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

As the second survey approaches, parish point of contact reflects on how first DMI helped two parishes to grow in faith and community

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

With the Lenten season rapidly approaching, the return of the Disciple Maker Index (DMI) survey is also on the way — with online portals opening this month, Feb. 18.

Online survey portals and paper materials for the second DMI will be distributed by parishes this month, with the survey running seven weeks. Results of the survey are projected to be published in June 2026.

Three years ago, the DMI was integral in developing Parish Pastoral Plans. With the feedback from parishioners, pastors and parish leaders — as well as the diocese at large — were able to curate and act on plans that promoted important aspects of parish life such as catechesis, evangelization and improved ministries to youth and Hispanic individuals.

Toni Zilliox, the parish point of contact for Divine Mercy Parish, Bellevue, and St. Bernard Parish, Dayton, particularly credits the DMI and the “excellent response” from their parishioners for the growth seen in both parishes over the past few years.

Following the survey, Ms. Zilliox reported on some positive changes in the parishes, including a “young adult group that has been busy forming that has really flourished.”

Parishioners who responded to Divine Mercy and St. Bernard's DMI's also expressed a desire for “more community,” said Ms. Zilliox, “They wanted to come together more. They wanted more activities and social events, and they wanted more outreach in the community, as well ... we now have so many things to offer in the



DMSB Young Adults Facebook photo
Members of the Divine Mercy/St. Bernard parishes Young Adult Group host an impromptu marshmallow roast following Adoration in November. Encouragement and support of the burgeoning group is part of the parish pastoral plan of both parishes. The active group is holding a Super Bowl party/fundraiser for its Mustard Seed Mission trip to Jamaica in June and had 18 members attend the SEEK retreat at the beginning of January. The dynamic group is also planning a Valentine's Day swing dance for young adults, Feb. 14. Follow them on Facebook DMSB Young Adults.

WITH ONE HEART

EMPOWERING PRIESTS. IGNITING PARISHES. ENLIVENING THE FAITHFUL.

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.

parishes that I'm sure there's nothing you can't find at our parishes!”

Looking back at the first DMI, and the pastoral planning process as a whole, Ms. Zilliox said that the parish wanted to hear everything, including com-

(Continued on page 13)

How one prayer group uses Franciscan at Home to grow in their faith — consider a new Lenten practice

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

As part of the Diocese of Covington's With One Heart pastoral plan, a collaboration with Franciscan University's Catechetical Institute allows every individual in the Diocese of Covington free access to the Franciscan at Home library of Catechetical materials.

These materials, accessed via <https://franciscanathome.com/diocese-covington>, offer learning tracks for any members of the diocesan community with courses covering many aspects of Catholic teaching, as well as offering “tracks” that cater to the needs of an individual or group no matter their role in their parish and diocesan community. These courses go hand-in-glove with many parish pastoral plans as adult faith formation and education was identified as a priority for many parishes.

Currently, one friend group who gathers weekly for prayer is utilizing these free resources to follow a mentor track titled “A Vision for Caring for Others Personally.”

Jenni VonLehman, one of the group's friends, reports a positive experience with the programming. “When my team first started viewing the Franciscan at Home videos, I expected to fill my brain with good information,” she said. “What I wasn't expecting was to experience a real sense of calm while having a retreat-like

encounter with God. I started looking forward to the videos, especially the ones presented by Dr. Willey. Not only were they helpful — they were actually fun to watch.”

She continued, saying, “In the catechetical formation classes, we were given the unexpected opportunity to work on our own catechesis and our own personal relationship with Christ. We learned that

we can't give what we don't have ourselves, so we were immersed in it first. It was exhilarating,” she said. “I've actually watched a couple of the videos again on my own, and I learned even more the

second time ... the fact that the Covington diocese generously provides this free program to every member of the diocese is pretty awesome. I'm sure most people aren't even aware of this treasure.”

This Lent, parish groups are asked to consider how Franciscan At Home might benefit members by hosting a similar prayer/study session. There are over 200 tracks to choose from, or you can start with the same track that Ms. VonLehman has found inspiring.

“It's an excellent tool for your own personal growth,” said Ms. VonLehman, “or to use to help others growth in their faith”

For details regarding registration and usage of Franciscan at Home learning materials, visit <https://covdio.org/catechetical-institute/>.



Kentucky March for Life to bring faithful together in Frankfort

Laura Keener
Editor

The Diocese of Covington will once again join Catholics from across the Commonwealth for the third annual Kentucky March for Life in Frankfort March 11, beginning with Mass at 9:30 a.m. at Good Shepherd Parish, Frankfort. Bishop John Iffert is scheduled to celebrate Mass and spend the day with participants.

“We will have Mass the morning of the March, and that is where the Catholic community from all the dioceses come together,” said Faye Roch, diocesan director, Pro-Life Office who is coordinating Covington’s participation. “Good Shepherd in Frankfort has hosted us, and Bishop Iffert will be presiding over Mass.”

Following Mass, travelers will have a short break before heading to the rally point — a location still to be determined due to construction at the Capitol. There, participants will gather for a series of speakers before continuing on to the Cemetery of the Unborn in the Frankfort Cemetery for a concluding prayer service. The day typically wraps up around 3:30 p.m., after which buses return to Covington.

This year, the Diocese of Covington expects to take three buses, including two filled primarily with students. The buses will leave Covington for Frankfort at about 7:30 a.m. “Every year it seems like we’ve increased our attendance,” Mrs. Roch said. She added that moving the event back to March should help avoid last year’s weather issues and make travel easier for more families and parish



Students from Holy Cross District High School were among the marchers at the second annual Kentucky March for Life in 2025. This year, the Diocese of Covington will take three buses to the event; register now.

groups. Mrs. Roch emphasized that even with abortion clinics no longer operating in Kentucky, the March remains vitally important. “We have to love them both,” she said. “A woman many times is in crisis, and we have to love and support our women and show them that the pro life community is not only thinking about the baby, but we’re thinking about you.”

She noted the need for legislators to hear this message clearly. “It’s important that our legislators know that we want to support women and offer them solutions to their crises,” she said, pointing to issues such as health care,

child care, and other supports for women and families. With various groups pushing for proposals such as criminalizing women, Mrs. Roch stressed that the pro life position must remain compassionate and comprehensive.

Last year, a notable number of legislators attended both the Mass and the rally — something Mrs. Roch hopes will continue. Their presence, she said, helps make visible “the community that has traveled there, and the importance of this.”

Kentucky March for Life Event Details

Mass for Life
Date: March 11
Time: 9:30 a.m.
Location: Good Shepherd Parish, Frankfort
Celebrant: Bishop John Iffert

Kentucky March for Life
Rally: After Mass, at a location to be determined (due to Capitol construction)
Procession: To the Cemetery of the Unborn, Frankfort Cemetery
Conclusion: Approximately 3:30 p.m.
Buses will leave Covington at approximately 7:30 a.m. and return at approximately 4:30 p.m. For information or to sign up call the Pro-Life Office (859) 392-1546.

Upcoming winter retreats lead students to Christ in the Eucharist

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

The Office of Youth Ministry is preparing to host two winter retreats, CONNECT26 and SUMMIT26, this February at Thomas More University, Crestview Hills. The retreats are centered around the Eucharist and are “age-appropriate experiences of gathering,” said Youth Minister, Angie Poat. CONNECT26 is for middle school students grades 6-8, while SUMMIT26 is for high school students grades 9-12.

“The winter CONNECT is focused more on the themes of the Eucharist, and a conversion of heart, falling deeper in love with Christ in a way that’s appealing to sixth, seventh and eighth graders,” said Mrs. Poat. “It takes their emotional, spiritual, learning needs into account and the day is structured particularly for that age group.”

