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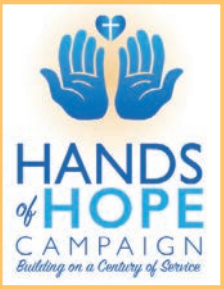
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Missed an edition? Current and back issues of the *Messenger* are available online at covdio.org/messenger.



(above left) Karen Zengel, executive director, St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky welcomes staff, volunteers, benefactors and guests to the public launch of the \$12 million Hands of Hope capital campaign, Jan. 21. On the day of the launch \$9 million has been pledged, of the needed funds to build a new headquarters and drop-off and distribution center: “We’re not fancy, we’re functional,” Mrs. Zengel said of the purposely designed and appointed 40,000 square foot facility.

(above right) Presenters gather around a rendering of the proposed St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky headquarters during the launch of its “Hands of Hope” capital campaign. Hands of Hope is the first such campaign in the Societies 115-year history in NKY. Pictured, from left, are: Deacon Jim Fortner, chief operating officer, Diocese of Covington; Beth Sewell, Kenton County commissioner; Karen Zengel, executive director, St. Vincent de Paul NKY and Marty Butler, chair of the Butler Foundation and Hands of Hope steering committee.



(below right) An endearing new feature is Ruthie’s Kitchen, a multi-purpose room with a teaching kitchen for nutritional education, seasonal programs, community gatherings, and distribution events.

(below left) The new headquarters will feature the R.C. Durr Chapel of Hope, a dedicated place for quiet reflection and prayer.



St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky Launches \$12 Million ‘Hands of Hope’ Campaign

Laura Keener
Editor

St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky (SVdP NKY) has announced its first-ever Hands of Hope Capital Campaign, a \$12 million effort to build a new headquarters that will help meet the growing needs of families in Northern Kentucky. The campaign officially kicked off with a launch event on Jan. 21 at the current Erlanger location.

For more than 100 years, SVdP NKY has provided food, housing and emergency assistance to neighbors in need. Today, the organization operates four thrift stores and 14 assistance programs, serving tens of thousands of people each year. But demand has grown so much that the current headquarters — a warehouse built in 1969 — is stretched to its limits.

“Our mission calls us to see Christ in those we serve and to respond with love, dignity, and action,” said Karen Zengel, executive director of SVdP NKY. “Hands of Hope is about creating a space that allows us to serve our neighbors today and for years to come.”

The new headquarters will be a 40,000+ square-foot facility designed to make services easier to access and more effective. Key features include:

- A larger food pantry, doubling current capacity.
- Expanded guest services and call center for better privacy and coordination.
- Dedicated space for community partners to provide wrap-around care.
- A chapel for quiet reflection and prayer.

— A multi-purpose room with a teaching kitchen for nutrition classes and community events.

— A climate-controlled warehouse to improve donation management and increase revenue.

— Enhanced retail space projected to generate \$150,000 annually for programs.

The new address will be 2064 Crescent Springs Road, Erlanger, less than a mile south of the current location. A former employee of St. Vincent de Paul learned that the owners of the land were interested in selling and helped connect the two. “Being right there, off of I-75, in the middle of Kenton County, was something we were hopeful for,” said Mrs. Zengel.

Cincinnati architectural firm GBBN was tapped to design the new headquarters. In 2019, GBBN architects designed St. Vincent de Paul’s Cincinnati Don & Phyllis Neyer Outreach Center.

“They understood the Vincentian model and how all the elements of the organization come together,” said Mrs. Zengel. “They really did have an understanding of the way that we operate and the importance of having space for us to meet with our guests and neighbors in a more dignified and discrete way than what we’re able to do in our building right now. They understood the thrift store not only as a way to support the outreach, but also as a program and the need for significant warehouse space.”

Before leading the opening prayer, Deacon Jim Fortner, chief operating officer for the Diocese of Covington, spoke fondly of the current warehouse and the St. Vincent de Paul ministry, saying, “I feel like

(Continued on page 6)

World Cancer Day event brings community together for support, education and empowerment

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

World Cancer Day is celebrated annually, Feb. 4, as a day to raise awareness regarding cancer prevention, early detection and treatment.

This year, St. Elizabeth Healthcare is teaming up with the Kentucky Cancer Program, Kenton County Public Library, Cancer Support Community and the Northern Kentucky Health Department for a screening event, Feb. 4, 1–3 p.m. at the Latonia Branch of the Kenton County Public Library.

The event, which is free and open to the public, will offer attendees opportunities to learn about cancer prevention and treatment, have screening questions answered and schedule appointments. St. Elizabeth’s mobile mammography van will also be on the premises of the library that day, with availability via appointment.

“We welcome anyone to come on down and check out all that the day has to offer,” said Maggie Lynnot, program manager for St. Elizabeth’s Community Health and Partnership.

“Our goal here is to educate the community about cancer prevention and resources,” Ms. Lynnot said, “but also to celebrate survivors and connect people with local programs that support early detection and treatment. We want to meet the community where they’re at and empower individuals to take proactive steps for their health.”

Cancer impacts millions of people each year, according to Ms. Lynnot. “A lot of those cases can be prevented or treated through timely screenings and healthy lifestyle choices,” she said. “And, so, this day, this event, really serves as a reminder to schedule those regular checkups and learn about warning signs — as well as support anyone affected by that disease.”

The event is open to “anyone and everyone,” Ms. Lynnot emphasized, saying, “It’s really about community putting together an event for community. So, whether it’s patients, caregivers or community members — cancer really touches everyone in some way.”

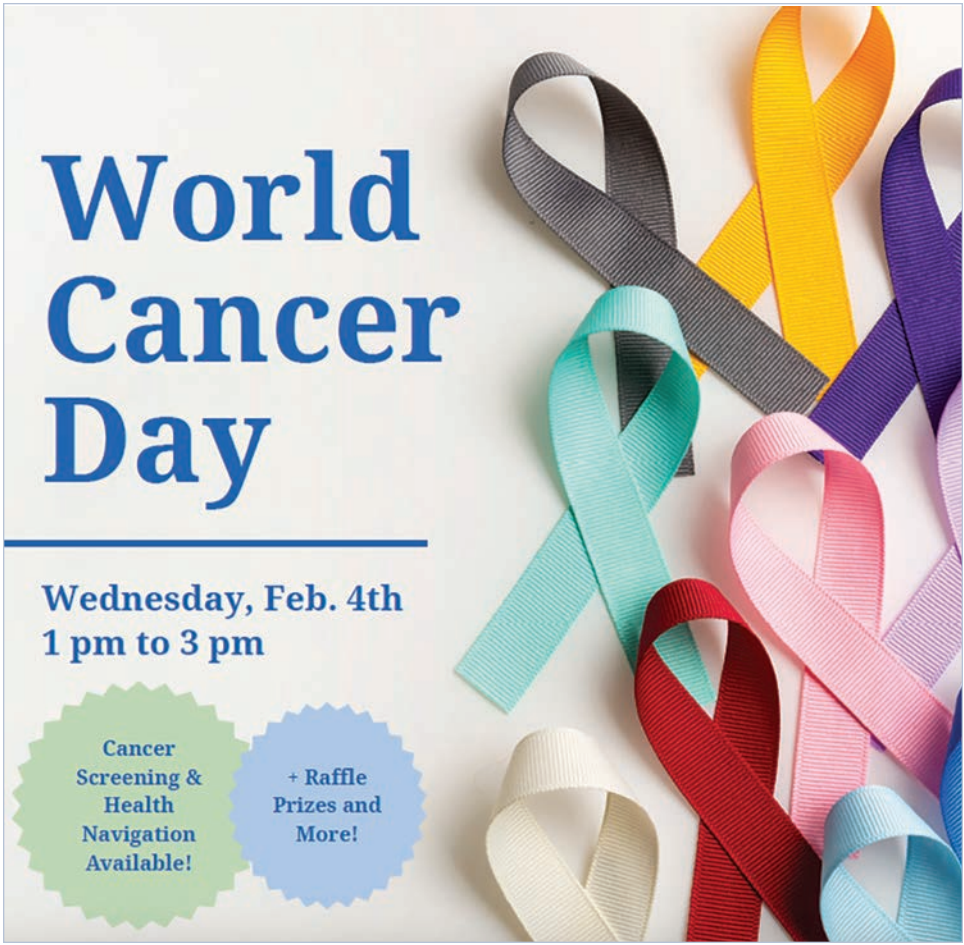
For more information, or to pre-schedule a mammogram appointment, call (859) 655-7400.

World Cancer Day

Wednesday, Feb. 4th
1 pm to 3 pm

Cancer Screening & Health Navigation Available!

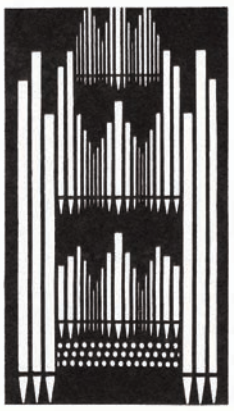
+ Raffle Prizes and More!



Bailey photo

Preparing for the 2026 DPAA

Bishop John Iffert spent time at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, Jan. 20, filming the promotional video for the 2026 Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal. The video will be shown during commitment weekend, March 21 and 22 this year, in parishes across the diocese. The theme for the 2026 DPAA is “Live Like Children of Light.”



Cathedral Concert Series

The Cathedral Concert Series continues its 49th Season, Feb. 15, 3 p.m.

The acclaimed Cincinnati Camerata vocal ensemble will return for a program of sacred choral music. Featured work is Messe Solennelle — a

Mass setting written for two organs and choir — by Louis Vierne. This will be a rare opportunity to hear both Cathedral organs played together. The concert will also highlight Early Music sung in the church. All are welcome with No Admission. A Freewill Offering is gladly accepted. Please visit cathedralconcertseries.org for more information.

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.

Living and sharing Christ’s love through consecrated life

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

The Diocese of Covington is celebrating World Day of Consecrated Life with Mass at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, Feb.7, 10 a.m. The Mass, celebrated by Bishop John Iffert, is an invitation to come together in communion with one another to celebrate those who have consecrated their life to Jesus.

