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Have a Beatitude Lent — Part 1, Poverty of Spirit

Most Rev. John Iffert
Bishop of Covington

My homilies and pastoral reflections are almost always a product of what I have seen and heard in the days and weeks prior. It is true again as I sit to think with you about how to enter the season of Lent in 2026.

This past Sunday I joined with others to pray for peace during a Holy Hour at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption. I was amazed at the number of people who came out to pray late in the afternoon on Super Bowl Sunday with little notice or planning. I was taken by the profuse expression of appreciation I received for



providing this opportunity to pray for peace in our hearts and minds, in our families, our Church, our communities, our nation and world. Many people seemed eager for an opportunity to bring their concerns to the Lord and to be led in turning our minds and hearts toward the mind and heart of Christ — who always greets his disciples with assurances of peace.

Just a week before that Holy Hour for Peace, the Church gave us the Beatitudes as the Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time.

It is with these experiences in mind that I invite myself, and you, to consider shaping our Lenten practice this year by asking how we might contribute to the peace that Christ wishes for his Church and his world. I propose to focus on the first three of the beatitudes as an entry-point for this Lent: poverty of spirit, mourning, and meekness of heart. Today I will write about poverty of spirit. Next week's *Messenger* will include my reflection about mourning and meekness.

Poverty of Spirit is another way to speak of freely chosen humility. Humility is that virtue that clearly recognizes that every good has its origins in God and gives due deference to the debt of gratitude and worship owed to God for his graciousness. It works against the corrupting influence of pride, self-aggrandization and entitlement that can eat away at the individual, the community or the nation that indulges in self-promotion. In the end, it works against

the kinds of idolatrous attachments to honor, greed, power and pleasure that lead to a “We-They” oppositional and acquisitional view of the world. It works against the kinds of attachments that can be taken as causes for (I might say excuses for) self-assertion, manipulation, violence and war.

We might focus on humility this Lent by adding the Litany of Humility to our daily prayer. Perhaps we could fast from something we take particular pride or delight in. It might be a type of food or drink that is luxurious, but it might also be a piece or type of clothing for which we get particular compliments, our impressive pen than draws attention in business meetings, or anything that speaks to us of high status or our own accomplishment.

We might take up a daily practice of gratitude, identifying each day an additional reason to be grateful for a gift that is important to us and our success, that ultimately came to us as gift — like a supportive family, educational opportunity or being born into a society that respects the rule of law. As an expression of gratitude and devotion, we might make a sacrificial gift of talent or treasure to assist those who have not so benefited.

It has been said that the virtue of humility is first in Jesus' list of Beatitudes because it is the virtue that is necessary for the development of all other human virtue. It works for the establishment of the Kingdom of Peace by fostering a healthier sense of self that is not in competition with others for honor, respect or any other good. It is the foundation for the edifice of temperance, prudence, fortitude and justice.

Next week I will write about the virtues of mourning with those who grieve loss and embracing meekness. Whatever Lenten observance we choose, may it lead us to become instruments of the peace Christ wills for his people and his Church. May the Holy Spirit guide you and pour out blessings upon you in this sacred time.



Bishop John Iffert



Lent in the Diocese of Covington

At the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption:

Ash Wednesday

Wednesday, Feb. 18, Mass 10 a.m.
 with Bishop John Iffert and 5:30 p.m.

Stations of the Cross

Fridays, Feb. 20–March 27, 6:30 p.m.
 Good Friday, April 3, noon

Rite of Election

Sunday, Feb. 22, 2 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.
 No 5:30 p.m. Mass



Twenty-seven prospective deacons established as lectors

Twenty-seven men in formation for the diaconate — eight from the Diocese of Covington and 19 from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati — gathered, Feb. 8, for the Rite of Institution of Lectors. This rite, as performed by Bishop John Iffert, tasked candidates with participation in the Mass via the role of lector. It also marks a definitive step in their diaconal formation. Until now the deacon candidate's prayer and study have been for the sake of his personal faith enrichment. Now, his prayer and study will be directed toward sharing their fruits with the communities they hope to serve as deacons.

In his homily, Bishop Iffert addressed the prospective deacons. "By entrusting you with the ministry of lector," he said, "the Church charges you to be the light of Christ that shines forth in his Scriptures."



Just as with the Eucharist, God transforms the work of our hands to reveal his Kingdom and unite his people

Keener photos

Laura Keener
Editor

During a Holy Hour for Peace, Feb. 8, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, Bishop John Iffert offered a reflection on what true peace means for Christians and for the world today. He began by reminding those gathered that peace is God's desire for every person. When Jesus appeared to His disciples after the resurrection, His first words were, "Peace be with you."

Bishop Iffert said that the peace Christ offers is different from the peace the world promises. The world often views peace as the result of power or domination, he said, but such peace is "no peace at all." Instead, true peace comes from becoming part of the Body of Christ and learning to set ourselves aside so that Christ may grow within us.

The Holy Hour was a part of a national prayer effort in response to increased violence within the United States and in the world. Archbishop Paul Coakley, president of

the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Jan. 28, invited all bishops and priests in the United States to offer a Holy Hour for peace, "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."

At the Holy Hour in Covington, Bishop Iffert encouraged the congregation to pray not only for peace but also for the return of Christ, who will gather all people into His kingdom.

"The only way we can have peace is by sharing the body of Christ, being drawn into his body and by the gift of his Spirit, to take the Father's Will as our will in Christ; to put ourselves aside, to decrease so that he can increase; to become small, so that he can become all. This is the only way, we pray, that peace will move in our world. It's the same thing as saying we pray for Jesus to return," said Bishop Iffert. "We pray for Jesus to come gain. To draw us to himself and to gather us into his kingdom"

Until then, he said, Christians must work to live as brothers and sisters to one another and to our neighbors, that these efforts will be a real sign of the Kingdom of God that can lead to the development of

people; the gift of



During the Holy Hour for Peace, Bishop Iffert blesses the congregation.

a real human, joyful, life shared together," he said.

As part of the Holy Hour, Bishop Iffert read from "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis," an encyclical written by Pope St. John Paul II in 1987. The document reflects on the development of people and the barriers that keep many in poverty and hardship despite global efforts to improve economic conditions. It also explains that peace and human development are deeply connected with the Church's mission and with the common good.

The encyclical teaches that even though no earthly

(Continued on page 4)



Notre Dame Sisters Maria Francine and Anita Marie Stacy were among the over 200 people who joined Bishop John Iffert for the Holy Hour for Peace, Feb. 8.

The divine role of consecrated life and the economics of salvation

Bella Bailey

Multimedia Correspondent

The Gospel reading for the Mass of Consecrated Life, celebrated by Bishop John Iffert at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, Feb. 7, explored the “economics of salvation,” said Bishop Iffert. And the ongoing tensions between the micro and macro ramifications of the presentation of the Christ child in the temple.

“On a macro level...we see Mary and Joseph continuing in the tradition of the people of Israel,” said Bishop Iffert. Where, in the tradition of Passover, where an “unblemished and spotless lamb” is sacrificed so that the angel of death would “passover” those in danger during the Biblical plagues. In the same way, Mary and Joseph present Jesus in the temple, “to consecrate him, redeeming him from this curse of death, redeeming the eldest child, and so redeeming all of Israel from the curse that our own sin had brought upon us,” said Bishop Iffert.

“They take the sacrifice, offered for the poor, and they offer it for Jesus ... and so he enters into this great macro drama of the salvation and redemption of humankind,” he said, “joined to our struggle and able to be the one who offers, once and for all, the acceptable sacrifice on the cross and frees all of humanity.”

This, Bishop Iffert says, is the “cosmic drama,” on a macro level, that is seen in the Gospel reading. The micro drama is seen in the relationships of the Gospel passage.

“Here he was, being brought as a babe to the city of Jerusalem, and this great cosmic drama is coming to a head in his person and being, and almost nobody notices,” said Bishop Iffert. “He’s just another kid being brought to the temple.”

In the Gospel, it is only Simeon and Anna who are able to see the “cosmic” significance of the presentation of the Lord.



Even Mary and Joseph, despite them having received angelic news of “the great salvific action of God in this Child ... they can still be surprised,” said Bishop Iffert.

This micro and macro tension, “the drama of God’s salvific work for his people, and the micro side of the economy of salvation, the relational side, the quiet side, the often unseen side,” is seen in the lives of consecrated men and women, said Bishop Iffert.

“I think this is the tremendous gift that we see in the lives of those who are consecrated. To help us recollect that in every moment of ordinariness, even pain, every moment when we feel forgotten, every moment when we feel alone, every moment when we feel we’re struggling against all odds, that divine drama is being played out.”

“When our lives feel ordinary,” he said, “your vocation, brothers and sisters, your vocation gives the great witness to that truth.”



Bailey photos

(above top) The Franciscan Daughters of Mary, whose primary ministry is to the poor, sing the opening hymn with the rest of the congregation.

(above) Divine Providence Sister Barbara Rohe and her fellow religious Sisters participate in Mass during the responsorial psalm, “Who is this king of Glory? It is the Lord.”

(above right) Brother Rock Larsen from The Poor of St. Francis prays thoughtfully after receiving the Eucharist.



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.

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.

To register to attend the Kentucky March for Life with the Diocese of Covington using private transportation or by joining the buses visit <https://forms.gle/9kYM9Nd8MoiXjcBR8>

Buses will load at:

The Curia, Covington, departing at 7:15 a.m.

The Florence Mall parking lot (upper level where the Sear’s entrance used to be), departing at 7:30 a.m.

For information or to sign up, call the Pro-Life Office (859) 392-1546.



Bishop’s Schedule

<p>Feb. 17 Josephinum Board of Trustees meeting, Columbus, Ohio</p> <p>Feb. 18 Ash Wednesday Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 10 a.m.</p>	<p>Feb. 19 Catholic Charities Corporate Board meeting Confirmation, St. Mary Parish, Alexandria, 7 p.m.</p> <p>Feb. 22 Rite of Election, Cathedral Basilica, 2 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.</p>
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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.

(Continued from page 2)



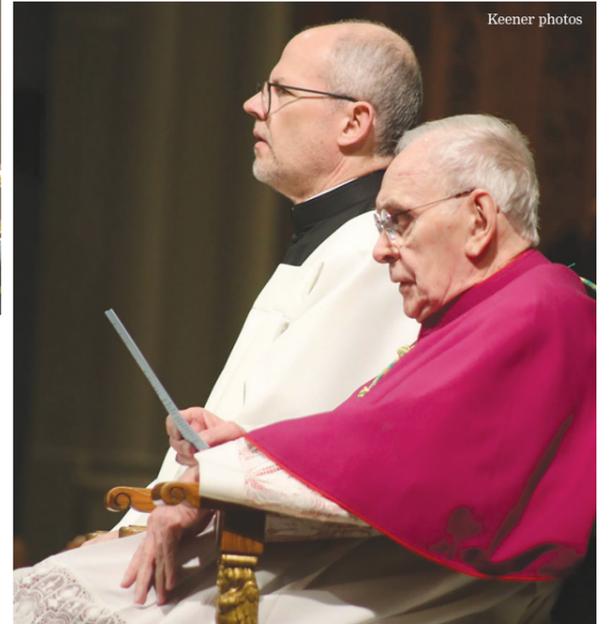
(above) At the benediction, Bishop Iffert raises the Eucharist encased in a radiant monstrance.

