

MESSINGER

Serving the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky since 1926

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(above) The sacrificial offering is raised as part of the Consecration during the Mass celebrating the Cathedral's 125th anniversary.

(top right) A candle is lit on a sconce in the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. These special candles, which mark the places of anointing with sacred chrism during the Cathedral's dedication, are only lit for special Masses — such as the anniversary of the dedication, the parish feast day and significant holidays like the Easter vigil.

(center right) Bishop John Iffert smiles as he greets the congregation, Jan. 27.

(bottom right) Members of the congregation attending stand as the Gospel is proclaimed.



Baker photos



During Mass celebrating cathedral's 125th anniversary, Bishop Iffert refers to Christ as the 'capstone'

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

On a cold, winter morning, the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption welcomed parishioners and guests alike to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the cathedral's dedication with Mass, Jan. 27.

While winter storms the weekend prior kept students from Covington Latin School, Covington, from joining in the Mass due to school closings — the celebration proceeded, with Bishop John Iffert as celebrant and homilist.

Bishop Iffert began his homily referencing an activity at a local science museum in St. Louis, Missouri. As the Gateway Arch is a major landmark of the city, children are given blocks to place and balance and construct their own arches.

"It's a great little way to teach how the arch is built," Bishop Iffert said, "and the importance of that capstone that slips right into the middle."

He continued, saying that "Jesus Christ is the capstone of the Church ... He is the greatest gift. His love, his salvation, his sacri-

fice, his offer of redemption — a gift greater than our existence itself."

Bishop Iffert said, "It's a sign of that, that those who came before us built up the local church ... We are truly blessed to be able to come here day after day, Sunday after Sunday, week after week, and offer worship and pray to the Lord Jesus Christ to purify us and make our worship true and honest and loving."

"Here in the Diocese of Covington," he said, "this particular cathedral facility; It stands like a tabernacle lamp for all the world to see — that the love of Jesus Christ is here in Northern Kentucky. We pray that our lives might be like this cathedral — that our lives might witness to the grandeur of Christ and that the community we share might help us to draw attention to the capstone as it slides into place in our lives and takes all the force, vectors, pressures and tensions and holds us together."

"We celebrate 125 years in this glorious place," Bishop Iffert concluded. "We pray that each of us, and all of us together, will be the living witness to Christ — the trueness of God, the temple of God — where worship is offered constantly and truly through Christ."

Faithful are enlivened as With One Heart plan continues to bear fruit at the parish level

Bailey photos



(above left) Ken Glaser, host team member, greets the 70 participants at the first Parish Missionary Disciples workshop, Jan. 22, at St. Mary of the Assumption Parish, Alexandria. (above center) Jerry Otto, host team member, speaks to the crowd while holding up his Parish Missionary Disciples handbook. (above right) Participants are all smiles as they arrive, undeterred by the cold weather, ready to become enlivened in their faith.

Bella Bailey

Multimedia Correspondent

"Empowering priests. Igniting parishes. Enlivening the faithful." This is the tagline for the With One Heart Pastoral Plan and lays out the marks of success, the hoped for fruit of the strategic plan. Since the announcement of the plan, many strides have been taken in target areas — priests participating in pastoral and leadership training, and laity being enlivened with Parish Missionary Disciples trainings.

From a core group of parishioners that participated in the Parish Missionary Disciples training by the Catholic Leadership Institute, a group of lay faithful joined together and formed the GYMM, the practice of Growing Your Missionary Muscles. GYMM meetings provide structured



time for PMD graduates to practice evangelization skills and support one another.

From the GYMM, the mini-Parish Missionary Disciples workshop was developed — a series of three, two-hour sessions. The mini PMD was first presented at Mother of God Parish, Covington, with much success. Encouraged by what they learned, parishioners from St. Mary Parish, Alexandria, are hosting the second mini PMD.

"We need more people active in the parish," said host team member and St. Mary Parishioner, Ken Glaser. "This seemed to be one way to be able to start down that road, to try and get more people talking a similar language, to try and get more people thinking in a manner that while faith can be a very personal thing, it can also be a very public

thing."

Mr. Glaser hopes that those who are attending, representing more than a dozen parishes, feel emboldened to host the mini-PMD at their parish.

"We don't want this to be the last one," said Mr. Glaser. "We hope that somebody that sat in the room goes, 'This would be really neat to do at my parish.'"

Jerry Otto, host team member, Mother of God parishioner and founding GYMM member, said at the workshop, "We dare to stand at the crossroads of our society and let others see what we believe, because God first stood at those crossroads waiting for us and welcoming us with mercy and love. God has forgiven us and now we help others know. We want to show God's mercy to all."

Mr. Otto encourages those in attendance to be the hands and feet of Christ in their everyday lives, and to evangelize with "warmth, humor and happiness."

AI 'deepfakes' and how to identify them

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Regardless of one's opinion on artificial intelligence (AI), its prevalence is hard to deny. AI-generated images, videos, text, music and more can be found easily on just about any site on the world wide web.

While the Catholic Church and world leaders still work to develop policies and frameworks for using this tool, conversations about ethical and appropriate use come to the forefront when engaging with AI's development.

One of AI's usages comes particularly into question with the concept of "deepfakes" — synthetic videos, audios or photographs that depict a person saying or doing something that they never actually did.

This practice can be financially, emotionally or spiritually harmful, slandering or play a dangerous part in spreading misinformation. Recently, these AI deepfakes have even targeted the pope and bishops of the Catholic Church, showing them sharing messages they never actually shared — at times counter to Church teaching. Recent examples include a 36-minute generated video of Pope Leo XIV addressing and praising Burkina Faso President Ibrahim Traoré. Others feature high-profile bishops such as Bishop Robert Barron, of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester.

When browsing the internet, it's important to stay vigilant of these deepfakes and other types of generated content. Here are some tips to spot AI media.

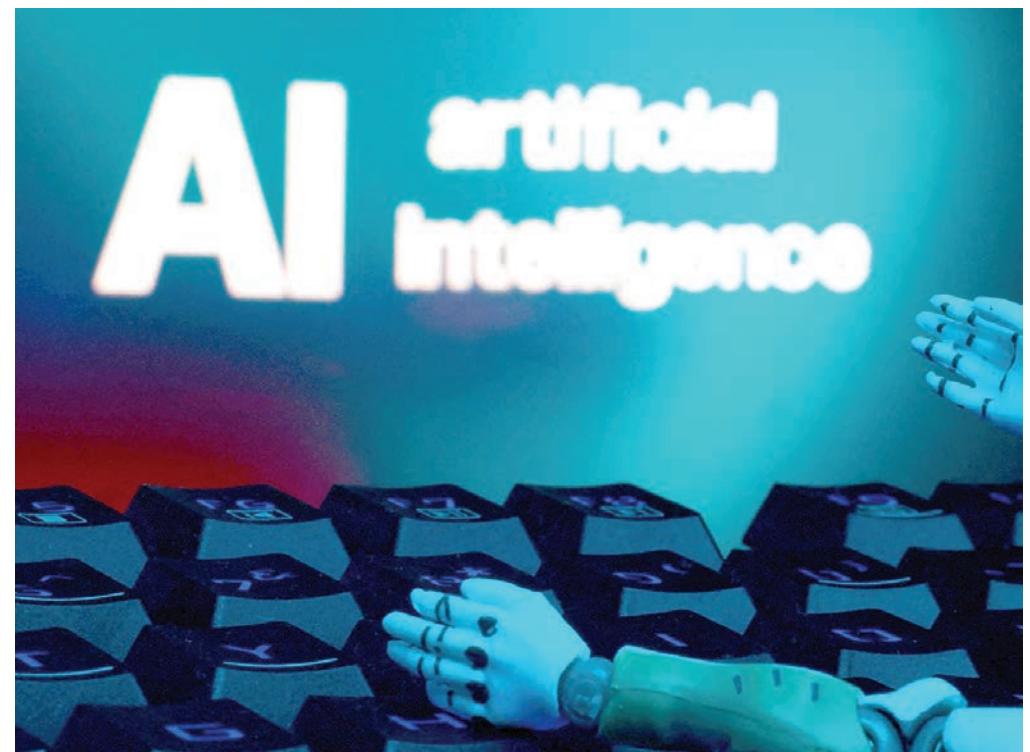
1. Check the source. Did the content come from an official account or refutable source? Check the URL, also known as the web address. Make sure that what you're seeing is posted from the official account of the individual, organization or diocese depicted.

2. Cross-check the internet. Open another tab and search

the web: Are there any news articles confirming that what you're seeing is true? Was the media posted originally on the official account, if it wasn't found there originally?

3. Check for continuity issues and quality. In videos, AI is far from perfect. Watch closely for solid objects and body parts "clipping" through each other, or mouths moving out of sync. Voices may sound robotic or inconsistent, and details may seem blurry or unnatural to a close eye.

