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Return of the Disciple Maker Index draws closer — participation from parishioners, parish leadership, needed to develop robust pastoral plans

Maura Baker  
Staff Writer

In Luke 14:28-31, Jesus asks a crowd travelling with him, “Which of you, wishing to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost to see if he has the resources to complete it? ... Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?”

This quote emphasizes the importance of gathering information — the goal of the upcoming Disciple Maker Index (DMI) survey returning this Lenten season to parishes across the dioceses.

Previously completed by more than 40 percent of parishioners in 2023, the results from the index were pivotal in developing the With One Heart parish and diocesan pastoral plans, which have been put into effect since the previous survey’s completion and the launching of the With One Heart Campaign. Fruits of these plans are already observable, with the establishment of a diocesan youth minister and growth of youth and young adult groups across the diocese, the promotion of the Catholic Leadership Institute and improvements in communications and Hispanic ministry.

Now, the survey returns to read exactly how this progress has



seven weeks given for parishioners to contribute. From there, the results will be analyzed by individual parishes and updates to plans will be put into effect for a projected June 2026 completion.

“Whether you’re a profit company or nonprofit company or church, the data says that if you have a strategic plan, you have better results,” Deacon Fortner said. “We’re expecting that to hold true here ... The data will give pastors insight into what has been working and what needs more focus.”

While it’s the described role of parish points of contact to promote and distribute the survey in their parish communities, Deacon Fortner also emphasized the importance of the clergy’s involvement in the process. “The pastors need to promote this as an important tool as well,” he said. “The better informed the parish leadership is, the better their plans will be.”

changed the responses since the previous round. And, as Deacon Fortner, the Diocese of Covington’s COO puts it, “my intuition tells me that I think this survey’s going to show positive results.”

With a goal of as many answers as possible, parish points of contact will be distributing the survey — which will be made available both physically and through an online portal shared at parishes — beginning Feb. 18, with

Pope sets Jubilee to mark 800th year since St. Francis’ death; message of peace needed now

Junno Arocho Esteves  
OSV News

Pope Leo XIV has proclaimed a special Jubilee Year coinciding with the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis of Assisi. The Apostolic Penitentiary, a Vatican tribunal that deals with matters of conscience, issued a decree published by the Franciscan Friars Jan. 10, declaring a yearlong celebration in honor of the Poverello, or the Little Poor One.

According to the decree, Pope Leo has established that from Jan. 10, following the closing of the Church’s Jubilee Year, until Jan. 10, 2027, a special Year of St. Francis may be proclaimed, in which every Christian, “following the example of the Saint of Assisi, may himself become a model of holiness of life and a constant witness of peace.”

Noting previous jubilee celebrations related to the works of St. Francis — such as the eighth centenary commemorations of the first Nativity scene, as well as his composition of the “Canticle of the Creatures” and his receiving of the stigmata — the decree stated that “2026 will mark the culmination and fulfillment of all previous celebrations.”

In its decree, the Apostolic Penitentiary also announced that plenary indulgences will be granted to Catholics “under the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father), which can also be applied in the form of suffrage for the souls in Purgatory.”

The indulgence will be granted to those who participate in a pilgrimage “to any Franciscan conventual church, or place of worship



OSV News photo/Sam Lucero, CNS

A hunter’s moon rises behind a statue of St. Francis of Assisi on the grounds of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion in Champion, Wis., Oct 8, 2022.

in any part of the world named after St. Francis or connected to him for any reason,” it stated.

The sick, the elderly and caretakers unable to leave their homes can also obtain a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions “if they join spiritually in the Jubilee celebrations of the Year of St. Francis, offering their prayers to the Merciful God, the pains or sufferings of one’s life.”

In a statement announcing the decree’s promulgation, the Franciscan Friars invited Catholics to take part in the Jubilee celebrations and hope that St. Francis’ example would inspire participants “to live with authentic Christian charity towards our neighbor and with sincere longings for concord and peace among peoples.”

May this year of St. Francis “be for each one of us a providential occasion for sanctification and evangelical witness in the contemporary world, for the glory of God and the good of the whole Church,” the statement read.

In a Jan. 10 letter to the ministers general of the Conference of the Franciscan Family, Pope Leo said St. Francis’ message of peace was needed now more than ever.

“In this age, marked by so many seemingly interminable wars, by internal and social divisions that create mistrust and fear, he continues to speak. Not because he offers technical solutions, but because his life points to the authentic source of peace,” the pope wrote.

That peace, the pope added, “is not limited to the relations between human beings,” but extends to “the entire family of Creation.”

(Continued on page 13)



# Passionist Nuns pray for the Church ahead of World Day of Consecrated Life

**Bella Bailey**  
*Multimedia Correspondent*

A Mass to celebrate the World Day of Consecrated Life will be celebrated by Bishop John Iffert, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, Feb. 7, 10 a.m. The Mass will be attended by consecrated men and women of the Diocese of Covington to celebrate one another, their ministry and service to their communities. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Within the Diocese of Covington there are 11 communities of consecrated religious. While many of the communities live their mission and vocation in the world, ministering to the poor, administering health-care and teaching, there are others that live a life of contemplative prayer, cloistered from the distractions of the world. The Passionist Nuns, a worldwide community of cloistered contemplative nuns, live to serve their community in prayer. Five of those Passionist Nuns reside in the Diocese of Covington.

Founded by St. Paul of the Cross, the Passionist Nuns, “were founded to pray for the Church,” said Mother Michelle Mudd, superior of the Erlanger community. “The Church needs prayer. One of the models for cloistered contemplative life, Jesus said, he wants us to dedicate our whole life to prayer.”

Passionist Sister Mary Catherine said, “Contemplatives are kind of the heart of the Church, the heart is hidden. I think of us contemplatives as pumping grace to the rest of the Mystical Body.”

“If you remove contemplatives from the Church, and put us all out in the field, the Church would not survive,” said Mother Michelle.

Their robust prayer life flows through their dedication

**You’re invited**

Bishop John Iffert will celebrate Mass in recognition of the World Day of Consecrated Life

Feb. 7, 10 a.m., Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington.

The Mass will be attended by consecrated men and women of the Diocese of Covington to recognize their ministry and service to the people of the Diocese.

Everyone is welcome to attend.

to the passion of Christ. “Our model is ‘May the passion of Jesus Christ be always in our hearts,’ and we bear that in our hearts but then we proclaim it,” said Mother Michelle. “... We proclaim it to the world by living here, maintaining the cloister.”

Sister Mary Catherine said, “It’s our favorite meditation, the Passion, what he (Christ) did. So many people are hurting, they come here for prayers and so to be able to let them know you’re not alone, he knows exactly what you want. In fact, it hit him first, everything was on the cross. I think it gives them



In this 2023 file photo Sister Mary Catherine (far left), Mother Michelle Mudd (middle) and Sister Mar Angela (far right) work diligently in the kitchen inside their Erlanger convent.

comfort to know that, even though they may not feel it, God’s presence is deeper than our feelings.”

“If this is your vocation, this is where you want to be, we don’t want to be out there. We’re called to be in solitude with Jesus,” said Sister Mary Catherine.

# St. Mary’s Parish plans Missionary Disciples Workshop

**Laura Keener**  
*Editor*

St. Mary’s Parish in Alexandria is preparing to host a Parish Missionary Disciples (PMD) mini session this winter, aiming to help parishioners grow in faith and learn how to share it with others. The workshop is part of a broader effort to bring evangelization into everyday parish life.

Parishioners Ken Glaser and his wife Amy, along with Russ and Lisa Thacker, are leading the planning. “We thought that doing this workshop would get other people involved and start talking a similar language, similar idea set,” Mr. Glaser said. “We want to see how we can integrate this new evangelization into our parish.”

The idea came after the couples attended the diocesan PMD training as part of Cohort Two. “At first, I was skeptical,” Mr. Glaser admitted. “I went into the first weekend with a thick head. But by the end, I was excited about what would lie ahead. Maybe God had softened my heart a little.”

