

2	Deacon rededication vespers
2	Strategic planning process Governance fall session
2	Catholic Family Night
3	Deanery Council Name change and update
3	Bishop Iffert in Africa
6	Hispanic ministry
7	Parish festivals
13	Obituary Sister Ann Middendorf, OSB
16	Seminarians Back to school

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

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



(far left) A student at St. Edward School greets Father Joseph Rielage and his dog, the unofficial school mascot, Maggie, on the way into school.
(left) A young preschooler inspects his locker closely.
(below, left) Friends reconnect after a summer apart while waiting for the school day to officially begin.
(below) Students bow their heads in prayer as Father Rielage leads them in prayer for a safe first day.

Bailey photos



(above) Siblings hug and smile for the camera in "First Day of School" glasses.
(above, right) Eighth graders at St. Joseph School smile excitedly with their Blue Jay mascots before heading into school for their last first day.
(right) A middle school student at St. Joseph School organizes his pencil pouch, holding a handful of red and blue pens.
(far right) Students were tasked with a new assignment early on the first day of school, to find their and their classmates names in a wordsearch. One student points at the word search laughing when the realization occurs that her name is in the wordsearch.



Another year begins as educators embark on the mission of Catholic education

Students, teachers and administrators across the Diocese of Covington return to school at the end of August, with St. Edward School, Cynthiana, being the first to return on August 10. The last group of schools are set to return on August 19.

Every year, Bishop Iffert reminds principals and teachers at their commissioning, that they are his coworkers in the largest ministry of the Diocese — Catholic education. And at the Mass to open the new school year he said to them in his homily, "We all want to make a difference in the world, in our schools, in the lives of young people

... none of us will be able to make a difference if we go at it alone."

As the school year begins and families become enwrapped in schedules, homework and sports, it is important to remember the central ideas of Catholic education: community, togetherness and most importantly faith.

"This is the way forward for our young people," said Bishop Iffert, "to act out of faith, and to foster that faith in ourselves and the young people we serve."

Bishop Iffert reflects on the virtue of hope at deacon rededication vespers

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

On Aug. 10, deacons from across the diocese gathered with Bishop John Iffert, their wives, fellow clergy, family and friends for solemn vespers at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. The vespers, celebrated on the Feast of St. Lawrence, Roman martyr and deacon, celebrated the rededication of the deacons to their diaconal promises of obedience, respect and commitment to sharing the word of God.

Bishop Iffert, who led the vespers, addressed the deacons in his homily. He told the story of a man he'd met the day before. George, who was concerned for his son, set up to accompany him in prayer — committing to praying all four sets of mysteries of the Rosary daily.

Bishop Iffert said that George told him that, "Until this point in my life, I never really thought that I ought to be trying to be a saint. ... It never really occurred to me that it was something I should be trying to do with my life, or that it was even possible. And now, it's all I think about."

"That conversation with that man reminded me of the virtue of hope," said Bishop Iffert.

"We have to believe that it is possible for us to be saints. We have to believe — and even longing for the desired possibility of being a martyr like Lawrence — that we might be capable of laying our lives down for the poor," he said.

Speaking more directly to the deacons present, he continued, "We have to believe that it's capable for all of us here who share in Holy Orders that have been

ordained deacons. We have to believe that it's possible for us to serve the Word of God with our whole heart."

"Our hope is Christ Jesus the Lord," Bishop Iffert said. "His charity, his grace, is what makes it possible for us both to know that we might live worthily according to these orders we have received and that without him, we are almost certain going to fail."

Baker photos



(above) Bishop John Iffert addresses deacons during his homily at the Deacon rededication vespers, Aug. 10.

(left) As part of the vespers, Deacons stand to renew their diaconal promises.

Diocesan strategic planning process prepares for fall session on governance

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

The public portion of the Diocese of Covington's spring strategic planning process has all but concluded, with Bishop John Iffert preparing to hear the priorities identified from the three commission.

"The committees have brought their data forward, and probably in the next two weeks we should have a good idea on the priorities that have bubbled up across the three commissions," said Deacon Jim Fortner, chief operation officer for the Diocese of Covington. "Then, we will draft the priorities based on what we heard. We are going to review that with the commission leaders," he said, "Then they look at it and then they make adjustments based on what they heard."

Once the commission leaders, Deacon Fortner and the strategic planning consultants are aligned on the identified positions, they will be presented to Bishop Iffert. His feedback will then be taken back to the commission leaders for an update. At the end of this process, "we got the priorities ready to go, publish, and then we work on the actual plan underneath it. So, we'll have the goals, priorities, and then we'll have an actual planning team...their job is to then take it into a specific action plan," said Deacon Fortner.

A key element of the strategic planning process so far has been the input of the faithful throughout the diocese, with lay leaders, clergy and religious

all coming together. "It's been beautiful," said Deacon Fortner, "you're putting responsibility on the people to help us make these decisions." He continued saying, "It's been phenomenal. The amount of support that we got, the passion from people has been invigorating because folks recognize that this is a big opportunity to provide input into a strategic plan," he said.