In his message introduced for the 60th World Day of Social Communications, Pope Leo XIV writes, "Preserving human faces and voices, therefore, means preserving this mark, this indelible reflection of God's love. We are not a species composed of predefined biochemical formulas. Each of us possesses an irreplaceable and inimitable vocation, that originates from our own lived experi-



A message reading "AI artificial intelligence," a keyboard and robot hands are seen in this illustration created on Jan. 27, 2025. OSV News photo/Dado Ruvic, Reuters

ence and becomes manifest through interaction with others." Keep this message in mind as you go about your daily life — and absorb content with a scrutinizing eye.

Solicitors luncheon launches phase one of the 2026 DPAA, 'Live as Children of Light'



Bailey photos

(above left) Former general gifts chair, turned solicitor, Jeff Juhn, peruses the names of the top 250 donors of the 2025 DPAA.

(above center) Current leadership gifts chair, Greg Salzman, addresses the 55 solicitors gathered for the solicitors luncheon at the launch of the leadership gifts phase of the DPAA.

(above right) Bishop John Iffert speaks to solicitors about the DPAA, which he says recognizes the central mission of the Church to "recognize our own poverty, the way the love and accompaniment of Jesus fills our emptiness, and then to extend ourselves to others as the body of Christ in response to that essential mission."

Bella Bailey

Multimedia Correspondent

Fifty-five volunteers from parishes across the Diocese gathered, Jan. 21, to quietly launch the Leadership Gifts Phase of the 2026 Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal (DPAA), at the DPAA solicitor's luncheon. These 55 volunteers are responsible for reaching out to the top 250 donors of the 2025 DPAA to solicit donations before the public phase of the DPAA.

Last year, the Leadership Gifts phase raised 33 percent of the lofty \$2.7 million goal. This year, the goal of the DPAA marks a slight increase to \$2.754 million with the theme "Live as Children of Light." Born out of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the theme, "is a reminder that we have been called out of darkness, we're being called out of darkness and being baptized into Jesus. Because light produces every goodness, kindness and truth. That's the call to be children of light," said Bishop John Iffert.

New to the DPAA this year is the introduction of a parish participation goal. Calculated by increasing the

total number of donors at a parish by five percent from the previous year, the participation goal "is not at all linked to the dollar goal. It's not linked to a monetary incentive, or a prize," said Jim Hess, director of the Office of Stewardship and Mission Services. "The DPAA has raised more and more money every year, but we've done it with fewer and fewer donors, so we're trying to reverse that," he said.

Dr. Greg Salzman, leadership gifts chair, told the solicitors, "What we're really doing is inviting someone to fulfill their need to give. Everyone has things that are a gift from God, and we're just stewards of those gifts."

"This is about our call to respond to God in gratitude," said Bishop Iffert to the solicitors. "We are grateful for everything that God has poured on us. Because of that gratitude we need to respond to God by contributing again to the mission of Jesus Christ."

Results of the leadership gifts phase will be announced at the DPAA kick-off dinners March 3 in Mount Olivet and March 5 in Erlanger.

US bishops' president calls for Holy Hour of peace amid 'current climate of fear'

Gina Christian
OSV News

Amid soaring domestic and global tensions, the head of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has called for a Holy Hour for peace as "a moment of renewal for our hearts and for our nation."

In a Jan. 28 statement, Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the USCCB, said that "the current climate of fear and polarization, which thrives when human dignity is disregarded, does not meet the standard set by Christ in the Gospel."

Archbishop Coakley's message comes amid a growing chorus of outcry from the nation's Catholic bishops over the increasingly frayed domestic and international order. (See related article page 10.)

During their annual plenary meeting in November, the USCCB issued a special pastoral message on immigration, which condemned "the indiscriminate mass deportation of people" and prayed for "an end to dehumanizing rhetoric and violence, whether directed at immigrants or at law enforcement."

In his Jan. 28 message, Archbishop Coakley acknowledged that "many people today feel powerless in the face of violence, injustice, and social unrest."

"To those who feel this way, I wish to say clearly: your faithfulness matters. Your prayers matter. Your acts of love and works of justice matter," he said. The archbishop invited "my brother bishops and priests across the United States to offer a Holy Hour for Peace in the days ahead," providing a link to a USCCB webpage with instructions, Scripture readings and a "Litany of Peace."

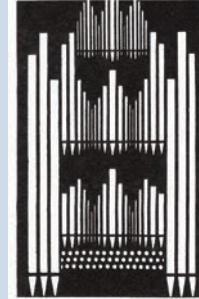
"Let us pray for reconciliation where there is division, for justice where there are violations of fundamental rights, and for consolation for all who feel overwhelmed by fear or loss," said Archbishop Coakley.

"I encourage Catholics everywhere to participate, whether in parishes, chapels, or before the Lord present in the quiet of their hearts for healing in our nation and communities," he said.

"May this Holy Hour be a moment of renewal for our hearts and for our nation," he added.

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 Solemnelle* — 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.

You're invited

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

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

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

Everyone is welcome to attend.

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.



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.

Milan Archdiocese unveils 'For Each Other' initiative ahead of Winter Games



OSV News photo/Yara Nardi, Reuters

Children play near the Olympic rings as snow falls in Livigno, Italy, Jan. 8, 2026, ahead of the Milan-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics, which will take place Feb. 6-22.

Junno Arocho Esteves
OSV News

As the world prepares for the 2026 Winter Olympics and Paralympics in Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo, the Catholic Church in the host city has launched an initiative to ensure that amid the competitions and stress, athletes can find a place to pray and reflect.

At a press conference in Milan Jan. 23, the Archdiocese of Milan unveiled the launch of "For Each Other," a program that will coincide with the Feb. 6-22 Olympic Games and the March 6-15 Paralympic Games.

"For me, the aim of our contribution is to be against the banality of sport, meaning sport reduced to performance, to exaggerated competitiveness, to business, to idolatry," said Archbishop Mario Delpini of Milan.

"Sport is good for people and not just for the excellent result achieved — which is naturally one of the goals of the competitions — but against banality. We want to say that people are made not only of a body that is perfect and capable of excellent performance but of a soul, of a relationship, of a capacity for sharing, of attention so that no one is left behind," he added.

The Vatican Dicastery for Culture and Education will also co-sponsor the initiative. In a message read at the conference, Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, prefect of the dicastery, highlighted the important role the Church plays in fostering an atmosphere of genuine sportsmanship.

The Church, he said, wants to contribute to the sports' world not by "denying the value of competition, but by guiding it so that it is not dominated by an individualistic mindset and instead is rather open to the dimension of the common good."

The archdiocese said the "For Each Other" will run from Jan. 29 to mid-March and will feature activities, performances and events hosted in parishes across Milan.

Cardinal Tolentino also said that during the initiative's Jan. 29 opening Mass, the "Cross of Sportspeople" will be formally entrusted to the archdiocese by Athletica Vaticana, the Holy See's sports association.

The cross, which was blessed by Pope Francis at the 2013 World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, has been placed in chapels in the Olympic host cities of London in 2012 and Paris in 2024.

According to the Vatican, "Athletica Vaticana will consign the 'Cross of Sportspeople' to the dioceses in whose territory the winter and summer Olympics and Paralympics will be held, from time to time, following the tradition of the Cross of the World Youth Days."

Archbishop Delpini will preside over the opening Mass concelebrated by Bishop Paul Tighe, secretary of the Vatican's Dicastery for Culture and Education.

At the heart of the activities will be the 11th-century Basilica of San Babila, where the opening Mass will take place and which will be known as the "Church of Athletes" throughout the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Sunday Masses will be held in various languages, including English, French, German and Italian, "to allow participation by members of the international delegations as well as by ordinary tourists in Milan for the Games," the archdiocese said.

The church will also be the starting point of the "Tour of Sports Values," which will count on the presence of some "13,000 young people from schools, youth and sports clubs in the diocese who have already signed up for the initiative.

Two local parishes will be known as "Values Villages," each one named after the values espoused in the Olympic Chart: excellence, friendship and respect, the archdiocese said.

Exhibitions, discussions with athletes, education workshops and theatrical performances will be held in each of the villages centered on the Olympic values.

Trained volunteers will accompany visitors for free on a "Paths of Beauty" tour, which includes stops at four historically significant churches in Milan's historic center.

Expressing his "pride of being Milanese," Archbishop Delpini said that the "For Each Other" initiative shows that the city of Milan "is capable of surrounding the Olympic event with forms of solidarity, educational aspects, and accessibility of events for everyone."

"I am proud to be from Milan because, at least on our part, we will take care to ensure that it is an asset to the city that benefits people in their entirety," he said.