(right) Father Ryan Maher, rector, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption and Bishop emeritus Roger Foy joined the Holy Hour for Peace.

achievement can be confused with the Kingdom of God, Christians must still care about people's real needs in society. Knowing that the poor will always be among us is not an excuse to ignore suffering or injustice.

"Even though we know that economic growth, that political freedoms, are not themselves the goal of the Christian life or the Kingdom of God, there is no excuse that can be found in the Christian gospel for ignoring the needs of others, what they need to grow and develop and be educated and share these blessings with their children. There's no excuse in the Gospel for ignoring that," said Bishop Iffert.

Instead, every effort to improve human life — however small or imperfect — can be used by God for good. "However imperfect and temporary, all the things that can and ought to be done through the combined efforts of everyone and through Divine Grace at any given moment in history in order to make people's lives more human,"



Keener photos

he said. "Nothing will be lost."

Bishop Iffert emphasized that the Eucharist shows most clearly how God uses human work for his purposes. In the Mass, the simple gifts of bread and wine, "the work of human hands," are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ through the Holy Spirit. In this way, God uses ordinary things to reveal his kingdom and unite his people with himself and with one another.

This same pattern, the bishop said, applies to efforts for peace.

Just as God transforms bread and wine, he can transform our actions — our advocacy, our service, and our care for the poor — into something greater than we could achieve alone, he said. Because of this, Christians should never give up working for human dignity, fighting injustice, or resisting violence, even when progress seems slow or discouraging.

"We are not to be discouraged when the forces of the world work against human dignity," said Bishop Iffert. "We are to see and we are to continue to work for the building up of that dignity precisely because we know that God will take the work of our hands, he will bless them. He will break them. He will offer praise over them. He will unite those efforts to the power of his Spirit and our shared life together in God will be plenty for all the world."

Bishop Iffert concluded by reminding those gathered that every act of love and every effort for peace will bear fruit when united with Christ. "We never give up praying for peace," he said, because God will use the work of our hands to bless the world.

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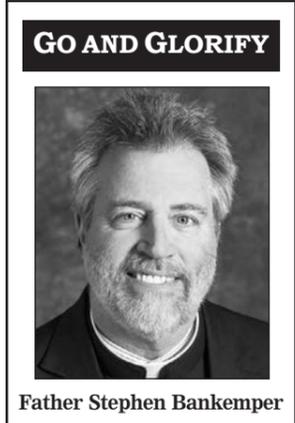
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Maura Baker Staff Writer
Isabella (Bella) Bailey Multimedia Correspondent
David Stutler Sales Manager

Living God's law

The readings for the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle A — are: Sirach 15:15-20, 1 Corinthians 2:6-10 and Matthew 5:17-37.

In the Gospel for the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, we continue through what we call Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In the section of the sermon we hear this Sunday, Jesus addresses various commandments — about murder, adultery, divorce and oath-taking — but the key to understanding his teaching about these and other commandments is three sentences from what we could call his introduction to his teaching.



GO AND GLORIFY

Father Stephen Bankemper

Jesus begins this part of His sermon saying, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." It is clear from this statement that Jesus is not positioning himself against the law of Moses, which only makes sense, as God cannot be divided against himself.

Remember that the evangelists record Jesus as saying, "I and the Father are one," (Jn 10:30) and "... no city or house divided against itself will stand." (Matt 12:25)

It might seem obvious what Jesus means by juxtaposing 'abolish' and 'fulfill,' but it is worth risking the obvious to discuss it. Abolishing "You shall not kill" would mean, of course, that Jesus is making murder legal, that we could do less than the Mosaic law. Fulfilling the law implies that there is more to the commandment than the words on the page (or the stone), that our goal should be to do more than the letter of the law, and not more quantitatively, so to speak, but qualitatively; not more as in more things to do, but more as to go more deeply into the commandment. So to insult and vilify and blast someone with my anger, but say, "I did not kill her," is to miss the point of the law.

A third sentence in Jesus' introduction makes this even more clear. Jesus tells his disciples, "I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." We might ask ourselves how this can be: the scribes, and especially the Pharisees, were highly respected as the ones who observed the law to the highest degree. In fact, they were so careful to observe the law that scripture scholars describe their approach as "building a fence around the law," referring to their practice of adding oral regulations that were stricter than the law to prevent accidental transgressions of the law.

What Jesus could mean is that the Pharisees were so focused on obeying the mandates of the law — bodily obedience, we might say — that they did not allow the law to change their hearts. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others." (Matt 23:23) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity. You blind Pharisee! First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean." (Matt 23:25)

Jesus could also be referring to the fact that the law itself cannot save. There are many passages in St. Paul's letters that comment on this, but here is how he expressed it to the church in Rome: "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." (Rom 3:21-22)

(Continued on page 17)

Be an instrument of God's peace

At last Sunday's Mass, one of the hymns we sang was the Prayer of St. Francis. It is a beautiful hymn, and as I sang along, the lyrics spoke to me in a way that I had not experienced in the past.

The hymn begins with the words, "Make me a channel of your peace." The thought of peace resonated with my heart, which is feeling the divisiveness of the world we currently live in. And as the words continued, it felt like God reminding us how we are called to live in the midst of this chaos.

As Catholics, we know that we are called to model Christ's love to others — but so many of us have lost sight of what this truly means or struggle to live it in our daily lives. In order to live this calling, we first need reminders of how Jesus lived. You get these reminders when you engage in daily prayer, read the Bible and attend Mass. We also need silent moments in our day. Times that we disconnect from all the devices and sit quietly with our own thoughts. This gives us time to think about Jesus' life and reflect on how closely we are to living like Him. It is only with this knowledge and God's grace that we can go out into the world and truly show His love to those around us.

As the Prayer of St. Francis continues, you will sing,



VIEWPOINT

Kendra McGuire

"Where there is hatred, let me bring your love." Unfortunately, we see hatred in many different places today. On the news, on social media, while driving, waiting in line, at a gathering with others, maybe in our own homes. Think about how you can radiate Christ's love in these spaces. Instead of writing your opinion in a comment thread on social media, remind others about compassion and forgiveness. Instead of yelling at the driver in a neighboring vehicle, offer a prayer for them instead. When your children are fighting, teach them how to be kind by your words and actions.

It feels like we are living in a very volatile world, and I'm sure most people would agree that we need to strive for peace. While most people feel this way, we may have forgotten that the seeds of peace begin with each one of us. If we all asked God to make us an instrument of his peace and intentionally lived it each day, we would make a difference in the world and would feel more at peace in our own hearts.

So let us pray today and in the days ahead.

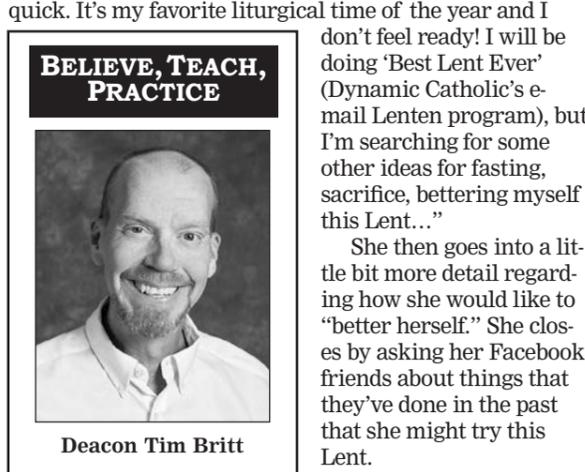
"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; Where there is hatred, let me sow love; Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; And where there is sadness, joy.

"O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; To be understood, as to understand; To be loved, as to love; For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen."

Kendra McGuire is superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Covington, Ky

God bless time

Several years ago, I woke up early on the last Sunday in Ordinary Time before the beginning of Lent to a Facebook post from one of the parishioners at St. Mary's in Alexandria. Her post said: "Lent is coming up so quick. It's my favorite liturgical time of the year and I don't feel ready! I will be doing 'Best Lent Ever' (Dynamic Catholic's e-mail Lenten program), but I'm searching for some other ideas for fasting, sacrifice, bettering myself this Lent..."



BELIEVE, TEACH, PRACTICE

Deacon Tim Britt

She then goes into a little bit more detail regarding how she would like to "better herself." She closes by asking her Facebook friends about things that they've done in the past that she might try this Lent.

I was so impressed with that post. I was impressed with how she describes Lent as her "favorite liturgical season," I was moved by her intense desire to better herself through her Lenten journey, and then there was her sense of urgency. She wrote that she didn't "feel ready" and Lent was only three days away.

There are a lot of us who don't see Lent the way this parishioner does. I talk to people who say that we're supposed to be bettering ourselves continuously, 365 days every year. St. Paul says "pray always" not just during this particular 40-day period. We're supposed to be aware of the poor and we should be making sacrifices for our own good and for the good of those who are less fortunate all the time.

What is it about this time of year that makes it so special? What is it about Lent?

Simply stated, Lent is holy time. It is time blessed by God.

We have no doubt that God can bless things. God makes all things; he looks upon them and sees that they are good, and then he makes them better when we call his Holy Spirit down upon them, and He makes them holy. Remember that, in the beginning, God made the earth, the sun and the moon. He set them to move around one another so that evening came and morning followed. God made time, and he saw that it was good.

But he also saw that it could be better. God saw that the time we spend in prayer is better than time squandered in meaningless pastimes. He saw that the time that we spend serving others is better than the time wasted serving ourselves. He saw that the time we spend in self-discipline is better than time that we spend in shameless debauchery.

And the Church saw this as well. And so, inspired by the Holy Spirit, we've asked our heavenly Father to bless this time that we call Lent, to consecrate it, to set it apart for a holy purpose. And He has done so. Some might say that they don't recognize any difference. We continue to work or go to school like always, the weather is no different, the moods and attitudes of people we encounter are no different.

Remember that what we receive from the plate at Mass and what is presented to us in the cup looks and tastes like the bread and wine that it was before and yet it has the power to transform us.

And this holy season has the power to transform us as well.

Lent is upon us. We are in the midst of something holy, something blessed. We must be sure not to let this sacred time slip away.

Deacon Tim Britt is assigned to St. Mary Parish, Alexandria.

Fasting, alms and prayer — the meaning of Lenten observance

Sarah Wells
Contributor

Ash Wednesday is coming up on Feb. 18 and there is much to be gleaned from our Church's tradition on the origins of the ashes and the gift of fasting. It is in the beginning, in the garden of Eden, where we find the first example of God's commandment to fast. In the fourth century, St. Basil the Great wrote in his First Homily on Fasting that "Fasting is as old as mankind itself ... If Eve had fasted from the tree, we would not have to keep this fast now," referring to the Lenten fast.

After Genesis, we find myriad instances of fasting, accompanied by the donning of sackcloth and ashes. Having been humbled by God, Job admits, "Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:6) The prophet Daniel interceded for the people of Israel saying, "I turned to the Lord God, to seek help, in prayer and petition, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes." (Daniel 9:3) In preparation for battle, the Israelites "fasted and wore sackcloth; they sprinkled ashes on their heads and tore their garments." (1 Mac 3:47) Hearing the news that a massacre of the Jews would be carried out by the king, "Queen Esther, seized with mortal anguish, fled to the Lord for refuge. Taking off her splendid garments, she put on garments of distress and mourning. In place of her precious ointments, she covered her head with dung and ashes. She afflicted her body severely and in place of her festive adornments, her tangled hair covered her" (Esther 4:12-13).