To help grow the skills learned at PMD, the Glasers began attending the GYMM, (Growing Your Missionary

Muscles), a monthly gathering of PMD graduates developed by Bill and Kim Dehlinger and Gerry and Bridget Otto, parishioners at Blessed Sacrament and Mother of God parishes, respectively. Mr. Otto took the six-seminar PMD training developed by the Catholic Leadership Institute and distilled into a mini session of three seminars. Mr. Otto first hosted this mini session at his parish with much success and is now offering it with encouragement to other parishes.

At St. Mary’s, so far, interest has been strong. “Forty people are already registered,” Mr. Glaser said. “About 24 are from St. Mary’s, eight from St. Joe Cold Spring, and the rest from other parishes.” While the workshop is hosted at St. Mary’s, it’s open to anyone in the Diocese of Covington. “We very much wanted to make it something available to the diocese,” Mr. Glaser shared.

The PMD program focuses on helping Catholics feel comfortable sharing their faith. “Evangelization is not a four-letter word,” Mr. Glaser joked. “It’s really just learning how to share your faith and being comfortable with that.”

Mr. Glaser believes that the word evangelization can be intimidating, but in reality, it’s a simple practice of sharing your faith in everyday moments. “When we talk about our faith, even in small ways, we don’t know what effect it will have on somebody,” he said. “All we can do is keep



Parish Missionary Disciples meet at the GYMM, Growing Your Missionary Muscles, in January. GYMM is a monthly meeting for those who have completed PMD so that they can sharpen their evangelization skills and support each other.

sharing and trust that God is working every day.”

The PMD workshop will give parishioners tools to share their faith in simple, meaningful ways. As Mr. Glaser put it, “It’s exciting to have these conversations and talk about what’s important. We all get caught up in the day-to-day nonsense, but when I spend even 30 seconds talking with God, it makes everything else easier to handle.”

The three-session PMD training will be held on Thursdays, Jan. 22, Feb. 5, and Feb. 19, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at St. Mary Parish, Alexandria. All are welcome! To register, contact Ken Glaser at kenglaser24@gmail.com or call (859) 512-1577.

**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.



# Faith meets future: educators, parents and leaders explore AI’s role in education at TMU

Laura Keener  
Editor

As the global society comes to understand and manage the use of Artificial Intelligence, the Catholic Church, first under Pope Francis and now Pope Leo XIV, encourages bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful, especially educators and parents, to “dedicate themselves to this critical subject with care and attention.” (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Antiqua et nova, §5)

As a regional education leader, Thomas More University is hosting an AI summit, entitled “AI & Education: A Catholic Perspective,” Jan. 24. The day will begin 9 a.m. with Mass with Bishop John Iffert at Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel on the TMU campus. The presentation will follow in the neighboring Zeigler Auditorium. Everyone is welcome to attend, especially educators and parents — Catholic and non-Catholic.

With all its promise and potential, AI carries with it the specter of misuse and abuse. “...there is broad consensus that AI marks a new and significant phase in humanity’s engagement with technology, placing it at the heart of what Pope Francis has described as an ‘epochal change.’ Its impact is felt globally and in a wide range of areas, including interpersonal relationships, education, work, art, healthcare, law, warfare, and international relations.” (Antiqua et nova, §4)

Of most concern to the Church is “ensuring that its

applications are used to promote human progress and the common good.” (Antiqua et nova, §4)

Keynote speaker for the TMU’s AI summit is Matthew Harvey Sanders. Mr. Sanders is CEO of Longbeard, a company founded in 2015 to build AI in service to the Catholic Church. Among its products is the popular Magisterium AI. Unlike ChatGPT, which is an open-source AI platform, Magisterium AI is a closed system sourcing from its own and trusted Catholic organizations in order to provide users accurate information. The Holy See is among its clients.

Dr. John Rudnick, professor at TMU, will also give a presentation on his participation at the 2025 Builders AI Forum in Rome last November: The Forum discussed ways AI can help the Church’s mission of evangelization.

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

Following the presentations, a panel of local educators, a Catholic communicator, and a psychologist will field questions and lead discussion.

# AI & EDUCATION

## A Catholic Perspective

### Highlights:

- Mass celebrated by Bishop Iffert
- Update on Vatican Forum/Pope Leo XIV positions on AI
- Q&A session with experts

### Speaker



Matthew Harvey Sanders  
CEO, Longbeard  
Catholic Innovator,  
Digital Transformation Strategist,  
Vatican/Global Voice on AI Ethics  
& Information

### SAVE THE DATE

# 24

Saturday  
January 2026

**9 AM** Mass followed by  
the program

**Thomas More University**  
Mass: Mary Seat of Wisdom Chapel  
Program: Zeigler Auditorium

A Program of the Diocese of Covington &  
Robert W. Plaster College of Business, Thomas More University

Information Contact: Dr. Jack Rudnick, Jr. rudnicj@thomasmore.edu

# January brings open houses to diocesan Catholic schools

Maura Baker  
Staff Writer

With the second half of the school year beginning, many Catholic schools in the Diocese of Covington are hosting open houses. These open houses provide excellent opportunities for students and families to learn about a school’s culture, environment and people — while also

allowing current attending families to meet with teachers, administrators and other families, as well as see what their students have accomplished in the first half of the school year.

See below for a list of open houses at diocesan schools, including websites and information on private tours.

Diocesan Grade School Open Houses			
Mary Queen of Heaven, Erlanger Jan. 25, 12:30–2:30 p.m. Contact the office to schedule a time slot. <a href="https://mqhschool.com">https://mqhschool.com</a>	St. Joseph, Crescent Springs Jan. 25, 12–2 p.m. <a href="https://www.sjsccrescent.com">https://www.sjsccrescent.com</a>	St. Thomas, Ft. Thomas Feb. 1 <a href="https://saintthomas.school.org">https://saintthomas.school.org</a>	St. Catherine of Siena, Ft. Thomas <a href="https://www.stcky.org/school">https://www.stcky.org/school</a>
Prince of Peace, Covington Jan. 25, 12–2 p.m. <a href="https://www.popcov.com">https://www.popcov.com</a>	St. Mary, Alexandria Jan. 25, 12–2 p.m. <a href="https://saintmaryparish.com/general-information">https://saintmaryparish.com/general-information</a>	St. Timothy, Union Jan. 24, 10:30 a.m.–12 p.m. <a href="https://saint-timothy-school.org">https://saint-timothy-school.org</a>	St. Cecilia, Independence <a href="https://www.stceciliaky.org">https://www.stceciliaky.org</a>
St. Agnes, Ft. Wright Jan. 29, 5:30–7:30 p.m. <a href="https://school.saintagnes.com">https://school.saintagnes.com</a>	St. Patrick, Taylor Mill Feb. 1, 12–2 p.m. <a href="http://stpat.school">http://stpat.school</a>	The following schools do not hold public open houses, or their open houses have passed. Families of prospective students may schedule a tour.	St. Edward, Cynthiana <a href="https://www.stedwardky.org">https://www.stedwardky.org</a>
St. Anthony, Taylor Mill Jan. 25, 10 a.m.–1 p.m. <a href="https://www.saintanthonytaylormill.org/school">https://www.saintanthonytaylormill.org/school</a>	St. Paul, Florence Jan. 25, 12–3 p.m. <a href="https://stpaulnky.org/school/">https://stpaulnky.org/school/</a>	Blessed Sacrament, Ft. Mitchell <a href="https://bssky.org">https://bssky.org</a>	St. Joseph Academy, Walton <a href="https://sjawalton.com">https://sjawalton.com</a>
St. Augustine, Covington Jan. 25, 12–1 p.m. <a href="https://www.staugustines.net/school">https://www.staugustines.net/school</a>	Sts. Peter & Paul, California Jan. 18, 12–2 p.m. <a href="https://www.stspp.com">https://www.stspp.com</a>	Holy Cross, Latonia <a href="https://www.holycrosselem.com">https://www.holycrosselem.com</a>	St. Patrick, Maysville <a href="https://stpatschool.com">https://stpatschool.com</a>
St. Joseph, Cold Spring Jan. 25, 12:30–2:30 p.m. <a href="https://stjosephcoldspring.com/school/">https://stjosephcoldspring.com/school/</a>	St. Pius X, Edgewood Jan. 22, 8:30 a.m. and 12 p.m. <a href="http://school.stpiusx.com">http://school.stpiusx.com</a>	Holy Trinity, Bellevue <a href="https://holyltrinity-school.org/">https://holyltrinity-school.org/</a>	St. Philip, Melbourne <a href="https://sites.google.com/a/stphilipky.org/stphilip/st-philip-parish">https://sites.google.com/a/stphilipky.org/stphilip/st-philip-parish</a>
	St. Therese, Southgate Jan. 29, 6–7:30 p.m. <a href="https://school.saint-therese.ws">https://school.saint-therese.ws</a>	Immaculate Heart of Mary, Burlington <a href="https://www.ihmkyschool.org">https://www.ihmkyschool.org</a>	Villa Madonna Academy Elementary, Villa Hills <a href="https://www.villamadonna.org">https://www.villamadonna.org</a>