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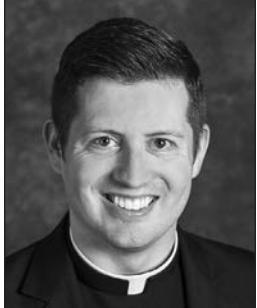
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Beatitude

The readings for the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time — Cycle A — are: Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 and Matthew 5:1-12a.

On the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time, the Church begins our journey through the Sermon on the Mount with the proclamation of the Beatitudes. The Latin word beatitudo, translated in the Lectionary as “blessed,” can also be rendered as “happy.” The Beatitudes therefore describe not abstract ideals, but concrete attitudes and practices that lead to the longing of every human heart — true, authentic, lasting happiness.

GO AND GLORIFY



Very Rev. Daniel Schomaker

stands in sharp contrast to what the Church teaches. Indeed, the way of Jesus frequently runs counter to what seems natural or instinctive. For this reason, the Beatitudes often conflict with commonly accepted ideas of success or fulfillment.

Jesus begins by saying, “Happy are the poor in spirit!” This is a call to let go of ego and self-importance, making room for God and for others. True happiness begins when the self is no longer at the center.

“Happy are the sorrowful!” This is not an endorsement of sadness, but an invitation to honest sorrow — especially sorrow for sin and other bad choices which isolate us from God and each other. Such sorrow opens the heart to receiving and more importantly, accepting forgiveness.

“Happy are the meek (the lowly)!” Meekness is rooted in humility. The humble person is not consumed by the ego or pride, and is therefore free to attend to what is truly important.

“Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness!” sometimes translated as holiness. For what do we truly long? St. Teresa of Calcutta once said: “There is more hunger for love and appreciation in this world than for bread.” Holiness — friendship with God — is the ONE priority that satisfies every other desire. Only God will satiate the hunger of the human heart; other “goods” may be important, but they will ultimately fade away.

“Happy are the merciful!” Mercy reveals the very heart of God. The word compassio — compassion - means “to suffer with.” If we want to be happy forever in the next life with God, we have to be willing to identify in love with those who suffer now — think of Jesus on the Cross.

“Happy are the clean of heart or Happy are the single-hearted!” A divided heart cannot find happiness. When Jesus becomes THE priority — in work, in family, in community — everything else finds its proper place.

“Happy are the peacemakers!” A true disciple is one who makes peace. We were created through an act of non-violence. After the Resurrection, Jesus returns not with judgment or vengeance, but with the words, “Peace be with you.” Violence, hatred, and division breed fear; and fear is the enemy of love.

Finally, “Happy are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness!” Gospel values will inevitably clash with the values of the world. At some point, living faithfully to the Lord and to His Church will invite opposition and criticism. If that never occurs, it is worth asking: “Am I truly living the will of God?”

Heaven is a gift freely offered by the Lord. God never coerces; He invites. Each of us will one day face death, but eternal bliss is promised to those who, in this life, choose the ways of Jesus ... the ways that lead not to momentary happiness, but to everlasting beatitudo.

Father Daniel Schomaker is pastor, Blessed Sacrament Parish, Ft. Mitchell and director, Office of Worship and Liturgy for the Diocese of Covington, Ky.

Lady Wisdom

There are many divisions in our world. We take sides — politically, religiously, socially, economically — the list goes on. It is hard to listen to the news when it is filled with conflict and disagreement on every side. Even when it comes to our faith we find that people disagree about what the Bible tells us to do or not to do. In the pages of the Bible we find opposing forces — Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, the exiled and the oppressor.

I sought a figure who would be a unifier producing no sides. I found that in the New Testament in Jesus. Yet, even Jesus’ life and message resulted in people choosing sides. Then I came upon Lady Wisdom in the Old Testament scriptures. There she was in the books of Proverbs and

Wisdom declaring that she was present when God created the world, was the craftsperson and God’s delight in the process. There she played before God, played on the surface of the earth and delighted in being among the human creatures (Proverbs 8:22-36). Travelling the highways and byways I see her playing on the golden hillsides in the autumn, on the snow-covered roofs in winter, in the fields of corn waving in the breezes of summer and the budding trees of spring. She plays and delights in the humans who see her.

In autumn as you travel along the road, see her dancing on the treetops making the leaves flutter to the ground. The limbs sway as she moves about and down come the leaves. The rustling of the leaves is her laughter and displays her delight in creation. Her breath stirs the

clouds in winter and down comes the pure white love she has for all God’s creation. See her dance in the blowing flakes and cover the roofs with her delight. What great joy it is for her to see humans draw closer to each other for warmth or gather before a fireplace to warm their hearts and conversations.

Life, life. At her touch life comes forth in the green, lush growth of spring. She touches the earth and the trees bud forth in new life, the grass the yard greens, the fields begin to sprout their crops, the trees along the roadside come to life with color. Spring, spring, must be her favorite season. Her breath wakes up every being and calls the frozen to melt. “Come out and play, come out and dance,” she calls as the days lengthen and the warmth melts the frozen. She is playful and dances among creation to the delight of God and humans.

In the summer she rejoices in the lengthening of the days. Light affords her more time to play among the children of the earth, to run and dance among them. She is the refugence of God’s glory and the spotless mirror of God’s power and the image of God’s goodness (Wisdom 7:26-27). Hear her call you to allow what is hard and frozen in your heart to turn to warmth and love. “Forgive,” she calls and “Take delight in creation and each other.”

As we have growing concern for creation, we could look to Lady Wisdom as our advocate and sponsor. She is, after all, the craftsperson who stood with God in the creative act and she displays the glory of the created world and the beauty of the human being. She is nothing but delight and in her there is no conflict. Be with us, Lady Wisdom, as we try to honor creation, preserve its beauty. Be with us as we try to take delight in each human person. Help us to peacefully resolve our conflicts.

Divine Providence Sister Fidelis Tracy is a retired theology professor at Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, Ky.

‘Life Is a Gift’: How to embrace the March for Life’s 2026 theme

As I walked to my car to return home, I spotted it: A Ziploc bag with an assortment of M&M’s and marshmallows taped to the door. “MeRRY ChRistMas,” read the green sticky note attached to it.

I didn’t see who put it here, but I had my suspicions. I was visiting my goddaughter’s family and noticed her momentarily disappear when I announced I was leaving. Her fingerprints were all over the surprise — a surprise given freely, without expecting anything in return. A gift.

I’ve been thinking about gifts, and the meaning of them, with the upcoming March for Life and its 2026 theme: “Life is a gift.”

For over a decade, I’ve written about the March for Life, which calls itself the “largest annual

human rights demonstration in the world.” The event held in Washington began in response to the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*, which once legalized abortion nationwide. The 53rd march, which was scheduled for Jan. 23, marks the fourth one since the court overturned *Roe* with its 2022 decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*.

While the March for Life still seeks to impact law, it also focuses on changing the culture until abortion becomes unthinkable. The 2026 theme reflects that cultural approach by recognizing every human person as a gift from the moment of conception. It also prompts pro-life marchers, particularly Christians and Catholics, to reflect on the question, “A gift from whom?”

It’s a question the new pope — the first pope known to have attended the March for Life as a young man — recently addressed.

Consistent with Catholic Church teaching, Pope Leo XIV, who embraces a holistic approach to human dignity, condemned abortion as a practice that “cuts short a growing life and refuses to welcome the gift of life” in remarks Jan. 9. He called for “the protection of every unborn child and the effective and concrete support of every woman so that she is able to welcome life.”

He said more on this in a Nov. 15 message where he also called the dignity of the human person a gift.

“Dignity is a gift from God, who created the human being in his own image and semblance (cf. Gen 1:26),” he wrote. “It is not something that is obtained by merit or effort; nor does it depend on what we possess or achieve. It is a gift that goes before us: it is born of the look of love with which God wanted us, one by one, and continues to want us.”

He added that “On every human face, even when it is marked by fatigue or pain, there is the reflection of the Creator’s goodness, a light that no darkness can erase.”

While human dignity is a gift, it does not promise a life free of suffering or pain but it does guarantee a life where, in every moment, we are infinitely and eternally wanted and loved just as we are. It calls us to a life where we recognize that every person we encounter, born and unborn, is also wanted and loved.

Today, many threats to human life exist, but the pro-life movement identifies the most pressing one as abortion, which ends the lives of more than 1 million unborn babies nationwide each year. The pro-life movement sees, as Pope Leo said Jan. 9, that “the protection of the right to life constitutes the indispensable foundation of every other human right.”

At a time when the abortion rate is rising, access to abortion drugs is increasing, and the Hyde Amendment prohibiting public funding of abortion is up for debate, a cultural approach to life beckons us to see the human persons involved. It begs us to ask why women are seeking abortion — and respond to that.

One person’s response might look different from
(Continued on page 13)

MUSINGS



Sister Fidelis Tracy, C.D.P.