The one-day Eucharistic retreat, held Feb. 21, 9:30 a.m. – 4:20 p.m., is “intended to energize young people for an experience with the larger Church that they can take back to their parishes,” said Mrs. Poat.

Registrations are open until all spots are filled. To register visit covdio.org/youth.

“It can either be a refresher and a renewal in their faith, or it could be a launching point for personal engagement with their faith,” she said.

While CONNECT26 is a one-day event, SUM-

Youth Retreats — Register now!

CONNECT26
For middle school students, grades 6–8
Feb. 21, 9:30 a.m.–4:20 p.m.
On the Thomas More University campus.

SUMMIT26
For high school students, grades 9–12
Feb. 27–March 1
On the Thomas More University campus.

Both retreats are sponsored by the Diocese of Covington, Youth Ministry and will be held on the campus of Thomas More University, Crestview Hills.

To register visit <https://covdio.org/youth/>.

MIT26 spans three days Feb. 27 – March 1, and “is very specific in its purpose,” said Mrs. Poat. “It’s more like a conference. Students go to keynote talks, they go to breakout sessions, they get to choose where they go. But everything leads into a deeper experience and understanding of the Eucharist,” she said.

The theme for SUMMIT26 is “Be Martyrs,” an inspiration from the upcoming themes of World Youth Day and Pope Leo’s messaging. Additionally, the venues patron saint, Thomas More, “serves as an inspiration for us to both witness our faith and to let go of some of the things in our culture, even if it means being a martyr ... standing for your faith,” said Mrs. Poat.

Registration for SUMMIT26 is open until all spots have been filled. Visit covdio.org/youth.

“It doesn’t matter how students come, we just want them to come,” said Mrs. Poat. “We will make sure that everybody is welcomed, valued and accompanied during this retreat. The goal is to lead them to Jesus and to community.”



Keener photo

Candlemas Day

On the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, Feb. 2, Bishop-Emeritus Roger Foys celebrated Mass at the Curia’s Oratory of St. Paul. The feast day is celebrated 40 days after Christmas and, as Bishop Foys noted in his homily, is the last feast of Christmas. The day is also World Day for Consecrated Life, honoring men and women who have dedicated their lives to religious life. Pope John Paul II attached the day celebrating consecrated life to Candlemas Day, the day when parishes bless the candles it will use at vigils and during the sacraments for the year. The association is that the lives of men and women religious are the light of Christ to the world. At the Mass, Bishop Foys thanked Notre Dame Sister Marla Monahan, diocesan vicar for religious, and Divine Providence Sister Margaret Stallmeyer, diocesan director for the Tribunal Office, who were in attendance, for their witness and service to the Diocese of Covington. He also blessed candles, which Curia staff were welcome to take and use at home.

Talks on St. Francis of Assisi

Staff report

This Lent, Father Michael Comer, pastor, Mother of God Church, Covington, will be presenting a series of five talks on St. Francis of Assisi. Pope Leo XIV recently declared a Jubilee Year of St. Francis in honor of the 800th anniversary of his death.



“In commemorating the significant anniversary of the eighth centenary of his (St. Francis of Assisi) passing, I wish to join spiritually with the entire Franciscan Family and with all those who will take part in the

commemorative events, hoping that the message of peace may find a profound echo in the Church and society today,” wrote Pope Leo in his letter opening the Jubilee Year.

Father Comer’s series of talks will be held at Mother of God Church on Thursdays, 10:30 a.m. and will be repeated at 6:30 p.m.

The following is the schedule for the talks:

- Feb. 19, Overview of the Life of St. Francis
- Feb. 26, The Call of St. Francis and the First Friars
- March 5, DPAA dinner — No session
- March 12, St. Francis—Apostle of Peace
- March 19, Francis and the Song of Creation
- March 26, Francis and the Cross

All are welcome. No fees, no books.

As the Jubilee Year invites deeper reflection on St. Francis’ enduring witness, Pope Leo offered a prayerful hope for all who take part in the commemoration. “May the example and spiritual legacy of this Saint, strong in faith, steadfast in hope and ardent in active charity towards his neighbour, inspire in everyone the importance of trusting in the Lord, of living a life faithful to the Gospel, and of accepting and illuminating every circumstance and action of life with faith and prayer,” wrote Pope Leo.

St. Thomas Parish to host concert celebrating installation of new Walker hybrid digital–pipe organ

Staff report

St. Thomas Parish, Ft. Thomas, is celebrating a major milestone in its ongoing effort to preserve and enhance the beauty of sacred music — the installation of a new hybrid organ in the parish church. A formal dedication and blessing



Grammy-nominated organist, educator and speaker, Dr. Jan Kraybill, will perform at a concert for the blessing and dedication the new Walker hybrid digital-pipe organ at St. Thomas Church, Ft. Thomas, Feb. 15, 3 p.m.

ing of the new organ is planned for Feb. 15, 3 p.m., featuring Dr. Jan Kraybill.

“We warmly invite parishioners, neighbors and friends from across the community to join us for the dedication concert and experience the beauty of this remarkable new instrument,” said Father Ross Kelsch, pastor. “Hearing the organ fill our church is a moment of great joy and gratitude, and we look forward to sharing its rich and inspiring sound with everyone.”

Dr. Kraybill is a Grammy-nominated organist, educator and speaker whose work spans concert performance, worship and musical leadership around the world. She serves as Organ Conservator at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts and Organist-in-Residence at Community of Christ headquarters in Kansas City.

“Having Dr. Jan Kraybill join us for this dedication is a tremendous gift to our parish and the wider community,” Father Kelsch said. “Her acclaimed career and inspiring musicianship will make this a truly memorable occasion for all who attend.”

The new organ includes several notable enhancements,

including a Festival Trumpet mounted behind the high altar and a Transept Solo Division, designed to fill the church with greater depth, brilliance and flexibility for both liturgical and concert use. In addition, a second console is currently in production, with installation planned for late 2026. This console will be located in the nave near the existing grand piano, providing expanded options for accompanying smaller liturgies, choirs and musical performances.

(Continued on page 13)



HANNAH KEEGAN
Thomas More University
Director for Center for Faith, Mission, and Catholic Education

You’re invited

The Diocese of Covington and the Intercommunity Sisters Peace and Justice Committee invite you to “An Evening of Prayer, Reflection, and Conversation,”

presented by Hannah Keegan, director, Center for Faith, Mission and Catholic Education, Thomas More University, **March 2, 7 p.m.** The presentation will be held at the Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington, and will focus on “Dilexi Te,” Pope Leo’s exhortation On Love for the Poor and “Dilexit Nos,” Pope Francis’ encyclical On the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ.

No preregistration required.



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.



Bishop’s Schedule

Feb. 7
Mass for World Day of Consecrated Life, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 10 a.m.

Feb. 8
Mass and installation of lector of the Permanent Deacons, Cathedral, 10 a.m.

Feb. 10
Confirmation, All Saints Parish, Walton, 7 p.m.

Feb. 11
Confirmation, St. Patrick Parish, Maysville, 7 p.m.

Feb. 12
Confirmation, St. Patrick Parish, Taylor Mill, 7 p.m.

Reporting Misconduct in the Diocese of Covington

Anyone who has experienced sexual misconduct by a cleric, employee or volunteer of the Diocese of Covington is asked to contact Ms. Julie Feinauer, diocesan victims assistance coordinator (859) 392-1515. Professional assistance and pastoral support will be provided in confidentiality and with respect.

A copy of the “Diocesan Policies and Procedures for Addressing Sexual Misconduct” is available by contacting the Chancery, (859) 392-1510 or visiting www.covdio.org and going to “Sexual Misconduct Policy.”