In these instances, we see individuals as well as communities fasting, all marked by ashes.

We emulate our forebears in faith with the ashes we receive on Ash Wednesday, which signify the beginning of a public, communal fast by the whole Church. Ashes are a sign of petition for a specific cause and sign of conviction to the world.

Around the eighth century, it was only public sinners and the dying who received ashes. To the dying, a priest would say, "Remember that thou art dust and to dust thou shalt return." He sprinkled the person with holy water and asked, "Art thou content with sackcloth and ashes in testimony of thy penance before the Lord in the day of judgment?" To which the person replied, "I am content."

At the start of the eleventh century, an Anglo-Saxon priest named Aelfric preached, "We read in the books both in the Old Law and in the New that the men who repented of their sins bestrewed themselves with ashes and clothed their bodies with sackcloth. Now let us do this little at the beginning of our Lent that we strew ashes upon our heads to signify that we ought to repent of our sins during the Lenten fast."

In 1091, Pope Urban II established the universal practice of distributing ashes on the foreheads of the faithful at the beginning of Lent.

Why fast? Why give alms? Why pray? We do these things in hopes of emptying ourselves, to become poor in spirit, to depend upon God alone. To acquire sanctity in this world, one must fight and suffer for it. Our fasts bring this truth to the front of our minds.

St. Basil continues, "Remember the saints of old, 'Of whom the world was not worthy, who went around in



sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, persecuted, mistreated.' Remember their mode of life, if indeed you are seeking after the same inheritance as them."

These practices restore dignity to our souls through the acquisition of self-control, leading to self-mastery. It is only through submission to God that man becomes master of himself, just as Adam submitted to God and received dominion over all of Eden. We still retain that commandment of dominion, but now we must overcome our inclination to sin in order to live it out.

Deacon James Keating, of the St. Paul Center, captures the nature of sin as he writes, "Sin pathologically clings only to the endless boredom of repetitive daily features of the interior life: constant rehearsal of our sinfulness, continued recollection of personal inadequacies, denigrating thoughts about the imperfections of neighbors, resentment toward the mundane horarium of each day, bathing in negative thoughts and moods, existing in cynicism and all manners of interior desires bent on disorder, greed, lust, envy, pride, sloth, anger, and gluttony. All of these desires weigh us down from within" (from his article The Healing Power of the Eucharist).

To fast is to be ripped out of this cycle. That is why we fast on each Friday of the year, not just during Lent (Code of Canon Law 1250-1253). Through deliberate hunger, the surrender of our income to causes outside of ourselves, and the quieting of our own thoughts to be present to God in prayer, we mature in our faith. We move from spiritual immaturity, which keeps us in a cycle of grasping for instant gratification, to spiritual maturity, a place of inner freedom where the soul lives out the truth that its deepest

need is God. Through these practices of self-emptying, man regains his original dignity and set on the path toward God.

Sarah Wells is pastoral associate at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. This article was first published in the parish's Gargoyle Gazette and has been reprinted with permission.



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except Good Friday

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PEOPLE AND EVENTS

The weekly TV Mass from the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption is broadcast locally on The CW, Sundays, 10—11 a.m. Viewers can tune-in on the following channels: antenna 12.2; Spectrum 117 or 25; Cincinnati Bell 17 or 517; and DirectTV 25.

Festivals, prayer services, etc. Parishes, schools and Catholic organizations of the Diocese of Covington can now have their event featured on the Diocesan online calendar. Submit your event at <https://covdio.org/calendar/>.

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.

Join in praying for an end to abortion with the Cincinnati 40 Days for Life Campaign, Feb. 18-March 29. Sign up for vigil hours at <https://www.40daysforlife.com/en/cincinnati>, or join for the opening rally, Feb. 15, 2 p.m., in front of the Auburn Ave. Planned Parenthood, Cincinnati. More information available online.

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.

Bishop Brossart High School, Alexandria, 5th annual girls' softball/volleyball euchre tournament, March 7. Doors open at 5:30 p.m.; cards fly at 7 p.m. Cost: \$25 pre-registration by March 4; \$30 walk up registration (limited spots); \$10 optional skin game. Contact Kari Bezold, (859)-391-5119 or bbhsvolleyball.softballeuchre@gmail.com. Checks payable to BBHS.

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.

Blessed Sacrament Parish will host a Lenten Food Truck night, March 20, beginning at 5 p.m. Food trucks serving Lenten classics such as pizza, fish and dessert will be available.

Sisters of Notre Dame Women's Retreat, "Women of Faith," March 28, St. Walburg Monastery, Villa Hills, with guest speakers Jenn Ledonne and Notre Dame Sister Mary Evelyn Reinke, reflecting on women of the Bible and the 21st Century. Cost \$50 includes continental breakfast, lunch from Panera and all activities. To register contact Margie Schnelle (859) 392-8229 or mschnelle@sndusa.org.



Students at St. Agnes school, Ft. Wright, participated in an all-school retreat for Catholic Schools Week hosted by retreat leader, Daniel Poat, and the Jesuit Spiritual Center at Milford. Students enjoyed singing and dancing to Praise & Worship music, a variety of retreat activities and ended with a beautiful Eucharistic Procession.

Lenten Fish Frys

Fridays, Feb 20 – March 6
St. William Parish,
Williamstown, 4:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Fridays, Feb 20 – March 13
St. Mary of the Assumption
Parish, Alexandria,
4:30 – 7:30 p.m.

Fridays, March 13 – 27
St. Matthew, Morning View,
5:00 – 7:30 p.m.

Fridays, Feb 20 – March 20
St. Agnes Parish, Fort Wright,
5:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Fridays, Feb. 20 – March 27
St. Barbara Parish, Erlanger
St. Cecilia Parish, Independence,
5:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Holy Cross High School,
Latonia, 5:00 – 8:00 p.m.
St. Joseph, Camp Springs,
4:00 – 7:30 p.m.

St. Joseph Academy, Walton,
4:30 – 7:30 p.m.

Mary, Queen of Heaven,
Erlanger, 4:00 – 8:00 p.m.

St. Benedict Parish, Covington,
4:45 – 7:00 p.m.

St. Bernard Parish, Dayton,
5:00 – 9:00 p.m.

St. Catherine of Sienna Parish,
Fort Thomas, 4:30 – 7:00 p.m.

Fridays, Feb. 20 – March 27 (continued)
St. Edward Parish, Cynthiana,
5:00 – 7:00 p.m.

St. Francis Xavier, Falmouth,
4:00 – 7:30 p.m.

Immaculate Heart of Mary,
Burlington, 5:00 – 8:00 p.m.

St. Joseph Parish, Crescent
Springs, 5:00 – 8:00 p.m.

St. James Parish, Brooksville,
4:30 – 6:30 p.m.

St. Patrick Parish, Maysville,
5:00 – 7:00 p.m.

St. Patrick Parish, Taylor Mill,
4:30 – 7:30 p.m.

St. Paul Parish, Florence,
4:30 – 7:30 p.m.

St. Pius X Parish, Edgewood,
5:00 – 7:30 p.m.

St. Thomas Parish,
Fort Thomas, 4:00 – 7:30 p.m.

St. Timothy Parish, Union,
4:30 – 7:30 p.m.

Fridays, Feb. 20 – April 3
St. Augustine, Covington,
4:00 – 7:00 p.m.

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.

Nominations now being accepted for Outstanding Catechetical Leaders

Staff report

Every parish and school has at least one — a teacher, catechist, or homeschool educator, whose love of the faith informs everything they do and say, a leader whose love of the Lord is so palpable that people naturally gravitate toward them and want to emulate them. The Office of Catechesis and Evangelization (OCE) will once again be honoring these Outstanding Catechetical Leaders at the Catechetical Leadership Awards, May 14.

“Recognizing the work of our catechists is not only a joy for us — it is essential,” said Isaak A. Isaak, director of the OCE. “These awards remind us that the Church is strengthened every day by men and women who witness the faith with humility, compassion and deep devotion.”

The OCE needs help in identifying these outstanding catechists. There are eight awards and nominations are now being accepted for each. Catechists are not limited to teachers in a classroom but also recognize homeschool educators and those leading ministries like marriage preparation and youth and young adult ministry.

The premiere award is the Sister Ann Adele Fritz Catechetical Award. For 47 years, Sister Ann Adele (born 1930; died 1998), a Notre Dame Sister, gave her whole heart in service to the Diocese of Covington and Archdiocese of Cincinnati. She served as both teacher and principal, and is remembered for her high expectations, organization, creativity, friendliness and service projects. The recipient of this award reminds us that we are all called to be joyful witnesses to Jesus Christ and are willing to make personal sacrifices so that others may come to know and love Jesus. This person embodies what it means to be a missionary disciple.

“Sister Ann Adele’s legacy reminds us that the work of a catechist is not simply instructional; it is missionary,” said Mr. Isaak.

The other categories include:

- Outstanding Early Childhood Teacher/Catechist
- Outstanding Teacher/Catechist (middle school, junior high, high school)
- Outstanding Catechetical Leader (catechetical leader, principal, director or coordinator of Religious Education)
- Outstanding Family Life Minister (marriage preparation or enrichment, natural family planning instruction, ministry for separated or divorced, and widows and widowers)
- Outstanding Catechetical Minister (youth, young adult, and campus ministers)
- Outstanding Catholic Retreat Minister
- Outstanding Homeschool Educator

“Our catechists are the quiet heroes of evangelization. Whether they serve in classrooms, parish ministries, family life programs, youth and young adult outreach, or in the dedication of homeschooling, each one helps others encounter the living Christ in a personal and transformative way,” said Mr. Isaak. “Their love, creativity and commitment form the heart of ministry.”

Nominations are due by Wednesday, March 18. The awards will be distributed May 14, 6-8 p.m., Bishop



Messenger file photo

Jeanne Hicks, lead catechist, watches as students engage with the child-sized altar at Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Ft. Thomas. The Office of Catechesis and Evangelization is now accepting nominations for outstanding catechetical leaders — those members of parishes, schools and community committed to teaching others the Catholic faith.

Howard Memorial Auditorium at the Diocesan Curia. Criteria for each of the awards and nomination forms are available online at <https://www.covdio.org/catechetical-awards/>.

Notre Dame Academy Opens New 1906 IDEAL Innovation Space

Staff report

Notre Dame Academy, Park Hills, has officially opened its new 1906 IDEAL Innovation Space, a modern learning area designed to support hands-on STEM education and strengthen the school’s mission of forming confident, compassionate young women.

President Lauren Hitron said the space represents much more than a renovation.

“More than a new space, this represents who we are and who we are called to form,” she said. “At Notre Dame Academy, we educate young women to be confident leaders, thoughtful innovators and compassionate servants.”

The name IDEAL stands for Inquiry, Discovery, Education and Learning. The new space includes flexible learning areas and advanced technology that encourage creativity, teamwork and real-world problem solving.

