

- 2 CONNECT Retreat**
- 2 Save the date**
Covington Lenten pilgrimage
- 3 OCIA candidate**
Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption
- 3 Reelin' it in**
St. Joseph Academy
- 4 Women Making a Difference**
- 6 Growing prayer muscles**
At the GYMM
- 6 Outstanding NKY educator**
- 7 Lenten fish fries**
- 8 Work of heart**
Commissioned painting features diocesan priest
- 16 St. Catherine students**
Visit relics of St. Carlo Acutis



Carrying the St. Joseph Parish, Warsaw, Book of Elect, Father James Schaeper leads the parish's five catechumens and their sponsors to Bishop John Iffert, Feb. 22, at the Rite of Election at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption.

Moving? Wrong address?

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 (859) 392-1570

Bishop's Schedule	3
Commentary	5
People and Events	7
Classifieds	12
Shopper's Guide	14
VIRTUS	14
News Briefs	15

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

Record numbers respond to 'God's grace' and call at Rite of Election and call to continuing conversion

Laura Keener
Editor

At the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion, Feb. 22, Bishop John Iffert welcomed 420 people from across the Diocese seeking full communion with the Catholic Church. This is a record-breaking number; an increase of 57.3 percent over last year and a 105.9 percent increase over the five-year average.

In an interview with Father Daniel Schomaker, diocesan direc-

tor for the Office of Worship and Liturgy, the dramatic increase, he said, can only be attributed to God's grace and the Holy Spirit.

"God's grace is moving and people are paying attention," Father Schomaker said. "God's grace is always moving; the Holy Spirit is always active and drawing people back to him." What's happening now is "all of a sudden people are paying attention a little bit more and responding to that grace."

(Continued on page 8)

Round two of the DMI marks progress in parishes, continues to guide parish planning

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

Round two of the Disciple Maker Index Survey (DMI) opened diocesan wide on Feb. 18. This survey, distributed throughout the parishes both online and via paper surveys, provides real, tangible data for parish pastors and leaders helping them to understand their congregation, and how to best serve their people in areas of faith formation and parish life.

The first DMI was held during the 2023 Lenten season and helped parishes form parish pastoral plans as part of the diocesan wide With One Heart pastoral plan and leadership development initiative. Now, it is time to take the survey again as a measure of progress in the chosen improvement areas at each parish.

Jeanette Landenwitch, member of the Faith Formation Committee at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington, and the Parish Point of Contact for round two of the DMI, has been a part of Immaculate Heart of Mary's pastoral plan implementation team.

"It's been really fun, and it's been interesting, talking to people and helping them on their faith journey," she said.

The top three priorities for Immaculate Heart of Mary's pastoral plan were: strengthening the youth ministry program, have

(Continued on page 12)



In June 2025, an anniversary Mass and procession of the Our Lady of Fatima statue culminated a month-long activity schedule, part of the Immaculate Heart of Mary parish pastoral plan. The parish pastoral plan was developed using data collected from the Disciple Maker Index survey in 2023. A follow-up DMI survey is now being held in all parishes throughout the diocese to measure progress, re-evaluate priorities and tweak goals.

WITH ONE HEART
EMPOWERING PRIESTS. IGNITING PARISHES. ENLIVENING THE FAITHFUL.

The DMI survey portal is open and available for all parishes and parishioners. To find your parish Disciple Maker Index Survey go to:

Students connect with peers, leaders and Bishop Iffert at biannual retreat

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

The 2026 Winter CONNECT Retreat brought together 110 middle school students from across the Diocese, Feb. 21, for a day of reflection focused on the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The theme “Take Heart,” was drawn from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops upcoming consecration of the nation to the Sacred Heart, June 12, in honor of the nation’s 250th anniversary.

“The theme was ... in concern with where we’re going as an American collection of Catholic churches, we just thought that the message of the Sacred Heart would be great to present to students,” said Bradley Barnes, youth ministry volunteer and CONNECT leader.

“You never know what middle schoolers are going to be excited about,” said Mr. Barnes, “but they seemed to really take the opportunity to see themselves reflected in the heart of Jesus, cared for by the heart of Jesus.”

Students began the day with a surprise visit from Bishop John Iffert, who joined in fun activities before leading the Liturgy of the Hours. Primarily prayed by priests and other religious, Liturgy of the Hours is not well known among lay people, especially middle schoolers. This, however, was the point of the exercise, said Mr. Barnes.

“What a great opportunity for the kids to get to see a way that our bishops and priests pray, a way that religious men and women throughout the world are praying. In the theme of the Sacred Heart, just the idea of that being the prayer of Jesus as our high priest. That’s a prayer where, in a really special way, I feel like we hear the heart of Jesus leading us and guiding us in worship,” Mr. Barnes said.

Mr. Barnes called the visit from Bishop and the praying of the Liturgy of the Hours, “such a cool Holy Spirit moment,” underscoring the emphasis of prayer and connection brought to middle schoolers through this biannual retreat.

“For the first time in a long time I feel like every middle



Bailey photos



(above) Bishop John Iffert smiles as he plays the best friend game with students, where, through process of elimination, they find out who Bishop Iffert’s best friend is.

(above) Volunteers mix and mingle with the students as they settle in and get ready for morning prayer, the morning offering of St. Therese of Lisieux.

(right) Bishop Iffert prays the morning Liturgy of the Hours with middle schoolers at Thomas More University’s Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel.

schooler took the times of prayer; the times of song, the times of activity; they took it really well. There was a great openness from their hearts,” said Mr. Barnes.

The goal of each CONNECT retreat is to connect middle schoolers to, “something beyond just their local partic-

ular church, to the diocesan and maybe even the universal Church. So, if a kid came and felt seen and known and loved and appreciated, that’s always my goal. That was the same goal for this retreat,” said Mr. Barnes.

Save the Date

Start and end your individual journey on foot or by car at any of the five historic churches on the 4.3 mile pilgrimage route



Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption



St. Benedict Catholic Church



St. Augustine Catholic Church



St. John Catholic Church



Mother of God Catholic Church

March 28, 9 a.m.–2 p.m.

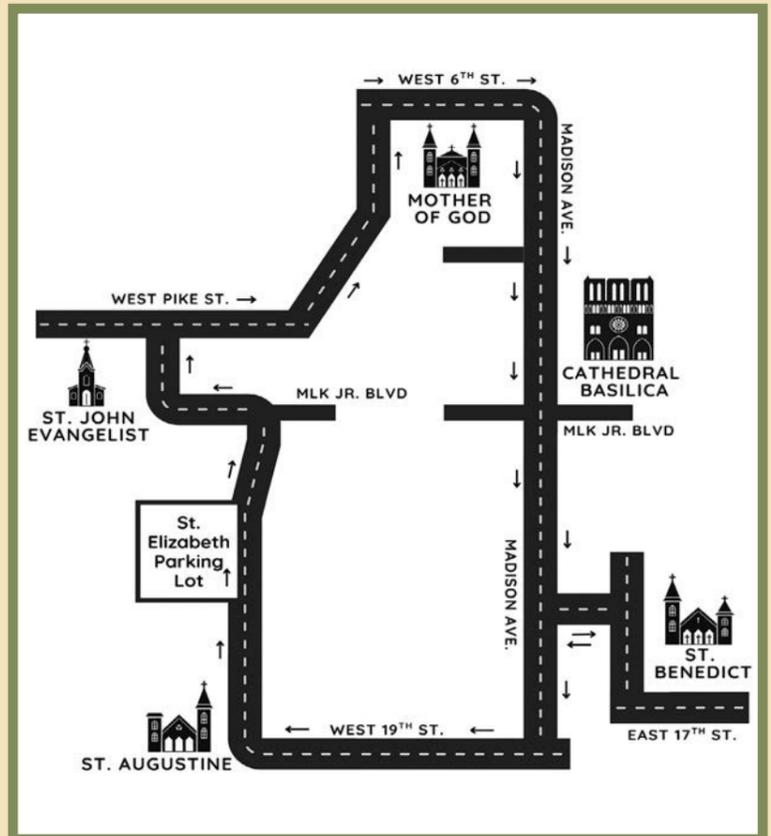
Start anytime between 9 a.m.–2 p.m.

Start from any location.

Park anywhere.

Route will be clearly marked.

Start and end your personal journey on foot or by car at any of the five historic Covington churches on the 4.3-mile pilgrimage route — Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, St. Benedict Church, St. Augustine Church, St. John Church and Mother of God Church.



