each chimera weighs 170 pounds, 100 pounds less than their removed counterparts. The chimera will be installed last, the crown of the Restored in Christ campaign and renovations.

The Deanery Pastoral Council orientation brings together members from the different deaneries in the Diocese.

Bishp Iffert celebrates the annual Red Mass at the Cathedral for members of the law profession.

Mother Clare is officially elected as the new Mother Superior of the Franciscan Daughters of Mary following the general elections, she succeeds Mother Seraphina Quinlan.

Following the resounding success of the first immigration presentation, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington, is filled for the second titled “Immigration: The Catholic Perspective, Part 2,” by the Intercommunity Sisters Peace and Justice Committee.

The Feast of the Assumption of Mary is celebrated with Mass by Bishop Iffert at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption. On one of the most highly regarded Marian feast

days, Bishop Iffert reminds everyone that Mary is the first tab-ernacle, the earthly carrier of the redeemer of the world.

The Serra Club for Vocations brings together Bishop Iffert, Father Connor Kunath, vocations director, and the diocesan seminarians for a back-to-school barbecue at the TMU Field Station.

St. Mary of the Assumption Parish and School, Alexandria, come together to celebrate the blessing and dedication of their new STEM center with Bishop Iffert.

Holy Cross District High School celebrates with students, faculty, staff and Bishop Iffert for Mass and the blessing of its new National Blue Ribbon School signs.

Chief Financial Officer Dale Henson retires after 17 years of service. Succeeding Mr. Henson in the role is Bob Hagedorn, who previously served as diocesan financial controller.

The Schools Office and Alliance for Catholic Urban Education welcome solicitors to its annual appeal kickoff breakfast meeting. Led by appeal chair, Karen Riegler, 60 solic-itors reach out asking for support of the 2025-2026 ACUE Annual Appeal.

The Our Savior Parish, Covington, community gathers to celebrate Divine Providence Sister Janet Bucher, who served the parish as pastoral administrator for thirty-four years.

Major campaign donors gather to celebrate the success of the Restored in Christ campaign. The group meets at Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium with Bishop Iffert, where they observe the newly delivered gargoyles.

Celebrity priest chef Father Leo Patalinghug visits the Diocese for a “Miracles at the Table” event.

The 2025 Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal (DPAA) celebrates its conclusion in Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington, with a reception where more than \$270,000 dollars are allocated to diocesan and community ministries in grants.

Obituaries

- Deacon Steven Irving Durkee
- Sister Judith McMahon, CDP

September

Youth Ministry charts four teams as it advances its Diocesan Pastoral Plan objectives. The teams are: Youth Commission Evangelization Team; Middle School Ministry; Youth Intern Team; and Service and Mission Team.

Matt Spencer is named director of the Diocesan Choir. He succeeds Katie Barton, who has directed the choir since its inception in 2014.

Nearly 100 married couples celebrate milestone anniver-saries and receive a blessing from Bishop Iffert at the annual Wedding Anniversary Vespers.

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

Local artist Daniel Zalla returns from Florence, Italy, and opens an exhibit “Persone e Paesaggi” at the Art Gallery, Xavier University, Cincinnati.

Bishop Iffert celebrates the second annual Mass of Belonging hosted by the Fire Foundation of Northern Kentucky.

Thomas More University welcomes speaker Magnus McFarland of global charity Mary’s Meals.

Sisters of Divine Providence celebrate the Season of Creation, Sept. 1 to Oct. 4.

Bishop Brossart High School, Alexandria, celebrates the blessing and dedication of its Verst Family Baseball Field and Bishop Brossart Softball Field, completing the Mustang Athletic Complex (MAC).

Newport Central Catholic High School and Notre Dame

Academy are nominated by the Council for American Private Education (CAPE) for the 2025 National Blue Ribbon Schools award. Just days before the announcement, the U.S. Education Department dissolves the National Blue Ribbon Schools pro-gram and awards are not distributed.

St. William Parish, Williamstown, is awarded a \$1,500 grant from Oregon Catholic Press (OCP) for bilingual missals to accommodate the parish’s growing Hispanic population.

Thomas More University and Covington Latin School announce a direct admissions agreement for all eligible CLS students, which includes financial aid up to \$30,000 a year.

Honorable David Bunning presides at a naturalization event held at Newport Central Catholic High School where 57 immigrants, representing 24 nationalities, become United States citizens.

Villa Madonna Academy High School is recognized at the Cognia 2025 Summit for its 100 years of accreditation.

Sir Walter D. Mace is invested as a Knight of The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

Dawn Groneck is installed as the Diocesan Council President of St. Vincent de Paul of Northern Kentucky.

Thomas More University establishes family-friendly resources for mothers on campus.

Jubilee Year

World Day for Grandparents and Elderly is celebrated. Last year, Pope Francis refers to elders as “‘the firm foundation’ on which ‘new’ stones can rest, in order to join in erecting a spiri-tual edifice.”

Local pilgrims Kathy Whittle, Zaylee Whittle, Kristina Pugh and Veronica Pugh return from Rome during the canonization of Carlo Acutis and Pier Giorgio Frassati.

In commemoration of National Migration Week and the jubilee theme “migrants, missionaries of hope,” Bishop Iffert celebrates Mass.

The Alliance for Catholic Urban Education presents its Faith, Hope and Inspiration Award to David Drees, chairman and CEO of Drees Home Foundation.

TMU men’s soccer team welcomes Cohen Bramlee to his first in-person soccer game since being signed to the team through Team IMPACT, an organization that matches children facing serious illnesses with college sports teams, in 2022.

Official Assignment

Deacon Eric Ritchie to, St. Thomas Parish, Ft. Thomas

Obituaries

- Sister Deborah Harmeling, OSB
- Sister Mary Paul Hanneken, SN

October

Notre Dame Academy celebrates the installation of Lauren Hitron as the school’s fifth president.

Bishop Iffert celebrates cemetery visitations at diocesan cemeteries St. John, St. Mary and St. Stephen and the priest’s cemetery at St. Pius X Cemetery, Erlanger.

The Angelico Project teams up with Open Window Theatre bringing the play Frassati to Cincinnati’s Aronoff Center.

FIRE Foundation of Northern Kentucky hosts an evening of inclusive education at Thomas More University’s Academic Center, Crestview Hills.

The Center for Hope and Healing, a health ministry of the Rose Garden Home Mission of the Franciscan Daughters of Mary, Covington, receives two recognitions: a fifth Gold Standards rating from the National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics and a 2025 Good Works Program award from the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels.

(Continued on page 14)



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# Annual Report of the Finances for the Diocese of Covington – June 30, 2025

The annual report of the Diocese of Covington shows the financial position and results of operation of the Diocese for the years ended June 30, 2025, and 2024. The financial statements of the Diocese of Covington are audited by the certified public accounting firm of Dean Dorton Allen Ford PLLC. The auditors' report on the financial statements includes an unmodified opinion that the statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Diocese of Covington and the related affiliates. An unmodified opinion is the highest level of assurance given by a public accounting firm.

The financial information presented herein includes the Diocese of Covington Curia offices, which are fiscally responsible to and under the direct control of the Bishop of the Diocese. This includes the central administrative offices, program offices and departments of the Diocese, its cemeteries, the Diocesan/Parish Annual Appeal, seminarian recruitment and education, the care for elderly and infirmed priests, the Diocesan-wide secondary school sup-

port program, the Alliance for Urban Catholic Education (ACUE) school operations, and the Diocesan-wide employee health insurance program, which was self-funded before fiscal year 2024 and is now a full-indemnity plan.

