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



Holy Week and Easter at the Cathedral

Chrism Mass
 7 p.m., Tuesday, March 31

Holy Thursday, April 2
 (No 8:15 a.m. Mass)
 Mass of the Lord's Supper, 6 p.m.
 Cathedral remains open for private prayer until 10 p.m.

Good Friday, April 3
 (No 8:15 a.m. Mass)
 Confessions, 12 – 2 p.m.
 Choral Stations of the Cross, 12 p.m. — The Bishop's Choir will sing Sacred choral reflections for each Station. This service is adapted from St. Pope John Paul II's *Via Crucis* at the Roman Coliseum
 Celebration of the Lord's Passion, 3 p.m.

Holy Saturday, April 4
 (No 4:30 p.m. Mass)
 Confessions, 3–4 p.m.
 Easter Vigil, 8:30 p.m.

Easter Sunday, April 5
 (No 5:30 p.m. Mass)
 Mass 7:30 a.m.
 Mass 10 a.m. – live streamed

Shroud exhibit
 Easter Monday, April 6 thru Easter Friday, April 10, 9 a.m.–3 p.m., with extended hours on Easter Thursday, April 5, 3–8 p.m.

Divine Mercy Sunday
 April 12, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament following 10 a.m. Mass–3 p.m. Vespers; Confessions will be heard during this same time

Cathedral Parish Office is closed Wednesday, April 1 thru Tuesday, April 7

The twelfth station, the crucifixion, depicts Jesus on the cross with the inscription above his head that reads "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews," written in the languages of Hebrew, Latin and Greek, as described in the Bible.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan to celebrate Mass with Bishop John Iffert in dedication of the Gardens of St. Patrick's — a place of spiritual pilgrimage

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

Twenty years ago, Gerald Lundergan, a long-time Maysville resident and then parishioner of St. Patrick Church, Maysville, bought a small plot of land, just off St. Patrick Cemetery, Maysville. With that land, it was his dream to build a Stations of the Cross, a spiritual refuge and place of pilgrimage for the faithful. Now, on land just off his original plot, and leased by the Diocese of Covington, Mr. Lundergan's dream is almost complete. Fifteen life-size, bronze, hand-carved Stations of the Cross will soon be unveiled at The Gardens of St. Patrick's, Maysville — eight acres of hand-crafted beauty and extraordinary detail, paying homage to Christ's great sacrifice.

The Gardens at St. Patrick's and its 14 completed stations, with one remaining to be completed on Ascension Sunday, May 14, will be blessed and dedicated by Archbishop Emeritus of New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan and Bishop John Iffert. Cardinal

(Continued on page 10)

The Gardens at St. Patrick's Holy Week Schedule

Holy Wednesday
 Mass with celebrant Archbishop Emeritus of New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan and con-celebrant Bishop John Iffert, 4 p.m. Musical accompaniment composed by Francisco Crabonell, performed by conductor, Dr. Everette McCorvey, and the American Spiritual Ensemble, with the addition of a brass choir.

Holy Thursday
 Mass, St. Patrick Parish, Maysville, 7:30 p.m.

Good Friday
 Stations of the Cross led by Bishop John Iffert, The Gardens at St. Patrick's, Maysville, 6 p.m.

Easter Sunday
 Mass with celebrant Father Jim Sichko, Missionary of Mercy commissioned by Pope Francis, The Gardens at St. Patrick's, Maysville, 8 a.m.

Listening first: How the Diocese of Covington is shaping a foundation and a pastoral plan for the next decade

Laura Keener
Editor

The Diocese of Covington is launching an expansive, consultation driven process to develop a Diocesan foundation and set a pastoral course for “the next decade or more.” And like the process used to develop the 2022 diocesan pastoral plan, Bishop John Iffert is inviting parishioners from around the Diocese to be involved in the discernment and recommendation process.

Bishop Iffert says the effort stems from the 2022 pastoral plan, which called for a study on forming a foundation to “encourage giving.”

Rather than “put the cart before the horse” by filing papers and naming a board, the Diocese chose to listen first — to pastors, parish and school leaders, potential board members and donors — so the foundation’s structure and services truly match local needs. “We really needed to hear from pastors ... from people who would benefit from these services ... [and] potential board members and donors ... What would be helpful to them?” Bishop Iffert said.

subcommittees, see page 4.)

The commitment, he says, is to make the process “as open and as transparent as it can be” so that “we can come up with a set of solutions that we can walk out supporting together.”

Spearheaded by Deacon Jim Fortner, diocesan chief operating officer, the Diocese is working with L’Etoile Development Services to help lead and organize the process. Based in Orlando, Florida, L’Etoile Development Services was founded in 2011 by Marilyn Blanchette. Named after her late father, Raymond C. Letoile, the consulting agency specializes in strategic planning, major gift fundraising and leadership development. Joining Ms. Blanchette in leading the process is Mark Dollhopf. (See related article on page 3.)

Bishop Iffert describes his leadership approach as rooted in broad consultation that moves toward consensus and, when ready, a clear decision: “Decision making is always a group process, to gain the wisdom that’s there and to try to move towards a shared decision. ... [and] then there’s that moment of decision taking and that’s the role

Help shape the Diocese’s future

Register to join one or more of four Commissions discussing essential ministries of the Diocese of Covington:

Foundation Commission
Catholic Schools Commission
Catholic Charities Commission
Diocesan Governance Commission

The commitment involves four monthly sessions from April through July, lasting 90 minutes to two hours each.

Note: Diocesan Governance commission meetings will occur in the fall and will be announced in July.

An initial kick-off meeting will be held April 15.
Learn more and register now at covdioplanning.org.

These initial conversations resulted in a process designed to keep the work focused and transparent by organizing the planning into four Commission-led dialogues:

— **Foundation Commission** — Designing the foundation’s governance, services, staffing and budget.

— **Catholic Schools Commission** — Addressing sustainability, structure, curriculum, finances and above all, mission and Catholic identity.

— **Catholic Charities Commission** — Evaluating governance, rural access to services, volunteer pathways and next generation ministries.

— **Diocesan Governance Commission** — Studying assessments, how diocesan structures and services support parishes and schools, and priorities like technology and communications.

Bishop Iffert is inviting parishioners from throughout the Diocese to consider being a part of a commission, based on personal interest, experience and expertise. The commitment involves four monthly sessions lasting 90 minutes to two hours each. Participants will attend an initial kick-off meeting followed by three focused subcommittee meetings to “benchmark best practices and draft actionable strategic goals,” according to the initiative’s website, covdioplanning.org.

Meetings will be held from April through July, except for the Diocesan Governance Commission whose meetings will occur in the fall and will be announced in July. (For more information on each of the four Commissions and

of the bishop; as those conversations progress, to recognize when we’ve come to a moment of consensus that also reflects my view and something we all can live with and support. Then it’s the unique vocation of the bishop, to take that decision and bring that conversation to a conclusion and promulgate whatever policy is going to come out of it.”

At its heart, planning is local Church discernment. “I believe God blesses every local community with the gifts they need to address their problems,” Bishop Iffert said. “In my mind, it’s an extension of God’s promise to fill the body of Christ with gifts; it’s kind of an extension of that promise to provide the kinds of pastors, the kind of shepherds that we need. I talk about a local genius. It’s not one person but it exists within the community. And that’s what we’re trying to do, we’re trying to be prayerful and discern together.”

As the conversations and discernment process begins, Bishop Iffert encourages everyone to “don’t assume” and to “stay open.” There is no agenda, no predetermined outcome. The process is really gathering information and expertise to answer questions that will help shape the future of the Diocese.

“What does the local genius tell us about the future of the Church here?” said Bishop Iffert. “How are we going to be best situated to witness to our neighbors, to evangelize one another, to grow deeper in faith in Christ, and to serve the local Church and the school community, not just in the way we always have, but the way that seems best? We’re

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going to study and we’re going to go where our discernment and our analysis leads us — with the hope of strengthening Catholic education [and] our life as a diocese.”

How the Diocese of Covington is planning and foundation establishment

Laura Keener
Editor

The Diocese of Covington has contracted with consulting firm L'Etoile Development Services to help guide its discussions on the formation of a diocesan foundation and its upcoming pastoral planning. Bishop John Iffert says the decision grew from listening and learning — first from other dioceses, and then from local stakeholders.