Informando sobre conducta inapropiada en la Diócesis de Covington

Cualquier persona que haya experimentado conducta sexual inapropiada por parte de un clérigo, empleado o voluntario de la Diócesis de Covington está invitada a ponerse en contacto con Ms. Julie Feinauer, coordinadora diocesana para dar asistencia a las víctimas. Teléfono (859) 392-1515. Asistencia profesional y apoyo moral serán ofrecidos de una manera confidencial y con respeto.

Una copia de “Normas y Procedimientos sobre Conducta Sexual Inapropiada” está disponible poniéndose en contacto con la Cancillería, Teléfono (859) 392-1510, o visitando www.covdio.org y marcando “Sexual Misconduct Policy.”

Official Appointments

Effective January 1, 2026

Rev. Msgr. William F. Cleves

Elected to Presbyteral Council, Diocese of Covington, by his brother priests and affirmed by Most Rev. John C. Iffert
Term: Three years
Continues other duties

Rev. Msgr. Gerald L. Reinersman

Elected to Presbyteral Council, Diocese of Covington, by his brother priests and affirmed by Most Rev. John C. Iffert
Term: Three years
Continues other duties

Appointed by the Most Rev. John C. Iffert
Bishop of Covington

Jamie N. Schroeder
Jamie N. Schroeder
Chancellor

Death notice

Messenger columnist Raymond (Ray) A. Smith, age 89, passed away peacefully at his residence Jan. 26, 2026, surrounded by his wife and their eight loving children. For 26 years (1998–2024), Mr. Smith’s monthly “Along the Way” column appeared in *Messenger* offering various life lessons while focusing on God’s love and guidance as the constant theme. “While Ray was a gifted writer, his true motivation was relationship,” said Laura Keener, editor, *Messenger*. “He cared about his readers and enjoyed hearing from them. He would regularly call me to chat about work and to ask what prayers I needed in both my personal and professional life and ask for prayers in return. May he now rest in the loving arms of the Lord he loved and served so well.” A devote Catholic, Mr. Smith was actively involved in his parish community for many years, serving as a lector, choir member, and lay minister. His faith was an integral part of his life and was reflected in the way he served others with kindness, humility and generosity. Mr. Smith was also a commissioned lay pastoral minister for the Diocese of Covington. His full obituary is available online at <https://www.middendorf-funeralhome.com/>.



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Scripture is intended to speak to believers ‘in every age,’ pope says

Josephine Peterson
Catholic News Service

Pope Leo XIV said Scripture is meant to speak directly to believers in today’s world, emphasizing that the Bible is the word of God expressed through human authors during his weekly general audience.

“In every age, the Church is called to re-propose the Word of God in a language capable of being embodied in history and reaching hearts,” he said Feb. 4.

He warned that when Scripture “loses touch with reality, with human hopes and sufferings,” or is proclaimed in language that is “incomprehensible, uncommunicative or anachronistic,” it becomes “ineffective.”

Continuing his catechesis series on Vatican II, the pope said the Bible is not a relic of the past but a living dialogue meant to lead people to know and love God. God chose to communicate through his people, demonstrating his mercy and desire to be close to humanity, the pope said.

Citing the Second Vatican Council’s document “*Dei Verbum*,” the pope said, “the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when he took to himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men.”

It is important to note, he said, that while God is the

principal author of Scripture, human beings were also “true authors,” not simply passive “scribes” sharing God’s words, the pope said, “God never mortifies human beings and their potential!”

He also warned against reading Scripture as though it had no divine origin and were only a relic of the past.

“While Scripture is a text rooted in historical truth, it also contains a limitless spiritual depth that speaks to people of all times and places, communicating above all God’s love and his desire to save us,” the pope said.

Pope Leo said that God, “in his goodness, ensures our lives do not lack the essential nourishment of his word,



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Leo XIV greets people at the conclusion of his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Feb. 4, 2026.

and let us pray that our words, and even more so our lives, do not obscure the love of God that is narrated in them.”

In an appeal he made at the end of the audience, the pope said a prayer for the people of Ukraine, who have endured frequent bombing recently, further impacting their access to power. He also acknowledged that a new START treaty between the United States and Russia was expected to be signed Feb. 5, which would curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Sharing his hope that the treaty be renewed, Pope Leo said in Italian, “I call on you to not let this instrument collapse without trying to guarantee a concrete and effective follow-up. The current situation requires us to do everything possible to break free from a new race of arms that further threatens peace between nations.”



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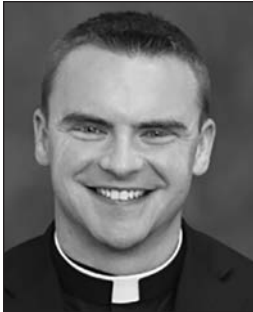
David Stutler Sales Manager

Salt of the earth and the light of the world

The readings for the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle A — are: Isaiah 58:7-10, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and Matthew 5:13-16.

Last Sunday, we entered into Jesus’s famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), and we did so by hearing the equally (if not more so) famous Beatitudes. What the

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Michael Elmlinger

Beatitudes ultimately serve for the remainder of Jesus’s sermon is a sort of framework or foundation upon which and around which he delivers the rest of his teaching. We see this especially in our Gospel for this weekend, where Jesus tells his disciples that they are “the salt of the earth” (5:13) and “the light of the world” (5:14).

To really understand what Jesus is telling his disciples by calling them the “salt of the earth,” we

need to think about what salt is used for. Salt on its own is not really useful. In fact, some people can even find salt on its own to be overpowering. Instead, salt is added to food to give it more flavor, as well as to help preserve the food by helping to draw out the moisture so as to prevent the growth of bacteria, thus extending the lifespan of food.

With this in mind, we can begin to see what Jesus is getting at by calling his disciples the “salt of the earth.” What the disciples are meant to preserve in the world is not food, but goodness. How do they do this? By living according to the Beatitudes that Jesus just delivered, all of which show a different aspect of the life of Christ, who himself was and is poor in spirit, meek, righteous, merciful, clean of heart, a peacemaker, mourns and was persecuted for the sake of righteousness.

By living in the same way that Christ lived on earth, the disciples of Christ are also preserving goodness in the world by drying up evil in the world just as salt dries up the moisture in food. In a world where there is constant war, violence, oppression, and many other evils, the disciples of Christ are to be the very ones through whom goodness continues to live by living according to the way Christ, who is goodness itself, lives.

That then leads us to Jesus telling his disciples that they are “the light of the world.” One of the vocations of Israel through the Old Covenant established through Abraham and Moses was that Israel was to be “a light to the world” (cf. Isaiah 60:1-3). The way they are to be so is by the very instruction that we see in our first reading from Isaiah: “share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked when you see them, and do not turn your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn...” (58:7-8). As we just discussed previously about the salt of the earth, there is much evil in the world, and this shows that the Kingdom of Darkness still reigns in the world. Christian disciples, however, are to be the light that shines in the darkness, showing to the world the love that God has for us by loving one another as he has loved us (cf. John 13:34).

To conclude this reflection, I would like to share a quote from a homily by St. John Chrysostom that I came across during my research for this passage which I believe sums up what it means for Christians to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world beautifully: “Assuredly there would be no heathen, if we Christians took care to be what we ought to be; if we obeyed God’s precepts, if we bore injuries without retaliation, if when cursed we blessed, if we rendered good for evil. For no man is so savage a wild beast that he would not run forth with to the worship of the true religion, if he saw all Christians acting as I have said.”


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

Years of hope and peace

In November of 2025, I was blessed with my first travel to Italy. It was a pilgrimage with Father Conor Kunath from our Covington Diocese for the Jubilee Year of Hope. Some friends from my Thomas More College days joined me for the trip of our lifetime.