Currently, there are five communities of women religious in the Diocese of Covington, in addition to six communities of men religious serving in the Diocese. These communities live out their charism and spiritualities in a variety of ways, each of which is beneficial to the wellbeing of the Diocese. Whether a charism of prayer, health-care, education or social work, the work of consecrated religious in the Diocese cannot be understated.

Claire Thérèse lives her vocation as a consecrated virgin through her work as a wife of Christ, spiritual mother and director, professor, author and the operation of a non-profit, private retreat cottage. Sister Lynn Stenken answered God’s call when she made first vows with the Congregation of Divine Providence at 23 years old. Now, Sister Lynn serves as director of Religious Education at Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, California.

Though answering different calls to consecrated life Ms. Claire Thérèse and Sister Lynn both model Christ’s love through their vocations.

The often-misunderstood vocation of a consecrated virgin is the oldest form of consecrated life within the Catholic Church, predating organized religious life, dating back to pre-apostolic times. “The women first called to be spiritually wed to Christ were not nuns or religious Sisters; they were consecrated virgins,” said Ms. Claire Thérèse.

While other consecrated religious communities, like the Congregation of Divine Providence, focus on living their vocation through a charism, consecrated virgins, can “only” boast of the most foundational aspect of all consecrated life: being the bride of Christ,” Ms. Claire Thérèse.

While members of the Congregation of Divine



Claire Thérèse caught in a candid moment while wearing her insignia veil, representing her as a bride of Christ.

Providence are also wed to Christ, they share additional responsibilities, through community life and the fulfillment of a charism and spirituality. Given to them by founder, Blessed John Martin Moye, the spirituality flows through four fundamental virtues: poverty, simplicity, apostolic charity and abandonment to Divine Providence.

These provide a framework for living out a charism “rooted in an understanding of God’s great love for all of us and for each of us, individually. And those of us who are attracted to that charism, then live that out through practicing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy,” said Sister Lynn.



Sister Lynn Stenken is the director of Religious Education at Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, California.

Traditionally, sisters of the Congregation of Divine Providence lived their charism through “ministries of teaching and nursing,” said Sister Lynn. “As time went on and minds expanded, we began to see the others way which we can live out the spiritual, corporal works of mercy.” Now, sisters can be found in social work settings, teaching, nursing and providing spiritual direction.

Both consecrated virgins and the sisters of the Congregation of Divine Providence, though different, share a love of Christ and a dedication to him. Serving as reminders of his love through their earthly ministry.

Knights of Columbus pancake breakfast returns in support of Sisters of Notre Dame, ACUE schools

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Once a staple of the Kehoe Council of the Knights of Columbus, the annual pancake breakfast hosted by the Knights makes a post-COVID return this year, Feb. 15, 8:30 a.m.–1 p.m., at Notre Dame Academy, Park Hills.

Having been on hiatus since 2020, this year’s breakfast will be the official 25th of these events, which directly benefits the mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame.

“One hundred percent of the proceeds go directly to the Sisters of Notre Dame,” said Tom France, a member of the Knights of Columbus who has been a part of many pancake breakfasts since the event’s conception. In addition to this support, this year “the sisters in their generosity have decided that they want to share the proceeds with our local ACUE (Alliance for Urban Education) schools,” Mr. France said.

The breakfast, which costs \$8 for adults and \$5 for elementary aged children, includes unlimited pancakes, coffee, juice and milk — as well as homemade sausage made



from a knight’s family recipe. All costs of the event are covered by the Knights of Columbus, allowing all funds to return to the sisters.

“It’s a great day of fraternity for our fellow knights,” said Mr. France. “We all get together ... the knights prepare and cook all the breakfast that morning right in the premises, and we serve it in the cafeteria.”

The camaraderie extends also to the students of Notre Dame Academy and other local schools, who provide

table service at the event, which Mr. France notes as another instance of the community emphasized at the breakfasts, calling their contributions a “tremendous help.”

“One of the founding principles of the Knights of Columbus is charity,” Mr. France said, “and it’s the first of our four principles —charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism ... we do this in that spirit. The Sisters of Notre Dame have always been good to the Knights of Columbus, and this is us returning the favor and helping to support them.”



Bishop’s Schedule

Jan. 24 Mass beginning AI Summit, Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel, Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, 9 a.m. Vigil Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 4:30 p.m.	Jan. 27 (continued) â Confirmation, St. Mary Parish, Alexandria, 7 p.m.
Jan. 26 Confirmation, St. Thomas Parish, Ft. Thomas, 7 p.m.	Jan. 28 Catholic Schools Week Mass, Cathedral Basilica, 10 a.m. Building Commission meeting, 2 p.m. Confirmation, St. Joseph Parish, Cold Spring, 7 p.m.
Jan. 27 Mass, 125th anniversary of dedication of the Cathedral, Cathedral Basilica, 8:15 a.m.	Jan. 29 Confirmation, St. Pius X Parish, Edgewood, 7 p.m.

Correction

In the previous edition, St. Henry Catholic School, Elsmere, was regrettably missed in the listing of elementary open houses.

St. Henry’s Open House is scheduled for: Jan. 25, 12:30–2 p.m.

The *Messenger* apologizes for the error.

WITH
ONE
HEART

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What’s on your heart?

The Disciple Maker Index survey returns this Lent

Survey opens Feb. 18

Online portal and paper forms will be available.

Parishes will share details leading up to the survey’s start date.

To know God, we must welcome Jesus’ humanity, pope says

Josephine Peterson
Catholic News Service

Pope Leo XIV said that God is revealed through Jesus’ humanity, not solely through a “channel of transmission of intellectual truths.” It is through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection that one can come to know God.

Pope Leo continued his series of talks during his weekly general audience Jan. 21, revisiting Vatican Council II with a speech on “Dei Verbum,” the church’s teaching on divine revelation.

By knowing Jesus, the pope said we can enter into a relationship with God as his adopted children, which was revealed through Jesus’ humanity.

“In order to know God in Christ, we must welcome his integral humanity: God’s truth is not fully revealed where it takes something away from the human, just as the integrity of Jesus’ humanity does not diminish the fullness of the divine gift,” he said. “It is the integral humanity of Jesus that tells us the truth of the Father.”

He went on further to say that in becoming man, Jesus “is born, heals, teaches, suffers, dies, rises again and remains among us. Therefore, to honor the greatness of the incarnation, it is not enough to consider Jesus as the channel of transmission of intellectual truths.”

God communicates with us, the pope said, and at the same time, Jesus is the Word of God incarnate. Through this corporal form, the truth of God is revealed.

“Jesus Christ is the place where we recognize the truth of God the Father; while we discover ourselves known by him as sons in the Son, called to the same destiny of full life,” he said.

In closing, Pope Leo said, “Brothers and sisters, by following the path of Jesus to the very end, we reach the certainty that nothing can separate us from God’s love.”



Pope Leo XIV smiles as he listens to a reader during his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Jan. 21, 2026.

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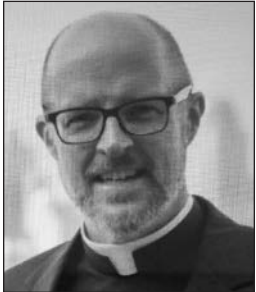
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Repent, the kingdom of Heaven is in our midst

The readings for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle A — are: Isaiah 8:23-9:3, 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17 and Matthew 4:12-23.

Not long ago I had a jarring epiphany when studying and praying on the question and the reality of Heaven.

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Phillip DeVous

they developed practices for avoiding this sin while laboring to honor the holiness and otherness of God in their speech and references. So, when you read the Word of God and you encounter the word “heaven” or “kingdom,” understand that it refers not a place, but to God, to his Presence and to his reign among us, right here and now, as well as his future coming.

How often in our worship, preaching, and scripture reading have we heard “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand?” Probably more than we can count or remember. A more probing question is, how often have I grasped its meaning and its urgency? I cannot speak for the saints among us, but as for me the answer is not often enough. And therein lies the problem.

Jesus’ call to repentance at the outset of his public ministry reveals the urgency of the act of repentance. He is with us now. We are staring him in the face. He is speaking to us. He is fulfilling his promise to be Emmanuel, God-is-with-us, in the inseparable realities of Word and Sacrament. It is precisely because of God’s presence to us in the Holy Communion of presence, truth and grace, that we can exclaim with the Prophet Isaiah, “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” As we make our pilgrim journey through this life, with its blessings and its burdens, the inseparable realities of Word and Sacrament reveal to us the way and give us the grace to live in imitation of Christ and towards his Kingdom.

Absent our deep and personal engagement with the Presence of God in the Word and Sacrament, we find ourselves dwelling in that “land of gloom” referred to by Isaiah. Much of the modern, technologized, anti-human, anti-theist world gives every appearance of being a land of gloom. We see soaring rates of anxiety, depression, personal disintegration, and despair. I think this situation has much to do with a deficient conception of ourselves as human persons, a conception that has closed us off from the “bounty of the Lord.”

In the first half of the 20th century, the theologian and spiritual writer, Monsignor Romano Guardini, perceived the drift of the emerging “technological civilization,” now nearly fully realized, which would reduce man’s dignity and culminate in a totally enclosed self; a self and a society closed off from God. He tirelessly reminded his readers and congregants, “the nature of Christianity is not just an idea, or a program, the nature of Christianity is Christ. When we lose him, no longer want to know, only shadows remain.”

Decades later, the philosopher, Charles Taylor, spoke of the “type” or concept of the human person that has come to exist in our age. He described it as the “buffered self.” This type of person senses themselves as self-contained, self-enclosed, and not needing any input from outside the self. For such a self, reality consists solely of their interior feelings and their interior, totally individualistic renderings of reality. In this rendering of existence, life is understood as having no independently

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Calm down, Karen, hope lies ahead

By the time you read this, St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky will have publicly announced plans to build a new facility to replace our outdated and undersized warehouse that has gradually become the heart of our operations. Since 1969, this building has housed our largest thrift store, distribution center, help line, food pantry, offices and essential resources that support our neighbors in need. It has served our ministry faithfully, allowing us to respond with compassion as needs have grown and changed. Today, however, the limitations of this space constrain our ability to serve, to adapt

VIEWPOINT



Karen Zengel

and to grow alongside our community’s needs. I’d like to share this journey with you and the hope that guides the road ahead.