Various religious orders, lay societies, religious organizations which operate within the Diocese, parishes, parish elementary schools, secondary schools and other related institutions are not included in the accompanying financial information.

## Results of Operations

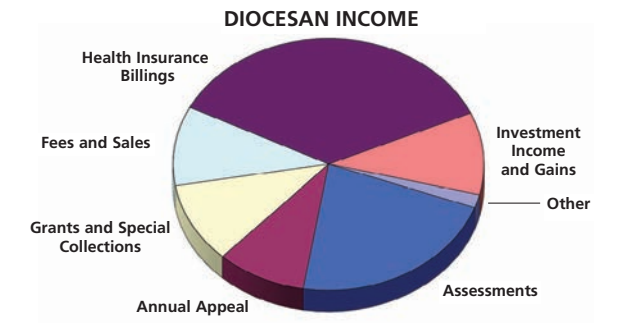
During this past fiscal year, total revenues decreased from the prior year by 3%. This is due mostly to less revenue from health insurance premiums, as the full-indemnity plan reduced health insurance fees for the Diocese and allowed for lower premium collections from all locations (-11.6%), poorer investment return (-10%), and less other and miscellaneous revenue (-10.5%) offset by more received in Grants and Special Collections, particularly in the ACUE schools (47.8%).

Total expenses increased by 11% due to increases in priest post-employment benefits following an actuarial study update (431.7%), grants made by the Diocese (57.9%), and programmatic expenses (18.2%) offset by reductions in interest expense (4.3%). Notably, an impairment loss on property was recognized (in programmatic expenses) in this past fiscal year of \$1.1 million.

## Operating Revenue

During the fiscal year ended June 30, 2025, the Diocese received operating revenue from the following sources which it used to fund its various ministries and services.

Health insurance billings	\$ 10,300,332
Assessments	6,334,996
Investment income/(losses)	3,028,045
Grants and special collections	2,967,177
Fees and sales	2,925,661
Diocesan/Parish Annual Appeal	2,678,316
Other	481,115
Total Operating Revenue	<u>\$ 28,715,642</u>



• Parish assessments are comprised of three taxes on the parishes of the Diocese. The first two are applied to assessable income, which is defined by diocesan policy and includes offertory, net fundraising, school tuition, and bequest income. A 6.75% tax on the assessable income of all parishes provided \$3,132,458 of income to fund the administrative offices of the Diocese. A 5% tax on the assessable income of the parishes of Boone, Campbell, Kenton and Mason counties provided \$2,340,698 of support for the secondary and urban schools of the Diocese. Lastly, in lieu of operating individual inner-city schools as parochial schools, the parishes of the inner-city core of the Diocese provide a subsidy to the Diocese to operate those schools as a consortium under the auspices of the Alliance for Catholic Urban Education (ACUE). This subsidy amounted to \$861,840.

• The Diocesan/Parish Annual Appeal for 2024 (ended on March 31, 2025; adjusted to fiscal year ended June 30, 2025) raised an amount totaling \$4,279,434. Of this amount \$1,601,118 was returned to parishes as rebates for use in local ministries.

• Grants, special collections, and contributions represent: 1) grant monies received, which are distributed to Diocesan parishes and missions, 2) the seminary collection used for seminarian education and 3) bequests received by the Diocese.

• Fees and sales represent the following for the 2025 fiscal year:

Cemetery fees and sales	\$ 1,096,274
ACUE tuition and fees	1,066,252
Departmental fees and fundraising	312,411
Education office fees	256,895
Newspaper ads and subscriptions	193,829
Total Fees and Sales	<u>\$ 2,925,661</u>

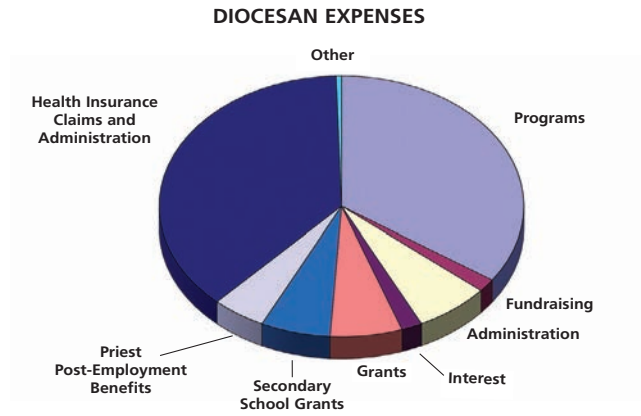
• Health insurance billings represent the collection of funds to pay the premiums charged to the Diocese and its entities for coverage with the full-indemnity plan in place effective July 1, 2024. The Diocese collects these premiums from the various locations and then pays the provider using these receipts. Previously, the Diocese was self-insured. In this full-indemnity plan, the Diocese only pays premiums to the provider of the insurance, who handles all claims payments.

• Investment income/(loss) is the accumulation of interest, dividends, realized and unrealized gains/(losses) on investments held by the Diocese.

## Operating Expense

During the fiscal year ended June 30, 2025, the Diocese incurred programmatic costs, grant-making and departmental expenses as follows:

Health insurance claims/administration	\$ 11,061,287
Program expenses	10,168,749
Episcopal administration	1,951,742
Diocesan Grants	1,882,854
Secondary school grants	1,820,000
Priest post-employment benefits	1,406,006
Interest expense	540,750
Fundraising expenses	476,848
Other expenses	141,354
Total Operating Expense	<u>\$ 29,449,590</u>



• In fiscal year 2025, the Diocese recognized an impairment loss on its Retreat Center property of \$1,110,220, representing a correction of the realizable value of that property.

• Health insurance premiums are paid to the provider of the full-indemnity health insurance plan that the Diocese has contracted. These premiums are paid from the funds charged and collected from the locations across the Diocese with employees in the plan.

• Program expenses represent expenditures for carrying out the various ministries for the Diocese. These expenses include personnel salaries and benefits as well as direct expenses of the ministry. Program expenses are categorized as follows:

ACUE expenses	\$ 3,682,912
Diocesan properties	2,045,978
Cemeteries	985,502
Community and pastoral services	859,653
Catholic Schools	816,768
Messenger	793,577
Clergy	566,945
Seminary studies, vocations and deacon formation	417,414
Total Program Expenses	<u>\$ 10,168,749</u>

• Secondary school grants are made to the Diocesan urban and secondary schools for operating, scholarship, and capital purposes from the secondary school assessment of parishes.

• Grants are made to various parishes, schools, and other Diocesan institutions from the Annual Appeal and from other Diocesan revenues as follows:

Cathedral Operations	\$ 780,743
Catholic Charities	300,000
Priest Retirement Fund	275,000
Inner city grants	244,500
Educational assistance	160,750
Parishes and Schools	61,990
Holy See	22,000
Mission Outreach	15,507
DPAA pledges	4,443
Other grants	17,921
Total Grants	<u>\$ 1,882,854</u>

• Priest post-employment benefits are the actuarially calculated cost of insurance for all retired priests as well as the costs of nursing care and assistance to infirmed priests.

## Donor Restricted Assets

As of June 30, 2025, the Diocese holds net assets which are donor restricted or endowed. Donor restricted assets are subject to a specific purpose or the passage of time. For endowed assets, only the income may be used for the intended purpose of the endowment, the principal may not be expended. These funds are classified as follows:

## Restricted for a Specific Purpose/Time Period

Diocesan Annual Appeal	\$ 2,637,468
ACUE	2,002,344
General Education Need	312,120
Pastoral Ministry Seminarian Services	65,601
Other Restrictions	606,135
	<u>\$ 5,623,668</u>

## Endowed Assets

Educational	\$ 2,485,218
Property maintenance	942,386
Diocesan Annual Appeal	52,504
Social concerns	16,374
ACUE	3,200
Accumulated Net Appreciation	<u>2,705,665</u>
Total Donor Restricted Assets	<u>\$ 11,829,015</u>

## Special Collections

The people of the Diocese of Covington have been extremely generous with their support of various agencies and relief efforts in our country and around the world. The following table is a listing of these Special Collections.