Hearing that Pope Leo announced 2026 the year of St. Francis of Assisi is remarkable. As pilgrims to Assisi, I learned that St. Francis was the first saint to receive the stigmata and that the 800th anniversary of his death was near.

VIEWPOINT



Ronald M. Bertsch

Although our sites in Rome and Florence were amazing — perfect weather, three opportunities to see and hear Pope Leo, walking through all four Holy Doors of the major basilicas, climbing to the top of the dome of St. Peter’s, touring the Vatican Museum and Sistine Chapel, observing Roman ruins, attending Mass in

the catacombs — my favorite stop was in Assisi.

To see the most beloved St. Francis’ birth home, his relics and being among the mountain top basilicas where he, St. Clare and her sister, St. Agnes, are honored, buried and remembered was incredible. The spectacular views, surrounded by olive groves were stunning, awe inspiring, and immersed us in a truly reverent mood. St. Carlo Acutis is laid to rest in Assisi. He is the world’s first millennial saint inspiring us all, especially the youth, through his devotion and love of the Holy Eucharist.

It was the peaceful and spiritual aspect of Assisi compared to the hectic, crowded and tourist-type atmosphere in Rome and Florence that stood out to me.

While in Assisi, I reflected on my ministry at DCCH Center for Children and Families and this peace and hope we seek for ourselves and the children. DCCH had developed a recruitment campaign that highlighted the gift of hope and peace that foster and adoptive parents can give

to a child in care. I think last year’s Jubilee of Hope, and now the Year of St. Francis with Pope Leo’s desire for this to bring peace to our world is not coincidental.

In Assisi, we saw the original San Damiano Cross now hanging in St. Clare’s Basilica. It is an interesting cross, called an icon crucifix due to the images surrounding Jesus. This very cross is where St. Francis, when just 23 years old, prayed and sought God’s will for his life. Three times Christ audibly spoke to young Francis with the words, “Go Francis, rebuild my house, which you can see, is in ruin.”

What can we learn from St. Francis’ life? God answers us when we ask and seek his will. We can start small with what is in front of us. Then uncovering deeper meaning and layers, God can unfold perhaps an even bigger mission that might blow our minds when we are obedient.

Father Kunath celebrated Mass several times and celebrated other Masses of our pilgrimage. In one of his homilies, he challenged us pilgrims without debate to know and trust God’s love for us. He asked us what we were doing to show our love in return. On judgment day, what are we going to have to say for ourselves?

Father Kunath shared another message that really got me thinking. In examining our consciences, we might find less temptation or guilt with sins of commission, but what about our sins of omission? Do we miss opportunities to help our neighbor, do we skip, excuse or push aside the call for various reasons? Do we even recognize our sin of omission because selfish interests blind us to others’ needs?

Let us pray for God’s will. We know seeking a life of holiness, loving God and neighbor by caring for the less fortunate are God’s two greatest commandments for us.

If you are interested in learning how you might meet the needs of others through adoption, foster care or mentoring, contact DCCHcenter.org. A special informational meeting is planned for Thursday, Feb. 26 starting at 6:30 p.m.

Ronald M. Bertsch is director of Therapeutic Foster Care/Adoption for the DCCH Center for Children and Families, Ft. Mitchell.

Catholicism: The greatest patron of the arts

The Catholic Church is the greatest patron of the arts in human history. Ever. No contest.

The Church preserved literacy after the fall of Rome. Western music and theatre were born from the Holy Mass. Catholicism practically sponsored the Renaissance.

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Bradley Torline

And over centuries, the Church has peppered the entire planet with breath-taking works of sacred architecture, many of which we now casually refer to as “the church on the corner.” Not to mention the cathedrals and basilicas.

In short, the world is a more beautiful place because of the Catholic Church. But why?

Why, when so many other religions, denominations, and worldviews drift toward iconoclasm or

aesthetic suspicion, do the Church and the arts go so naturally hand in hand?

The answer is part theology, part mission and part love.

At the heart of Catholic theology is a decisive rejection of the idea common in many religious and philosophical systems that “spirit is good” and “matter is bad.”

From the very beginning, Scripture tells us that God created the material world and declared it good. Creation itself speaks of his glory. And our faith is radically incarnational — God does not merely rescue us from the world; he enters into it!

God literally took on flesh. The God-man, Jesus Christ, stepped into material creation not only to save our souls, but to “restore all things” in a creation that, as St. Paul says, “groans” in “eager longing” for “the revelation of the sons of God.”

You are not a soul trapped in a body; you are an embodied soul. And God seeks to redeem your body as well as your soul. More than that, he invites you to collaborate with him in restoring the world around you.

There is a mystery at the heart of the Christian vision: man stands as the crown of creation, and creation follows him. When the human soul is disordered, the world reflects that disorder. When the soul is rightly ordered, beauty and harmony spring up around it.

For this reason, the Church’s mission has never been limited to saving souls alone; it has always included the renewal of the temporal world, the restoration of all things.

Then there is love. Beauty is the source and summit, the alpha and omega of love. Beauty draws love to rest in it and ignites love to go forth from it and create more beauty. The beauty of a woman strikes a young man’s heart and suddenly he finds himself bringing her flowers, taking her to see sunsets and listening to music with her. Her beauty strikes him and inspires him to bring more beauty to her.

The Church loves God. And the Church loves people. So, we build beautiful churches. We make beautiful art. We sing beautiful music. Why? To glorify God and to edify the faithful.

Like the smitten young man bringing flowers to the woman he loves, the Church brings beauty to God, not because God needs it, but because love overflows and because beauty begets beauty. We also create beauty because we are children imitating the Father we love —

(Continued on page 13)

Career readiness at Holy Cross, from college to the trades — a path for everyone

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

Participation in post-secondary education has been on the rise since the 1950s, creating a national cultural shift — high school graduates don’t go to work, they go to school. College admissions have been growing steadily over the last half a century and to accommodate this shift, many high schools have turned into centers of college preparation. This leaves little room for the students who wish to pursue what would now be considered a non-traditional career path, such as the trades.

At Holy Cross District High School, Covington, they are bridging the divide, providing opportunities for students to explore a profession in the trades, even before graduation.

James Resing, instructor of the newly revised “Intro to the Trades” class, has three goals for the students in his class: to grow in confidence using power tools, to pick up a new hobby and “the introduction of career paths to students who might not be seeking college,” he said.

Mr. Resing’s class explores the basics of HVAC, plumbing, electric and carpentry. The students build walls, run wiring to plugs and switches, solder copper pipes and build toilets. At the end of each semester, the students participate in an “open workshop,” said Mr. Resing.

The success of the program is evident, with more classes being added due to the demand of students who wish to register. In addition, six students who have gone through Mr. Resing’s class have secured an apprenticeship in the trades.

The apprentice program is for students who have expressed an interest in a career through the trades. Structured as a cooperative education opportunity, the students are gainfully employed in a trade. They attend school for half a day, completing all their core class requirements, before heading to work.

“One of them is in facilities maintenance, one is actually working for a car dealership in mechanics, one is in HVAC and I have a couple that are with builders,” said Mr. Resing.

Hannah Knox, graduation and career counselor, said, “I’ve seen a different confidence. They have found something that excites them so they’re different at school. They want to be here; they want to be involved. Because they know that when they go to their job site, they’re going to also get to do what they love.”

Facilities maintenance apprentice, Grant, said, “I feel like it is giving me a clear path on which trades I want to get into and how to go about getting into this trade. It has given me experience while I’m still in school.”

“This is all about exploration,” said Mr. Resing. “This is all about giving them a place to try and realize it’s not for them, and then I’ll help them find something else.”