For decades, Notre Dame Academy has been known for strong programs in science, technology, engineering and math. School leaders say the new IDEAL space will give students more opportunities to explore design thinking, applied technology, and innovative learning.

Lisa Timmerding, principal, emphasized that the school’s focus on innovation is closely tied to its Catholic identity.

“Our commitment to academic excellence is inseparable from our mission,” she said. “In this space, innovation is guided by values, discovery is rooted in ethics and leadership is grounded in service.”

During the dedication ceremony, Father Conor Kunath, chaplain, blessed the Innovation Space, asking God to make it a place of collaboration, creativity and courage for all students and teachers who use it.

The number 1906 in the space’s name honors the year the school was founded by the Sisters of Notre Dame, who were known for forward-thinking ideas



Submitted photo

At the dedication, leadership of Notre Dame Academy ceremoniously cut the ribbon opening the new 1906 IDEAL Innovation Space. Ribbon cutters are (from left) Lisa Timmerding, principal; Notre Dame Sister Mary Ethel Parrott, Notre Dame Sister Mary Judith Averbeck and Lauren Hitron, president.

about education. School leaders say the new space continues that tradition by combining the school’s history with modern learning.

The Innovation Space was funded through generous donors and strong community support. Leaders also thanked Principal Timmerding and assistant principal Stacey Turner for helping guide the programming and curriculum behind the project.

At the end of the ceremony, the Board of Directors honored Jane Kennedy Kleier ’83, who served as interim president during the planning and creation of the new space. She received a special plaque that will hang in the Innovation Classroom. The board shared that Mrs. Kleier’s work reflects the mission of Notre Dame Academy and her strong commitment to servant leadership.

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MARRIAGE and WEDDINGS

SPECIAL SECTION OF THE MESSENGER

FEBRUARY 13, 2026

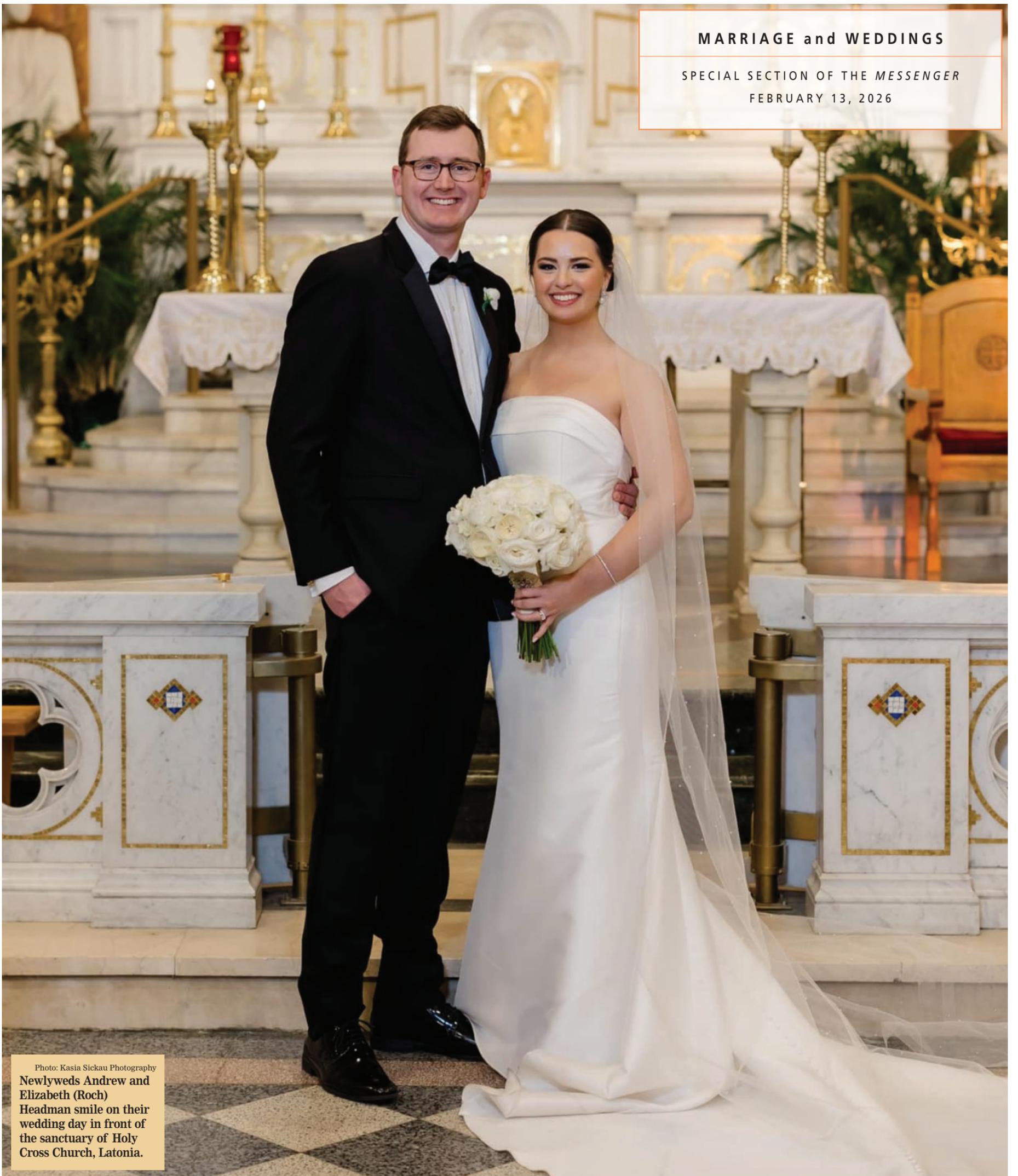


Photo: Kasia Sickau Photography
Newlyweds Andrew and Elizabeth (Roch) Headman smile on their wedding day in front of the sanctuary of Holy Cross Church, Latonia.

"We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become."

—St. Clare of Assisi

Love and life in the divine plan

In November 2009, the U.S. Catholic Bishops approved a pastoral letter called "Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan." The letter presents the essential points of Catholic teaching on marriage as a natural gift, as a sacrament and as a public commitment between a man and a woman. The bishops' pastoral letter is so important today because of all the challenges and/or threats to the institution of marriage. "Our pastoral letter is an invitation to discover, or perhaps rediscover, the blessing given when God first established marriage as a natural institution and when Christ restored and elevated it as a sacramental sign of salvation." After all, "God himself is the author of marriage — not us."

Here is the essence of what the Church believes marriage to be, as authored by God and explained by our bishops:

- It is an institution created by God.
- It is an indissoluble bond.
- It is established by mutual consent.
- It is a "lifelong partnership ... of mutual and exclusive fidelity."



Isaak Abraham Isaak

It is an exclusive partnership between one man and one woman, who are complementary in their two distinct ways of being human.

It is a "unique communion of persons" through the mutual self-giving of conjugal love.

It is meant to mirror Christ's love for the Church.

It is ordered towards two equally important ends: the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children.

Here is what I love from this letter: "The love that is as strong as death is the love that prays and praises, caught up into divine love." This places love and service of God at the forefront of marital love.

The bishops point to several "fundamental challenges to the nature and purposes of marriage," which include contraception, same-sex unions, divorce and cohabitation.

All these challenges can be seen as stemming from original sin, which harmed the original communion intended for marriage; but Jesus restored the institution by raising it to the dignity of a sacrament.

The bishops of the United States state, "In restoring to marriage its original meaning and beauty, Jesus proclaims what the Creator meant marriage to be 'in the beginning.' He does so because marriage will be made into the visible embodiment of his love for the Church. In His espousal of the Church as his bride, he fulfills and elevates marriage to a Sacrament. He reveals his own love 'to the end' (John 13:1) as the purest and deepest love, the perfection of all love. In doing this he reveals the deepest meaning of all marital love: self-giving love modeled on God's inner life and love."

In marriage, my wife Elsa and I are called to give ourselves to each other as fully as Christ gave himself to the Church. That is a pretty tall order. If every married couple and every single or engaged person discerning marriage read this pastoral letter and made this a goal for their marriage, it could enrich the entire Church.

Elsa and I work at loving as Christ loves through self-gift every day, even when it is not easy. We can reflect the love that we and the bishops want to see in the world.

Jesus Himself demonstrated what love looks like when he allowed himself to be hung on a cross for our sins. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lays down his life for his friends," John 15:13.

Isaak Abraham Isaak is Director of the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization.

National Marriage Week USA and World Marriage Day to be celebrated February 7–14

USCCB

Each year, National Marriage Week USA and World Marriage Day provide an opportunity for the Catholic Church to focus on and celebrate the vocation to marriage and family life. This year, National Marriage Week USA is celebrated Feb. 7–14 and World Marriage Day, which is commemorated on the second Sunday of February, is Feb. 11.

The theme for this year's celebration of National Marriage Week is "Man and Woman He Created them: Together with Purpose."

National Marriage Week USA, launched in 2010, is part of an international event seeking to mobilize individuals, organizations and businesses in a common purpose — to strengthen marriage in communities and influence the culture. World Marriage Day was started in 1983 by Worldwide Marriage Encounter. More information is available on their website, NationalMarriageWeekUSA.org.

This article has been edited by Messenger staff.



Lindsey Zitzke Photography

New mentor couple program coming soon, from engaged to married and beyond

Bella Bailey

Multimedia Correspondent

Coming soon the Diocese of Covington marriage preparation program are new marriage catechumenal pathways, expanding the way for an engaged couple to receive the sacrament of matrimony. Part of the new marriage pathways is the institution of a mentor couple program, providing guidance to the newly engaged in married, helping them live their marriage as a sacrament.

The new program is structured in two phases, with the first being couple to couple support during the engagement, or betrothal, period. This begins after a couple has chosen which parish they will get married at and attend Mass at after they are married, typically twelve months before the wedding. At this point the pastor will assign the engaged couple a mentor couple to journey together during the twelve months leading up to the wedding.

The mentor couples will be trained in the Living Marriage as a Sacrament program and will mentor the engaged with this curriculum through a one on one, personalized approach. The primary goal of this first phase is that "the couples will be prepared for marriage," said Michelle Alley, member of the new marriage pathways development team.

"It's something to raise awareness of the sacrament to the holiness that it is desired to be from the time Jesus walked into Cana," said Deacon Steve Alley, deacon at St. Timothy Parish, Union, and member of the new marriage pathways development team.

After the engaged couple receives the sacrament of matrimony and is married, they can choose to continue on to phase two of the mentor couple program, which includes parish involvement and small



group settings.

"The intent is that they continue to journey for four or five more years in their home parish with other newly married couples," said Deacon Alley. The hope is that continuing in this journey will allow the newly married to "build a relationship group that would feel comfortable with each other and be well known to each other and in the parish. This is a way for them to make friends, make connections, get involved," said Mrs. Alley. "I think there's a hunger for that personal connection in your parish."

"The plan is to build these couples up, help them grow in their love of the sacrament in the parish they're living in," said Deacon Alley, "we see it as a beautiful, long overdue, mission for matrimony."

MARRIAGE AND WEDDINGS

Getting married in the diocese

The Catholic Church and your diocesan community are here to support couples and help them stay centered on Christ to form strong, lasting marriages.