St. Vincent de Paul has been in Northern Kentucky since 1911. A letter to the Bishop at the time described our first year of outreach as \$667 spent to aid 90 families with groceries, coal, medicine, shoes and a sewing machine. In 2026, we are now blessed with 31 parish conferences plus one in the works and over 670 Vincentian volunteers across the Diocese. Add to that 4 thrift stores, 100 employees and 14 programs that our Vincentians can draw upon to address the basic needs of our neighbors struggling to make ends meet. This committed network of friends had the opportunity to encounter 60,000 individuals through our ministry last year.

As the dust began to settle from COVID, we kicked off a facility review. That review clearly showed that we had run out of space and there was no room to accommodate our growing ministry. After 18 months of research, study and discussion, we decided to move forward with our first ever capital campaign, where the proceeds would be used to build a larger, modern and welcoming facility to meet the needs of our community now and well into the future.

This decision was not made lightly. Through prayer, reflection, and discernment, we wrestled with what it would mean for a ministry largely fueled by volunteer hands and humble resources. We have always sought to be simple and focused, supporting our Vincentians as they

serve our neighbors. We questioned what others might think if we began asking for significant gifts for a building. Historically, we never asked for more than we believed was necessary in any given year. Yet, year after year, the need consistently exceeded our expectations. And still, those needs were met: more people stepped forward, more joined our ministry, and more neighbors reached out for help. There was no doubt that the Holy Spirit was the true fuel behind our careful planning and volunteer efforts. Trusting the Holy Spirit, we took a leap of faith and moved forward.

We had never undertaken a significant fundraising effort, let alone built a facility. With the support of our Board and a consultant, we assembled teams to help plan an affordable building and guide the fundraising efforts. These teams have been nothing short of fantastic and, as you will read, I am so grateful for them.

So, we officially began this journey in the summer of 2024. We created a prayer for the success of the campaign that starts every meeting. After some early wins, our fundraising efforts began to stall. I quietly struggled with the balance between the big picture and the daily details. While there was no question we needed to push forward, doubt was quietly creeping in. Cool, calm collected Karen was lost. Instead, I was anxious, agitated and uneasy. I was not getting along well with that version of Karen.

The tide began to turn. Our team of building experts continued to guide our next steps in planning our future home. Our steering committee focus became education, meeting new people and teaching our community about the ministry of St. Vincent de Paul, the people who make it and the people we are blessed to serve.

One day, a brief visit with a member of our steering committee brought me completely back on track. This teammate is relatively new to the work of St. Vincent de Paul — someone I may never have had the chance to know were it not for this effort he chose to join. He shared that he, too, had concerns at different points along the way. And yet, despite the ups and downs, he told me how much he loved being part of it. He loved the people on the committee, so deeply passionate about loving their neighbors and sharing the love of Christ through service.

In that moment, it clicked. This isn’t about the campaign or the building. It’s about the people — the people God is placing in my life and the daily encounters that invite me to see Christ in those around me. Like our mission statement says, it is a blessing to be part of a network

(Continued on page 18)

How to get more comfortable with being less comfortable

Picture your favorite place to sit. A cozy recliner near the TV, a reading spot on your couch or your usual chair at the kitchen table. Remember how your body sinks into that space without a second thought. After a long day, there’s nothing better than settling in where we feel most at home.

GUEST



Laura Kelly Fanucci

you’re simply a creature of habit!

There’s nothing wrong with having a favorite place. In a chaotic, ever-changing world, our nervous systems sigh with relief at routines. We need the expected. Even Jesus liked to recline at table with his friends.

But in this in-between stretch of Ordinary Time, between the high feast of Christmas and the solemn preparation of Lent, we find ourselves in a new place as

we settle into the New Year. What will 2026 hold, the good and the bad? Who might we become by year’s end?

At home, at church, in our communities and in the wider world, we can find ourselves seeking what is comfortable. We like this kind of food, that style of worship, this grocery store or that politician. We feel at home in our particular camp.

Yet Christ came both to comfort (with God’s mercy) and challenge (with God’s justice). His call to discipleship is always prophetic, asking each of us to leave behind the nets of our comfort zones and venture into the deep.

As a parent of children ranging from kindergarten to high school, I find myself thinking often about the home as a place of comfort — but also challenge. I want our family home to be a space of safety, solace and love for our kids, but I also know it must be a source of difficult lessons: how to forgive, how to change and how to do the right thing even when it’s hard.

In 1902, humor columnist Finley Dunne coined a famous phrase about the duty of journalism, writing that the role of the newspaper is to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” Catholics sometimes say the same about the mission of the Church, too. We need only look to the Gospels to see how Jesus comforted the suffering and spoke out strongly against the wealthy and powerful who did not care for the poor and vulnerable.

Where we stand (or sit) determines our view — of our

(Continued on page 18)

‘Hands of Hope’ Campaign

(Continued from page 1)

we’re on holy ground.”

“I know how many times we’ve (he and his family) come here as a family to drop things off and what it means to shoppers,” said Deacon Fortner. “St. Vincent would be really proud. I’m so excited about the new place and I know we’re going to reach our goal and exceed our goal.”

Martin (Marty) Butler, chair of the Butler Foundation and the St. Vincent de Paul Hands of Hope steering committee, spoke on how the Foundation and St. Vincent de Paul share a common mission: “to provide help to those in need by the most direct means possible.”

“No other organization meets people where they are quite like St. Vincent de Paul,” said Mr. Butler. “Through

thousands of home visits each year, their volunteers build real relationships — listening, praying, and restoring dignity in moments of greatest need. This campaign isn’t just about bricks and mortar; it’s about ensuring that kind of personal, compassionate care continues for generations to come.”

SVdP NKY has already raised \$9.1 million of its \$12 million goal, thanks to strong community support. The organization is now inviting the public to help reach the finish line by donating at bit.ly/svdpnky_handsofhope. Construction is expected to begin in late 2026, with the new headquarters opening in early 2028.

The need for help in Northern Kentucky is growing. Rising costs for housing, utilities, and food have made it harder for families to make ends meet. SVdP NKY’s programs provide emergency assistance, food and hope to thou-

sands of people each year, and the new headquarters will make sure no one faces hardship alone.

“The Hands of Hope Campaign is a powerful witness to what can be accomplished when faith, love, and a deep reverence for human dignity converge,” said Bishop John Iffert. “St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky has, for more than a century, embodied the Church’s unchanging mission to see Christ in those who are poor, vulnerable or forgotten. This new endeavor reflects not only strategic vision but a profound theological truth: that every act of service is an extension of God’s own mercy at work in the world. I am deeply grateful to all who are giving of their resources, hands and hearts to make this dream a reality. May this new headquarters become a place that Pope Leo XIV envisions, where, ‘the poor will come to realize that Jesus’ words are addressed personally to each of them: I have loved you.’ (Dilexi Te \$121)”

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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.

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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, 859/392-1589.

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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/>.

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.

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.

Middle school students are invited to “Take heart!” at Youth Ministry’s upcoming CONNECT26 event, Feb. 21, 9:30–4:30 p.m. at Thomas More University, Crestview Hills. Cost is \$40. Registration online at <https://covdio.org/youth/>.

High school students are invited for the SUMMIT 2026 Youth Ministry retreat. The retreat will be held Feb. 27 through March 1 at Thomas More University, Crestview Hills. Not an overnight retreat. Friday evening, all day Saturday, and Sunday morning. Cost is \$60 before Feb. 14, \$75 after. Registration online at <https://covdio.org/youth/>.

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.

A Marriage Encounter Experience will be held on March 13–15 at the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center in Norwood, OH. Sign up at wwme.org or call Andy and Melanie Reinersman at (859) 653-8464. Learn how to make your marriage better.

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.

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

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

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

the Holy Face of Jesus, the Holy Face Chaplet, prayers of petition and silent devotion, all during Exposition.

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

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 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 and give your name, address and phone number.



Third grade students at St. Pius X, Edgewood, performed a Nativity Play for the school following the last all-school Mass before Christmas Break.

Out of struggle and hardship, a new Cathedral is born

Stephen Enzweiler
Cathedral Historian

This is the fourth 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.

In the spring of 1894, there was every reason for Bishop Camillus Maes to be optimistic. The architectural plans for the new cathedral were in hand and construction was about to begin. Yet he knew from his own experience that building any structure the size and complexity of a gothic cathedral came fraught with unexpected twists and turns. He knew there might be delays in materials delivery and construction, or plans changes caused by other unforeseen conditions. He experienced it when as a pastor he built St. John the Baptist Church in Monroe, Mich., and he experienced it dealing with the finances of building new parishes when he was chancellor of the Diocese of Detroit. Architect Leon Coquard also knew about the unforeseen. But neither man expected the kind of emergency that threatened to kill the St. Mary’s Cathedral project entirely.

“I have been thinking,” Coquard wrote Maes less than six weeks before the May 1, 1894 groundbreaking. “As Covington is so hilly and rocky, it might be possible that solid rock may not be far below the surface. Could you find out to a certainty the nature of the ground at the site?” The bishop didn’t know the answer to his question. But the initial excavations of the ground and the sudden discovery of “a wet, marshy soil with deep layers of sand and clay” surprised both men completely.

“The whole lot is endless and bottomless sand!” the bishop lamented. “About 8 ½ feet deep there is a layer of clay of seven inches in thickness, and at a depth of 15 feet another of about the same thickness. The men who worked it...assure me it is the same all over, for blocks and blocks.”