Career readiness at Holy Cross District High School means “building successful individuals who are going to be positive members in a community,” said Mrs. Knox.



(above top) Mr. Resing works with groups of four, each stationed at a work bench, and helps them with their project.

(above bottom) In “Intro to the Trades” students learn to work with power tools. With the help of Mr. Resing, students gain the confidence needed to work with the machines needed in the trades.

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PEOPLE AND EVENTS

The prayer intention for February, as suggested by Pope Leo XIV, is for children suffering from incurable diseases and their families, that they may receive the necessary medical care and support, never losing strength and hope.

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://covidio.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 blenihan@nduec.org.

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://covidio.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://covidio.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 covidio.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 pre-registration 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://covidio.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://covidio.org/register> or contact Isaak A. Isaak at (859) 392-1529 or iisaak@covidio.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@covidio.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.



Basilica and bourbon
The Holy Name Society of St. Henry Parish, Elsmere, took two truly Kentucky tours, Jan. 17: the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington and New Riff Bourbon Distillery, Newport. The men enjoyed both spirited tours.

A story of forgiveness in the face of tragedy inspires students during Catholic Schools Week

Bailey photos

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

A story of tragedy, loss, grief and despair turned into a story of love, hope, forgiveness and mercy when Matthew and Rebecca Seifried turned to their faith after the death of their eight-month-old daughter, Lucia Iris. The Seifrieds traveled from their home in Michigan to St. Henry District High School Erlanger, alma mater of Mr. Seifried, to tell students their story.

On April 26, 2025, just days after celebrating the risen Christ at Easter, the young family of four was enjoying a peaceful evening by the lake when, “We see this massive white Toyota Tundra coming straight for us,” said Mr. Seifried. “It ended up continuing to come and hit Lucia. We knew instantly that she had died.”

Mr. Seifried sustained injuries to his knee and leg after the truck pinned him against a tree before tumbling into the shallow lake. The driver, relatively uninjured, was later arrested for operating a vehicle under the influence and was charged with second-degree murder. The driver pleaded no contest to the felony charge in a January court appearance.

Mrs. Seifried and the couple’s eldest son were uninjured and accompanied the ambulances to the hospital where Lucia was pronounced dead. “We don’t even really have the words to explain the feeling other than just a complete and empty hollowness,” said Mr. Seifried. “It felt like a darkness that was shredding us apart from the inside.”

When the Seifried family was able to see Lucia in the hospital, they made a conscious decision that, “No matter what emotions we feel in the coming days, we will not let this take us from our God, from faith, from Christ. This is the cross that God wants us to carry, and we will bear it,” said Mr. Seifried.

In the days and weeks following Lucia’s passing, the Seifrieds felt God’s presence and knew that he was accompanying them through this journey of loss.

“We say nobody should have to go through what we’ve been through. But we do wish everybody could experience what it was like to have the presence of God in those two-week periods. If you did, you would never question if God is real; you would never question your faith,” said Mr. Seifried.

Together, the Seifried family began to choose forgiveness and eventually offered the driver a plea deal of 13.5 years in prison.

“Through much prayer, we decided that in order to show mercy as Christ has asked, we decided to offer a plea deal,” said Mr. Seifried.

“Us forgiving him doesn’t mean that it just erases what he’s done to us,” said Mrs. Seifried. “It allows us to be able to have peace in our hearts and to then allow him to start reviving his own soul.”

“We could make the choice of anger, bitterness, hate, or we can choose what Christ wants us to choose. We can choose love, forgiveness, mercy,” said Mr. Seifried. “And, while some days it’s much easier than others, that’s the path that we really want to choose. We want to choose love; we want to choose mercy.”



(above left) Matthew and Rebecca Seifried joined St. Henry District High School students, Jan. 30, to share their story of tragedy and forgiveness through Christ’s love.

(above right) Rebecca Seifried emphasizes the importance of a Christian community, “Tragedy will not escape you. We are humans here on earth ... having that faith community is what’s going to hold you together while you’re going through it.”

(below) Teary-eyed students and teachers alike listen as the Seifrieds detail their grief and loss, as they keep alive the memory of their daughter, Lucia Iris.





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Olympics 2026: Pope calls for ‘healthy competition’ to unite people at Winter Games

Junno Arocho Esteves
OSV News

In a message to the Archdiocese of Milan, Pope Leo XIV expressed his hope that the 2026 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games will be an occasion of solidarity and bridge-building between peoples and cultures.

The papal message was read during a Jan. 29 Mass marking the arrival of the “Cross of Athletes” and the official launch of the archdiocese’s Olympic pastoral initiative, “For Each Other.”

In his message, which was signed on his behalf by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, the pope said he hoped the Olympic Games would bring about “sentiments of friendship and fraternity, strengthening awareness of the value of sport at the service of the integral development of the human person.”

“The Holy Father assures his prayers so that these days of healthy competition may contribute to building bridges between cultures and peoples, promoting hospitality, solidarity, and peace,” the message stated.

The “For Each Other” initiative, which will coincide with the Feb. 6-22 Winter Olympics and the March 6-15 Paralympics, will feature activities, performances and events hosted in parishes across Milan.

At the heart of the activities will be the 11th-century Basilica di San Babila, dedicated to St. Babylas of Antioch, where the opening Mass was celebrated and which will be known as the “Church of Athletes” throughout the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

During the Mass, the “Cross of Athletes” was entrusted to the archdiocese by Athletica Vaticana, the Holy See’s sports association. Blessed by Pope Francis at the 2013 World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, the cross has been placed in chapels in the Olympic host cities of London in 2012 and Paris in 2024.

According to the Archdiocese of Milan, the cross, which will remain at the altar in the Basilica di San Babila until the end of the Paralympics, “symbolizes the close bond between sporting activities and the values of solidarity, inclusion, and personal growth.”

In his homily, Archbishop Mario Delpini of Milan said the Olympic and Paralympic Games could serve as a form of rigorous spiritual education, describing the athletic competitions as “school of asceticism” and a “school of life” where one learns how to handle both victory and defeat.

For Olympians and Paralympians, the games will be a chance to learn “what strength is needed to accept defeat without becoming depressed, to live victory without becoming arrogant, to live through the disordered reactions of others, the unexpected anger, the irritating stubbornness, the paralyzing discouragement.”

Reflecting on the presence of the “Cross of Athletes,” which features a void silhouette of Christ’s crucified body, Archbishop Delpini said the cross offered “more of a glimpse than a figure” of the body of Christ that “encourages our questions, our gaze, and our attention.”

“If you want to know what love is, if you want to know if there is hope,” the archbishop said, “look to Jesus, adore the crucified and risen body, listen to his words and follow him, for he is the way, the truth, and the life.”



OSV News photo/Archdiocese of Milan

Members of Athletica Vaticana, the Holy See’s sports association, entrust the “Cross of Athletes” to Archbishop Mario Delpini of Milan outside the Basilica di San Babila in Milan Jan. 29, 2026. The cross was entrusted to the archdiocese ahead of the 2026 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in Milan and Cortina d’Ampezzo.

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Pope praises religious for courageous witness serving the marginalized



OSV News photo/Simone Risoluti, Vatican Media

Pope Leo XIV receives the gifts from women religious as he celebrates Mass marking the feast of the Presentation of the Lord in St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican Feb. 2, 2026. The Mass also marked the Vatican celebration of the World Day for Consecrated Life.

Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service

Pope Leo XIV praised consecrated men and women for going to the world’s peripheries and refusing to abandon their people, even amid conflict.

“They remain, often stripped of all security, as a living reminder — more eloquent than words — of the inviolable sacredness of life in its most vulnerable conditions,” he said Feb. 2 in his homily for Candlemas — the feast of the Presentation of the Lord — which also marks the Catholic Church’s celebration of World Day for Consecrated Life.

