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Celebrate 50 years



Baker photos

(above left) Guests talk among themselves at the second DPAA kickoff dinner at Receptions in Erlanger. The dinner was greatly attended from supporters across the diocese.

(above right) Bishop John Iffert speaks to guests during the dinner's program. The two dinners, held in both the northern and southern part of the diocese, mark the end of the leadership gifts phase and beginning of the public phase of the Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal, which benefits the ministries of the Diocese of Covington its community.

(below left) Guests visit a booth representing the Mary Rose Mission, one of the ministries benefitting from the DPAA. The ministry fair gives donors the opportunity to meet people and learn more about the organizations they are impacting.

(below right) Mother Seraphina Quinlan, FDM, speaks to another attendee at the ministry fair. The Franciscan Daughters of Mary's missions receive funding from the DPAA, such as their Rose Garden Home Mission.

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## 'You are the divine life of God,' Bishop tells guests at second DPAA dinner

Maura Baker  
Staff Writer

The second Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal kickoff dinner, March 5, joined donors, ministry leaders and supporters with Bishop John Iffert, Lisa Knochelmann, DPAA general chair and Dr. Greg Salzman, DPAA leadership gifts chair at Receptions event center, Erlanger.

Marking the end of the leadership gifts phase and the beginning of the public phase of the campaign, the event included a ministry fair where guests could meet with the people behind the ministries that the DPAA supports — including Curia offices and organizations within the diocese and its community that minister to youth, homeless people, the poor, people with disabilities, students, the Hispanic community and more.

Following dinner, Dr. Salzman offered words of thanks to individuals who had already donated to the campaign, with nearly \$700,000 raised so far in the first phase alone — already well on the way to the \$2.754 million goal.

Bishop John Iffert also spoke at the dinner, referencing the theme of the 2026 DPAA, "Live as Children of Light," from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (5:8-9).

"Paul said once you were darkness," Bishop Iffert quoted the passage. "Notice the strength of that language.

Recalling a talk given at a Cursillo retreat he gave, Bishop Iffert said that there was "a point (he) made over and over and over again: Grace is simply the gift of God's divine life. It's the gift that God gives to us," he said.

"All of the spiritual thinkers, all of the great teachers, all of the apostolic and sub-apostolic figures talk about grace that is the very divine life of God with the metaphor of light," Bishop Iffert said. "The grace of God enlightens the soul ... Once you were in darkness, once you were capable of no good, but now the light of God, by the baptism of Jesus Christ, has taken residence in you and made you a temple of the Holy Spirit."

"You are the divine life of God," he said, "and the light that is God's grace and being shined into every corner of your being."

"That is why we give, because God has taken the cold, dark winter night out of my heart and yours, and in its place put the warmth of divine love, the fire of the Holy Spirit and the light of his divine grace and wisdom — and so we want to be light for others," said Bishop Iffert. "That's it. That's why we're here ... It is because God first graced us with the opportunity to be grateful and to respond to the world in kind. That's who we are. Thank you for being children of the light," he told attendees, "Thank you for being those kind of people."

# Experiencing the Church in different cultures helps unite young people to Christ, Bishop says about upcoming World Youth Day as diocese prepares for pilgrimage

Maura Baker  
Staff Writer

World Youth Day is an international gathering of youth and young adults — a celebration uplifting their presence in the Church. In 2027, the next World Youth Day will take place August 3-8 in Seoul, South Korea — the first time that World Youth Day will be hosted in East Asia. The theme for this year’s event is “Take courage! I have overcome the world.” (Jn 16:33)

As in years past, the Diocese of Covington will be coordinating a pilgrimage — with interested parties, especially young adults ages 18-25 (although all are invited to accompany them on the journey), invited to register by March 16 to reserve a spot.

Bishop John Iffert, who attended the previous World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, in 2023, reminisced on the experience. “I still remember the crowds with the flags from every nation being brought in,” he said, “I still remember the prayer services that were organized by young people — very kinetic, very active.”

“It’s a time of great joy and enthusiasm,” he said, “for Christ and the life of the Church.”

Bishop Iffert said that he remembers seeing World Youth Day “stir faith in young people. You see young people who come to World Youth Day and who leave with a more directed sense of their faith and how to move out into the world. It’s something to look forward to.”

Those who attend World Youth Day can expect to “encounter the Church around the world and see the vitality of faith that young people around the world bring. I pray that when young people attend World Youth Day and they get to know the people they encounter, not simply as aliens to them, but as brothers and sisters in Christ — I pray that these kind of encounters will make the violence that we’re seeing in the world today unthinkable for us to participate in,” said Bishop Iffert.

“It’s an encounter,” Bishop Iffert described of World Youth Day, “The Church is the Body of Christ on earth. As we come to know the Church better, we come to know all the manifestations of the Church in every culture ... We can’t help but come to know Christ more intimately, more completely.”



In this file photo from 2023, Bishop John Iffert says Mass for pilgrims attending World Youth Day 2023 in Lisbon, Portugal.

Bishop Iffert, who has also previously attended Mass and experienced the Church in foreign countries such as Vietnam recalled witnessing Christ “embedded in that culture, in a way that helped me come to know Christ better.”

Bishop Iffert also plans on joining other bishops worldwide in Seoul next year, saying that he is most looking forward to “encountering the Church of South Korea” and “encountering the Churches from around the world

through their young people.”

“Experiencing from all those different perspectives,” he said, “helps us learn more and more of the Body of Christ and who Christ is ... and that is what I hope for.”

Interested parties can register at <https://forms.gle/9JW61qeAUGbdWxy6>, or contact Isaak Isaak, director, Catechesis and Evangelization, at (859) 392-1529 or [iisaak@covdio.org](mailto:iisaak@covdio.org).

## 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.

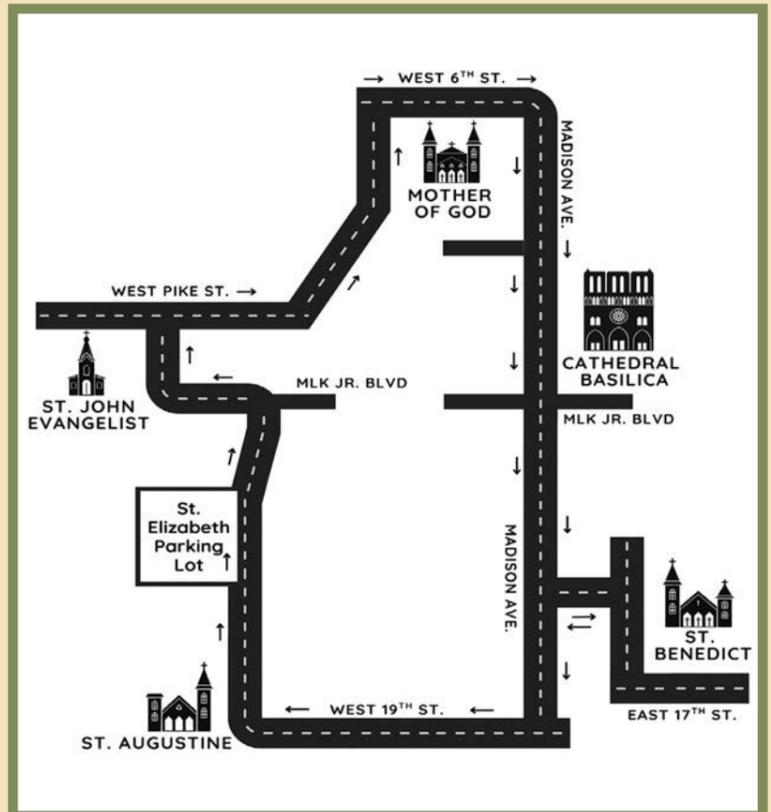
Start anytime between 9 a.m.–2 p.m.

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.