There are three requirements for all engaged couples wishing to marry in the Diocese of Covington:

1. Contact the parish priest at least nine to 12 months before your wedding to set an initial appointment and to start your marriage preparations.

2. Attend one of the following marriage preparation programs at least three to six months prior to your wedding. Since marriage preparation programs often fill quickly, it is best to register two to three months before the program date. Program options:

Living Marriage as a Sacrament

This program is held at St. Timothy Parish, Union, on two consecutive Saturdays with large group presentation, private couple interaction, and small group discussion. The focus is on a couple's relationship and the beauty and importance of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

For dates and registration for Living Marriage as Sacrament visit: <https://marriagedoc.org/>

For any questions, please contact Eric and Lauri Nienaber at: register@marriagedoc.org

Directions: St. Timothy Church
10272 Highway 42
Union, KY 41091
(859) 384-1100

I-75 to Florence/Union Exit (180). South on US 42 approximately 4.4 miles. St. Timothy is on the left, across from Ryle High School.

Covington-Cincinnati Catholic Engaged Encounter

The weekend retreat offered by the Cincinnati-Covington Catholic Engaged Encounter (CEE) ministry offers couples a unique opportunity to look at their com-

mitment to each other in a deeper way as they prepare for marriage. Free from the pressure and distractions of the outside world, couples are given 30-plus hours to dialogue honestly and intensively about their prospective lives together.

Two married couples make up the presenting team and share brief stories about their marriages and the impact of the Sacrament of Matrimony on their lives, with the goal of encouraging participants to explore their own attitudes and expectations. The team also offers couples ideas on how to continue to love each other, even amid the pressures of the world.

The engaged couples should anticipate discussing each other's strengths and weaknesses, desires, and ambitions, as well as their attitudes about money, sex, children, family and the role of the Church and society in their future marriages. Our motto is: "A wedding is a day; a marriage is a lifetime."

Most people spend huge amounts of money and many months planning for their wedding. CEE is about preparing for what most hope will last 50 or 60 years — your marriage.

Location:
Holy Spirit Center
5440 Moeller Ave
Cincinnati, Ohio 45212
Registration: visit <https://cincinnati-covington.engagedencounter.com/>

For more information: e-mail the Cincinnati-Covington CEE Local Community at Cincinnati-Covington@engagedencounter.com or call Ashley Altenau at (513) 479-1700

Three to get Married

This retreat is sponsored by the Regnum Christi Movement of Greater Cincinnati. Mentoring couples include Regnum Christi members who are in different stages of their marriage.

Spiritual accompaniment and talks will be led by Fr. Thomas Flynn, LC.

Featured speakers include family practitioners Amber and Paul Day M.D., and Emily Lewis, Licensed Professional Counselor.

The Archdiocese of Cincinnati Office of Marriage and Family Evangelization will recognize the certificate of attendance as satisfactory for the retreat portion of marriage preparation.

Location: Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center, Norwood, OH.

Contact person for additional questions?
Vicki Jung at 513-260-2373 or vjung3@1791.com

3. Attend a certified Natural Family Planning (NFP) course. It is preferable to attend this course after attending your marriage preparation program, if possible. Natural Family Planning courses fill up quickly, so register early.

NFP is the general title for the scientific, natural and moral methods of family planning that can help married couples either



Jessica Wiggins Photography photo

achieve or postpone pregnancies. NFP methods are based on the observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle. No drugs, devices, or surgical procedures are used to avoid pregnancy. Since the methods of NFP respect the love-giving and life-giving nature of the conjugal act, they support God's design for married love.

Engaged couples are required to select a method of NFP that works best for them and obtain a certificate from one of the instructors listed below. For more information about NFP, call the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization at (859) 392-1500.

Sympto-Thermal Method

Couple to Couple League
(513) 471-2000

En español: (513) 471-2000, ext.1031

Website: ccli.org

(Please note: CCL offers a self-paced online course that is not approved for couples getting married in the Diocese of Covington.)

Boston Cross Check Method

Jessica Grace, RN
(443) 824-8285 (text or call)
E-mail: jessicagracefertility@gmail.com

Creighton Method

Rita Johnson
+1 (517) 775-7229
Website: <https://naturalfertilitycare.org/>

Marquette Method

Jenna Bernardo, RN
(513) 658-0444
E-mail: jennamarquettern@gmail.com
Website: <https://jenna-the-fertility-rn.square.site/>

For more information about NFP, visit <https://covdio.org/oce/natural-family-planning/>



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New Marriage Catechumenal Pathways journeys with individuals from kindergarten through marriage to strengthen the home church

Bella Bailey

Multimedia Correspondent

The Diocese of Covington's marriage preparation program is currently undergoing a transformation in line with Pope Francis' request for more intensive preparation and the ongoing With One Heart Diocesan Pastoral Plan. The new program, Marriage Catechumenal Pathways, is broken into four phases: Remote, Proximate, Immediate and Enrichment. These four phases intend to strengthen the sacramental faith formation and marriage preparation beginning in childhood and extending beyond the wedding.

Deacon Jim Fortner, diocesan chief operating officer and deacon assigned to Blessed Sacrament Parish, Ft. Mitchell, said, "Bishop Iffert laid out three strategies in the pastoral plan: faith formation, evangelization and leadership. This is faith formation."

Marriage Catechumenal Pathways is not a new concept to those in the Church, said Deacon Steve Alley, St. Timothy Parish, Union, who is a member of the Marriage Catechumenal Pathways development team.

"The Catechumenal Pathways for Marriage was a request from Pope Francis. (The Pope's concern) was that we, as a Church, don't spend enough time training couples for sacramental marriage," he said.

The first of the four phases is the Remote phase, where a stronger emphasis is placed on the age-appropriate edu-

cation of the sacrament of matrimony.

"I think the main focus for children is always on first Communion and confirmation. This is going to put emphasis also on marriage," said Deacon Alley.

Starting in kindergarten through 12th grade, students will learn about marriage in a foundational way. The ideal will be that when students graduate high school, they will be equipped with the knowledge needed to discern what God asks of them.

This discernment is phase two of the Marriage Catechumenal Pathways, the Proximate phase. In this phase, high school graduates who have not yet found their vocation discern God's calling for their life.

"They're discerning whether they want to be married, be single, maybe go into some religious order. It's that searching," said Deacon Alley. "This is just a lot deeper, personal and faithful way to journey through life. When you come out of high school, you immediately start that discernment process."

Phase three of the Marriage Catechumenal Pathways is the Immediate phase, which begins right after a couple's engagement. One year prior to marriage, the engaged couple will receive a mentor couple from their home parish. This couple will journey with the engaged up to the wedding day and for the first five years of marriage.

"We marry couples, but then we don't accompany them after they get married," said Deacon Fortner. This new

structure will accompany the engaged and newly married on their journey. "Our hope is that once this program is set, it will be self-perpetuation. The couples graduating out of the five-year program would then become mentor couples for the next group," said Deacon Fortner.

Also new in the Immediate phase is the betrothal ceremony where the engaged couple, in the presence of the priest, their family and friends, will receive a blessing as they make a commitment — a betrothal — to one another, said Deacon Alley.

Following the Immediate phase is the Enrichment phase, which is the first years of marriage, journeying with a mentor couple, to discover ways to practice the faith at home and to engage in parish life as a couple.

"The idea is that you become a community in your church, a community with other couples who may be dealing with the same things you're dealing with as a couple," said Deacon Alley. "The idea is that you have this small group of like-minded Catholic faithful couples."

The formation of Marriage Catechumenal Pathways will change the way that the Diocese of Covington prepares couples for the Sacrament of Matrimony and marriage. Bestowing in them a renewed heart of spirit for the journey which lies ahead.

"The home church is the most important institution here. We have to form husbands and wives to create a strong home church," said Deacon Fortner.

Meet five married couples who are saints

Katie Yoder

OSV News

Catholics and people worldwide associate St. Valentine's feast day with love and romance. Here are five married couples who are saints today because they lived out a vocation of love for each other — and for God.

1. Sts. Louis Martin and Marie-Azélie Guérin (Zélie)

Pope Francis canonized the French couple Louis Martin (1823-94) and Zélie Guérin (1831-77) in 2015. Louis, a watchmaker, and Zélie, a lacemaker, attempted to enter religious life before discerning marriage. They are perhaps best known for being the parents of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, their youngest daughter.

St. Thérèse was one of nine children the Martins welcomed into their home; four died in infancy, the other five — all girls — joined religious orders.

The couple's path to holiness embodies the "little way" that St. Thérèse is famous for — doing small things with great love.

"The holy spouses Louis Martin and Marie-Azélie Guérin practiced Christian service in the family, creating day by day an environment of faith and love which nurtured the vocations of their daughters," Pope Francis remembered at their canonization.

Their feast day is July 12.

2. Sts. Aquila and Priscilla

Sts. Aquila and Priscilla served an important role in early Christianity. The Jewish tentmakers who converted to Christianity traveled to Corinth after being exiled from Rome. While there, they encountered St. Paul, a fellow tentmaker whom they welcomed into their home.

The first-century Christian couple appears multiple times in the Bible because of their faithful witness.

"Greet Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I am grateful but also all the churches of the Gentiles," St. Paul writes in Romans 16:3-4.

Acts 18 reveals that the two saints accompanied St. Paul from Corinth to Syria and then, to Ephesus, where they instructed others in "the way of God."

They also opened their home as a church to the local Christian community, where together they read Scripture and celebrated the Eucharist.

From their example, Pope Benedict XVI said in 2007, the faithful can learn how "every home can transform itself in(to) a little church."

According to some traditions, they died as martyrs. Their feast day is July 8.

3. Mary and St. Joseph

Catholics honor Sts. Mary and Joseph as the parents of Jesus. Throughout their lives, they always said "yes" to God's plan — from Mary consenting to become the Mother of God to Joseph, a carpenter, taking Mary as his wife after an angel appeared to him. The solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, is Jan. 1. St. Joseph's feast day is March 19.

4. Sts. Joachim and Anne

Sts. Joachim and Anne are honored as Mary's parents and Jesus' grandparents. While their story does not appear in the Bible, tradition remembers them as a faithful, holy couple who struggled with childlessness before they became the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Their feast day is July 26.

5. Sts. Zechariah and Elizabeth

Sts. Zechariah and Elizabeth are the holy parents of St. John the Baptist. The couple also struggled with having children until the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and promised them a son in their old age.

When Zechariah doubted the angel, he became unable to speak until after his son's birth, when he confirmed in writing that his son's name was John. His first words were of praise for God.

Before giving birth, Elizabeth receives a visit from her relative, Mary, while they are both pregnant. Today, Catholics repeat her words of greeting in the "Hail Mary" prayer: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb."

The couple's feast day is Nov. 5.

Bonus: Blessed Luigi Beltrame Quattrocchi and Maria Corsini

Luigi (1880-1951), a lawyer, and Maria (1884-1965), a catechist, are the first married couple to be beatified together by the Catholic Church. They welcomed four children into their home, three of whom entered consecrated religious life.

When doctors recommended that they choose abortion for their youngest, Enrica, due to pregnancy complications, they refused. Today, she is also on the path to sainthood.