“Even where weapons roar and arrogance, self-interest and violence seem to prevail,” he said, the presence of these consecrated men and women “proclaims the words of Jesus” in his parable of the lost sheep: “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for ... their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father.”

The pope’s Mass began with the pope blessing with holy water the candles used for the entrance procession. Dozens of consecrated men and women led the candlelit procession while the lights in St. Peter’s Basilica remained dimmed, and thousands of people who filled the basilica held lit candles as well.

After the darkened basilica was filled with light, Pope Leo, who joined the Order of St. Augustine as a young man and served as a missionary in Peru for decades, reflected on the mission of religious men and women in the Church and in the world.

“Dear brothers and sisters, the Church asks you to be prophets — messengers who announce the presence of the Lord and prepare the way for him,” he said in his homily. “You are called to this mission above all through the sacri-

ficial offering of your lives, rooted in prayer and in a readiness to be consumed by charity,” he said.

Docile to the action of the Holy Spirit, the founders and foundresses of their religious orders and communities offer “wonderful models of how to fulfil this mandate faithfully and effectively,” he said.

“Living in constant tension between earth and heaven, they allowed themselves to be guided with faith and courage,” he said. Some founders “were led to the silence of the cloister; others to the demands of the apostolate,” but all of them returned “humbly and wisely, to the foot of the cross and to the tabernacle, where they offered everything and discovered in God both the source and the goal of all their actions.”

Pope Leo highlighted those founders who “embarked on perilous undertakings.”

“They became a prayerful presence in hostile or indifferent environments; a generous hand and a friendly shoulder amid degradation and abandonment; and witnesses of peace and reconciliation in situations marked by violence and hatred,” he said. “They were ready to bear the consequences of going against the current, becoming, in Christ, a ‘sign of contradiction,’ sometimes even to the point of martyrdom.”

One way to honor these brothers and sisters, he said, is “by carrying forward their legacy.”

“You are called to bear witness to God’s saving presence in history for all peoples, even within a society in which false and reductive understandings of the human person increasingly widen the gap between faith and life,” he said.

“You are called to testify that the young, the elderly, the

poor, the sick and the imprisoned hold a sacred place above all else on God’s altar and in his heart,” he said, and to show how each of the least is “an inviolable sanctuary of God’s presence, before whom we must bend our knee, in order to encounter him, adore him and give him glory.”

Many religious communities have established “outposts of the Gospel ... in a wide variety of challenging contexts, even in the midst of conflict,” he said. “These communities do not abandon their people, nor do they flee” as they seek to uphold the sacredness of human life in its most vulnerable conditions.

“Consecrated life, in its serene detachment from all that is passing, reveals the inseparable bond between authentic care for earthly realities and a hope filled with love for what is eternal” and gives meaning to everything else, he said.

Through their promise to follow Christ more closely by professing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, consecrated men and women “empty” themselves so that Christ, “the one eternal messenger of the covenant who remains present among humanity today, can melt and purify hearts with his love, grace and mercy,” Pope Leo said.

Through this self-emptying and life in the Spirit, he said, consecrated men and women “can show the world the way to overcome conflict, sowing fraternity through the freedom of those who love and forgive without measure.”

“Dear consecrated men and women, today the Church gives thanks to the Lord and to you for your presence,” he said, encouraging them “to be leaven of peace and signs of hope wherever Providence may lead you.”

Illinois pitching for funds to shore up abortion tourism denounced as ‘macabre’



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Leo XIV welcomes Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker to a meeting room attached to the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Nov. 19, 2025. Pritzker announced Jan. 28, 2027, the launch of the \$5 million dollar Prairie State Access Fund to support Illinois’ abortion tourism industry. Robert Gilligan, executive director of the Catholic Conference of Illinois, called it “macabre” to help people “end the life of their unborn child.”

Simone Orendain
OSV News

The executive director of the Illinois bishops’ conference and an Illinois pro-life leader have decried the state’s call for funding to support Illinois’ abortion tourism industry after recent data indicated a slight weakening in the number of out-of-state women coming to the state to abort their unborn children.

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker announced Jan. 28 the launch of the \$5 million dollar Prairie State Access Fund, calling it “an example of true public and private sector partnership” that would help build “a more connected and resourced reproductive health ecosystem.”

The tourism aspect of the governor’s appeal was not lost on Robert Gilligan, executive director of the Catholic Conference of Illinois.

“When we are publicly asking for private donations to subsidize services for people who want to come to Illinois for an abortion ... we should all think about what that really means,” Gilligan told OSV News. “Most states, many places, entice people to come to their states for: various cultural activities, the weather, many other things. And here we are, trying to provide abortion-related services, so people can end the life of their unborn child. It’s so macabre.”

The Catholic Church teaches that all human life is sacred from conception to natural death, and as such, both opposes direct abortion and calls for strengthening support for those living in poverty or other risk factors that can push mothers toward aborting their unborn child.

With nearly 22.6% of the nation’s share of the 155,000 out-of-state abortions in 2024, Pritzker touted Illinois as the No. 1 out-of-state abortion destination in the U.S. The data has been tracked by the Guttmacher Institute, an abortion and reproductive health policy and research group that advocates for abortion, since the 2022 overturning of Roe v.

Wade. The 2022 U.S. Supreme Court decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization relegated the legality of abortion to individual states.

Nearby Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee have banned abortion and their residents make up a significant portion of the out-of-state women seeking abortion in Illinois. In downstate Illinois, one Planned Parenthood clinic told local media in the spring of 2025, 90% of its clients were from neighboring states.

According to Guttmacher, 39% of abortions in Illinois were from out-of-state travel in 2024. However, Guttmacher also found that out-of-state abortions were also down from the year before, when 43% of all abortions in Illinois were from out of state.

Illinois Right to Life President Mary Kate Zander said “this new program” raises the issue of funding abortion tourism to a level beyond Illinois.

“Pro-life and pro-parents’ rights Americans need to start paying attention to what’s going on in our state, because this is officially a national problem. If we don’t put a stop to the madness, we are going to be a national foothold for all sorts of reproductive atrocities and these ‘public-private partnerships’ are only the beginning,” she told OSV News in an email.

Zander also criticized the fund’s ties to the encouragement of gender dysphoria, calling out what she described as “Pritzker’s obsession over abortion and sex transitions.”

The governor said the fund was a response to the Trump administration’s “all out assault on abortion and gender-affirming care.”

Planned Parenthood, the nation’s largest abortion provider, which is poised to benefit significantly from the fund, also provides gender transition services, such as hormone therapy and puberty blockers.

The U.S. Catholic bishops approved in November an updated version of their guiding document on Catholic health care explaining the church’s opposition to such services on the basis that “any technological intervention that does not accord with the fundamental order of the human person as a unity of body and soul, including the sexual difference inscribed in the body, ultimately does not help but, rather, harms the human person.”

At the Chicago press conference announcing the fund, Pritzker said, “Ensuring clinics can stay open, providers can grow, and systems can handle the demand that’s being put on them, this is a task that requires all of us — across government, across business, philanthropy, and just everyday people who want to support this work.”

Pritzker and other officials, including the head of the Chicago Abortion Fund, made a pitch for other states across the country to contribute to the fund.

Ameya Pawar, president of the Chicago-based Michael Reese Health Trust, which is overseeing the fund, said, “As federal policy and courts have narrowed access, Illinois is not just a haven. In many ways, it is the nation’s safety net for this healthcare.”

The Illinois conference’s Gilligan said while the state’s heavy-handed support of abortion continues to escalate, the Church has “some opportunities here that we have not really fully taken advantage of.”

