

- 2 Picnic for Women Religious
- 2 Bishop decrees
- 2 Safe Environment Policy updates
- 3 60 year jubilee
Msgr. Gilbert Rutz
- 3 Official assignments
- 3 Catholic Family Night
Great American Ballpark
- 4 NDUCEC
Leadership transition
- 7 Parish festivals

Moving? Wrong address?

Call the circulation desk,
(859) 392-1570

Bishop's Schedule3
 Commentary5
 People and Events7
 Classifieds12
 Shopper's Guide14
 VIRTUS14
 News Briefs15

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Two affordable homes dedicated via Pope Leo Village, opening doors for home ownership in Greater Cincinnati Area

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Two Covington homes were dedicated, June 18, as part of Habitat for Humanity's Pope Leo Village initiative — which aims to open up home ownership opportunities for lower income families. The homes were purchased at an equitable price by two sisters and their families, both with children. Deacon Jim Fortner, COO of the Diocese of Covington, was there for the dedication and to bless the newly built homes — each made with the blood, sweat, tears and dedication of Habitat for Humanity volunteers and the families themselves.

The families who benefit from the project are working families, and each receive gifts of home goods and holy texts (such as Bibles, Qurans or Torahs) upon receiving the keys to their homes. The families are required to not only help in the construction of their future homes, but also attend classes regarding home ownership — setting them up for future success in their houses.

John Simkonis, Greater Cincinnati's Habitat for Humanity treasurer, shared opening remarks at the dedication ceremony — which brought the families, volunteers and benefactors together.

“More than two years ago, Habitat for Humanity began working with the city of Covington after a regional housing study highlighted a significant shortage of affordable housing here in the area,” Mr. Simkonis said. “We recognized a unique opportunity to create something meaningful here. Not just homes, but a path to stable, affordable home ownership for local families along the way.”

With the aid of an “incredible gift” through an anonymous donor, Pope Leo Village was actualized. “Inspired by Pope Leo’s call to serve others, that generosity has grown into a national faith and action movement,” said Mr. Simkonis, with 19 Habitat for Humanity affiliates across the country also helping to build quality, affordable homes. In addition to the two homes being dedicated, four more in the Greater Cincinnati are already underway through the Pope Leo Village project.

“Habitat for Humanity believes everyone deserves a chance to build a stable future,” Mr. Simkonis said. “Families should not be priced out of these opportunities. Seniors should be able to stay safe in their homes. Every child should have a place to grow, learn and feel secure. At the heart of it is one simple idea: everyone deserves a safe, decent place to call home.”

(top) Sprinkling holy water, Deacon Jim Fortner, diocesan chief operating officer, blesses a home for the Pope Leo Village, June 18.

(top, center) Helen Spieler, director of Homebuyer Services, Habitat for Humanity of Greater Cincinnati, smiles with one of the homebuyers benefitting from the Pope Leo Village program.

(bottom, center) Outside of the newly built homes, volunteers gather around a branded Habitat for Humanity truck.

(bottom) Habitat for Humanity volunteers, who helped construct the Pope Leo Village homes, bow their heads in prayer during the dedication ceremony.



Baker photos



A caricature artist at the picnic for Women Religious sketches out the face of a Divine Providence Sister Janet Bucher as she smiles for the portrait.



A religious sister plays a game of cornhole versus a member of the Serra Club for Vocations.



(above) Divine Providence Sisters Marie Rose and Leslie Keener dance to music by a live band performing at the picnic.

(below) Religious sisters peruse raffle baskets put together by members of the Serra Club to serve as "door prizes" for women religious.



(left) Father Conor Kunath, chaplain of the Serra Club for Vocations, holds a pin received at the picnic from Serra USA's president, Dr. Anne Roat.



(above) Serra Club member Nancy Goeke, who leads planning the picnic for Women Religious, smiles while holding a gift basket to be won during a game played at the picnic.



Serra Club brings religious sisters together for annual picnic, thanks them for their prayers

Maura Baker
Staff Writer


Communities of women religious throughout the Diocese of Covington came together at Summit Hills Country Club, Edgewood, with members of the Serra Club for Vocations, for an afternoon of food and fun during the picnic for Women Religious, June 19.

This event, put together by the Serra Club, serves as a "thank you" to women religious for all they contribute and have contributed to the diocese. There, women religious are treated to a cookout-style luncheon of hamburgers and hot dogs, live music, games such as cornhole and bingo, raffle prizes and camaraderie with their sisters in other religious communities.

Also attending the picnic was Dr. Anne Roat, president of Serra Club USA, who thanked local Serrans for welcoming her. Dr. Roat additionally gifted a Serra Club pin to Father Conor Kunath, the Serra Club's chaplain during her visit.

Serran Dennis Reinersman, in his opening remarks, joked with sisters that there "is no free lunch."

"Your payment is to pray for vocations for us," said Mr. Reinersman, who also thanked the sisters themselves. "Thank you for all you do to further our Catholic faith," he said, "... thank you for your prayers, we really appreciate you being here."



JOHN CURTIS
BY THE GRACE OF GOD
AND THE FAVOR OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE
BISHOP OF COVINGTON

In order to provide more suitably for the protection of all people involved in the ministries and institutions of this local church,

I hereby establish as particular law for the Diocese of Covington


Safe Environment Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults (2026 edition).

This law is to be promulgated through its publication on the diocesan website and will take effect on July 1, 2026.

Given at the Chancery of the Diocese of Covington on the first day of June in the two thousand twenty-sixth year of our Lord.

John C. Iffert
Most Reverend John C. Iffert
Bishop of Covington

Jamie N. Schroeder
Mrs. Jamie N. Schroeder
Chancellor



JOHN CURTIS
BY THE GRACE OF GOD
AND THE FAVOR OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE
BISHOP OF COVINGTON

I hereby approve for use in the parishes, schools, and institutions of the Diocese of Covington

VIRTUS – Protecting God's Children
and
VIRTUS – Empowering God's Children.

This approval is effective from July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027.

Given at the Chancery of the Diocese of Covington on the first day of June in the two thousand twenty-sixth year of our Lord.

John C. Iffert
Most Reverend John C. Iffert
Bishop of Covington

Jamie N. Schroeder
Mrs. Jamie N. Schroeder
Chancellor

Diocesan safe environment gets a new format and fresh updates

Laura Keener
Editor

The Diocese of Covington has updated its Safe Environment Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults, with changes meant to make the document clearer, easier to use and simpler to update.

Bishop John Iffert signed the decree, June 1, making the updated policy particular law for the Diocese of Covington. The updated policy takes effect July 1. It is available online and in Spanish on the Diocese of Covington's Safe Environment webpage. People in the diocese who are enrolled in VIRTUS will receive a form by email to confirm they will comply with the 2026 policy.

Bishop Iffert said the review has been underway for the past couple of years. He said the diocese plans to review the policies on a regular basis. A primary goal, he said, was to keep the policy focused. Instead of try-

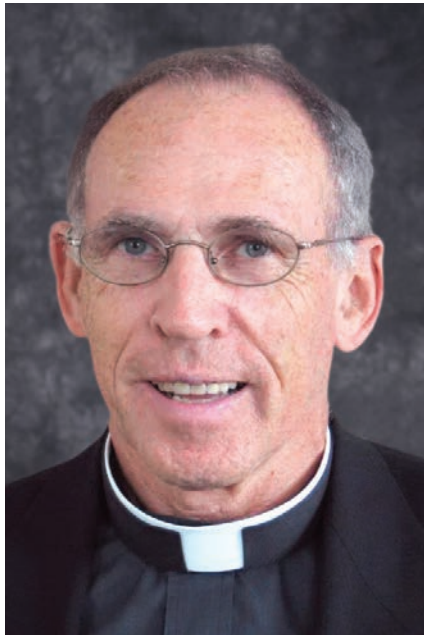
(Continued on page 3)

Msgr. Gilbert Rutz celebrates 60 years of priestly ministry

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Msgr. Gilbert Rutz, retired priest of the Diocese of Covington and Vicar General Emeritus, this year is celebrating 60 years of priestly ministry. Born Oct. 26, 1940, in Covington, Father Rutz was ordained to the priesthood in the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, May 28, 1966.

Msgr. Rutz attended grade school at Sacred Heart Grade School (now Holy Spirit School, Bellevue) — where he was taught by the Sisters of Notre Dame — before attending Newport Catholic for high school. He then studied at the Seminary of St. Pius X and Mt. St. Mary's seminary prior to his ordination. His first Mass was said at the same Church where



Msgr. Gilbert Rutz



he was baptized — Sacred Heart Church, Bellevue.

During his priesthood, Msgr. Rutz held an array of assignments and responsibilities — in parishes as pastor, associate pastor and sacramental minister; in schools as faculty and campus minister and as an administrator for various offices of the diocesan Curia — notably the former Religious Education Department, the Worship Office and as Vicar General for Bishop Emeritus Roger Foys.

In an interview for Msgr. Rutz's 50th jubilee in 2016, Bishop Emeritus Foys said this about him: "He (Msgr. Rutz) has been involved in many ministries in the diocese and is a man of many and varied talents at the service of the Church. It should have been no surprise, therefore, when I asked him to be my vicar general."

"Msgr. Rutz has a true heart for the Church," Bishop Foys said. "He is honest and straightforward and minces no words where the faith is concerned. He is blessed with wonderful administrative gifts and helped me in so many ways in the organization of the staff. When I entrusted some project to him, I never had to worry that it would be done and done right. He was a true blessing to me in my administration and I will always be grateful for him."