## Bishop’s Schedule

<b>Jan. 16–17</b> Cursillo, St. Walburg Monastery guesthouse, Villa Hills	<b>Jan. 21 (continued)</b> DPAA solicitors lunch, Summit Hills Country Club, Crestview Hills, noon
<b>Jan. 18</b> Masses, Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, California, 9 and 11a.m.	Confirmation, St. Cecilia Parish, Independence, 7 p.m.
<b>Jan. 19</b> Diocesan Curia closed — Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday	<b>Jan. 22</b> Deans meeting, Curia Boardroom, 1:30 p.m.
<b>Jan. 20</b> Confirmation, Holy Cross Parish, Covington, 7 p.m.	Confirmation, St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs, 7 p.m.
<b>Jan. 21</b> Mass, Covington Latin School, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 8:15 a.m.	<b>Jan. 24</b> Mass, AI Summit, Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel, Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, 9 a.m.
	Vigil Mass, Cathedral Basilical, 4:30 p.m.

## Correction

In the Jan. 9, 2026, edition, the construction of Newport Central Catholic’s Tom Hoffman Alumni Hall and Commons was improperly attributed as part of the high school’s “Looking Up” capital campaign. The projects are, in fact, separate. The *Messenger* apologizes for this error.



# Thomas More University students and staff attend ‘life changing,’ SEEK conference

Bella Bailey  
Multimedia Correspondent

More than 30 students, faculty and staff from Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, attended SEEK, January 1-5, traveling to Columbus, Ohio, to experience their faith in a new way. Along with Thomas More University, students from the Newman Club at Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, and students throughout the Diocese of Covington attended.

The annual Catholic conference boasted a record-breaking 26,000 attendees, a 24 percent increase from 2025, busting the “weird narrative,” that, “Gen Z doesn’t care

about their faith,” said Amber Konerman, assistant registrar.

Ms. Konerman was one of the staff members to attend SEEK from Thomas More University, chaperoning students like Emily Brown, a second-year psychology and philosophy student. Like many of the other student attendees, Ms. Brown is an active member of campus ministry, leading the organization of on campus Eucharistic adoration for students and community members. When Ms. Brown heard of the opportunity to attend SEEK with Thomas More, she knew, no matter the cost, that she was going to attend.



“I knew I had to go because I’ve never seen that many Catholics my age before, it was a once in a lifetime opportunity,” she said. The lofty \$500 conference ticket, in addition to the cost of hotel rooms for the five-day conference, threatened to deter students from attending. However, a donor offered to help pay the way for students, allowing them to “pay what we could,” said Ms. Brown.

Once at SEEK, both Ms. Konerman and Ms. Brown had what they called a “life changing,” experience. “I’ve never seen that many young Catholics in one place before. We were in a room full of



(above) Emily Brown (far right) poses for a photo with speaker Emily Wilson (middle) and another Thomas More student, with the Thomas More University flag.

(left) More than 30 students, faculty and staff from Thomas More attended SEEK, traveling to Columbus, Ohio, to experience their faith in a new way.

16,000 people who chose to be there on New Year’s Day,” said Ms. Konerman.

In a particularly poignant moment, Ms. Brown was sitting in Mass on the last day of the conference. Listening to the priest’s homily, she closed her eyes and, “I could feel Jesus’ arm around me, like the presence,” she said. This holy moment she attributes to the four days of reveling in likeminded, faith-filled company without the distraction of outside pressures. “I wasn’t thinking ‘Oh, I want to go on my phone right now and look on Instagram,’ I was like, ‘I need to be here right now,’” she said.

As a faculty member, Ms. Konerman said, “It was a really cool experience to see that these students do care about their faith.” A sentiment shared by Ms. Brown, “I can just see in my peers who went, they’re on fire with the Spirit ... for young people, the Church is still alive and thriving and we want to spread the word,” she said.

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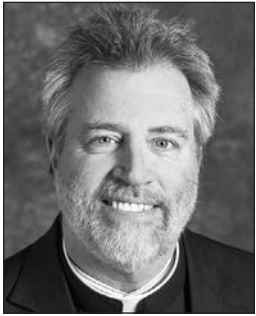


# After Christmas (another afterword)

The readings for the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle A — are: Isaiah 49:3, 5-6, 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 and John 1:29-34.

In the Gospel for the solemnity of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, we heard the story of Mary and Joseph searching for Jesus, and his response to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Stephen Bankemper

Chesterton wrote an article for *The Illustrated London News* which he entitled *After Christmas (An Afterword)*. He wrote, “One of the strangest things about our own topsy-turvy time is that we all hear such a vast amount about Christmas just before it comes and suddenly hear nothing at all about it afterwards ... Everybody writes about what a glorious Christmas we are going to have. Nobody, or next to nobody, ever writes about the Christmas we have just had.” And then comes the most important sentence in the article: “I am going to plead for a longer period in which to find out what was really meant by Christmas; and fuller consideration of what we have really found.”

One of the strengths of our American culture is that we accomplish things; we get things done. One of the weaknesses of our culture is that we spend very little time reflecting on the meaning of what we have done, or of what was done or said to us. We tend to think that what is important is what happened and miss the importance of what “what happened” means.

If we took seriously what the Scriptures tell us, we would learn this. We read in Revelation 21:1, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more;” and in 2 Peter 3:10, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up.” In these and other passages, Scripture reminds us that “things” will pass away.

What will be left, then? “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away,” Jesus says in Matthew’s Gospel (24:35). The Greek word here for “words” is *logoi*. *Logos* can mean word, but it can also mean “meaning.” Think of how often we say something like, “She is like that because such and such happened to her when she was a child.” Or how often do we note that two people come from the same neighborhood or the same family, and one succeeds in life but the other fails. Events pass away; their meaning is what remains.

The Christmas season has passed away, but what meaning was there in it for us? What did we learn, or could we have learned? Did it change us? How? Could it have changed us if we allowed it? What did Jesus want to do with us, for us, to us, this Christmas? Did we allow Him to do it? What insights came to us as we celebrated Jesus’ birth, as we heard the stories in holy Scripture again? What did we hear in homilies that we should ponder a little longer? Were there any “holy moments,” to use a phrase of Matthew Kelly’s, in the Christmas season? Perhaps we should go back to them and savor them more.

Some people by personality are more reflective than others, and contemplation comes more easily to some

(Continued on page 13)

# Happy Birthday to U.S.!

One of the things I am most excited about in 2026 is celebrating our country’s 250th birthday. I am showing my age, but I can vaguely remember celebrating the bicentennial in 1976. My mother sewed prairie dresses for my sisters and me. With my brown pigtails and toothy

smile, I was told I resembled the character Laura Ingalls from the Little House on the Prairie TV series!

Because I was a young child, I have no recollection of how my parish of the time celebrated the occasion or what the Catholic Church in the United States did to observe the 200th anniversary. However, I am very much looking forward to what is being planned for the current semiquincentennial (That word is a mouthful!).

In November 2025, the U.S. Bishops decided to consecrate our nation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in June 2026. The consecration will take place during their spring assembly which concludes on the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The devotion to the Sacred Heart can be traced back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries and spread to the universal Church following Jesus’ revelations of His heart to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque between 1673 and 1675. The emphasis of this devotion is honoring the physical heart of Jesus which shows His immense love, boundless mercy and tremendous suffering for humanity. The purpose of consecrating our nation and her people to the Sacred Heart is to call us to respond with love, to show mercy, to make reparation for offenses against Jesus, and to draw closer to Him particularly through the Eucharist.