He pointed to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ 5-year-old program called “Walking With Moms in Need,” which is a parish-based support system for women who find themselves unexpectedly pregnant.

Gilligan said the program, as well as the difficult topic of abortion, needs to be talked about more in churches.

“But with that, I would underscore, it has to be done in a manner that is not judgmental and in a manner that is compassionate,” he said.

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DMI helped two parishes

(Continued from page 1)

plaints. “Hearing all of that is the opportunity to help us grow,” she said.

“It helps us increase our faith, increase our discipleship, increase our spirituality and increase the Sunday Mass experience. That’s what we wanted. We wanted to hear all the responses so that we could take that as an opportunity to help us improve and grow,” she said.

And now, three years later; the DMI’s second round will help to take a pulse on the success of the efforts of parishes like Divine Mercy and St. Bernard. “I hope that we have met the expectations, and maybe even exceeded the expectations, of our parishioners,” said Ms. Zilliox, “so that they are inspired to come to Church, to come to events, to participate as active parishioners and ask others to join them.”

Greatest patron of the arts

(Continued from page 5)

and our Father is the Great Creator.

A final thought. Art is “useless” in the ordinary sense of the word. It is not a tool. It is not efficient. It does not maximize productivity. And that is precisely why our hyper-utilitarian age is suspicious of it. Why build something beautiful when it is cheaper to build something ugly? Why spend time and money on art when we could be advancing, optimizing, streamlining?

But eventually a deeper question presses itself upon us: Advancing toward what? Optimizing for what, ultimately? If life becomes nothing more than working to live and living to work, making things faster, better and more efficient for efficiency’s sake, then we end up empty.

Because human beings, like art, are not meant to be used up and discarded for the sake of progress, no matter how noble the cause. Art is not cherished because it is useful. It is cherished because it is good in and of itself. Just like the human person.

Art reminds us that you and I were not made merely to work, pay bills and die. We were made for something more. Something beautiful.

Brad Torline is executive director for The Angelico Project, an organization dedicated to building Catholic culture through beauty and the arts, online at www.AngelicoProject.org.



Obituary

Betty Ann Goller, the eldest child of William and Margaret Goller, was born on Feb. 23, 1939, into a proud Irish family with German influence from her father. She grew up in a household rich in tradition and deeply rooted in Catholic values.

Betty Ann attended St. Agnes School in Bond Hill, Ohio, where she first encountered the Sisters of Notre Dame, a relationship that would shape the course of her vocation. After completing eighth grade, she became an aspirant and continued her education at Notre Dame Academy. As a senior in high school, she took the next step in her religious journey and became a postulant. Sister Mary Sharron was professed on Aug. 16, 1959.

Sister Mary Sharron pursued higher education with dedication and purpose. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education from Villa Madonna College, now Thomas More University, and later completed a Master of Arts degree at the University of Kentucky. She also pursued further studies at Xavier University and received her Administrative Certificate.

Throughout her ministry, Sister Mary Sharron served in numerous schools across the Diocese of Covington and the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. Her leadership and passion for Catholic education led her to serve as principal at Prince of Peace in Covington, Ky.; St. Bernard in Taylor Creek, Ohio; and St. Charles in Carthage, Ohio.

In 2001, Sister Mary Sharron began a ministry especially dear to her heart at Holy Cross High School. There, she served as a special education teacher, religion teacher, and grant writer, touching countless lives with her compas-



Sister Mary Sharron Goller

sion, patience and wisdom. Even after her retirement in 2018, she continued to volunteer at Holy Cross for several years, demonstrating her unwavering love for the school community.

In November 2023, Sister retired to Lourdes Hall at the St. Charles Campus, where she spent her later days surrounded by the care and friendship of her religious community.

Sister Mary Sharron passed away peacefully on Jan. 30, 2026. She was preceded in death by her parents. She is survived by her brother, William Goller, her sister, Margaret Unterbrink, and beloved nieces and nephews.

Sister Mary Sharron will be remembered for her deep faith, her steadfast service, and the many lives she shaped through education and commitment to her calling. Her

legacy lives on in the students she nurtured, the schools she strengthened, and the community that loved her. May she enjoy the reward she so gracefully deserves.

Mass of Christian Burial was held Feb. 5, at St. Agnes Church, Ft. Wright, with interment in the convent cemetery. Memorials are suggested to The Sisters of Notre Dame, Covington, Kentucky.

St. Thomas Parish to host concert

(Continued from page 3)

In October, teams from Walker Organ Company and Colby Pipe Organs began the careful process of removing the former console and installing the new console in the choir loft. The new instrument blends modern digital technology with traditional pipework, creating a versatile and enduring organ that will serve the parish’s liturgical life for generations to come.

The existing Möller pipe organ, originally installed in 1980, served St. Thomas faithfully for more than four decades. Over time, however, the pneumatic lines and pipework deteriorated significantly, with some metal pipes beginning to collapse and fail. These conditions made a comprehensive refurbishment both timely and necessary. As part of the project, many of the original Möller pipes were preserved, restored, and incorporated into the new instrument, allowing the legacy of the original organ to continue in renewed form.

The restored pipes were returned to St. Thomas and reinstalled in January, including pipework placed under the rose window, marking a significant milestone in the completion of the instrument.

This significant project has been made possible through the generosity of parishioners and benefactors who share St. Thomas Parish’s commitment to sacred music and the enhancement of worship. “I am sincerely grateful to everyone who contributed to this effort,” said Father Ross Kelsch, pastor. “Through their generosity, our parish has been blessed with an instrument that will

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Bulletins:

February bulletin: posted Sunday, Feb. 1; due Tuesday, March 3.

The monthly e-mail reminder of a new bulletin posted will come from system@pub.virtus.org.

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Monday, Feb. 9, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

Tuesday, Feb. 17, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

Tuesday, Feb. 17, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

Tuesday, Feb. 24, 6:30–9 p.m., Diocesan Catholic Children's Home, Training Room, Miller Building, Ft. Mitchell

Tuesday, March 3, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

Tuesday, March 3, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

Thursday, March 19, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

Thursday, March 19, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

Wednesday, April 15, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

Wednesday, April 15, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

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NEWS BRIEFS

National/World

Sister Thea Bowman’s sainthood moving forward to Vatican review

JACKSON, Miss. — Servant of God Thea Bowman’s canonization cause is moving ahead, with a Mass and ceremony marking the closure of the cause’s diocesan phase to be held Feb. 9 at the Cathedral of St. Peter the Apostle in Jackson, Mississippi. Bishop Joseph R. Kopacz of Jackson will celebrate a Mass of thanksgiving at noon followed by an official closing session of the diocesan phase of the canonization process, where the cause’s leaders will seal the boxes containing the diocesan phase’s documents and findings. Those boxes will be shipped to the apostolic nunciature in Washington for transfer to the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican, which will further investigate the cause. In 2018, Bishop Kopacz opened the cause for Sister Bowman, a Mississippi native and the only African American member of her religious community, the Wisconsin-based Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. Before she died of cancer in 1990 at age 52, she was a widely known speaker, evangelizer, singer and trailblazer for Black Catholics.

Pope adds feast day of St. John Henry Newman to universal calendar

VATICAN CITY — Pope Leo XIV has added the feast day of St. John Henry Newman, who is “a radiant light for the Church on pilgrimage through history,” to the General Roman Calendar so that “his Optional Memorial be celebrated by all on 9 October.” Cardinal Arthur Roche and Archbishop Vittorio Francesco Viola, respectively prefect and secretary of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, announced the pope’s decision in a decree published by the Vatican Feb. 3. Cardinal Roche said the inclusion of St. Newman in the General Roman Calendar “is intended to present his figure as an outstanding example of the constant search for the truth that enlightens and saves” and to help the faithful contemplate him “as a man led by the ‘kindly light’ of God’s grace to find peace within the Catholic Church.” Bishops’ conferences around the world will need to translate from Latin the prayers issued by the dicastery for Mass on his feast day as well as those used in the Liturgy of the Hours and in the Roman Martyrology, and have the translations confirmed by the dicastery.