While serving as Vicar General, and later Prelate of Honor, Msgr. Rutz additionally volunteered to be assigned as campus minister at Northern Kentucky University's Newman Center. Already 65 years old at the time and able to retire, Msgr. Rutz cited his positive relationship to Bishop Foys and enjoyment of working with students as the reasons he continued working in his retirement years.

Now fully retired as of 2010, Msgr. Rutz is living out his retirement out west — in residence at Mt. Claret Retreat Center, Phoenix, Arizona.

Join Bishop Iffert and Archbishop Casey at the ballpark for Catholic Family Night

Staff Report

During Labor Day weekend, the Diocese of Covington will join the Archdiocese of Cincinnati for the second annual Catholic Family Night at Great American Ballpark.

Mark your calendars and order your tickets to watch the Cincinnati Reds take on the Milwaukee Brewers, Sept. 5, and as the great work of Catholic Charities is honored and recognized. Archbishop Robert Casey of Cincinnati and Bishop John Iffert of Covington will be honorary co-captains as the evening's theme "Love In Action" fills the ballpark and hearts of fans on both sides of the Ohio River.

"We are so grateful that the Archdiocese of Cincinnati has reached out and invited the Diocese of Covington to participate in this fun, family-centered event," said Laura Keener, communications director, Diocese of Covington.

Love In Action will focus on the ministries of Catholic Charities and the work of six people — three from Ohio and three from Kentucky — dedicated to bringing Christ's love in service to the local community. The first 1,500 fans will be invited to take part in an on-field parade, where participants will round third and be welcomed at home plate by

Catholic Family Night at Great American Ballpark

Join Archbishop Robert Casey and Bishop John Iffert for an evening of family fun Saturday, Sept. 5, as the Cincinnati Reds take on the Milwaukee Brewers.

The theme "Love In Action" expresses the many charitable works the members of the Catholic Church bring to the community. During the game, members of Catholic Charities will be highlighted.

Get your discounted tickets at <https://www.gofevo.com/event/Archdiocesecovington2/offer> or scan the QR code.



honorees will be shared in the weeks leading up to Catholic Family Night. Get your discounted tickets at <https://www.gofevo.com/event/Archdiocesecovington2/offer> and be a part of Catholic Family Night at GABP.

Archbishop Casey and Bishop Iffert. Gates open at 5:10 p.m. and the pre-game festivities, including the parade, begin at 5:30 p.m. Adding to the excitement, Sept. 5 is also Elly De La Cruz bobblehead night.

"In 2025, Elly joined the Holy Cross District High School baseball team in a Pure Life Project, which brought bottled water to Cincinnati's Freestore Foodbank," said Mrs. Keener. "It's exciting for us that Elly's special commemorative giveaway would be providentially a part of this night of Love in Action."

Also providential, Sept. 5 is the feast day of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, whose lifelong work among the world's most impoverished people has earned her a place of endearment in the hearts of many.

"How appropriate that we would be highlighting Love In Action and the ministries of Catholic Charities on the feast day of a modern-day witness to Christ's love," said Mrs. Keener.

The Messenger will share more information on game-day

(Continued from page 2)
ing to address every safe environment concern in one document, the diocese is building a policy manual. This first updated section focuses specifically on sexual abuse and harassment of minors and vulnerable adults.

"I wanted to make sure that the policy was clear," Bishop Iffert said.

The revised format gives each policy its own number. That makes the document easier to search, review and amend without rewriting the whole policy.

Julie Feinauer, director, Safe Environment Office, said the new structure is one of the biggest changes of the policy.

"Before it was in a paragraph format, whereas now each individual policy has its own number," Mrs. Feinauer said. "It gives us more freedom to be able to go in and change things in a more nuanced way to meet the needs of our

schools and parishes."

Mrs. Feinauer said the update also reflects changes in ministry, school and parish life since the COVID-19 pandemic. The policy now addresses situations such as online learning, online youth ministry and therapists meeting with students by video while the students are at school — all ways of communicating and connecting with children that wasn't practiced in diocesan schools before 2020.

The policy also spells out reporting procedures more clearly and keeps VIRTUS compliance as a key requirement for clergy, religious, employees and volunteers who have significant or repeated contact with minors or vulnerable adults.

Bishop Iffert said the policy remains consistent with the diocese's past practice, while also reflecting the essential norms that bind dioceses and newer church law related to penalties.

Official Assignments

Effective April 16, 2026

Deacon Thomas L. Nolan

To: Retirement after 41 years of dedicated ministry in the Diocese of Covington
From: Deacon, St. Timothy Parish, Union

Effective July 14, 2026

Rev. Monsignor Gerald L. Reinersman

To: Return to retirement
From: Parochial Administrator Pro Tem, Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, California

Reverend John J. Sterling

To: Retirement after 30 years of dedicated ministry in the Diocese of Covington
From: Pastor, St. Barbara Parish, Erlanger

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

Jamie N. Schroeder

Jamie N. Schroeder
Chancellor



Bishop's Schedule

June 27

Vigil Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 4:30 p.m.

June 28

Mass for the 50th anniversary of the Congregation of Divine Providence Associate Community, St. Anne, Melbourne, 10:30 a.m.

July 3

Curia closed in observance of Independence Day Holiday

July 5

Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 10 a.m.

The diocese also is updating its code of conduct. Bishop Iffert said the plan is for people to review and sign off on the code each year through VIRTUS.

"We're going to put that in place, so that people review that and sign off on it annually," Bishop Iffert said. The review and sign off will be conveniently administered through VIRTUS.

Mrs. Feinauer gave examples to help explain who must

(Continued on page 13)

A legacy of impact: Notre Dame Urban Education Center announces leadership transition

Staff report

Notre Dame Urban Education Center (NDUEC) entered a historic new chapter on July 1, 2026, as Sister Maria Therese, SND, steps down as Executive Director and Erin Woods assumes the organization's leadership role.

The transition marks more than a change in leadership, it represents NDUEC's evolution from leadership by the Sisters of Notre Dame (SND) to lay leadership while remaining firmly grounded in the SND charism, mission, and values that have guided the organization since its founding in 2009.

Sister Maria Therese has served as Executive Director since August 2018, leading the organization through a period of remarkable growth and expanded impact. Under her leadership, NDUEC strengthened existing programs, launched its Early Learning Program in 2019, expanded family engagement initiatives, increased volunteer involvement, and deepened its presence as a trusted educational resource for children and families in Covington's urban core.

A lifelong educator and Sister of Notre Dame USA, Sister Maria Therese brought decades of educational experience and a deep commitment to the congregation's mission of goodness, love, and respect for the dignity of every person. Her leadership helped shape NDUEC into an organization known not only for academic excellence but also for fostering confidence, hope, and opportunity in the lives of the children and families it serves.

"Everything we do begins with the belief that each child is created by God and has tremendous potential," said Sister Maria Therese. "It has been a privilege to walk alongside our students, families, volunteers, donors, and staff as we have grown together over the years."

Today, NDUEC serves more than 100 children

and families annually through its four core programs: Summer Academics, Homework Plus, Family Support, and the Early Learning Program. The organization engages

hundreds of volunteers each year and continues to provide transformative educational experiences that impact individual well-being.

While stepping down as Executive Director, Sister Maria Therese is not saying goodbye. Beginning July 1, she will continue serving NDUEC in a part-time Program Coordinator role, allowing her to remain actively involved with students and families.

Board Chair Sarah Gray described Sister Maria Therese's influence as immeasurable.

"Sister Maria Therese's leadership has touched every aspect of this organization," Gray said. "Her vision, compassion, and unwavering commitment to children and families have helped create a lasting legacy that will continue to guide NDUEC well into the future."

Stepping into the Executive Director role is Erin Woods, who has served as NDUEC's Director of Development since 2020. During her tenure, Woods has helped strengthen the organization's fundraising efforts, cultivate strategic partnerships, and increase awareness of NDUEC's mission throughout Northern Kentucky.

Woods sees the transition as both an honor and a responsibility.

"Sister Maria Therese has built upon an incredible foundation established by the Sisters of Notre Dame and the leaders who came before her," Woods said. "As we transition to lay leadership, our commitment to the mission remains unchanged. The charism of the Sisters of Notre Dame, recognizing the goodness of God in all people and helping each child realize their God-given potential, will continue to be at the heart of everything we do."

The leadership transition reflects years of thoughtful planning by NDUEC's Board of Directors and the Sisters of Notre Dame to ensure the organization's long-term sustainability while preserving its Catholic identity and founding values.

Although NDUEC will no longer be led by a Sister of Notre Dame, the congregation's influence will remain deeply woven into the fabric of the organization. The Sisters of Notre Dame will continue to be represented on the Board of Directors, and the organization's mission, values and educational philosophy will remain rooted in the spirit that inspired its founding.

"This is not an ending," Woods said. "It is a continuation of the mission. We are incredibly grateful for the Sisters of Notre Dame, whose vision and commitment created NDUEC. Our responsibility now is to carry that legacy forward and ensure that future generations of children and families continue to benefit from their gift."

As NDUEC prepares for its next chapter, the organization will honor Sister Maria Therese's extraordinary legacy of service during a special Open House celebration on September 17, from 4:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the center. The event will provide an opportunity for students, families, volunteers, donors and community members to celebrate her lasting impact and the countless lives she has touched throughout her years of leadership.



Erin Woods, Executive Director, NDUEC

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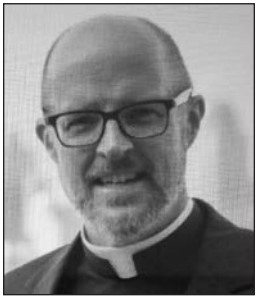
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The priority of Christ and the defeat of idolatry

The readings for the Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle A — are: 2 Kings 4:8–11, 14–16a, Romans 6:3–4, 8–11 and Matthew 10:37–42.