The Bishops will be making resources available for dioceses and parishes to use in preparation for the consecration. Further, I have been thinking about ways that I can prepare to consecrate myself and my home to the Sacred Heart. I figure January is a great time to start not only because it is the season of resolutions, but also

because January is dedicated to the Holy Name of Jesus — how appropriate!

Normally, I rotate the pictures and other sacramentals that decorate my home according to the liturgical calendar. Starting this month, however, the picture of the Sacred Heart will be on display all year long including a prayer of consecration to encourage those who see it to stop for a moment to pray.

One of the practices that is part of the devotion to the Sacred Heart is to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion on the first Friday of nine consecutive months. I recently read that Catholics are especially encouraged to adopt the practice this year. I missed the first Friday this month but am determined to start on the first Friday of February!

Pope Francis released an encyclical in 2024 on the Sacred Heart of Jesus entitled *Dilexit Nos* (“He loved us”). Pope Leo released an apostolic exhortation in October 2025 entitled *Dilexit Te* (“I have loved you”). I plan to read *Dilexit Nos* leading up to the June consecration to understand more about the love of the Sacred Heart and then to read *Dilexit Te* following the consecration to understand how to respond to that love.

Remember the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage that traveled through Cincinnati on the way to the National Eucharistic Congress in June 2024? The annual pilgrimage will be unique in 2026 because it will pay tribute to our nation’s 250th anniversary. The pilgrimage theme is One Nation Under God, and the procession will visit most of the original 13 colonies ending in Philadelphia on the Fourth of July weekend. My family’s vacation plans have not yet been made, but if by God’s providence we visit the East Coast between Memorial Day and the Fourth of July, we will make every effort to participate in the procession. For more information, visit <https://www.eucharisticpilgrimage.org/>.

These are just a few ideas for celebrating our country’s semiquincentennial as only Catholics can — by consecrating ourselves, our families and our nation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus! I am sure other ideas will be forthcoming from our Bishops, our diocese and our parishes, but there is no time like the present to begin thinking about how you will participate! Happy birthday to U.S.!

Jamie Schroeder is chancellor for the Diocese of Covington, Ky

# Kneeling in the pigpen: Human connection in the age of efficiency

We live in an age that prizes efficiency above almost everything else. Tap your phone and a car arrives. Click a

button and groceries appear. Swipe right and ... well, that’s supposed to be connection, isn’t it? Except it’s not. What we’ve gained in convenience we’re losing in something harder to quantify — actual human closeness.

Josef Pieper saw this coming. Writing decades before smartphones existed, the German Catholic philosopher understood that love — real love — can’t be engineered for

tends to treat everything as a problem to be solved. But love doesn’t work that way. Neither does friendship. Neither does the slow, messy work of actually knowing another person. Real connection requires what we’re increasingly unwilling to give — time. Embodied presence. Inefficiency. The awkwardness of sitting with someone who’s struggling instead of sending a text. The risk of being misunderstood or rejected.

It’s easier than ever to pull away from people with minimal consequence — ghost someone, block, unfollow. We’ve built technologies that make disconnection frictionless.


Which means forgiveness and reconciliation have become more radical, more essential to our humanity than ever. When you can walk away from any relationship at the first sign of difficulty, choosing to stay and work through conflict becomes revolutionary.

This is where St. Claude La Colombière speaks to our moment with unexpected power. He wrote: “Really humble people are never scandalized: They know their own weakness too well; they know that they themselves are so close to the edge of the precipice and they are so afraid of falling over that they are not at all astonished to see others do so ... We have no reason to despise anyone. A humble man sees his own faults. It is a sign of little virtue to notice the imperfections of others. A person may be imperfect today who in a little while, recognizing this, may rise to great sanctity.”

This should perhaps be written across the top of every screen and scroll across every social media site. What have our digital platforms become if not engines of scan-

(Continued on page 13)

GUEST



Leonard J. DeLorenzo

maximum efficiency.

“What is really sought, human closeness, overcoming of loneliness, union with another personal being,” he wrote, “all that can be had only in real love. But at this point we see a further segment of the vicious circle. For love — above all, eros — is by nature something that cannot be fitted smoothly and easily, without problems, into the functional context of utilitarian plans.”

In other words, love made to serve other ends ceases to be love at all. The moment we try to make relationships efficient, productive, useful — the moment we optimize them — we kill the very thing we’re after.

This is uncomfortable news in a modern culture that



# Youth Ministry

## Leadership Events and Deadlines

**YCET nominations due in January**  
Nominations are being accepted for the 2026-2027 Diocesan Youth Commission Evangelization Team from adult parish and school leaders. Nominate students (grades 9-11) to be trained in discipleship and servant leadership.

**College Internship Summer Program accepting applications**  
Applications are open for college age adults who seek experience in ministry in a collaborative and prayerful community. Interns are mentored, trained, and immersed into the mission of the Church by learning practical skills for communication, prayer, planning, and ministry.

**March 5 — Ministry Leaders**  
(professional and volunteer) Evening of Reflection at the Curia  
Presented by YDisciple/NET ministries.

## Mark Your Calendar

**Feb. 21 — CONNECT Junior High Retreat Day at TMU, 9:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.**  
An inspirational day of faith, friendship, and fun for 6th, 7th and 8th graders. The retreat theme is “Take Heart.” Registration deadline is Feb. 11.

**Feb. 27–March 1 — SUMMIT 26 High School Eucharistic Retreat at TMU**  
For students in 9th thru 12th grade providing joyful encounters with the Lord in music, prayer, Adoration and reflection. Not an overnight retreat. Early bird registration is Feb 13, \$60.

**March 15 — Scout Mass at the Cathedral, 10 a.m.**  
For Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, American Heritage Girls and Knights of St. George and their families, followed by a reception at the Curia, Covington. RSVP required, youthministry@covdio.org.

**March 21 — Middle School Revive Night**  
Hosted at Newport Central Catholic High School, Newport.

**April 2–4 — Holy Week Mission of Mercy**  
High school service and prayer experience during the Holy Triduum. High school youth may participate in one or multiple days. College and adult volunteers needed. Contact Carrie O’Connor for additional information, e-mail youthministry@covdio.org.

# Empowering young leaders: Innovative opportunities for High School and College students in the Diocese of Covington

## Staff report

The Diocese of Covington is reimagining youth ministry by shifting from a model where adults host events for youth to one that empowers young people to lead. This paradigm shift reflects a growing desire among teens and young adults for mentorship, intergenerational support, and meaningful roles in the Church.

“Teenagers are asking the Church for a reimagining of faith formation . . . away from a classroom model, with greater intergenerational support, dialog and mentorship,” said Angie Poat, diocesan Youth Minister.

“Teenagers want caring adults.”

Through innovative programs, both high school and college-aged students can take active roles in evangelization, ministry, and community building. Here are the key opportunities available for teens and young adults willing to explore leadership roles.



A member of YCET blesses an expectant couple during last year's Good Friday Cross Walk evangelization event.

and learn leadership skills.

Responsibilities: YCET members meet twice a month during the school year. They help lead diocesan youth events such as the Summit Eucharistic Retreat, Revive nights, and the Holy Week Mission of Mercy. They also create their own mission statements and discern personal strengths for parish service.

Vision: To form disciples of Christ who return to their parishes and schools equipped to lead and inspire others.

## Leadership Opportunities for College Students

**Totus Tuus Missionary Program**  
Totus Tuus is a nationally recognized catechesis and evangelization initiative that brings vibrant Catholic programming to parishes. College students serve as missionaries, leading week-long camps (think Vacation Bible School) for grade school children at local parishes during the day and youth ministry for junior high and high school youth in the evenings. In the Diocese of Covington, the Totus Tuus program is led by Father Conor Kunath, diocesan vocations director and pastor, Sts. Boniface and James Parish, Ludlow.

Who Can Apply? College-aged men and women. Seminarians already participate, but the diocese is actively recruiting missionaries to complement the team.

Commitment: A 10-week summer program that includes training, retreat, and formation experiences, as well as leading summer camps and youth ministry.

Benefits: Missionaries receive a weekly stipend and gain hands-on experience in ministry and leadership.