Candidate seeks community in her faith ahead of Easter Vigil

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

Candidate Katie Foster is one of over 400 to enter the church in the Diocese of Covington at this year's Easter Vigil Mass, joining in full communion with Catholics of the diocese, the worldwide Church and her loved ones.

Growing up in Toledo, Ohio, Ms. Foster was introduced to the Catholic faith when her mother went through the Order of Christian Initiation (OCIA), before marrying her stepfather. "I was probably about fourth or fifth grade, and my mom got remarried to my stepdad, who was Catholic ... My mom went through OCIA because they wanted to continue raising their kids in a Catholic household. That was kind of my first introduction," she said.

Ms. Foster's four stepsisters are all Catholic and, in their footsteps, Ms. Foster attended Notre Dame Academy in Toledo, an all-girls preparatory high school. It was there that she became infatuated with the Catholic faith beyond the pew.

"Once I got the chance to be in theology classes and kind of understand the background behind the religion, the history and tradition is something I really enjoyed," she said.

Beyond an academic love for the faith, a love for the Catholic community was taking root in Ms. Foster. "I really enjoyed the community, specifically, that the Catholic faith offers," she said. "Being in that environment, all of my friends ended up being Catholic. I think the more that I was around them and their families, around the Catholic faith, the more I started to think about wanting that for myself."

A recent move to Newport, Kentucky, spurred Ms. Foster to make the leap and register for OCIA at the



Pictured is the 2026 Order of Christian Initiation class through the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption following the Rite of Election, Feb. 22. For a related Rite of Election article see page 1.

Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. "I think that's special, the center of the Diocese, was something that was really appealing to me," she said.

At the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Ms. Foster found the community she was looking for at first instance when she inquired with Sarah Wells, pastoral associate. "This is a community I want to be around, I really enjoyed talking with her about it," she said.

During the Easter Vigil, Ms. Foster, along with other

candidates, will receive the remainder of the Sacraments of Initiation in holy Communion and confirmation. Through those sacraments, she will become a full member of the community she has been around for so long.

"It's something I've been on the outside of but have admired most of my life. So, I think that just kind of making things official, to be a part of that, is really exciting," she said.

How a fish fry builds community at St. Joseph Academy

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

In 2026, St. Joseph Academy, Walton, will celebrate the school's 50th anniversary. The St. Joseph Fish Fry, a pillar of the school's community, has been around to support the school and its mission for most of those years — with over 30 years of continuously serving Friday fish to the community.

The St. Joseph Fish Fry is a part of the community, said St. Joseph the Worker Sister Patricia Jean Cushing, the school's principal. "Not just parish, not just school. We're private school, but it is the community," she said.

In fact, according to Sister Patricia, the community extends far beyond Walton. "We draw people from literally everywhere," she said. "From Taylor Mill to Union to Williamstown," including a couple people joining from Lexington for 2026's first fish fry on Feb. 20.

"They come with their friends," Sister Patricia said. "They socialize ... they're relaxed. It benefits them that way, because that camaraderie is there."

St. Joseph's fish fry, manned primarily by the parents of the school children there, also welcomes a plethora of student volunteers who contribute to the fish fry's buzzing feeling of community.

"The children volunteer because their parents volunteer," said Sister Patricia. "So, they want a piece of that. They see their parents are happy because they get to meet other parents who their children go to school with."

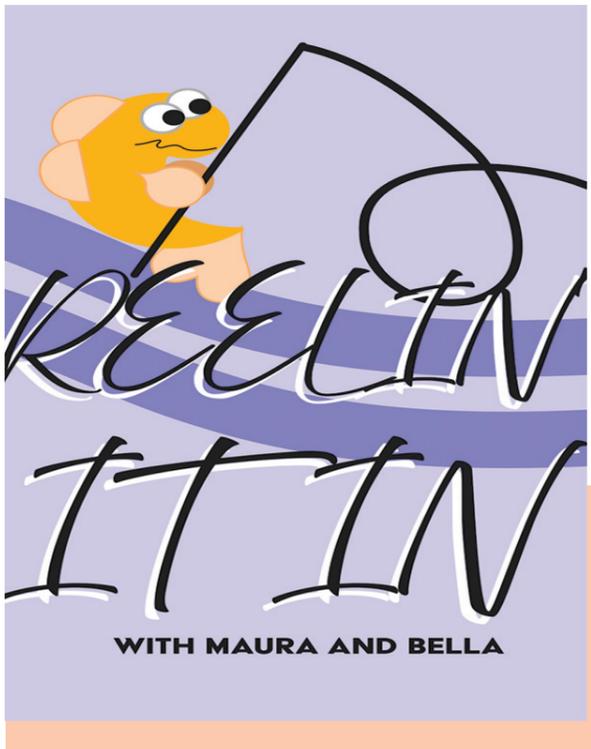
In fact, according to Sister Patricia, the students sign up to volunteer for different roles around the fish fry — carrying out orders, bussing tables, doing dishes — on their own accord, signing up on sheets during school.

"I don't pick them," said Sister Patricia. "They sign up for themselves. This is where they want to work, and they

do an absolutely great job. They're with their friends, the parents are involved — they are happy, and the children see that."

The fish fry, which is one of two major fundraisers for the school alongside the Pig Fest held on Father's Day Weekend, was started in monetary support of the school's mission. "The parents coming in have always known that," said Sister Patricia. "That this is how — rather than raise tuition up too high — by having these fundraisers and drawing from the community to help support us, we can keep tuition comparable to other schools."

"In 50 years, we've grown," she said, "We've grown from grades one through eight to putting in a kindergarten, to putting in a preschool, to putting in a childcare and putting in homeschool programming. And so, here we are — with so, so, so many blessings. Many people, all supportive — it's just been wonderful."



Bishop's Schedule

March 3
DPAA dinner, Blue Licks State Resort Park, Carlisle, 6 p.m.

March 5
Thomas More University Board of Trustees meeting
DPAA dinner, Receptions, Erlanger, 6 p.m.

March 10
Catholic Charities volunteer appreciation dinner, Receptions, Erlanger, 6 p.m.

Reelin It In Season III

Messenger staff members Bella and Maura headed out to St. Joseph Academy in Walton to help them celebrate 50 years of Catholic education. Long time volunteers, students and the sisters of St. Joseph the Worker are just some of the things that make this fish fry special. To see their fish fry and hear from volunteers and patrons, scan the QR code.



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.

Notre Dame Academy to celebrate 25 years of honoring Women Making a Difference

Notre Dame Academy will mark a special milestone this spring as it hosts the 25th Annual Women Making a Difference Award Luncheon, March 3. The long running event celebrates alumnae who have made a strong, positive impact on their families, careers and communities.

The luncheon will take place at the St. Elizabeth Training and Education Center in Erlanger. The day will begin with registration and networking at 11:00 a.m., followed by lunch and the award program at 12:00 p.m.

Funds raised at the event will support tuition assistance for Notre Dame Academy students. This helps ensure that young women can continue receiving the strong, faith based education the school is known for. All alumnae, families, community members and local businesses are invited to attend. Ticket and sponsorship information is available on the school's website.

2026 Women Making a Difference Honorees



Sister Mary Lynette Shelton

Notre Dame Sister Mary Lynette Shelton, '59

Sister Mary Lynette Shelton exemplifies the heart of a true servant leader; humble, dedicated and quietly transformative in every ministry she embraces. For more than five decades, she has served as an educator and administrator at institutions including Notre Dame Academy, St. Agnes School, Ft. Wright; St. Joseph School, Crescent Springs; St. Augustine School, Covington

and Thomas More College, where her visionary leadership inspired innovation and lasting change. As a co-founder of the Notre Dame Urban Education Center, she expanded educational opportunities for children, while her service with the Emergency Cold Shelter, St. Elizabeth Hospital, the Rose Garden Mission and Lourdes Hall reflects her deep compassion for those in need. Whether mentoring teachers and fellow Sisters, organizing blessing bags and blanket drives, or offering hands-on support to families, Sister Lynette continues to live the Notre Dame Academy mission daily with quiet strength and unwavering love.



Donna Bloemer

Donna Bloemer '87

Donna Bloemer embodies the spirit of compassionate service and justice that defines a Notre Dame Academy alumna. A dedicated attorney focused on family law and a respected Guardian ad Litem, Donna has devoted her career to advocating for children and families with empathy, integrity, and grace. Her humble leadership extends well beyond the courtroom through volunteer service with organizations

including the Family Nurturing Center, Redwood, St. Charles, the Notre Dame Urban Education Center and the Children's Home. Known for her gentle presence and joyful spirit, Donna brings light to every community she serves, living out the mission of Notre Dame Academy through her steadfast commitment to faith, family and service.