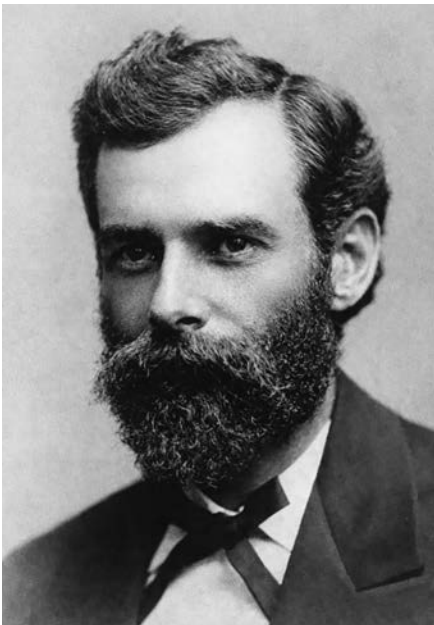
Coquard was just as surprised as the bishop. “It is impossible for me to say just what should be done,” he replied. “I have allowed about 2 ½ tons per square foot of footing. Of course, this will not do if you have the bottom which you describe.” He asked if the excavations had been made elsewhere on the property. They had. But the further borings only confirmed that no cathedral of the planned size and weight could be built on the site without risking disaster.

The ever-inquiring Bishop Maes felt confident there must be another way to approach the problem. For that he contacted Gustave Bouscaren, a Paris-trained civil engineer living in Cincinnati who the *Enquirer* said “had the reputation of being one of the great civil engineers of America.” He worked for Cincinnati Southern Railway for 25 years, held patents for dozens of inventions, and built most of the bridges spanning the Ohio River. He also was once appointed by President Cleveland to evaluate the Brooklyn Bridge.

After inspecting the building site, Bouscaren sent his report to the bishop. Based on his initial findings, he concluded that the allowable load capacity was easily half of what architect Coquard originally calculated, indicating the ground as it was could never support the size and weight of the cathedral as he had designed it. The bishop wrote to Coquard saying the conclusions made it “too deep to reach for foundations and unfit for draining.” Yet Bouscaren wasn’t finished. “Upon the engineer’s recommendation,” Maes wrote, “we proceed today to a test of the bearing strength of the ground.”

Bouscaren dug a well 25 feet down into the ground and built a mechanical load-bearing test apparatus at the bottom. On it he systematically placed 6,000 pounds of weight and waited to see conclusively how much weight the sandy soil could actually support. So interested was Bishop Maes in the outcome, he even assisted Bouscaren in the process, taking readings himself over the planned four-day test period. In the end, Bouscaren wrote to the bishop on July 16, noting that the result was “somewhat more favorable than I had anticipated” and advised that the tests only justified “a maximum allowance of three thousand pounds per square foot,” rather than the 6,000 pounds Coquard planned for.

Embarrassed at his miscalculation, Coquard tried to make up for it by proposing he increase the footings in size



Cathedral Archives

Gustav Bouscaren, the French civil engineer who “saved” the cathedral project by determining it was possible to build on the existing ground.

as an added precaution. But the bishop replied that he was “perfectly satisfied” with Bouscaren’s results and directed Coquard to adjust his plans accordingly. Willis Kennedy, the Covington City Engineer overseeing the process, agreed. “Hence,” the bishop wrote Coquard, “only increase the footings so as to get a bearing area of 3,000 lbs. per sq. ft.” The matter seemed to be settled after that. Two days later, Coquard’s redrawn plans arrived and construction resumed.

But the relationship between the bishop and his architect became increasingly more strained as the work progressed. Coquard’s difficulty in fitting such a massive structure into the tiny lot Maes had procured was a constant source of discussion and disagreement between the two. “If your lot were at least two hundred feet square,” he wrote, “I would not be obliged to calculate down to every inch, and could get along much faster. I am trying to arrive at the very best possible arrangements under the circumstances, and I hope that you will not force me to send out plans which are not sufficiently studied, just to gain a few days’ or even week’ time, at a cost of years of regret and dissatisfaction.”

By the spring of 1895, the steam shovels had finished their work and were replaced by block and tackles, swarms of stone masons, carpenters, brick layers, and horse-drawn wagons clattering about the streets. By late summer, the brick and limestone walls had risen to a height just below the windows.

Sunday, September 8, 1895, the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, had been chosen as the date for the laying of the cornerstone. Thousands from Covington turned out and more than 10,000 came from Cincinnati, with as many from each of the surrounding cities. All told, there was an estimated 20,000 attending the event. The newspapers reported a street parade beforehand “which completely eclipsed anything ever witnessed in Covington.” They dubbed it the “monster parade.”

“Never in the recent history of Covington has such a religious demonstration been witnessed on the streets,” reported the *Kentucky Post*. The parade was four miles in length with more than 4,500 men, boys, clergy and public officials participating. It took hours to arrive at the cathedral site. When time came for the blessing of the cornerstone and the walls, with the priests kneeling, facing a wooden cross, they chanted the litany of the saints led by Bishop Maes, who rose to perform the dedication. It was then that everyone noticed her.

“As the assemblage of bishops and priests climbed the steps,” the *Enquirer* reported, “a little golden-haired girl, dressed in pure white, and reflecting from her face religious faith and innocence, clung to the cornerstone and hung there during the ceremonies.” Bishop Maes in particular could not help noticing her. Neither could every other bishop and priest there. For Maes, her presence clinging to that cornerstone had the same unusual quality as did another little girl he encountered some years earlier who handed him a silver dollar and tasked him to “build a cathedral in Covington.” As he ascended the wooden steps, Bishop Maes carried in his hand a copper box, among whose contents was the same silver dollar she had given him. He placed the box inside the cornerstone niche and mortared it in place with a sterling silver trowel. None of the bishops, priests or attendants told the little girl to leave.

The cornerstone laying that Sunday continued the community’s great pilgrimage toward the new cathedral’s eventual completion and dedication. As the days and months passed, residents watched in fascination as the beautiful French gothic edifice rose incrementally toward the heavens. No one had ever seen anything like it before. With its progress, enthusiasm of the parishioners and the city resi-



Bishop Maes at the work site inspecting the progress of sanctuary construction, c. 1896.

Cathedral Archives

dents mounted. Everyone from the wealthy of Covington to the poorest of the poor realized they were to have a House of God “which would rank architecturally among the notable cathedrals of the country, an edifice eminently worthy of its sacred purpose and at the same time a great honor to the city and the State.”

“Splendid Edifice Now Nearing Completion in Covington” said the headline in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* on the morning of Nov. 5, 1899. “Bishop Maes lays no claim to as superb an edifice as the grand cathedrals that grace England and the continent of Europe,” the article said. “He is convinced that his is the finest temple of purely gothic architecture in America.” Indeed, it had been a herculean effort, and it came at a personal price. When Camillus Paul Maes began construction, he was still a robust man, his black, curling hair showed only a few scattered flecks of grey. But looking into the mirror in the days before the cathedral’s dedication, it was completely white.

The original estimated cost of the new cathedral had been \$150,000 in 1893. But by the time of the dedication, that amount had ballooned to \$250,000. By the spring of 1900, funds for further construction had again run out. “My debt is so large now that I may not add another hundred dollars to it,” he wrote Coquard. “Let me know immediately what hope of completion of the job is held out.” By that summer, it was obvious the façade would have to wait, so the bishop ordered the architect to brick up the front wall temporarily until he “had the means to erect the towers and front entrances.”

By January 1901, the construction crews were gone, and the streets of Covington filled with a feeling of quiet excitement as the big day approached. On January 7, Maes sat down in his office and penned a final note to Leon Coquard in Detroit. “The Dedication will take place on Sunday, January 27th 1901,” it said simply. “You are kindly invited to attend.”

January 27 dawned cold and cloudy, with flecks of snow drifting in a brisk north wind.

Bishop Maes, accompanied by “the venerable and revered Most Rev. William Henry Elder, Archbishop of Cincinnati,” a dozen other bishops

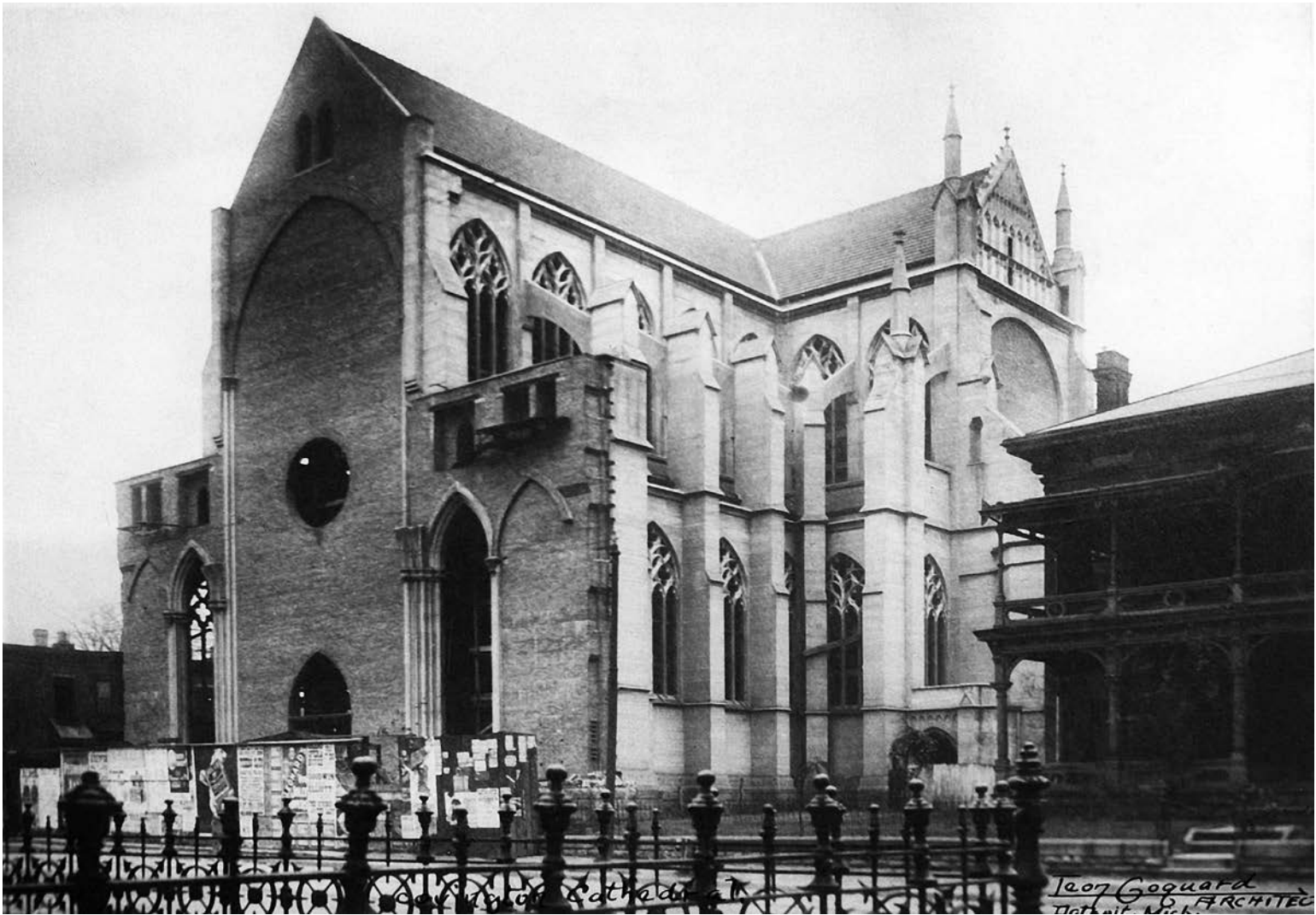
and dozens more priests, celebrated Holy Mass one final time in the old cathedral on Eighth Street, then moved in procession through the cold to the new cathedral.