Impact: Parishes benefit from a well-established Catholic program without having to run it alone. “The benefit to the parish is that it is a well-established Catholic catechesis and evangelization week. It’s fun, it’s engaging, it has a great reputation,” said Mrs. Poat. “We’re looking for parishes to host Totus Tuus and have openings for 10 parishes right now.”

**Summer Internship Program**  
The diocesan summer internship program, organized for the first time in the diocese last year, offers college students a chance to explore ministry and leadership roles beyond traditional youth ministry.

“Last year’s interns had a positive experience with the Diocesan Church and with developing relationships with Catholic professionals and each other,” said Mrs. Poat.

Structure: Interns participate in formation, prayer, and community life. They meet weekly for training and work on projects such as planning events, leading retreats, and assisting with diocesan events.

Past Success: Last year, nine interns from three colleges helped lead the Connect middle school retreat, supported youth ministry events, and learned skills from diocesan offices like Stewardship and Communications.

Connection: This program ties into Thomas More University’s Bishop Foys Scholars Program, offering academic and spiritual enrichment.

Goal: To develop young Catholic professionals who can serve in various capacities, not limited to youth ministry.

## Leadership Opportunities for High School Students Youth Commission Evangelization Team (YCET)

YCET is a leadership team for high school students who want to deepen their faith and serve their peers.

“We would like teachers, youth ministers, chaplains, and adult mentors to nominate students,” said Mrs. Poat. Through February students will be invited to apply and in March will be interviewed. In April, the 2026–2027 team will be announced.

Membership: Applications are open for freshmen, sophomores and juniors from parishes, schools, and homeschool communities. About 15 new members will join the current team of 20.

Formation: Students attend a retreat in May to build community

## Intergenerational Leadership Opportunity Teens Encountering Christ, aka Together Encountering Christ, (TEC) Movement

What sets TEC apart is that it’s more than a retreat — it’s a lay ecclesial movement that fosters intergenerational communities of faith and lay leadership. Bishop John Iffert is the episcopal moderator for the entire TEC movement and is the local chaplain of Covington TEC #1.

Audience: High school juniors, seniors, college students attend TEC. The team consists of adults of all ages who have attended a TEC, and priests and deacons who serve as spiritual directors.

Format: A three-night experiential retreat focused on the Paschal Mystery — die (to sin), rise (in Christ through baptism and the Eucharist) and go forth (living God’s will and spreading the Gospel). The retreat includes sacraments, witness talks, and community building.

Leadership Path: Like a Cursillo, participants must attend a TEC retreat before serving on a TEC team. The diocese is forming its first TEC team. Organizers are currently seeking additional team members who desire to participate in this movement from the group up.

Goal: To create a culture of lay leadership and small faith communities that extend beyond the retreat experience.

“We have people traveling to Indiana, to New Orleans, to different TEC retreat experiences across the country, they’ll return and host the first Covington TEC in November,” said Mrs. Poat. “That will be an historic moment for our diocese, welcoming and growing with this beautiful community.”

These programs reflect a paradigm shift in youth ministry. “It is a paradigm shift that comes from several different sources. First, the leadership of Bishop Iffert, who is empowering the church and lay communities to provide creative ministries that resonate with their local communities and to raise up leaders from within the communities using their own gifts and talents,” said Mrs. Poat.

Mrs. Poat said that studies show that teenagers thrive when they have five caring adults in their lives, and these initiatives foster those connections through mentorship and intergenerational support.

“Together, these programs ensure that young Catholics feel connected, wanted and loved in the Church,” said Mrs. Poat. “Not only to stay connected to the Church, but to be happily rooted and grounded, not isolated.”

The Diocese of Covington is building a future where young people are not just participants but leaders in the life of the Church. Through Totus Tuus, internships, YCET, and TEC, high school and college students are invited to grow in faith, develop leadership skills, and serve their communities. “Our tag line is ‘Together, We Thrive’ — we are supporting one another,” said Mrs. Poat.

To learn more or to participate in the youth and young adult leadership development programs, contact Angie Poat at [Apoat@covdio.org](mailto:Apoat@covdio.org) or (859) 392-1590.



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/>.

**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.

**St. Peter’s COF Court 1492 annual Men’s Stag,** Jan. 23, 7–11 p.m., Social Center, Sts. Peter & Paul School, California. Proceeds benefit the COF Education Awards Program and St. Vincent de Paul Society.

**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.

**Super Bowl party fundraiser,** Feb. 8, 5 p.m., St. Bernard Parish, Dayton, Garvey Hall. In June, 20 young adults are heading to Blessed Assurance, Jamaica, a home for disabled young people cast away by society. At halftime, there will be a presentation about the upcoming for a Mustard Seed mission trip.

**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](https://covdio.org/bible-workshops).

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

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

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

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

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

**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. For information contact Jeff Duell at (859) 801-8213.

**Zoom Support Group for family, relatives and friends of victims of clergy sexual abuse,** second Monday of the month, 6:30–8 p.m. CST; 7:30–9 p.m. EST. Most often family members, relatives and friends do not have anyone to talk with about their loved one’s abuse. They are considered secondary victims of abuse. These meetings are confidential and no one is forced to contribute unless they want to. The support group is not there to give answers but to share experiences. Participants are free to bring a friend if that makes them feel more comfortable. Everyone is welcome to attend no matter geographical location. For information contact Paula Kaempffer, coordinator of Restorative Practices and Survivor Support, for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, at [kaempfferp@archspm.org](mailto:kaempfferp@archspm.org) or call (763) 688-3978.

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

Do you have a bike no longer used? Donate it to Pickett’s Corner a ministry of Catholic Charities. Each bike makes a significant difference in the lives of those in need. Pick up available and all repairs are done at Pickett’s Corner. Simply e-mail [Pickettscorner23@gmail.com](mailto:Pickettscorner23@gmail.com) and give your name, address and phone number.



Villa Madonna Academy, Villa Hills, congratulated alum Henry Thole, Dec. 15, by retiring his #32 basketball jersey. Mr. Thole, Class of 2024, is the second leading scorer with 1,571 points and the leading rebounder in VMA history with 1,041. He also holds the single game record for points scored with 50. He now plays for Xavier University and was joined on the court by his Musketeer teammates.



# Amid the winds of Providence

Stephen Enzweiler  
Cathedral Historian

*This is the third 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 April 8, 1890, a man named James Walsh, Sr. (1818-1890), former resident of Covington, retired owner of James Walsh & Company, distiller of whiskey, wealthy citizen and philanthropist, supporter of Catholic charities and institutions across Northern Kentucky, and lifelong parishioner of St. Mary’s Cathedral, died suddenly from a fatal stroke at his residence in Washington, D.C. An emigrant from Ireland, Walsh had lived in Covington and Newport since 1848, entering the employ of a distillery business and rising to become a partner in 1867. At the time of his death, he was one of the wealthiest men in America and head of the largest producer of whiskey, with a massive distillery headquartered on the Ohio River at Covington and with a second distillery at Lawrenceburg. In his Last Will and Testament, he left bequests in large amounts to 10 Catholic beneficiaries, including “the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars” to the Rt. Rev. Camillus Paul Maes, “for use and benefit of a new St. Mary’s Cathedral at Covington.”

The \$25,000 for the new cathedral was the largest of Walsh’s bequests, and within days all the newspapers across the region carried the many details of his generosity. His example occasioned others to make their own bequests to the new cathedral fund. Throughout that year, money steadily came in. According to *The Catholic*

*Telegraph*, “the total of the bequests by November of that year amounted to \$90,000.” With the cathedral parish itself having already agreed to pay \$75,000 of the cost from their own pockets, it brought the total available means for construction to \$165,000, which was more than the roughly \$150,000 the bishop calculated it might cost.

Since his arrival in Covington in 1885, Bishop Maes had been working and praying hard for a solution to his new cathedral problem. There had been many dark times when he turned out the light at the end of a day feeling that he would never be able to build the kind of cathedral his people should have or one that was worthy enough to be a House of God. With each passing year he watched as the cost of building materials and labor increased and the cost of erecting it became greater and more unaffordable. Sometimes it seemed to him a new cathedral would never be built at all.