GUEST



Katie Yoder

Sacred Scripture is a living reality that develops, grows in tradition, pope says

Carol Glatz

Catholic News Service

The Word of God is not "fossilized," but rather develops and grows in tradition, Pope Leo XIV said.

The Church's "deposit of faith," which contains "the entirety of our faith — doctrine, worship, morality, etc. —

is not static but dynamic for it develops and is more profoundly understood by the Church over the centuries under the guidance of the Holy Spirit," he said Jan. 28 during his weekly general audience.

"Entrusted to the Church, who preserves and interprets it in Jesus' name, this deposit helps us to navigate the com-

plexities of life to reach our eternal home in heaven," he said, praying that "we become living and faithful witnesses to God's word in Scripture and tradition."

Speaking to visitors gathered in the Paul VI Audience Hall for the general audience, the pope continued his series of talks dedicated to the Second Vatican Council with an ongoing, in-depth reflection on the council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, "Dei Verbum."

"Today we considered the relationship between Scripture and tradition," he said in his remarks in English.

Jesus sent "the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles to remember, apply and proclaim everything he taught," he said. That means, "sacred Scripture, the inspired word of God, and sacred tradition, the living memory of the Church, are intimately bound together and form the one deposit of faith."

In his main catechesis in Italian, Pope Leo said, "the Word of God, then, is not fossilized, but rather it is a living and organic reality that develops and grows in tradition."

"Thanks to the Holy Spirit, tradition understands it in the richness of its truth and embodies it in the shifting coordinates of history," he said.

"The Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes," he said, quoting from "Dei Verbum."

St. Gregory the Great said, "The sacred Scriptures grow with the one who reads them," the pope said, and St. John Henry Newman affirmed that "Christianity, both as a communal experience and as a doctrine, is a dynamic reality, in the manner indicated by Jesus himself in the parables of the seed: a living reality that develops thanks to an inner vital force."

OSV News photo/Simone Risoluti, Vatican Media



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Pope Leo XIV greets a child during his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Jan. 28, 2026.

sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church, interpreted by the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ," he said, quoting from "Dei Verbum."

The term "deposit" is used because of its juridical nature as it "imposes on the depositary the duty to preserve the content, which in this case is the faith, and to transmit it intact," Pope Leo said.

"The 'deposit' of the Word of God is still in the hands of the Church and all of us, in our various ecclesial ministries must continue to preserve it in its integrity, as a lodestar for our journey through the complexity of history and existence," he said.

The pope concluded by urging Catholics to rediscover "Dei Verbum," which emphasizes how sacred Scripture and tradition, "together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit, contribute effectively to the salvation of souls."

In his greetings in different languages, Pope Leo also highlighted the Jan. 28 feast day of St. Thomas Aquinas. He prayed that this doctor of the Church "guide us in understanding the Scriptures, which he commented on with such wisdom, so that we may understand how much God loves us and desires our salvation."

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/>.

Notre Dame Urban Education Center, Covington, needs volunteer tutors for its Education Center's Homework Plus Program (Grades K-8). Volunteers work alongside students to complete homework, build academic skills and create a lifelong passion for learning. Contact Brandi at (859) 630-9475 or benihan@nduec.org.

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.

Special Olympics of Northern Kentucky's "Orange Crush" will take on the Newport Central Catholic intramural basketball team, Feb. 10, 7:30 p.m., in a spirit of love and friendly competition. The game will be held on NCC's campus. Entrance is free; donations are welcome. Proceeds benefit Special Olympics of NKY.

Thomas More University's Department of Creative Media presents "A Wrinkle in Time," Feb. 13-15. General admission \$10; TMU Students \$5. (Use code: TMUStudent 26) Purchase tickets at tmuky.us/tmtheatre.

The 40 Days for Life kickoff is Feb. 15, 2-3 p.m., starting at Holy Name Church, Cincinnati, with a prayer procession to Planned Parenthood.

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/>.

Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, is hosting its annual Saints Night Feb. 25, 6-8 p.m., for high school seniors and transfer students admitted to Thomas More for Fall 2026. Learn about college affordability and the FAFSA, hear an insider's view of campus life, attend an athletics session and browse a fair of our 35+ academic majors.

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.

The Diocese of Covington and the Intercommunity Sisters Peace and Justice Committee are hosting

"An Evening of Prayer, Reflection, and Conversation," March 2, 7 p.m., presented by Hannah Keegan, director of Thomas More University's Center of Faith, Mission and Catholic Education. Dr. Keegan's presentation will focus on Pope Leo's exhortation "Dilexi Te," (On Love for the Poor) and Pope Francis' encyclical "Dilexit Nos," (On the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ). The presentation will be held at the Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington. No preregistration required.

Northern Kentucky St. Patrick's Day Mass, March 12, 7 p.m., Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. This Mass celebrates local Irish families and heritage with an after-Mass celebration at Molly Malone's Irish Pub, Covington.

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.

New Beginnings is 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, this program invites participants to move toward their own new beginnings. Registration is required. Visit <https://covdio.org/new-beginnings-2/> or call (859) 392-1529. The next session will be held on consecutive Tuesdays, March 17-May 5, 7-8:30 p.m., Catholic Charities, Covington.

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.



Benny Backbreakers

A team of parishioners from St. Benedict Parish, Covington — calling themselves the "Benny Backbreakers" — gathered to clear snow from the church's sidewalks following the Jan. 24-25 winter storm.

‘Complex’ political moment has challenges, opportunities, March for Life president says

Kate Scanlon

OSV News

A “complex” political environment presents both challenge and opportunity for the pro-life movement, Jennie Bradley Licher, president of the March for Life Education and Defense Fund, said at the 27th annual Cardinal O’Connor Conference on Life on Jan. 24.

“We shouldn’t kid ourselves that everything is rosy and we shouldn’t be too quick to pat ourselves on the back,” she said in a keynote address at the conference. “Abortion rates have actually been rising with the rise of the chemical abortion pill and how easily it’s accessed; our culture is still deeply unfriendly to life.”

The conference, organized by students at Georgetown University, gathered under the theme “The Pro-Life Mission After-Birth: A Lifelong Devotion.” The Cardinal O’Connor Conference is typically held the day before or after the annual March for Life, according to the university. It was first held in 2000 and later named in honor of the late Cardinal John J. O’Connor, who was archbishop of New York, a Georgetown University alumnus, and founder of the Sisters for Life. Cardinal O’Connor was known for his pro-life activism on abortion, but also for his opposition to the death penalty and his support for social safety net programs.

In her address, which came the day after her first national March for Life at the helm of the organization, Licher told the conference that the pro-life movement needs to win converts to its cause.

“We can never compromise our position, which is rooted in the truth about human life,” she said. “But how do we adjust our framing and our messaging so that our fellow Americans can hear and understand it, can receive it?”

The conference this year, and the March for Life itself, took place amid growing frustration from some in the pro-life movement about what they see as inaction from the Trump administration on key policy priorities like stronger restrictions on mifepristone, a pill commonly but not exclusively used for early abortion, and protecting the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits public funding of elective abortions.

Vice President JD Vance addressed the 53rd annual March for Life in Washington Jan. 23. Acknowledging in his comments what he called “the elephant in the room,” Vance spoke about concerns from some in the pro-life movement about their remaining policy priorities just over a year into Trump’s second term in the White House.

“I want you to know that I hear you, and that I understand there will inevitably be debates within this movement,” Vance said in his address. “We love each other, and we’re going to have open conversations about how best we use our political system to advance life, how prudential we must be in the cause of advancing human life. I think these are good, honest and natural debates, and frankly, they’re not just good for all of you. They help keep people like me honest, and that’s an important thing.”

The comments from Vance, and from President Donald Trump, who addressed the rally by pre-recorded video message, came shortly after pro-life leaders criticized Trump’s comments to House Republicans Jan. 6 telling them to be “flexible” on the Hyde Amendment in negotiations on health care subsidies, to the disappointment of pro-life groups that have long supported that policy.



(above) A woman with a sign reacts as pro-life advocates gather during the 53rd annual March for Life rally in Washington Jan. 23, 2026.

(right) Jennie Bradley Licher, president of the March for Life Education and Defense Fund, waves as she speaks during the 53rd annual March for Life rally in Washington Jan. 23, 2026.

Pro-life leaders have also objected to a September decision by the Food and Drug Administration, which operates under the Department of Health and Human Services, to approve Evita Solutions’ generic version of mifepristone. The drug’s approval came despite previous indications from FDA and HHS officials that mifepristone would undergo a safety review. On its website, Evita Solutions calls mifepristone “an effective, safe way to terminate early pregnancy.” It was also the second time a Trump administration approved a generic pill for abortion, which it did in 2019.