Hurricane Relief	\$ 244,413
Mission Cooperative (ACUE)	221,312
Religious Retirement Collection	176,283
International and Domestic needs	143,089
Holy Father collection for worldwide charities (Peter's Pence)	63,112
Wildfire Relief	36,470
Opportunities for Life	14,105
Other special collections	1,791
Total Special Collections	<u>\$ 900,575</u>

Respectfully Submitted,

Robert Hagedorn, CPA  
Chief Financial Officer  
Diocese of Covington

January 7, 2026



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Blessings in this New Year!

I am pleased to present you with the audited financial statements for the Diocese of Covington for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025. As you review these reports, you will see that an independent public accounting firm has again issued an unmodified opinion that these statements present an accurate and thorough picture of Diocesan finances for the year. This is the highest level of assurance attainable. The Diocesan Finance Council reviewed these statements in October 2025.

This year has been a profound journey for the Church. We mourned the passing of our beloved Holy Father, Pope Francis, and rejoiced in welcoming Pope Leo XIV, the first American-born pope. Both leaders have inspired us during this Jubilee Year with a simple yet powerful call: to be “Pilgrims of Hope.”

As Pilgrims of Hope, we are invited to pause and reflect on the abundant gifts God has entrusted to us — our time, our talents and our treasures — and to consider how we can share these blessings to bring hope to others.

Here in the columns of this report, you will discover how, together, your generosity is breathing new life into Catholic formation and leadership in the Diocese of Covington. Youth ministries are flourishing, parish communities are reimagining their ministries and our priests are guiding with courage and compassion.

I am grateful to the members of the Diocesan Finance Council and the staff of the Diocesan Finance Office for their advice and diligence to promote sound management of the resources you entrust to the Church. As we begin this new year, I thank God for each of you and entrust you to His loving care. Be assured of my prayers. Please, pray for me and for our beloved Diocese of Covington.

In Christ's peace,

Most Rev John C. Iffert  
Bishop of Covington

## Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, Diocesan Curia CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION

June 30	2025	2024
<b>Assets</b>		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$ 6,403,439	\$ 7,267,439
Restricted Cash for Perpetual Care Fund	22,930	21,360
Accounts Receivable, Net	653,512	646,751
Loans Receivable, Net	9,562,549	8,182,498
Notes Receivable, Net	4,510,175	6,193,686
Unconditional Promises to Give, Net	2,529,720	1,832,724
Cemetery Property Held for Sale	314,257	314,621
Investments	26,510,074	25,106,016
Restricted Investments for Perpetual Care Fund	3,386,463	3,293,757
Property and Equipment, Net	10,640,905	12,234,134
Other Assets	940,357	667,611
Right of Use Assets - Operating Leases	96,902	128,999
Total Assets	<u>65,573,283</u>	<u>65,889,596</u>
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Accounts Payable and Accrued Expenses	1,605,591	1,968,863
Claims and Reserve for Incurred but not Reported Benefit Claims	-	1,100,000
Special Collections Payable	718,748	543,602
Pledges Payable, Net	361,473	442,030
Deposits Payable	14,196,386	11,951,477
Notes Payable, Net	4,524,126	6,212,274
Advances and Deferred Receipts	3,539,915	3,318,108
Priest Postretirement Liability	5,363,398	4,337,775
Operating Lease Liabilities	98,379	128,162
Total liabilities	<u>30,410,016</u>	<u>29,992,381</u>
<b>Net Assets</b>		
Without Donor Restrictions	23,334,252	24,583,367
With Donor Restrictions	11,829,015	11,313,848
Total Net Assets	<u>35,163,267</u>	<u>35,897,215</u>
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<u>\$ 65,573,283</u>	<u>\$ 65,889,596</u>

See accountants' report and accompanying notes.

## Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, Diocesan Curia CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES

Year Ended June 30	2025			2024
	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total	
<b>Revenues, Gains and Other Support</b>				
Parish Assessments	\$ 6,334,996	-	\$ 6,334,996	\$ 6,181,618
Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal	-	2,678,316	2,678,316	2,700,959
Dividends and Interest	1,183,490	96,241	1,281,731	1,176,206
Grants and Special Collections	18,591	552,116	570,707	400,185
Realized Gains on Investments	592,588	251,970	844,558	1,642,068
Unrealized Gains / (Losses) on Investments	544,981	356,775	901,756	545,549
Contributions and Bequests	267,222	2,129,248	2,396,470	1,607,489
Insurance Premium Retention	375,714	-	375,714	414,365
Fees and Sales	2,925,661	-	2,925,661	3,204,139
Health Insurance Billings	10,300,332	-	10,300,332	11,657,540
Other Income	105,401	-	105,401	64,750
Total revenue, Gains and Other Support	22,648,976	6,066,666	28,715,642	29,594,868
<b>Net Assets Released From Restrictions</b>	5,551,499	(5,551,499)	-	-
Total Revenue, Support, Gains, and Reclassifications	<u>28,200,475</u>	<u>515,167</u>	<u>28,715,642</u>	<u>29,594,868</u>
<b>Expenses</b>				
Programs	10,168,749	-	10,168,749	8,599,486
Fundraising	476,848	-	476,848	481,299
Management and General:				
Episcopal Administration	1,951,742	-	1,951,742	1,830,799
Related to Sexual Abuse				
Settlements, Legal Fees and Counseling	45,812	-	45,812	55,177
Grants Made by Diocese	1,882,854	-	1,882,854	1,192,163
Interest	540,750	-	540,750	565,138
Priest Post Employment Benefits	1,406,006	-	1,406,006	264,438
Secondary School Grants	1,820,000	-	1,820,000	1,852,001
Health Insurance Claims and Administration	11,061,287	-	11,061,287	11,797,715
Contributions and Assessments	95,542	-	95,542	90,334
Total Expenses	<u>29,449,590</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>29,449,590</u>	<u>26,528,550</u>
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	(1,249,115)	515,167	(733,948)	3,066,318
<b>Net Assets at Beginning of Year</b>	<u>24,583,367</u>	<u>11,313,848</u>	<u>35,897,215</u>	<u>32,830,897</u>
<b>Net Assets at End of Year</b>	<u>\$ 23,334,252</u>	<u>\$ 11,829,015</u>	<u>\$ 35,163,267</u>	<u>\$ 35,897,215</u>

See accountants' report and accompanying notes.

## Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, Diocesan Curia CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF CASH FLOWS

Year Ended June 30	2025	2024
<b>Cash Flows From Operating Activities</b>		
Change in Net Assets	\$ (733,948)	\$ 3,066,318
Reconciliation of Change in Net Assets with Cash Flows From Operating Activities		
Depreciation	607,433	717,568
Amortization of Debt Issuance Cost Included in Interest	15,163	15,163
Credit Loss Expense (Recovery)	17,285	33,749
Impairment Loss	1,110,220	-
Realized Gains on Investments	(844,558)	(1,642,068)
Unrealized Gains on Investments	(901,756)	(545,549)
Interest credited directly to deposits	284,650	187,400
Losses on Disposal of Property and Equipment	9,242	-
Changes in		
Accounts Receivable, Net	(24,046)	1,813
Unconditional Promises to Give, Net	(696,996)	104,341
Cemetery Property Held for Sale	364	27,512
Other Assets	(97,746)	95,866
Right of Use Assets - Operating Leases	44,184	39,329
Accounts Payable, Accrued Expenses and Other Liabilities	988,757	(195,894)
Claims and Reserve for Incurred but not Reported Benefit Claims	(1,100,000)	300,721
Operating Lease Liabilities	(41,870)	(45,166)
Cash Provided by Operating Activities	<u>(1,363,622)</u>	<u>2,166,103</u>
<b>Cash Flows from Investing Activities</b>		
Purchases of Property and Equipment	(333,066)	(254,366)
Proceeds from Disposal of Property and Equipment	25,300	-
Purchases of Investments	(9,180,858)	(10,556,528)
Proceeds from Sales and Maturities of Investments	9,428,408	10,593,590
Issuance of New Loans	(4,004,593)	(4,030,282)
Payments Received on Loans	2,624,542	234,562
Cash (Used) / Provided by Investing Activities	<u>(1,441,167)</u>	<u>(4,013,024)</u>
<b>Cash Flows from Financing Activities</b>		
New Deposits Received	2,637,538	3,916,160
Withdrawals of Deposits	(675,279)	(2,561,126)
Payments on Notes Payable	(19,900)	(23,888)
Cash Provided / (Used) by Financing Activities	<u>1,942,359</u>	<u>1,331,146</u>
Net change in Cash and Cash Equivalents	<u>(862,430)</u>	<u>(515,775)</u>
<b>Cash, Beginning of Year</b>	<u>7,288,799</u>	<u>7,804,574</u>
<b>Cash, End of Year</b>	<u>\$ 6,426,369</u>	<u>\$ 7,288,799</u>

See accountants' report and accompanying notes.



# The Bishop and the Architect

Stephen Enzweiler  
Cathedral Historian

*This is the second in a four-part series celebrating the Quasquicentennial (125th) anniversary of the Dedication of St. Mary’s Cathedral (Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption) on January 27, 1901.*

On the cold, starlit night of Friday, Jan. 22, 1885, Bishop-elect Camillus Paul Maes walked into the spacious front parlor of a house in Detroit and was greeted by warm applause from a large assembly of the membership of the Young Men’s Catholic Union, a Detroit Catholic social and fraternal organization. Also in attendance were diocesan clergy and local political figures, all of whom had known him for years. They came that night to say goodbye to their long-time friend on the eve of his departure from Detroit. Early the next morning, he would be on a train heading south to take charge of his new See in Covington, Kentucky.

The Bishop-elect graciously took his seat on the platform and was soon visibly overwhelmed by the many outward expressions of farewell and good wishes from so many good and dear friends. Rev. James G. Walshe, pastor of SS. Peter and Paul’s Church, the Diocese’s mother church and Cathedral, stood up and addressed the crowd: “The time has come when a sorrowful word of farewell must be said to a beloved priest. The burdens of the episcopacy are such that many have avoided the acceptance of them, but in obedience to the divine call, the new Bishop has made a sacrifice, and the wishes of his fellow clergymen and his friends are that God will bless him in his office.” After finishing, Walshe presented Maes with a set of episcopal vestments which he had displayed on one side of the room.

Another group of clergymen presented the Bishop-elect with a large oil portrait taken from a photograph, along with a chalice studded with precious stones. Catholic Union member James L. Edson presented him with an episcopal cross on a massive gold chain and an elegantly engraved amethyst ring. “It is in earnest appreciation,” Edson said in his remarks, “of your labors, of your exemplary piety, exalted character and strict adherence to duty that we tender to you this slight testimonial, and we do so with the hope that no cross which you may have to bear will be more onerous or less honorable than that which we now present you.”

Among those in the crowd attending the farewell reception that night, standing in the packed room amid the well-wishers, was a dapper, bespectacled 23-year-old architect and fellow Catholic Union member named Leon Coquard. The Bishop-elect knew him well. The two became acquainted in 1880 after Maes was transferred from his pastorate at St. Mary Parish in Monroe to become secretary to Detroit’s Bishop Caspar Borgess. Like many others in the room, Coquard could also bear testimony to how zealously Bishop Maes labored for the Catholic Union and the good he had done. Maes was a member of its Board of Directors, and because of his literary reputation for having written a popular biography of Kentucky missionary Rev. Charles Nerinckx, he became the chairman of its “Reading Room and Literary Committee” of which the young Leon Coquard was a regular member. His relationship with Coquard would be one of the most important and deeply consequential of his future episcopacy, as will be seen.

Leon Coquard was born in Detroit on Sept. 11, 1861, the third son to Nicholas and Marie (Stiker) Coquard. His father was from Paris, where he worked in the carpentry trade until emigrating to America. After settling in Detroit, Nicholas continued working as a carpenter, eventually seizing upon various opportunities to work as a builder and contractor, ventures that permitted him to grow more wealthy as time went on. Eventually, he would own more than a dozen rental properties and valuable tracts of land which he kept until his death in 1886. Nicholas was the ever-independent man, a personal trait his son seemed to inherit.

Leon Coquard had always been the talented and creative offspring. From a young age he excelled as an artist, able to effortlessly render finely detailed drawings of whatever struck his fancy. While one older brother became a dentist and another became a banker, Leon was instead attracted to his father’s work and to the construction of the great buildings of his day. He studied how they were designed, what materials were used, how they were put together, and how they should look when finished. However, Leon didn’t want to become like his father. As he matured into an ambitious young adult, he began to dream of ventures bigger than those of his father’s world, preferring to set out on his own course, under his own power, in a cause of his own making. More than anything else, he