Yet, despite his frustrations, he knew by faith and with confidence that if God wanted a new cathedral, he would provide the means for it. Over time, Maes came to recognize that Providence had been at work all along. He mused over the reasons why Pope Leo XIII chose him, “a poor and useless servant in the vineyard of the Lord.” He knew of many other qualified candidates, and to his friends he repeatedly denied his own merits, writing, “I am fully conscious of my own unworthiness.” Yet, Camillus Paul Maes was also a man of duty and ironclad conviction, infused with a seemingly limitless energy, a boundless determination, a business savviness, creative talents and deep spiritual qualities, the kind of attributes that make apostles. Detroit’s Bishop Caspar Borgess certainly recognized this

rare combination when he submitted his name to the Holy Father for the episcopacy.

Then there was the unknown little girl who visited him in 1886 with an unusual message. Described years later in a *Kentucky Post* interview, Bishop Maes told how she visited him one day at his office and placed into his hand a shiny, new silver dollar, telling him to “take it and build a new cathedral in Covington.” On the surface, it was the impossible request of a child; but Maes saw it differently and came to recognize it as a sign of Providence.

The bishop, like most clergymen of his day, understood that God sometimes spoke to man through the innocence of children, just as he had through the Marian apparitions of in his own day. There was the 1842 apparition at Celles in his native Belgium, in France at La Salette (1846), Lourdes (1858), Pontmain (1871) and in Germany at Marpingen (1876). According to the *Post* story, he took the little girl’s gesture as the sign that God wanted him to build the new St. Mary’s Cathedral. “From that hour,” the *Post* reported, “Bishop Maes determined to act upon the suggestion of the child, and from that day he has labored without rest to accomplish the task the child had given him to do.”

In 1890, with funds pledged and feeling the winds of Providence filling his sails at last, Bishop Maes found himself with two very large questions before him: where to locate the new cathedral, and what kind of cathedral it should be. To the first question, he chose its location at what was then considered the center of the city – the corner of Twelfth Street and Madison Avenue. Two properties were situated there — the residences of Dr. John Delaney and the McVeigh family. And when the opportunity presented itself, he purchased both, giving him a large footprint on which to build.

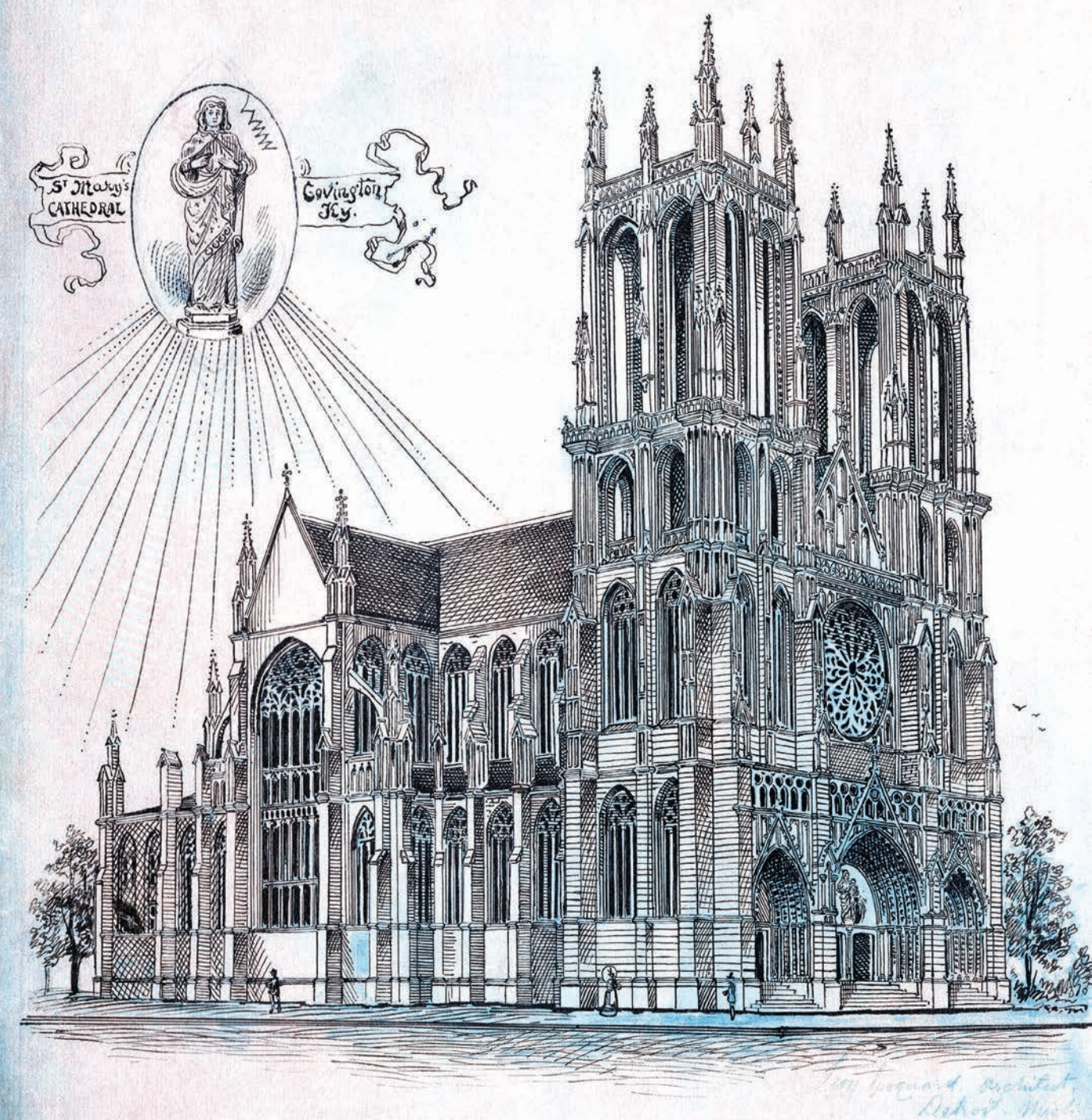
Back in Detroit, Leon Coquard had become an architect in his own right after leaving the employ of Albert E. French in 1887. His reputation must have been secured, because the newspapers reported he was rarely without work. Up to this point, he had been designing commercial buildings, schools and residential homes, such as the posh and spacious neo-Gothic homes of Detroit’s famed Indian Village and the sprawling Saint Peter and Paul Academy in Midtown. But it didn’t satisfy him as greatly as did his work on St. Ann’s, and he longed for a great commission to design something that would make him an architect of consequence.

Maes didn’t yet know what kind of cathedral he wanted to build, but his thoughts kept drifting back to his 1888 visit to St. Ann’s Church and the deep impressions it left on him. As a result, he had long ago settled on Leon Coquard as his architect of choice.

In June 1891, Maes finally penned a letter to Coquard asking for his terms of contract. “The fact that I select you without competitive plans is because I am pleased with your art and work,” he wrote. “I consider that your terms ... for preliminary sketches, definite drawings, working plans, specifications and details, are very low. Hence, I accept your terms; and foreseeing that you will give me the best work you are capable of, I feel that I am your debtor.”

It would be another year before the two men began a serious collaboration on the plans. In a June 10, 1892, letter, Bishop Maes laid out his basic preferences for what he would like to see. His lingering worries over “burdening the people with further debt” prompted him to first suggest constructing “a lofty basement church to be used for the next two or three years or longer.” He eventually saw the folly in it and yielded to Coquard’s insistence on a full-scale Gothic cathedral. The bishop replied with simple demands: that the new Cathedral should be cruciform in its floorplan, with the apse facing east and the front “facing Madison Avenue, with a stone front, the balance of the building, Gothic style.” The details he left up to Coquard.

Within weeks, the architect sent him a detailed pen and ink rendering of the structure he proposed. It was an ambitious concept, incorporating the bishop’s earlier requests, but also presenting Coquard’s own creative vision for what he liked to call “the pure French style of Gothic Architecture.”



Coquard’s original Cathedral concept sketch, 1892.

Cathedral Archives







# St. Timothy group takes on the Big Apple, stuns in Radio City Music Hall performance



(above left) Fifty students from St. Timothy School, Union, took the stage at Radio City Music Hall, New York City, Dec. 4, in an opening number for the Radio City Rockettes Christmas Spectacular.  
(above right) A behind the stage look at Radio City Music Hall shows the hustle and bustle of pre-show work, with a line of St. Timothy students buzzing with excitement, ready to go on stage.