Some pro-life groups have called on the Trump-Vance administration to roll back the Biden administration’s actions on mifepristone to what was in place during the Trump-Pence administration.

Licher told the conference, “right now, this moment, our particular American moment, is full of opportunity, and it’s full of challenges for those of us who care about the rights of the unborn and about making sure that moms have the support they need to choose life.”

Licher said, “the cultural and political landscape for the pro-life movement is challenging, no doubt about it, but these challenges are not a sign to retreat.”

“They are an invitation to sharpen our message and be keen students of our times, to know what the arguments



against us are, and to speak with moral clarity, courage and compassion, with unflagging hope and with joy,” she said.

The Catholic Church teaches that all human life is sacred from conception to natural death, and as such, opposes direct abortion. After the Dobbs decision, Church officials in the U.S. have reiterated the Church’s concern for both mother and child, and they have called to strengthen available support for those living in poverty or other causes that can increase the risk of abortion.



Serra Club welcomes editor

The Serra Club for Vocations, Northern Kentucky, met for lunch at Thomas More University, Jan. 20, to conduct club business and to hear a presentation given by Laura Keener, editor of the *Messenger* and communications director for the Diocese of Covington. Pictured are: (from left) Alan Pickett, Serra Club NKY program chair; Laura Keener and Dennis Reinersman, Serra Club NKY chapter president. The Serra Club for Vocations is a Christian fellowship dedicated to encouraging and supporting priestly and religious vocations, while also fostering the spiritual growth of its members. To learn more, visit www.serranyak.org.

St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky kicks off 3rd annual Souper Bowl to tackle hunger

Staff report

As excitement builds for the Big Game, St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky (SVdP NKY) is rallying the community for a different kind of win: helping ensure that local families facing food insecurity have access to warm, reliable meals. The organization has launched its 3rd annual Souper Bowl, a community-wide soup drive supporting its 29 food pantries across Northern Kentucky.

Running now through Sunday, Feb. 8, the Souper Bowl encourages supporters to donate cans of soup at St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Store locations in Cold Spring, Erlanger, Falmouth and Florence. Financial gifts can also be made online at the event's donation link.

"Soup may seem simple, but it's one of the most important items we can provide," St. Vincent de Paul wrote in its press release. "It's shelf stable, easy to prepare, and it allows families — especially those with young children or limited cooking resources — to get a nutritious meal on the table quickly."

St. Vincent de Paul NKY encourages businesses, schools, church groups, and neighborhood organizations to participate by hosting their own collections. With pantry shelves often strained after the holiday season, the Souper Bowl arrives at a critical time for restocking.

"This is a chance for the entire community to team up and make a real impact," the press release added. "When people donate even a few cans, they're helping ensure their neighbors have a warm, comforting meal during the coldest time of year."

Soup donations are an essential staple across SVdP NKY's network of pantries, including its Choice Food

FIRE Foundation reaches fundraising goal, prepares for next steps

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

The FIRE Foundation of Northern Kentucky, a non-profit dedicated to funding and supporting inclusive education in Catholic schools, announced that their fundraising goal for 2025 has been met.

The foundation, which currently is supporting St. Therese, Southgate, is now able to offer grants to three to four additional schools in the Diocese of Covington — allowing the chosen schools to provide training, resources and other needs for students with disabilities.

Following their major event, Ignite the Mission, Oct. 2, 2025, the FIRE Foundation has been working to follow up with supporters, growing their website and board and establishing their finance committee, according to Missy Hail, board president.

In addition to being able to offer their services and funding to more schools, the foundation will also be helping to fund a part-time position in the diocesan Curia — the Coordinator for Inclusive Education.

"We're so excited because we feel like that position can help when all issues arise," said Mrs. Hail. Although FIRE part-

ners with only a few schools right now, Mrs. Hail believes the new coordinator will help ignite a future where every school in the diocese can access the support.

As for the grants going to the schools, the FIRE Foundation will be accepting and reviewing grant applications until mid-February. From there, funding and support will be provided for the 2026-2027 school year, with a target date of announcing partner schools on April 1.

To learn more about the FIRE Foundation, and their mission, visit <https://www.firefoundationnky.org>.



Northern Kentucky



Pantries in Cold Spring and Erlanger, which allow families to select the foods that best meet their needs. These donations play a vital role in helping families prepare quick, nutritious meals when resources are limited.

More information on food assistance programs and organizing group drives can be found on the SVdP NKY website.

More US bishops warn: 'The country cannot go on like this'

Gina Christian
OSV News

More U.S. Catholic bishops are sounding the alarm over an increasingly frayed social order both at home and abroad — while calling for a renewal of heart and a commitment to Gospel values safeguarding God-given human dignity.

Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles and Archbishop Paul D. Etienne of Seattle are among the latest prelates to weigh in on widespread unrest and division, with Archbishop Etienne issuing a Jan. 26 pastoral letter on "A Well-Ordered Society Rooted in Truth, Justice, and Peace."

Three key sources — the Second Vatican Council, Catholic social teaching and a Jan. 9 address by Pope Leo XIV to Holy See-accredited diplomats — "illuminate our path with clarity and a renewed urgency," said Archbishop Etienne in his letter.

The latest statements and reflections — which follow comments already made by Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops; Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis and Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin of Newark, New Jersey — came within days of the fatal shooting of 37-year-old nurse Alex Patti, a U.S. citizen, by federal agents during a protest amid an immigration enforcement operation in Minneapolis.

Another U.S. citizen and Minneapolis resident, 37-year-old Renee Nicole Good, was shot to death by a federal agent at a separate immigration-related protest Jan. 7.

Hours after Patti's death, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz said at a Jan. 24 news conference the nation was at "an inflection point" amid the Trump administration's crackdown on immigrants lacking legal authorization to live and work in the U.S., which has seen Minneapolis and several other cities become flashpoints.

In their respective reflections, the various bishops agreed that current societal tensions have reached an untenable crisis point.

"The country cannot go on like this," said Archbishop Gomez in a Jan. 27 column published by Angelus, the news outlet of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

In his pastoral letter, Archbishop Etienne pointed broadly to "turbulent times" that have been "marked by conflict abroad, fragmentation at home, and profound questions about our shared moral life."

In an accompanying Jan. 26 blog post, the archbishop said he had been moved to issue the teaching having "read my own mail, seen fissures in the unity of our Church, witnessed the fracturing of our American society and watched in dismay at the escalation of war around the world."

Archbishop Gomez lamented that as the U.S. marks its 250th anniversary this year, "what's happening now seems to be moving us away from the values of our nation's founding."

He stressed that "America was the first nation to be established on the belief that human rights come from God and that the government's purpose is to protect these rights," and that "we do not lose our rights based on the color of our skin, or the language we speak, or for not having the proper documents."

"Right now our government seems to be treating undocumented immigrants — men, women, and children — as if they have no rights. That should not be happening," said Archbishop Gomez.

Archbishop Gomez named "the root cause of the cur-

rent crisis" as "the country's broken immigration system," and advocated support for the bipartisan Dignity Act.

Despite its "flaws," said Archbishop Gomez, the legislation would reform visa and asylum processes, enhance border security and provide greater verification for employers while offering "a path to a legal status" for millions of people who have been living and working in the U.S. without authorization.

Archbishop Gomez also said that in the present moment, "the first task is to restore order and peace to our streets, and insist on calm and restraint in our public discourse."

"There is no question that the federal government has the duty to enforce immigration laws. But there must be a better way than this," he said.

The archbishop said he hoped "all sides in this conflict — federal authorities, city and state officials, and those protesting the enforcement actions — will take a step back in the interests of the common good."

The principle of the common good — founded on human dignity, social well-being and a just, peaceful order — was one stressed by Archbishop Etienne in his pastoral letter, which highlighted charity, or love of neighbor, and respect for the rule of law as "two essential pillars of any Christian society."

"These do not stand apart from the principles of our social teaching, but they flow directly from them," he explained, adding that "our Catholic Social Teaching makes clear that rights also come with corresponding duties."

Archbishop Etienne clarified in his blog announcement that in writing the letter, he focused not on "speaking to specific, outrageous behaviors of individuals, nations or leaders," but "to simply speak to what a well-ordered society looks like."

In his letter, Archbishop Etienne noted that Pope Leo's Jan. 9 address — which he said had inspired his pastoral — "framed the challenges of our age through the lens of St. Augustine's 'The City of God.'" The treatise, written by the saint in the early fifth century, contrasted the ongoing struggle between good and evil in human history — and the archbishop noted how the pope used it to offer "a deeply Christian vision of peace, justice, and right order."

Writing in his pastoral letter, Archbishop Etienne said that "in these turbulent times, the Church once again lifts high the Gospel as the light by which we must walk."