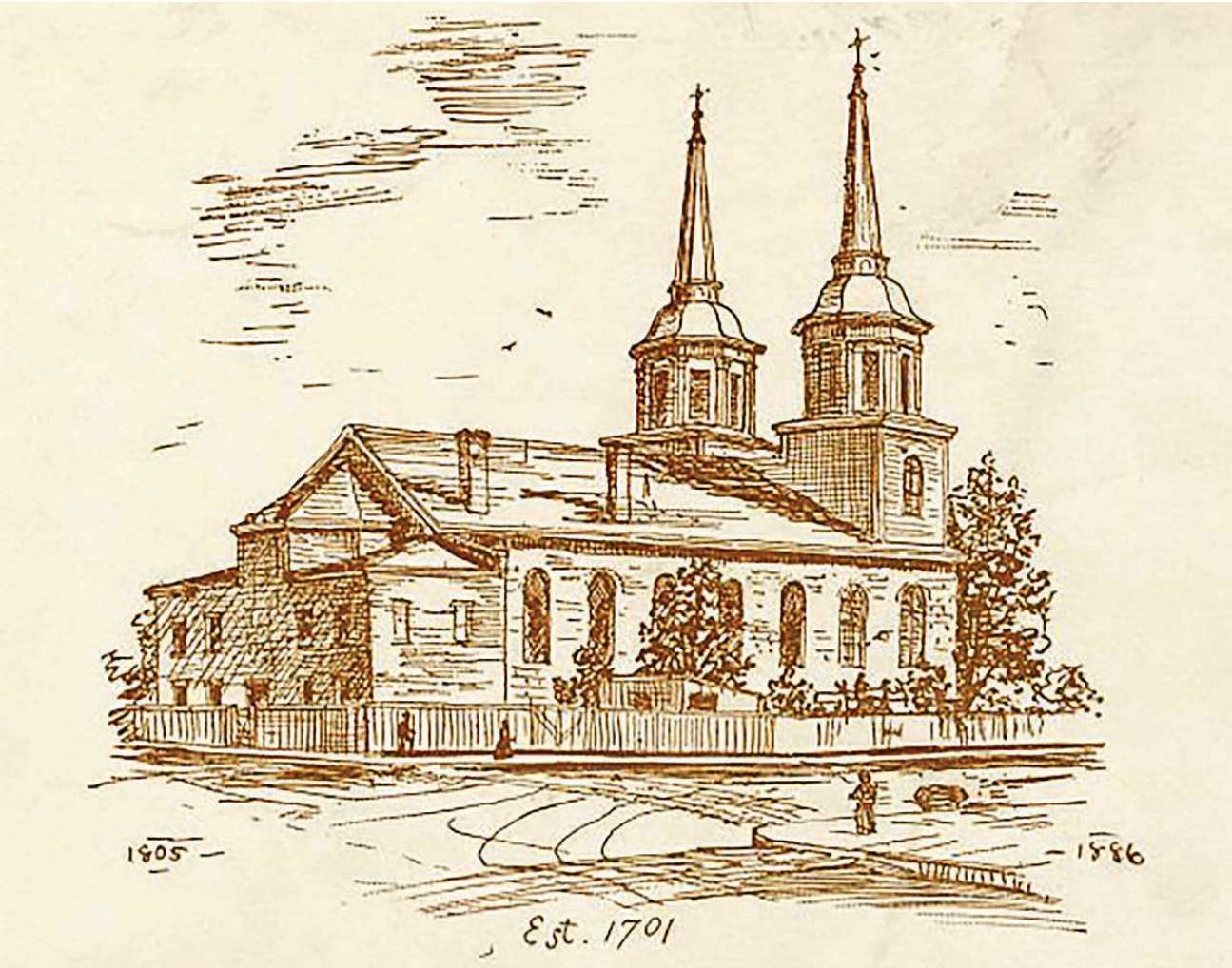


**Bishop Camillus P. Maes, c. 1890** Photo courtesy of Stephen Enzweiler  
longed to accomplish something for himself.

The Coquards were part of the Detroit French Catholic community and were long-time parishioners at St. Anne’s Church in Detroit. Leon attended parochial schools and afterward attended a technical academy to study and acquire an education in architecture and design. It must be remembered that in his day, there were no formal testing or certification requirements for becoming an architect. Instead, one had to rely on the public recognition of one’s craft through education and years of apprenticeship in order to credibly and respectably enter the profession. Reputation and public reviews of one’s work became the accepting standard. And so, it was to the surprise of some when the 19-year-old Coquard, fresh out of school and without a shred of experience, brashly listed himself in



Photo courtesy of Stephen Enzweiler  
**The only known photograph of Leon Coquard, taken in 1914.**



**An 1886 drawing by Leon Coquard of the old St. Anne’s Church.**

Detroit Historical Society



the 1880 Detroit City Directory as being an “Architect.” Armed with some education in architecture, Leon Coquard became apprenticed as a draftsman in the employ of Albert E. French, an eminent Canadian architect living in Detroit who specialized in “the design of public buildings, churches, schools and theaters.” In Coquard, French found a skilled and precise hand, an imaginative mind, and an ambitious, hard-working and punctilious servant of the architectural trade. He seemed an ideal candidate who might one day become an eminent architect himself. So skilled was this new draftsman, thought French, that he gradually began entrusting him with the responsibilities of developing architectural plans for various building projects he had under contract.

Coquard’s big chance to show what he could do came in 1886 when Albert E. French was contracted to design and build a new St. Anne’s Church in Detroit. St. Anne’s was the second oldest Roman Catholic parish in the country, founded in 1701 by French explorers and having a rich history that reached back to the early years of the growing Michigan frontier. The old church being replaced was erected in 1828 and had become too small for the rapidly growing French Catholic community of the city. French was contracted for his architectural services and served as the responsible party of record; but it was Leon Coquard, French’s employee, to whom the actual design and the drawing of the plans was entrusted. He would not disappoint.

It took only a few months’ time before he had them ready. The final design was a French gothic church with the typical cruciform plan and followed the customary decorative and structural patterns of churches in northern France. It was large, spacious, traditional, gothic and French. The interior had three levels: a main arcade, a triforium and a clerestory with stained glass windows. The individual arcades in the triforium were painted with religious symbols and the images of French saints. Twin spires soared above its exterior façade, and between them was a large, ornate rose window of exquisite beauty. When St. Anne’s Church was finally dedicated in late 1887, the French community was thrilled with the result. The *Michigan Catholic* called it “one of the grandest Christian temples in the West.”

In 1889, Bishop Maes finally got to visit the newly completed St. Anne’s Church in person. He was both surprised and deeply moved by what he saw. In his mind, it took him back to memories of his favorite churches and Cathedrals of his seminary days in Bruges, Louvain and Mechlin, Belgium. He had no illusions yet about what kind of an edifice he wanted for his own new Cathedral in Covington — a persistent debt and lack of money would not let him even consider it. But he liked what he saw in St. Anne’s, and he would keep the experience of it close to his heart.

On that day, a seed was planted in the mind of Bishop Maes that would, in time, become a mighty oak. As time passed, his appreciation for the importance of Leon Coquard to both himself and to the future of Covington only increased. Seeing what his friend could produce convinced him that he was the only architect possible to design his new Cathedral. And when the time came, the Bishop would defend his choice by remarking that what he saw in Coquard was “the promise of great ability, even of genius.”

“You will have heard through friends that I was very much pleased with your work,” he wrote the young architect in June 1892, “that St. Anne’s Church strikes my notion ... as to what my new Cathedral shall be.”

Photo courtesy of Stephen Enzweiler  
**Interior of St. Anne Church today.**



(above) The new St. Anne Church, dedicated in 1887.

Photo courtesy of Stephen Enzweiler





(Continued from page 9)

Dynamic Catholic films one of a series of programs on the Mass entitled People of the Eucharist, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption.

Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Covington pilots a restructured counseling program — CARES, which stands for the Catholic Approach to Resilience, Engagement and Support — at three elementary schools: Holy Cross School, Mary, Queen of Heaven School and Holy Trinity School.

The second longest-running choir in Cincinnati, Musica Sacra, opens its 60th season at the Cathedral.

A record crowd of nearly 700 attends the annual Seminary Ball.

Bishop Iffert celebrates the annual Pro-Life Mass with Father Ryan Maher as homilist.

Father Connor Kunath is installed as pastor at Sts. Boniface and James Parish, Ludlow.

The young son of Charles and Kaitlin Marks is blessed by Pope Leo while on pilgrimage to Rome.

Honoring a year of transition, Our Savior Parish celebrates with homecoming.

Thomas More University Alumni Association recognizes seven at its 2025 Alumni Awards: Edward Schneider '68; Ellen Roesel '66; Theresa Behan; Greg Wilkins; Mary Jo McFadden '74; Charles McFadden '73 and Joshua Vogel '10.

TMU and Kentucky Community and Technical College launch Pathways to More, a dual admission and transfer program.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul launches its 25th annual coat drive.

The Pregnancy Care Network and diocesan Pro-Life Office host the biannual Community Baby Shower at the Holy Spirit Parish Center, Newport.

A watercolor depicting Jesus washing the feet of the apos-

tlés by Greidy Deleon, a senior at Notre Dame Academy, is selected as the artwork for Bishop John Iffert's annual Thanksgiving card.

The archives of the Benedictine Sisters of St. Walburg Monastery and 44 other women religious communities will be housed at the new Woman Religious Archives Collaborative Heritage Center; Cleveland. The Center's mission is to preserve the witness of vocations.

Brayden Pope, senior, Covington Catholic High School, participates in discussions bringing NCYC's historic digital encounter with Pope Leo XIV.