Part of the spring's strategic planning process was gathering data, both quantitative and qualitative, in the form of

anecdotal evidence from committee members. Deacon Fortner referred to the data gathered as, "rich insights," which was gathered by, "listening to people, looking at other diocese, which we've done across the board," he said. This data, and the priorities identified from it, will be key when beginning the fall portion of the strategic planning for diocesan governance.

"We started with the spring commissions, they give input on what they need from the Curia," said Deacon Fortner. "That's why it was really important to start with those spring commissions and let that feed the Curia."

"This is a synodal process," said Deacon Fortner, "at the end of the day, this is all about salvation of souls, this is all about leading people to a sacramental lifestyle. Everything we do in this strategy work needs to ultimately lead to that."

Diocesan Governance Commission

The Diocese of Covington's fall strategic planning will focus on Diocesan Governance and will be split into four sub-committees:

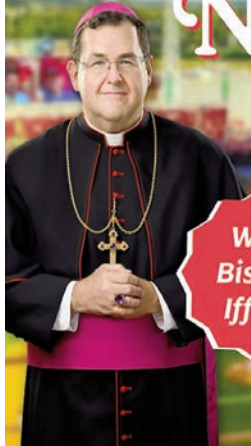
Departments and Ministries

Finance, Revenue and Allocations

Shared Services

Communications

Each sub-committee will meet on at least four separate occasions to discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for their topic, research and benchmarking best practices, setting benchmarks and a final meeting to draft goals. These meetings will help the sub-committee chairs discern the best path forward for the Diocese on their specific focus area.



Catholic Family Night Sept. 5 at Great American Ballpark

Watch the Reds take on the Brewers as the Diocese of Covington and Archdiocese of Cincinnati celebrate "Love in Action"

With Bishop Iffert!



Calling all Reds fans — join Bishop John Iffert and Archbishop Robert Casey in cheering on the Cincinnati Reds at Catholic Family Night, Sept. 5. Grab your discounted tickets early to participate in the pre-game field parade. To buy tickets scan the QR code.

Diocesan Pastoral Council and Deanery Council receive name changes, other changes

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Changes were announced at a Deanery Council meeting, Aug. 8, affecting both the Deanery Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council — with their name changes, Deanery Pastoral Council becoming Deanery Council and Diocesan Council becoming the Diocesan Pastoral Council, being the first distinction made.

“Both councils go along with the notion of synodality,” according to Jamie Schroeder, chancellor, “as well as consultation and walking together in terms of decision making and discernment about issues that impact the diocese and the local Church.”

The Deanery Council — which consists of “deans” from

each deanery in the diocese, two lay representatives from each parish and a representative of clergy and religious from each deanery as well — as well as the Diocesan Pastoral Council, consisting of two of the lay representatives as well as the Vicar for Religious and Vicar General, both communicate and collaborate with the bishop and the chancery regarding the needs of the parishes and the diocese at large.

Lay members of both councils are chosen typically from their parish councils, so that they may serve as direct liaisons.

The name change was done in an effort to “distinguish” between the two councils, according to Mrs. Schroeder, as the Diocesan Pastoral Council was established later by

Bishop John Iffert to allow for more open dialogue with lay people — and the names had previously caused confusion.

In addition to the change of names, it was announced at the meeting that deans, while remaining in leadership positions, can now delegate leadership responsibilities, such as “the logistical and practical duties of leading the deanery council” to Diocesan Pastoral Council members as they deem fit or necessary at their discretion.

“So many things happen in the Church behind the scenes,” Mrs. Schroeder said, “and your average person in the pew doesn’t realize that that’s happening. I think it’s good when the lay people of the diocese can stay informed of these changes at work.”

Bishop Iffert returns to United States from Africa, having met with local Church, faithful

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

From July 12 to August 3, Bishop John Iffert travelled halfway across the globe to Africa. His trip took him to the countries of Kenya and Madagascar on the East side of the continent, where he met with African bishops and religious sisters, visited the humanitarian compound Akamasoa (“good friends” in Malagasy) in Madagascar and even encountered briefly wildlife such as a white rhino in Kenya and lemurs in Madagascar.

As a member of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Subcommittee for Solidarity with the Church in Africa, Bishop Iffert’s trip first had him attending a meeting of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya.

With one session every three years, Catholic bishops from Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and associate members Somalia and Djibouti all come together. This year, Bishop Iffert alongside USCCB consultant Fritz Zuger, attended the session for dialogue on how the USCCB Subcommittee for Solidarity with the Church in Africa’s yearly national collection — which generates three and a half million dollars annually given as grants to the Church in Africa — can best support the needs of the people in these nations. While the Diocese of Covington has previously never taken the subcommittee’s collection for Africa, the diocese plans to begin taking it in 2027 as part of the international missions collection, according to Bishop Iffert.