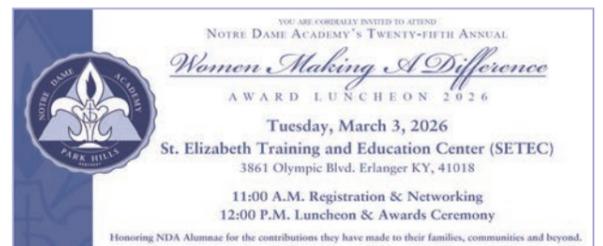


Christine Dunn Whelan

Christine Dunn Whelan '90

Christine Dunn Whelan exemplifies resilience, compassion and the power of transforming pain into purpose. Following the heartbreaking loss of her son, Christine has become a dedicated advocate for mental health awareness, suicide prevention and trauma-informed care. As a medical massage therapist, she cares for the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs

of her clients. Through mentoring grieving mothers and volunteering with families in crisis, Christine offers comfort and hope rooted in deep empathy and lived experience. Her life stands as a testament to courage, compassion and the enduring spirit of a Notre Dame Academy alumna.



For more information, contact the Notre Dame Academy Advancement Department or visit the school's website, www.ndapandas.org.

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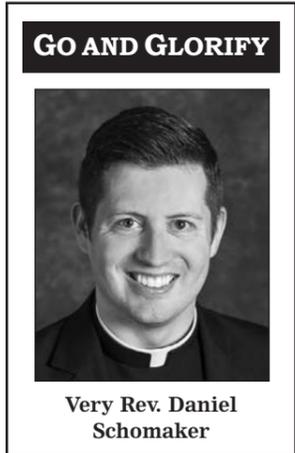
Looking for something to do?

Check out the diocesan calendar online now at <https://covdio.org/calendar/> to keep up with what's happening in the Diocese of Covington!

What came first, holiness or worship?

The readings for the Second Sunday of Lent — Cycle A — are: Genesis 12:1-4a, 2 Timothy 1:8b-10 and Matthew 17:1-9.

On this, the Second Sunday of Lent, we hear the account of the Transfiguration of our Lord on Mt. Tabor. As Jesus converses with Moses and Elijah, Peter, in awe and shock of what is happening, says to the Lord: “It is good that we are here.” In this encounter had by the Lord, we see the fullness of the Church — the Old Testament and the New Testament — brought together through the teachers of the faith of old (Moses and Elijah) and the “new” teachers of the faith (Peter, James and John), with the Lord in their midst.



GO AND GLORIFY

Very Rev. Daniel Schomaker

This made me start to reflect on when the Lord Jesus is most in our midst — at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is there that we encounter the Lord in four ways:

1. In the community gathered at prayer.
2. In the minister who is in persona Christi capitis (in the person of Christ the head).
3. In the proclamation of the Sacred Scriptures.
4. And most importantly, in his Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity really and truly present in the Eucharist.

We believe that when we participate in the celebration of Holy Mass, we are partaking in a Divine Mystery — where the whole Church, across space and time, gathers in worship. So, not only do we get to have an encounter with Jesus, but with the Church. Therefore, we should echo the words of St. Peter: “It is good that we are here!”

Our beloved Catholic faith is very personal, but it is not individualist — it is communal. I need you, and you need me, and we need each other in order to get to heaven. In a real way, we NEED to be here at Mass!

That personal relationship with the Lord is developed primarily at Holy Mass through its twofold end — the glorification of God and the sanctification of his people. And it’s not a one-off. Every time we go to Mass, we glorify God in our worship of him, and hence we are made holy. The more we are made holy (sanctification), the greater the desire one has to enter into worship (glorification). This then leads to holiness and then back to worship, and on and on and on and on until we stand before the throne of the Almighty. It’s kind of the Church’s version of the chicken and the egg.

So, let us be sure this Lent we are showing up so that we can express like St. Peter: “It is good that we are here!”

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

Last November, my husband and I celebrated 40 years of wedded bliss. For anyone who has been married for a long period of time, you know the truth to that.



VIEWPOINT

Faye Roch

At a dinner with our adult children and their spouses, we made a toast to our wedding vows, “to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until death do us part,” commenting that we have endured all those moments; marriage is until death do us part. On our wedding day, we took a vow, made a covenant — a promise to God — that we were in this for the long haul no matter what. Has it been easy? Have we always been the best we can be? I can assure you not! Even the strongest marriages that have lasted over many years endure those better and worse parts. But, in living our Catholic faith, we can rise above the not so pleasant moments to live out our vocation of marriage. God is with us in those times when it is not easy, and when we are not the best we can be. He is certainly with us when we are suffering, he makes us strong when we are weak and he gives us peace during the storm.

For better or worse

Two days after our joyful celebration of 40 years together, my husband suffered a medical emergency. It was not the first medical crisis in our marriage though it was one that truly brought us to our knees and continues to do so.

That night, as I drove to the hospital trying to follow the ambulance on a very rainy highway, I started to pray the rosary, my favorite tool when I am feeling unrest. I felt the comfort of these prayers calming me, they also calmed me as I called our children. Throughout the many moments of uncertainty, a sense of peace was surrounding me, and I knew that no matter what happened, my faith was with me and would carry not only me but my husband through the good times and bad.

In a culture that is so disposable, and where marriage is sometimes viewed as an event rather than a promise to God, we need to witness to others the importance of having that foundation of faith. Our Catholic faith can bring us to see our suffering as a gift from God, where he brings us hope, no matter what.

Our message must be to put God at the center of our marriages and implore his help, asking for grace and begging for strength — opening hearts up to sacrificial love.

By the grace of God, my husband ended up having minor side effects compared to a much worse scenario that could have been anticipated. Countless times we’ve looked at Jesus’s suffering on the cross, knowing of his sacrificial love for us. We rejoice to God, knowing that it is through him that we have life.

Faye Roch is director of the Pro-life Office, Diocese of Covington, Ky

Wisdom and experience

Wisdom asserts that she was at God’s side when God created the earth. She claims to find joy as she dances on the face of the earth, plays among human creatures (Proverbs 8:22-31). But how do humans find her in order to dance with her? Certainly, we find her in creation if we



MUSINGS

Sister Fidelis Tracy, C.D.P.

take time to notice and honor the beauty of our world. But her instruction continues beyond creation. We are accustomed to gain knowledge through study. The acquisition of knowledge through book learning is one way to become wise. It is a worthy and important pursuit in life. Yet there are people who can explain the movement of the planets or speak in numerous languages but do not have wisdom. I had an aunt who had only three years of formal education. She was one of the wisest people I met in my youth. She was loving and kind and knew both how to soothe a wounded heart and demand appropriate behavior from a child. She could bake a cake without a cake mix or a recipe. Her cakes nourished the body but also the spirit in search of love. This is evidence that Wisdom is found beyond the book learning which is sometimes called wisdom. Of course, study can lead to experience that imparts wisdom. But in the end, Wisdom in the biblical sense, comes through experience. She claims to dwell with experience (Prov 8:12).

What is experience? Surely, it is not merely having passed through an event and survived. To genuinely experience what is happening in life requires an awareness beyond mere sensory grasping of the action that is taking place. It is even more than an analysis of the intellectual

understanding of an event. To experience what is happening requires absorbing the meaning, the significance that the occasion has for life. Wisdom claims to dwell with experience. To find her in our experience necessitates reflection, dwelling, searching for where God is speaking in the moment.

Most of my days begin with making a “do list.” One of my great joys is checking off items as I complete tasks. I must admit I occasionally list things I have already done, just so I can check them off. Yet, after I have checked all the items off my list, I may not have attained wisdom. It is only when I do more than check actions off a list, only when I savor, linger with, suffer or enjoy the tasks that I have enumerated that I may possibly become wiser. I accomplish many things without really experiencing the activities I engaged in to finish the project.

Wisdom lists her dwelling places as the sites where life and the business of life is going on — the place of commerce and the places where people assemble. She claims to be at the city gates, the crossroads and the top of the heights along the road (Prov 8:1-3). What would it take to find her? How do people arrive at the crossroads, the city gates, the meeting places of the world and find wisdom? To gain wisdom necessitates getting involved, interacting with others, taking responsibility for life. Of course, it is possible to get involved and not reflect on what is happening, without seriously relating to people and environments. Gaining wisdom always involves being conscious of what life offers, contemplating events, bringing life before God and seeing beyond self-interest.