Official Assignments

Rev. Joshua L. Lange to Parochial Administrator, St. Matthew Parish, Morning View

Rev. Jacob E. Straub to Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, Cincinnati

(Continued on page 16)



Obituary

Sister Mary Joan Terese, SND

Carole Helen Niklas was born on Jan. 2, 1937, to John and Johanna (Busch) Niklas, who lovingly welcomed her as the youngest in their family. Growing up in a warm and nurturing home alongside her sister and two brothers, Carole's early years were filled with faith and family.

Her journey with the Sisters of Notre Dame began during her time at St. Martin Elementary School in Cheviot, Ohio. After graduating from Mother of Mercy High School, Carole entered the Sisters of Notre Dame on Sept. 8, 1955. At investment, she was given the name Sister Mary Joan Terese. She professed her first vows on Aug. 16, 1958.

Sister Joan Terese earned a BA from Edgely College in Cincinnati, Ohio, and later an MA in religious studies from Providence College in Rhode Island. Her ministry spanned decades of dedicated service, including fifteen years in edu-



Sister Mary Joan Terese Niklas, SND

cation, teaching elementary and junior high students in Ohio and Kentucky. She then furthered her ministry as director of religious education, guiding faith formation in multiple local parishes. Next, she devoted over eight years at Gateway Community and Technical College, supporting students with special needs through the

Department of Support Services.

Sister's compassion extended to several specialized ministries, including outreach to the deaf community and to men in prison. In 2005, Sister Joan Terese began service as archivist for the Covington Province of the Sisters of Notre Dame, preserving the rich history of her congregation until her retirement in 2019.

Sister's life was marked by unwavering faith, a love for learning, and a deep commitment to serving others. She leaves behind a legacy of kindness, dedication, and devotion to God's work.

Sister Mary Joan Terese passed away peacefully on Dec. 16, 2025. She was preceded in death by her parents, her brothers Robert and Richard, and her sister, Sister Mary Johanna, RSM. She is survived by her beloved nieces and nephews.

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

Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Dec. 22, 2025, at St. Agnes Church, Ft. Wright, followed by interment in the convent cemetery. Memorials are suggested to The Sisters of Notre Dame, Covington, Kentucky.



Obituary

Sister Rose Mary Rizzo (formerly Sister Charles Elizabeth), CDP

died peacefully at Holy Family Home on Dec. 27, 2025. She was a professed member of the Congregation of Divine Providence for 78 years. Born in Covington, Ky. in 1930 to Edgar and Florence Fugazzi Rizzo, she made her first profession of vows in 1947 and professed her final vows in 1952.

Sister Rose Mary began her ministry of teaching in 1947 at St. Bernard School, Dayton, Ky. For the next forty years, she taught elementary school at St. John's, Dry Ridge, Ohio; St. Michael's, Kalida, Ohio; St. Joseph, Camp Springs, Ky.; St. Louis School, Clarksville, Md.; St. Leo's in Versailles, Ky.; at St. Camillus Academy in Corbin, Ky.; at St. Michael's in Wheeling, W.Va.; and at St. Agatha Academy in Winchester, Ky. In 1987 and for the next 10 years, she served at Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission in Kayenta, Ariz., where she provided pastoral ministry to the mostly Native American parishioners of the



Sister Rose Mary Rizzo, CDP

Navajo tribe.

She returned to St. Anne Convent in Melbourne in 1997 and coordinated transportation for sisters until 2012. For two years she lived in Covington visiting and praying with residents at a local senior residence. She retired to Holy Family Home in 2014, where she kept busy serving in the community and tending one of the

gardens.

Sister Rose Mary was a kind and helpful sister, always finding little jobs to do for others. She loved to be outdoors, weeding the garden or planting flowers and she was as good with a wrench as she was with a hoe. She cleverly composed a little booklet to tell a story of an event while she was in Arizona. Her smile, her kindness and her friendly manner touched many people she interacted with over the years.

She will be missed by her religious community, the Sisters of Divine Providence, her brothers, Victor and Rev. John Rizzo, her sister Mary Hoffman and her many nieces and nephews. Her brothers Pete, Frank and Anthony Rizzo and her sisters Therese Ward and Rita Haigis preceded her in death.

Mass of Resurrection was celebrated in Immaculate Conception Chapel, Holy Family Home, Melbourne on Jan. 3, 2026. Sister Rose Mary donated her body to science research and her cremated remains will be buried in the convent cemetery at a later date. Memorials to the Congregation of Divine Providence, 5300 St. Anne Drive, Melbourne, KY 41059.

The grace of receiving

(Continued from page 5)

into generosity. The gifts of the Holy Spirit (CCC 1831) equip us to respond meekly. By offering our lives, transformed through love, we imitate Christ's total self-gift.

God needs nothing from us yet desires our hearts. In this cycle of freely receiving and offering, we remain in communion with Him and one another, finding true joy, fulfillment and eternal reward.

As the prayer over the offerings for the 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, beautifully states: "Lord, accept

our sacrifice as a holy exchange of gifts. By offering what you have given us may we receive the gift of yourself." Let us embrace this grace: receive humbly, offer generously, and never take, for in free exchange lies divine love.

Deacon Scott Folz is assigned to the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, Ky.



Protecting God’s Children for Adults Safe Environment Trainings

**For all employees and volunteers** of the Diocese of Covington who in any way provide a safe environment for children.

**Step 1: Contact parish/school institution leader** to review the Policies and Procedures and fill out the Application and Acceptance Forms.

**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:**  
■ 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. For other difficulties, contact Marylu Steffen at (859) 392-1500 or [msteffen@covdio.org](mailto:msteffen@covdio.org)

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(Continued from page 14)

Obituaries

Patricia Ann Lauer (nee: Eilers), mother of Father Douglas Lauer  
Rev. Terence E. Hoppenjans  
Paul Martin Pitstick, father of Father Martin Pitstick

November

Twenty-four of the 32 chimeras are delivered to the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. Their installation is the last step of the Cathedral restoration project.  
The Diocesan Catholic Children’s Home Center for Children and Families raises money for new and improved furnishings for their four residential apartments, which house 32 adolescents waiting for their forever families.

Seventy-two pilgrims from the Diocese of Covington return from their jubilee pilgrimage to Rome with Bishop John Iffert, having experienced the home of the Catholic Church and growing deeper in the faith and love of the Lord.  
Women religious of the Diocese of Covington travel to Selma, Alabama, for a pilgrimage commemorating the Jubilee of Consecrated Life.  
Amid the shutdown of the federal government, the *Messenger* highlights the work of the St. Vincent de Paul food pantries and Mobile Food Pantry ministry of the Diocese of Covington Catholic Charities, as ministries see an uptick in need.  
Bishop Iffert reviews the success of the With One Heart Diocesan Pastoral Plan, discussing the fruit that the plan has so far borne.  
Eighth graders at Holy Cross Elementary School, Covington, rally their school community for a shoe donation

drive.  
Priests across the Diocese return from the Good Leaders, Good Shepherds pastoral training and retreat, where they refine their pastoral skills and share in fellowship with their brother priests.  
Good Leaders, Good Shepherds sister program, Tending the Talents, shows promise as lay members of the diocesan curia staff and parish staff reflect on the lessons they learn in their pastoral training.  
The Parish Missionary Disciples Training completes two cohorts, igniting in its lay parish participants a new love of evangelization and service to others.  
Dr. William Keimig, deputy director of the Catechetical Institute at Franciscan University, leads a workshop focused on revitalizing OCIA ministry and reigniting parishes through

(Continued on page 17)

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

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Interested candidates should submit a cover letter and resume to [ndahr@ndapandas.org](mailto:ndahr@ndapandas.org). (Attn: Myanna Webster).