There is simply no getting around it. It is literally the Gospel truth. The priority of Christ as the priority of life — both biological and eternal — is a non-negotiable for discipleship, salvation and eternal life. It is meant to be

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Phillip DeVous

the priority that organizes and directs all other priorities in our lives: “Jesus says to his apostles: ‘Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me...’”

Now, if we take ourselves to be the center of things, or the world as our norm, or if we try to tidy up Jesus’s radical message to suit our comforts — and

what the world finds congenial — Jesus’s words to us are nonsense. We will just write them off as a bit of spiritual excess or exaggeration on the part of our Blessed Lord. It occurs to me, however, that we should consider what our Lord says is true and pay attention to the radical nature of what he is saying to us. It is so easy to wipe away the strangeness of Jesus that we forget to consider he means what he says, and it deserves to be taken seriously.

It seems obvious to me that in our contemporary reckoning with Jesus he easily gets reduced to a milquetoast character or an abstract ideal. This very often occurs when the person of Jesus, especially in the aspect of his sacred humanity, gets reduced. Yet, as Msgr. Romano Guardini, a towering figure of 20th century theology and spirituality, says in his reflections concerning Jesus’ humanity: “Jesus was no cold superman — he was more human than any of us. Entirely pure, unweakened by evil, he was loving and open to the core. His ardor, truth, sensitivity, power, capacity for joy and pain were unlimited, and everything that happened to him happened in the immeasurableness of his divinity.”

Following from his tendency to cut the person of Jesus down to the size of “one of the guys” who suits us is the tendency to reduce his Word to something akin to a Hallmark card sentiment.

These relentless temptations to bleach out the radicalness of Jesus Christ and fit the demands of His Word to our emotional preferences are a species of the primordial temptation of idolatry. Idolatry, as Archbishop Charles Chaput notes, “is a means by which we try to control God, to make worshiping him less of a sacrifice. On the other hand, the false gods we make — either by crafting them directly with our hands, or by conjuring them more discreetly in the way we invest our time, desires, skills and passions — always end up controlling us. By their nature, false gods are vampires. They prey on, and draw their life from, the human spirit.”

In falling prey to the temptation to reduce the priority of Jesus Christ and his Word we can all too easily forget that he brings to us and to the world a sword of truth, which is a sword of division. The fundamental purpose of the sword of division brought by Christ is to compel each of us to decide whether to adhere to him or to any one of a multitude of false gods. The fundamental task of the spiritual combat of the spiritual life is to reject the temptation of idolatry and the false gods we conjure up to suit ourselves.

Precisely because these false gods distract and delude our hearts, Jesus speaks of the conditions necessary for discipleship. The imperative Jesus issues to “take up his cross and follow after me” is the sine qua non of discipleship.

It is obvious from this imperative that following Jesus is following the Lord God of Israel. Our Blessed Lord is challenging his disciples to an intimate imitation of him such that they must become living images of his own life and destiny.

As St. Paul teaches us: “Brothers and Sisters: Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with

Personal archeology: Unearthing the hand of God in our life

During an April weekend, our community held its election for prioress. This occurs every four years.

These elections are different from any you are likely familiar with. For a wonderfully helpful description, read Sister Christa’s blog post on the election, “A Choice Made Together.” For me this current election was an exercise in living Eucharist. Indeed, it was one of three profound Eucharist experiences in my life. Each of the three differed in character, but over the years they built on each other.

The first experience was more than 70 years ago. I was a young girl in my parish church attending the ritual for closing of 40 Hours. As I watched the monstration being carried up and down the aisles, a deep insight washed over me: “Here, right now, is Jesus Christ.” It touched me so deeply that even now I can visualize the scene and remember the feeling.

The next remarkable moment was many years later. I was a young Benedictine at Mass in the chapel, standing with other sisters around the altar (This was an era when priests could invite assembly members to come up to the altar instead of remaining in their pews.) The moment occurred as the priest was holding the host up for all to see and proclaiming: “This is the Lamb of God.” As he said that, I suddenly realized that all those I was standing with were truly “the Lamb of God.” This was a deepening of my knowing what it means to be the Body of Christ.



Sister Colleen Winston, OSB

My experience during our recent election process was a third building block in my lived theology of Eucharist. Again, it was at one given moment in time. The four sisters who had agreed to be a candidate for prioress were sitting in front facing the rest of the community. They were opening themselves to anyone in the assembly who might have a question whose answer she thought would shed light on what gifts or challenges a candidate would bring to the office of prioress.

I was suddenly flooded with gratitude for the immense gift that was before our eyes. No matter what the cost, these four women were ready to give themselves totally to service of the community and the Church. Their presence was God saying to us: “I am here. Trust in me. Through these women and the rest of the community I will continue to make my presence visible to you and the rest of the world.”

I’d been aware for a long time that I had a deep Eucharistic theology, knowing each of us is part of the Body of Christ. I don’t think I knew, however, that it had been developing since childhood and was related to various experiences over my lifetime. In a way, the revelation had been a kind of personal archeology, helping me gain deeper insight into myself, my relationship with God and everyone else.

I’m guessing that all of us have pivot points, some special moments in our lives whose impact helps fashion the rest of our life. For me I have a new understanding of how God’s hand has been shaping my relationships over many decades. Because of them, for me the term Body of Christ is a daily reality, around each of us in flesh and blood.

Are there any pivot points in your life where, with some introspection, you’ll find a hidden gift of God that sheds light on who you have become?

Sister Colleen Winston is a Benedictine Sister of St. Walburg Monastery, Villa Hills.

The friendship crisis beneath the loneliness epidemic

A few months ago, I sat across from a young man who seemed to have everything going for him. He had a good job, plenty of social connections and a busy calendar. Yet after a few minutes of conversation, he looked at me and said something that has stayed with me ever since: “Nobody really knows me.”

His words surprised me, not because they were unusual, but because I hear them so often. Across the country, we are talking about the loneliness epidemic. Researchers study it. Mental health professionals warn about it. Families experience it. Yet I wonder if loneliness is not the problem but the symptom.

Perhaps the deeper issue is that we have forgotten how to be friends. Not acquaintances. Not followers. Not networking contacts, but friends. The kind of friend who answers the phone when life is falling apart. The

kind who sits with you in grief and defeat. The kind who knows your shortcomings and loves you anyway.

Many of us are surrounded by people, yet deeply unknown. We have hundreds of contacts stored in our phones but very few people we trust with our fears. We know how to stay connected, but we struggle to remain close. We have learned to practice a kind of performative friendship. We gather when life is good, celebrate achievements and share our highlights. But friendship is not tested on the mountaintop. It is tested in the valley. Many of us have people to celebrate with, but very few people to suffer with. Real friendship is not about who shows up when everything is going well. It is about who remains when life becomes difficult.

him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life?”

This is what it means to get discipleship right and to

Perhaps the loneliness crisis is not simply that we lack relationships. It is that we lack friendships deep enough to carry the weight of a real life. We lack the relationship that does not stay on the surface, and makes you feel cared for and walked with.

In the book of Genesis, God says, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” This truth extends beyond marriage. It speaks to the very nature of the human person. We were created for relationships because we were created in the image of God himself. And who is God? Father, Son and Holy Spirit: A community in communion of love. If God exists eternally in relationship, then it should not surprise us that our hearts long for communion. Friendship is not simply a nice addition to life. It is an essential part of God’s design for humanity. Yet authentic friendship requires something many of us find difficult: vulnerability.

Since, real friendship asks us to stop performing, stop pretending like everything is OK all the time. We need to be reminded that Jesus himself showed us vulnerability, in many moments, but especially in the abandonment of the cross. In a culture that rewards image, achievement and self-promotion, we become experts at presenting the best version of ourselves. We carefully curate what others see while hiding our struggles, doubts and fears.

Social media did not create this tendency, but it has certainly amplified it. As a result, many people spend their lives being seen without ever being known. You may be surrounded by peers but feeling deeply alone.

This is especially true among young adults. I regularly meet young people who are successful by every external measure yet feel profoundly isolated. They fear that if others truly knew them, they would not be accepted. So, they continue performing with confidence while carrying loneliness in silence.

The Gospel offers a different path. Jesus did not build relationships through performance. He built them through presence. He walked with people. He shared meals with

(Continued on page 14)

witness with the very fiber of our being, “I live no longer I, but Christ who lives in me.” (Gal 2:20)

Father Phillip W. DeVous is pastor of St. Charles Borromeo, Flemingsburg and St. Rose of Lima, May’s Lick.

Pope Leo: Trip in briefs

Pope Leo XIV visited Spain, Jun 6-12. His itinerary took him to Madrid, Barcelona, Gran Canaria and Tenerife, where he addressed Spain's parliament, inaugurated one of the towers of Barcelona's iconic Sagrada Familia basilica and met migrants arriving in the Canary Islands. Here is his trip in briefs.