“We had a working group... exploring the establishment [of a] foundation,” Bishop Iffert explained. “We thought that we would start in just a very conventional way ... talking to lawyers ... drafting documents and setting up a board.”

But, Bishop Iffert said, advice from other dioceses changed the approach. The best guidance was “to begin from the other direction... start by talking to the people who had a stake in the success of the foundation — our priests, our principals, our school parents, our donors... and then from the grassroots up, design the foundation around the perceived needs.” He added, “You know me, I love to start these processes by listening to people.”

As the diocese looked for help to do that listening and design work, one name kept coming up. “Over and over again, people identified this L'Etoile ... Marilyn and Mark are the people that we work with locally, and they have experience in several dioceses, helping dioceses to do that,” Bishop Iffert said.

Marilyn Blanchette is the founder of L'Etoile Development Services. After 30 years in non-profit management — 13 of those years with the Diocese of Orlando, Florida — she established her consulting firm in 2011 to assist dioceses, universities and religious orders to help plan for their future.

Joining Mrs. Blanchette in assisting the Diocese of Covington is Mark Dollhopf. Mr. Dollhopf has nearly 50 years of fundraising, marketing and donor engagement experience working with universities, faith-based institutions, and other non-profits.

Bishop Iffert notes that creating a foundation is a common step for healthy, growing church organizations. “It’s a very common thing anymore,” Bishop Iffert said, noting that many dioceses have foundations, some for 30 years or

more.

The Diocese of Rockford, Illinois, was an early adopter, and one which Bishop Iffert is most familiar with, establishing its Catholic Foundation for the People of the Diocese of Rockford in 1987. Other local (arch)dioceses with established foundations include Cincinnati, Lexington and Louisville.

“If you think of a growing, successful, not-for-profit — whether it’s your diocese, schools or university — almost certainly they have a foundation.”

In the near term, the foundation’s “low-hanging fruit” will be helping parishes and schools with work that often gets overlooked. “Parishes are busy places, and ... it’s nobody’s job,” Bishop Iffert said about promoting charitable giving. The foundation makes it their job “to help parishes and schools do that work,” especially building endowments and planned giving — needs that can seed long-term support for ministries.

Beyond the establishment of a foundation, wider pastoral planning is centered on consultation. Recently, Bishop Iffert met with every active priest for lunch conversations about the plan and next steps. “Over the last two weeks, we’ve had a lunch almost every day, inviting seven or eight priests in,” he said. Going forward, he plans “one or two meals a month ... so that I see each priest at my table once or twice a year;” and to create “another opportunity ... for priests to have a special voice” as planning advances.

Why so much listening? Because priests are key partners, and the changes will affect them and their people. “Priests are ... my closest collaborators and co-workers; they’re the only group that has the sacramental nature to form a college with the bishop, ... they’ve given their whole lives, so these decisions will have an impact on them,” Bishop Iffert said.

Ultimately, Covington turned to L'Etoile because trusted peers recommended them, their approach starts with listening, and their track record matches the diocese’s goals. As Bishop Iffert put it, partnering with L'Etoile is already “a very productive relationship” — and it’s helping the diocese build a foundation, in every sense of the word, for the future.

(See related articles on pages 2 and 4.)

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Reelin It In Season III

In the fifth episode of Reelin' It In, Maura and Bella visited the Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington, fish fry. Famous for their Tommy Boy sandwich, the volunteers and community are the heart of this parish fish fry. To hear from their volunteers and patrons scan the QR code.



Bishop's Schedule

March 29
Palm Sunday Mass,
Cathedral Basilica of the
Assumption, Covington,
10 a.m.

April 3
Stations of the Cross, The
Gardens at St. Patrick's,
6 p.m.

March 31
ChrisM Mass, Cathedral
Basilica of the Assumption,
7 p.m.

April 4
Easter Vigil Mass, Cathedral
Basilica of the Assumption,
8:30 p.m.

April 1
Ribbon cutting, The Gardens
at St. Patrick's, Maysville,
4 p.m.

April 5
Easter Mass, Resurrection of
the Lord, Cathedral Basilica
of the Assumption, 10 a.m.

April 2
Mass of the Lord's Supper,
Cathedral Basilica of the
Assumption, 6 p.m.

Help shape the future of the Diocese of Covington

Your input is important! Help shape the future of the Diocese of Covington by joining one of four pastoral planning and development Commissions — Catholic Schools Commission, Diocesan Foundation Commission, Catholic Charities Commission or Diocesan Governance Commission.

The commitment involves four monthly sessions from April through July, lasting 90 minutes to two hours each. All participants will attend an initial kick-off General Session, Wednesday, April 15, 6:30-8:30 p.m., followed by three focused subcommittee meetings to benchmark best practices and draft actionable strategic goals.

The Commissions, their subcommittees and meeting dates and times are listed below. All meetings are at Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, 1125 Madison Ave., Covington. Registrations are now being accepted, visit www.covdioplanning.org. (See related articles on pages 2 and 3.)

The Catholic Foundation Commission

The Catholic Foundation Commission will evaluate the feasibility of establishing a Diocesan foundation designed to inspire greater generosity and ensure sustained support for the Church’s mission. To inform this strategy, the Commission will analyze giving trends within the Diocese of Covington over the last 20 years, reviewing data across parishes, schools, and Diocesan ministries. This process includes benchmarking against peer organizations to adopt best practices in annual funds, major gifts, and planned giving.

Subcommittees of the Catholic Foundation Commission are:

Governance Committee

Meeting 1: Wed., Apr 15, 6:30-8:30 p.m. (General Session)
 Meeting 2: Thur., May 14, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.
 Meeting 3: Thur., Jun 11, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.
 Meeting 4: Thur., Jul 16, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

Foundation Services Committee

Meeting 1: Wed., Apr 15, 6:30-8:30 p.m. (General Session)
 Meeting 2: Wed., May 13, 5-6:30 p.m.
 Meeting 3: Wed., Jun 10, 5-6:30 p.m.
 Meeting 4: Wed., Jul 15, 5-6:30 p.m.

Communications and Technology Committee

Meeting 1: Wed., Apr 15, 6:30-8:30 p.m. (General Session)
 Meeting 2: Wed., May 13, 6:45-8:15 p.m.
 Meeting 3: Wed., Jun 10, 6:45-8:15 p.m.
 Meeting 4: Wed., Jul 15, 6:45-8:15 p.m.

The Catholic Schools Commission

The Catholic Schools Commission will work closely with the Superintendent of Schools and the Diocesan School Board to create a three-year strategic plan for the Office of Catholic Schools to ensure our diocesan school system is operating as a proactive, mission-driven model that ensures long-term viability, spiritual vitality and academic excellence. In an era of changing demographics and financial pressures, such a plan will serve as a “living roadmap” to align resources with our core values. The commission will use the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools as the framework for the planning and sub-committee organization.

Subcommittees for the Catholic Schools Commission are:

Governance and Leadership Committee

Meeting 1: Tue., Apr 14, 6:30-8:30 p.m. (General Session)
 Meeting 2: Mon., May 11, 5-6:30 p.m.
 Meeting 3: Mon., Jun 8, 5-6:30 p.m.
 Meeting 4: Mon., Jul 13, 5-6:30 p.m.

Operational Vitality Committee

Meeting 1: Tue., Apr 14, 6:30-8:30 p.m. (General Session)
 Meeting 2: Mon., May 11, 6:45-8:15 p.m.
 Meeting 3: Mon., Jun 8, 6:45-8:15 p.m.
 Meeting 4: Mon., Jul 13, 6:45-8:15 p.m.

Academic Excellence Committee

Meeting 1: Tue., Apr 14, 6:30-8:30 p.m. (General Session)
 Meeting 2: Tue., May 12, 5-6:30 p.m.
 Meeting 3: Tue., Jun 9, 5-6:30 p.m.
 Meeting 4: Tue., Jul 14, 5-6:30 p.m.

Mission and Catholic Identity Committee

Meeting 1: Tue., Apr 14, 6:30-8:30 p.m. (General Session)
 Meeting 2: Tue., May 12, 6:45-8:15 p.m.
 Meeting 3: Tue., Jun 9, 6:45-8:15 p.m.
 Meeting 4: Tue., Jul 14, 6:45-8:15 p.m.