“The majestic and devotional ceremonial of the Catholic Church was never before displayed in Covington as on yesterday,” wrote the *Cincinnati Commercial Appeal*. “A ceremonial ancient, yet ever new, and in which every act and every vestment, every prelate and every priest, every psalm and every ceremonial portrayed to the faithful the passion, the death and the glorious triumph of Christ, the Son of God.” A magnificent musical program was rendered by the full Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, augmented by a choir of four hundred voices. In the congregation was a subdued but happy Leon Coquard. In his own words, he said he had designed it “with the idea in mind

that it should stand for centuries as a monument, and symbolical of the strength and purity of the Christian faith.”

When Bishop Maes approached the completed interior for the first time, he remarked, “As I walked down the aisle and saw the white marble steps of the sanctuary, I felt I was at the gate of heaven!”

Now with the work completed, the long pilgrimage ended, the job finished, Bishop Maes looked upon his accomplishment with a bittersweet reflection. He had hoped to complete the cathedral during his lifetime, but now out of funds, he longed to start work on the facade. It seemed to him he might never live to see it. But the winds of Providence still graced the effort, and not a few years would pass before work would begin again to that purpose.



Coquard photo of unfinished cathedral after the front was bricked up, c. 1900.

Cathedral Archives



Coquard photo of unfinished cathedral after the front was bricked up, c. 1900.

Cathedral Archives



Coquard photo of finished cathedral interior after the dedication, January 1901.

Cathedral Archives

Catholic Schools

THE MESSENGER • JANUARY 23, 2026

Celebrating
Catholic Schools Week
Jan. 25–Jan. 31



A high school student at St. Henry District High School, Erlanger waves as he approaches the building on the first day of school, 2025.

Drawing New Maps of Hope
“Educating is an act of hope and a passion that is renewed because it manifests the promise we see in the future of humanity.”

—Pope Leo XIV’s Apostolic Letter on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Conciliar Declaration *Gravissimum educationis*



Catholic Schools
United in Faith and Community

A mission of love: celebrating Catholic Schools Week

Most Rev. John Iffert
Bishop of Covington

Pope Leo, building on the teaching of Pope Francis, recently issued the apostolic exhortation, “Dilexi Te (“I have loved you”): To All Christians on Love for the Poor.” In that document, he makes his own the desire that the Catholic Church should be a “church of the poor for the poor” and identifies care of the poor in the name of Christ as the essential mission of the Church. He also firmly roots educational opportunity as one of those essential missionary works of the Church.

Pope Leo recalls Pope Francis’ teaching that education is a high expression of Christian charity. “Yours is a mission full of obstacles as well as joys...,” he quotes his predecessor as saying to educators, “A mission of love, because you cannot teach without loving.” This is the mission and goal of our Catholic schools, to express the love of Christ Jesus that finds a place in our own hearts, confident in the belief that knowledge of God and the world is the path to freedom, dignity, human progress, and even salvation in the truth. When we provide education that arises from charity and centers on the development of charity, we do the work of restoring justice and promote the faith.

On this Catholic Schools Week, I want to especially thank those who sacrifice for this work of charity, justice



Bishop John Iffert

and faith-development. This includes, in a special way, our teachers, administrators and employees who work sacrificially to be able to promote education in a faith context. This also includes the many families and volunteers who offer their time, talent and treasure to promote Catholic education for the love of their young people and their neighbor.

There are two other groups that I should mention. First, our Catholic parishes and parishioners who make extraordinary sacrifices for the love of young people and confidence in education to promote well-being and faith. It is not unusual for our parishes to dedicate 40-percent of their parish collections or more to the maintenance of these laboratories for charity. Increasingly, there is a group of donors, including our Diocesan and Parish Annual Appeal donors, who contribute to scholarship funds to assist the families of students with financial assistance to assure that the labor of love that is Catholic education reaches as many young people as possible.

Here’s a particular example. A group of parents brought to my attention a desire to assist our Catholic schools to serve more people with disabilities. They gathered, created a Northern Kentucky affiliate of the Fire Foundation; a Catholic Foundation that promotes Catholic

‘This is the mission and goal of our Catholic schools, to express the love of Christ Jesus that finds a place in our own hearts’

education for people of all abilities. Recently, they have offered to fund a part-time Inclusive Education Coordinator who will assist our Diocese’s schools to include more students of varied ability. They are also assisting in training faculty and staff and are beginning a grant process to promote inclusion in our schools. This kind of devotion highlights Catholic education as the work of charity that it is and fosters that mission in the life of the Church. I am grateful.

We recognize our own poverty and our need for a Savior; becoming the Church of the poor. That recognition inspires devoted love for Jesus, which in turn directs us outward to serve the poor. Material, intellectual and spiritual poverty fosters a charitable response that is Catholic education. Christ is made known through the love of so many, manifesting the Body of Christ and his loving mission in the world.

Thank you all. In this Catholic Schools Week, let us celebrate that high calling that has served so many of us and continues to bring Christ to the world today.



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Catholic Education: Our past and our future?

Kendra McGuire
Contributor

Each January, we take time to celebrate our Catholic schools in a week-long celebration known as Catholic Schools Week. For students and teachers in our schools, various activities take place that highlight Catholic education and show gratitude to those who make Catholic schools possible. The celebration of Catholic Schools Week is not just for those working in or attending a Catholic school. It is meant to extend beyond the walls of the school building to our local parishes, our diocese and local community. This is a time for all of us to reflect upon the blessings of Catholic education and recognize that this ministry is helping to shape the future generations of our church and community.

As the mother of six children and superintendent of schools, I am immersed in Catholic education. Every day I have the opportunity to experience the joys of Catholic school communities with my husband and children while also supporting the schools across our diocese. While you might think everyone would find value in this ministry, I also hear from those who think Catholic schools are a “burden” and take too many resources to operate.

With the naysayers in mind, it may do us good to reflect on the history of Catholic schools in the United States. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton is credited for opening the first Catholic school for young women in 1810. And throughout the 1800’s, bishops were encouraging the establishment of Catholic schools. In 1884, at the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, it was decided and decreed that a Catholic




Kendra McGuire

school should be established near each parish which led to a large increase in the number of Catholic schools. The proliferation of Catholic schools that started two centuries ago occurred at a time when anti-Catholic sentiment was high. While this may not be our pressing issue in the United States today, we are raising children in culture that doesn’t seem to value faith or community. Instead, the culture is teaching our children that life is all about themselves. That you do not need community or relationships — just the pursuit of the things you want and desire with little regard for others. This is why Catholic education is needed now, as much as ever. The teachings of Jesus Christ permeate the Catholic school. Along with rigorous academic instruction, children are taught about Jesus’ love for them and how we are called to love and serve God and others. And they learn to live these values daily through prayer, the celebration of the sacraments and community service. Children who embrace these teachings and go on to live them in their adult lives will become the church and community members you want to live and work beside. As we celebrate Catholic Schools Week, let’s remove the mindset that schools are a burden. Instead let’s remember that they are filled with God’s children — children who need a safe place to learn about Jesus and his love for


them. A place where the evil and dangerous teachings of our culture can be cast aside so they can feel what true community is all about. Catholic schools are a ministry of our Church, and we need to not only celebrate them this week but also remember that our support of this ministry shapes the future of our church and the communities in which we live. Just as Jesus told the disciples, His words echo true for us today too, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs” (Lk 18:16). Catholic schools are places where our children encounter Jesus. Let’s celebrate and support them! Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, pray for us! *Kendra McGuire is superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Covington, Ky*

By the numbers:
Diocese of Covington
Catholic Schools
36 total schools (K–12)
27 elementary schools
9 secondary schools
8,871 total students (K–12)
35 Blue Ribbons awarded to schools



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Catholic schools — Drawing new maps of hope



Bishop Brossart High School

Luke D’Alessandro, Senior

As stressed by Pope Leo XIV in his apostolic letter “Drawing New Maps of Hope,” collaboration is an intrinsic part of a Catholic education. Bishop Brossart High School’s leading motto, “Charity First,” is an incredible testament to establishing a collective education rooted in faith.

As a student at Bishop Brossart, I have seen firsthand the impacts that working together has (not only on the school, but also on our society). Each class has a day dedicated to service where the students volunteer their time at various organizations in the community. Additionally, Bishop Brossart has two clubs that emphasize serving the community through working together. Students also have the opportunity to take a campus ministry class that embodies the importance of collaborating to bring hope to others. Through this class, I have helped plan service days, led retreats and organized masses. This would not have been possible to accomplish if my classmates and I worked independently.