The couple lived "an ordinary life in an extraordinary



OSV News photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

Sts. Marie-Azélie Guérin and Louis Martin, the parents of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, are depicted with their daughter in a stained-glass window at St. Thérèse of Lisieux Church in Montauk, N.Y.

way," Pope St. John Paul II said during their 2001 beatification, including by embracing a rich spiritual life.

"At the center of their life was the daily Eucharist as well as devotion to the Virgin Mary, to whom they prayed every evening with the rosary, and consultation with wise spiritual directors," he said.

Their example, he said, serves as an inspiration for all.

"Dear families, today we have distinctive confirmation that the path of holiness lived together as a couple is possible, beautiful, extraordinarily fruitful, and fundamental for the good of the family, the Church and society," he said. "This prompts us to pray to the Lord that there be many more married couples who can reveal in the holiness of their lives, the 'great mystery' of spousal love, which originates in creation and is fulfilled in the union of Christ with his Church."

Katie Yoder is an OSV News correspondent. She writes from Maryland.

Marriage: A sacrament of lasting love

Heidi Busse, Cory Busse
OSV News

The great marriage myth of our time is that happy marriages “just happen.” When we were first married, we — like many young couples — were under the impression that true love was all that was required to live “happily ever after.” We certainly didn’t believe that we needed to put any work into our marriage, because only unhappy couples work on their marriages.

Wow — were we wrong.

The images of love and marriage that surround us in popular culture reinforce the idea that real love is easy, and experiencing hardship means you’ve married the wrong person. The reality is, we are all human beings struggling to find our way through relationships. Successful spouses know that putting time and energy into marriage is essential in building the foundation of a lasting love.

The Church teaches that marriage is a sacrament. When a baptized man and a baptized woman freely consent to marry one another, their bond becomes sacramental — that is, it is a living and effective sign of God’s love. Christian marriage is more than a signed piece of paper and a shared checking account. Sacramental marriage means that the couple shares together in the life of grace by the very fact of being married to one another.

The Church goes even further, teaching that the sign of God’s presence in marriage is the couple themselves. While the priest is an essential witness at a Catholic marriage ceremony, the spouses are the true ministers of the sacrament of matrimony. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “Christian marriage in its turn becomes an efficacious sign, the sacrament of the covenant of Christ and the Church. Since it signifies and communicates grace, marriage between baptized persons is a true sacrament of the New Covenant” (1617). As spouses, we are called to be signs of God’s love and presence through our words and actions, by raising our children in the faith, and through the way we show love for one another.

Christian marriage is a holy vocation in which each spouse is called “to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love. In the joys of their love and family life he gives them here on earth a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb” (CCC 1642). Married life gives us a glimpse of the eternal union of God and his Church and calls each spouse to build the other up for everlasting life in heaven.

Think of the shape of an hourglass. Wide at the top, continually tapering, tight at the middle and flaring out again to its widest point on the other side. That’s the shape of a marriage. At times we’re far apart, at other times we’re as close as we could be. The only thing constant in marriage is change.

In most marriages, there are four main seasons: the honeymoon, young parenthood, middle age and empty nesting, and the later years. Each season or cycle has unique joys and challenges.

— The honeymoon: The heady, early days of romance are like “living on a breath mint,” because it seems like it



OSV News photo/Stacy Rausch, Catholic Herald

A file photo shows a groom spinning his new bride in the middle of a deserted street during a snowstorm in Old Town Alexandria, Va.

takes almost no effort to keep your marriage happy and healthy. As time goes by, novelty is replaced by familiarity. It’s critical to navigate this transition because you want it to breed satisfaction instead of contempt. Falling in love is a wonderful blessing. Staying in love is a choice we make every day (and it takes a lot of work).

— Young parenthood: Children often give a marriage greater meaning and some amazing stuff to post on social media. Kids can be a source of joy and fulfillment. But this phase of marriage is also among the toughest — and it can last two decades or more. So finding joy in one another and your blossoming family is critical.

— Middle age/empty nest: During this phase, your careers are probably flowing well and the house is paid off (or getting closer to it). Now that the kids are grown and gone, you can refocus your time and energy on one another. The world is your oyster — so long as you’ve taken care to stay connected and interested in one another.

— The later years: Couples that age together often find a deepening love. Many couples who have been married for 20, 30 or 40 years say that they are even more in love in the later years of marriage than in their early days. This phase of marriage may also be called the “best friend” phase because spouses rely on one another and enjoy spending time together. One couple in their later years summed it up this way: “We simply can’t imagine life without each other!”

It is important to foster closeness with your spouse through all cycles of marriage. Parenting often becomes the main connection while the “couple relationship” is no longer prioritized. Spending time together alone as a couple is essential to staying connected.

Date nights may seem trite, but they really do work! If a babysitter isn’t forthcoming, turn off your devices and

share the news of the day with each other. A friend of ours who was married for more than 40 years says that the secret to a lasting marriage is “to periodically learn something new about your spouse.”

Difficult times visit every marriage. Unexpected challenges arise: illness, job loss or death in the family. But that doesn’t mean your marriage is doomed — far from it. Even the happiest and most successful marriages you can think of have had troubles — many of them big troubles.

Sacramental marriages work through the tough times. When marital conflicts arise, it is helpful to remember there are no “winners” because you are always on the same team. Being “right” is not so much the goal as being heard and understood. And listening is just as important as talking. It is important to respect your spouse enough to listen and consider his or her side of the conflict. The best marriages are a union of two “forgivers.”

Nourishing your faith life together is also essential to a lasting union. Praying together at bedtime and at mealtimes is a great way to keep God at the center of your marriage (and serves as a faith model for children and friends as well).

It is a great gift to journey through life together as a married couple. There will be “ups and downs,” and as you move through the many phases of married life, it is most important to remember that you’re not alone. The Church is there for your marriage long after the flowers have faded and the dress no longer fits. In times of joy and in times of trouble, remember that you have an entire faith community that wants your marriage to succeed and is committed to helping you in any way it can. Count your blessings and they will flow.

Heidi and Cory Busse write from Minnesota.

Tips to strengthen your domestic church in 2026

Dr. Gregory Popcak
OSV News

Did you know that your home is holy? It might not feel like it sometimes, but similar to the way God transforms common bread and wine into his precious Body and Blood, God uses sacramental grace to transform your messy family life into a “domestic church.” This is a truly sacred place where you are meant to encounter God’s grace in the everyday stuff of everyday life, learn how to care for one another with the love that flows from God’s heart, and bring the world to Christ through your witness.

everything God created us to be — like Jesus did.

The mission of every domestic church is to build grace-filled, loving, intimate households rooted in the commitment to work for one another’s ultimate good.

Whatever the makeup of your household, the degree to which you can say that the people you live with are united by sacramental grace and committed to living out the Christian/Trinitarian vision of love in all your relationships is the degree to which you can say your household represents a true domestic church. Likewise, the degree to which this isn’t true of your household is the degree to

God’s love instead.

Similar to the way the Liturgy of the Eucharist is made up of different building blocks — that is, rites — we can say that the Liturgy of Domestic Church Life is made up of three parts: the “rite” of Christian relationships, the “rite” of family rituals and the “rite” of reaching out. Each of these so-called rites involves certain practices that help families exercise their baptismal mission to be priests, prophets and royals, respectively.

So, how do we live all that? Considering each of the three rites we’ve explained, think how you might implement the following traits that can strengthen your domestic church.

The rite of Christian relationships helps families live the priestly mission of baptism. When we work to overcome the selfish, sinful ways we treat one another; imitate Christ’s sacrificial, incarnate love; and consecrate the things we do all day to Christ, it is then that family life becomes a “little way of holiness.”

Here are some concrete practices:

— Prioritize family time. Because we can only form godly children if we spend meaningful time together every day, don’t let outside activities compete with efforts to create a close-knit, family team.

— Be extravagantly affectionate. Christ’s love is generous and incarnate. As a Christian household, imitate Christ by being generously and appropriately affectionate, affirming, and supportive of one another.

— Pope St. John Paul II said that Christian relationships are characterized by “mutual self-giving.” Work hard to respond to one another’s needs (parents and kids) promptly, generously, consistently and cheerfully.

— Practice discipleship discipline in the home. As St. John Bosco taught, reject harsh punishments and focus on teaching, supporting and encouraging godly behavior through “reason, religion and loving kindness.”

The rite of family rituals equips families to live the prophetic mission of baptism. When families work, play, talk and pray together every day, they witness to the ways Christians relate to work, leisure, others and faith.

— Work rituals. Each day, instead of dividing and conquering, make time to do at least some household chores together. Don’t think of chores as just “things that have to get done.” They are opportunities to learn to be a team and take good care of one another.

— Play rituals. Every day make a point to play together, enjoy one another’s company, and model healthy ways to celebrate your life together.

— Talk rituals. Several times a week have meaningful conversations (not lectures) about faith, values, how God is showing up, and how to take better care of one another.

— Prayer rituals. Pray together as a family throughout each day. Relate to Jesus as another member of the family. Regularly praise him and ask for his help.

The rite of reaching out equips families to live the royal mission of baptism. We reign with Christ by serving with him.

— Take good care of others in the home. Authentic Christian service begins with caring generously for the people under our roof.

— Think about others even when at home. As a family, donate gently used items, look for ways to help neighbors, and make your home a place where others can enjoy godly fun and fellowship. Regularly engage in charitable service together as a family.

— Implement kind and thoughtful attitudes and use good manners in and outside the home. As a family, be conscious of leaving people happier than you found them.

Every family has strengths and areas for growth. Incorporating this vision and these practices will help strengthen your domestic church in the New Year.

Dr. Gregory Popcak is the founder and executive director of the Pastoral Solutions Institute, an organization dedicated to helping Catholics find faith-filled solutions to tough marriage, family, and personal problems.



OSV News photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

A file photo shows a family leaving the altar after presenting the gifts during Mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York.

But what does it really mean to be a domestic church?

A domestic church is a household of persons who are, first, united to one another and God through the sacramental life of the Church, and, second, committed to living out the Christian vision of love in their relationships with one another and the world. Let’s break that down.

A household of persons who are united to God and one another through the sacramental life of the Church means that it is grace that makes a household a domestic church.

In ancient Roman society, the family was a tribe based on blood. Christianity challenged this tribalistic view by teaching that all the baptized were God’s family. For Christians, the ties of grace are even more binding than ties of blood.

In fact, it was this new understanding of family that gave rise to religious and monastic communities. Monasteries and convents are types of domestic churches. Like every other Christian family, they are households of persons united to God and one another through the sacramental life of the Church.

Of course, just living under the same roof doesn’t make a domestic church happen any more than standing around in a physical church makes Mass happen. In both cases, the people who are gathered together need to be intentional about what they are doing. That’s why, besides sharing a sacramental connection, a domestic church must also be committed to living out the Christian vision of love in their relationships with one another and the world.

The world offers a lot of different ideas about what love means. At its core, being a Christian disciple means living a life that promotes a uniquely Christian vision of love. For Christians, loving someone means, first, working to be in intimate communion — as the Trinity is revealed to us as the perfect communion of life and love — and, second, giving everything we have to help one another become

which God is calling you and yours to grow. Every domestic church lives in the tension that exists between the already present and the not-yet-fulfilled kingdom of God.