The Catholic Charities Commission

The Catholic Charities Commission will study the vital mission and history of Catholic Charities at both the local and national levels. With the Board and staff having celebrated the completion of its current three-year strategic plan and all associated achievements, this commission will develop a new strategic plan to guide Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Covington through 2030.

Subcommittees for the Catholic Charities Commission are:

Governance Committee

Meeting 1: Thur., Apr 16, 6:30-8:30 p.m. (General Session)
 Meeting 2: Fri., May 15, 10-11:30 a.m.
 Meeting 3: Fri., Jun 12, 10-11:30 a.m.
 Meeting 4: Fri., Jul 17, 10-11:30 a.m.

Programs and Services Committee

Meeting 1: Thur., Apr 16, 6:30-8:30 p.m. (General Session)
 Meeting 2: Thur., May 14, 5-6:30 p.m.
 Meeting 3: Thur., Jun 11, 5-6:30 p.m.
 Meeting 4: Thur., Jul 16, 5-6:30 p.m.

Parish and Community Partnerships Committee

Meeting 1: Thur., Apr 16, 6:30-8:30 p.m. (General Session)
 Meeting 2: Thur., May 14, 5-6:30 p.m.
 Meeting 3: Thur., Jun 11, 5-6:30 p.m.
 Meeting 4: Thur., Jul 16, 5-6:30 p.m.

Communications and Fundraising Committee

Meeting 1: Thur., Apr 16, 6:30-8:30 p.m. (General Session)
 Meeting 2: Fri., May 15, 10-11:30 a.m.
 Meeting 3: Fri., Jun 12, 10-11:30 a.m.
 Meeting 4: Fri., Jul 17, 10-11:30 a.m.

The Diocesan Governance Commission

The Diocesan Governance Commission will meet from September-December 2026. Specific dates and times will be determined and published in July.

Subcommittees for the Diocesan Governance Commission are:

- Governance and Organization Committee
- Finance and Financial Services Committee
- Technology Committee
- Communications Committee

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An initial kick-off meeting will be held April 15. Learn more and register now at covdioplanning.org.

VOL. 96 **MESSENGER** NO. 12
 Official newspaper of the Diocese of Covington
 Cathedral Square • 1125 Madison Ave. • Covington, Ky. 41011-3115
 Telephone: (859) 392-1500 E-mail: messenger@covdio.org
www.covdio.org

(UPS-403-650) Published by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, Ky.; 44 issues a year (weekly except from June 1 to mid-August, when published every other week; not published the week after Easter and two weeks at Christmas/New Year's). Subscription rate: \$19 per year; \$40 foreign. Periodical Postage paid at Covington, KY 41012 and additional mailing office Cincinnati, Ohio 45203. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MESSENGER, 1125 Madison Ave., Covington, KY 41011-3115.
Advertising deadline: Wednesday noon, 9 days prior to publication date.
Editorial deadline: Friday noon, 7 days prior to date.
Subscriptions, address changes: Contact Circulation Dept. at above address.

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Students enrolled in OCIA exemplify Catholic schools as tools for evangelization

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Evangelization is just one of many functions of Catholic schools. When attending, students are not only educated in theology but submerged in an environment surrounded by prayer and faculty, staff and peers living out their faith.

While Catholic schools are open to students of all faiths who desire a faith-based private education, some students

find themselves called to the Catholic faith while attending these schools — choosing to attend OCIA with the eventual goal of Baptism and full communion with the Church.

This year, students and their families from across the diocese will be welcomed into the Church during the Easter Vigil. These candidates and catechumens come from both grade schools and high schools — including three students from Villa Madonna Academy, Villa Hills; one from St. Cecilia School, Independence; two from St.

Joseph School, Crescent Springs; two from St. Joseph School, Cold Spring; three from Bishop Brossart High School, Alexandria, and others.

One such candidate is Ava Freppon, a junior attending Bishop Brossart High School, and enrolled in OCIA at St. Joseph Parish, Cold Spring.

“Back in the spring of 2024, I went to a non-denominational church with my friends from school because I found an interest in having religion in my life,” Ms. Freppon said of her experience. “I was then baptized in July of 2024 alongside many of my friends and it was such a fun and important day in my life.”

However, saying that her previous church didn’t give her the “strong passion” she had hoped for, she “attended (her) first Mass at St. Joes that November and (she) loved the Church’s meaningfulness and purpose behind each Mass.”

Later transferring schools to Bishop Brossart High School — a decision made to further encourage her interest in the faith — Ms. Freppon said that she “was excited to have a religion class to hear more about different topics of the faith. As the school year and OCIA sessions went on, I started to notice being able to compare things I learned at school to what I was learning at the OCIA meetings. I feel like I have been able to dive deeper into the Catholic faith and I am excited to continue my life alongside my friends and family under this wonderful following of our Lord.”



A classroom in St. Dominic Academy in the Diocese of Portland, Maine, is seen in this undated photo.

OSV News photo/courtesy Diocese of Portland, Maine

Federal tax credits granted by House Bill 1 serve as major victory towards school choice in Kentucky

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Kentucky House Bill 1, which allows federal tax credits to nonprofit organizations providing scholarships and aid for private schools, is now law. Effective 2027, the bill was

formerly vetoed by Governor Andy Beshear, but lawmakers recently overturned the decision — making this a major victory for advocates of school choice.

According to Jason Hall, executive director of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, individuals who donate

to these such organizations get a tax credit of up to \$1,700 per year. Under the new law, “those scholarship granting organizations then have to provide scholarships on a needs-based approach,” said Mr. Hall. And that money can be given to families in need of assistance regardless if they are attending private or public school — as these tax credit supported donations can go to any educational need — including tuition, technology or tutoring. Donors can also request funds be allocated to specific schools, including Catholic schools.

Previously, similar tax credit programs in Kentucky were vetoed due to a provision in the Kentucky constitution prohibiting state tax money from supporting private schools. This does not apply to House Bill 1 as a federal program, allowing the program to be implemented state-wide.

One of the biggest struggles of seeing the bill passed — and part of the continuous struggle towards school choice state wise — was “a lot of misinformation,” according to Andrew Vandiver, a major proponent of school choice and formerly the associate director of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky. “It’s not about hurting public schools, or taking anything away from public schools,” he said. “This is just another opportunity to help kids.”

Optimistic about the program, Mr. Vandiver said that “the thing (he’s) really excited about is that this is going to bring millions of dollars into Kentucky to help kids.”

“You’re going to see nonprofits pop up around the state, including in the Diocese of Covington,” said Mr. Vandiver. “It’s going to really encourage charitable giving.”

“Kentucky is one of very few states that has no form of educational choice,” said Mr. Hall. “I’m hopeful that this will remove the stigma and show that we can really work together and support all kids in a better way.”



Bailey photo

Students at Immaculate Heart of Mary School wait to be taken to their new classrooms on the first day of school, having fun together before school begins. House Bill 1, which allows federal tax credits to be granted to donors of organizations providing scholarships to private school children, will be effective in 2027, encouraging more options for families to attend Catholic and other private schools.

Bishop Iffert accepts recommendation to discontinue K thru 8 education at St. Catherine School; preschool and Atrium to remain in operation

Keener photo

Laura Keener
Editor

In a letter to Father Stephen Bankemper, pastor, March 24, Bishop John Iffert accepted the recommendation of St. Catherine of Siena Parish leadership to end K-8 education at St. Catherine of Siena School, Ft. Thomas, beginning with the end of the current academic year.

The St. Catherine of Siena Little Colts preschool is expected to continue, as well as the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Atrium, the parish's religious education program for children ages three through grade 3.

"This decision was not made lightly. It comes after a period of thoughtful discernment and honest evaluation of the school's current situation," Bishop Iffert said in the letter. "I recognize that those who have studied this reality and recommended this action are motivated by a sincere desire to do what is best for the long-term mission of Catholic education in the community. I am deeply grateful for the many years of faithful service, sacrifice and love that have shaped St. Catherine School into a place where generations of students have encountered Christ, grown in knowledge, and formed lasting friendships."