“This year, the plenary session focused on accompanying young people,” Bishop Iffert said. “Young people from all of these countries came to Nairobi to give their input to the bishops on how they thought the Church could better accompany them as young Catholics.”

While in Nairobi, Bishop Iffert also visited the Sisters of Notre Dame there.

“The Sisters of Notre Dame were founded in East Africa by two sisters from Covington and two from California,” he said, “and started their presence there.”

The Sisters of Notre Dame now have their own province



ACI Africa/AMECEA

(above) Bishop John Iffert interviews with media while in Nairobi, Kenya. As a member of the USCCB’s Subcommittee for Solidarity with the Church in Africa, Bishop Iffert met with East African bishops, religious and laity during a trip to the continent, July 12 to August 3.



ACI Africa/AMECEA

Bishop Iffert speaks at the plenary session of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Africa (AMECEA). Meeting every three years, AMECEA consists of Catholic bishops from Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and associate members Somalia and Djibouti.

The late Pope Francis, who visited Akamasoa himself in 2021, said “This is what one priest can accomplish. This is what one life can accomplish when they follow the will of God,” Bishop Iffert quoted.

“It was just extraordinary,” Bishop Iffert said, reflecting on a Mass of around 5,000 people held at the parish in Akamasoa. “Madagascar is the ninth poorest country in



Submitted

(above) In Nairobi, Bishop Iffert was able to meet with the Sisters of Notre Dame. Two SNDs from Covington and two from California were the founders of the Order in Eastern Africa. Picture is Bishop Iffert with the Sisters from the House of Studies in Nairobi.

in East Africa, with Bishop Iffert visiting one of their houses of studies and one of their schools.

After Nairobi, Bishop Iffert and Mr. Zuger flew to the island nation of Madagascar, where they visited the National Episcopal Conference there — meeting with Malagasy bishops and staff of the conference and Catholic Relief Services and continuing dialogue of how the USCCB can best assist the nation’s needs.

“The whole mission was to get to know people,” Bishop Iffert said, “to get to know the Church and again to help them understand what our program can do and how we can help them.”

Bishop Iffert’s final visit on the trip was to Akamasoa. Founded in 1989 by Vincentian missionary Father Pedro Opeka, the compound of houses built to aid Madagascar’s poor has turned into a proper community and humanitarian effort — providing food, shelter and education.

the world ... extraordinary poverty, and they’re really struggling to develop. There’s a lot of political corruption there.”

Bishop Iffert commented further on the volunteers and missionaries at Akamasoa. “Just so many good people,” he said, “So many holy people who want to contribute to the life of this church. It was a wonderful visit.”



Bishop's Schedule

- Aug. 15**
Mass of First Vows, St. Joseph the Worker Sister Philomena Marie, The Motherhouse, Walton, 10:30 a.m.
- Aug. 15**
Vigil Mass, Solemnity of the Feast of the Assumption, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 4:30 p.m.
- Aug. 16**
Installation Mass Father James Schaeper, St. Joseph Parish, Warsaw, 10 a.m.
- Aug. 18–19**
CCK/Province meeting, Archdiocese of Louisville

- Aug. 20**
Catholic Charities Board meeting, 1 p.m.
- Monthly Priest Holy Hour, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 3 p.m.
- DPAA celebration, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington, 6 p.m.
- Aug. 23**
Catholic Charities Cassba, Drees Pavilion, Covington, 1 p.m.

Pope Leo says Sunday is ‘foundation and kernel’ of liturgical year

Josephine Peterson
Catholic News Service

Pope Leo XIV urged Catholics to gather in person for Sunday Mass and called for working conditions that allow people to attend, saying Sunday is “the foundation and kernel of the whole liturgical year.”

“To sanctify Sunday, it is essential to celebrate the Eucharist,” the pope said at his Aug. 12 general audience in St. Peter’s Basilica. “In this regard, I urge everyone to seek the best possible conditions so that even those who are unable to take time off work on Sundays may take part in Holy Mass.”

Continuing his series on the documents of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Leo reflected on ‘Sacrosanctum Concilium,’ the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. The liturgical year is not a static representation of past events, but an ongoing encounter with Christ, he said.

At its core is Easter, when Christ rose from the dead, and for that reason, the pope said, it is “essential for the faithful to sanctify the Lord’s Day by gathering to celebrate the Eucharist.”

“May our active participation and steadfast witness help us to enter ever more deeply into the reality of belonging to Christ, and may we anticipate with hope his coming in glory,” he said in his remarks to English-speaking pilgrims.

Pope Leo recalled St. John Paul II’s description of Sunday as the “weekly Easter” and “the day of the Lord, the day of the Church, the day of man and, finally, the ‘day of days.’”