Education would not be a collective endeavor without the constant support from educators, and this is especially true at Bishop Brossart. I appreciate having teachers who are not just there to judge their students’ memorization skills, but rather help them gain knowledge on the importance of working together. As Pope Leo wrote, “educating is an act of hope and passion,” and it is obvious that the teachers at Bishop Brossart do not shy away from these qualities: they keep faith first in the classroom, encourage their students to work together to problem solve and sacrifice their valuable time to lead clubs that allow collaboration to flourish.

While not always interacting with students in the classroom, the clergy in the Bishop Brossart community are extremely impactful. Our chaplain, Father Ed Brodnick, is a perfect example of Pope Leo’s message, as he is one of the most involved members within our school. He says our school Masses and is involved in all of the retreats. If you play a sport at Bishop Brossart, there is a very high likelihood that Father Ed has been to one of your games, and if he hasn’t, he has definitely sent an email to the school telling us to wish the teams playing good luck. While educating is often about teaching directly, leading by example is one of the most compelling calls to action when witnessed, and Father Ed’s actions accomplish just that.

Some of the most frequent interactions we have in our everyday lives involve our families, so it may feel easy to overlook their impact on education, but they contribute in vast ways. A family is the perfect example of the necessity of working together and the benefits that will be produced when doing so. All members must help out so that the family can maintain functionality, and this remains the same when it comes to a Catholic education. The students are participating every day in the classroom, and the parents stay involved by volunteering at the sports games, attending meetings with school administrators and supporting Bishop Brossart financially. Without families functioning as one, there would be discord and instability, showing the importance of viewing Catholic education as a collective endeavor.

Bishop Brossart High School has its foundation in collaborative service involving students, teachers, clergy and families. This gives the platform for a Catholic education that benefits an entire society, not just those directly involved.



Covington Catholic High School

Jack Salyers, Senior

God has created each of us with a core purpose of getting to Heaven and bringing along as many people as possible. On a deeper level, this purpose is achieved in many different ways in respect to each individual and God’s vocation for their life. When it comes to one’s discovery of how they will achieve their purpose, a Catholic education is of the utmost impor-

tance. While normal education focuses solely on the gathering of information and learning job skills (which are still important), Catholic education takes these things as smaller parts of a larger vision for each individual student. Catholic schools are not merely buildings of education, but “constellations,” as Pope Leo XIV says. The families, teachers, administration, clergy and students all work together to help students find God’s purpose for them.

In his letter, Pope Leo XIV highlights that Catholic Schools know each student has a higher calling than just a successful life. At Catholic Schools, students are pushed to discover themselves and the meaning of their life on earth. Through the environment of love, support and life that works through Catholic Schools, students are able to explore who God has made them to be and discover the world through a Catholic lens. The regular subjects are taught alongside faith and truth, with a larger-than-life purpose to discover meaning. At Covington Catholic, where I attend school, I have taken major steps in my faith journey, and towards finding my vocation because of various faith-based clubs and the wise perspectives my teachers have offered me. On that note, when one seeks to fulfill God’s personal mission for their life, that is when they truly live. And it is in this sense that Catholic schools, formed by large, loving, networks of people, are able to “generate life.” Catholic Schools are able to achieve this mission because of the constellation-like network of all the aspects of the school, which form together for one common goal. Firstly, as I have mentioned previously, there is the interconnectedness of the teachers, administration, clergy, families and students.

At Covington Catholic, the community of people that runs through the school is the most supporting network I have. It’s a place where everyone can come together towards the common goal of love and the students’ search for meaning. In his letter, Pope Leo stresses that the family is the beginning of a student’s education, but instead of Catholic schools replacing parents, they “collaborate” with them. With this, an interlocked community is created between everyone involved in the school. The school faculty all become close to family for the students, rather than just educational overseers. In my experience at Covington Catholic, I have established great relationships with all the teachers and staff. In some ways I am able to see my teachers as wise friends, making the classroom feel like an open conversation filled with good advice, rather than a dull lecture. Furthermore, there are the many distinct yet connected educational sectors of Catholic education. These two networks combine for the common purpose of helping students to find God’s purpose for their life, which, in turn, generates life and opens the door for the flourishing of the Catholic faith.

The unique purpose of Catholic Schools, and how that purpose is achieved, is remarkable. Normal subjects are taught through a lens of Faith, which draws the students closer to God; and the staff become akin to a second family for each student, opening the door for an opportune learning environment. These beautiful characteristics, among many others, is what makes Catholic schools so special.



Covington Latin School

Jenna Keller, Junior

In “Drawing New Maps of Hope,” Pope Leo XIV presents an inspiring vision for how the Church can adapt to the complexities of our changing world. Instead of sticking to known paths, he encourages believers to become spiritual explorers, recognizing the new avenues where God’s grace is already at work. This concept of hope as a dynamic and living force resonates with my experiences in a Catholic high school.

One of the major points in the apostolic letter is that hope isn’t merely about being optimistic; it involves actively engaging in discernment. Pope Leo XIV emphasizes that genuine hope flourishes when the Church takes the time to truly listen.

Covington Latin truly reflects this commitment to listening. Our religion classes encourage us to ask questions, think critically, and have meaningful discussions. Faith is

portrayed not as a finished product but as a journey that requires interpretation and the courage to navigate it. The letter also emphasizes the essential role of education in creating these “new maps.” Pope Leo XIV argues that schools should focus on intellectual growth as well as moral and spiritual development, helping students connect their faith to the challenges of contemporary society.

Another important theme in “Drawing New Maps of Hope” is the idea of accompaniment.

Pope Leo XIV insists that the Church should walk alongside individuals rather than simply guiding them from a distance. This concept deeply influences my understanding of community during my years at Covington Latin. Faculty members and teachers become mentors who embody compassion and patience. Their sincere support during academic pressures, personal challenges and spiritual doubts truly reflects the pastoral approach outlined in the letter.

Ultimately, Pope Leo XIV’s invitation to redraw maps of hope is a heartfelt call to trust that God is still leading the Church into unexplored territory. Faith grows strongest when shared within a community that is open to questions and dedicated to service. This perspective transforms education into an act of hope, one that prepares young people not just to accept the world as it is but to courageously and creatively work to transform it.

Incorporating this spirit of exploration and dialogue, the Church inspires young people to take active roles in their communities. Fostering environments where diverse ideas are appreciated, it encourages a deeper connection to faith. Engaging with the world around us, driven by faith and hope, nurtures empathetic leaders ready to tackle the complexities of modern life.



Holy Cross District High School

Abigail Reed, Senior

Catholic education is a unique mesh of countless individual facets and influences all striving with their full might to achieve the same goal: delivering the true image of faith to the youth of today. From students to educators to religious leaders, each distinct person joins into a human system that is perpetually in motion.

This conglomerate acts in an efficient system in a similar manner to the human person, giving life to a body whose purpose is Christ’s service. The clergy and religious persons are the heart; They use their invaluable positions to share God’s Word, pumping the message of Christ throughout the entire system and providing the sustaining message of faith to all. Without them, the ability of the Catholic education system to guide the youth towards Christ would be impossible.

The administration and the educators are the bones, veins and arteries. They are responsible for transmitting the faith indiscriminately throughout their communities while maintaining a strong foundation and structure for students to rely on and build off of. The educators share the message of Christ, living each day as an example to the formative youth under their tutelage. Jesus is alive in every teaching moment, connecting the faith to the larger world and providing the necessary building blocks to cultivate a life guided by God.

Finally, the students are the outward facets of the body—the skin and other features. They are what is displayed to the world, using the essential support of their Catholic system to bring Christ’s light into the world and continue the cycle of sharing it with the world. They are the result of the constant hard work of numerous individuals in the fervent dedication to share Christ’s love. Students go into the world, displaying the sum of so many parts, and reflect the Christian spirit to all they come across, thereby continuing the never ending cycle of Catholic education.

This body, this complementary ecosystem, values no part above the other. Each piece is intrinsically necessary; without even one, the system could not survive. Catholic education is connection; it is a collaboration of idiosyncratic puzzle pieces fitting seamlessly together to create a larger picture, a picture of God’s unceasing love and presence in our lives.

(Continued on page 14)



Newport Central Catholic

Ella Myers, Junior

“Educating is an act of hope and passion that is renewed because it manifests the promise we see in the future of humanity.” When Pope Leo XIV wrote these words, he was not describing an abstract idea or a goal that he has — he was describing something that takes place every day in Catholic schools.

In a time where education is often reduced to test scores and rankings, Catholic schools offer something uniquely beautiful; they teach students to hope. At my own school, Newport Central Catholic, education is not strictly about preparing for college or a career; but about learning who we are and how we are called by God to show up in the world. Faith is not an accessory to learning, it is our North Star as we are “drawing new maps of hope”.

You can feel that difference the moment you walk into a Catholic school. Prayer opens the day, not as a formality, but as a pause, a reminder that what we do matters. Teachers care not only about whether we understand a lesson, but whether we are growing as people. There is space for questions, reflection and grace. As a high school student, my world is often moving fast and I get overwhelmed. The structure of Catholic education helps me slow down and find meaning in each day.

Pope Leo’s call to “draw new maps of hope” feels especially relevant here. Hope isn’t passive in his letter; it’s something that must be built intentionally. Catholic schools do this by helping students see themselves. Service projects, retreats and community involvement are all ways this is put into practice at Newport Central Catholic, and I personally view them as essential pieces of my learning. Through these things, students discover that faith is not only learned but lived.

Passion is another defining characteristic of Catholic education. At Newport Central Catholic, passion shows up in teachers who stay late helping students, classmates who lead service initiatives and in conversations that extend beyond the classroom. We are encouraged to care deeply about our faith, our education, and those around us. That passion fuels purpose, reminding students that what they do can shape the future.

Most importantly, Catholic education is a collective endeavor. Pope Leo emphasizes that hope is built together; and Catholic schools reflect that truth daily. I know anyone that spends a day on The Hill will tell you that our school is like a family. Being that we’re small in number, it allows us to connect with each other easily no matter our background. People are always helping each other, teaching each other, sharing with one another and overall just creating a loving community that is uniquely our own. Students, teachers, families and staff all form a community that is rooted in pride for faith and mutual care. Successes are celebrated together, and struggles are met with support, not silence.