# Catholic Charities celebrate humility, service and lasting impact at annual appreciation dinner

Laura Keener  
Editor

Receptions in Erlanger was teeming with volunteers and supporters of Catholic Charities, Diocese of Covington, March 10, for the annual appreciation dinner. Bishop Iffert, Chris Goddard, executive director, and Deacon Barry Henry, director of Community Ministries and Outreach, welcomed and honored guests.

“The Gospel tells us in Christ’s own words, whatever you did for one of these least of mine, you did for me,” said Deacon Henry as he expressed gratitude to all the volunteers that make the many ministries at Catholic Charities thrive. “Look around tonight, you’ll see the face of Christ. You are the face of Christ to the poor, the marginalized when we serve with those around us.”

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of two awards, the Marcella Strategier Angel of Hope Award and the Community Partner Award.

This year’s Angel of Hope Award was awarded to Rose Schlosser. Jill Walch, director of Donor and Volunteer Engagement, introduced Mrs. Schlosser, highlighting her humility and dedication.

“When we approached Rose about receiving this award, she did something very characteristic. She cried and said, ‘Why me?’” said Ms. Walch. “The answer is simple. That humility is exactly why Rose is the perfect recipient of this award.”



Bishop Iffert is surrounded by staff of Catholic Charities’ St. Joseph Apartments and CommonSpirit Health, the recipient of the Community Partner Award. For a decade, CommonSpirit Health has been a pillar of generosity and compassion for the families of St. Joseph Apartments.

Mrs. Schlosser is a “behind-the-scenes angel, quiet, steady, faithful and deeply compassionate woman,” said Ms. Walch. Mrs. Schlosser serves and prepares meals at Parish Kitchen and does whatever needs to be done. She and her husband also are prolific gardeners, sharing their produce with the Parish Kitchen so that guests have fresh fruits and vegetables.

“Rose is also deeply attentive to the people she serves,” said Ms. Walch. “She notices when guests are not present and she worries about them. Her concern is genuine, ten-

der and rooted in love.”

As a member of the cooking team, Mrs. Schlosser also cooks for staff and board meetings. “Her meals nourish not only our bodies but also the sense of community and connection we share in our work,” said Ms. Walch.

CommonSpirit Health was the recipient of the Community Partner Award. For a decade, CommonSpirit Health has been a pillar of generosity and compassion for the families of St. Joseph Apartments, a supportive housing program serving formerly homeless families with dis-

(Continued on page 6)

# The dangers of Artificial Intelligence among students, presented by Dr. Mandy Sanchez



Dr. Mandy Sanchez

Bella Bailey  
Multimedia  
Correspondent  
Mandy Sanchez, director of programming at Culture Reframed, will return to the Diocese of Covington for a public presentation, “AI: The Dangers of an Increasingly Digital World.” Dr. Sanchez has been educating the public on pornography and violence for over twenty, specializing in sexual violence, the intersectionality of gender, sexualities, place and trauma.

Twice previously, Dr. Sanchez has presented in the Diocese on the dangers of social media, pornography and the relationship between the two.

These past presentations were well received by attendees. “What we found was that there were a lot of people who were not in the know about social media was affecting kids,” said Julie Feinauer, director for the office of safe environment in the Diocese of Covington. “This time she’s going to focus more on AI (Artificial Intelligence). I think that parents are really nervous about how AI is not only affecting their kids, how their kids are using it, but how it’s being used against their kids in certain aspects,” she said.

The dangers of AI are plentiful with deepfake images, false information and impersonation of one’s identity... The question remains, “how do we allow students to use this wonderful tool, but also stay safe?” asks Mrs. Feinauer.

Dr. Sanchez will host a public presentation at Bishop

Howard Memorial Auditorium, on March 25, beginning at 7:00. However, she will host a private presentation for teachers, principals and school staff.

“I hope for our principals and school staff that what they’re able to find is that AI can be something that can be used safely when there are specific guidelines set in place. Or, if they’re choosing not to allow students to use it, how can they keep it out if that’s something they’re choosing to do,” said Mrs. Feinauer, “I think that it’s important that they understand that it’s out there and it’s not going away. So, how do they incorporate it in a way that is safe?”

Much of what Dr. Sanchez will discuss is sensitive in nature and may be “hard to hear,” said Mrs. Feinauer. “Especially for people who have been taken advantage of online or if they’re a survivor in any way.” The March 25 presentation is free and open to the public, however only those 18+ are permitted to attend.

“There are these new exciting tools that are out there, but all of it comes at a price,” said Mrs. Feinauer, “we have to understand that if we’re going to use these tools, and our kids, we have to know all they can offer. But also, we have to know the safety precautions to take in order to use them effectively and safely.”



## Bishop’s Schedule

**March 15**  
Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 10 a.m.

**March 26**  
Pro-Life essay banquet, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington, 6:30 p.m.





**Reelin It In Season III**  
Episode three of the 2026 Reelin’ It In series takes Maura and Bella to St. Pius Parish Fish Fry, Edgewood. To hear from patrons and volunteers on what makes this fish fry special, scan the QR code!



# From classroom to conversion, the Brownfield family's conversion story

**Bella Bailey**  
Multimedia Correspondent

The Brownfield family was welcomed as Elect at the Rite of Election, February 22, as parents, Cailey and Ryan, prepare to join the Catholic church with their four children. The family's story of conversion began when Mr. and Mrs. Brownfield decided to send their second oldest child to Sts. Peter and Paul School, California, where she blossomed in love of the faith.

"She's a very spiritual child," said Mrs. Brownfield, whose personal conversion was sparked by a moment of faith with her daughter. "She and all of her friends ran to the Stations of the Cross. I walked up there and she was explaining what each one of them was, what the meaning behind each one of them was. For me, that sparked my interest, just watching her light up about all of it."

Mr. Brownfield explained that his daughter's curiosity spurred the family to consider OCIA classes. "She'd always come home and talk about God and Jesus, and she'd ask us questions, and we didn't know how to answer them. We want her to be able to come to us and ask those questions, now that we have the knowledge. We wanted to feel in place with her."

The Brownfield family had been attending Mass at Sts. Peter and Paul Parish while their daughter was enrolled in the school and were familiar with director of religious education, Congregation of Divine Providence Sister Lynn Stenken, who proved to be instrumental in the personal conversion of Mr. and Mrs. Browning to the faith.

At her second OCIA class, Mrs. Browning arrived with, "a list of questions for Sister Lynn, because I was curious. I wanted to know why everybody had a Mary in their front yard ... there were just so many things that didn't make sense," she said. "Just that one class, Sister Lynn connected all of the dots for me that I had that were scattered all over the place."

Since attending OCIA classes, Mr. and Mrs. Brownfield both feel a sense of peace amongst their family. "You could



Keener photo

Cailey Brownfield shakes Bishop John Iffert's hand at the Rite of Election. Next in line behind her is her daughter. The entire Brownfield family will become full members of the Catholic Church at this year's Easter Vigil at Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, California.

just tell the difference in our family," said Mr. Brownfield, "even with having young kids running around and screaming we kind of take a deep breath, take a minute to relax...I would say the morale in the family has been a lot higher since before we went to Church."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Brownfield are excited to continue learning their newfound faith, even after their initiation at

Easter Vigil. "I feel like learning is what brings me closer to God, I don't want it to end, I want to keep growing with it," said Mrs. Brownfield. For Mr. Brownfield, he looks forward to, "being more involved with the community of the Catholic Church," which he will do through his new membership as a member of the Knights of Columbus. "It just feels like, with the Catholic religion and the community, it's just everybody's so loving that if you're on the outside coming in, they'll still open their arms to bring you in, no matter what."

As the family prepares to enter the Church at Easter Vigil, Mr. Brownfield said, "It makes me feel like my grandma's up in Heaven right now, jumping up and down that someone in the family decided to become Catholic and get into the Church."