Hear her call, “Listen.” Look around and seek her. Is she whispering to you as you go about the routine tasks of your day? What is she pointing to? How is she asking you to be aware of the essence of life? Where is the spirit of God in the activities of life? She offers joy. It is a joy you can only receive if you are aware of your surroundings and involve your mind and heart in your actions. O Wisdom.

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



Growing prayer muscle

Fifteen Parish Missionary Disciples (PMD) gathered at the GYMM (Growing Your Missionary Muscles), Feb. 8, for a presentation on prayer. Mike Hebbeler, parishioner, St. Agnes Parish, Ft. Wright, shared thoughts about meditative prayer and the role prayer plays in evangelization. To effectively evangelize, one must first “get our own house in order” and develop a heart-centered relationship with Jesus, not just a “mind game” of knowing theology, he said. The goal, he said, of meditative prayer is to fill the mind with God and enter into relationship with him, which makes one more fully themselves. The monthly laity-led GYMM is open to anyone who has completed Parish Missionary Disciples training. To learn more about the GYMM or to schedule PMD training at your parish, e-mail Bridget Otto at bridgetotto.pmd@gmail.com.



Outstanding Northern Kentucky Private School Educator

Bridget Kaiser-Munday (right) has been recognized as a recipient of the Cincinnatus Association 2026 Excellence in Education Award. Mrs. Kaiser-Munday, a social studies teacher at St. Henry District High School, Erlanger, was recognized as an Outstanding Northern Kentucky Private School Educator. A dynamic social studies educator, she teaches an exceptional load of six AP courses while maintaining outstanding student achievement, including multiple 100 percent AP pass rates. Beyond academics, she is a mentor, faith leader and role model whose grace, humility and dedication inspire students and faculty alike. Pictured with Mrs. Kaiser-Munday is Dr. Christy Petroze, School of Education department chair and professor at Thomas More University.

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Dinners are served each Friday, February 20th – March 27th, 2026, from 4:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

The menu features hand-breaded fried cod and catfish fillets as well as baked cod, shrimp, crab cakes, salmon, and a wide variety of homemade desserts.

Dine-in or carry-out options available.

For more information or to place a carry-out order, please call 859-635-2491 or visit stjosephcampsprings.org.

6833 Four Mile Road, Camp Springs, KY



Saint Agnes Fish Fries

Feb 20, 27, March 6, 13, 20
Food Served 5:00 – 8:00 PM
Drinks & Social until 10:00 PM

Beer Battered Cod
Shrimp Tacos
Sautéed Shrimp, Homemade Pineapple Slaw
Pizza - Grilled Cheese
Beer – College Basketball
All Are Welcome
1680 Dixie Hwy. Fort Wright



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.

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.

St. Benedict Parish, Covington, will be hosting a one-night only Bingo Night after the March 6 fish fry, 7 p.m. Come support the parish's new boiler. Cost is \$20 for 27 cards, and food and drink will be available.

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.

This Lent, Father Michael Comer, pastor, Mother of God Church, Covington, will be presenting a series of five talks on St. Francis of Assisi. Pope Leo XIV recently declared a Jubilee Year of St. Francis in honor of the 800th anniversary of his death. The talks are on Thursdays, Feb. 19 through March 26 (no sessions March 5) at 10:30 a.m. and repeated at 6:30 p.m. at Mother of God Church.

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.

St. Augustine Church, Augusta, bingo social, March 15, 1–5 p.m., bingo, pull tabs, split the pot raffle; drinks and snacks provided. Located in the new parish hall. Must be 18 or older to participate. Cost \$10, additional bingo cards optional. Meal following for players. Proceeds benefit St. Augustine Parish Benevolent Fund. Weather permitting.

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.

Thomas More University, Crestview Hill, will continue its astronomy public lecture series and night sky viewing, March 28, 7:30–9:30 p.m., in Ziegler Auditorium. The talk is titled "Beneath the Ice: Europa and the Search for Life" presented by Dr. Wes Ryle, Astronomer at the Cincinnati Observatory.

The fourth annual Covington Lenten Pilgrimage will be held on Palm Saturday, March 28, 9 a.m.–2 p.m. On the self-guided pilgrimage, pilgrims will journey to five historic Covington churches: St. Benedict, St. Augustine, St. John the Evangelist, Mother of God and the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption of Mary. Adoration and confession is available at multiple churches.

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.

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

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

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
4:30–8 p.m.

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 – 7:00 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.

March 27
Our Savior Parish, Covington,
noon–6 p.m.

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

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



Villa Madonna Academy, Villa Hills, student Krithika Saravanakumar works on circuits for an automated pill dispenser at the University of Louisville's J.B. Speed School of Engineering. Ms. Saravanakumar and her classmates participated in the Transition to Engineering program. T2E was designed to allow high school seniors to gain skills in engineering disciplines such as coding, 3D modeling, and circuit design.

Commissioned painting shows diocesan priest surrounded by community, saints

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

It's a warm image — smiling faces surrounding a young priest, his face quiet and contemplative. To the people of the Diocese of Covington, some may recognize the man standing front and center as Father Joshua Heskamp, who was ordained to the priesthood just last year.

The painting was commissioned by Father Heskamp's uncles, Father Jeff Von Lehmen, the pastor of St. Patrick Parish, Taylor Mill, and his brother, Greg Von Lehmen.

Described by Father Heskamp as an ordination present from his uncles, the private commission, done by religious painter and illustrator John McCoy, was intended to exemplify the "community" surrounding Father Heskamp, according to Father Von Lehmen.

On either side of Father Heskamp, his grandparents are depicted. "I always say that there's nothing more powerful than a parent's or grandparent's prayer," said Father Von Lehmen, "And I wanted to start there with the symbolic significance of the prayerful church, family and community that has helped inspire a vocation."

Depicted by his grandparents on the left is St. Josephine Bakhita, FDCC, a Sudanese saint who became a religious sister after her freedom from slavery, whom Father Heskamp said he had a "strong devotion to." The significance of his inclusion also ties into his relationship with African priests in the diocese, according to Father Von Lehmen, whom Father Heskamp serves alongside at St. Patrick Parish, Maysville. On the other side is an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, who was chosen for the painting for her role as "mother of priests" — as well as representing Father Heskamp's relationship and ministry to the Hispanic community of Maysville, as well as an "immersion" experience he did in seminary.

"He fell in love with the Hispanic culture, and relates very well with Hispanic culture, and Our Lady of Guadalupe represents that," Father Von Lehmen said.

The final figure included in the composition, with a prayerful hand on Father Heskamp's shoulder, is St. Pope John Paul II — who shares a feast day with Father



This painting by artist John McCoy, featuring Father Joshua Heskamp surrounded by saints and grandparents, was commissioned for him by his uncle, Father Jeff Von Lehmen.

Heskamp's birthday.

"It's like they say," Father Von Lehmen said, "Saints adopt us; We don't adopt them. I feel as if St. John Paul adopted Father Josh (Heskamp)."

"(Father Heskamp) doesn't want to be front and center," he continued, "but it was more that all the people surrounding him are there to help him be the light. I suppose that is a good Scripture passage to go along with it," said Father Von Lehmen, quoting Matthew 5:16. "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Rite of Election

(Continued from page 1)

In two ceremonies, Feb. 22, pastors from 36 parishes in the Diocese of Covington and Thomas More University presented 171 catechumens and 249 candidates to Bishop John Iffert. Catechumens are unbaptized individuals seeking to enter the Catholic Church. During the Rite of Election each is called forward by name, receive a blessing from Bishop Iffert and had their name inscribed in the Book of the Elect, which Bishop Iffert signed, declaring them the Elect — God's chosen people.

Candidates are baptized Christians seeking full communion with the Catholic Church. Included with the candidates is 46 baptized Catholics seeking to complete the sacraments of initiation. They, too, are called by name and received a blessing from Bishop Iffert.

Both the candidates and catechumens have been participating in the Order of Christian Initiation for Adults (OCIA) at their parish. At this year's Easter Vigil they will receive the sacraments of initiation — baptism (catechumens), first Communion, and confirmation (catechumens and candidates) — and will become the newest members of the Church.

In his homily, reflecting on the Gospel passage of the temptations of Christ in the desert (Matt 4:1-11), Bishop Iffert said that Jesus is the perfect model for us to resist sin that strains both our relationship with God and each other.