Concerned about year-over-year decreasing enrollment at the school and increasing costs, Father Bankemper, Deacon Barry Henry, Mike Jacks, principal, and representatives of St. Catherine of Siena parish and finance councils and school board, met with Bishop Iffert, March 20, detailing the financial burden and trends that led to the recommendation. Currently, there are 100 students enrolled at St. Catherine School in pre-K-8 grades, with 19 of those students in pre-K. Projected enrollment for the 2026-2027 school year saw a significant reduction in enrollment in grades K through 8, with 58 students registered. The preschool is anticipating a significant increase with 38 preschoolers registered.

In a letter to parents, Bishop Iffert said, "The decline in enrollment and increasing educational costs over the last several years have placed a growing financial burden on the parish and school, making it increasingly difficult to sustain the school in a healthy and stable way."

Neighboring schools, St. Thomas School, Ft. Thomas and St. Therese School, Southgate, have reached out to families inviting them to register their children for the upcoming 2026-2027 school year. Many St. Catherine families have begun registering at the schools.

"I am deeply grateful for the many families who are now seeking new Catholic school homes for their children and for the thoughtful efforts parish and school leaders are making to support you through this process," Bishop Iffert said.

In a letter to teachers and faculty, Bishop Iffert expressed gratitude and support.

"I recognize that the decision ... affects you in very personal ways. The uncertainty of transitioning from a cherished workplace and ministry is not easy," he said to the faculty and staff. Noting that additional conversations need to take place, it is the hope of Bishop Iffert and Kendra McGuire, superintendent of Schools, to assist teachers in exploring opportunities within Catholic schools in the Diocese of Covington.

"Your experience and commitment to Catholic education are valued, and we want to accompany you as you discern your next steps," Bishop Iffert said.

In an interview with the <<Messenger>>, Bishop Iffert said that his decision to accept the recommendation was "a concession to necessity rather than a hoped-for direction for St. Catherine School" and that he calls on the parish to help one another grieve and to strengthen their commitment to the education and formation of its young people.

"While this marks the closing of a significant chapter in the life of your parish, it does not mark the end of the Church's mission to form young people in faith," Bishop Iffert said. "This local Church must remain committed to supporting the students, families, faculty, and staff during this transition and to ensuring that Catholic education continues to thrive in our local Church. I urge you to continued diligence in your efforts to promote faith formation



Bishop John Iffert accepted the recommendation of St. Catherine of Siena Parish leadership to end K-8 education at St. Catherine of Siena School (pictured above), Ft. Thomas, beginning with the end of the current academic year. The St. Catherine of Siena Little Colts preschool and the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Atrium, the parish's religious education program is expected to remain open.

and Catholic education for the youth of St. Catherine Parish."

In a letter to parishioners, Bishop Iffert expressed his confidence in the viability and vitality of St. Catherine of Siena Parish.

"While we grieve this loss at St. Catherine School, the mission of the Church remains alive and entrusted to us," Bishop Iffert said. "I am confident that St. Catherine Parish will continue to be a place where faith is nurtured, community is strengthened, and families encounter the presence of Christ. I ask you to surround one another with compassion and prayer in the months ahead."

When asked how the parish and school communities are responding to the announcement, Father Bankemper said, "The truth is, it's a very difficult time for all of us," he said, describing the gamut of emotions — sorrow, anger, worry, anxiousness — many are experiencing right now. "I think all that's natural. We're grieving," he said.

Father Bankemper echoed Bishop Iffert's call for compassion, pointing to two guiding truths: "Jesus says love one another," and "St. Paul says we walk by faith, not by sight."

"We have to remember that we're people of faith," said Father Bankemper. "If we do our best to walk by faith — walking when you don't see the road, when you don't know what's ahead — if we trust in Jesus and put our lives in his hands, I think we're going to be at our best."

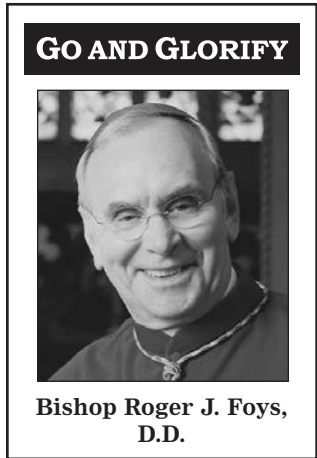
Soon after Holy Week and Easter, Bishop Iffert plans to visit the parish to celebrate Masses and to be with parishioners, parents and students.

"My commitment now is to accompany you in the months ahead," Bishop Iffert wrote to parents. "Your children remain at the center of this transition, and we will do all we can to help them experience continuity, care and welcome."

Joy, wonder, betrayal, grief, joy

The readings for Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion — Cycle A — are: Isaiah 50:4-7, Philippians 2:6-11 and Matthew 26:14-27:66.

Holy Week. The holiest week of the year for all Christians. A week filled with emotion. We move from joy to wonder, to betrayal, to denial, to grief and back to joy.



GO AND GLORIFY

Bishop Roger J. Foys, D.D.

We relive that week during which Jesus would suffer and die. We walk with him, as it were, the path to His passion and death. But we begin with joy.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus was welcomed with great fanfare into Jerusalem. Throngs of people lined the streets and shouted His name. Hosanna, they called to the Son of David! What exhilaration must've filled the air! The Lord had arrived! The

Savior was to save His people! But, unfortunately, that joy would not last. By the end of the week, it would turn to grief and sorrow.

On Holy Thursday, Jesus dined with His apostles to celebrate the Passover meal. During this meal, he would wash the feet of His apostles, a ritual ordinarily conducted by a servant. Jesus, the Son of God, stooped down to wash the feet of His apostles — and when he was finished, he would tell them that what he had just done, they were to do for each other.

This was a sign of His love, His humility. He wanted His disciples to do likewise. This is the kind of community he desired His followers to live — one of service, one of love. The apostles must have wondered what all this meant.

Further on Holy Thursday, Jesus would bless and break the bread, would bless the wine and proclaim that this was His body and His blood and that His apostles were to do this in memory of him. Notice, he didn't say this was a symbol or a sign of His Body and Blood. He said this IS my body, this IS my blood. And so, he gave us the Eucharist to sustain us on our journey, to strengthen us amid the vicissitudes of life. Thus, was given to us the gift of the Eucharist and of the Priesthood. It was a marvelous wonder!

But then came the betrayal. Judas, one of the disciples of Jesus, sold him to those who wanted to kill him. And he betrayed Jesus with a kiss. With a kiss, a sign of love, a sign of friendship.

And once Jesus was taken away, His most trusted disciple, Peter, would deny him — not once, not twice, but three times. He proclaimed that he didn't know Jesus and was certainly not one of His followers.

The next day, Good Friday, we recall the passion and death of Jesus on the cross. What grief must His followers have experienced. What sorrow must have filled His mother, Mary, as she beheld her beloved son beaten and bruised as he carried His cross to Golgotha, the place of His death. What emptiness filled the earth on that dreadful day.

On Holy Saturday, the disciples of Jesus must have experienced that loss. They had thrown their lot in with Jesus. They had given up everything to follow him. And now, it had all come crashing down. Would they ever experience joy again?

What can we learn from this Holy Week as we walk with Jesus?

We have all at some point in our lives experienced the joy that the apostles must have felt on that Palm Sunday when Jesus was welcomed to Jerusalem — that exhilarating feeling that we would like to bask in for the rest of our lives. But we know that the joys of this world are fleeting, that our true joy — the joy that will last — can only be found in the Lord and in our obedience to His word. When life gets difficult, it is good to remember the joys we've experienced and to thank God for them. We

(Continued on page 13)

Hope floats

My mind has been so full lately. It seems like every time I turn on the TV there is a new warning or terrible incident that has occurred overnight. I wonder and worry about what my children's future will look like with the current chaos of the world. In talking with others, I have quickly learned that I am not the only one feeling this way.

This worldly weight often feels like a physical burden that can lead to a loss of personal connection with God. St. John of the Cross called this despair the "Dark Night of the Soul." Mother Theresa wrote specifically about her own 50-year "Dark Night." Yet we still celebrate these saints for their ever-present faith.

They still believed in God; they still believed in the Church. Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and has revealed to us. Think of faith as the foundation of a house. When the storms of life hit — when the news is filled with warnings and the future for our children seems dim — faith is what keeps the structure from collapsing.

Those who are experiencing a "Dark Night" of their own soul, need to know that if they still have faith, the foundation is there, even the electricity has been cut off, and the house is pitch black. Faith is present; hope is what's missing. Hope is the electricity in our lives. It brings light! It is looking toward our eternal future, knowing this life is not permanent.