He explained that "Catholic Social Teaching begins with the unshakeable truth that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God," and that "this fun-



A makeshift memorial is seen in Minneapolis Jan. 27, 2026, at the site where 37-year-old Alex Patti was fatally shot by federal agents trying to detain him.

damental dignity forms the bedrock of all moral life and a just society."

"God created us in his image and we need to treat other people like we believe that," noted Archbishop Gomez.

The rule of law is "a moral achievement" that "embodies the conviction that justice, not force, must govern human relationships," wrote Archbishop Etienne in his pastoral letter. "Laws grounded in moral truth safeguard the weak, hold the strong accountable, and restrain the impulses of domination that St. Augustine identifies with the 'city of man.'"

Quoting Pope Leo, the archbishop said that "when nations and leaders abandon dialogue in favor of coercion, they erode 'the foundation of all peaceful civil coexistence.'"

The Catholic principle of solidarity — "the social expression of charity" — extends to "all levels of society," from the family to the international community, and remains crucial in "a world that has so many levels of interdependence," said Archbishop Etienne.

Subsidiarity, another core principle of Catholic social teaching, "affirms that decisions should be made at the most local level possible, respecting the integrity of families, parishes, and communities," Archbishop Etienne said.

"Brothers and sisters, the world around us is undergoing profound change and we are experiencing no small amount of fragmentation, but Christ remains our sure foundation," wrote Archbishop Etienne. "Pope Leo XIV's Augustinian vision reminds us that the destiny of society depends on the love that shapes it."

He added, "May we choose, again and again, the path of truth, justice, charity, and peace." OSV News photo/Jakub Knap, USA Hockey

U.S. Hockey player Britta Curl-Salemme is pictured in a

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Olympic-bound hockey player encourages young athletes 'live your faith boldly'

Lauretta Brown

OSV News

Britta Curl-Salemme's love for skating and ice hockey began very early in her life. She remembers skating with her three siblings since "basically the time we could walk" after her dad built an ice rink in their backyard in Bismarck, North Dakota.

She told OSV News that she started dreaming of going to the Olympics when she was about 10 years old.

"As a girl, you had the NHL, which was all guys, but the thing you could see women doing was the Olympics," she recalled. "I really looked up to the women's Olympic players." She would draw Olympic rings in her notebooks in grade school hoping to go one day.

Along with her passion for hockey and Olympic dreams, she was also learning about her Catholic faith which she credits her mom for making "a huge part of our family's life."

"My parents always made sure that we went to Mass every Sunday," she said, "even when the four of us kids had travel for tournaments or were playing different sports, we didn't miss a Sunday Mass."

She said that consistency from her parents helped keep her faith strong along with their choice to put her and her siblings in the Catholic school system in the area. She is a graduate of St. Mary's Central High School in Bismarck.

During her college years at the University of Wisconsin, she also benefited from a supportive community at the St. Paul's Catholic Student Center and feels "very lucky" to have had the support of these strong faith communities over the years.

Now she is realizing her Olympic dream and will be heading to Milan, Italy, to compete on the U.S. women's ice hockey team in her first Olympic games.

She said her faith has given her strength in her journey to the Olympics. "I think my life would be pretty chaotic and stressful if I didn't have something steady and consistent that I can go back to that I drew strength from, and that's my Catholic faith," she emphasized, "just the routine of in the morning I get up and the first thing that I'm doing is going to my Bible."

Looking to role models in her faith, she was inspired by the example of her mom's "quiet faith" that's evident in "the way that she lives," and the example of the saints, especially St. Thérèse of Lisieux who "reignited" her faith in college and "was the first saint that I really attached myself to."

She read "I Believe in Love," a personal retreat book based on the teachings of St. Thérèse the summer after she graduated from high school. She said the book, which was given to her by one of her high school teachers, "just blew my mind" and St. Thérèse's "spirituality and the way that she thought about humility just totally opened my eyes to a new way of thinking and of praying."

She hadn't heard of the Little Flower's other Olympic connection, but St. Thérèse may have a special affinity for Olympic skaters as Tara Lipinski, who won the 1998 Olympic gold medal in figure skating, also had a special devotion to St. Thérèse and credits the intercession of the saint in her victory.

In her travels as a player with the Professional Women's Hockey League, or PWHL, for the Minnesota Frost, Curl-Salemme features masstimes.org on her Instagram page and said going to Mass every Sunday has helped her keep a good perspective on things and see some "beautiful



April 25, 2025, photo. Curl-Salemme, a Catholic, will be part of the U.S. Women's Hockey Team competing in the Milan-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics in Italy, which will take place Feb. 6-22.

churches" on the road.

"Being able to relate the things that I'm learning and the things I'm going through with my faith," she said, "that's just been super important for me just to keep perspective and it's a certain detachment from my sport. It's been everything for me."

That detachment came in handy when she faced a setback after initially being selected to play hockey in the 2022 Beijing Olympics.

She had taken the year off of college and moved to Minnesota to train and try out for the Olympics but was cut from the team toward the end of the selection process. She got a second chance as she was chosen for the team when another player was injured but was unable to go at the last minute after testing positive for COVID.

She said that time was a "roller coaster of emotions and adversity," but she ultimately was "peaceful and grateful for the whole experience."

"I look back and I think God was really trying to teach me detachment and just to trust him and realize that my happiness and my purpose and my worth comes from more than just hockey," she reflected.

For her upcoming trip to the Olympics, Curl-Salemme is excited about the experience and is also looking forward to seeing the Catholic culture and history in Italy. Her family has planned a trip to Rome and are hoping to see Pope Leo XIV, the first American pope.

Among her teammates over the years, Curl-Salemme said she's had fun interactions over the topic of faith and "people just enjoy asking me questions and talking about the faith." She even has a couple of teammates who are Catholic and join her for Mass.

"That's been really cool, just the way that God has given me this avenue to kind of go out and talk about my faith or just even be an example," she said. "I'm not one that really super outwardly needs to bring it up all the time or talk about it, but I think my teammates see me going to Mass consistently and hopefully showing virtue and being a good teammate and I think that opens the door for a lot of

conversations."

She said for female Catholic athletes one excellent resource that she discovered and has partnered with is the group FIERCE, an organization founded by Samantha Kelley, a Catholic author and former D1 soccer player, who aims to "empower female athletes to thrive in their God-given identity and femininity." The group offers retreats, talks and mentorship for female athletes in high school, college and beyond.

What would Curl-Salemme tell a young Catholic athlete who is dreaming of one day going to the Olympics? "Live your faith boldly, especially in your sports, because we need that more than anything," she said, adding that "you don't have to do anything crazy, just live your faith. Keep going to the sacraments and being a good teammate, it's going to be way more beneficial for you than winning any game or championship."

Ultimately, Curl-Salemme does see hockey as one of her "paths to be a saint." She said there's a lot to learn from "the daily ins and outs of being on a team and being with tons of different people with different backgrounds and different personalities and the way that, as a team sport, you're tested to sometimes die to yourself and put the team ahead of yourself."

"It's such good practice for greater life and things that Jesus is asking you to do," she emphasized. "I kind of see it as like a little training, a little training table for heaven and for how I'm supposed to be."

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Affording Catholic schools: School choice programs, other options can help numbers add up

Kimberley Heatherington
OSV News

In a nation fixated on affordability, a Catholic school K-12 education can easily become a contested line in the family budget.

But as the experts who spoke with OSV News underscored, there are financial possibilities worth examining before making a final decision — and it is in part a matter of just getting the word out.

“I’m not sure that we’ve completely cracked that code — how we get the message out that our schools are not just for the elite who can afford it,” admitted Steven Cheeseman, president and CEO of the National Catholic Educational Association in Arlington, Virginia.

“We want them to be accessible to as many students as possible who want to be there,” he emphasized. “Most schools have some sort of tuition program — but the key is how we communicate it in the places that people will see it, and that we say it enough times so they remember it.”

That said, Catholic school enrollment “is stable across the country,” Cheeseman reported.

According to the NCEA, nationwide in 2024-2025 there were about 1.68 million Catholic elementary, middle and secondary school students, studying at 5,852 schools with 154,258 professional staff. Sixty-three schools closed, while 24 opened.

Cheeseman told OSV News that school choice programs — programs and policies that allow families to use public funds to access schools beyond their local public options, including private schools — are now a major component of Catholic school affordability.

“One of the best forms of capitalism is educational choice — because it gives you a choice, and I would argue competition is good for everyone,” he said. “I think the more educational choice opportunities we have, that will not only strengthen our Catholic schools, but it will strengthen all schools.”

Across the country, some 31% of Catholic schools use parental choice programs, while 18% of students do.

As of January 2026, 18 U.S. states have made virtually all students eligible for state funding to use on nonpublic school tuition. EdChoice — a pro-school choice advocacy group — estimates 1.5 million students are using private school choice programs in the 30 states that have them — an increase over about 1 million in 2024, and fewer than 500,000 in 2018-2019.