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### MESSENGER ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER

Due to an upcoming retirement, the Diocese of Covington is seeking a full-time ad salesperson for its official newspaper, the Messenger, beginning in January. The successful candidate will be a practicing Roman Catholic and an excellent representative of the newspaper and the diocese. The candidate will be ready to embrace the mission of the diocesan newspaper, has some previous sales experience, works well as a team member, is attentive to detail, and energetic in serving existing customers as well as expanding sales to new clients. The salary is commission-based, with medical and retirement benefits provided by the diocese. Interested candidates are asked to e-mail a letter of interest and a résumé outlining sales experience and other qualifications to Stephen Koplyay at [skoplyay@covdio.org](mailto:skoplyay@covdio.org).

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### ARCHIVIST

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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(Continued from page 16)

the use of the Franciscan University Catechetical Institute. Marriage pathways in the Diocese of Covington get a new look, unveiled by Deacons Steve Alley and Jim Fortner, along with Michelle Alley. The new pathways are broken down into four parts, serving the engaged couple from engagement through their first years of marriage. As part of the With One Heart Diocesan Pastoral Plan, the Diocese of Covington hires for a new role, Hispanic Minister: Sylvia Schmidt now serves in the role of Hispanic Minister.

The Diocese of Covington Youth Ministry Office is another fruit of the With One Heart Diocesan Pastoral Plan, engaging the youth of the Diocese in annual retreats and church service opportunities.

Jack Rudnick, professor at Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, is invited to attend a Vatican Summit on the use of Artificial Intelligence.

The Intercommunity Sisters Peace and Justice Committee organizes a prayer service in solidarity with immigrants at St. Mary's Park, Covington, and is joined by a sizeable crowd of sisters and laity.

The Diocese of Covington Office of Stewardship and Mission Services prepares for the first Giving Tuesday event of the Diocese. Each school, parish and diocesan organization is invited to participate in the annual day of giving.

St. Vincent de Paul of Northern Kentucky hosts the annual Turkey Trot 5k. The race sees a record turnout of 800 participants, and over \$50,000 donated.

More than 400 students and chaperones gather in Covington Catholic High School's gymnasium for Mass before heading to the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis.

Bishop John Iffert joins Ron Washington, mayor of Covington, and the staff of Habitat for Humanity of Greater Cincinnati, to break ground on one of the homes included in the Pope Leo Village Campaign — a campaign to bring affordable housing to the Botany Hills neighborhood of Covington.

The *Messenger* highlights Congregation of Divine Providence Sister Grace Schmersal ahead of the collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious.

Young parishioners from Cristo Rey Parish attend the National Catholic Youth Conference thanks to the generous support of the parish community and diocesan scholarships. The teens are featured in the *Criterion*, the Catholic newspaper for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

Matt Spencer, director for the Diocesan Choir, Diocese of Covington, and choir teacher/organist at Covington Latin School, Covington, Ky, starts a Diocesan Youth Choir seeking participants.

The Institute for Religious Liberty of Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, celebrates 10 years of interfaith dialogue with a panel of prestigious interfaith leaders.

On the week of Thanksgiving, the tradesmen of Trisco Systems install the first of the newly restored gargoyles to the Cathedral; 32 gargoyles are to be installed, with an expected completion date of January 2026.

Bishop Iffert accepts the candidacy of nine men who take their first formal step in diaconal formation. The men, with the support of their wives, are admitted as Candidates to the Diaconate in a Mass in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

The Franciscan Daughters of Mary annual turkey giveaway sees more than 550 families ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday.

Diane Donathan, sign language interpreter for Mother of God Parish, Covington, celebrates 40 years of making Mass more accessible to the deaf community.

Jubilee Year

In commemoration of the Jubilee of the Poor, the Messenger highlights three long-time diocesan ministries dedicated to serving the poor:

Obituaries

Father Thomas Charles Barnes  
Sister Mary Jo Hummeldorf, CDP  
Teri Ann Hardebeck, wife of Deacon Charles Hardebeck  
Sister Mary Claire, SND

December

Giving Tuesday sees tremendous success throughout the Diocese with more than \$500,000 being raised across all schools, parishes, diocesan organizations and offices.

The Diocese holds a second collection in support of the Retirement Fund for Religious. The *Messenger* meets with retired Benedictine Sister Emmanuel Pieper to learn more about the retirement needs of the religious.

Students return to the Diocese of Covington from the National Catholic Youth Conference, where they participate in an virtual audience with Pope Leo XIV and experience the universality of the Church.

Students and their families, along with the faculty and staff of St. Patrick Elementary School, Taylor Mill, spend a morning bagging more than 5,000 bags of food to send overseas.

As the end of the Jubilee Year draws near, Bishop Iffert reflects on the Jubilee Year and the message it spreads of God's indulgent love and mercy.

The Knights of St. John raise the walls of the live diocesan

nativity once again, marking the 50th year of the project. The live nativity hosts parishioners from St. Pius X Parish, Edgewood, along with goat kids for all to visit.

Bishop Iffert celebrates Mass at the Cathedral for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, where he reminds the congregation of Mary's role as the mother of the world.

Diocese of Covington Curia Staff, along with the staff of Catholic Charities, gather to celebrate the Christmas season and recognize staff members celebrating milestone service anniversaries.

Parishioners at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington, host the annual "Thank God It's Free Event" where collected donations are given away free of charge, no questions asked.

At Cristo Rey Parish, Florence, Bishop Iffert celebrates Mass in commemoration of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Christmas tree farmer and doctor, Ron Lubbe, donates a Christmas tree to stand tall in St. Mary's Park, Covington, for all to see as a radiant beacon of the Christmas season.

Jail Ministry volunteers come together with community members to prepare Christmas goodie bags for inmates at the Campbell County Detention Center.

The Cathedral is full as Bishop Iffert celebrates the traditional Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve.

Newport Central Catholic High School cut the ribbon on a new front entrance and lobby. This space now includes a space for alumni reunions and gatherings, a safer front entry and ADA-compliant ramps.

Stephen Enzweiler, Cathedral historian, begins a four-part series on the Cathedral ahead of the quasiquicentennial (125th) anniversary of its dedication on January 27, 1901.

Bishop Iffert celebrates Midnight Mass saying in his homily that being loved by Jesus changes everything; that love transforms us. It is our training. It is the path to holiness. It is the path to peace.

Jubilee Year

Bishop Iffert celebrates Mass at the Cathedral to close out the 2025 Jubilee Year: Pilgrims of Hope. His homily reflects on the message and theme of the Jubilee Year and how the faithful can live their lives as Pilgrims of Hope on a journey to heaven.

Obituaries

Sister Mary Theresa Bowman, CDP  
Sister Rose Mary Rizzo, CDP  
Sister Mary Joan Terese, SND

Wyoming Supreme Court strikes down abortion laws, including abortion pill ban

CHEYENNE, Wyo. — The Wyoming Supreme Court on Jan. 6 found that two state laws restricting abortion — including the first state law to specifically ban chemical or medication abortions — violated the state's constitution and could not be enforced. The decision keeps abortion legal in the state after its lone abortion clinic challenged those laws. Wyoming enacted a near-total abortion ban in March 2023, and a preexisting ban also took effect after the U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* ruling in 2022, which overturned its previous abortion precedent in *Roe v. Wade*. However, a 2012 amendment Wyoming adopted in its state constitution in protest of then-President Barack Obama's signature health law, the Affordable Care Act, sometimes called Obamacare, stated that adults have a right to make their own health care decisions. Lower courts previously found that the abortion restrictions ran afoul of that constitutional language, an interpretation the state's highest court also reached. In a statement, Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon, a Republican, called the ruling "profoundly unfortunate" and argued it "only serves to prolong the ultimate and proper resolution of this issue." He called on the Legislature to enact legislation in the upcoming budget session that would put a constitutional amendment before the voters in the fall.