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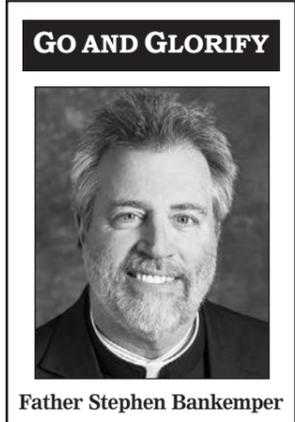
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## Light in darkness

The readings for the Fourth Sunday of Lent — Cycle A — are: 1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a, Ephesians 5:8-14 and John 9:1-41.

How blessed we are in Lent to have such rich fare in the Scriptures provided for us! We heard the story of Jesus' temptations on the first Sunday, then the Transfiguration, the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well last week, and this week the story of the man born blind.



Father Stephen Bankemper

If part of your Lent is to read more Scripture, you could do no better than to read these stories two or three times again, slowly, savoring the details. The details on which this article will focus will be the question Jesus' disciples ask him

about the man born blind and his answer, what Jesus does to bring sight to the man, and what he tells the man to do as his part in gaining his sight.

In the background of Lent and Holy Week is Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden; after all, that is the reason we needed a Savior. Although some people think that "Original Sin" refers to Adam and Eve's disobedience, this is a misunderstanding. "Original Sin" refers to the wounded state that all of humanity inherited after their sin.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains, Adam and Eve did commit a personal sin, but what we inherit from them is not their sin, but the "fallen state" of human nature. The Catechism continues: "That is why original sin is called 'sin' only in an analogical sense: it is a sin 'contracted' and not 'committed.'" (CCC 404) To the question, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents...?" Jesus answers, "neither he nor his parents sinned . . ." We can hear in his answer a reference to Original Sin. We did not commit Adam and Eve's sin, rather we inherit a human nature that is "fallen" or wounded. We needed someone to save us; we received more, which we will see a little later:

Many people have wondered at the strange way that Jesus brings sight to the man. Modern Christians are likely to think immediately that Jesus is being unhygienic, but some biblical scholars explain Jesus' actions in terms of a Rabbinic tradition about creation. Genesis relates that God formed the first man out of clay, but one needs water to make clay from dirt, so the tradition says that God used spittle to mix with the dirt. This means that Jesus is not "healing" the man, as one sometimes hears. In fact, the text of the Gospel never uses the word "heal," rather, the text reads "gained his sight" and "able to see" and four times some version of "opened his eyes." The implication is that this is an act of re-creation restoring what God originally intended, undoing the damage brought about by Adam and Eve.

After smearing the clay on the man's eyes, Jesus tells him to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. How does a person appropriate for herself or himself this restoration? By washing, or more properly, by being washed in the waters of Baptism. This restoration will not be complete until "the resurrection on the last day," but Baptism begins the process of that restoration.

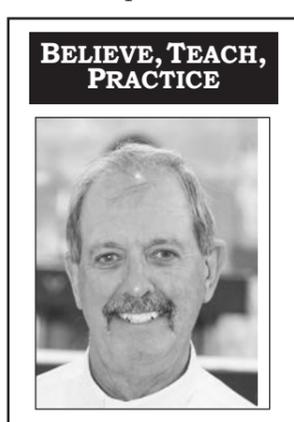
The theme of light versus darkness/blindness versus sight is woven throughout this Gospel, highlighted by the Church's choice of the second reading: "Brothers, you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." (Eph 5:8) Notice the present tense: now you are light in the Lord. We are born into darkness — as St. Thomas Aquinas puts it, a double darkness: ". . . removing from me the double darkness into which I was born, namely, sin and ignorance." (*Prayer Before Study*)

We are born under the condition of Original Sin but need not remain in sin. We are born in the darkness of not knowing God, not living for God, but need not remain in that ignorance. In baptism we have been freed, our

Jesus' temptations on the first Sunday, then the Transfiguration, the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well last week, and this week the story of the man born blind.

Here we are already at the fourth Sunday of Lent, about half way through. At about this time, we look back at the Lenten resolutions we made on Ash Wednesday and see how we're doing.

Recently I came across an article titled, "A Not so Radical Proposal for Lent: Do Nothing." I don't remember the author or exactly where I read it, but I was interested because I figured I can definitely do that. Finally, a Lenten resolution I can keep.



Deacon Michael Keller

The premise of the article is that today we are busy from the time we wake up until we go to sleep each night. Today we are constantly "on," we hate silence and downtime. Waiting in traffic or in line is almost painful. We are constantly bombarded by noise. We are always doing something.

Looking back to the second Sunday of Lent when we heard Matthew's Gospel of the Transfiguration, our heavenly Father tells us, "this is my beloved son, listen to him." But with our senses constantly being bombarded, that's impossible!

Recall the Old Testament reading from the 1 Kings, chapter 19, where Elijah is hiding in a cave waiting for

## Do nothing

the Lord to pass by. There was a strong wind, an earthquake and fire, but the Lord wasn't in them. Then, there was a tiny whispering sound, and that was where he found the Lord.

We don't hear much whispering in our world today, do we?

Pope Benedict, in one of his homilies for Lent in 2011, said that the account of the Transfiguration is an "invitation to take a distance from the noisiness of everyday life in order to immerse ourselves in God's presence." In the Gospels, we frequently see Jesus going to deserted places to pray. Jesus is teaching us how to listen to the Father, who speaks to us in silence.

What the author of the article was suggesting was to take some time to sit down, close our eyes, take a deep breath and just put ourselves in the presence of God, to allow him to talk to us. When we pray, we usually do all the talking. Prayer should be a two-way conversation with God and just like all conversations we need to listen. When we are silent, God can speak to us.

We should do this not only during Lent, but all year — when we are sitting in Eucharistic adoration, taking a break from our busy day, enjoying a quiet evening or anytime we can find some peace and quiet. We should listen to God when we are wrestling with a troubling issue, a big decision or anytime we feel lost.

God is always trying to talk to us; we just have to do nothing and listen.

Deacon Michael Keller is assigned to St. John the Evangelist Parish, Carrollton, and Transfiguration Mission, Perry Park.

## Some Lenten thoughts on science, faith and God

Toward the end of January, I had the opportunity to make a 1-day Zoom retreat on "God in the Cosmos." It explored the wondrous compatibility of the visions of Hildegard of Bingen, an 11th century Benedictine mystic; the explorations of Teilhard de Chardin, a 20th century Jesuit physicist; and the 21st century astronomical findings of the space-based James Webb telescope.



Sister Colleen Winston, OSB

Considering God through these various lenses greatly increased my amazement at the ongoing nature of God's creation. It demonstrates that God speaks to humanity in all times, spaces and in the language of science, math,

visions and the beautiful complexity of creation itself.

Many people have heard of the Big Bang Theory. (The TV series got its name from this theory that says the universe originated with a single huge explosion in space and is still expanding.) In the 1990s some scientists began calling this theory the Great Flowering Forth. With this re-naming they shifted the description from a mechanistic, one-time event to that of a more complex, inter-relational growing within every created entity from a single atom to each human being. Much earlier St. Hildegard's faith and Teilhard's science led both of them to envision this, and, in our own time, images from the James Webb telescope support this new understanding of how we and the universe came into being and that this creation is still blooming.

Humans from primitive to contemporary have long tried to understand a higher power and explain the mysteries of the universe. Those who believe in a literal inter-

pretation of the bible with its story of creation in seven days probably consider a theory like the Big Bang or Flowering Forth to be anti-God, even heretical. Significant Church officials in the times of both Hildegard and Teilhard thought this and ostracized them in significant ways. (Later both were exonerated by Church officials.)

As technology and knowledge have expanded over the millennia, so has human willingness to realize that the universe is far more complex than we thought and that God's ways are infinitely beyond our understanding. Doctors tell us that the cells of our body are constantly being replaced without our even being aware; physicists now understand that the universe is growing at this very moment, and geologists know the earth is moving thru space as you read this. While thinking about all this universal, continuous change, the concept of Lent and change of heart crept into my thinking.