"Jesus takes this stand with us, relying on the spiritual gifts and powers that are available to all of us," he said. In refusing to deny his human nature, "Jesus makes himself the source of our inner strength and inner freedom to resist the tempter in our own life. He makes himself the source of our unity and the supreme example of human solidarity. We are most united by baptism in Jesus Christ."

Acknowledging the catechumens, who are preparing for baptism, Bishop Iffert said, "the Church rejoices with you and invites you to this period of purification and enlightenment that you might be prepared to receive Christ and his Holy Spirit with full and open hearts; to be united through Christ with your Father in heaven and in the grace that flows from that union to truly become peacemakers and reconcilers in the world and in the Church."

Addressing the candidates, Bishop Iffert said, "Your fuller incorporation into this body where the marks of the Church established by Christ endure in their fullness, even if sometimes they are obscured because of sin, and your union with us at the table of the Lord will always remind us of our duty to embrace the spirit of God's love, to eschew the division that comes from sin, and to work for reconciliation and unity among all who profess the name of Jesus."

To the baptized Catholics, "who now respond to the call of the Holy Spirit to draw near to the table of the Lord with us, we rejoice that the day of your rebirth has led you here to us and that together, united in Christ, we may work that Christ's name may be embraced by all and for all, everywhere in the world," Bishop Iffert said.

Bishop Iffert thanked all those journeying to full Communion with the Church "for calling us again to this most fundamental of vocations."

"The greatest gift we have, the greatest gift we are empowered to share, is renewed life in Christ," said Bishop Iffert. "This is the gift we long to share with you all. This is the gift we long for and we strengthen in our own life. This is the gift we call you to today."

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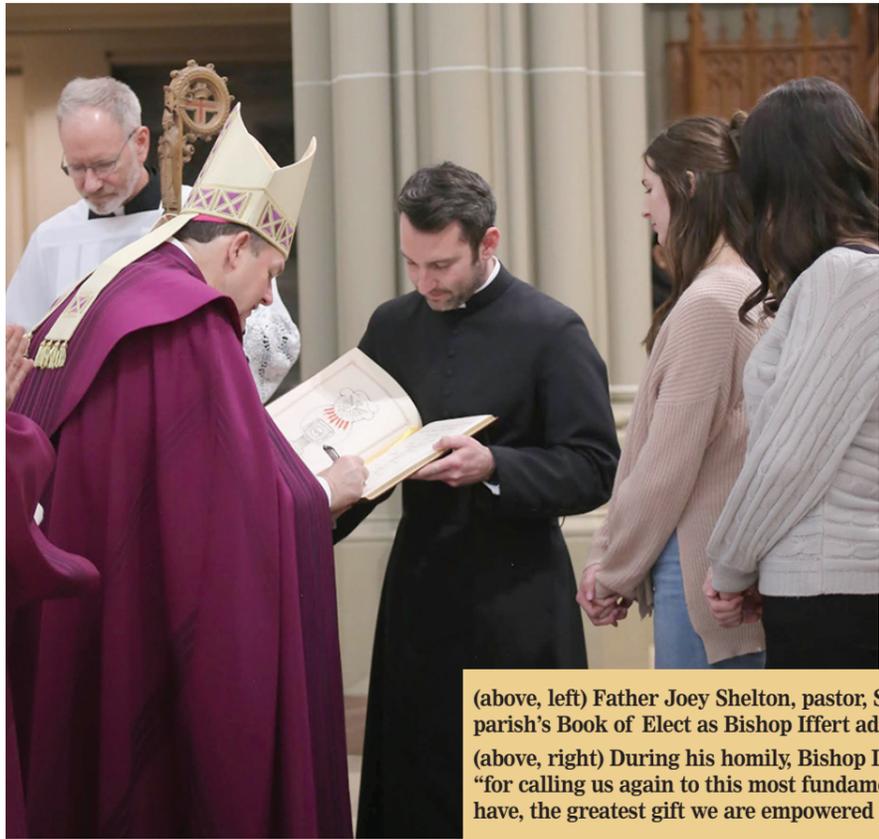
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Keener photos

(above, left) Father Joey Shelton, pastor, St. Augustine Parish, Augusta, holds the parish's Book of Elect as Bishop Iffert adds his signature.
 (above, right) During his homily, Bishop Iffert thanked catechumens and candidates "for calling us again to this most fundamental of vocations ... The greatest gift we have, the greatest gift we are empowered to share, is renewed life in Christ."



(center) Bishop Iffert greets catechumens from Cristo Rey Parish, Florence (left) and St. Francis Xavier Parish, Falmouth (right).



(above left and right) Bishop Iffert greets candidates during the celebration of the Call to Continuing Conversion, Feb. 22.

‘Christ is my identity, my foundation,’ says Catholic player on US women’s hockey team



Haley Winn of the U.S. women’s hockey team, holding the U.S. flag, celebrates her team’s Olympic gold medal win during a victory ceremony Feb. 19, 2026, after they won in overtime by defeating Canada 2-1 during the Milano Cortina 2026 Olympics at Milano Santagiulia Ice Hockey Arena in Milan, Italy.

Mike Latona

Catholic Courier, OSV News

The Olympic gold medal hanging from Haley Winn’s neck was a crowning touch on her rapid rise to ice hockey’s mountaintop.

Winn — a graduate of Bishop Kearney High School in the Rochester suburb of Irondequoit — and her United States women’s team struck gold Feb. 19, thanks to a 2-1 overtime win over Canada in the Olympic final in Milan, Italy. Winn played stellar defense throughout the 2026 Winter Games, helping her team score 33 goals in seven games while allowing just two goals.

“It’s crazy to think about. It’s so hard to put into words,” Winn, 22, told the Catholic Courier, newspaper of the Diocese of Rochester, in a Feb. 22 telephone interview from Milan. “Just to be a part of something so much bigger than myself, it’s so special. There’s been so many emotions — a

lot of tears of joy, disbelief.”

The gold-medal win came in Winn’s first Olympics and followed three world titles with other U.S. national teams on which she played. She asserted that her hockey success was only made possible through two mainstays in her life — her family and her Catholic faith.

“I wouldn’t be (an Olympic champion) without them,” Winn said of her parents, Janet and Mike, and older brothers Casey, Ryan and Tommy — all five of whom were on hand in Milan to cheer her on. “It’s their medal as much as mine.”

Winn said she also drew inspiration from praying together with several U.S. teammates before each Olympic game.

“Christ is my identity, my foundation,” she said. “I think it’s the thing that keeps me grounded.”

Staying grounded was no easy task in the gold-medal contest, as Winn’s U.S. team faced a 1-0 deficit until Hilary Knight’s goal tied the score with just over two minutes left in regulation. Megan Keller followed with the game-winner 4:07 into sudden-death overtime, setting off a wild U.S. celebration.

“I just had a sense of belief and confidence that as soon as we got that tying goal, it was over,” Winn said, lauding the ability and cohesiveness of her U.S. teammates: “It’s the best team I could have played on, a great group of girls. Everyone just has so much trust in each other and gives you the confidence to play your own game.”

Winn, a 5-foot-5-inch defenseman wearing uniform No. 8, logged substantial ice time in every Olympic game. Offensively, she netted her first Olympic goal — in a 5-0 win over Switzerland Feb. 9 — and three assists during the Games.

En route to her Olympic success, Winn spent her high school career with the BK Selects Hockey Academy for boys and girls, playing in elite youth events across the U.S. and Canada.

Winn, as well as BK Selects players from other states and countries, resided in dormitories on Bishop Kearney’s top floor while attending the school, where Winn’s mother is on the board of directors. She was one of eight BK

Selects alumnae to play in the Olympics — five for the U.S. squad — yet was the only Rochester-area resident among those eight.

Upon graduating from Bishop Kearney in 2021, Winn played Division I hockey at Clarkson University in Potsdam, New York. In her senior season, she served as co-captain and was named ECAC Player of the Year as well as first team All-American. She graduated in 2025 with a bachelor’s degree in psychology.

Winn also has won International Ice Hockey Federation women’s world championships in 2023 and 2025 and was on the U.S. under-18 national team that earned the world title in 2020. In June 2025, she was selected

second overall by the Boston Fleet in the Professional Women’s Hockey League draft. Through late February, she had helped the Fleet to a first-place showing in the eight-team PWHL.

Despite the time demands of playing top-level hockey, Winn makes ample time for her Catholic faith and is adamant about sharing it with others. While attending Clarkson, she joined a team Bible study group as a sophomore, and by her senior year, she was overseeing it.