Even in languages such as English and German, where the name for Sunday refers to the “day of the sun,” Pope Leo said Christians can discern a reference to Christ, “the true ‘sun of righteousness’ who enlightens every person.”

Listening to the word of God, receiving the body of Christ and gathering together on Sundays, the pope said, allow “the Christian community” to make “visible its communion with the Lord” and bear witness to its fidelity to Christ and the Church.

“This assembly cannot be substituted by a solely virtual presence, nor can it be reduced to a merely passive gathering,” he said, stressing that the liturgical assembly is fulfilled through the active participation of the faithful.

Addressing Spanish-speaking pilgrims, Pope Leo also expressed his closeness to people affected by the powerful



Pope Leo XIV talks to visitors and pilgrims during his weekly general audience in St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican Aug. 12, 2026.

earthquake that struck western Colombia Aug. 10, killing hundreds and leaving many others injured or missing. Rescue efforts are still underway.

“While I pray to the Lord for the eternal rest of the deceased, I assure you of my prayers for their families and all those affected by this tragedy,” he said. “I express my gratitude to all those working in the rescue efforts and providing assistance to the victims.”



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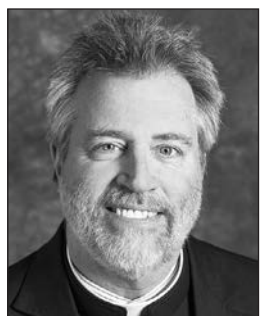
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Gratefulness to God

The readings for the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle A — are: Isaiah 56:1. 6–7, Romans 11:13–15, 29–32 and Matthew 15:21–28.

As we continue our way through Matthew's Gospel, we come to the surprising story of Jesus and the Canaanite woman, surprising, not just because Jesus speaks to her in a manner that seems offensive to us (and likely to her

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Stephen Bankemper

as well), but also because just two verses later he pays her the highest compliment he pays to anyone in the Gospels.

To get a better feel for this encounter, we should remind ourselves of how the apostles might have viewed this woman. Matthew tells us that she was from the region of Tyre and Sidon, places not high in the esteem of the Jews. Further, she was a Canaanite woman. Besides the fact that

Canaanites worshipped pagan gods, the Jews' opinion of them is reflected in the book of Wisdom:

"Those who dwelt of old in thy holy land/ thou didst hate for their detestable practices,/ their works of sorcery and unholy rites,/ their merciless slaughter of children,/ and their sacrificial feasting on human flesh and blood." (Wis 12:3-5a)

This was the woman the apostles saw crying to Jesus for mercy.

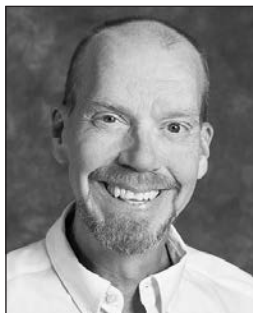
Many have struggled with Jesus' treatment of her: first ignoring her, then dismissing her request to the apostles, and finally dismissing her to her face with his comment about taking bread meant for children and throwing it to dogs. Yet she does not back down from Jesus, but uses His term to further argue for her request.

It is worthwhile considering her rejoinder to Jesus. Instead of taking offense, she merely answers, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Whether or not she finds Jesus' words objectionable, she is in fact acknowledging the truth of his comment: she is not a Jew and does not have the same claim on Jesus that the Jews have. Yet she is not asking for salvation or to be part of the covenant — the "bread" that belongs to the children. She is asking only for freedom for her daughter — a "scrap" that even an unworthy Canaanite woman might eat from the floor beneath the table. And her insistence leads Jesus to praise her with his highest praise: "O woman, great is your faith!"

We Catholics — especially we "cradle" Catholics — are subject to the temptation to take our membership in the Catholic Church for granted. We can forget that we do not have a right to be Catholic, that it is an undeserved grace. Our baptism into Christ's salvation, the opportunity to have our sins forgiven and wiped away, the ability to worship God with "the sacrifice acceptable to him," these are astounding graces. In our society in this time there is very prevalent the attitude that "we all worship the same God," that "all religions are the same," but, in fact, all religions are not the same. We are, through no merit of our own, members of the Church begun by Jesus. We offer his true sacrifice on our altars, we receive his true Body and Blood in Holy Communion, we receive his Holy Spirit in the sacraments, especially Confirmation. Those things do not make us better than anyone, they make us undeservedly blessed. Let us always (hopefully eternally) be grateful to God and use these graces to serve him with all our hearts.

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

BELIEVE, TEACH, PRACTICE



Deacon Timothy Britt

"To have and to hold" are words we use in the Catholic Rite of Marriage. After the priest or deacon asks the couple about their freedom in choosing marriage, faithfulness to each other and openness to children he will invite the couple to declare their consent before God and his Church

The church gives bride and groom options of what they would like to say and one option is, "to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part."