Our baptism calls us to change, not physically but spiritually. If change is such an intrinsic part of our body and our universe, could awareness of this reality help us to be humbler in recognizing our personal need for interior change? If the Great Flowering Forth theory of creation contains even minimal truth, it indicates that change is an instrument God gave creation so it can become more than it already is; we ourselves can become more by deepening our life in God. How?

One tool we have is the season of Lent when the Church reminds us of both of our weaknesses and God's endless mercy. Considering all this, it is comforting to believe what Teilhard said: "God is not finished with creation. Incarnation is ongoing." Or, to paraphrase an old saying, "It's a good thing that pencils are made with erasers."

Colleen Winston is a Benedictine Sister of St. Walburg Monastery, Villa Hills. Her commentary was first published on the monastery's blogspot "Reflection from the School of the Lord's Service" online at stwalburg.org.

eyes have been opened, let us now live in that freedom and sight, as Paul exhorts us. Let us live as children of the light, and children of the Light.

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

## Catholic Charities

(Continued from page 3)

abilities. Brandy Medaugh, client care specialist and St. Joseph Apartment case manager, praised the partnership as one rooted in genuine service from the very first day. “They didn’t come seeking recognition,” she recalled. “They came with a genuine desire to give back and to strengthen our community.”

Over the years, CommonSpirit has provided everything from school supplies to holiday support, even maintaining their commitment through the pandemic. “Every time they returned with more than was expected — more items, more support, more blessings,” Ms. Medaugh said.

One of the most transformative moments was the redesign of the Christmas program, which empowered children to “earn” gifts through goal-setting. “It wasn’t

about giving less — it was about giving differently,” she explained. “It was about the blessing of giving, the dignity of working hard, and the joy of earning something meaningful.”

In the summer of 2025, Ms. Medaugh launched a literacy program at St. Joseph Apartments, and CommonSpirit immediately jumped in, providing tutors who worked weekly with children. They created homework stations and built a literacy library.

“When I met with the schools before the holidays, they shared that reading scores for several of the children in the program had improved,” said Ms. Medaugh. “That was huge, a direct result of the dedication, consistency and unwavering support of this partnership.”

Ms. Medaugh concluded with gratitude: “Because of you, families are stronger; children are learning, and communities are brighter.”

In his remarks, Mr. Goddard reflected on the impor-



Keener photos

(above) Bishop John Iffert presents Rose Schlosser with the Marcella Strategier Angel of Hope Award. As a member of the cooking team, Mrs. Schlosser was honored for her humility and dedication.

(below) Chris Goddard, executive director, Catholic Charities Diocese of Covington applauds volunteers and supporters at the annual appreciation dinner, March 10.



tance of service, gratitude and spiritual encounter: Calling the evening’s event his “favorite day as part of Catholic Charities,” Mr. Goddard said the gathering allows staff and volunteers to pause from daily responsibilities to “stop, reflect, rejoice and acknowledge all the great work.”

He emphasized that their mission extends beyond operations to meaningful human connection, noting that Catholic Charities strives to “encounter them in a deeper way” through intentional practices like prayer groups and Bible studies. Inspired by the Gospel story of the woman at the well — his “absolute favorite Bible story” — Mr. Goddard highlighted encounter as the heart of transformation for both volunteers and those they serve.

“And as Bishop Iffert reminds us so beautifully, it’s through that encounter that we’re often the ones that are transformed. It’s in growing in that relationship with Christ as a volunteer that we grow ourselves,” Mr. Goddard said.

Bishop Iffert ended the evening saying to those present, “You are like God. You remind me of God,” as an awesome silence fell over the room. “I think we forget that we are supposed to desire to be like God.” Not in an all-powerful, cosmic superhero kind of way, but “we are called to aspire to be like the essential character of God ... to be merciful in the way God is merciful ... in his capacity for compassion, for mercy, for love.”

“What you’re doing is you’re sharing in the divine work of God to be merciful to those who need him and then to participate in his divine creativity, to spread that goodness around the world,” Bishop Iffert said. “That’s what you do. That’s why we’re so grateful. That’s why this room is such a joy to be part of.”



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**Thursday, March 19 from 6:30–8:00 P.M.**

Choosing a high school is an important decision, and we invite your family to experience Notre Dame Academy firsthand. Designed especially for 6th and 7th grade girls, as well as 8th grade girls still exploring their high school choice, Panda Preview Night is the perfect opportunity to discover what sets NDA apart.

Explore our beautiful campus, connect with students and faculty, and see how NDA empowers young women to grow in faith, confidence and leadership. As Northern Kentucky’s only all-girls Catholic high school, Notre Dame Academy offers a transformative education rooted in the mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame — preparing young women not only for college, but for life.

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*Registration is required. Scan the QR code to reserve your spot. For questions, please contact our Admissions Office at (859) 292-1829.*



REGISTER HERE

PEOPLE AND EVENTS

**Noteworthy**

**2026 National Merit Finalists**

Annually, the National Merit Scholarship Corporation recognizes and provides scholarships in academics to students within the United States to stimulate and support their education.

The following diocesan high school students have been declared as National Merit Finalists in 2026. These finalists were chosen for their standardized test scores, academic record, excellence and leadership exemplified through a submitted application.

Covington Catholic High School, Park Hills

**Jackson Germann, Senior**

**William Jennings, Senior**

**Brayden Proud, Senior**

Covington Latin School, Covington

**Quinn Schulte, Senior**

Notre Dame Academy, Park Hills

**Jacie Hail, Senior**

**Jane Schuh, Senior**

St. Patrick High School, Maysville

**Jada Dickson, Senior**

Villa Madonna Academy, Villa Hills

**Drew Thomas, Senior**

**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/>.

**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 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](https://covdio.org/bible-workshops).

**The Diocesan Safe Environment and Schools offices welcome back Dr. Mandy Sanchez,** director of programming at Culture Reframed, for a presentation “AI: The Dangers of an Increasingly Digital World,” March 25, Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Hall, Covington. Doors open 6 p.m.; program begins 7 p.m. Must be over 18 years old to attend. Preregistration preferred but not required, <https://forms.gle/hQAmpWUvnC5TKoEGA>. Questions? Contact Julie Feinauer, director, Office of Safe Environment, [jfeinauer@covdio.org](mailto:jfeinauer@covdio.org).

**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.

**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.

**Come and See Retreat,** March 28, 9 a.m.–7 p.m., St. Paschal Baylon Convent, Highland Heights, Ohio. Am I called to be a sister? What is the life of a Sister of Notre Dame like? Women ages 20-39 curious about religious life are invited to join us for a day of reflection and conversation. Contact Sister Kelley Rush, [krush@sndusa.org](mailto:krush@sndusa.org) or (440) 241-3124. Overnight options 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](mailto: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](mailto:iisaak@covdio.org).

**World Youth Day 2027, Seoul, South Korea, July 30 to August 10, 2027.** The Diocese of Covington is coordinating a pilgrimage to World Youth Day 2027 for young adults ages 18 to 35. Experience the universality of the Catholic Church in the presence of our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, alongside millions of young adult Catholics from around the world. Bishop John Iffert hopes to join the

**Lenten Fish Frys**

**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.

St. Edward Parish, Cynthiana, 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.

**Fridays, Feb. 20 – March 27 (continued)**  
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 6 — April 3**  
Father Bealer Council, Knights of Columbus, Elsmere, 11 a.m.– 2 p.m.; 4:30–8 p.m.