Catholic Church has message for everyone, pope says before landing in Spain

ABOARD THE PAPAL PLANE FROM ROME TO MADRID — Before touching down in Spain for his fourth apostolic journey abroad, Pope Leo XIV told reporters traveling with him that his plan was to meet with all facets of society: Catholics, young people, migrants, the poor and regular citizens. "The Church has a message for everyone," he said in Spanish June 6, offering special greetings to journalists. While he has visited Spain many times, particularly during his 12 years as prior general of the Order of St. Augustine, he said he was looking forward to visiting this predominantly Catholic though increasingly-secularized country as pope: "to meet the faithful, celebrate the faith, proclaim the message of Jesus Christ." Pope Leo is scheduled to visit Madrid, Barcelona and the Canary Islands June 6-12, visiting migrants and the poor as well as the royal family, dignitaries, representatives of the world of culture, sports and politicians, becoming the first pope to address the Spanish parliament in Madrid. He will also meet privately with survivors of sexual abuse by clergy. Pope Leo will lead many events with the nation's Catholics, and one of the highlights will be his blessing of the recently-completed central tower of the Basilica of the Sagrada Família in Barcelona, which now makes it the tallest church in the world at nearly 535 feet. The event also commemorates the 100th anniversary of the death of its architect, Antoni Gaudí.

'Be human as Christ is,' Pope Leo XIV tells half a million youth in Madrid

MADRID — Pope Leo XIV challenged young Catholics to reject superficiality and embrace authentic Christian witness during a prayer vigil in Madrid on June 6 that drew an estimated 500,000 people. Addressing the crowd in Plaza de Lima, the pope said the mission he entrusts to young people is simple: "Be human," urging them to become "men and women of flesh and blood" with "trustworthy faces" who reflect Christ in the world. The massive gathering, described as a "festival of faith," featured music, testimonies, Marian devotion and Eucharistic adoration. Pope Leo's arrival was delayed as the popemobile slowly moved through crowds of cheering pilgrims lining Madrid's streets. In a living room-style dialogue with youth, the pope spoke about faith, vocation and his missionary experience in Peru, recalling how the Gospel transforms conflict into peace and reconciliation. He also encouraged young people to seek silence amid mod-



CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Spain's King Felipe VI bows as he shakes hands with Pope Leo XIV during a welcome ceremony at Adolfo Suárez Madrid/Barajas International Airport June 6, 2026.

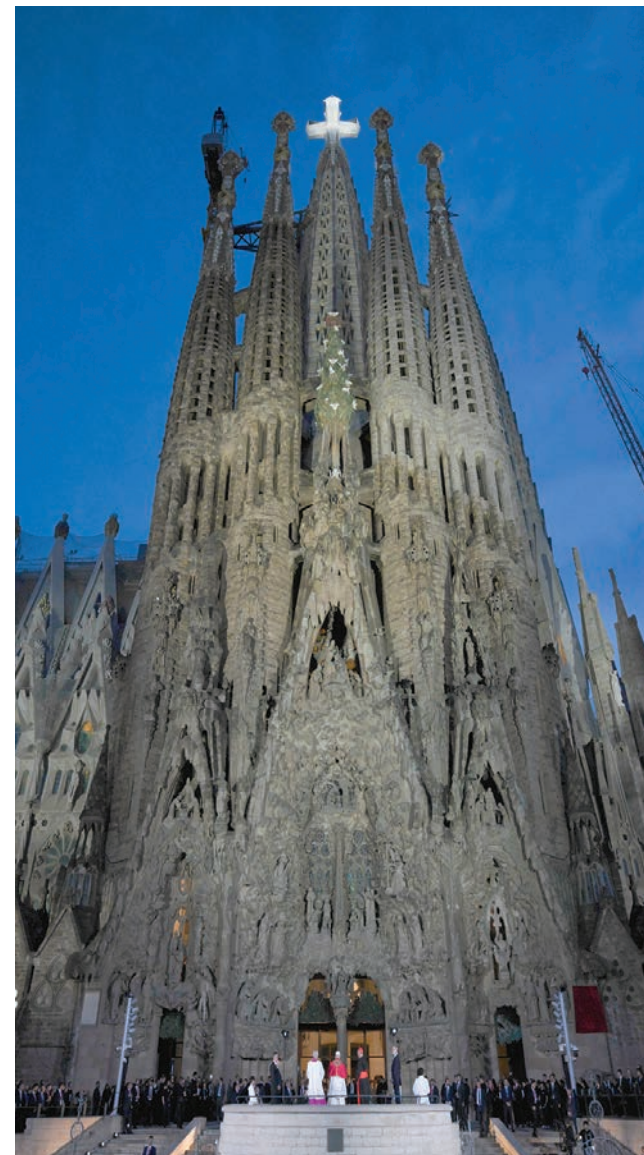
ern distractions, saying truth endures while ideologies fade. Pope Leo urged Catholics to be missionaries, including online, and encouraged openness to marriage, family life, priesthood and religious vocations. The evening concluded in silence as hundreds of thousands joined the pope in Eucharistic adoration.

Secret to building peace lies in recognizing dignity of every person, pope says

MADRID — In a highly anticipated and historic speech to Spain's parliament, Pope Leo XIV urged modern-day leaders to be guided by ancient and Catholic principles that gave birth to universal human rights based on the inalienable dignity of the human person. While Church and state legitimately remain separate, many virtues and aims of good governance and just laws are rooted in values profoundly marked and inspired by the Christian tradition, he told hundreds of lawmakers and leaders of judiciary branches June 6 in Spain's Congress of Deputies. When lawmakers ask themselves "how to ensure that what is possible is just, that what is legal is truly humane, and that the will of the majority safeguards those goods that belong to all and respects that

which no majority can legitimately violate," he said, the answer needs to "stand before the dignity of the person and pass that test without shame." Even though "society and the Church herself did not always live up to these insights found in their own Christian tradition," he said, Spain's Christian thinkers introduced the idea of "the irreducible value of every human being and the moral limits of power," which led to the core principles of international human rights. Even today, the pope said, the whole world "continues to ask itself how to build peace on the recognition of the person

(Continued on page 8)



OSV News photo/Simone Risoluti, Vatican News

Pope Leo XIV stands before the blessing and inauguration of the Tower of Jesus Christ at the Basilica of the Sagrada Familia during Pope Leo XIV's apostolic journey in Barcelona, Spain, June 10, 2026.



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PEOPLE AND EVENTS

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

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

Extraordinary Ministers are needed, especially on Sundays, at St. Elizabeth hospital in Edgewood. If you are a Eucharistic minister, or are interested in becoming one, contact the Pastoral Care office or the Volunteer office at St. Elizabeth for more information, (859) 301-2000.

The 139th annual St. Ann Novena will be held July 18–26 at St. Ann Church, Covington. Novena prayers begin at 7 p.m.; Mass at 7:15 p.m. The theme is major Marian apparitions: Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Champion, Our Lady of Vailankanni, Our Lady of Knock, Our Lady of La Sallette, Our Lady of Siluva and Our Lady of Lourdes, respectively. The Feast of Sts. Joachim and Ann is celebrated the final evening. Individual blessings with a relic of St. Ann and the sacrament of reconciliation will be offered following Mass. The novena will be livestreamed on Facebook St John Ann Covington.

There will be a Summer Marriage Encounter Weekend July 24–July 26 at Towneplace Suites by Marriott in Lexington-Keeneland. Sign up at <http://esharing.org> or <http://wwme.org>. You can also register by calling Andy and Melanie Reinersman at (859) 653-8464. Come join us for an experience that can change your marriage, and your life!

The Thomas More University Biology Field Station third annual “Raisin’ Hellbenders on the River: Concert for Conservation,” July 25, 3–9 p.m. Listen to live bluegrass music from local bands, enjoy a guided hike, explore laboratories, purchase raffle tickets for a brand-new kayak and paddle on the river. Visit tmuky.us/bfsconcert for more information; purchase at tmuky.us/concertsvp (case sensitive).

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.

Healing, prayer and adoration to conclude the Novena of Our Lady of Knock, Aug. 22, 7 p.m. at St. Patrick Parish and Shrine, Taylor Mill. The evening will include veneration of a relic of St. Faustina.

Carmel Manor, Ft. Thomas, festival, Aug. 29, 3–10 p.m.



After a seven year hiatus, the St. Henry Parish Festival, Elsmere, returned for a summer weekend. It was a beautiful weekend with fun had by all, especially Father Kevin Kahmann in the dunking booth!

Parish festivals

June 19–20
St. Henry, Elsmere
Parish festival

St. Therese, Southgate
Summer festival

June 26–27
St. Benedict, Covington
Parish festival

June 26–28
Mary, Queen of Heaven, Erlanger
FunFest

July 10–12
Immaculate Heart of Mary,
Burlington
Summerfest

St. Pius X, Edgewood
Summer festival

June 12–13
St. Augustine, Covington
Summer festival

July 17–18
St. Thomas, Ft. Thomas
Block party

July 24 and 26
St. James, Brooksville
Fish Fry and Ice Cream Social

July 25
Sts. Peter and Paul, California
Parish festival

July 31–Aug. 1
St. Joseph, Cold Spring
Parish festival

July 31–Aug. 2
St. Joseph, Crescent Springs
Summer celebration

Aug. 7
Blessed Sacrament,
Ft. Mitchell
Athletic Boosters corn roast

Aug. 7–8
St. Mary of the Assumption,
Alexandria
Parish festival

Aug. 28–30
St. Augustine, Augusta
Parish festival

Aug. 28–29
Holy Cross District High School,
Latonia
School festival

Sept. 5–6
St. Anthony,
Taylor Mill
Festival Latino

Sept. 5–7
St. Cecilia, Independence
Parish festival

Sept. 11–12
St. Barbara, Erlanger
Rocktoberfest

Sept. 11–13
St. Patrick, Maysville
Parish festival

Sept. 18–20
St. Timothy, Union
Oktoberfest

Sept. 25–27
St. Anges, Ft. Wright
Oktoberfest

Sept. 27
St. Philip Parish, Melbourne
Golf outing

The evening will include chicken dinners, raffles, kids’ games and live music by Ben Walz.