I came across a stand-up comedian by the name of Marcus D. Wiley who says, "I've been married 27

years, and I just found out this summer what 'to have and to hold' means."

And then he goes on to tell a story about his 94 year old grandmother who called him and told him that there's something's wrong with her washer.

Marcus Wiley says that, "because I don't have patience, because I don't have a whole lot of time, I get right up, and I run to this appliance store because I'm just about to get a new one. I don't want to, you know, have to mess around with this old thing. I'm about to get a new one.

And so I'm in the appliance store and I'm looking, I'm pricing, and I call my granny. I say, 'Granny, how long y'all had that washer?'

She said, 'Oh, we got it in '78.'

I said, 'And it just broke?'

She said, 'No, it gave us a problem a time or two, but your pawpaw had it under warranty with Sears and Roebuck.'

And then grandma asks Marcus 'But why are you at the appliance store?'

He said, 'Gran, because you told me the washer broke.'

She said, 'Nah, ain't nothing wrong with it. It just

needs to be fixed.'"

And then Marcus Wiley says something like, "You men are around here thinking something's wrong with your wife. You women are around here thinking something's wrong with your husband. But according to my granny's theology, ain't nothing wrong with either of them. They just need to be fixed. We are living in a generation that's good at having and horrible at holding."

Thinking about this a little bit made me wonder if Jesus might be to Christian marriage what Sears and Roebuck' extended warranty is to Marcus Wiley's grandmother's washing machine. Because when she and paw-paw bought that washer back in '78 at Sears and Roebuck they got it planning on it being around for awhile. Knowing how things wear out, get broken, stop working, need to be fixed, they got the extended warranty. They had that washing machine and they were planning on holding onto it.

To have and to hold.

For those of us who enter into a Christian marriage, we do so with every intention of living in that relationship 'for as long as we both shall live.' But we know how things wear out, get broken, stop working or need to be fixed. We invite him into our marriage because we acknowledge our sinfulness, our brokenness. According to Marcus Wiley's grandmother's theology that's not what's wrong with us — that's our human condition — we all live in a state of needing to be fixed in one way or another.

And on top of that, as surely as Marcus Wiley's grandparents had no idea how to fix a washing machine, we have no idea how to fix a broken spouse.

The thing is that it's not our job as husband or wife to fix our spouse. It's our job to remember that we've got the extended warranty. It's our job to keep Jesus alive in our marriage, to keep him alive in the heart and mind of our chosen spouse, to keep him close and to let him do what we can't do without him.

And what we can't do is take a spouse into our lives to have and to hold, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until death do we part.

Deacon Timothy Britt is assigned to St. Mary Parish, Alexandria, Ky

What is the 'common good,' anyway?

My social media feeds have recently been full of discussions of "the common good." It is mostly driven by advocates of "classical liberalism" or libertarianism, who essentially negatively equate common good with something like totalitarian collectivism.

GUEST



Kenneth Craycraft

And, of course (it's social media after all), defenders of common good have been energetic in their replies. The problem, however, is that these two groups are talking past one another. This is largely because "the common good" is so difficult to define, even in Church documents such as the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

As a threshold matter, the common good is a non-negotiable aspect of the Church's moral teaching, as one of the four pillars (with dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity) of Catholic social doctrine. "Gaudium et Spes" explains that the "political community exists ... for the sake of the common good, in which it finds its full justification and significance, and the source of its inherent legitimacy."

The Catechism describes common good as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily." This fulfillment, of course, is not met merely by the attainment of material goods.

Certainly, for the common good to be achieved, certain levels of material wealth and economic vitality are required. Some quantifiable goods such as access to housing, health care, education, nutrition and leisure to worship are necessary constitutive elements of common good. But common good is not achieved merely by the attainment of a minimum level of material prosperity. It cannot be reduced to a calculation or spreadsheet.

Nor is common good simply the measure of the distribution (or redistribution) of wealth. Significant disparities of wealth may be an indicator that common good has not been achieved in a particular political economy. And certain tools for regulating wealth accumulation or effecting redistribution may be necessary constitutive elements of common good.

But absent a host of other goods — some quantifiable and some not — merely redistributing wealth to achieve something like relative equality will not achieve common good. Common good is not simply another name for some goal of the welfare state or a result of redistributive regulatory structures.

Perhaps the best we can do, then, is describe aspects of our lives together that are consistent with dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity — the other three of the four pillars of Catholic Social Doctrine — and conclude that the extent to which we can achieve policies consistent with those values, we have approximated common good.

Put another way, perhaps the best way to define common good is as a state of affairs in which dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity are acknowledged and approximately achieved.

To define common good in this way is a concession to both hurdles above. But it is still a useful definition. If, theoretically, we live in a society in which true visions of dignity, solidarity, and subsidiarity are observed and achieved, it seems almost necessarily to follow that common good would obtain.