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

pilgrims along with a few priests and deacons from the diocese. Estimated cost is \$5,500 per person and includes round-trip airfare, transportation, lodging, meals (from WYD) and tours. To reserve your spot, the initial payment of \$800 is now due. The full amount must be paid by Monday, March 15, 2027. For more information, go to [covdio.org/register/](https://covdio.org/register/)



**Golden arches at Parish Kitchen**

Recently, volunteers at Parish Kitchen proudly served McDonald’s Quarter Pounders and apple pies to the guests at Parish Kitchen. The special treat was made possible by an anonymous generous donor. Parish Kitchen, a ministry of Catholic Charities, Diocese of Covington, serves a hot lunch to hungry Northern Kentuckians 7 days a week, 365 days a year. To learn more visit [covingtoncharities.org/parish-kitchen](https://covingtoncharities.org/parish-kitchen).

# Associates of the Congregation of Divine Providence celebrate 50 years of joy and community spirit



**Staff Report**

The year was 1976. The Apple Computer Company was founded; the book *Roll of Thunder; Hear My Cry* was published; Catholics around the world celebrated the centenary of Pope Pius XXII's birth; the Cincinnati Reds won the World Series. Alongside these historic events, the Associates of the Congregation of Divine Providence (ACDP) of Kentucky began. Now, in 2026, they celebrate their 50 year anniversary. Their beginning was small, with one young woman from Rhode Island being the first to formally commit to living the four fundamental virtues of the sisters' founder, Blessed John Martin Moye. These virtues are simplicity, apostolic charity, spirit of poverty and abandonment to Divine Providence.

These virtues began to attract other women. Initially, the majority of them were vowed religious who had returned to the lay apostolate. With time, though, women and men from the community at large became part of the ACDPs, and the membership grew.

Candidates go through a formation program that takes them more deeply into the meanings of the four fundamental virtues, gives them a history of the founding of the Sisters of Divine Providence, and emphasizes a very important fact: ACDP members do not change their way of life — their call to the apostolate — whatever that call may be. Rather, the ACDP life takes associates more deeply into their personal spirituality, the way they live their apostolate, whether it be the president of a thriving company or a volunteer at a homeless shelter.

As the ACDPs celebrate their 50-year anniversary, they find themselves moving toward 100 members. Presently,



(above left) An associate, Pat Tenbrink, receives a remembrance card at the opening of the ACDP 50th anniversary celebration.



(top) Associates of the Congregation of Divine Providence gather for a group picture taken at the opening of the ACDP 50th anniversary celebration.

(above) Sisters of Divine Providence Margie Verhoff and Theresa Falkenstein speak to the Associates at the prayer service marking the opening of the anniversary year.

both men (including priests) and women fill the ranks, all being connected by their dedication to Gospel values lived through the practice of the four fundamental virtues. Their inclusivity closes no doors. Each member ministers in their own unique way, including homemaking, teaching, nursing, counseling, parenting, grandparenting, pastoring, designing, caregiving, helping refugees, cooking for the homeless, ministering in parishes, etc.

"Being an associate has deepened my relationship with God in unbelievable ways," said Anne Etzel, who has been an associate since 2007. Through friendships with Sisters and fellow Associates, she has come to experience God's love more intimately and consistently. Living the charism has shaped her sense of self and vocation, blessing her volunteer service and returning to her "over and over again" the assurance of God's faithful care. As she looks ahead, Ms. Etzel describes the associate call as a source of peace — an anchor as she moves closer to "seeing the face of our Providential God."

Present members come from nine different states,

Ireland and Ghana. When members were asked why they chose to become associates, responses included joy and community spirit among members; attraction to the emphasis on Gospel values; the sisters' deep spirituality; building a deeper relationship with Divine Providence; having a sense of purpose that transcends career achievements; wanting to foster personal spirituality in communion with others.

In Ireland, associate Pauline Maher's path into the Associate community was shaped by both relationship and need. Her initial draw, she recalls simply, was Sister Leslie Keener and God Space — a place of shared prayer, reflection and presence. That ministry became especially vital to her during the COVID-19 pandemic and at the time of her mother's passing. "I felt held by the community," Ms. Maher shared, describing how regular participation sustained her through grief and uncertainty.

The anniversary year opened on January 17 with a prayer service presented by the CDP sisters, followed by lunch and socializing. Several special events are planned throughout 2026 to help celebrate this milestone, among them being a Mass to be celebrated by Bishop John Iffert and pilgrimages within the tri-state area.

While the majority of the current ACDPs are considered senior citizens, the organization is attracting a younger population. The future looks optimistic for growth, not just among this group but for associate communities in general. With 50 years completed, the next 50 are anticipated with hope, joy, and trust in our provident God.

For more information about becoming an associate, contact Marilyn Schleyer, formation coordinator; at (859) 380-6155 or schleyermarilyn@gmail.com.



## Saint Agnes Fish Fries

**Feb 20, 27, March 6, 13, 20**  
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*Shrimp Tacos*  
Sautéed Shrimp, Homemade Pineapple Slaw  
*Pizza - Grilled Cheese*  
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# Church's unity comes from faith in Christ and from love, pope says

Josephine Peterson  
OSV News

The Catholic Church is made up of diverse people who are united by their faith in Christ and are called to welcome all of humanity, Pope Leo XIV said during his weekly general audience.

"Its unifying principle is not a language, a culture, an ethnicity, but faith in Christ," he said in St. Peter's Square March 11.

Continuing his series of reflections on the Second Vatican Council, the pope focused on the Dogmatic Constitution "Lumen Gentium," which describes the Church as the "People of God."

The Church is the assembly of "all those who in faith look upon Jesus," he said, united not by nationality or culture but by their shared faith in Christ.

Pope Leo said this understanding is rooted in the Bible, pointing to God's covenant with Abraham and the people of Israel, which prepared the way for the new covenant established through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The pope said love is the law that governs relationships within the Church, as believers receive and experience it through Jesus. Through Christ, believers from every nation are united in faith, he said. The Church is the people of God who "draw their existence from the body of Christ and who are themselves the body of Christ."

Rather than turning inward, the pope said, the Church must remain open to everyone.

"Unified in Christ, Lord and Savior of every man and woman, the Church can never turn inwards on herself, but is open to everyone and is for everyone," he said.

In a world marked by conflict and division, Pope Leo added, the diversity of the Church is a sign of hope.

"It is a great sign of hope — especially in our times, marked by so many conflicts and wars — to know that the Church is a people in which women and men of different nationalities, languages and cultures live together in faith," he said.

Before greeting Italian-speakers, the pope said he was

CNS photo/Lola Gomez  
**Pope Leo XIV greets a child from the popemobile while riding around St. Peter's Square at the Vatican before his weekly general audience March 11, 2026.**



close to the Lebanese people "in this moment of grave trial," following the death of Father Pierre El-Rahi. The Maronite priest was killed in an Israeli bombing of southern Lebanon March 9. The pope said his funeral was to be held March 11 in Al-Qlayaa, a Christian village.

"In Arabic, 'Adrachi' means shepherd. Father Pierre was a true shepherd who always remained close to his people with the love and sacrifice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd," he said in Italian. "As soon as he heard that some parishioners had been wounded in a bombing, without hesitation, he ran to help them."

Before the audience, Pope Leo met privately with

Cardinal Dominique J. Mathieu, Archbishop of Tehran and Isfahan, Iran. The Belgian cardinal, who is a member of the Franciscans, arrived in Rome March 8 after being evacuated along with every member of the Italian Embassy, where he is based.

During the general audience, Pope Leo asked for prayers of peace in Iran and throughout the Middle East, above all for the many civilian victims and innocent children.

"May our prayer be a comfort to those who suffer and a seed of hope for the future," he said.

**LENTEN FISH FRIES**  
**St. Joseph Parish in Camp Springs**  
**invites you to its Lenten Fish Fries.**



**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](http://stjosephcampsprings.org).**

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# As humanitarian crisis looms in Lebanon, Mideast Christians face uncertain future

Dale Gavlak  
OSV News

Lebanon has been gripped by panic and internal displacement crisis following Israeli evacuation orders as part of the U.S. and Israel-Iran war, with the country coming to reflect the growing pressure on Middle Eastern Christians, raising fears the conflict could force many to leave the region permanently.