(Continued on page 15)

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CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

NOTICE OF NONDISCRIMINATORY POLICY
AS TO STUDENTS

Diocesan Policy states that “No person shall be refused admission to any church, school or institution or membership in any Catholic society or organization solely on the grounds of race or nationality.” In keeping with this policy, the schools under the auspices of the Department of Catholic Education, Diocese of Covington, do not discriminate on the basis of race, color or national or ethnic origin. Students of any race who meet the individual school’s eligibility requirements are admitted to all the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded to students at that school and that school does not discriminate on the basis of race in administration of its educational policies, admission policies, scholarships and loan programs and other school-administered programs. The names and addresses of these schools are listed below.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

- Bishop Brossart - 4 Grove Street, Alexandria, Kentucky 41001-1295
- Covington Catholic - 1600 Dixie Highway, Covington, Kentucky 41011-2797
- Covington Latin - 21 East Eleventh Street, Covington, Kentucky 41011-3196
- Holy Cross - 3617 Church Street, Covington, Kentucky 41015-1498
- Newport Central Catholic - 13 Carothers Road, Newport, Kentucky 41071-2497
- Notre Dame Academy - 1699 Hilton Drive, Covington, Kentucky 41011-2705
- St. Henry - 3755 Scheben Drive, Erlanger, Kentucky 41018-3597
- St. Patrick - 318 Limestone Street, Maysville, Kentucky 41056-1248
- Villa Madonna Academy - 2500 Amsterdam Road, Villa Hills, Kentucky 41017-3798

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

- Blessed Sacrament - 2407 Dixie Highway, Ft. Mitchell, Kentucky 41017-2994
- Holy Cross - 3615 Church Street, Covington, Kentucky 41015-1430
- Holy Trinity School - 235 Division Street, Bellevue, Kentucky 41073-1101
- Immaculate Heart of Mary - 5876 Veterans Way, Burlington, Kentucky 41005-8824
- Mary Queen of Heaven - 1130 Donaldson Road, Erlanger, Kentucky 41018-1088
- Prince of Peace - 625 Pike Street, Covington, Kentucky 41011-2148
- St. Agnes - 1322 Sleepy Hollow Road, Ft. Wright, Kentucky 41011-2795
- St. Anthony - 485 Grand Avenue, Covington, Kentucky 41015-0219
- St. Augustine - 1840 Jefferson Avenue, Covington, Kentucky 41014-1165
- St. Catherine of Siena - 23 Rossford Avenue, Ft. Thomas, Kentucky 41075-1298
- St. Cecilia - 5313 Madison Pike, Independence, Kentucky 41051-8611
- St. Edward - 107 North Walnut Street, Cynthiana, Kentucky 41031-1299
- St. Henry - 3825 Dixie Highway, Erlanger, Kentucky 41018-1863
- St. Joseph - 6829 Four Mile Road, Camp Springs, Kentucky 41059-9507
- St. Joseph - 4011 Alexandria Pike, Cold Spring, Kentucky 41076-1817
- St. Joseph - 2474 Lorraine Avenue, Crescent Springs, Kentucky 41017-1493
- St. Joseph Academy - 48 Needmore Street, Walton, Kentucky 41094-1028
- St. Mary - 9 South Jefferson Street, Alexandria, Kentucky 41001-1398
- St. Patrick - 318 Limestone Street, Maysville, Kentucky 41056-1248
- St. Patrick - 3285 Mills Road, Taylor Mill, Kentucky 41015-2480
- St. Paul - 7301 Dixie Highway, Florence, Kentucky 41042-0366
- Sts. Peter & Paul - 2160 California Crossroads, California, Kentucky 41007-9713
- St. Philip - 1400 Mary Ingles Hwy., Melbourne, Kentucky 41059-9701
- St. Pius X - 348 Dudley Road, Edgewood, Kentucky 41017-2698
- St. Therese - 2516 Alexandria Pike, Southgate, Kentucky 41071-3298
- St. Thomas - 428 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue, Ft. Thomas, Kentucky 41075-2295
- St. Timothy - 10268 Hwy 42, Union, Kentucky 41091-9591
- Villa Madonna Academy - 2500 Amsterdam Road, Villa Hills, Kentucky 41017-3798

Catholic schools are special not because they are perfect, but because they are intentional in everything that they do. They educate the mind, strengthen the heart and unite the students in faith and community. In doing so, they help draw new maps of hope, not just for those inside their walls, but for the world those students will one day help navigate.



Villa Madonna Academy High School
Pamela McQueen, Principal/Executive Director

Shared commitment. Partnership. It’s how we describe the Villa community. Education is never a solitary act; it thrives in an atmosphere where teachers and students, families and schools, tradition and possibility are all rooted in love of God and neighbor.

Each day, through countless unseen moments, our high school teachers create an environment where students are known and loved. That is the sacred and demanding work before us: to show up fully for one another, to let our shared humanity be the lesson, and to keep tending the flame that draws us together and lights the way forward. You see, we are the keepers of that flame in a world often shrouded in darkness. How do we do this?

House System: Our shared mission is creating a learning environment where young people thrive. A small, red book is in the hands of our teachers. It is The Rule of St. Benedict, and through his teachings we learn how to live the values of hospitality and respect, peace and scholarship, stewardship and stability. Our Benedictine House System reflects the monastic way of living with daily dedicated time to morning convocation, prayer, community-building activities and collaborative work. Trained at St. Benedict’s Prep in New Jersey, teachers and students worked for two years to develop a House system unique to our high school. Student house leaders and deans work closely with the faculty and administration in school leadership. They give witnesses during Monday Morning Convocation to the values of our school, and the results we see are truly life giving. Teaching students to see the face of Jesus in one another — to love their brothers and sisters without exception — is so needed. It is daily work. It is important work. It is the work Pope Leo expects of us.

Academics and Athletics: Top-rated academics and important athletic honors are not isolated achievements; they are the natural fruit of a Benedictine community rooted in discipline, balance and shared purpose. At Villa, excellence emerges because students are known and supported. Whether in the classroom or on the field, Villa’s high school students achieve at the highest levels because they are formed within a Benedictine community that teaches balance, stability and respect for self and others. Our awards tell a story, but the Benedictine community is what makes them possible.

Community: A true hallmark of a Villa education is the collaborative network of parents, coaches, counselors and clergy. Success is shared and grounded in purpose and compassion.

Education is never a solitary act. It is sustained by partnership — among teachers and students, families and schools, tradition and possibility. Each partner brings hope: parents entrust us with who they love most, educators bring their gifts and calling, and students arrive with promise still unfolding. When these hopes meet, learning becomes more than instruction; it becomes a shared act of belief in what a child can become. It becomes



Two students from Immaculate Heart of Mary School embrace with palpable joy upon their reunion before the first day of school.



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Visuals, rituals, traditions: How Catholic schools stand out

Joseph D. White
OSV News

Most of the growth we have seen across Christian denominations in recent years has been in Christian communities that teach sure norms that are relatively stable as society changes. The coming generation of Catholic parents are likely to look for a strong sense of Catholic identity in Catholic schools. As resources become scarcer, why would parents choose Catholic school for their children if they do not perceive that Catholic school offers something that public school, or another private school, cannot?

Promoting a uniquely Catholic culture in our schools is both a necessary task and a challenging one. In rising to this challenge, it is helpful to examine what variables make cultural identity survive and thrive.

One important characteristic is a common language. How do we understand, and talk about, Catholic education? What do we mean by “Catholic”? And more broadly, what language do we share when we talk about our faith? Sharing a common language will mean a well-articulated mission, one that is communicated effectively to parents such that it attracts families to our schools.

A second characteristic of cultural identity is the use of symbols. What symbols do we see of Catholicism in our schools? When parents stop by to visit, does the Catholic school look different to them than the local public school or a Baptist school would?

Children, especially those of elementary age, are very concrete thinkers and learners. The visible symbols around them, such as icons, statues, crucifixes and pictures of faith in action, help tell them about where they are and what they are learning. What unique ideas, values and beliefs do we promote in our Catholic schools, and how are they made visible in concrete ways?

The identity-building power of rituals and traditions

make them important characteristics of most academic institutions that have longevity. Current students want to remain because of the shared rituals that have built community and become an important part of their lives, and former students continue to support the school — and encourage their children to attend it — because of their fond memories of these traditions.

In our Catholic tradition, we need not look far for ideas that can build the sense of collective identity in our Catholic schools. The liturgical calendar provides occasions for many types of celebrations and traditions, not to mention the day-to-day experiences of Catholic prayer and the sacraments.

Shared cultural norms, even ones that pose challenges to the individual, also build



Vice Principal Elaine Wagner at Immaculate Heart of Mary School, Burlington, walks with a student from drop off to the doors of the school as the excitement builds in anticipation of a new school year.

the sense of cultural identity. Catholic schools should not be afraid to promote an authentically Catholic, often countercultural, morality that includes respect for life at all ages and stages, promotion of chastity as a response to our understanding of the dignity of the body and sacredness of marriage, the necessity of social action, including solidarity with the poor, and countless other ways in which we as Catholics are called to be witnesses in society today.

Similarly, we live in a culture in which academic standards have been challenged by the notions of one’s “personal best,” leading to a situation in which we have many public school graduates with high self-esteem, but very little knowledge or academic skill.

While needs and talents can vary greatly, we must also remember that children cannot rise to standards we do not set, and we must not be afraid to call them to rise to high standards of behavior and academic achievement, all the while assisting them in meeting the challenge.

Joseph D. White is a licensed psychologist.

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With prayers from ACUE

Beth Reuhlmann
Contributor

Peggy’s Prayer Partners, ACUE’s (Alliance for Catholic Urban Education) Catholic Schools Week “thank you” mailing from students to donors of \$25 or more was named for Peggy McCloskey, a very special donor. This was done in recognition of the many ways Ms. McCloskey has dedicated herself to students through both prayers and financial support. Peggy has been generous to the students in ACUE schools over the years, but perhaps the most touching are her prayers for them.

Retired after 29 years with IBM, Peggy relocated from South Florida after the purchase of a farm in Cynthiana where she now boards and raises horses — a lifelong dream. Her many horses demand a day that begins at 5 a.m. and does not end until 7:30 p.m. or later, but she loves it. Her passion for horses began at an early age in her native New York where she would frequent her uncle’s nearby farm.