The FIRE Foundation of Northern Kentucky will be hosting a “FIRE in the Hole” golf outing, Sept. 12, at Devou Golf Course. Starting with registration at 8 a.m., the event will feature a 9 a.m. shotgun start and a 3–5 p.m. cocktail hour. Price is \$500 for a foursome (\$125 per golfer.) Includes breakfast, lunch, 2 drink tickets and hors d’oeuvres included. Win exciting prizes for longest drive, closest to the pin, live auction, raffles and split-the-pot. More information and registration online at <https://www.firefoundationnky.org/golf>.

Empowering God’s Children 5th annual facilitators’ training, Sept. 15, Curia, Covington. All facilitators, priests, principals, DREs and CREs are welcome to attend, as well as anyone interested in learning more about the program. Dinner and networking begin at 3 p.m.; training ends at 5:30 p.m. Registration requested at <https://forms.gle/LmtrSBxFjDmh64L1A>

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/

Millions of Monicas prayer group, St. Mary of the Assumption Church, Alexandria, the first Monday of each month, 6:30-7:30 p.m. Women are invited to gather for one hour of guided prayer for the intention that our children and youth will return to or remain active in the faith. For information call Carol, (859) 653-5638. Note: no gathering in September due to the Labor Day holiday.

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

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

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

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

(Continued from page 6)

and not on the imposition of force.” “I invite you, then, to lift your gaze to the world around you, not to turn away from reality, but to remember that every decision by public authorities affects real people, especially those who have less power to make their voices heard,” Pope Leo said.

Pope Leo scores with 80,000 Spanish Catholics in Real Madrid soccer stadium

MADRID — Madrid’s famous Bernabéu soccer stadium, normally packed with fans of the Real Madrid football club, roared with cheers and songs of praise to the Lord on June 8 as 80,000 Catholics prayed together with Pope Leo XIV. In an unscripted moment at the start of the evening of testimony, music and prayer, Pope Leo joked, “I think that for a player, scoring a goal in this stadium is a major milestone in life. But ... today, the Church in Madrid scored an amazing goal that will go down in history!” The pope encouraged Catholics to share the Gospel in urban life and highlighted the growing phenomenon of adults discovering or returning to the faith. Responding to the testimony of a recently baptized young man, he said, “Baptism truly changes lives.” After his speech, Pope Leo led the crowd in praying the Our Father together before bestowing his apostolic blessing. The evening event in Bernabéu stadium was the final public engagement of the Madrid leg of the pope’s seven-day apostolic journey to Spain. On June 9, Pope Leo is scheduled to travel to Barcelona before continuing on to the Canary Islands June 11.

Pope Leo speaks with suicide survivor about mental health, hope in Christ

BARCELONA, Spain — Pope Leo XIV listened to deeply personal testimonies from young people grappling with depression, family trauma and questions of faith on his first day in Barcelona at Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium, telling a crowd of tens of thousands that God does not abandon those who suffer, even when his presence feels most dis-



People await Pope Leo XIV’s arrival at the Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium in Barcelona June 9, 2026, for a prayer vigil. CNS photo/Lola Gomez

tant. In one of the evening’s most poignant moments, a young woman named Carmina described her yearslong struggle with depression and a suicide attempt, asking the pope where God could be found “when the darkness is absolute and we cannot take it anymore.” Pope Leo gave her a hug after his response in which he called her presence at the event “a remarkable miracle.” “I am moved,” he said,

“that you are here among us and that you have found the strength to embrace this second chance that the Lord has given you.” In his closing speech, the pope reflected that “we are called to engage with the shadows of our own human condition: We lack the full truth; we do not fully fathom the mystery of ourselves or the true identity of others; we do not always succeed in understanding the hidden truth of the reality that surrounds us and the events unfolding before our eyes. We seek a light to illuminate the path.” The evening opened with a performance of the castell, the centuries-old Catalan tradition of building human towers, by a group from Vilafranca del Penedès.

Don’t let painful past overshadow hopeful future, pope tells Barcelona inmates

BARCELONA, Spain — Pope Leo XIV brought a message of mercy and renewal to inmates at the Brians 1 Penitentiary in Barcelona June 10. Speaking to prisoners and ministry volunteers, the pope emphasized that life’s mistakes do not define a person’s identity. He encouraged the crowd of over 1,000 pretrial detainees to trust in divine grace, noting that “the past does not condemn the future.” The prison’s chaplain, Father Jesús Bel, thanked the pontiff for bringing global visibility to the inmates’ suffering and their desire for spiritual freedom. During the visit, Pope Leo listened to testimonies from two female inmates, Montse and Josefina, who shared their struggles with grief and faith behind bars. Concluding his address, the pope urged the inmates to keep dreaming and reminded them that God always allows human beings to start anew through repentance and reconciliation.

Pope Leo blesses Sagrada Familia’s Tower of Jesus, says beauty can lead people to God

BARCELONA, Spain — Pope Leo XIV blessed the newly completed Tower of Jesus Christ at Barcelona’s Sagrada



Pope Leo XIV watches traditional flamenco dancers during an event with representatives of culture, art, the economy and sport at the Movistar Arena in Madrid June 7, 2026. CNS photo/Lola Gomez

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OSV News photo/Yara Nardi, Reuters

Pope Leo XIV greets migrants at the “Las Raices” migrant center in San Cristobal de La Laguna, Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain, June 12, 2026, where he is meeting migrants and humanitarian organizations, as part of a seven-day apostolic journey to Spain, with visits to Madrid, Barcelona and the Canary Islands.



OSV News photo/Yara Nardi, Reuters

Pope Leo XIV greets migrants at the “Las Raices” migrant center in San Cristobal de La Laguna, Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain, June 12, 2026, where he is meeting migrants and humanitarian organizations, as part of a seven-day apostolic journey to Spain, with visits to Madrid, Barcelona and the Canary Islands.

Familia basilica June 10, inaugurating the crowning spire that makes the iconic church the tallest Catholic church the world and urging people to lift their gaze to Christ “who alone reveals to us the truth about God and the truth about ourselves.” Pope Leo offered Mass inside the basilica and formally inaugurated the Tower of Jesus Christ, which stands at more than 564 feet, before a crowd of thousands gathered inside and around the Sagrada Familia. “By looking at Christ, we can see the world with renewed eyes: the tower of the cross then becomes a banner of charity, for God loves us in this way, transforming an instrument of death into a sign of hope,” the pope said. Spain’s King Felipe VI welcomed the pope upon his arrival at the basili-

ca. Before Mass, Pope Leo descended to the basilica’s crypt to pray at the tomb of Antoni Gaudí, the visionary Catalan architect who devoted 43 years of his life to the design and construction of the basilica before his death in 1926 at age 73. The papal Mass fell on the 100th anniversary of Gaudí’s death. Known as “God’s architect,” Gaudí’s cause for can-

onization advanced last year when Pope Francis declared him venerable in April 2025. Pope Leo paid tribute to the visionary builder in his homily, reflecting on Gaudí’s intent to narrate the mysteries of Christ’s life through stone and light.

In Canary Islands, Pope Leo warns of indifference against ‘monsters’ preying on migrants

ARGUINEGUÍN, Spain — Standing at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, where thousands of migrants arrive each year after dangerous journeys from Africa, Pope Leo XIV recalled the biblical sea monsters Leviathan and Rahab. Yet the greatest threats lurking in these waters, he said, are not creatures of Scripture. “Monsters lurk in these seas: mafias that profit from despair; traffickers who enslave women and children, and those whose indifference allows the poor to be swallowed up by exploitation or forgetfulness,” he said June 11 in the Canary Islands. In his first stop of the final leg of his apostolic journey to Spain, Pope Leo delivered an impassioned speech on migration. Those “monsters” are real as more than 3,000 people died or disappeared while trying to reach the Canary Islands in 2025, according to the Spanish NGO Caminando Fronteras. More than 10,000 people were recorded to have drowned along this dangerous migration route in 2024, it added. Pope Leo appealed to the nations of origin of the migrants, saying they must establish conditions for peace, justice and development and he appealed to transit nations to protect people from criminal networks. “It is likewise an appeal to the conscience of Europe, which cannot claim to uphold human dignity while growing accustomed to the Mediterranean and the Atlantic becoming unmarked graves, as well as that of the international community, which is called to effective and persevering cooperation,” he said.

Pope Leo: Whoever immerses in the Sacred Heart no longer lives for themselves

SANTA CRUZ DE TENERIFE, Spain — Pope Leo XIV concluded his visit to Spain Friday by urging Christians to reject the pursuit of profit and instead embrace hospitality toward migrants. Celebrating Mass at Tenerife’s main commercial port, a major migratory hub, the pontiff said residents have a unique opportunity to grow in faith through those seeking a better life. “The greatest grace is to allow ourselves to be evangelized by those we assist,” Pope Leo told the crowd on the solemnity of the Sacred Heart. Earlier, the pope greeted cheering crowds from the balcony of Bishop Eloy Alberto Santiago’s residence, praising locals for welcoming migrants from across the globe. He reminded the faithful that all belong to “one single family.” Citing his apostolic exhortation, “Dilexi Te,” Pope Leo called the resilience of the vulnerable the “wealth of the poor.” He prayed that Tenerife remain a place of encounter with Christ through fraternal hospitality. “This is the heart of the Gospel, the heart of Christ,” he said. “Whoever immerses themselves in it no longer lives for themselves. Open this sea of love to everyone! This is my wish and my prayer for you and for all those who will come to know you.”