Heavy Israeli airstrikes on Iran-backed Hezbollah and ongoing clashes, along with mass evacuation orders, have forced Christians across Lebanon to flee, leaving many homeless. Hezbollah joined Iran in the fighting despite a prohibition from the Lebanese government.

According to the United Nations, nearly 700,000 people have been displaced from southern Lebanon, south Beirut, and the Bekaa Valley as they seek refuge in Beirut. The violence has also killed more than 80 children.

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam warned on March 6 of a "looming humanitarian disaster" after Israel ordered mass evacuations March 5 in south Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs. He said Lebanon has been dragged into a devastating war it did not choose.

The economically stricken country is still recovering from the last war between Israel and Hezbollah ending in 2024.

Michael Constatin, CNEWA Pontifical Mission's regional director for Lebanon, Syria and Egypt, told OSV News that his organization is ministering to Christians who remain in the south, caught in the crosshairs between the Israeli military and Hezbollah, and to those who are now displaced in the Beirut area. It also helps people of other faiths.

Speaking about Christians in the southern areas of Marjayoun, Bint Jbeil and Al-Mashhad, Constatin said: "They have all decided to stay to protect their homes. But those in Al-Mashhad were forced to evacuate their homes on March 10 and come to Beirut. Very few remain in that village. These people could be killed."

"In Rmaich in Bint Jbail, there are 1,300 Christian families who have taken in another 300 Christian families displaced from other villages. They are surrounded by the Israeli army and by shelling. The village situation is very harsh," he said, underscoring the danger.

CNEWA is providing this area and Marjayoun with fuel to empower water purification and generate power for cell-phones and the internet to be able to communicate.

"People are afraid for attacks on these Christian villages," Constatin explained, recounting at least three violent incidents involving Catholic clerics' families in the south, including the killing of Lebanese Maronite Catholic priest Father Pierre al-Rahi in Qlayaa, Marjayoun, by Israeli artillery tank fire on March 9. Father al-Rahi refused to leave the village, protecting his community.

"This has made Christians very anxious, not knowing whether to stay or not," the CNEWA head said, adding that this puts more pressure on Christians caught between



Mohamed Azakir, Reuters

A child watches a cat eating in a school March 11, 2026, that has been turned into a shelter for people displaced from Beirut's southern suburbs and southern Lebanon, following an escalation between Hezbollah and Israel amid the U.S. and Israel-Iran war, in Beirut.

Hezbollah militants and Israeli forces.

"If they leave immediately, some Hezbollah members will hide in their villages and their homes, and all the villages will be completely destroyed."

Meanwhile, CNEWA is aiding the displaced in Beirut with food coupons. Some 750 Christian families have now fled there. However, Constatin points out that they could soon be joined by an additional 3,000 more Christian families escaping fighting in the south as the humanitarian crisis grows.

Iraqi Christians are also coming under growing pressure as a result of the U.S. and Israel-Iran war. An explosive drone strike on the Chaldean Catholic complex in Ankawa, outside of Irbil took place on March 4, luckily damaging only the chapel and a block of apartments. "We thank God for the safety of everyone," Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Bashar M. Warda told OSV News.

"When war erupts in the Middle East, we face another erosion, fast or slow. Do we stay? Do our children have a future?" Archbishop Warda further commented to the pontifical charity Aid to the Church in Need.

A U.S. military base near Irbil Airport has come under multiple drone attacks, while the United Arab Emirates consulate and a hotel frequented by foreigners in Irbil were also attacked by drones.

Father Emanuel Youkhana, a priest, or archimandrite, of the Assyrian Church of the East, who aids Christians and other Iraqi minorities in northern Iraq, told OSV News that the "situation in Irbil is escalating because of

the American logistic base attached to the airport and the American consul in Irbil."

"The Christian town of Ankawa is close to the airport and near the area of targeting. So, the church complex and the hotel were vulnerable to these attacks. North of Irbil is the American military base, Harir Air Base, and in the area are the camps of Iranian Kurdish opposition groups which especially became targets," Father Youkhana explained.

"Both Iran and the Iranian-backed Shiite militias of Iraq carry out these attacks," he said. "This is the concern that it can form the basis for internal conflict in the country."

Father Youkhana said there are fears that Christians will once again face displacement. They were forced to flee their ancestral homeland of the Nineveh Plain in 2014 — after the brutal Islamic State group invasion — and the latest war evokes painful memories and trauma.

"Should the violence escalate, there are fears that this could lead to the displacement of Christians in Ankawa to seek refuge further north. And further south in the Nineveh Plain from where these Iran-backed militias are now operating."

If Israel and/or the U.S. were to attack this area, once Iraq's Christian heartland, "Christians would be forced to flee north to Dohuk," the priest explained.

"In crisis times, vulnerable communities, like Christians, suffer more and feel greater uncertainty," said Father Youkhana.

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# Faith and flowers: Special rules keep God's house simply beautiful

Carol Glatz

Catholic News Service

Of the many traditions and penitential practices observed during the season of Lent, one of the more visible is the stark change in church decor and a complete absence of flowers.

That shift was markedly noticeable during Pope Leo XIV's series of pastoral visits to different parishes in Rome.

He started the weekly Sunday visits Feb. 15, before Lent, and the areas around the altar in the Church of Santa Maria Regina Pacis in Ostia Lido were resplendent with bright yellow and white blooms and lush greenery.

Then, after Ash Wednesday Feb. 18, each church visit has featured an altar and surroundings to be somberly bare of all floral decorations.

"Using flowers is absolutely forbidden" during the season of Lent, according to Micaela Soranzo, a professor and expert in liturgy and religious architecture.

However, this doesn't mean the church should be devoid of greenery, as small plants or simple compositions made up of leaves and branches are permissible, Soranzo told Catholic News Service in an interview in 2019. She has since published a book on the subject, "Il giardino del cielo. Arredo floreale e liturgia," (The Garden of Heaven: Floral decoration and the liturgy.)

Even fruit and berries are acceptable adornments all year, and the cherry is particularly suitable for Lent because, as St. Augustine noted, its red pulp is a powerful symbol of Christ's passion and the pit recalls the wood of his cross, said Soranzo, who has also worked for the liturgy office of the Italian bishops' conference for two decades.

A modest display of flowers during Lent is possible on "Laetare" (Rejoice) Sunday, the fourth Sunday in the season, when the liturgical vestments change from purple to rose. This sudden visual variation is meant to strike the faithful that something new and joyful is approaching as Easter draws near, she had told CNS.

On Easter day, there is a true "explosion of flowers," representing new life and "light," which means the predominant colors should be yellow and white, she said. All the other colored blossoms and plants are there "to give the idea of a garden, the garden of the Resurrection," she said.

For the Catholic Church, those sprigs, sprays and bouquets adorning church interiors are meant to bring deeper meaning and attention to the liturgy and the key elements inside each place of worship, Soranzo said.

"The liturgy needs the language of flowers" because they complement "the immobility of the architecture" and church furnishings with their ability to appropriately represent different feast days and the changing cycle of seasons both in nature and the liturgy, she said.

"Flowers are meant to be an integral part of the liturgy," Soranzo said, "not filler."

In fact, when the true purpose of floral arrangements is misunderstood, churches run the risk either of being bereft of any gift of nature presented in homage to Christ or of being turned into a greenhouse "obstacle course" with pots and plants placed in every available space, she



Pope Leo XIV celebrates Mass in the Church of St. Mary of the Presentation in Rome March 8, 2026, during Lent.

CNS photo/Vatican Media

said.

The topic is so important that the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and bishops' conference guidelines include norms on the appropriate use of floral decoration, said Soranzo.