Winn noted that her faith kicked into another gear while still at Bishop Kearney. Through attending Masses at Rochester’s St. Frances Xavier Cabrini Parish with other team members, Winn developed a friendship with Father Robert Werth, a Diocese of Rochester priest who assists in the parish. Winn’s parents eventually became good friends with Father Werth as well.

“Father Bob and Haley have really helped Mike and I become strong in our faith through the years,” Janet Winn said, noting that they often attend Sunday Masses that Father Werth celebrates when they’re not traveling for their daughter’s hockey games.

“He is amazing. I don’t have enough good things to say about him,” Winn remarked about Father Werth. The priest, in turn, lauded the star hockey athlete: “She is the best — the most humble person, maybe even a little shy.”

The same cannot easily be said about Winn’s brothers. Casey, Ryan and Tommy became viral sensations during the Olympics with their zany outfits and videos; their supportive antics even led the four siblings to being featured on NBC’s “Today” show.

Meanwhile, Winn was part of a U.S. squad that, according to published reports, attracted a television viewing average of 5.3 million people — peaking at 7.7 million during overtime — in the final against Canada, making it the most-watched women’s ice hockey game on record.

As she continues to gain popularity around the world, Winn said she will utilize that attention not for personal gain, but to continue voicing her religious beliefs.

“I am so blessed that God is using me to glorify him on this platform,” she stated.



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Russia's war on Ukraine means 'No Priests Left,' documentary shows

Gina Christian
OSV News

Four years ago, Ukrainian Greek Catholic priest Father Oleksandr Bohomaz was serving at a parish in the southern Ukrainian city of Melitopol, along with his pastor, Father Petro Krenitskyi.

Then Russian forces launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, continuing attacks initiated in 2014 — which up to that point alone had killed more than 14,000.

A week into the 2022 invasion, “repression began,” said Father Bohomaz, speaking in the recently released short documentary “No Priests Left.”

“Priests and pastors were arrested. They were interrogated. They were beaten. They were held in ... torture chambers,” said Father Bohomaz, who was forcibly deported from Russian-occupied Melitopol in December 2022.

He added, “People come out of Russian captivity looking like they came out of Auschwitz, from a death camp. And actually many don’t make it out, because they do die there.”

In a June 2024 interview with the media outlet Ukrinform, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, father and head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, said that as a result of Russia’s war on Ukraine, “There is not a single Catholic priest in the occupied territories today — either Greek Catholic or Roman Catholic.”

That grim reality led to the naming of the documentary, part of the film project “A Faith Under Siege.”

The documentary initiative has resulted in several works examining Russia’s persecution of faith communities in occupied regions of Ukraine.

Spearheading the project are executive producers Colby Barrett, an entrepreneur and former U.S. Marine; Steven E. Moore, a former chief of staff in the U.S. House of Representatives and founder of the Ukraine Freedom Project, a nongovernmental organization bringing humanitarian aid to the front lines of Russia’s war in Ukraine; and Anna Shvetsova, a Ukrainian native and an expert on U.S. policy in that nation.

Appearing in the film along with Father Bohomaz and Father Krenitskyi are Metropolitan Borys A. Gudziak of the Archeparchy of Philadelphia, head of external relations for the global Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church; and Jesuit Father Andriy Zelinsky, deputy head of the Department of Military Chaplaincy for the UGCC.

Both Archbishop Gudziak and Father Zelinsky noted the long historical precedent for Russia’s persecution of Ukrainian Christians not affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church from Russia’s czarist era and into communism.

That repression — which has spanned “the 18th, 19th, 20th and now 21st centuries,” Archbishop Gudziak noted — included the 1946 liquidation of the UGCC by Soviet authorities, driving the Church underground until 1989, ahead of the fall of the Soviet Union.

Russia’s targeting of these Christians — as well as Jewish and Muslim communities — in Ukraine has



OSV News photo/courtesy A Faith Under Siege

This is an image from “No Priests Left,” a short-film documentary series produced by “A Faith Under Siege” that documents the persecution of Catholics in Russian-occupied Ukraine.

become a salient feature of its war, which has been assessed as a genocide in two joint reports from the New Lines Institute and the Raoul Wallenberg Center for Human Rights.

The strategy is part of Russia’s “weaponized” Orthodox Christianity, Moore — who has testified before the U.S. Helsinki Commission in Washington on the issue — told OSV News.

In March 2024, the Russian Orthodox Church declared Russia’s war on Ukraine a “holy war,” with Russia “protecting the world from the onslaught of globalism and the victory of the West that has fallen into Satanism.”

Patriarch Kirill, the church’s head, told believers in a September 2022 sermon that Russian military personnel killed in Ukraine will have “all sins” washed away by their deaths.

“It’s the same way that the Islamic extremists have tried to create martyrs with religion,” Moore explained to OSV News. “That’s what Patriarch Kirill is doing. Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals — these are all people that we’ve met that have been tortured or lost loved ones to the Russians.”

Moore said that “Kirill’s followers and Russian Orthodox soldiers have taken him (Kirill) seriously when he says that he’s declared a holy war:

“They have killed by some counts as many as 80 pastors and priests,” Moore added. “And they’ve shut down every church in occupied Ukraine that is not controlled by the Kremlin.”

Since Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022, some 700 churches and religious structures have been damaged or destroyed. Catholic churches and properties have been seized and rededicated for the Russian Orthodox Church,

described by UGCC leadership as a sacrilege.

Russian officials in the occupied Zaporizhzhia region formally “banned” the UGCC, the Knights of Columbus and Caritas.

Torture — including beatings, mutilation and burning — and execution are commonplace and systematic in Russian captivity.

Two UGCC Redemptorist priests, Father Ivan Levitsky and Father Bohdan Geleta, were abducted in late 2022 and subjected to torture while held in Russian custody for some 18 months prior to their Vatican-brokered release.

Archbishop Gudziak told OSV News that “global, particularly American, awareness, prayer and action are crucial” to prevent further atrocities.

He encouraged “all bishops and priests” to show “No Priests Left” to the faithful.

Everyone who does see the film “cannot but be mobilized to prayer and action,” he said.

Archbishop Gudziak said it was crucial for people of goodwill “to see what has happened, to realize the biblical nature of this war, and to do everything we can spiritually, socially, or politically to help the innocent victims.”

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Round two of the DMI marks progress

(Continued from page 1)

greater hospitality and to increase adult faith formation and education. “Those came directly from the survey ... what our parishioners would like to see,” said Mrs. Landenwitch.

As a result of its pastoral plan, born of the DMI, “We’ve seen more and more people coming back to Masses, more and more people coming back to the different activities and things,” said Mrs. Landenwitch. During round two of the DMI, she said, “We’ll see the results and get the feedback, but I’ve seen great improvements in the activities and participation in the parish.”

The parish began publicizing round two of the DMI in late January, in preparation of the Feb. 18 release. “People are not hesitant at all,” she said. “I think as time keeps going on, more and more people will understand.”

When asked what she would like parishioners to know, she said, “The biggest thing that I would say is to fill out the survey, give us your input. We don’t know what to do specifically unless you tell us what you need. That’s the best way, I think, to help strengthen the parish, to help strengthen people’s faith.”

She continued saying, “We always do this with the help

of God, the Holy Spirit guiding us. And that’s the most important thing is that the Holy Spirit is going to lead the hearts and the minds and the souls of the people in our parish. And we hope to assist the Holy Spirit in that guidance.”

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Bishops urge prudence, prayer, invoke Guadalupe's protection as violence erupts in Mexico

Junno Arocho Esteves
OSV News

Mexican bishops called on the faithful to follow safety protocols as violence broke out in several states following the military's killing of a powerful cartel boss.

In a message published by the Mexican bishops' conference Feb. 22, the bishops expressed their closeness with Catholics, "sharing your concern and inviting you to prudence and prayer."

"We exhort you, with a pastoral and fraternal spirit, to strengthen personal and community security measures, take shelter in your homes when necessary, and avoid unnecessary travel, always following the instructions of the civil authorities," the statement read.

The message, which was addressed to "The Pilgrim People of God in Mexico," was signed by Bishop Ramón Castro Castro of Cuernavaca and Auxiliary Bishop Héctor M. Pérez Villareal of Mexico City, the president and secretary general of the bishops' conference, respectively.

Mexican military officers conducted an operation in the town of Tapalpa, located in the central western state of Jalisco Feb. 22, in an attempt to capture Nemesio Rubén Osegura Cervantes, who was known by his nickname, "El Mencho."