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America at 250: Celebrating both a birthday and a history of religious liberty

Kimberley Heatherington

OSV News

As the United States indulges in a star-spangled celebration of its 250th birthday, a cornerstone of historical significance that stands out is religious freedom, and unlike for many other nations, it is a unique founding principle of this nation.

"From the beginning, we've had this quarrel — that's why I call it the Founders Quarrel — which is, on the one hand, there was agreement that we should have religious liberty. But what that actually meant — was what?" Linda Przybyszewski, associate professor of history at the University of Notre Dame, told OSV News.

"They argued about it," she said of the Founding Fathers, "because so many of them believed that some form of belief in God was necessary to teaching people virtue and morality — since we need virtue and morality in order to be a self-governing republic. The question then became, 'Who's going to teach the religion?' ... And I don't think that has ever gone away."

The variety of religious traditions in the U.S. also complicated matters.

"At the founding of the United States, we saw a fascinating mix of groups who argued for religious liberty," explained Przybyszewski. "There were deists — people who believed in God, but had their doubts about Christ — like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. There were also sort of 'orthodox' churches, which were in some cases newer — like the Baptists, or the Presbyterians — and they had been actively persecuted by colonies that had established churches; that is, churches with privileges."

During the colonial period of the early 1700s, most colonists — about 85% of some 500,000 — lived in colonies with an official state church, typically the Congregational (Calvinist) or Anglican Church.

"This disparate group of people argued very strongly for religious liberty," Przybyszewski said, "which is why we have in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that Congress shall make no law regarding the establishment of religion or imposing on the free exercise of religion."

Michael Breidenbach — dean of the Honors College and associate professor of history at Ave Maria University in Ave Maria, Florida — agreed.

"Religious experience for colonial Americans was very varied. There were some colonists who came specifically because they were fleeing religious persecution. There were others who were forced to come to America, in the case of enslaved people and indentured servants," he shared.

"There were others who were trying to find a better life than what they had in Europe. And most of them were, I would say, a Christian in some description — although there are notable and important exceptions with Jews and Muslims; and of course, those who did not profess the faith, gnostics or atheists," said Breidenbach.



OSV News photo/Gregory A. Shemitz, Long Island Catholic
A file photo shows an American flag flying outside Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Church in Centerport, N.Y.

home of the first U.S. diocese) — is typically identified as the first American law specifically referring to "the free exercise" of religion.

It mandated religious tolerance for Trinitarian Christians, stating, "No person or persons shall from henceforth be any ways troubled, molested, or discountenanced for or in respect of his or her religion nor in the free exercise thereof."

Ironically, it was repealed in 1654 when William Claiborne, who was stridently anti-Catholic, took control of the colonial government. A new law was passed barring Catholics from openly practicing their religion.

The "Great Awakening" of the 1740s — an evangelical revival of Christianity that swept the colonies, ushering in both religious and political change — further fueled debates.

"By the time we get to American Independence," said Breidenbach, "what changes is that we see a shift in the discourse to the natural rights of someone to freely exercise one's religion — public worship — according to the dictates of their conscience. And that's a different commitment because the government can't abridge those rights," he added. "They can maybe limit them under certain conditions — but they are natural rights, and so that's a much more firm protection."

Catholics, Breidenbach noted, were at the forefront of the commitment for the natural rights of religious liberty.

He noted that most frequently, arguments for religious toleration involved a fair degree of self-interest — meaning those who wished it for themselves were not necessarily committed pluralists.

"Religious toleration," Breidenbach said, "is a kind of grant from the civil authority that allows for religious nonconformity because that does better for civil peace — and a kind of recognition that conforming people to a religion they do not believe in makes them hypocrites; makes them not true believers; and otherwise creates a lot of dissension in a political community."

The Maryland Toleration Act of 1649 — written by Cecil Calvert (1605-1675), son of George Calvert (1580-1632), the Catholic founder of the colony of Maryland (later

Archbishop John Carroll of Baltimore (1735-1815) — the first Catholic bishop in the U.S. — wrote publicly on the subject; his brother Daniel Carroll (1730-1796) was a framer of the U.S. Constitution; and their second cousin Charles Carroll (1737-1832) was the only Catholic to sign the Declaration of Independence.

Still, non-Protestants often faced exclusion and outright persecution.

In the 17th century, Massachusetts hanged people for being Quakers; when the Declaration of Independence was signed, nine of the 13 colonies prohibited Catholics and Jews from holding office; in 1838, the governor of Missouri issued Executive Order 44, calling for the "extermination" of the Mormons; and during the 1830s, Protestant mobs burned convents and sacked churches during anti-Catholic riots.

"A lot of American Protestants didn't even think the Catholic Church was producing people who were going to make good citizens," explained Przybyszewski. "The Protestant view of Catholics was that this was a backward, superstitious, not really Christian church — which their faith had rejected centuries earlier."

Even the first Catholic U.S. president, John F. Kennedy (1917-1963), had to convince Protestant-majority America he would not answer to the pope: "I am not the Catholic candidate for president," Kennedy stressed. "I am the Democratic Party's candidate for president who happens also to be a Catholic. I do not speak for my church on public matters, and the Church does not speak for me."

Since May 2020, at least 410 anti-Catholic episodes have occurred throughout the country, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops notes.

"Incidents," the USCCB states, "include arson, statues beheaded, limbs cut, smashed, and painted, gravestones defaced with swastikas and anti-Catholic language and American flags next to them burned, and other destruction and vandalism."

The USCCB itemizes an annual list of religious freedom concerns; the latest edition was released in mid-February.

For 2026, those identified as "critical" are "political and anti-religious violence; unjust terms and conditions on federal grants, and unreliability of government; access to sacraments for ICE detainees and immigration enforcement at houses of worship; school choice and the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit; repeal of provisions that prevent religious organizations from participating in government programs; and further repudiation of gender ideology."

While present questions of religious liberty may seem discouraging, Breidenbach nonetheless sees a lesson in the revolutionary history the nation is celebrating.

"Catholics in colonial America were presumed dangerous until proven loyal. And to go from being suspected subjects of a king to trusted patriots in a new republic is a remarkable transformation," he emphasized.

"It's something that still needs to be retold; it needs to be revitalized," said Breidenbach. "Because — when we think about questions of religious liberty today — we need to firmly say that, whatever you think about a particular religion, one has to acknowledge that Catholics were founders and framers of this country."

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Eucharist transforms believers into Christ's body and counters division, pope says

Josephine Peterson
Catholic News Service

Participation in the Eucharist transforms believers into the Body of Christ and offers a remedy to the divisions affecting families and communities, Pope Leo XIV said during his weekly general audience June 24.

In his final general audience until Aug. 5, Pope Leo also encouraged young people to use the downtime of summer vacation to attend Mass, go to confession frequently, reflect on Scripture, go on spiritual retreats and pilgrimages and spend time with loved ones.

"Vacation is a time for rest and to seek signs of God in the beauty of creation," he said in his remarks to Polish-speaking visitors. He also asked people to pray for students so that they may "choose wisely" the schools and universities they will attend and "discern with prudence their vocation."

Continuing his series on the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the pope focused on "Sacrosanctum Concilium," the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, explaining how the Eucharist draws the faithful into deeper communion with God and one another.

Receiving Christ in the Eucharist transforms believers into the Body of Christ, whose head is the risen Lord seated at the right hand of the Father, the pope said.

"Thus, the Eucharist is the sacrament of the Kingdom that is to come," Pope Leo said.

The Eucharist teaches Catholics to adopt Christ's way of self-giving love and to be "drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other," he said.

"This gift draws us into the dynamic of unity, offering a powerful antidote to the forces of division that undermine our world, our communities, our families, and our hearts," he said.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy teaches that the faithful are called to "offer themselves in union with Jesus Christ" to the Father "through the hands of the priest and together with him," the pope said. Participation in the Eucharist also means being formed by God's word and "nourished at the table of the Lord's body."

The Eucharist cannot be separated from the Word of God, the pope said, noting that the liturgy and the Eucharist form "one single act of worship." Quoting Pope Benedict XVI, he said Scripture illuminates and explains the mystery of the Eucharist, while the Eucharist opens believers to a deeper understanding of Scripture.



Pope Leo XIV greets a child from the popemobile while riding around St. Peter's Square at the Vatican before his weekly general audience June 24, 2026.

CNS photo/Vatican Media

"This Word nourishes and sustains us together with the Eucharistic bread and leads us from the decay of sin to new life in Christ," Pope Leo said.

Referring to the Second Vatican Council's focus on giving Catholics greater access to Scripture, the pope pointed to the Lectionary — the book containing the biblical readings proclaimed at Mass — as a result of the council's liturgical reform. The expanded collection of readings used in the Church's liturgies today, he said, reflects the richness of the Church's living tradition, combining "fidelity to tradition with openness to legitimate progress."

"Dear brothers and sisters, let us draw with faith from this source of divine life and allow ourselves to be transformed by the mystery we celebrate," he said.



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Submit cover letter, resume, salary history, and five references with email address to: Stephen Koplyay by email of fax. SKoplyay@CovDio.org or 859-392-1589. EOE

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Other requirements include spiritual maturity, defined in part as an actively practicing Roman Catholic who is in good standing with the Church, regularly receives the sacraments, and is faithful to the magisterium and Church teaching; good facilitating, consulting, and leadership skills; and previous experience in paid or volunteer parish ministry.

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Bishops' spring public meeting culminates with charter vote, consecration to Sacred Heart

OSV News

The second day of public sessions at the U.S. bishops' spring plenary culminated with the much-anticipated consecration of the United States to the Sacred Heart of Jesus during a late afternoon Mass June 11 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of Mary, Queen of the Universe.