While faith tells us God is real, hope tells us God is coming for us. He will leave the 99 to find the one. Hope is the light at the end of the tunnel.

Faith is built on the past; hope is our future. The

Catechism of the Catholic Church (ccc 1817) defines the theological virtue of hope as desiring the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as happiness, placing trust in Christ's promises rather than one's own strength. It is a key virtue in Catholic theology that sustains people during abandonment, purifies desires and leads to charity.

In moments of deep trial, it is often not faith that we lose, but hope. We believe God is there, but we stop expecting him to act or believing things will get better. This is especially true when we have been devastated by loss. Whether this is a loved one, friend, home, job or even a beloved pet.

The Catholic tradition does not see struggles and hardships as obstacles to hope. They are the very soil where hope grows. St. Paul explains this "spiritual gardening" perfectly: "Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, produces hope." (Romans 5:3-4)

There is a beautiful sentiment in the phrase "hope floats." In a spiritual sense, it signifies that even when our plans sink into failure or our spirits are heavy with challenge, hope has a divine buoyancy, and it is anchored in faith. Our faith in the resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate proof that hope is not wishful thinking. It is a guarantee that the "tunnel" of death and suffering ends in light and love.

Our relationship with God should not be affected by worldly concerns, but we are human. We are fallible, often weak, easily overburdened, anxious and scared. Fortunately, we were given spiritual gifts to help us through these difficult times. When you feel overwhelmed by the state of the world, remember that your faith is the anchor that keeps you from being swept away. And hope, well it's the thing that keeps you afloat.

"For I know well the plans I have in mind for you ... plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope." (Jeremiah 29:11)

Julie Feinauer is director of the Safe Environment Office, Diocese of Covington, Ky.



VIEWPOINT

Julie Feinauer

The belly of the whale

My favorite part of the newspaper is the comic section. I trust it to present the truth. Maybe I like the book of Jonah in the Bible because it has much comic relief. Just imagine that scene after the people of Nineveh repented and everyone put on sackcloth and ashes, even the cows and sheep. I picture the animals in their clothing of sackcloth and their heads covered in ashes and it brings a smile.



MUSINGS

Sister Fidelis Tracy, C.D.P.

The very beginning of the book hints that this prophet is going to be different. Normally prophetic calls begin like this, "God called Henry and told him to get up and go to Newport and Henry got up and went to Newport." Jonah's call begins with a slight change. God called to Jonah and told him to get up and go to Nineveh and Jonah got up and went — wait for it — toward Tarshish. He is

clear and deliberate. He hails a ship going away from Nineveh. We are now aware that this is a different kind of call story. Perhaps a little more like the account of our own stories.

There is such a big storm at sea that all the sailors are frantically running around, throwing cargo overboard and shouting out prayers to every god they can think of. The noise must be deafening — the winds, the rain, the sailors crying out, the cargo hitting the water. Where is Jonah? He is sound asleep. Does that bring a smile? When the sailors wake him and bid him pray to his god to calm the sea, he tells them he worships the god who made the sea and he is running away from his god.

Well, that explains it all. Jonah instructs them to solve the problem by tossing him overboard. And they do. As soon as Jonah hits the water the sea becomes calm.

That should be the end of Jonah. Wait. He is swallowed by a large fish (usually interpreted as a whale, though a whale is not a fish) sent from God. I think that is meant to make us laugh. Jonah chewed up but not spit out, rather spiraling down to the innards of the fish. Down he goes, straight to the belly. Jonah may believe this is the end, but it appears it is his opportunity to muse over his life and decisions.

I imagine that at first, he thinks it is the end for him. But as time moves on and Jonah remains in the darkness, he recalls those desires he had for his future. There still might be a happy life in Tarshish where he could be a successful plumber or herdsman with people admiring his wits and success. He is buoyed up by the thoughts.

Then other thoughts intrude. He hears a call to review his choices and how those choices brought him to this empty, dark place.

How long did it take for Jonah to realize that this is not the end of the story, that he is not finished, that life is not over? Did he review the choices he had made and realize that they did not lead to a life of comfort in a paradise-like place? Aloneness, quiet, time in the dark can do that — call us to ponder. There is room for hope, regret, even new choices.

God speaks when Jonah, in quiet stillness, has room in his heart to hear: "Jonah, Jonah, I am a forgiving God. I love you. I love all creation, all people, even those who do evil. I love the Ninevites." At that moment Jonah's heart is ready to respond to this forgiving, loving God.

The big fish spits Jonah up. Not into the turbulent waters and not in Tarshish, but right back to the spot where it all started. He stands at the site of his innocent beginning. He is new again. This is what God does for those who listen. God calls Jonah again to get up and go

(Continued on page 13)

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/>.

Newport Central Catholic High School, Newport, blessing and dedication of the Ciafardini Family Athletic Complex. April 14. Bishop John Iffert will celebrate Mass, 1p.m. Following Mass and dedication ceremony, guests may tour and view the facility.

“Community Circle for Maternal Wellness: Resources, Stories & Support,” a free event to support the health and well-being of minority moms, April 14, 5:30–7:30 p.m., Life Learning Center, Covington. Hear from a panel of health experts, community leaders and local moms. Visit with local community supports, get free resources and enter for raffles prizes.

Serve with Sisters. Join local Sisters for a service day, April 18, 9 a.m.–2 p.m. Meet at Mother of God Church Hall, Covington for morning prayer, then volunteer at area agencies before returning for lunch and reflection. Service options include gardening, food pantry assistance, bingo and more. Open to all; participants under 18 must be with a parent or guardian. Sponsored by the Benedictine Sisters of St. Walburg, Sisters of Divine Providence, and Sisters of Notre Dame. Register at tinyurl.com/ServeWithSistersCovington. Questions? E-mail Sister Leslie Keener: Ikeener@cdpkentucky.org.

Thomas More University theatre presents: “Once Upon a Mattres,” a delightfully silly twist on the classic tale of “The Princess and the Pea.” Showings will be April 23-25, 7:30 p.m. and April 26, 2 p.m. For information, or to purchase tickets, visit tmuky.us/tmtheatre.

New Beginnings, a support group for separated and divorced, begins Aug. 18. The 8-week program provides the opportunity to heal and move forward. Led by facilitators who have been through their own personal losses. The next session, held on consecutive Tuesdays, is Aug. 18 – Oct. 6, 7- 8:30 p.m. at Catholic Charities, Covington. Registration is required. Visit <https://covdio.org/new-beginnings-2/> or call (859) 392-1529.

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 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/

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.

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

Parents of Addicted Loved Ones, (PAL) is a support group that meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays, 6:30–8 p.m. at Catholic Charities, Latonia. It provides continuing education and support, at no charge, for parents with a son, daughter or spouse suffering from addiction to alcohol or drugs. No cost. Just come — 3629 Church Street, Latonia. For more information contact Client Care at (859) 581-8974.

A Survivors of Suicide Loss Support Group begins at Mother of God Parish, Covington, for family members and friends of persons who have ended their own lives. Group meetings will be held on the first Wednesday of each month at the parish office in the St. Aloysius Conference Room. For information contact Jeff Duell at (859) 801-8213.

Zoom Support Group for family, relatives and friends of victims of clergy sexual abuse, second Monday of the month, 6:30–8 p.m. CST; 7:30–9 p.m. EST. These meetings are confidential and no one is forced to contribute unless they want to. For information contact Paula Kaempffer, coordinator of Restorative Practices and Survivor Support, for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, at kaempfferp@archspm.org or call (763) 688-3978.

St. Mary’s Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, offers Veneration of a relic of the True Cross, on the first Friday of every month, from noon–1 p.m. Confessions are offered concurrently. The monthly veneration is held in silence and concludes with a blessing and the opportunity for the faithful to come forward to

Lenten Fish Frys

Friday, April 3
St. Augustine, Covington,
4:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Father Bealer Council, Knights
of Columbus, Elsmere,
11 a.m.–2 p.m.; 4:30–8 p.m.

personally venerate the True Cross relic. The monthly veneration is sponsored by the Knights and Dames of the Covington-Lexington section of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

Do you have a bike no longer used? Donate it to Pickett’s Corner a ministry of Catholic Charities. Each bike makes a significant difference in the lives of those in need. Pick up available and all repairs are done at Pickett’s Corner. Simply e-mail Pickettscorner23@gmail.com and give your name, address and phone number.