She also feels strongly about helping children who need a hand up. Through financial planning, she discovered that she could initiate several ACUE scholarships. Every year, Ms. McCloskey assists multiple ACUE grade schoolers through tuition aid making their Catholic educations possible. She has also initiated a first-year high school scholarship, which she named the St. Francis Scholarships after her favorite saint, Francis of Assisi. These are awarded annually to one graduating eighth grader from each ACUE school.

Her St. Francis Scholars receive not only her scholarship; they receive a hand-written note from Peggy expressing her congratulations and confidence in their future success if they continue to give their best. Most importantly, she assures them of her prayers.

Asked why she, as a member of a rural community, was drawn to support urban students from the ACUE schools, she commented, “We have students here (in Cynthiana) who have need, and we take care of our own, but who do the urban children have to assist them?”

For Peggy’s Prayer Partners, ACUE students are paired individually with ACUE donors for whom they promise to pray during Catholic Schools Week. The hope is that their assigned donor will also pray for them, just like Peggy.

Beth Ruehlmann is the Director of Development for Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Covington.



The front and reverse of the ACUE Catholic Schools Week postcard, which is sent to donors of \$25 or more. Students are paired individually with donors, or “prayer partners”, who pray for their student during Catholic Schools Week.

Changing world calls for new commitment to Catholic schools, pope says

Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

Catholic education, which has changed over the centuries, must continue to evolve to help young people face the challenges not only of technology but of confusion about the meaning and purpose of life, Pope Leo XIV said.

“I call upon all educational institutions to inaugurate a new season that speaks to the hearts of the younger generations, reuniting knowledge and meaning, competence and responsibility, faith and life,” he wrote in an apostolic letter.

Titled “Disegnare Nuove Mappe Di Speranza” (“Drawing New Maps of Hope”), the letter was issued only in Italian Oct. 28, 2025. It marked the 60th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Catholic Education.

“To educate is an act of hope,” he said.

Catholic schools and universities, the pope wrote, must be “places where questions are not silenced and doubt is not



(above) A group of students at St. Henry District High School, Erlanger, walk into school on the first day.

banned but accompanied. The ‘heart speaks to heart,’” he

said, quoting St. John Henry Newman’s, whom the pope declared in the letter as “patron of the church’s educational mission alongside St. Thomas Aquinas,” motto as a cardinal.

Parents, as the Second Vatican Council affirmed, are the first and primary educators of their children, the pope said, but “Christian education is a choral work: no one educates alone.”

Those who teach in a Catholic institution, he said, “are called to a responsibility that goes beyond the employment contract: their witness is worth as much as their lesson.”

And while the human person is at the center of all educational initiatives, the goal is to help that person learn to see beyond him- or herself and “discover the meaning of life, inalienable dignity and responsibility toward others,” he wrote.

“Education is not merely the transmission of content but an apprenticeship in virtue,” Pope Leo said. “It forms citizens capable of serving and believers capable of bearing witness — men and women who are freer, not more isolated.”

The article has been modified by Messenger staff.

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Heaven is in our midst

(Continued from page 5)

existing reality outside of one’s feelings about it. This closing of the self to ultimate Reality is a quick path to life in the shadowlands.

It is against this backdrop of the buffered, enclosed self of our contemporary shadowlands that we hear anew the command of Jesus, “repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

We have every opportunity to take up the Word of God and lets its truth enlighten us. It is that Word that leads us to the house of Lord where we “may gaze on the loveliness of the Lord and contemplate His temple” in the Most Holy Eucharist. It is only through our Eucharistic Communion with the Lord in Spirit and Truth that we can break out the land of gloom and escape the shadowlands. For in the Holy Eucharist, the Kingdom of Heaven-is at hand. Let us repent of our unbelief.

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

Hope lies ahead

(Continued from page 5)

of friends, growing in holiness and building a more just world through personal relationships. Calm down, Karen. You are not alone in this. You never were. It’s time to get back to being cool, calm and collected.

So, now I am more intentional about praying for the people I encounter thanks to this campaign and more broadly, thanks to my role. Every day, I pray for our Vincentians who serve, despite the significance and complexity of today’s need, our staff working in crowded quar-

ters through hot and cold weather; our committees who have invested their time and hearts in the work we do, our supporters who have connected with our mission and have chosen to help us lay the groundwork for our future and finally, our neighbors in need, who may have lost hope in a time of crisis. May this effort help us to bring calm to their chaos and peace to their anxious hearts. May they know they are never alone. There is always hope when we trust in Christ.

Karen Zengel is executive director, Society of St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky.

Being less comfortable

(Continued from page 5)

home, church and society. If we stand with the least among us as Christ did, we will see things very differently than if we side with the powerful, the popular or the strong.

What if we took one step out of our comfort zone in 2026?

It might be a small change, like sitting in a different pew, to meet new parishioners in our community and see our physical church home from a new perspective. It might be a big change, like deciding to volunteer as a family with a local food shelf, to get to know our neighbors in need and serve them with our time and energy. Or we might devote this short season of Ordinary Time to

deeper prayer, asking God to lead us further in faith even when it gets uncomfortable.

When we know we have safe spaces where we can return — like our family home, our favorite chair or our regular parish pew — we can strike out in good faith and courage to do whatever challenging work that God calls us to do.

I pray this for my children when they leave the house each day, that God might go with them and lead them home safely. I pray the same for each of us: that we will always remember there is nowhere we can go, even the farthest leap from our comfort zone, where God has not already gone before us.

Laura Kelly Fanucci is an author, speaker and founder of Mothering Spirit, an online gathering place on parenting and spirituality.

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NEWS BRIEFS

National/World

Ahead of March for Life, pro-life movement faces political challenges

WASHINGTON — As the pro-life movement prepares for the 53rd annual March for Life, their cause faces a number of key issues, including preserving the Hyde Amendment, the recent approval of a new generic abortion drug and a rising abortion rate. Multiple studies show that since the Supreme Court’s 2022 Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization decision, which overturned its previous precedent that viewed abortion as a constitutional right, the abortion rate in the U.S. has increased rather than decreased, despite bans in some states. Pro-life organizations, eager to reverse some of the policies implemented by the Biden administration, such as eased restrictions on mifepristone, a pill commonly, but not exclusively, used for early abortion, have in some cases been met with further setbacks during the first year of President Donald Trump’s second term in office. In September, the Food and Drug Administration approved a new generic version of mifepristone, despite previous indications from FDA and Department of Health and Human Services officials that the drug would undergo a safety review. In a Jan. 6 speech, 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 policy pro-life groups have long supported.

Remain steadfast in Christian unity efforts amid division,

PHILADELPHIA — Amid division and geopolitical turmoil, an ecumenical expert is encouraging the faithful to remain steadfast as they observe the international Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Jan. 18-25. This year’s commemoration “is even more relevant” since “there’s so much division in our world,” said Msgr. Gregory Fairbanks, an ecumenical expert and dean of the diaconal formation school at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Ambler, Pennsylvania, part of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. “I think it’s even more important to recognize that we can come together, at least as Christians, for a common purpose: to pray.” The annual observance, formally instituted in 1968 by the Vatican and the World Council of Churches, traces its roots to the 18th century, with

Pentecostal, Anglican and Catholic clergy all promoting prayers over the intervening decades to restore the bonds among believers. The recent celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea and the Nicene Creed have imparted renewed impetus to the work of Christian unity, said Msgr. Fairbanks. True Christian unity begins with self-reflection, as the Second Vatican Council noted, he said. “We have to at least engage with other Christians, and see the Christ in them, even if we’re not ready to have full visible unity yet.”

Conflicting reports of recent kidnappings in Nigeria raise alarm for Christian advocates

KADUNA, Nigeria — Conflicting reports are fueling anxiety among Christian communities in northern Nigeria after claims that more than 160 Christians were kidnapped during church services in Kaduna state. Christian leaders initially said armed attackers stormed two churches on Jan. 18, forcing worshippers into nearby forests. But some state and local police later denied that any mass kidnapping occurred, calling the reports false and saying no victims could be identified. However, Afiniki Moses, whose relatives were allegedly kidnapped, confirmed to Reuters that the armed gang seized more than 170 people during a church service from two churches, including her husband and two children. The contradictory accounts have deepened mistrust as Christians already face persistent threats from extremist groups, bandits and criminal networks. Advocates say attacks on Christians often go unpunished and accuse Nigerian authorities of complicity or indifference — claims the government rejects. Regardless of the disputed Kaduna incident, kidnappings remain widespread across Nigeria. Security analysts say abductions have become a lucra-

tive criminal industry, with thousands taken in recent years. Church advocates warn the ongoing violence continues to destabilize communities and undermine religious freedom, drawing growing international concern.

Cardinal warns a ‘crisis of values’ amid global uncertainty may lead to international war

ROME — The Vatican’s top diplomat has warned that the world is sliding into a “crisis of values” that risks wider conflict, citing troubles from Venezuela to Iran. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, told reporters Jan. 17 in Rome that diplomacy is weakening as nations turn away from multilateral cooperation toward forceful measures. Cardinal Parolin confirmed the Holy See tried to broker a peaceful solution in Venezuela to prevent bloodshed, including outreach to regime figures, but those efforts failed before recent military actions captured President Nicolás Maduro. He also expressed “great concern” about the “endless tragedy” in Iran, lamenting the loss of life amid the government’s crackdown on protests and urging peaceful solutions. Highlighting tensions over Greenland and other geopolitical flashpoints, Cardinal Parolin stressed that resolving disputes through force, rather than dialogue, risks drawing the international community closer to open conflict. In his Jan. 17 lecture, Cardinal Parolin warned of a “crisis of multipolarism” that “disregards the values upon which the community of nations was gradually built. “Conscience and reason can no longer tolerate violations of sovereignty in their most diverse forms, the forced displacement of entire peoples, the change in the ethnic composition of territories, the subtraction of means necessary for economic activity, or the limitation of freedoms,” the cardinal said.



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