"It's about love of our country and wanting to dedicate our country to the Sacred Heart of Jesus," Bishop John Iffert of Covington said about the consecration, who attended meetings and the Mass. "We all recognize that there are aspects of our country where we need the healing of the blood of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to heal us and make us whole ... It's an expression of love of country, a desire for our country to be both strengthened and purified and a real expression of piety."

After concluding their public session agenda, the bishops left the Omni Resort in ChampionsGate for a half-hour drive up Interstate 4 to the spiritual refuge that is the shrine.

The Mass was a momentous one as it served to formally consecrate the United States to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as part of the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

The relics of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque — the French Visitation sister who experienced visions of Jesus revealing his Sacred Heart — were also present at the Mass, on loan from the Knights of Columbus for the consecration.

Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, incensed the altar after processing in from the thick humidity and cloudy skies of a typical Orlando afternoon outside the shrine. "Clothe us, Lord God, with the virtues of the heart of your son, and set us aflame with his love," he prayed in opening the Mass.

The Sacred Heart reconciles divisions and transforms hardened hearts, Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore said in his homily. He described consecration as an act of faith and acknowledgment of the need for God's mercy, wisdom and guidance, and also an act of hope.

"To consecrate ourselves to the Sacred Heart is ultimately to accept Christ's invitation to remain in His love and to allow that love to shape every aspect of our lives, public and private," Archbishop Lori said. "It is a declaration that the future does not belong merely to political movements, economic forces, or human plans. The future belongs to God."

Like the previous day, the June 11 public session began with prayer, followed by Archbishop Coakley congratulating two prelates on the anniversaries of their priestly ordinations:

— Archbishop Gabriele G. Caccia, the Italian-born apostolic nuncio to the U.S., who was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Milan on June 11, 1983.

— Retired Bishop James A. Tamayo, first bishop of Laredo, Texas (2000-2026), who was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Corpus Christi, Texas, on June 11, 1976.

Archbishop Coakley also noted the day marked the 75th anniversary of the episcopal ordination of Venerable Fulton J. Sheen, who is "soon to be Blessed Fulton Sheen." Appointed an auxiliary bishop for New York, he was ordained a bishop in Rome on June 11, 1951. Archbishop Sheen will be beatified Sept. 24 at a Mass in St. Louis.

In their first votes of the day, the bishops approved portions of two texts: a new edition of the Lectionary for Mass, which provides the Scripture readings and psalm for each day's liturgy; and the 2025 Roman Missal-Liturgy of the Hours Supplement.

The bishops then approved several updates to their land-

mark document on protection policies for children and minors, seeking to define key terms while balancing care for victim-survivors with accused clergy's right to a presumption of innocence until proven otherwise.

The revisions, preliminarily introduced June 10 during the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' spring plenary assembly in Orlando, passed by a two-thirds vote June 11 after a period of debate.

The changes will keep the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" focused "exclusively" on clergy abuse of minors, with a new document being developed to address abuse involving vulnerable adults, said Bishop Barry C. Kestout of Richmond, Virginia, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on the Protection of Children and Young People, in presenting the proposed revisions June 10.

Next, Bishop Oscar Cantú of San Jose, California, chairman of the bishops' Subcommittee on Hispanic/Latino Affairs, addressed his fellow bishops about preparations for the 500th anniversary of Our Lady of Guadalupe's appearance to St. Juan Diego in five years. U.S. dioceses will be participating in the Novena Intercontinental Guadalupana (Intercontinental Guadalupana Novena).

Four years ago, the Mexican Episcopal Conference began a "Novena of Years" in anticipation of the quinquennial, and they have invited all dioceses throughout the Americas to join them for the remaining five years leading to the quinquennial.

Catechetical materials already being used in Mexico are in the process of being translated into English for use in the United States, Bishop Cantú said.

Bishop William A. Wack of Pensacola-Tallahassee gave a presentation to the bishops on the Catholic Prison Ministry Coalition, urging his brother bishops to deepen their commitment to prison ministry. Joining him in the presentation was executive director Robert Cunningham, who highlighted the coalition's mission to support ministry for people affected by incarceration and detention.

Bishop Wack said his own involvement in prison ministry began during seminary formation as a Holy Cross priest, even though the work initially intimidated him. He started in youth detention facilities, later serving in jails and prisons and completing clinical pastoral education at a federal prison in California. Those experiences, he said, helped confirm his vocation to religious life and the priesthood.

As a bishop, administrative demands gradually reduced his prison visits. But a letter from a local prison prompted a change. The inmate wrote, "We need a shepherd," reminding him that incarcerated people remain part of the Church's flock.

Auxiliary Bishop Juan Miguel Betancourt of Hartford, Connecticut, speaking on behalf of a USCCB task force on the ongoing implementation of synodality in the life of the Church, provided the bishops June 11 with an update on



OSV News photo/Bob Roller

A clergyman swings a censer near a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as U.S. Catholic bishops consecrate the country to the Sacred Heart at the Basilica of Mary Queen of the Universe in Orlando, Fla., June 11, 2026, during their spring plenary assembly.

recent consultations on synodality with members of the episcopacy.

Experiences of synodality in dioceses presently include assessments of Mass times, workload of priests, resource allocation (including parish mergers and closures), opportunities for diocesan staff to gather for prayer, reflection and learning, as well as transfer from business-minded ethos to mission.

Looking ahead to the next phase of the synodal path for the universal Church, which includes national, continental and universal synodal assemblies for implementation of the final document of the synods on synodality approved by Pope Francis and made an official part of his magisterium.

In preparation for these assemblies, Bishop Betancourt noted that a delegation from the USCCB will be meeting with officials at the Vatican's General Secretariat of the Synod.

Later, as the bishops gathered at the Basilica of the National Shrine of Mary, Queen of the Universe, President Donald Trump issued a statement acknowledging the U.S. Catholic Church's consecration of the country to the Sacred Heart for its 250th anniversary.

Trump said he and first lady Melania Trump joined their prayers with the bishops. He called the consecration "a powerful moment in our national story and a poignant reminder that America has always been guided by the loving hand of God."

"Even in the centuries before the United States was conceived in nationhood, America was a land of prayer, a place of miracles, and home to some of the most faithful and devoted Christians to ever live," Trump said.

He noted the role of Catholics in the formation of this country, particularly Bishop John Carroll, the first Catholic bishop in the United States, and his cousin Charles Carroll, one of the Founding Fathers.

"We pray that America will continue for the next 250 years, and beyond," Trump said, "to be a land of faith, a country of miracles, and a light and glory to all nations."

Contributing to this story were Julie Asher, Gina Christian, Jean Gonzalez, Michael R. Heinlein, Laura Keener and Tony Gutiérrez.

Diocesan safe environment gets a new format and fresh updates

(Continued from page 3)

be VIRTUS compliant. A person in any supervising role must be compliant because that person needs to know who else must meet the requirement, she said. Volunteers or employees who work closely with children or vulnerable adults or have repeated interaction with them must be compliant.

For example, a person working a beer booth at a parish festival may not need to be VIRTUS compliant if that person does not work with children. But the people running children's games should be compliant. In schools, Mrs. Feinauer said, all volunteers must be compliant, whether they are helping in a classroom or spreading mulch outside, because they are volunteering in a school setting.

She also gave examples involving third-party contractors. A plumber who comes once to fix pipes should be supervised but may not need to be VIRTUS compliant. A

hired technology worker who is in the school or parish building every day would need to be compliant.

Mrs. Feinauer said the point is to focus on those who have ongoing access to children or vulnerable adults.

"Those one-offs, that's not our biggest concern," she said. "It's those with repeated interactions, and those people that are working closely with children."

The policy also reminds adults to be aware of what children may see or hear in parish and school settings. Mrs. Feinauer said that includes language, media, social media, films and materials on phones.

In 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops released its groundbreaking Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which required every diocese to establish policies, procedures and programs to educate and nurture the faithful on how to identi-

fy and report concerning behavior. In line with the Charter, since 2003 the Diocese of Covington has incorporated its safe environment policies and procedures into the life of all its parishes, schools, organizations and ministries. So, much of what is in the updated policy is not new.

"Many people already follow safe practices without thinking of them as 'safe environment' rules," said Mrs. Feinauer. The updated policy, she said, should confirm the good work already being done and make expectations easier to understand.

"I think most people do a really good job," Mrs. Feinauer said. "It just reaffirms what they're doing. It's just clearer cut."

To find the "Addressing Sexual Misconduct Policies and Procedures Booklet" online visit www.covdio.org/safe-environment and click on the title.

The friendship crisis

(Continued from page 5)

them. He listened to them. He allowed them to encounter him not as an idea but as a friend. Before his Passion, he told his disciples, "I no longer call you servants ... I have called you friends." What a simple and beautiful statement. The Son of God invites us into friendship.

This invitation also teaches us how to relate to one another. Christian friendship is not based on usefulness or convenience. It is rooted in genuine concern for another person. It remains present during moments of joy and moments of suffering. It is a simple call to love one another.

Our call is to be a place for communion and community. People do not simply need more programs or more events.

They need places where they can belong. They need communities where they can tell the truth about their lives without fear of judgment. They need friendships rooted in faith, trust and love.

The first Christians transformed the world not because they had impressive buildings or sophisticated strategies. They changed the world because people looked at them and said, "See how they love one another." That witness is just as powerful today.

The antidote to loneliness is not merely connection. It is communion. Communion begins when we have the courage to know another person deeply and allow ourselves to be known in return. It grows when we choose presence over performance, honesty over image, and friendship over convenience.