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.



Sixth grade students at St. Joseph, Cold Spring, partnered with the first grade students to help make two hundred peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for The Rose Garden Mission in Newport. Students wrote simple messages reminding the recipients that they are a child of God and that they are loved.



Supported by the Elsmere Fire Department, one long-standing tradition at St. Henry Catholic School, Elsmere, is learning CPR as eighth graders. Pictured is this year’s class with the training dummies used during the class.

Thomas More University partners with Garrard County Schools to expand college access

Staff report

Thomas More University and Garrard County Schools have announced a new partnership designed to give students in central Kentucky more opportunities to earn college credit and explore future careers. The agreement is the first major step in a series of planned investments Thomas More will make in the region.

The collaboration focuses on three main areas. First, Garrard County High School students will gain expanded access to dual-credit courses beginning in the 2026-27 school year. This includes allowing credentialed Garrard County teachers to teach Thomas More courses and adding new online options. Students who take part in the dual-credit program and meet eligibility requirements will also receive direct admission to Thomas More University in their senior year.

Second, the university and school district plan to create new pathways for undergraduate degrees, graduate programs, and certificate opportunities tied to the region's workforce needs.

Third, Thomas More will establish dedicated classroom and meeting space inside Garrard County High School to support these programs.

University President Joseph L. Chillo said the initiative shows a strong shared commitment to student success. "This collaboration reflects our shared commitment to preparing students for success in college and in life," he said. "By working together, we can provide Garrard County students with the tools and opportunities they need to thrive and be more."

Garrard County Schools Superintendent Dr. Kevin Stull said the partnership will open doors for many families. "This partnership opens doors for our students in ways that will have a lasting impact," he said. "By expanding access to college coursework and bringing university resources directly to our campus, we are giving our stu-

dents a head start on their futures while keeping opportunity close to home."

Overall, the partnership aims to reduce barriers to

higher education, lower college costs for families, and create a smooth path from high school to college for students in the region.

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Dedication of the Gardens of St. Patrick's — a place of spiritual pilgrimage

(Continued from page 1)

Dolan and Bishop Iffert will celebrate Mass together on Holy Wednesday, April 1, to music composed by esteemed musician Francisco Carbonell, who studied at the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, Rome. The composition will be performed by Dr. Everette McCorvey and his American Spiritual Ensemble. The 19-person vocal ensemble will be accompanied musically by a brass choir consisting of trumpets, horns, trombones and tubas.

The celebration of Holy Mass, April 1, will take place at the outdoor altar and accompanying amphitheater seating, which are nestled into a small hillside, just before the first station.

"The Stations of the Cross, to me, is what it's all about," said Mr. Lundergan. "If you live the Stations of the Cross, you understand why you're here on Earth."

Upon arrival at the Gardens at St. Patrick's, visitors will be greeted by a welcome center, ticket booth and a 7.5-story-tall cross. This cross will cast a shadow over the twelfth station, the crucifixion, at the time of Christ's death, 2 p.m. Inside the welcome center, guests will be greeted by stories about the "crucifixion, stations, the history of the stations," said Mr. Lundergan.

Before beginning their spiritual journey, visitors will walk through a recreation of the Garden of Gethsemane. Though not officially a location in the Stations of the Cross, the Garden of Gethsemane is an important part of the Passion of Christ. At the garden there is an olive press from Jerusalem, symbolic of the Garden of Gethsemane's role as a functional olive garden at the time of Judas'

betrayal.

The replicate Garden of Gethsemane will lead visitors to the first of 15 stations, all of which are life-sized and hand-carved by Italian sculptor Reto Demitz, and his team of sculptors. The bronze statues include important figures in the Stations of the Cross including, of course, Jesus, Pontius Pilate and Mary, mother of Christ, but also Veronica, Simon of Cyrene and the women of Jerusalem.

"I wanted to make it just exactly the way it really was. So, there would be no discrepancies about what went on during this time in the life of Christ, who was there and who witnessed it. And so, when you walk these stations, hopefully you'll feel like you're there the day that it's happening," said Mr. Lundergan.

"It's my hope that if you've got pain, you'll come here and be relieved, if you've got a problem, you'll come here and figure it out. I hope this is a solution place," said Mr. Lundergan, "that people will come here and know that this is a quiet, sacred place ... it's a sacred place for you to figure out things that you want to do better in your life and how you conquer things in your life."

Such a precise level of detail will be prevalent throughout the walking path as visitors travel from station to station. Mr. Lundergan partnered with a research team out of Lexington, Kentucky, to ensure the path which visitors walk, will closely replicate the Via Dolorosa, the path Christ walked as he proceeded towards death.

"I wanted it to be close, if not just like the real walk in Jerusalem," said Mr. Lundergan.

Including two small bridges featured along the route, which will take visitors over a manmade stream twice, because "the path that we're on that Christ took the day of his crucifixion, he crossed over the water twice," said Mr. Lundergan. "So, we have recreated that. We took the natural stream that was here and we rebuilt it."

The stream has been landscaped with limestone rock from a local quarry, an homage to Maysville history. The stream will be supplied by three 10,000-gallon tanks circulating water through the landscape.

Each station along the path will have an audio accompaniment, where visitors will be able to hear reflections from Cardinal Dolan and Mr. Lundergan as they walk the route. Visitors will have the opportunity to stop at each station and truly reflect as benches are provided at each station, with kneelers included at the twelfth station.

"We all have little roadblocks in our life. And if you can come here and solve that roadblock by just reflection and prayer and really realize what the Lord went through for us, maybe this is all worthwhile," said Mr. Lundergan. "The whole idea just behind this whole thing is to give back in a way that will be very beneficial to people — middle-aged people, senior people, anybody that needs quiet time, that wants to reflect and wants to figure out their next move in life."

He continued saying, "I'm just hoping that people will use this as a way to get closer to the Lord and prepare themselves for the real life that they're going to live in Heaven."

Bailey photos



(above) The signage on the front of the welcome center reads "The Gardens at St. Patrick's."



(above) The fourteenth station, when Jesus is laid in his tomb, is depicted in great detail, including a life-sized replication of Jesus' tomb, equipped with a 5,000-pound front stone.



(above) This station is the eighth station, where Jesus meets with the women of Jerusalem. Peeking out from under the protective tarp covering, this statue betrays a look of sorrow.



(above) A member of the construction team takes care to stain the wood seating on the benches before opening day, April 1. Ensuring that all visitors have a place to rest and reflect.

Shrine is a place of prayer, pilgrimage and ‘encounter’ with St. John Paul II’s life, legacy

Richard Szczepanowski
Catholic Standard, OSV News

St. John Paul II “changed the Church and the world, and you can encounter that here” at the national shrine in Washington named for the Polish pope, said Grattan Brown, the shrine’s director of mission and ministry.

“Here, one can encounter Christ through the life and legacy of John Paul II. We appeal to both the head and the heart,” Brown said.

The St. John Paul II National Shrine in Northeast Washington is marking its 25th anniversary this March.

The 118,000-square-foot shrine is located in the city’s Brookland section, affectionately called “Little Rome” for the many Catholic institutions located there.

Its neighbors include the Archdiocese of Washington’s St. John Paul II Seminary, the Jeanne Jugan Residence operated by the Little Sisters of the Poor, Capuchin College, the Ukrainian Catholic National Shrine of the Holy Family, The Catholic University of America and the



A file photo shows a statue of St. John Paul II outside the St. John Paul II National Shrine in Washington.

OSV News photo/Bob Roller

Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

When approached with the idea of creating a cultural center in his name, Pope John Paul told organizers he wanted a place where “people come to a greater understanding of the richness of the Catholic intellectual tradition and its relevance for the critical issues facing American society.”

Originally established as the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center, it was dedicated in 2000, during the Great Jubilee Year, and inaugurated on March 22, 2001. Then-President George W. Bush attended the dedication. Originally, it offered exhibits, talks and other special events. Later for a time, it operated as a kind of academic

think tank and was open by appointment only.

In 2011, the Knights of Columbus purchased the center and renovated the structure to its present form where it offers a permanent exhibit called “A Gift of Love: The Life of St. John Paul II.” It includes videos, photographs, artifacts and other displays honoring the life and legacy of the saintly pope.