Like all adornments, flowers and plants must not ignore or detract from the symbolic and theological meaning of sacred spaces and furnishings, and they should highlight — not hide — the altar, the ambo and the baptismal font, said Soranzo.

The altar — the table of the Lord — is Christ; the ambo — from where the word of God is proclaimed — is the visible image of Christ resurrected; and the baptismal font is where God's children are welcomed into the Church, she said.

The need to focus on Christ and his sacrifice means only those elements necessary for the eucharistic celebration should be on the altar, she said, which means flowers should be placed near or next to the altar, never on top — unless the altar is so large that a small arrangement would not be in the way.

Potted plants with roots should never be used near the altar — only cut flowers to represent life "that is sacrificed," like the sacrifice of the Eucharist, she said. That is also why no artificial flowers or fake candles should ever be used, she said, because objects near the altar must always be things that "are consumed," depleted and fade away.

The use of flowers also should reflect the hierarchy of

what is most important in the church, she said; for example, "it is not right if there are more flowers adorning the statue of the patron saint than the altar."

Soranzo said that a frequent concern of sacristans and parish workers in Italy is the high cost of floral decorations.

She said she tells them, "We must recognize that nature offers us so much," not just the usual hothouse flowers and expensive imports.

"Creation is so beautiful and wide. The Lord really gave us a lot," she said.

Parishes can keep their costs down by working with florists or farmers and using what is available in their community, said Soranzo. Sometimes the greater the challenge — be it low budgets, high snowdrifts or long droughts — the more room for creativity.

"Often simplicity is what makes a composition more beautiful," she said.

The aim, she said, is to create a space where a person of faith or a visitor walks into church and says, "How beautiful it is to be here." It has to feel welcoming and flowers help do that.

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# ‘Catholic Saints of America’ event celebrates America’s 250th birthday

Katie Yoder  
OSV News

Drawing inspiration from St. Carlo Acutis, a national shrine in Wisconsin is inviting Catholics to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the United States this summer by joining in prayer and learning about the holy men and women of America.

“They founded schools, cared for the sick, served the poor, and witnessed to the Gospel through lives of sacrifice, service and unwavering love for Jesus Christ,” said Father of Mercy Anthony Stephens, rector of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion. “Their example shows us what it truly means to be a faithful Catholic and to be American.”

Scheduled for July 1-9, “Catholic Saints of America” will feature a special novena, an exhibit honoring Americans who are saints or on the path to sainthood, and an opportunity to venerate their relics. The relics or remains of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Blessed Solanas Casey and Blessed Stanley Rother will be among those on display.

All this is taking place on the site of the only Church-approved Marian apparition site in the United States.

“First, through this novena and exhibit, we hope people will come to learn about the canonization process,” Father Stephens told OSV News. “Next, we want to help people discover those who may one day be declared saints. Finally, we can help introduce people to a new devotion that inspires them to grow closer to Christ.”

The novena prayer, which Father Stephens is writing, will seek Mary’s intercession for



OSV News photo/Sam Lucero

A worshipper venerates the Jubilee Mission Cross used during a 2025 Jubilee Year procession at the National Shrine of Champion in Champion, Wis., July 20. Jesuit Father Francis Xavier Weninger, a pastor to German Catholics in Green Bay in the 1800s, erected mission crosses in each parish he visited, including the one used for the procession. The cross is inscribed with the message: “He who perseveres will be blessed forever.”

unity, holiness and renewal nationwide. Alongside the novena, the exhibit will feature the stories of holy men and women of America. It will highlight their lives, virtues and legacy, organizers said.

Its format was inspired by a traveling Eucharistic miracles exhibit, which was based on a website created by St. Carlo Acutis, an Italian teenager canonized last year.

“There are fewer than 15 American saints, and only a little more than 70 people whose causes (for sainthood) have been opened” in the U.S., Father Stephens said. “Each of these holy men and women has a beautiful story and powerful example, yet so few people know about them.”

“We do not have saints from 2,000 years ago; we have saints of today,” he added. “This shows that God is still at work, calling people to himself.”

Americans who have been canonized are Sts. Elizabeth Ann Seton, John Neumann, Marianne Cope, Katharine Drexel, Damien de Veuster of Molokai, Junípero Serra, Kateri Tekakwitha, Théodore Guérin, Frances Xavier Cabrini and Rose Philippine Duchesne. St. Teresa of Kolkata was given honorary American citizenship in 1996, the year before she died.

Beatified Americans include Blesseds Miriam Teresa Demjanovich, Stanley Rother, Solanus Casey, Michael J. McGivney, Francis Xavier Seelos and Carlos Manuel Cecilio Rodríguez Santiago of Puerto Rico. Five Franciscan friars known as the Georgia martyrs will join them Oct. 31, and the beatification of Archbishop Fulton Sheen is also expected soon.

The shrine is in the process of inviting promoters of all U.S. causes to participate. So far, the promoters of more than 35 causes have confirmed they will collaborate in some way. Some will help create their respective exhibit displays, and many will attend in person, Father Stephens said.

While the novena and exhibit take place July 1-9, many of the promoters and representatives of these causes will be present July 3-5. For those days, guest speakers will also “engage with pilgrims, share the stories of these holy men and women, and provide opportunities to learn more about the path to sainthood in America,” said Kim May,

the shrine’s event and volunteer coordinator.

Organizers expect that more than 15,000 pilgrims could attend, which would make this the largest event hosted by the shrine.

The exhibit will recognize in a special way the cause of Servant of God Adele Brice, a Belgian immigrant who reported seeing the Blessed Virgin Mary three times in 1859. She is buried at the shrine, which marks the site where they met. The cause for her sainthood opened in January.

Mary, as she appeared to Brice (sometimes also spelled “Brise”), is honored under the title of “Our Lady of Champion” for the nearby town of Champion, 15 miles northeast of Green Bay.

Father Stephens, who as the shrine’s rector serves as the actor or promoter of Brice’s cause, said the upcoming event will mark the 130th anniversary of the catechist’s death July 5.

The shrine plans to celebrate Mass that day at 11:30 a.m. local time to pray for Brice’s cause for canonization and for her continued intercession, he said.

“The afternoon will include guest speakers representing sainthood causes and catechetical presentations, continuing the mission Our Lady entrusted to Adele to teach the faith and lead souls to salvation,” he said.

The shrine will also host a picnic that day. In addition to Mass and speakers, videos and educational presentations will highlight America’s holy women and men.

The shrine, May said, is entrusting the event to the patronage of Mary under her titles of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas; the Immaculate Conception, patroness of the United States; and Our Lady of Champion.

The all-age event will include interactive activities for families. The shrine will offer history scavenger hunts, children’s activity pages and more.

“Our hope,” May said, “is that families will come together to celebrate this historic moment, learn about the holy men and women who shaped our nation, and be inspired to grow in faith.”

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Details: [covingtoncharities.org/news-events/job-opportunities](http://covingtoncharities.org/news-events/job-opportunities)

NEWS BRIEFS

National/World

**Beloved Notre Dame coaching legend Lou Holtz remembered for ‘building men, not just players’**

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — Leading up to a college football clash between Notre Dame and heated rival Miami in the late 1980s, a team chaplain for the Hurricanes proclaimed that God doesn’t care who wins football games. Lou Holtz, coach of the Fighting

Irish at the time, agreed. “I don’t think God cares who wins, either,” he replied with a smile. “But his Mother does.” This now-famous quip captured the essence of the legendary coach: an uncanny wit, an unwavering Catholic faith and an unshakable love for Notre Dame — Our Lady’s university. On March 4, Holtz died in Orlando, Florida, at the age of 89, surrounded by his family. Forever etched in Fighting Irish lore for leading Notre Dame to the 1988 National Championship, Holtz leaves behind not just a decorated football resume but a legacy of shaping young men and

inspiring people to live virtuously. “Notre Dame mourns the loss of Lou Holtz, a legendary football coach, a beloved member of the Notre Dame family, and devoted husband, father, and grandfather,” said Holy Cross Father Robert A. Dowd, Notre Dame’s president, in a public statement. “Among his many accomplishments, we will remember him above all as a teacher, leader, and mentor who brought out the very best in his players, on and off the field, earning their respect and admiration for a lifetime.”