**Bella Bailey**  
*Multimedia Correspondent*

Fifty middle school students from St. Timothy School, Union, were selected by Madison Square Garden Group to open for the Radio City Rockettes Christmas Spectacular, Dec. 4. And, after months of preparation with choir director and teacher, Andrew Mason, the students were ready and left to take on the big stage of Radio City Music Hall, New York City.

When Mr. Mason and the students walked onto the stage of an empty Radio City Music Hall to warm up, the reality that soon the 6,000 seats staring back at them would be filled, began to set in.

“They knew what that we were there to do, and that’s to represent our school and represent our Catholic identity ... they took that responsibility seriously,” said Mr. Mason. The students sang a medley of Christmas songs, including

two church hymns, “Angels We Have Heard on High” and “A Child Is Born in Bethlehem,” and two secular songs, “Somewhere in My Memory” and “Christmas Canon.”

“Our best performance was when we were on the stage singing it, that’s when we sounded our best. I was just super thrilled with how it all came together and how they all work together. It was awesome to see that,” said Mr. Mason.

The grandeur of that moment was not lost on the students, with many noting the sheer scale of the venue and how special the opportunity was.

“I really like New York,” said student Hadley. “It was a lot bigger than I expected and the stage was huge. I didn’t expect it to be that big.”

Another student, Harper, said, “It was really cool to be on the really big stage, and it was a really big city with a lot of lights. It was a really big responsibility since we’re such

a small school, it was really cool.”

While standing on the stage, back turned to the audience, focused only on directing his students, Mr. Mason said, an overwhelming sense of pride filled him, knowing how hard the students worked. “Pride, with how hard they worked, their talent, how well they came together as a group. It was just an overwhelming amount of pride,” he said.

“It was kind of a big honor,” said middle school student Lucas, of the opportunity to open for the Rockettes.

Middle school student Ava, said, “It was a once in a lifetime trip, because once we saw the Rockettes go up there, I thought, ‘I was on that stage.’ So, it’s really just a once in a lifetime opportunity.”

The opportunity and experience, Ava said, “shows what we’ve learned here [St. Timothy School] and how far we’ve come.”



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# They came from a-fire: the Epiphany, Christmas and the twelve days thereof

Maura Baker  
Staff Writer

It's Black Friday. People across the country have eaten their turkey and filled their refrigerators with Tupperware. The braver of them will head out to face the retail heat of the day — for a little Christmas shopping.

It begins as early as possible for the rest of the world: Christmas music in every speaker from mid-November onward, lights on houses sometimes earlier. And yet, on December 26 — so much falls silent.

In the Catholic tradition, the weeks leading up to Christmas Day are celebrated as Advent — a time of excitement and preparation for the coming of the Lord. But Catholics know it doesn't end on Christmas day — rather, as famously exemplified in the carol "The Twelve Days of Christmas," the season of Christmas, and all its festivity, carries on for at *least* the twelve days leading to the Epiphany on Jan. 6, more if you consider that the Baptism of Christ on the following Sunday is the true "end" of the liturgical season.

Yet, the world seems to end its jubilations way too early — but the true Twelve Days of Christmas are kept alive in the heart of Catholic families.

Enter Dr. James "Jim" Noll — an Edgewood resident and parishioner of Blessed Sacrament Parish, Ft. Mitchell. For Dr. Noll, the Christmas fun begins on Christmas Eve — with a lit firepit in his front yard.

The fire represents the East — it comes from a joke Dr. Noll likes to tell. He asks, "Why were the three kings covered in ash?" With the punchline, "Because they come from afar!"

It takes a moment — but with the right accent, "afar," as is described in the carol "We Three Kings" can sound a lot like "a fire," and the firepit maintained by Dr. Noll and his family on Christmas Eve becomes the origin point for a set of three figures of the wisemen.

Through the Christmas season, to the Epiphany, Dr. Noll, with the help of his grandchildren, moves the figures day by day of the road towards a Nativity scene in front of his daughter's — who lives next door — house.

It's about preserving tradition, Dr. Noll said. "If people don't keep doing traditions, the traditions get lost. So that's sort of why I do what I do."

Another tradition for Dr. Noll's family is celebrated on Epiphany, which he describes to "prolong the Christmas season." A party in the evening where family members gather for tapioca pudding — three beans are hidden amongst the cups of pudding. Those that get the bean earn the status of "king" for the night, and a prize.

Inspired by the King Cakes eaten on Mardi Gras or the similar Latin American tradition of the *rosca*, traditions like the tapioca pudding party "take note of the epiphany," Dr. Noll said, "which is a pretty important thing."



(above top) Dr. James "Jim" Noll stands proudly beside his pick-up truck, on which the three wise men and their camel are situated. In the days leading up to the Epiphany, this truck bed is the final stop in their journey from a campfire in Dr. Noll's front yard to a humble Nativity scene up the road.

(above) Excited gesturing from Dr. Noll's son-in-law, Shane Baker (top left), daughters Cecilia Baker (left) and Nancy Noll (right) and grandson Samuel Baker (center) point out the wise men at their starting point — a fire pit at the corner of Dr. Noll's front yard.

(right) Three of Dr. Noll's grandsons, Owen Pate, Samuel Baker and Lucas Pate, carefully choose a bowl of tapioca pudding. As part of a Noll family tradition, three beans are hidden within the pudding bowls on the night of the Epiphany — and those who find them are "crowned" one of three kings.

Even after the Epiphany, the evangelization and fun continue as the kings return to their fire from another direction (to avoid King Herod, presumably), and the Holy Family flees into the Egypt stand-in of the neighbor's yard.

Traditions like these keep the Christmas season in the Noll family — and Mr. Noll hopes those that drive by and observe the wise men moving across the lawn will be inspired, too.

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## After Christmas

(Continued from page 5)

than to others, but everyone can learn to think about what happens to them, and the more we think about the meaning of things, the richer our lives will be. Just as if we eat too fast, we miss the full taste and enjoyment of a meal, if we simply “wolf down” the events, songs, Scriptures, conversations, correspondence and homilies of Christmastime and jump back into Ordinary Time, we will miss the richness and lessons of the season. We must let go of the season; it has passed but let us continue to ponder its meaning.

We have mentioned Mary; there is another image we can take from the Christmas story. Two of the creatures of the story — the sheep and the ox — are ruminants, animals that eat rapidly, but then expel harvested forage for further chewing and digesting. Ruminants typically spend one-third or more of their time eating but can spend almost that much time chewing their cud. We can learn a lesson from them: reflecting on what we have heard and learned is a way of garnering all the spiritual nutrition, or meaning, possible.

Whether we use the image of Mary or of the ox and sheep, let us not let Christmas have been just a passing pleasant escape from life, but a season that has changed our lives. Let us respond to Chesterton’s exhortation and take “a longer period in which to find out what was really meant by Christmas; and fuller consideration of what we have really found.”

Let us pray for each other.

*Father Stephen Bankemper is pastor, St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Ft. Thomas, Ky*

## Kneeling in the pigpen

(Continued from page 5)

dalization? We’ve created spaces where noticing and broadcasting the imperfections of others has become not just entertainment but social currency. The algorithm rewards outrage. The architecture encourages judgment.

Real humility — the kind St. Claude describes — makes that impossible. When you know your own fragility, when you’ve faced your own capacity for failure, you can’t maintain the posture of the perpetually scandalized. You remember that you too are close to the edge. You extend to others the grace you desperately need for yourself. And that creates the possibility for actual relationship instead of performance.

There’s an image that captures this better than words can. Albrecht Dürer’s engraving “The Prodigal Son Among the Swine” (c. 1496) shows the wayward son at his lowest point — kneeling in prayer amid the pigs, surrounded by ruins. But here’s what strikes me: The one who prays in the midst of his sin already sees beyond his sins, even if he believes he can see nothing else. Dignity, which is reborn in the redeemed sinner, is here in its embryonic stage.