Because the good is "common," it cannot be diminished by being shared. The social conditions by which the human person is able to pursue fulfillment must be the same for all, or else it is not common.

Nor is it divisible, as though some people may have a greater quantity of "common" good than others. To be sure, common good may be approximated even in the presence of some degree of inequality. But common good itself — and the minimum social conditions that make it possible — must be available to all. This is the mandate

(Continued on page 14)

Hispanic ministry grows in the Diocese of Covington, new programs make a difference

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

It has been almost one year since the Diocese of Covington hired Silvia Schmidt, the diocesan Hispanic minister. Since the beginning of her tenure, Mrs. Schmidt has made great strides, acting as a bridge between the Spanish speaking community and the larger diocesan community. As a result of her work, there has been higher attendance of Spanish-speaking individuals at youth ministry events, more Spanish faith formation opportunities and an ever-growing love of Christ's Church throughout the Diocese.

The role of the hispanic minister in the Diocese is to, "support families in their spiritual journey and facilitate their integration into local parishes," according to Mrs. Schmidt's pastoral plan. In working towards this goal, Mrs. Schmidt has brought programs to the Diocese with the goal of helping children and adults grow in a personal relationship with Christ. One such program is Emmaus Retreats, for both men and women. These healing retreats offer a respite from everyday life and help participants "really feel God's love," so that they become "on fire for God," said Mrs. Schmidt.

The men's Emmaus Retreat concluded at the end of July and was hosted by a group from Miami, with the idea that "once you receive it, you give it," said Ms. Schmidt. "It's the beginning of something that will stay in the Diocese," she explained.

The retreats become self-sustaining, with previous retreatants hosting the next retreat for the next group of people. Through this model, the men who recently completed their retreat will host the women's retreat.

"It's a true witness of that they really care, and it's a true camaraderie between them, but on fire for God. It was just, for me, that was in itself a true witness," said Mrs. Schmidt who participated in an Emmaus Retreat in Miami.

Cristo Rey Parish, Florence, hosted the men's and will host the women's retreat, however parishioners from any parish are welcome to attend. More details will be announced regarding the women's Emmaus Retreat.

In addition to these retreats, Mrs. Schmidt has also introduced programs offered by the Southeast Pastoral Institute (SEPI). SEPI is U.S. Catholic Bishops regional office for Hispanic Ministry. Their programs will train "the adults, the catechists, the parents, all the adults who deal with children ... people train the adults in these parishes who might interact with kids, for those adults to go back and kind of put what they learned into practice," said Mrs. Schmidt.

The programs will be held for identified staff members at five Diocesan parishes with hispanic populations. Mrs. Schmidt hopes that the program will help "establish that children ... have that personal relationship with God. It's not just a checklist for sacraments, but 'this God is a real

person for me that I can go talk to,'" she said. "To strengthen the child's sense of belonging in the Church, participating actively in the Mass," she said.

As hispanic ministry continues to grow in the Diocese of

Covington, so too does the body of Christ continue to grow on earth in Covington. Emboldened in the pursuit of relationship with Christ, communion with Christ and community with one another.



(above) One part of the Southeast Pastoral Institute program coming to the Diocese of Covington will be discovering ways to get youth more involved in the celebration of Mass, like altar serving.

(below) Silvia Schmidt, diocesan Hispanic minister, leads a children's Bible class at St. Anthony Parish, Taylor Mill. Children from the parish, along with their parents, gathered to listen to Bible stories.



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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.

Notre Dame Urban Education Center, Covington, is seeking adult volunteers to tutor children in grades K-8 one day a week in the Homework Plus Program, Monday–Thursday, 3–5 p.m. The program runs Sept. 8, 2026–May 13, 2027. Volunteers must be Virtus trained and compliant. Contact Brandi at (859) 630-9475 or blenihan@nduec.org for information.

St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky is in urgent need of Call Center volunteers to answer calls for assistance. On average, we receive over 1,700 calls each month. Shifts are available M-F, 10 a.m.–noon and noon–2 p.m. Training and initial shifts at our Erlanger location, with remote volunteering possible after. Must be 18+ years old. Background check (provided) required. Visit www.svdpnky.org/volunteer to register.

Volunteers needed at St. Vincent de Paul NKY’s Erlanger Food Pantry. Volunteers assist neighbors as they shop and keep the shelves stocked. More than 300 families are served each month. Shifts are: Tuesdays, 9 a.m.–noon and 4–6 p.m.; Wednesdays, 9–11 a.m. (stocking only); and Thursdays, 9 a.m.–noon. Visit www.svdpnky.org/volunteer to register.

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.

Catholic Charities of Northern Kentucky will be hosting a Mental Health First Aid certification class Aug.



Serra Club at the Yalls

On July 7, the Serra Club for Vocations celebrated a night at the old ball game with the Florence Yalls, members of clergy invited to throw out the first pitches for the evening. From left to right are Deacon Terry Mason, Deacon Steven Winbiger, bullpen catcher Angelo Pahila and Father Mark Keene, vicar general.