Out of the different types of domestic churches that exist, households rooted in marriage rightfully enjoy a special pride of place, but not because they represent some kind of human ideal. They deserve special respect because they share a stronger sacramental connection and, as “icons of the Trinity,” they are better equipped to witness to Trinitarian love.

That doesn’t mean other households are lesser domestic churches, or that married households are automatically ideal. It just means there are different kinds of domestic churches — all of which share some sacramental connection, but each of which witnesses to Christian love in the manner that’s most appropriate to its specific reason for being.

One reason people can be confused by the term “domestic church” is that, when we go to church, we usually celebrate a liturgy — namely, the Liturgy of the Eucharist. But families don’t celebrate liturgy at home, do we? Actually, yes, we do! We celebrate the Liturgy of Domestic Church Life. Theologians tell us that Christian family life is liturgical. The Liturgy of Domestic Church Life is the liturgy over which we, the common priesthood (a vocation we received at baptism), preside.

Liturgy is an act of worship that God uses to heal the damage sin does to our relationships with him and others. The Liturgy of the Eucharist, over which the ministerial priesthood presides, facilitates communion with God and makes communion with others possible. The Liturgy of Domestic Church Life, presided over by the common priesthood, enables families to bring Christ home so that he can help us overcome the selfish and sinful ways we tend to treat one another and learn to care for others with

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- 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

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Six Catholic athletes from past Winter Olympics inspire with stories of faith, endurance

Lauretta Brown
OSV News

As billions tune in to the Winter Games in Italy, many will recall highlights from past Winter Olympics over the decades.

The Catholic athletes at the Games this year are joining a long tradition of Catholic Olympians who have made history with their inspiring stories of faith and endurance. Here are just some of the Catholic stories that came out of past Winter Games.

'Queen Yuna' and a priest's influence

One of the most revered Olympic figure skaters of all time, Yuna Kim of South Korea, witnessed to her Catholic faith at two Olympics where she took home gold and silver medals in 2010 and 2014. Called "Queen Yuna" by figure skating fans, Kim converted to the faith in 2008 after an



OSV News photo/Shamil Zhumatov, Reuters

South Korea's Yuna Kim celebrates with her silver medal during the victory ceremony for the figure skating women's free skating program at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, Feb. 21.

unlikely encounter with Catholic doctors and a priest.

"I had an injury, indeed a series of injuries, starting in 2006, which obliged me to be in and out of hospital," she explained in a 2014 interview with the then-Pontifical Council for the Laity (now succeeded by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life). "In hospital I had a providential encounter with some Catholic doctors with whom I established a trusting relationship. They quoted sentences to me from the Bible and the New Testament, to keep up my morale and to comfort me, and all this was a great help in overcoming the psychological problems I had due to my continuous relapses after my injury."

"I would say that what impressed me most was that they were not trying to convert me," she added. "Theirs was a disinterested act for a girl who was going through a difficult time in her life and in her professional career; they sought to give me the best possible advice in accordance with their vision of the world."

She described the recovery process as "the hardest time in my life" with back problems which "had been recurring for two years, it seemed as though I would have them forever. At a certain point you find yourself at a crossroads. You ask yourself if it is really worth going ahead and, if it is, where you can find the strength to continue to hope. I needed to be able to count on something or someone. Faith in Catholicism gave me all this. For me it was a completely unknown path. Neither my mother nor my father was a believer. But in hospital I met Father Lee."

"He was not merely the clinic's priest but he himself



OSV News photo/Kimimasa Mayama, Reuters

U.S. Olympic gold medalist Tara Lipinski waves to the crowd after receiving her award in Nagano, Japan, Feb. 20, 2018.

was also a patient at that time and a common destiny seemed to create a certain bond between us," she said. "After meeting Father Lee, I began to understand more in detail the fundamental teachings of Catholicism; he gave me private lessons on the Bible and on the Gospels, in short he introduced me to the faith: hence my decision to be baptized with my mother."

At her baptism, Kim took the name "Stella" after the Marian title "Stella Maris," Star of the Sea, telling a diocesan paper that during the baptism she "felt an enormous consolation in my heart," and she promised God to continue to "pray always," especially before competitions.

She joined with Korean bishops in 2010 to explain the rosary through the example of the rosary ring she wore in competition.

Tara Lipinski and the Little Flower

Another revered Olympic figure skater and current NBC figure skating commentator, Tara Lipinski, who won a gold medal in the 1998 Winter Games, attributed

her success, in part, to the intercession of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower.

Lipinski, whose mother, Pat, felt renewed in her Catholic faith after a novena to St. Thérèse, said in a 2001 interview with the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette that she liked the saint "because she didn't seem perfect, which makes you feel you have something in common with her."

She related to St. Thérèse's battles with perfectionism, saying it was comforting to know that the saint could be "a little bratty."

"She was struggling to get into the convent kind of like I was struggling to be accepted, because I was too young,"

(Continued on page 18)

Living God's law

(Continued from page 5)

We might express all this by saying that mere obedience to dictates of the law is not the purpose of our Christian faith. Becoming "good" is not the purpose. Placating God by being perfect is not the purpose. The purpose of our Christian faith is to be transformed, to become like Christ. There was a book published in the 1970s with a chapter entitled, "How Far Can We Go?" referring to how much sexual activity can an unmarried couple engage in before they sin. The question itself is Pharisaic. The true Christian attitude is the opposite: not how little can I do and still say I belong to God, but how much of myself will I allow to be transformed, how much like Christ can I become?

Notice the passive tense of the last part of that last sentence: how much of myself will I allow to be transformed. Obeying the letter of the law will not transform us, because we are still in control. Obeying the law in its fullness — fulfilling the law — transforms us because we allow God to be in control, because we have handed ourselves over to him. It is interesting that obeying the law is easier than fulfilling the law; that is because we can obey the law by our own strength, our own willpower; but to live the law in its fullness, we need God's grace.

Notice one final and lovely thing. Jesus does not say that he has come to get us to fulfill the law; he uses the word 'I': "I have come to fulfill the law." Jesus asks nothing of us that he does not do. He leads, in obedience and humility, in fulfilling the law, and then invites us to follow. Let us accept his invitation. Let us follow him, not disregarding God's law but living it to its fullness, allowing it to transform us into the likeness of our Savior, bringing us finally to love.

And let us pray for each other and help each other in that endeavor:

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

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(Continued from page 17)

she added. Lipinski won her Olympic gold medal at just 15 years old.

Before her long program in Nagano, Japan, her coach held her statue of St. Thérèse while Lipinski took the ice. "I remember being on the ice and feeling such a strong presence of her being there with me," she said of the saint. "She was on my mind constantly. It kept my mind off of doubting myself or technical things."

"I think she's changed me as a person," Lipinski said. "She crosses my mind often. I think, what would she do? Her Little Way applies to everything in life."

A skier's Olympic ring for St. Pier Giorgio Frassati

Cross-country skier Rebecca Dussault brought her faith to the 2006 Winter Games in Turin, Italy, 20 years ago.

Before her journey to the games, Dussault married her childhood sweetheart at 19 and credits her mother-in-law with igniting her faith life.

"She really had and has a deep interior life and that's what she continually conveyed to us — the love and the mercy of Jesus Christ and the beauty and the depth and the heights of the Catholic faith," she said. "She showed us the universal Church with such passion and consistently that we just couldn't not fall in love with the faith."

Dussault told OSV News recently that the games in Turin were special even though she didn't come home with a medal. She traveled to the games with her husband and their then-4-year-old son cheering her on from the sidelines and used the occasion to spread devotion to then-Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, engraving his name on her Olympic ring.

St. Pier Giorgio Frassati, who was canonized in September, was an avid skier and mountain climber with the well-known motto "Verso l'alto" ("To the heights").

Dussault still skis and enjoys time on her homestead in Idaho with her eight children and two grandchildren.

"If you can do sport in right conscience and be building the kingdom of God, then you've really latched on to some greatness," she emphasized.



OSV News photo/courtesy Sharbel Dussault

Rebecca Dussault skis during the Alberta Centennial World Cup in Canmore, Alberta, in December 2005.

A speedskater-turned-Franciscan sister

Kirstin Holum was a rising star in the world of speed skating at the Winter Olympics in Nagano. Her future looked bright as the youngest national junior champion speed skater at the age of 17. She placed sixth for Team USA in the 3,000 meters and seventh in the 5,000 meters.

Her mother and coach, Dianne Holum was a speed skating legend who won a gold medal at the Munich Games in 1972. She was also a devout Catholic who emphasized the importance of faith. She paid for her daughter to make a pilgrimage to the Marian shrine in Fatima, Portugal.

It was there at age 16 that Holum felt a sense of her vocation and the "powerful experience of realizing Jesus' presence in the Blessed Sacrament."

Rather than continuing her speed skating career, Holum chose to enter the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal in the Bronx borough of New York City after finishing college.

She was later sent to open a new convent in England on the invitation of the bishop of Leeds. "I was asked to be a part of the first group of sisters who were sent over as missionaries," she told NBC in 2018.

She said she had no regrets about the path she chose.

"I was not feeling in my heart that I would be skating the rest of my life; I knew there was more to life than sports," she said in an interview with Catholic News Service. "I never regretted that decision. I think it was just a grace from God to bring me to something else."

"The excitement and the joy of competing and doing well, even just doing your personal best, there's a great thrill in that," she told NBC. "But it was always a fleeting joy: You're on to the next event, so you get nervous for that."

"I think deep down,

everyone is desiring to be great and to do something great," she added. "It's only when you get really in touch with God's plan for you that you really find a peace in doing the great thing, whatever it might be."

A hockey coach and priest sets an example of forgiveness

It was an unlikely sight at the 1964 Winter Olympics in Innsbruck, Austria: A Catholic priest coaching Team Canada was struck in the face by a broken hockey stick tossed by a Swedish player.

Father David Bauer, still bleeding from the blow, ordered his players not to retaliate against Sweden's Carl-Göran Öberg — not wanting to take penalties in a close game which Canada won.

Father Bauer "returned to the arena the next day to scout the Czechoslovakia-Soviet Union game. He invited Öberg to sit with him, sending a message that he harboured no ill will toward the Swede."

While Canada finished in fourth that year, Father Bauer was recognized for his sportsmanship in response to the incident with Öberg.

The brother of Boston Bruins star Bobby Bauer, Father Bauer was a successful junior hockey player in Canada in the 1940s. However, rather than entering the world of professional hockey, he followed a vocation to the priesthood with the Basilian order and began teaching at St. Michael's College in Toronto and later St. Mark's College at the University of British Columbia.

Taking a holistic approach to coaching, Father Bauer said, "If you can improve the boy as a person through virtues of hockey — courage, judgment, prudence, fortitude, teamwork and fair play, he will improve as a hockey player."

Father Bauer was awarded the Order of Canada in 1967 for his contributions to the sport of hockey. The priest died in 1988 and he was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1989.

The bobsledder staying on track with prayer

Curtis "Curt" Tomasevicz, a history-making gold and silver medalist in bobsled in the 2010 and 2014 Winter Olympic Games, said in a 2018 interview that his Catholic faith is what keeps his life on track.

"If I weren't Catholic, I think my life would be the equivalent of a bobsled crash," he said. "Being Catholic allows me to get my priorities straight and know that, despite what most people will tell you, athletic competitions are fleeting and you should not measure your self-worth through them."