Over the years, visitors to the shrine have included Pope Benedict XVI, presidents, many American cardinals and bishops, and the faithful from across the country and throughout the world.

While offering exhibits and special events, the St. John Paul II National Shrine is an important place of prayer and pilgrimage, and that includes the Redemptor Hominis Church where Mass is offered daily, and a chapel dedicated to the luminous mysteries of the rosary where a first-class relic of St. John Paul is displayed.

“Our mission has expanded and we are also a place of pilgrimage,” Brown told the Catholic Standard, the news outlet of the Archdiocese of Washington. “A pilgrimage expresses first devotion to the Lord, and this is a place honoring God’s special activity in the world.”

On March 14, 2014, the U.S. bishops formally designated the center a national shrine. On April 17, 2014 — the day Pope Francis canonized Pope John Paul — the shrine hosted a live broadcast of the canonization Mass, and the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center officially changed its name to the St. John Paul II National Shrine.

“The shrine is a place dedicated to the cultural and intellectual legacies of Pope John Paul II. But it has also grown over the years into a place of pilgrimage, devotion and veneration,” said Stephen P. White, the incoming executive director of the shrine. “St. John Paul II, like all the communion of saints, is much more than a cherished memory or a role model; he is alive in Christ, part of the living Church.”

Recently the shrine purchased the Washington Retreat House next door that was formerly run by the Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement. Brown said the shrine will renovate that facility and will be offering spiritual retreats there beginning around Advent.

Currently, the shrine is hosting an exhibit titled “Lord, You Could Not Love Me More! St. John Paul II and the Shroud of Turin.” Continuing throughout Lent, the exhibit includes a full-scale replica of the Shroud of Turin and more than 30 gallery panels featuring the holy object’s historical significance, scientific study and spiritual impact.



(above) Italian sculptor Reto Demitz and his team hand-carved each of the Stations of the Cross in Northern Italy, before they were shipped to Maysville, where they take permanent residence at The Gardens at St. Patrick’s.



(above) Gerald Lundergan stands face to face with Jesus at the first Station of the Cross, where Jesus is condemned to death.

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Joy, wonder, betrayal, grief, joy

(Continued from page 7)

also know that life is made up of joys and sorrows, of good times and bad, of success and failure. So, we do not lose hope, we do not give up or give in.

There are also times in our life that we experience wonder just as the apostles did when Jesus washed their feet and when He gave us the Eucharist and the Priesthood. They might not have understood at that moment all that these gifts of Jesus implied, but they accepted them, knowing that they were acts of love, acts of friendship. When we experience this kind of wonder in life, we give thanks to God for providing it for us. We have experiences that we don't always understand, but it is enough to understand that God provides these moments for us because He loves us.

Betrayal, unfortunately, is sometimes a part of our lives. Perhaps we've been betrayed by a spouse, a friend, a co-worker, a neighbor. A relationship that we imagined would last forever suddenly ends. We are left stunned, we don't understand. How could this happen? What or who caused it? Is it irrevocable? Was it me? Did I do something wrong? It seems to be a pain too difficult to bear. How will we ever survive? When these moments happen, we remember Jesus and His betrayal by Judas, by one he trusted, one he chose, one he loved. We will survive, we will conquer the grief, the hurt, even the anger. We pray to the Lord Jesus, who experienced the betrayal of one he loved, and ask Him to ease the pain, to ease the hurt, to heal the emptiness we feel at that moment.

And finally, grief. Sometimes people discount grief, as though grief is something to be embarrassed about, as though grief is a sign of weakness. Grief, believe it or

not, is a byproduct of love. If we never loved, we'd never grieve. But if we never love, we never live. When someone we love dies, no matter how strong our faith is, we feel a loss, there is a void, an emptiness in our lives. The passing of a loved one leaves a hole in our hearts. You can imagine how the apostles grieved when the one in whom they had placed all their trust, all their hope, for whom they had given up everything and everyone, died. Their hopes and dreams hung on that cross with Jesus, and they saw those hopes and dreams dashed. How would they go on, how would they survive? But they did. We are blessed to know that the death of Jesus on the cross was not the end. We know the rest of the story. We know that the grief the apostles were experiencing would turn to

joy when the Lord Jesus would be raised from the dead. This was not the end — it was the beginning. So too with us. When we experience grief from some significant loss, our grief can be turned into joy when we remember that Jesus died for us but that He also rose. He is with us always. This is our hope. This is our faith. This is our joy.

And so, we end as we began — with joy. The joy of Palm Sunday, the wonder and betrayal of Holy Thursday, the grief of Good Friday, the emptiness of Holy Saturday will give way to a new joy with the resurrection of Jesus Who conquers sin and the grave.

A blessed Holy Week and a joyous Easter to all!

Most Rev. Roger J. Foys, D.D. is Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Covington, Ky.

The belly of the whale

(Continued from page 7)

to Nineveh and Jonah gets up and goes to Nineveh.

Time alone in the darkness, in the silent belly of the whale, away from all the distractions of life, Jonah listened to his life and his God. For our relationship with God to flourish we need to occasionally remove ourselves from our busy pursuits, from our aggressive seizing of life, from our worries, from our desires and quietly listen for God speaking to us.

Lent is a good time to find or refine this time for reflection. The belly of the whale is a blessing.

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

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

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National/World

Russian drone strikes damage historic church, monastery in Lviv ahead of Holy Week

LVIV, Ukraine — Drone strikes hit religious and residential sites in Lviv, western Ukraine, on March 24, just days before Holy Week, damaging a historic monastery complex and St. Mary Magdalene’s Church. Local officials say the attack was part of the largest 24-hour assault since Russia’s full-scale invasion began in 2022. The 16th-century Bernardine monastery, located in Lviv’s UNESCO-listed historic center, suffered damage to its tower, while nearby apartment buildings caught fire. At St. Mary Magdalene’s Church, shattered windows and debris littered the interior. Archbishop Mieczyslaw Mokrzycki said the timing likely prevented fatalities, though injuries were reported. Nationwide, officials say six people were killed and dozens wounded as hundreds of drones targeted multiple regions, including a maternity hospital. UNESCO condemned the strikes, warning that cultural and religious sites are protected under international law. The agency added it “stands ready to support the authorities with assessments, protection measures and emergency assistance.” Ukrainian leaders said the attacks underscore the ongoing toll of war. Archbishop Mokrzycki said it affects residents not only during moments of attacks, but also in everyday life, marked by loss and uncertainty.

New US global health policy seen as a way to eliminate malaria

WASHINGTON — The future of efforts to eliminate malaria in sub-Saharan Africa may depend in part on a U.S. policy shift now drawing mixed reactions. In September, the State Department unveiled its America First Global Health Strategy, describing it as a plan to protect Americans by stopping infectious diseases before they reach U.S. borders. Officials framed the approach as strengthening national security while supporting global health. In a February report, an interfaith coalition of malaria-fighting groups warned that progress against the disease has slowed in several regions, calling the current moment a “crossroads.” Still, some experts see the strategy as a potentially workable path forward in combating malaria, which remains a leading cause of death in parts of Africa. At Georgetown University March 19, Bishop Dinis Matsolo of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Mozambique Synod, was a participant on a panel on the topic. He told OSV News he’d like clarification as to what “America First” means, since “we all belong to the same world. We need each other.” He emphasized that global health requires shared responsibility. Bishop Matsolo is executive director of Programa Inter-Religioso Contra a Malaria, or PIRCOM, a faith-based organization co-founded with the Catholic Church that is focused on eliminating malaria in Mozambique. According to a February 2026 interfaith coalition report titled “Making Country-Led Malaria Control a Reality,” over 4,000 faith leaders are involved in efforts to combat malaria in Mozambique.