That’s the moment Dürer chose to depict. Not the celebration of the son’s return. Not the father’s embrace. But the instant when someone broken by his own choices turns toward home. Prayer amid the wreckage. The first stirring of hope in the heart of the lost. The prodigal hasn’t cleaned himself up yet. He’s still in the pigpen. But he’s already being transformed.

This is what human connection requires in our age: the willingness to kneel in the pigpen with each other. To stay present in the mess. To pray together when nothing is fixed yet. We can’t optimize our way to this. We can’t hack intimacy or engineer belonging. We can only do the slow work of showing up, choosing reconciliation over convenience, presence over productivity, the risk of real love over the safety of managed relationships.

The father in the parable was watching for his son. Watching requires time. Waiting requires patience. Welcome requires generosity. None of these fit into our utilitarian plans. But they’re the only way home.

*Leonard J. DeLorenzo is a professor of the practice in the McGrath Institute for Church Life and concurrent professor in the department of theology at the University of Notre Dame.*

## God speaks to the faithful; take time to listen every day, pope says



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. 14, 2026.

Carol Glatz

Catholic News Service

If Christians are to speak about God, then they must dedicate time each day and week to listening to God’s word in prayer and the liturgy, Pope Leo XIV said.

“We are called to live and cultivate friendship with the Lord” through prayer, he said Jan. 14 during his weekly general audience.

“This is achieved first of all in liturgical and community prayer, in which we do not decide what to hear from the Word of God, but it is he himself who speaks to us through the Church,” he said. “It is then achieved in personal prayer, which takes place in the interiority of the heart and mind.”

“Time dedicated to prayer, meditation and reflection cannot be lacking in the Christian’s day and week,” he said. “Only when we speak with God can we also speak about him.”

Speaking to visitors gathered in the Paul VI Audience Hall for the general audience, the pope continued a new series of talks dedicated to the Second Vatican Council, which “rediscovered the face of God as the Father who, in Christ, calls us to be his children,” Pope Leo said in his first talk introducing the series Jan. 7.

He dedicated his Jan. 14 catechesis to the Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, “Dei Verbum,” calling it “one of the most beautiful and important” documents of the council.

The document, published in 1965, affirms “a fundamen-

tal point of Christian faith,” that “Jesus Christ radically transforms man’s relationship with God,” who is no longer invisible or distant, but has been made flesh, he said.

Out of the abundance of his love, the Lord “speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself,” he said. “The only condition of the New Covenant is love.”

While the Covenant is eternal, and “nothing can separate us from his love,” the revelation of God has “the dialogical nature of friendship,” which “does not tolerate silence, but is nurtured by the exchange of true words,” he said.

Just as human friendships can end with “a dramatic gesture of rupture or because of a series of daily acts of neglect that erode the relationship until it is lost,” one’s friendship with Jesus must be cultivated and cared for daily, Pope Leo said.

Therefore, the first step is to cultivate an “attitude of listening, so that the divine Word may penetrate our minds and our hearts,” he said. “At the same time, we are required to speak with God, not to communicate to him what he already knows, but to reveal ourselves to ourselves.”

“If Jesus calls us to be friends, let us not leave this call unheeded,” he said.

“Let us take care of this relationship, and we will discover that friendship with God is our salvation,” he said.

## Pope sets Jubilee to mark St. Francis’ death

(Continued from page 1)

“This insight resonates with particular urgency in our time, when our common home is threatened and cries out under exploitation,” he wrote. “Peace with God, peace among human beings, and with creation are inseparable dimensions of a single call to universal reconciliation.”

Pope Leo concluded his letter with a prayer to St. Francis, asking the saint’s intercession “to give us the courage to build bridges where the world raises up boundaries.”

“In this time afflicted by conflict and division, intercede for us so that we may become peacemakers: unarmed and disarming witnesses of the peace that comes from Christ,” the pope wrote.

The pope’s letter was read during a Jan. 10 celebration marking the start of the Franciscan Jubilee Year at the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels in Assisi, which houses the Chapel of the Transit, marking the site where St. Francis died.



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ROME — As the Catholic Church prepares for the 2026 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Vatican officials are highlighting unity as a core Christian calling — not just an ideal. Resource materials released by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity describe unity as a “divine mandate” rooted in life in Christ and sustained by love. The Jan. 18–25 week will center on the theme, “There is one body and one Spirit,” drawn from St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians. The materials were prepared by the Armenian Apostolic Church, alongside Armenian Catholic and evangelical partners, underscoring a strong ecumenical focus. Unity has been a defining theme of Pope Leo XIV’s pontificate, reflected in his motto, “In the One, we are one.” The pope has repeatedly said this vision extends beyond Christians, calling all people to dialogue, peace and reconciliation. During his first apostolic visit to Turkey and Lebanon, Pope Leo emphasized that Christian unity is ultimately a gift from God — one meant to be lived, prayed for and witnessed in a divided world. Reflecting on the Nicene Creed, Pope Leo said unity must take the form of “a communion which does not imply absorption or domination, but rather an exchange of the gifts received by our Churches from the Holy Spirit.”

WASHINGTON — Marking the Jan. 19 Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. bishops' conference, urged Catholics to reflect on how they are called to be "drum majors for justice" in their own communities. He drew on the slain Civil Rights leader's words and the Church's Gospel mission from Jesus Christ in a Jan. 13 statement released by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Archbishop Coakley reflected on the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1968 sermon, "The Drum Major Instinct," and challenged the faithful to consider how leadership rooted in service and humility can shape efforts for justice, peace and righteousness today. "Let us take a moment to honor the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose prophetic voice was a 'drum major for justice,'" Archbishop Coakley said. Archbishop Coakley emphasized that Rev. King's message remains relevant for Catholics who are also called to "be leaders in the priorities that Christ gave us," particularly the works of mercy. "Just as important is the challenge to help the faithful to authentically live out this call," he said. Born in 1929, Rev. King had led the Civil Rights movement from 1955 until 1968, when a white supremacist assassinated him in

NOTRE DAME, Ind. — The University of Notre Dame recently received from the Lilly Endowment a \$50.8 million grant — the largest given by a private foundation in the school's history — to support the DELTA Network, a faith-based approach to AI ethics launched in September 2025. Notre Dame said the grant “will fund the further development of a shared, faith-based ethical framework that scholars, religious leaders, tech leaders, teachers, journalists, young people and the broader public can draw upon to discern appropriate uses of artificial intelligence, or AI.” The framework is based on Christian principles and values yet designed to be accessible to people of all faith perspectives. “Anytime there’s this amount of really rapid transition, that raises questions for people about what it means to live a good life and what it means to have a good society,” said Meghan Sullivan, founding director of Notre Dame’s Institute for Ethics and the Common Good and DELTA. “That is an incredible opportunity for Christians, because the kinds of changes and questions that AI are raising are questions where the Church’s teaching has never been more relevant.”

WASHINGTON — The 2026 national March for Life promises to bring tens of thousands of pro-life Americans to the nation's capital to celebrate the beauty of every human person, born and unborn, with the theme "Life Is a Gift." That's a universal message that speaks to the heart and cuts through the noise," Jennie Bradley Lichter, president of the March for Life Education and Defense Fund, said about the 53rd annual March for Life in Washington Jan. 23. "It invites our marchers to join the spirit of joy and celebration that is the March for Life — a spirit inspired by the inherent goodness and beauty of life itself." The 2026 march is the first led by

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump met with Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Jan. 12, a spokesperson for the USCCB confirmed. The private meeting, which was listed on the official White House schedule for Trump, was closed to press. The White House did not specify the topic of the meeting. In a statement provided to OSV News, a USCCB spokesperson said, “Archbishop Coakley had the opportunity for introductory meetings with President Trump, Vice President Vance, and other Administration officials, in which they discussed areas of mutual concern, as well as areas for further dialogue.” The statement said Archbishop Coakley was “grateful for the engagement and looks forward to ongoing discussions. Meetings between a sitting president of the USCCB and the president of the United States are not without precedent, but do not always happen. Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, told OSV News in November, that he was never able to meet with either President Joe Biden nor with Trump. Trump had a brief meeting in 2017 that included Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, who was president of the conference at the time. USCCB presidents, including then-Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Kentucky, and Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York, had several meetings between the two of them with then-President Barack Obama over the course of his presidency.



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