"My first crash — which lasted so long that I was able to pray three and a half Hail Marys before the sled stopped — was very jarring," he recalled, "but I had to get back into things and not let fear take a hold of me. It was also a strong reinforcement of how I never pray to win, but so that everyone would compete to the best of their abilities and that no one would get hurt."

"At the end of my career, I had a void to fill due to my departure from bobsledding," he emphasized. "I had grown accustomed to planning everything else around the sport, so there was a big transition when it was no longer there. This reinforced how important it is to me to be Catholic — being a part of the Church that Christ founded for our well-being. I was very motivated to be the best bobsledder I could be, but I didn't let it become a god for me. If I had let that happen, the transition away from it would have been devastating rather than challenging."

Now, Tomasevicz has returned to the Winter Games in a new capacity as director of sport performance for Team USA Bobsled in Milan.



OSV News photo/Steffen Schmidt, Reuters

U.S. speed skater Kirstin Holum is seen in action during the women's 3000 metres race at the Speed Skating World Cup in Davos, Switzerland, Jan. 25, 1997.

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National/World

Police commissioner names Cardinal Dolan as co-chief chaplain of NYPD

NEW YORK — Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, retired archbishop of New York, is the new co-chief chaplain of the New York Police Department, sharing the role with the Rev. A.R. Bernard of Brooklyn's Christian Cultural Center, a nondenominational megachurch. Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch welcomed the cardinal and Rev. Bernard, a prominent leader of the Black Church, in their new role at her "State of the NYPD" address the morning of Feb. 10. The cardinal's successor, Archbishop Ronald A. Hicks, also attended the event. "I want to thank some of our esteemed faith leaders here today, especially Cardinal Dolan and Reverend A.R. Bernard, and I want to welcome Archbishop Ronald Hicks to our great city," Tisch said. On Feb. 9, an NYPD news release said Tisch would officially announce the two churchmen as co-chief chaplains during her address the following day. "The two men need no introduction, because for decades they have shaped the spiritual life of this city through leadership that reaches far beyond their congregations and their pulpits," she said in her address. Their decision to serve "speaks to something enduring between faith and policing," she added.

Oklahoma death-row inmate to be executed Feb. 12, unless granted reprieve or stay

OKLAHOMA CITY — Death-row inmate Kendrick Simpson is to be executed by lethal injection Feb. 12 unless Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt grants him a last-minute reprieve or the U.S. Supreme Court grants a stay. On Feb. 9, advocates for Simpson filed a petition on his behalf with Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch asking the high court to stay his execution. Gorsuch oversees the federal judicial circuit that includes Oklahoma. The governor-appointed Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board voted 3-2 on Jan. 14 to deny clemency for Simpson, convicted of the 2006 killings of Glen Palmer and Anthony Jones. Advocates for clemency say jurors were not permitted to hear evidence of his severe post-traumatic stress disorder, a mental health factor they say might have led to a different outcome than capital punishment. Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City in a Jan. 20 statement urged state leaders to grant Simpson clemency, explaining that while his life has been marked by profound suffering and trauma, these factors do not diminish the gravity or pain of the crime. Instead, they "call us to a deeper moral reflection on justice, mercy, and the dignity of the human person," the archbishop said.

Religious Liberty Commission tussles over antisemitism as lawsuit challenges its legality

WASHINGTON — The Religious Liberty Commission held its fifth hearing — with some tense exchanges — to examine a rise in antisemitism Feb. 9, the same day a lawsuit was filed

challenging the committee's creation as unlawful. In the hearing, which took place at the Museum of the Bible, commissioners looked at an increase in cases of antisemitism and hate crimes towards Jewish Americans. The Anti-Defamation League, which tracks antisemitic attacks, said in a 2025 report that it recorded 9,354 antisemitic incidents across the U.S. in 2024. That marked a 344% increase over its findings from the previous five years. Many speakers emphasized religious teachings opposing antisemitism and the contributions of Jewish Americans to the U.S. since the founding. Father Thomas Ferguson, a Catholic priest on the commission's Advisory Board of Religious Leaders, shared the Church's teaching that the "human person has a right to religious freedom" and pointed to its 1965 teaching in "Nostra Aetate," which condemned antisemitism as incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Tense exchanges arose when Commissioner Carrie Prejean Boller, a former Miss California USA and a Catholic, questioned Jewish American witnesses whether criticism of Israel or protests over Gaza should be considered antisemitic. In a lawsuit filed the same day, a multifaith coalition argued that while the commission was "ostensibly designed to defend religious liberty for all Americans," the suit alleged it unduly favored Christians as "no members of the Commission represent other minority religions, such as Islam, Hinduism, or Sikhism."

2 major medical groups back limits on gender transition procedures for minors

WASHINGTON — Two major medical groups backed limitations on certain types of medical or surgical gender reassignment procedures for minors who identify as transgender. The comments from The American Society of Plastic Surgeons and The American Medical Association marked the first time major medical groups backed such limitations, while most have opposed efforts to restrict gender transition surgeries or provide hormonal treatments for minors experiencing gender dysphoria, often citing doctor-patient privacy. In its policy statement, ASPS cited "a growing uncertainty about the benefits of medical and surgical interventions," saying it therefore "recommends that surgeons delay gender-related breast/chest, genital, and facial surgery until a patient is at least 19 years old." The AMA, the nation's largest organization representing doctors, which has previously backed such procedures, agreed with ASPS Feb. 4 that they should generally be deferred until patients reach adulthood. The Catholic Medical Association praised the ASPS recommendation in a Feb. 5 statement. The Church "is called to compassionately accompany people in their respective circumstances, which includes those struggling with his or her God-given sexual identity as male or female," added Chieko Noguchi, spokesperson for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The U.S. bishops, she added,

"have been clear that medical procedures or interventions related to 'gender transition' are not morally acceptable."

Jimmy Lai's daughter hopes for 'political solution' after devastating sentence

LONDON — The daughter of imprisoned Catholic media tycoon and democracy advocate Jimmy Lai says her family remains grounded in faith after a Hong Kong court sentenced him to 20 years in prison under China's national security law. Speaking with OSV News on Feb. 9, Claire Lai said that although the sentence was heartbreaking, her father continues to trust in divine providence. At 78, and in declining health, Lai is believed to have received the harshest sentence yet under the sweeping law, which critics say has been used to silence dissent and crush press freedom. Claire Lai expressed skepticism about an appeal, describing Hong Kong's legal system as compromised and pointing instead to the need for a political solution involving Beijing's National People's Congress Standing Committee. The ruling drew international condemnation, including from U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who called for humanitarian parole. Despite the sentence, Lai's family says prayer has sustained them — and her father — through what she called a moment of profound trial and grace.

Vatican aid a sign of Pope Leo's closeness to suffering Ukrainians, papal almoner says

ROME — As brutal winter temperatures grip wartime Ukraine, the Vatican has stepped up emergency aid to help civilians facing power outages and health risks. Vatican News reports that three trucks carrying 80 electricity generators — along with food and medicine — have reached Kyiv and nearby Fastiv after departing Rome's Basilica of St. Sophia, known as the church of the Ukrainians. The shipment was sent at the request of Pope Leo XIV and coordinated by the Dicastery for the Service of Charity. Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, told OSV News the mission is a clear sign that the pope has not forgotten Ukraine's suffering, especially as attacks on energy infrastructure leave families without heat or light. Medicines included antibiotics, anti-inflammatories, supplements and melatonin to help those struggling with trauma-related insomnia. The aid is distributed through local bishops and parishes and reaches Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and others alike. The pope has also thanked Catholics across Europe for their solidarity, urging continued prayer and support as the war enters its fourth year. The papal almoner noted that the aid sent by the Vatican doesn't just go to Catholics. "This truly is pure Gospel: to love," he said.

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In a world of empty words, sacred Scripture offers nourishment, healing, pope says

Carol Glatz

Catholic News Service

Ignorance of sacred Scriptures is ignorance of Jesus Christ, Pope Leo XIV said during his weekly general audience.

"The ultimate purpose of reading and meditating on the Scriptures," he said Feb. 11, is "to get to know Christ and, through Him, to enter into a relationship with God, a relationship that can be understood as a conversation, a dialogue."

Also, with the season of Lent beginning in one week, Feb. 18, the pope said the season "is a time for deepening our knowledge and love of the Lord, for examining our hearts and our lives, as well as refocusing our gaze on Jesus and his love for us."

"May these coming days of prayer, fasting and almsgiving be a source of strength as we daily strive to take up our own crosses and follow Christ," he said during his audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall.

In his main catechesis, Pope Leo continued his series of talks on Vatican II, specifically the Dogmatic Constitution "Dei Verbum," on divine revelation and the Word of God.

The word of God is a source of comfort, guidance and strength for Christians, he said, and it should be shared with others, too, he said.

"Indeed, we live surrounded by so many words, but how many of these are empty!" he said.

"On the contrary, the Word of God responds to our thirst for meaning, for the truth about our life," he said. "It is the only Word that is always new: revealing the mystery of God to us, it is inexhaustible, it never ceases to offer its riches."

Sacred Scripture is "the means by which we come to know the incarnate living Word of God who is Jesus Christ," the pope said in his summary in English. "Indeed, praying with Scripture opens the door for an intimate rela-

tionship with God who, through these sacred writings, invites us into conversation with him."

"As St. Jerome rightly points out, ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of God," he said, encouraging all faithful to read and reflect on the word of God every day, so that it may "nourish our hearts and our minds and lead us to the fullness of life."

Speaking to Portuguese-speaking visitors, Pope Leo said prayerfully reading the word of God is a special kind of "nourishment" and an invigorating "medicine in moments of weakness"; from it, the faithful can draw "light and comfort."

"Christians are called to listen to the word of God, to keep it in their hearts, and to put it into practice in their daily lives, because it is alive, effective and a light on their path," he told Arabic-speaking visitors, which included members of the Sisters of Nazareth living in Haifa, Israel.

Pope Leo said in his English summary that there is a "profound and vital connection" between the word of God and the Catholic Church.

"Sacred Scripture, which has been entrusted to the Church and is guarded by her, reveals its meaning and manifests its strength in the life and faith of the Church, above all in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist," he said.



CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Pope Leo XIV lights a candle and prays before an image of Our Lady of Lourdes prior to his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Feb. 11, 2026.

Jesus Christ," he added.

To mark the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, celebrated Feb. 11, Pope Leo began the general audience with lighting a candle placed in front of a statue of Our Lady, and he joined in singing the "Immaculate Mary," also known as the Lourdes Hymn, with the thousands of faithful in the hall.

After the general audience, he visited the replica of the grotto at Lourdes in the Vatican Gardens and lit a candle there, too, "as a sign of my prayer for all the sick, whom we remember with particular affection today, World Day of the Sick."

Gathered together with a small group of people experiencing illness and those who care for them, the pope said, "We pray for you."

Thanking them for taking part in the moment of prayer, he said, the feast day "reminds us of the closeness of Mary, our mother, who always accompanies us and teaches us so much: what suffering means, what love means, what it means to entrust our lives into the hands of the Lord."

"For this reason, the Church continually meditates upon and interprets Scripture because it is the means by which we come to know the incarnate living Word of God who is



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