With the passage of President Donald Trump’s “One Big Beautiful Bill” — signed into law July 4, 2025 — many Catholic educators and parents are hopeful, since it created a federal tax credit for individuals who make donations to 501(c)(3) public charities providing scholarships to elementary or secondary school pupils.

The creation of the provision could lead to increased contributions to Catholic nonprofits that grant scholarships for K-12 students. Such contributions should in turn increase the number of scholarships that can be offered — and thereby, hopefully expand access to Catholic schools.

“I think focusing on those — advocating for school choice programs — is the key differentiator for Catholic

schools right now, and what the future could look like,” Cheeseman said.

Shawn Peterson — president of Stillwater, Minnesota-based Catholic Education Partners, a national apostolate advancing policy to enable families to pursue a Catholic education — agreed with Cheeseman.

“I would just say nothing has been as effective as school choice right now in answering the challenge to affordable tuition,” he confirmed.

Just how effective?

“We’ve run the numbers: (In) some of our major archdioceses — with the new federal scholarship tax program — if 1% of Catholics in a diocese participated, it’s in the tens of millions of dollars in a diocese,” Peterson said. “And that’s on top of a lot of state programs — so we could have billions of dollars if this federal scholarship tax program is implemented properly, and if the Church really leans into it. That could be huge in helping overcome tuition challenges.”

In 2021, the most recent year the NCEA included tuition in its annual data report, the average Catholic school elementary tuition was about \$5,178; high school tuition, about \$10,575.

“But I still believe they’re an incredible value for the money,” Peterson said. “Not only do they (Catholic schools) provide a great academic offering — they nurture the soul, which is obviously the main point of Catholic education.”

Making the kitchen table math add up is a specialty of Kathryn Whitaker, a Texan mom of six and author of the 2019 book “Live Big, Love Bigger: Getting Real with BBQ, Sweet Tea, and a Whole Lotta Jesus” from Ave Maria Press.

“I think the biggest mistake people make is that they make up their mind before they ever have a meeting or contact the school,” Whitaker told OSV News. “So they either see something on the school’s website or they talk to a friend and then they think, ‘Oh, we can’t make that work. That’s not in our budget.’”

Whitaker recommends parents don’t stop there.

“I wish more people would call the principal or call the admissions officer and sit down and say to them, ‘What options are available? Are there scholarships? Can we defer payments? What are some options that we have?’ As opposed to seeing the final process and saying, ‘We can’t make it work.’ So I always tell people: Call the principal; call the admissions officer — sit down and have a conversation.”

She also suggests buying uniforms used or on sale, as well as lifestyle changes that might include fewer streaming services, extra income opportunities or frugal vacations.

“I think parents have a lot of options,” said Whitaker,



OSV News photo/Bob Roller

A third-grader smiles during class at Sacred Heart Grade School in Prescott, Ariz., Jan. 20, 2026. Catholic Schools Week, the annual celebration of Catholic education in the U.S., is observed Jan. 25-31 in 2026.

“but they just see the tuition, and then they forget about all the other options that are available.”?

In the Florida Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, superintendent of Catholic schools Michael Juhas — like Cheeseman and Peterson — is a strong proponent of school choice.

“We’re blessed in Florida with universal school choice — so that makes Catholic schools more affordable for everyone,” Juhas said. “On top of that, each individual school has financial aid available. And at the diocesan level, we created a mustard seed scholarship that allows a family whose children have never attended Catholic school before to have an amount for one year.”

Still, getting the word out about school choice remains a necessity.

“In a lot of ways, getting people into school choice is a lot like a voter registration drive — and that is available to everyone,” explained Juhas, whose diocese encompasses 11 schools and five early learning centers.

“We just have to raise awareness. And we have to be consistent and persistent in messaging so that people know what is available to them — and so the parents, as the primary educators, can make the best choice for their individual family.”?

‘Life Is a Gift’

(Continued from page 5)

another’s, but every person can contribute to building a culture of life. It might look like volunteering at or donating to one of the thousands of pregnancy centers that exist to help women in need. It might mean babysitting for a neighbor, cleaning an expectant mom’s home, or knowing about available resources in case someone asks. It might be as simple as speaking a word of encouragement to pregnant and parenting families or being present when someone needs to talk. It could look like a prayer; it could look like marching. It might even look like a baggie of M&M’s and marshmallows.

Life is a gift — a gift for us and, if lived well, a gift for others too.

Katie Yoder writes for OSV News from Maryland.

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National/World

Bishops applaud House for legislation supporting pregnant women

WASHINGTON — Three U.S. bishops who chair committees of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops are applauding two pieces of legislation designed to support pregnant women through an array of resources, including continued access to higher education. "We were grateful to see the U.S. House of Representatives pass the Pregnant Students' Rights Act and the Supporting Pregnant and Parenting Women and Families Act," said Archbishop Shelton J. Fabre of Louisville, Kentucky, Bishop David M. O'Connell of Trenton, New Jersey, and Bishop Daniel E. Thomas of Toledo, Ohio, in a Jan. 23 joint statement. The three prelates respectively chair the USCCB's committees on Domestic Justice and Human Development, Catholic Education and Pro-Life Activities. The Pregnant Students' Rights Act would require colleges and universities that participate in federal student aid programs to provide both prospective and current students with information on rights and resources for carrying a baby to term while enrolled. The Supporting Pregnant and Parenting Women and Families Act would allow states to use low-income support funds for pregnancy centers that support protecting the life of the mother and her unborn child, and that offer services such as pregnancy testing, prenatal and pregnancy education, counseling, diapers, baby clothes and other material resources.

Amid tensions in Minnesota, Archbishop Hebda calls for conversion of hearts

ST. PAUL, Minn. — After a second fatal shooting in January involving federal agents in Minneapolis during an increase in federal immigration enforcement, Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda presided over an evening Mass for peace Jan. 25 at the Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul. In a Jan. 25 statement, Archbishop Hebda asked "all people of good will to join me in prayer today for Alex Jeffrey Pretti, for his parents, and for his loved ones." Pretti, 37, of Minneapolis, was shot and killed Jan. 24 by federal agents during an altercation in Minneapolis. In his homily, Archbishop Hebda underscored the need for Christians to make Jesus' "light shine" in the darkness and seek their own conversion of heart. The special Votive Mass for the Preservation of Peace fell on the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, a man who opposed Christ and was present when the Church's first martyr, St. Stephen, was killed, Archbishop Hebda said. "That's what makes Paul's conversion so significant for us in this day, in 2026, brothers and sisters, in that we have a God for whom nothing is impossible, a God who's able to change hearts," he said. "But we have confidence that he's able to change the hearts of all people, and indeed, that he's able to bring compromise — not in the truth — but he's able to bring people together so that they're able, together, to follow that light that is Jesus."

MN Catholic Conference director, others call for 'off-ramp' to immigration enforcement 'crisis'

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Minnesota Catholic Conference Executive Director Jason Adkins joined Christian and Jewish leaders Jan. 23 in urging elected officials to pursue an "off-ramp from this crisis" amid heightened federal immigration enforcement in Minnesota. In an open letter, the leaders cited concern over "Operation Metro Surge," writing, "In recent weeks we have been alarmed by stories of the too many Minnesota residents (citizens and immigrants) who've suffered." They also warned of damage to community trust. Despite differing views within the broader community on immigration policy, they stressed a shared duty to protect human dignity and public safety. Calling for a "united Minnesota vision that prioritizes de-escalation," the letter outlined five steps, including focusing enforcement on dangerous individuals, respecting civil rights, protecting vulnerable communities and restoring calm in streets, schools and houses of worship. "This is the moment for responsible leadership," they concluded. "Minnesota needs to act together — now."

Russia aims to 'freeze' Ukrainians, prelate says

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia's latest missile strikes on Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities deliberately targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure and show clear signs of crimes against humanity, according to Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Speaking as Ukraine entered the 206th week of Russia's full-scale invasion, Major Archbishop Shevchuk said attacks have intensified along the entire front line, with Kyiv emerging as a

major epicenter. He noted that 12 missiles struck the capital in a single assault, a scale not seen for months. Major Archbishop Shevchuk said the goal is to destroy Ukraine's energy system and freeze the population during winter, warning that power outages quickly turn apartment buildings into deadly "cold traps." Despite the hardship, he praised civilians for their resilience and faith, saying attacks have only strengthened national unity. Cardinal Konrad Krajewski called the winter bombardment of infrastructure "genocide." He also criticized waning international attention. "Ukraine has been abandoned," Cardinal Krajewski told OSV News. "Since the focus of the world is on Venezuela, Gaza and other places, Russia is deliberately targeting Ukraine, thinking they can do whatever they want." Cardinal Grzegorz Rys of Kraków, Poland, announced aid from Kraków's churches. Ukrainian church leaders continue to appeal for international attention and solidarity.