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# Pope Leo calls on Catholics to rediscover Vatican II teachings



CNS photo/Vatican Media  
**Pope Leo XIV greets people at the conclusion of his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Jan. 7, 2026.**

**Carol Glatz**  
*Catholic News Service*

The teachings of the Second Vatican Council are still “the guiding star” the Catholic Church is meant to follow, Pope Leo XIV said.

Rereading all of its teachings “is a valuable opportunity to rediscover the beauty and the importance of this ecclesial event,” he said Jan. 7, and because its work remains “a guiding principle for us today.”

“We have yet to achieve ecclesial reform more fully in a ministerial sense and, in the face of today’s challenges, we are called to continue to be vigilant interpreters of the signs of the times, joyful proclaimers of the Gospel, courageous witnesses of justice and peace,” he said.

Speaking to visitors gathered in the Paul VI Audience Hall for his weekly general audience, the pope said that with the conclusion of the Holy Year Jan. 6, he was beginning a new series of talks dedicated to the Second Vatican Council.

The council, which convened for four sessions from 1962 to 1965, produced 16 documents, addressing everything from liturgy to Scripture, missionary activity to ecumenism and interfaith relationships, and the functions of clergy and laity to religious freedom.

“Vatican Council II rediscovered the face of God as the Father who, in Christ, calls us to be his children,” he said in his talk.

The council looked at the Catholic Church “as a mystery of communion and sacrament of unity between God and his people; it initiated important liturgical reform, placing at its center the mystery of salvation and the active and conscious participation of the entire people of God,” he said.

“At the same time, it helped us to open up to the world and to embrace the changes and challenges of the modern age in dialogue and co-responsibility, as a Church that wishes to open her arms to humanity, to echo the hopes and anxieties of peoples, and to collaborate in building a

more just and fraternal society,” he said.

For the past six decades, the popes have repeatedly underlined the importance of Vatican II, its teachings and its fuller implementation.

However, since the council was held so long ago, that means that “the generation of bishops, theologians and believers of Vatican II is no longer with us,” said the pope, who would have been 10 years old when the council ended in December of 1965.

“It will be important to get to know it again closely, and to do so not through ‘hearsay’ or interpretations that have been given, but by rereading its documents and reflecting on their content” directly, he said.

“Indeed, it is the Magisterium that still constitutes the guiding star of the Church’s journey today,” he said.

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NEWS BRIEFS

National/World

Christians must resist allure of power, serve humanity, pope says at end of Holy Year

VATICAN CITY — The powerful and violent cannot control, suppress or commodify God’s grace, friendship and will to usher in a new dawn, Pope Leo XIV said. “Around us, a distorted economy tries to profit from everything. We see how the marketplace can turn human yearnings of seeking, traveling and beginning again into a mere business,” he said, celebrating Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica Jan. 6, the feast of the Epiphany, and officially closing the celebration of the Holy Year dedicated to hope. “Let us ask ourselves: has the Jubilee taught us to flee from this type of efficiency that reduces everything to a product and human beings to consumers?” he asked. “After this year, will we be better able to recognize a pilgrim in the visitor, a seeker in the stranger, a neighbor in the foreigner and fellow travelers in those who are different?” Before the Mass, the pope, cardinals and bishops present in Rome, gathered in the atrium of the basilica and gave thanks to God for the gifts received during the Holy Year. Pope Leo went to the threshold of the Holy Door and pulled each side shut. The door will be sealed until the next Holy Year, which is likely to be 2033, the 2000th anniversary of the death and resurrection of Jesus. While the last of the Holy Doors in the city was closing, “the gate” of God’s mercy will never be shut, Pope Leo said before shutting the door. God “will always sustain the weary, raise up those who have fallen” and offer “good things” to those who place their trust in him.

Pro-life groups push back after Trump advises to be ‘flexible’ on Hyde Amendment

WASHINGTON — After President Donald Trump told House Republicans to be “flexible” on the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits public funding of elective abortions, in negotiations on health care subsidies, a key national pro-life group argued

the policy should be “a minimum standard in the Republican Party.” During a speech to the House GOP conference at the Kennedy Center, Trump suggested to members of his party that addressing rising health care costs could give them an edge over Democrats in the upcoming midterm elections, telling them, “Now you have to be a little flexible on Hyde.” Trump’s comments came as lawmakers negotiate a potential deal on renewing enhanced subsidies under the Affordable Care Act that expired at the end of 2025. The subsidies, or tax credits, were previously used by lower-to-middle-income households to reduce their out-of-pocket costs for enrolling in the health insurance program. Many Republicans have indicated they support including the Hyde Amendment in any such deal, a sticking point in negotiations. Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, which works to elect pro-life candidates to public office, said in a statement, “For decades, opposition to taxpayer funding of abortion and support for the Hyde Amendment has been an unshakeable bedrock principle and a minimum standard in the Republican Party.” John Mize, CEO of Americans United for Life, said in a statement, “As we approach the 50th Anniversary of the Hyde Amendment, we cannot abandon the most popular pro-life provision of all time.”

As Maduro faces New York trial, uncertainty lingers for Venezuelan migrants

NEW YORK — As deposed Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro made his first appearance Jan. 5 in a New York courtroom on narco-terrorism charges after the Trump administration carried out what President Donald Trump called on social media “a large scale strike against Venezuela,” uncertainty about immigration status lingered for some Venezuelan migrants in the U.S. Astrid Liden, communications officer for the Hope Border Institute, a group that works to apply the perspective of Catholic social teaching in policy and practice to the U.S.-Mexico border region, and a Venezuelan-American, told OSV News that Maduro’s reign led to the displacement of millions of Venezuelans, including hundreds of thousands who have sought protection in the United States. However, she

added, “The recent end of TPS for Venezuelans by the Trump administration sets a very dangerous precedent and puts hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans at risk.” She said the dismantling of Maduro’s “corrupt autocratic regime” will require more than just removing Maduro and said, “This protection in the United States must be maintained until voluntary and safe return truly becomes a viable option.” J. Kevin Appleby, senior fellow for policy at the Center for Migration Studies in New York and the former director of migration policy for the USCCB, told OSV News that keeping TPS renewed “at least until a democratically-elected government is in power” will help avoid the scenario of people facing persecution from Maduro’s regime upon their return and allow remittances from Venezuelans with TPS to “help steady the country economically.”

Israel bans dozens of aid groups from Gaza, including Caritas

JERUSALEM — Israel has revoked the licenses of 37 international aid organizations operating in Gaza, including Caritas Internationalis and Caritas Jerusalem, ordering them to halt operations by March 1. The Ministry of Diaspora Affairs said the groups failed to meet new security and transparency rules requiring full disclosure of staff, funding and operations. The regulations were announced last March, with a 10-month compliance deadline that expired Dec. 31. Israeli officials said the measures are needed to prevent links to terrorism and note the affected groups represent about 15% of nongovernmental organizations in Gaza. The European Union, United Nations and 10 foreign ministers have condemned the move, warning it could worsen Gaza’s already dire humanitarian crisis after two years of war. Church leaders said Caritas Jerusalem operates under recognized legal agreements with Israel and will continue its humanitarian mission. George Anton, administrative director of Caritas Medical Center in Gaza, told OSV News that Caritas is a church charity organization whose work in Gaza is “very important and essential in Gaza” and he hopes they will be able to continue their work. Several major NGOs, including Doctors Without Borders and Oxfam, are also affected, though they may continue limited work using local supplies.



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