Osegura was the head of the notorious Jalisco New Generation Cartel, known by the Spanish acronym CJNG, Mexico's most powerful drug cartel known for trafficking fentanyl, methamphetamine and cocaine into the United States.

According to The Associated Press, a shootout occurred, resulting in the deaths of four people; three more, including Osegura, were wounded and later died.

Hours after his death, violence broke out in half a dozen states across the country, with gunmen blocking highways and setting cars and businesses on fire. Residents and tourists were forced to shelter in place in the resort town of Puerto Vallarta, after several major airlines canceled flights due to the increasing violence.

The Reuters news agency also reported that gunmen attacked a National Guard military police base in Jalisco.

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, a cartel member confirmed that the attacks were done out of revenge for Osegura's killing and warned that more attacks would be coming as rival gangs attempt to take control of CJNG.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt confirmed via X that the United States "provided intelligence support to the Mexican government in order to assist" with the operation.

In their message, the bishops called on the faithful to "intensify their prayer for the peace that our nation so greatly needs" and prayed that through Jesus, Catholics renew their commitment "to be sowers of reconciliation and fraternity."

Invoking the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe,



OSV News photo/Henry Romeroin, Reuters

Members of the National Guard walk past people while on patrol in Acapulco, Mexico, Feb. 22, 2026, after authorities reinforced security following roadblocks and arson attacks carried out by organized crime in several states in the aftermath of a military operation in which a Mexican drug lord Nemesio Oseguera, known as "El Mencho," was killed in Tapalpa in Mexico's Jalisco state.

the bishops prayed that Mary would "cover us with her mantle, protect our families, and help us build paths of justice, peace, and hope."

"May the Lord strengthen us and grant us to live through these moments united, with prudence, solidarity, and faith," the bishops wrote.



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Local

As search continues so do prayers for NKY native Nancy Guthrie

ARIZONA — Authorities in Pima County, Arizona, are searching for Nancy Long Guthrie, an 84-year-old Northern Kentucky native who was reported missing on Sunday, February 1. Guthrie, the mother of *Today Show* host Savannah Guthrie, was last seen at her home outside Tucson the night before she failed to appear at church. Guthrie grew up in Ft. Wright and graduated from Notre Dame Academy in 1959. In a communication inviting its community to join in prayer, Notre Dame Academy said, “We are holding her, her family, and all those who love her in our prayers during this deeply concerning time ... As a faith community we remain grounded in hope and united in prayer.” The Pima County Sheriff’s Department has issued a missing person alert, and the investigation remains active.

Amid clash with Notre

National/World

Dame administration, students pray for life

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — Two weeks after calling on the University of Notre Dame to withdraw its appointment of pro-abortion professor Susan Ostermann as head of one of the school’s research centers, Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend joined students to pray for life at the university’s Marian grotto. “I’m so proud of you; I’m so proud of all of you,” Bishop Rhoades said on the evening of Feb. 24 to the approximately 50 students, faculty and staff gathered at the grotto. “The power of prayer — that’s why we’re here at Our Lady’s grotto, so we’ll pray together for the cause of life and respect for all human life.” In his Feb. 11 statement, Bishop Rhoades expressed “dismay” and “strong opposition” to the university’s appointment of associate professor Ostermann as director of the Liu Institute for Asia and Asian Studies, effective July 1. Sophomore Luke Woodyard, 20, a co-organizer of the event, said that it, along with an on-campus protest being organized by students for Feb. 27, is part of a corrective movement directed “out of love” toward the university’s administration. “We’re going to call for the people at this administration to do the things that they should be doing, and if they don’t, things need to change,” Woodyard said.

Sacramento Catholic school averts possible shooting at Mass, thanks to astute parent

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — St. Mary Parish School in Sacramento averted a possible mass shooting during an Ash Wednesday school liturgy, thanks to the quick intervention of an off-duty law enforcement officer and school parent who detained an armed former student attempting to enter the church. The suspect, 20-year-old Brian Richard Girardot Jr., now faces a federal charge of possessing a firearm within a school zone. School principal Amy Hale credits parent volunteers serving as safety monitors for preventing what could have been a tragedy. The Feb. 18 incident comes some six months after the deadly shooting at Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis during a school liturgy. A police search of Girardot’s car and home turned up several more weapons and a profanity-laced suicide note that named three relatives as the reason for his potential attack. “Thanks to the vigilance and professionalism of our parent volunteers, our children remained safely inside the church for the duration of Mass and a potential crisis was averted,” Hale said in a Feb. 18 statement posted to the school’s Facebook page. “No students came into contact with the man, and were unaware of the situation happening outside. After Mass the children were escorted back to class.”

Bishops: Ukrainians ‘resist, trust, pray’ as Russia’s full-scale invasion turns 4

PHILADELPHIA — As Russia’s war on Ukraine enters its 13th year, “the people of God resist, trust, and pray,” said the Ukrainian Catholic bishops of the U.S. The bishops, led by Metropolitan Archbishop Borys A. Gudziak of the Archeparchy of Philadelphia, issued a Feb. 23 statement ahead of the fourth anniversary of Russia’s full-scale invasion of

Ukraine, which was launched Feb. 24, 2022. The war — which continues attacks begun in 2014 that saw more than 14,000 killed — has been classified as a genocide in two joint reports by the New Lines Institute and the Raoul Wallenberg Center for Human Rights. In their statement, the bishops said “the genocidal intent is manifest” as Russia has regularly pummeled Ukraine’s energy grid, leaving millions without heat or electricity for days at a time, amid a winter that has been “the harshest in years.” They stressed that “Russia has systematically targeted Ukraine’s social and spiritual infrastructure,” pointing to hundreds of attacks on health care, education and religious sites. The bishops also highlighted Russia’s deportation of tens of thousands of Ukrainian children, and the widespread use of torture by Russian forces. Yet “despite it all,” Ukrainians “live with gratitude ... first, to God. And to all people who help.”

New initiative to form mental health professionals rooted in Church teaching

PHOENIX — A new initiative by the University of Mary and the Diocese of Phoenix promises to respond to today’s rising mental health challenges by forming mental health professionals who are clinically trained and rooted in the Catholic teaching on human dignity. “The idea of mental health ministry is to reach out to those who may be struggling with mental health or those who have lost loved ones through suicide — and let them know that they’re loved and that they belong in the life of the Church,” said Bishop John P. Dolan of Phoenix, who has lost four family members to suicide. “One of the fundamental and primary and central needs in the wider culture is for mental health professionals,” said Msgr. James P. Shea, president of the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota. The initiative is called the Photina Center for Catholic Counseling. Located in Phoenix, the center will provide select educational programs, professional development and community resources beginning this year. It will coordinate practicum and internship opportunities so students can experience hands-on learning in diocesan schools or with Catholic mental health practitioners. The center will also provide coursework for the university’s Catholic anthropology for counselors graduate certificate.

Team USA’s hockey gold honors Catholic hockey star tragically killed with brother in 2024

MILAN — When the U.S. men’s hockey team dramatically captured its first Olympic gold medal in 46 years at the 2026 Winter Games Feb. 22 in Milan, Italy, the triumph was defined not only by athletic achievement but by remembrance and faith. After the dramatic 2-1 overtime thriller over Canada, U.S. captain Auston Matthews and teammates skated around the ice holding the late Johnny Gaudreau’s No. 13 jersey, ensuring that a beloved player — gone too soon — was at the forefront of their celebration. Gaudreau of the Columbus Blue Jackets and his brother Matthew were killed Aug. 29, 2024, when they were struck by an alleged drunk driver while cycling near Salem County, New Jersey, on the eve of their sister’s wedding. Before the Olympics began, the Gaudreau family issued a heartfelt message that underscored Gaudreau’s lifelong dream to represent his country at the Olympic Games. The Gaudreaus attended Gloucester Catholic High School in New Jersey, where their father, Guy, helped build the school’s ice hockey program, before they played for Boston College and professionally. While celebrating Team USA’s victory, players brought two of Johnny’s three children onto the ice for the official team photo. From the stands, his widow, Meredith, and his parents, Guy and Jane, witnessed a tribute that blended athletic triumph with deep personal loss.