Sept. 24 beatification of Archbishop Sheen ‘a moment of immense grace’

VATICAN CITY — Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen will be beatified on Sept. 24 in St. Louis, the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints announced March 25. The beatification will take place in St. Louis, with Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, pro-prefect for the Dicastery for Evangelization, presiding. In a statement, Bishop Louis Tylka of Peoria, Illinois, said the beatification will take place at 2 p.m. CT at The Dome at America’s Center in St. Louis. On Feb. 9, the Diocese of Peoria had announced that the Vatican had given the green light for the beatification of Archbishop Sheen to move forward. “With anticipation of a great number of people wanting to participate, we chose this location because of availability, being indoors, and the close proximity to the Diocese of Peoria,” Bishop Tylka said. He added that a “number of events in Peoria” will be held “to celebrate this wonderful occasion.” “This is a moment of immense grace for the Church — especially for us in the Diocese of Peoria, where Archbishop Sheen was born, ordained, and first served as a priest,” the bishop said. Msgr. Roger Landry, national director of the Pontifical Mission Societies USA, received the news of the beatification date with “indescribable joy.” Archbishop Sheen led the Pontifical Mission Societies USA from 1950 to 1966.

Trump DOJ efforts to block abortion pill challenges frustrate pro-life advocates

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration has asked

multiple judges to pause several state lawsuits seeking to roll back Biden administration-era eased restrictions on mifepristone, a drug commonly, but not exclusively, used for first trimester abortion, prompting frustration from pro-life advocates who support those challenges. The U.S. Department of Justice during the second Trump administration has moved to dismiss a series of state lawsuits — notably Louisiana, Missouri and Florida — seeking to end a Food and Drug Administration policy implemented during the Biden administration permitting mifepristone to be distributed by mail. The states have argued the policy undermines their own state laws, among other objections. Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, told OSV News, “It’s inexcusable that the Trump-Vance DOJ is actively litigating against pro-life states just trying to enforce their laws.” In its filings, DOJ lawyers in the Trump administration argued that the court “should either stay this case until after FDA completes its review or dismiss it.” However, the status and timeline of the FDA’s review is unclear. A spokesperson for the Department of Justice did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the filings. A spokesperson for the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees the FDA, did not immediately respond to a request for comment on its review.

Vatican diplomat decries ‘eugenic’ termination of Down syndrome pregnancies

GENEVA (Vatican News) — A Vatican diplomat in Geneva has called for stronger global protection for people with Down syndrome, warning against what he called “discriminatory and eugenic practices” tied to prenatal screening. Speaking ahead of World Down Syndrome Day, which occurs annually on March 21, Archbishop Ettore Balestrero addressed a side event hosted by the Jérôme Lejeune Foundation. “Persons with Down syndrome are more than a diagnosis, more than a condition, and certainly more than the limits others may imagine. All of them, like all of us, possess the same inherent dignity and sacred value, intentionally and lovingly imprinted by the Creator from the very first moment of conception,” he said. He emphasized that people with Down syndrome, “like everyone else, hold the same fundamental rights,” and insisted such practices “must be firmly rejected.” Archbishop Balestrero said inclusion means recognizing full human dignity, not just providing services, and called for a culture marked by care, humanity and respect for every life. The value of a person’s life, he added, should not be measured by utility or performance, but by the simple and profound fact of being human.

Pope Leo XIV declares Boys Town founder Father Flanagan venerable

ROME — Pope Leo XIV on March 23 declared Father Edward Flanagan, founder of Boys Town, venerable, recognizing his heroic virtue and advancing his cause for sainthood. Father Flanagan, who was born in County Roscommon, Ireland, in 1886 and emigrated to the United States at age 18, is best known for founding Boys Town, a home for orphaned and at-risk youth on the outskirts of Omaha, Nebraska. He started with a rented house and five boys on Dec. 12, 1917, driven by the conviction that every child deserved care, education, and love. “There are no bad boys. There is only bad environment, bad training, bad example, bad thinking,” Father Flanagan once said. Father Flanagan became widely known to American audiences after actor Spencer Tracy portrayed him in the 1938 film “Boys Town.” He died in 1948 while serving children in post-war Europe. The papal decree also recognized the heroic virtue of four others, including Father Henri Caffarel, the founder of the “Teams of Our Lady” to support married couples, and Giuseppe Castagnetti, an Italian mayor and father of 12 children who grew in holiness under the spiritual direction of Padre Pio.

Jerusalem patriarchate cancels Palm Sunday procession, postpones chrism Mass amid war

JERUSALEM — The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem said war-related restrictions are forcing major changes to Holy Week in the Holy Land. In a March 22 statement, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa said traditional Lenten observances and large public liturgies will not take place, citing ongoing conflict and uncertainty. Key events are affected: the Palm Sunday procession from the Mount of Olives is canceled, and the chrism Mass is postponed. Celebrations at sites like the Church of the Holy Sepulcher remain in question, with decisions being made day by day. In a March 21 statement, the Custody of the Holy Land said the Church of the Holy Sepulcher remains a place of continuous prayer despite restricted access and ongoing uncertainty over Holy Week and Easter, as friars appealed to Catholics worldwide to unite in prayer for an end to violence and for dialogue and diplomacy to prevail in what they described as a “time of trial.” Despite the disruptions, churches will stay open, the Latin patriarchate said, and clergy are encouraging smaller, local expressions of prayer. The patriarchate also called for a shared day of prayer on March 28, inviting the faithful to pray the rosary for peace.

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Life must be defended in a world wounded by warfare, pope says

Carol Glatz

Catholic News Service

The sanctity of life, from conception to its natural end, must be defended, especially now, in a world marked by “the madness of war,” Pope Leo XIV said.

When greeting Polish-speaking visitors during his general audience in St. Peter’s Square March 25, Pope Leo highlighted Poland’s pro-life celebration during his greetings, saying initiatives such as their “Spiritual Adoption of a Conceived Child” were truly needed.

“In a time marked by the madness of war, it is important to defend life from conception to its natural end,” he said.

Poland celebrates the Day of the Sanctity of Life every March 25, the feast of the Annunciation, which falls nine months before the Lord’s birth Christmas Day and celebrates Jesus’ incarnation in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Similar prayer initiatives exist around the world, including in the United States. The late Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, who is set to be beatified Sept. 24 in St. Louis, also inspired a spiritual adoption program, in which participants pledge to pray daily for nine months for an unborn child whose mother is considering abortion.

Sometimes “spiritual parents” are encouraged to name the unborn child and to pray for him or her daily, and, at the end of nine months, hold a baby shower to collect supplies and money to donate to local pregnancy centers.

Marking the feast of the Annunciation, Pope Leo invited Catholics to follow the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary more closely and to “always be ready to do God’s will.”

“As we continue our Lenten journey, let us ask the Lord to grant us the grace to imitate Our Blessed Mother in her total ‘yes’ to the Lord, and so open our hearts to his will for our lives,” he told English-speaking pilgrims and visitors.

In his main catechesis, the pope continued his series of reflections on the documents of the Second Vatican Council, specifically, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, “Lumen Gentium.”

Pope Leo explained that the hierarchical structure of the Church is not a “human construct” for fulfilling some kind of organizational function, but is “a divine institution whose purpose is to perpetuate the mission given by Christ to the apostles until the end of time.”

The Catholic Church, he said, is “founded on the apostles, whom Christ appointed as the living pillars of his mystical body, and possesses a hierarchical structure that works in the service of the unity, mission and sanctification of all her members.”

Since the apostles are called to faithfully preserve Christ’s “salvific teaching, they hand on their ministry to men who, until Christ’s return, continue to sanctify, guide and instruct the Church ‘through their successors in pastoral office,’” he said.

While all the faithful make up “the one priesthood of Christ,” he said, those ordained ministers who have received the Sacrament of Holy Orders, that is, bishops, priests and deacons, do have a unique ministry.

Endowed with “sacred power” for service in the Church, the bishops, “first and foremost, and through them the priests and deacons, have received tasks (‘munera’ in Latin), which lead them to the service of ‘all those who belong to the People of God, ‘so that, ‘working toward a common goal freely and in an orderly way, [they] may arrive at salvation,’” the pope said, citing the council document.

This apostolic mission is “collegial and communal,” reflecting the Lord’s desire for “shepherds of His people” who serve with love, he said. That is why St. Paul VI presented the hierarchy as being “born of the charity of Christ, to fulfil, spread and ensure the intact and fruitful



Pope Leo XIV blesses a baby during his general audience in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican March 25, 2026.

CNS photo/Vatican Media

transmission of the wealth of faith, examples, precepts and charisms bequeathed by Christ to His Church.”

“Dear sisters and dear brothers, let us pray to the Lord that He may send to His Church ministers who are ardent

with evangelical charity, dedicated to the good of all the baptized, and courageous missionaries in every part of the world,” Pope Leo said.

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