The loneliness epidemic is real. But so is the Christian answer. Perhaps what our world needs most right now is not another platform, another app or another strategy. Perhaps what it needs is to dig deeper on how we can be in true relationship with each other and regain the deep joy of not walking alone.

This is scary, but I feel the deep call to respond to the call and invite others to remind ourselves that, as Mother Teresa said, we belong to each other.

Vicente Del Real is the founder and CEO of Iskali, a Catholic nonprofit dedicated to forming and empowering young Latino leaders. He writes from Chicago, where he leads Iskali's mission of faith, service and community. This column was written in collaboration with Maria De Leon-Sanchez.

Protecting God's Children for Adults Safe Environment Trainings

For all employees and volunteers of the Diocese of Covington who in any way provide a safe environment for children.

Step 1: Contact parish/school institution leader to review the Policies and Procedures and fill out the Application and Acceptance Forms.

Step 2: Go to www.virtus.org and click on Registration. Follow the prompts to create an account and to request a background check. Selection.com is a secure site; the background check is

posted on your account and you receive a copy if you request it during the registration process. You will sign up for a VIRTUS training class during the registration.

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 unless your computer program blocks them.

Bulletins:

■ May bulletin: posted Sunday, June 7; due Tuesday, July 8.

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

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.

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■ 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.

For other difficulties, contact Lynn Weisgerber at (859) 392-1565 or lweisgerber@covdio.org

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National/World

DOJ to join Dominicans' suit on NY gender identity law for long-term care facilities

WASHINGTON — The Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne, who operate Rosary Hill, a 42-bed palliative care home for poor, terminally ill cancer patients, will have a co-plaintiff in their religious freedom lawsuit against New York state: The U.S. Department of Justice. The DOJ has moved to join the sisters' challenge to a 2024 New York law known as the Long-Term Care Facility Residents' Bill of Rights for LGBTQ+ New Yorkers and People Living with HIV. The law requires long-term care facilities to use residents' preferred pronouns and assign rooms based on gender identity. The lawsuit was filed April 6 in U.S. District Court in White Plains by the Idaho-based law firm First & Fourteenth. Defendants include New York Gov. Kathy Hochul and four officials with the state Department of Health. The Justice Department's intervention is being handled by its Civil Rights Division, led by Assistant Attorney General Harmeet K. Dillon. In a June 18 statement, Dillon said states cannot force Americans to abandon their religious beliefs "in the name of woke gender ideology." A hearing date has not yet been set. New York state is expected to seek dismissal of the lawsuit.

French bishops launch prayer novena ahead of key 'assisted-dying' vote

PARIS — The bishops of France are urging the faithful to take part in a prayer novena that began June 21, as lawmakers move closer to a pivotal vote on legislation that could permanently legalize assisted dying. The measure returned to the National Assembly on June 22 for a third reading. Lawmakers are expected to vote June 30 on a proposal that supporters say would establish a legal right to die, while opponents warn it would mark a major shift in the country's approach to end-of-life care. The debate has been one of the most contested social issues in France in recent years. On June 22, the Alliance Vita movement organized a national rally near the National Assembly in Paris, and the collective Les Éligibles et leurs Aidants, which brings together people with disabilities and their caregivers, planned a gathering for June 23. Efforts to create a legal framework for assisted dying have sparked political and ethical disputes and have moved through a lengthy legislative process since 2022. If approved June 30, the bill will return briefly to the Senate before a final National Assembly vote scheduled for July 15.

As fuel shortages deepen Cuba's humanitarian crisis, nuns struggle to sustain ministries

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador — Religious sisters in Cuba say ongoing electricity shortages are threatening key church ministries, including the production of Communion hosts for every Catholic parish on the island. In a message shared with priests and made public June 3, the Discalced Carmelites in Havana said limited power supplies have made it difficult to operate the equipment used to produce the hosts. The sisters said remaining supplies will be rationed to ensure they last as long as possible. The shortages come amid a broader crisis affecting daily life across Cuba. Sister Noemy Ayala, a Carmelite Sister of St. Joseph in Havana, said religious communities face the same struggles as other Cubans, including difficulty obtaining food and other necessities needed to carry out their mission. Church leaders warn the situation is taking a toll on religious life. In a May 20 interview, Bishop Arturo González Amador, president of the Cuban bishops' conference, said some religious communities have been forced to leave the country after being unable to secure basic resources for ministry. He did not specify how many had departed. The bishop described the shortages of food, water, fuel and medicine, along with concerns about conflict, as bringing Cuba to what he called its "saddest moment."

New Mexico diocese fights to save holy site from 'desecration' for border wall

LAS CRUCES, N.M. — A New Mexico diocese is citing religious freedom violations as it continues to counter the Trump administration's advancing efforts to seize land from a pilgrimage site for building a sector of the U.S.-Mexico border wall. "This affront to religious liberty cannot stand," said the Diocese of Las Cruces in a June 19 opposition response filed in U.S. District Court for the District of New Mexico. Along with the response, Bishop Peter Baldacchino of Las Cruces; Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas; and Bishop Michael Buerkel Hunn of the Albuquerque, New Mexico-based Episcopal Diocese of Rio Grande, filed June 19 declarations in support of the diocese's challenge. The documents were the latest filings in a federal government lawsuit claiming eminent domain — or government power to seize private property for public use, with "just compensation" as required by the Fifth Amendment — over some 14 acres that include Mount Cristo Rey in Sunland Park, New Mexico. The peak, capped by a 29-foot limestone stat-

ue of Jesus Christ, has been a place of prayer for close to a century. In his court declaration, Bishop Baldacchino stressed the government's plans for the site contravened Catholic teaching and U.S. religious freedom protections, while putting him at odds with canon law over disposition of Church property. Above all, said the bishop, "the erection of a physical symbol of division and dehumanization on the holy site of Mount Cristo Rey would shatter the sacredness of that cherished place, especially where there are alternative means of patrolling the border."

Tickets for Sheen beatification, related events available starting week of June 22

PEORIA, Ill. — Tickets for Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen's Sept. 24 beatification in St. Louis and events surrounding the historic celebration will be available starting the week of June 22 through the Archbishop Fulton Sheen Foundation website at celebratesheen.com. The site includes a schedule of various events related to the beatification in St. Louis and the Peoria Diocese, and which require tickets. Bishop Louis Tylka of Peoria announced the ticket availability with "profound joy and gratitude" in a June 18 letter to friends of the foundation. The beatification "is a historic moment for the Diocese of Peoria, and the Church throughout the United States and around the world," he said. The Illinois diocese is where Archbishop Sheen was born, ordained and first served as a priest. "I encourage everyone to begin considering how they can make this historic moment meaningful in their own lives," Bishop Tylka said. "I invite you to review the schedule, prayerfully discern which events you would like to attend, and begin planning your pilgrimage now." The beatification will take place at 2 p.m. in St. Louis at The Dome at America's Center, with Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, a pro-prefect in the Dicastery for Evangelization, presiding.

AI models overlook religion, but also favor some faiths — including Catholicism

PROVO, Utah — If you're using a chatbot to help with life's decisions, the answers aren't necessarily going to include religion — and if they do, some faiths are more likely than others to get top billing in certain query results. Those findings were highlighted in several research papers on artificial intelligence

released in May by scholars from the Consortium for Evaluating Faith and Ethics in AI. The consortium — a partnership among Brigham Young University, Baylor University, the University of Notre Dame and Yeshiva University — debuted May 26 during the Summit on AI Ethics in Athens, Greece. The May 25-28 gathering kicked off the same day Pope Leo XIV released his encyclical on AI. One of the consortium research papers identified what it called the "omissive bias" displayed by large language models with respect to religion, which was only invoked in a philosophical sense but not in response to questions about "practical personal situations." In a second consortium paper, researchers observed that 20 commercial and open-source LLMs favored certain faiths — the Catholic, Bahá'í and Sikh religions — when asked if the user should convert from one to another faith. With some 75% of the world population identifying with a religion, both papers stressed the need for better development of LLMs to reflect the global importance of religious belief and practice.

As DeWine announces death penalty opposition, Catholic advocates urge further action

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Gov. Mike DeWine announced June 16 his opposition to capital punishment, as Catholic opponents of the practice urged him to end the practice in the state before he leaves office. During his time in the U.S. House and Senate, DeWine supported legislation that expanded the use of the death penalty, and as a previous attorney general in Ohio, he oversaw capital cases. But DeWine has postponed every execution since he took office as governor in 2019. "I believed that in some cases capital punishment could serve as a deterrent to keep some people from killing," DeWine said at a press conference. "It is impossible today to make the case that the death penalty is a deterrent," DeWine continued. "I no longer believe the death penalty is a deterrent to murder." Opponents of the practice have pushed DeWine, a Republican whose term ends in January, to support their effort to end capital punishment during his final months in office. Brian Hickey, executive director of the Catholic Conference of Ohio, said in a June 16 statement that DeWine "is correct that Ohio should not kill human beings, given the flawed system of execution."



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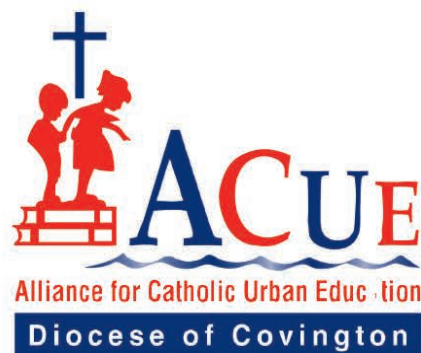
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