25, 9 a.m.–3:30 p.m., diocesan Curia, Covington. No cost to attend. Upon successful completion, participants will receive a Mental Health First Aid certification. Register via <https://form.jot-form.com/MHFA>

Collaborative/ catholic-charities-mhfa-8252026.

Carmel Manor will be hosting their festival Aug. 29, 3–10 p.m. An unforgettable day of family fun, delicious food, live entertainment, raffles, Split the Pot, kids games and so much more — all while supporting the residents of Carmel Manor. Cash only event.

Newport Central Catholic annual Fine Arts Hall of Fame, Aug. 29, 5:30 p.m. social; 7 p.m. dinner and ceremony. This year’s inductees are Tammy Vulhop Hubler ‘95, Michael Connor ‘68, Steve Schofield ‘94, Scott ‘82 and Jane Grosser, and Therese Muench Blank ‘77; Show of Distinction is the production of “Shrek.” Cost \$35, RSVP by Aug. 21, <http://ncchs.com/events>.

Join Bishop John Iffert, Sept. 5, for Catholic Family Night at Great American Ball Park as the Reds take on the Milwaukee Brewers. Enjoy discount tickets as the Cincinnati Reds take on the Milwaukee Brewers. Bring your family, friends, and fellow parishioners for a fun night of fellowship. Bobblehead featuring Elly De La Cruz to fans in attendance, while supplies last. Participate in the on-field parade at 5:30 p.m. and greet Bishop Iffert at home plate. The theme “Love In Action” features the ministries of Catholic Charities on both sides of the river. For tickets visit <https://www.gofevo.com/event/Archdiocesecovington2>.

Newport Central Catholic High School invites you to bring your family up on the school hill, Sept. 6, for the Labor Day fireworks at its 32nd Family Fireworks Fest. Food trucks, drinks and fun begin at 5:30 p.m. (no cans, bottles or coolers permitted). Admission \$5; tickets can be purchased at <https://gofan.co/app/school/KY6479?activity=Event%20School>. For information contact Tessy Krebs at (859) 292-0001 or tkrebs@ncchs.com.

“Date Night with Father Nathan Cromly – An Evening Celebrating the Sacrament of Marriage,” Sept. 12, St. Joseph Parish, Cold Spring, optional vigil Mass, 5 p.m.; doors open at 6:15 p.m. With his signature blend of humor, honesty, and practical wisdom, Father Cromly speaks directly to the realities of marriage, offering couples a renewed vision for their relationship and simple, meaningful ways to strengthen it. <https://brushfire.com/eagleeyeministries/>

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.fire-foundationnky.org/golf>.

Bishop John Iffert will celebrate Vespers at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption in Covington to honor couples celebrating significant wedding anniversaries in 2026. Married couples celebrating their 1st, 25th, 50th, 60th, or 60+ wedding anniversary in 2026 are invited to a Vespers celebration on Sep. 13 at 2 p.m. Anniversary couples should RSVP by August 17, 2026, at covdio.org/wedding-vespers/. Phone registrations are available through Isaak Abraham Isaak at (859) 392-1529. Reservations are required only for anniversary couples; family members and guests are welcome to attend. Congratulatory certificates will be available upon request.

The FIRE Foundation of Northern Kentucky will be celebrating their annual Mass of Belonging, Sept. 15, 6 p.m., at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. This special Mass celebrates learning differences and disabilities within our diocese. Family ice

Parish festivals

August 14–15 St. Bernard, Dayton Parish festival	Aug. 28–29 Holy Cross District High School, Latonia School festival	Sept. 11–12 St. Barbara, Erlanger Rocktoberfest	Sept. 25–27 St. Agnes, Ft. Wright Oktoberfest
August 15 St. Philip Parish Festival and golf ball drop	Sept. 5–6 St. Anthony, Taylor Mill Festival Latino	Sept. 11–13 St. Patrick, Maysville Parish festival	
Aug. 28–30 St. Augustine, Augusta Parish festival	Sept. 5–7 St. Cecilia, Independence Parish festival	Sept. 18–20 St. Timothy, Union Oktoberfest	

cream social to follow.

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>

“Understanding Marriage and Baptism in the OCIA Process,” presented by Dr. William Keimig. Sept.19, a workshop exploring the pastoral and canonical issues related to the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults and Children (OCIA/OCIC). RSVP by Sept. 7, online https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfAK93XyEMkbAFuqO1JeJH_3qI6GfVQ9AmVagIQPA-4daV1Kg/view-form . Contact Isaak at iisaak@covdio.org or (859) 392-1529.