**Protecting God’s Children for Adults Safe Environment Trainings**

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**Step 3: Your account becomes active** when your background check, VIRTUS session and Acceptance Form are posted on

your account. You will receive 12 bulletins per year. You will receive e-mail notices at [system@pub.virtus.org](mailto:system@pub.virtus.org) unless your computer program blocks them.

**Bulletins:**

■ March bulletin: posted Sunday, March 1; due Tuesday, April 7.

The monthly e-mail reminder of a new bulletin posted will come from [system@pub.virtus.org](mailto:system@pub.virtus.org).

**[www.virtusonline.org](http://www.virtusonline.org), enter your user id and password.** If your account is suspended contact your primary location where you volunteer or are employed. Your primary location contact information is found under your Contact Tab.

**VIRTUS Training:**

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

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

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

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

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

■ Tuesday, May 19, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Tuesday, May 19, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Wednesday, June 17, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Wednesday, June 17, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Wednesday, July 1, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Wednesday, July 1, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Tuesday, July 28, 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

■ Tuesday, July 28, 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

**Note: If your Training Tab is missing** or you cannot access your account, contact your parish, school or institution.

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National/World (continued)

**Wyoming governor signs ‘well-intended’ but ‘fragile’ heartbeat law on abortion**

CHEYENNE, Wyo. — Wyoming’s governor enacted what he called a “well-intended” but ultimately “fragile” ban on abortions of unborn children with a detectable heartbeat. The legislative liaison for the Diocese of Cheyenne, the state’s only Roman Catholic diocese, expressed support for the new law despite its shortcomings. On March 9, Gov. Mark Gordon, a Republican, signed into law the Human Heartbeat Act, which makes it a felony to perform abortions where an unborn child’s cardiac activity can be detected with standard medical equipment. Gordon, who describes himself as “pro-life, with exceptions,” expressed concern that the bill would not survive a legal challenge under the state’s “current constitutional framework.” Deacon Mike Leman, the Diocese of Cheyenne’s executive director of Catholic social teaching and communications, and legislative liaison, said the diocese supported the Human Heartbeat Act. The Catholic Church teaches that human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the first moment of conception, and since the first century has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion.

**HHS proposes scrapping policy requiring foster homes to affirm children’s LGBTQ+ identity**

WASHINGTON — The Department of Health and Human Services on March 6 proposed scrapping a Biden administration policy requiring foster homes to affirm a child’s gender transition or sexual orientation. HHS posted a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on the Federal Register that proposed rescinding the Biden administration rule, which was finalized in 2024. That policy that said in order to be considered a Designated Placement for an LGBTQ+ child, the placement must satisfy three conditions, including, committing to “establishing an environment that supports the child’s LGBTQ+ status or identity,” undergo training for “appropriate knowledge and skills to provide for the needs of the child related to the child’s self-identified sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression,” and commit to “facilitate the child’s access to age- or developmentally appropriate resources, services, and activities that support their health and well-being.” However, the Biden administration policy was later blocked by a federal judge who found the policy violated what is known as the Major Questions doctrine, a legal premise that holds that significant economic or political matters should be left to Congress, not courts. The proposed HHS rule is listed for public comment until April 6.

**White House ‘gamifying’ war on Iran marks a ‘moral crisis,’ warns cardinal**

CHICAGO — Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago has issued “a call to conscience,” while deploring efforts to “gamify” the U.S.-Israel war with Iran — particularly on the part of the Trump administration. “A real war with real death and real suffering being treated like it’s a video game — it’s sickening,” he wrote in a March 7 statement published to that archdiocese’s website. The

cardinal pointed to a 42-second video posted March 5 on the White House X account, which showed a mashup of action movie clips, interspersed with unclassified video from U.S. Central Command showing U.S. missile strikes on Iran. The clip, captioned “JUSTICE THE AMERICAN WAY,” included action clips from “Iron Man,” “Top Gun,” “Superman” and “Breaking Bad” among others, with a voiceover at the end declaring, “Flawless victory.” Cardinal Cupich noted the hundreds who have been killed, displaced and terrorized by the war, saying that the U.S. soldiers who have fallen — now a total of 7 — were also “dishonored” by the White House post. The cardinal described the “gamifying” of war as “a profound moral failure” that “strips away the humanity of real people.” But, said Cardinal Cupich, “the longer we remain blind to the terrible consequences of war, the more we are risking the most precious gift God gave us: our humanity.” He added, “I know that the American people are better than this. We have the good sense to know that what is happening is not entertainment but war, and that Iran is a nation of people, not a video game others play to entertain us.”

**Christians ‘most persecuted religious community in the world,’ Vatican tells UN**

GENEVA — The Vatican’s representative to the United Nations in Geneva warned that Christians remain the most persecuted religious group worldwide and called for stronger protections for religious freedom. Speaking at a March 3 event during the U.N. Human Rights Council’s 61st session, Archbishop Ettore Balestrero said nearly 400 million Christians face persecution or violence — roughly one in seven believers globally. He noted that almost 5,000 Christians were killed for their faith in 2025, about 13 each day. The event, organized in cooperation with the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians, brought diplomats, experts and civil society leaders together to highlight growing threats to Christians and broader religious freedom concerns. Archbishop Balestrero said governments have a “fundamental responsibility” to defend religious liberty and hold perpetrators accountable. He warned that persecution can also take subtle forms, including social marginalization or legal pressures against believers. “These are not superficial acts,” he said. “They are serious violations of the rights of Christians.” The archbishop added that religious freedom must be recognized not as a privilege granted by states, but as a basic human right.

**Trump administration seeks pause on another lawsuit challenging abortion pill**

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration on March 6 again asked a judge to pause a state lawsuit seeking to roll back Biden administration-era eased restrictions on mifepristone, a drug commonly, but not exclusively, used for first trimester abortion. The U.S. Department of Justice moved to dismiss Missouri v. FDA, a lawsuit from a coalition of states led by Missouri seeking to end an FDA policy permitting mifepristone to be distributed by mail, arguing it undermines their own state laws, among other objections. But DOJ lawyers in the Trump administration argued in the filing the court “should either stay this case until after FDA completes its review or dismiss it.” The filing came after the Trump administration previously sought to dismiss a similar lawsuit brought by Louisiana. In the DOJ’s filing in the Louisiana case, it said such reviews often take about one year. Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, said in a March 6 statement that “the Trump-Vance Justice Department” is again taking the side of abortion drug dealers and the radical Left against women and children, public health and safety, and the overwhelmingly pro-life GOP base.” A DOJ spokesperson did not immediately respond to an OSV News request for comment.

**‘Underbelly of the AI industry’: Panel explores data centers’ ecological, economic impacts**

WASHINGTON — The explosion of massive data centers to handle the increasing generative demands of artificial intelligence have placed high demands on both power and the water used in cooling systems — millions of gallons per day — and low-income communities have typically endured the brunt of the air pollution they create. This was the topic of a March 5 webinar, “The Growing Impacts of Data Centers on Our Neighbors and God’s Creation,” hosted by the Washington-based Catholic Climate Covenant. “Shared resources are being squandered,” said Amanda Garcia, a senior attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center. Her example was Colossus, the powerful training computer for the Grok program built by X.Ai, a subsidiary of SpaceX, the company founded by billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk. She called X.Ai “a stark example of the unreasonable demands data centers are putting on communities. Robin Lewis, director for climate equity at Washington-based Interfaith Power and Light, said faith leaders in all denominations should examine the toll taken on the environment and lives by the expansion of data centers, putting “people over profit.”

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