Cardinal says Ukrainian medal belongs to all Catholics, not him, as he urges continued aid

ROME — Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the Vatican's chief charity official, said he cannot accept a Ukrainian Medal of Merit offered by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, insisting he was simply doing his duty as a priest. Speaking to OSV News Jan. 23, the papal almoner said humanitarian service is his "job description," not an extraordinary act deserving personal recognition. Krajewski has coordinated Vatican aid to Ukraine for four years and traveled there 10 times since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, distributing millions of dollars in assistance and conveying Pope Francis' closeness to a suffering people. He emphasized that Catholic organizations and individual donors worldwide are the true recipients of any honor. The cardinal spoke as Ukraine faces its worst winter energy crisis, with Russian attacks crippling infrastructure and forcing civilians into freezing shelters. Calling the assaults "genocidal," Cardinal Krajewski urged Catholics not to grow weary, appealing for continued aid as Vatican-led convoys deliver medicine, warmth and hope to Ukrainians enduring the cold and war. "Ukraine has been abandoned," Cardinal Krajewski told OSV News. "Since the focus of the world is on Venezuela, Gaza and other places, Russia is deliberately targeting Ukraine, thinking they can do whatever they want," he said.

Archdiocese of Paris convenes council in response to historic rise in catechumens

PARIS — The Archdiocese of Paris is launching a major

churchwide council in response to a surge in adult and youth conversions across France. The initiative began Jan. 25, the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, with a four-month consultation involving all parishes and nine bishops. Church leaders say the timing reflects the unprecedented growth in catechumens, especially among young people. In 2025 alone, more than 17,800 catechumens were baptized across France during the Easter Vigil, including over 10,000 adults. In Paris, adult baptisms reached 2,652. The trend has been building for five years but rose sharply again at the start of this year. Father Maximilien de La Martinière, a priest of the Diocese of Versailles, was appointed secretary general and is responsible for overseeing the organization of the council. He works with teams established locally in each diocese. The date for start of the council was chosen, the priest explained, because St. Paul "was an adult who, after his conversion, became a catechumen and then a zealous neophyte." The council will use a synodal-style process to study how parishes can better welcome, form and retain new Catholics. An assembly will meet in May, with final recommendations expected to be implemented in late 2027.

Steubenville students died from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning, say police

STEUBENVILLE, Ohio — Police confirmed to OSV News Jan. 21 that two students at a Catholic university in Ohio found dead in their car succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning, with their deaths determined to be accidental. Franciscan University of Steubenville students Luke Reimer and Mary Mich were found shortly after noon Jan. 19, Franciscan Father Dave Pivonka, university president, said in a statement. The two 20-year-olds — respectively from Indian Shores, Florida, and Downington, Pennsylvania — were located inside a vehicle in the parking lot of the school's St. Agnes Residence Hall, said Father Pivonka. "At this time, early indicators suggest this was a tragic accident related to a potential vehicle exhaust or engine malfunction," he said. In a statement emailed to OSV News, Steubenville Police Chief Kenneth Anderson — whose department had investigated the case — said "there were no signs of foul play and no signs of any drug use." On Jan. 20, the police department was informed by the Jefferson County Coroner's Office that "toxicology results confirmed both subjects died as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning." Anderson said the deaths were "ruled accidental in nature" and appeared to be caused "by a problem with the vehicle's exhaust." The university community gathered the evening of Jan. 19 to remember the two students during a Holy Hour and rosary.

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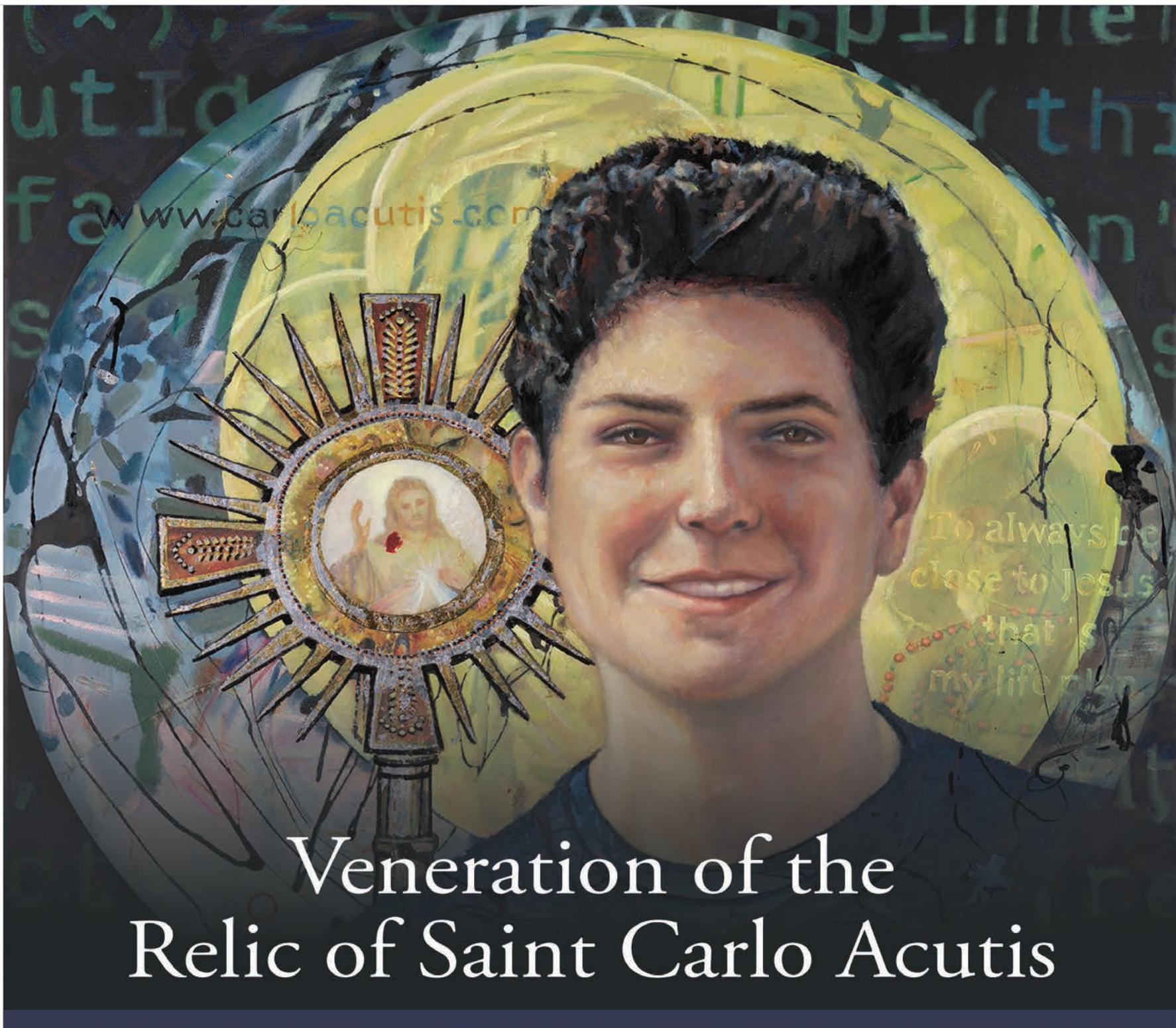
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12:15 PM Veneration begins following Mass
1:30 PM Talk by Monsignor Anthony Figueiredo from Assisi - *"Saint Carlo Acutis: An Ordinary Life Turns Extraordinary"*
3:00 PM Talk by Holly Schapker - *"The Art of Modern Sanctity"*
4:00 PM Rosary in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel
6:00 PM Veneration ends
7:00 PM Youth and Young Adult Gathering with Fr. Kevin Scalf - Prayer with Saint Carlo

Wednesday, February 11

9:00 AM Veneration begins
10:00 AM Talk by Holly Schapker - *"The Art of Modern Sanctity"*
11:00 AM Rosary in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel
1:30 PM Talk by Monsignor Anthony Figueiredo - *"You too can be a saint!"* Carlo's Five Steps to Being a Saint
3:00 PM Rosary in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel
5:00 PM Veneration ends

Thursday, February 12

9:00 AM Veneration begins
10:00 AM Talk by Monsignor Anthony Figueiredo - *"I will give you signs that I am with God"*
Graces and Miracles through Saint Carlo's Intercession
11:00 AM Rosary in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel
1:30 PM Talk by Holly Schapker - *"The Art of Modern Sanctity"*
3:00 PM Rosary in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel
4:15 PM Veneration ends
5:15 PM Closing Mass - Archbishop Robert G. Casey, celebrant



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