US bishops end lawsuit against Trump administration over refugee resettlement

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has ended its lawsuit against the Trump administration over the suspension of a long-running refugee resettlement contract, with monies owed to the USCCB now recovered. Court records show that Judge Trevor N. McFadden of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia signed a Jan. 23 order dismissing the case “without prejudice” — allowing the USCCB the option to bring a subsequent suit on the same grounds. The USCCB had filed a Jan. 22 notice of voluntary dismissal, stating that “no defendant has filed either an answer or a motion for summary judgment in this action.” Chieko

Noguchi, spokesperson for the USCCB, confirmed to OSV News Feb. 24 that the conference had recovered what it was owed for its refugee resettlement work with the federal government. As of April 2025, those funds — still unpaid at the time — amounted to more than \$24 million. The USCCB filed suit in February 2025 after the Trump administration suspended the conference’s long-running contract for resettlement under the congressionally established U.S. Refugee Assistance Program. In April 2025, the USCCB said it would not renew its cooperative agreements with the federal government related to children’s services and refugee support, saying its longstanding partnerships in those areas had become “untenable.”

Retired Bishop Stika of Knoxville, Tenn., dies at 68; memorial Mass set for March 3

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — Bishop Richard F. Stika, who served as the third bishop of the Diocese of Knoxville from 2009 to 2023, died in his native St. Louis at age 68. He was found in his residence on Feb. 17. A memorial Mass will be celebrated at the Church of the Annunziata in the St. Louis suburb of Ladue March 3. The funeral Mass and burial will take place March 10 at the Cathedral of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in Knoxville with Bishop Mark Beckman as principal celebrant and Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, retired archbishop of New York, as homilist. Annunziata is where, as a Monsignor, Bishop Stika served before his appointment to East Tennessee. Bishop Beckman, Knoxville’s fourth bishop, who succeeded Bishop Stika, learned of his predecessor’s death on Feb. 17. “We keep Bishop Stika in our prayers, that the Lord may bring him fully into the light of His kingdom, and for his family, and for all who mourn his passing, we offer our prayers for their consolation. May he rest in peace with the Lord,” Bishop Beckman said.

Pope Leo XIV tells priests not to use AI to write homilies or seek likes on TikTok

VATICAN CITY — Pope Leo XIV has urged priests to not to use artificial intelligence to write their homilies or to seek “likes” on social media platforms like TikTok. In a question-and-answer session with clergy from the Diocese of Rome, the pope said priests should resist “the temptation to prepare homilies with artificial intelligence.” “Like all the muscles in the body, if we do not use them, if we do not move them, they die. The brain needs to be used, so our intelligence must also be exercised a little so as not to lose this capacity,” Pope Leo said in the closed-door meeting, according to a report by Vatican News on Feb. 20. “To give a true homily is to share faith,” and artificial intelligence “will never be able to share faith,” the pope added. Pope Leo has expressed interest in the topic of artificial intelligence and the dignity of work since the first week of his pontificate, telling the College of Cardinals shortly after his election last May that he took his name in honor of Pope Leo XIII, who wrote the social encyclical “Rerum Novarum” in the context of the first industrial revolution.

Grave discovery on land once owned by slaveholders trigger search for descendants

AQUIA, Va. — A team of student and professional history detectives — led by Laura Masur, assistant professor of anthropology at The Catholic University of America — have discovered what appear to be additional gravesites in a family cemetery on land once belonging to the Brents, one of early and colonial America’s prominent Catholic families and the first to settle in Virginia during an era when practicing Catholicism was prohibited. The 17th-century Brent Cemetery parcel — owned by the family until 1841 and since 1974 by the Diocese of Arlington, just outside Washington — has been an intermittent and careful archaeological project for decades. There may be 90-plus graves on the property, which is located in Aquia, Virginia. Many of them could contain the remains of the African American slaves of the Brents. Some of the graves are identifiable by unetched fieldstone markers characteristic of the poor or those in bondage. Now Arlington Bishop Michael F. Burbidge, as well as the researchers, hopes descendants of those buried at Brent Cemetery centuries ago “may come forward so that together we may more fully honor the lives and legacies of these first Virginians, our brothers and sisters, created in the image and likeness of God and entrusted to our remembrance.”

West photos



Junior high students visit relics of 'first millennium saint'

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Junior high school students from St. Catherine of Siena School — joined by teachers Bill Arnzen, Sue Seta and Shannon West — visited relics of St. Carlo Acutis, Feb. 12.

These relics, which included a first-class relic of a piece of St. Carlo's heart membrane (pericardium), and second-class relics of his favorite shirt and hospital blanket, were displayed at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Peter in Chains, Cincinnati.

Students at the cathedral attended for the veneration of these relics and were allowed to touch prayer cards and other items to them forming them into third class relics. A talk on miracles of St. Carlo Acutis, given by Msgr. Anthony Figueiredo of Italy, was given prior to the veneration.

"Our students were greatly impacted and moved by their experience at the Cathedral. They were first struck by the beauty of the images inside the church and chapel and the overall peace that blanketed us during our visit," Language Arts teacher Shannon West said about the experience. "I feel like time stood still as we listened to the stories of miracles and stood in line to venerate the relics. Prior to Carlo's canonization, we showed our students his movie, Roadmap to Reality, so our students were already familiar with his life and some of his miracles. This experience helped connect our students more deeply to Carlo's life!"

Students also reflected positively on the experience, as eighth grade student Lillian said, "It was very impactful, and it was very special to be able to venerate the relics and even obtain a third-class relic for myself."

Another student, seventh grader Nyhla, commented that "The thing that inspired (her)

was that St. Carlo was not afraid of dying. He saw it as a new life, an eternal life in Heaven with God. St. Carlo Acutis was different from other kids his age in this time. He was really connected with God ... I learned that anyone can become a saint. It doesn't matter what year it is. It matters that you put God above others and above material things. It inspired me because God never stops performing miracles."

"I am so glad we went and I hope this opportunity can come up again," Alex, another eighth-grade student said. "It truly felt like Carlo was with us in the moment and that nothing could hurt us. If a saint relic is around, don't pass the opportunity."



(above) St. Catherine of Siena students pose for a photograph with the relics of St. Carlo Acutis. Joining them are teachers Bill Arnzen, Sue Seta and Shannon West.

(left) Junior high students from St. Catherine of Siena School, Ft. Thomas, sit in the pews of the Cathedral Basilica of St. Peter in Chains, Cincinnati. In the aisle, adorers approach a setup displaying first and second class relics of St. Carlo Acutis.

SAINT CARLO ACUTIS
(1891-2006)

Who was Carlo Acutis?
Carlo Acutis was a teenager known for his deep Catholic faith, devotion to the Eucharist, and passion for technology. Born in London on 3rd May 1991 to Italian parents and raised in Milan, Carlo had a deep love for his Catholic faith, attending daily Mass and praying the rosary regularly. He is known for his particular love of the Eucharist, stating that "The Eucharist is my highway to heaven."

What is a Relic?
In the Catholic Church, relics are special objects that are connected to saints or to Jesus. The word "relic" comes from a Latin word meaning "remains" or "something left behind." Catholics do not worship relics, but they honour them because of their connection to holy people. The most famous relic is the Shroud of Turin (a burial cloth which depicts the face of Jesus Christ).

There are three types of relics, first, second and third:
 • **First-class relics** are parts of a saint's body, such as bones, hair, or even ashes.
 • **Second-class relics** are items the saint used in life, like an item of clothing, a rosary, or a book.
 • **Third-class relics** are items that have touched a first- or second-class relic, like a piece of cloth.

We believe that God worked through the lives of the saints, and relics remind us of their holiness. Just as people keep special objects from loved ones who have died (like a letter or a favourite shirt), Catholics keep relics as a way to stay close to the saints and to be inspired by their lives.

The Bible gives examples of holy objects having special meaning. In the Old Testament, the bones of the prophet Elisha brought a man back to life (2 Kings 13:21). In the New Testament, people were healed when Peter's shadow touched them (Acts 5:15). These stories show that God sometimes uses physical things to share His power.

Relics are often placed in the altars of Catholic churches. This tradition reminds us that the Church is built on the faith & sacrifice of the saints. When Catholics pray near relics, they may ask the saint to pray to God for them. This is called intercession.

It's important to remember that relics do not have magical powers. They are not lucky charms. Their value comes from their connection to holy people who loved and served God. **Catholics are honouring God.**

In summary, relics are reminders of how God works through human lives. They help Catholics feel closer to the saints, encouraging them to live holy lives too.

Carlo was declared **Blessed** on 10th October 2020, after a miracle was attributed to his intercession. His body lies in a glass tomb in Assisi, Italy, where thousands of pilgrims now travel to seek his intercession inspired by Blessed Carlo's example of faith, technology, and holiness.

Saint Carlo Acutis, pray for us.

A posterboard in the Cathedral Basilica of St. Peter in Chains displays information regarding St. Carlo Acutis, canonized September 2025.

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