Traditionalist society to consecrate new bishops in July without papal mandate

ROME — The traditionalist Society of St. Pius X announced it will move forward this summer with the consecration of new bishops — without a papal mandate — a step that could trigger automatic excommunication under Church law. In a

Father Davide Pagliarani, authorized the consecrations, scheduled for July 1, citing a breakdown in recent communication with the Holy See. Father Pagliarani had sought an audience with Pope Leo XIV to discuss the society’s future and the need for new bishops, but said the Vatican’s response failed to address those concerns. Invoking what he described as an “objective state of grave necessity” for souls, Father Pagliarani said the decision followed the unanimous advice of his council. The justification echoes arguments used by the SSPX’s founder, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, who consecrated bishops without papal approval in 1988 — an act later deemed schismatic by St. John Paul II. The Vatican has spent decades seeking reconciliation with the SSPX, including lifting excommunications in 2009 and granting limited sacramental faculties under Popes Benedict XVI and Francis. The society said further explanations are forthcoming.

Lapse of last US-Russia nuclear treaty ‘simply unacceptable,’ says Archbishop Coakley

WASHINGTON — As global tensions soar, the head of the nation’s Catholic bishops has denounced the lapse of a key nuclear arms agreement, while urging policymakers to hold to its terms. “The dangers posed by current conflicts around the world, including the devastating war in Ukraine, make the forthcoming expiration of New START simply unacceptable,” said Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a Feb. 3 statement. Signed in 2010, New START limited the U.S. and the Russian Federation to 1,550 nuclear warheads each, allowing for on-site inspections and information exchanges. The treaty’s original 10-year term was mutually extended through Feb. 4, 2026. With the last remaining bilateral agreement on nuclear arms between the two superpowers now expiring — and with little momentum on either side to seek a renewal of its terms — analysts have predicted an accelerated nuclear arms race. “I call upon policymakers to courageously pursue diplomatic negotiations to maintain New START’s limits, opening pathways toward disarmament,” said Archbishop Coakley. He added that “international policy disagreements, as serious as they are, cannot be used as excuses for diplomatic stalemates; on the contrary, they should spur us on to more vehemently pursue effective engagement and dialogue.” He added, “I call

ardently pray that we, as an international community, may develop the courage to pursue an authentic, transformative, and lasting peace.”

Trump administration asks federal court to pause Louisiana’s abortion pill challenge

WASHINGTON — A key national pro-life group has accused the Department of Justice of undermining Louisiana’s efforts to roll back the Biden administration’s eased restrictions on mifepristone when it asked a court Jan. 27 to pause the Pelican State’s challenge to that policy. In October 2025, Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill, alongside Rosalie Markezich, who said she was coerced into taking abortifacient drugs by her then-boyfriend, sued the Food and Drug Administration over a policy permitting mifepristone, a drug commonly but not exclusively used for early abortion, to be dispersed by mail. The suit says that the policy enabled Markezich’s former partner to acquire the drug and then coerce her into taking it. But in a Jan. 27 court filing, DOJ lawyers said a safety review of mifepristone is underway, and argued the plaintiffs “threaten to short circuit the agency’s orderly review and study of the safety risks of mifepristone.” The plaintiff’s request to end mail-order distribution of the drug, their filing said, “may prove as unnecessary as it is disruptive, if FDA ultimately decides that the in-person dispensing requirement must be restored.” Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, said in a Jan. 27 statement, that the “denial of justice by the DOJ is completely unacceptable.” She said, “It slams the door on women like Rosalie Markezich and their babies, who are suffering very real harm as the Trump-Vance administration refuses to reimplement basic guardrails on deadly mail-order abortion drugs.” A DOJ spokesperson did not immediately return OSV News’ request for comment.



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statement released Feb. 2, the SSPX said its superior general,

on people of faith and all men and women of good will to

South Sudan bishops warn of genocide, plead for peace as

St. Elizabeth Healthcare celebrates its 165th anniversary

Dr. Austin M. Schafer
Contributor

St. Elizabeth Healthcare celebrated its 165th anniversary, Jan. 23, 2026. The annual Founders Week observance recognizes the organization’s enduring mission and the legacy of service in improving health in Northern Kentucky and Southeastern Indiana.

“Founders Day is our opportunity to reflect on the remarkable individuals who laid the foundation of our ministry — and to celebrate the people who live it out today,” said Garren Colvin, president and chief executive officer, St. Elizabeth Healthcare. “To all our healthcare workers: thank you for courageously and compassionately continuing a mission that has touched generations.”

Throughout the week, associates across all St. Elizabeth locations were invited to participate in activities designed to honor the health system’s history and mission. These included taking a St. Elizabeth history quiz with top scorers entered into a drawing for St. Elizabeth logo wear prizes, goodie appreciation packages, encouraging team members to send personalized messages to colleagues who exemplify the St. Elizabeth mission in their work, and engaging in local community outreach and service.

In particular, there was a special Mass celebrated on Jan. 21 at their Edgewood hospital chapel location with Father Joe Gallenstein, priest chaplain, presiding. Then, on Jan. 23, at St. Lawrence Catholic Church in Lawrenceburg, IN, there was a special Mass in the community celebrated by the local Catholic parish, where over 200 school children helped pray for healthcare leaders in the Dearborn community.

St. Elizabeth Healthcare began by the vision of one remarkable woman by the name of Henrietta Cleveland. Concerned with the plight of Covington’s poor, Ms. Cleveland petitioned the Diocese of Covington’s first bishop, the Bishop George Carrell, S.J., about the need for a hospital in Northern Kentucky to care for the less fortunate. After gaining the bishop’s approval, she enlisted the help of a wealthy Cincinnati social activist, Sarah Worthington King Peter, to raise more than \$2,000 to help build the hospital.

The civic-minded pair then recruited the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor to staff the hospital and open a home for foundlings — infants who had been abandoned. The nuns worked with Ms. Cleveland, and the ladies of the first St. Elizabeth Support Guild, to raise the funds needed to purchase a building on 7th Street, which soon became the hospital which they named after St. Elizabeth of Hungary. The first St. Elizabeth Hospital opened its doors on Jan. 23, 1861 and 78 patients were admitted in its first year.

“Let us continue to pray for the sacred ministry of healthcare and appreciate all who work, serve, and volunteer at St. Elizabeth Healthcare,” said Mr. Covin.

Dr. Austin M. Schafer, D.HCML, BCC, is director of Pastoral and Spiritual Care, St. Elizabeth Healthcare



(top left) In honor of Founders Day, Austin Schafer, director of spiritual and pastoral care, St. Elizabeth Healthcare, brings a white carnation to the grave of Bishop George Carrell. (top center) Likewise, a red rose is placed on a memorial to Henrietta Cleveland, the woman whose vision and vigor established in 1861 St. Elizabeth Hospital, Northern Kentucky’s first hospital.

(bottom left) Father Joseph Gallenstein, chaplain, celebrates Mass in honor of Founders Day, Jan. 26, at St. Elizabeth Healthcare, Edgewood.

(bottom right) Healthcare workers at St. Elizabeth Healthcare, Lawrenceburg, Indiana, gathered at neighboring St. Lawrence Catholic Church, for a Founders Day Mass. Joining where over 200 school children who added their prayers for healthcare leaders in the Dearborn community. (top right) For the Mass, a statue of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, the hospital’s patroness, was displayed.

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