The Intercommunity of Women Religious Peace and Justice Committee and Mother of God Parish, Covington, will host a prayer service for the 112th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Sept. 27, 2 p.m. at Mother of God Church, Covington. All are welcome. Pope Leo XIV has chosen the theme, “Even Just One of These Children,” taken from Matthew’s Gospel “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.” (18:5) It focuses on the need for pastoral care for minors on the move.

All former St. Thomas School students who attended for at least one year between 1949 and 1976 are invited to a reunion Oct. 4, 3–7 p.m., in the St. Thomas School Cafeteria. Guests are welcome. Cost is \$50 per person; reservations deadline Sept. 15. For an RSVP form contact Tom Dierig at (859) 781-8743 or tomdierig@gmail.com.

“Vatican II Workshop: Proclaiming the Joy and Hope of Christ to the Modern World,” an engaging and informative workshop presented by Prof. Lucas Pollice, chief mission officer, Diocese of Colorado Springs, Nov. 14, 8:30 a.m.–4 p.m., Thomas More University’s Ziegler Auditorium. Register by Oct. 23 online registration form: Register Here. Again, everyone is welcome to attend. Contact Isaak at iisaak@covdio.org or (859) 392-1529.

TEC (Teens Encounter) Christ is coming to the Diocese of Covington. TEC is church movement that evangelizes and accompanies older teens and young adults within an intergenerational community. Participants are invited into this community through a 3-day retreat. If you have attended a TEC weekend in another diocese and would like to serve on a TEC team or support TEC, contact Angie Poat, apoat@covdio.org. High school juniors and seniors, and college students, are invited to attend TECov #1, Nov. 21–23, 2026 or TECov #2, March 6–8, 2027.

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.

Meet the first American bishop — Bishop John Carroll

D.D. Emmons
OSV News

Who is Bishop John Carroll? We may not hear much about him today, but he was the first bishop of the United States, the father of American Catholicism and a highly regarded patriot of the American Revolution. Father Carroll has been credited with influencing the words of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Because of his skills in planning and organizing the Church in America, some Church historians have given him the title “Spiritual Hannibal.” He was instrumental in establishing Catholic schools such as Georgetown University and St. Mary’s Seminary in Maryland, and he encouraged St. Elizabeth Ann Seton to begin the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

But these achievements only begin to tell the story of this man, singled out by God to further the Gospel in the new frontiers of America.

Born in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, in 1735, at age 13 he was sent to Europe for Catholic schooling because, at that time, Catholic schools or teachings did not exist, nor were permitted, in the 13 colonies. In 1761, he was ordained a Catholic priest of the Jesuit order.

Within the next four years, the Jesuits were suspended by Pope Clement XIV, and Carroll returned to Maryland, where he found extreme anti-Catholic sentiment prevailing throughout much of the colonies. Many colonies did not allow public Masses, prohibited Catholics from holding governmental office and mocked Catholic beliefs. Around 16,000 people were Catholics, less than 2% of the total population.

The same year that Father Carroll returned from Europe, the British Parliament, under the rule of King George III, passed the Quebec Act, which approved the practice of Catholicism in Canada. This British effort was designed to ensure the alliance of the French Canadians in the event of a conflict with the colonies. The majority of colonists wanted nothing to do with this act or King George. The threat of the king extending the Quebec Act to the colonies was among the factors that caused the Americans to break from England. They proclaimed: “No King, No Papacy.”

This was the environment in which Father John Carroll found himself during the late 1700s. Despite the condemnation of his faith, he was able to hold American Catholics together and, at the same time, find ways to support the cause of the colonies. He was successful both in being true to Rome and to the land he loved.

Father Carroll was from a well-off and influential Catholic family; his cousin Charles was a signatory to the Declaration of Independence. John Carroll became widely known and was well respected before and after the American Revolution.

In February 1776, the Continental Congress wanted the Canadians to ally themselves with the Americans in the forthcoming war against England. A small group of men was dispatched to encourage the Canadians; this group was led by Benjamin Franklin and included Father John Carroll.

The mission was not a success, but Father Carroll and Franklin became well acquainted and their relationship would later lead to Franklin recommending the priest as the head of the Catholic Church in America, a recommendation he made to the papal nuncio of France.

From the early founding of America, Catholic missions in the new land were under the jurisdiction of the Vatican Congregation Propaganda Fide (now the part of the Dicastery for Evangelization) and overseen by the vicar apostolic in London. Following the Revolutionary War and appealing to the pope, the colonial mission became independent from the London vicar apostolic and, in 1784, Father Carroll was named superior of the Mission in the Thirteen United States of America with the power of confirmation. He was responsible for some 25,000 geographically separated Catholics.

Gaining independence from England, the new nation began to expand, especially to the West, and there was the need for additional Catholic parishes and priests. This expansion thrived during the French Revolution (1787-99), as many priests left France for America and would help fill the need for priests in the new settlements.

In 1789, the Catholic clergy asked the U.S. Congress if



OSV News photo/courtesy of Georgetown University Library, Special Collections Research Center

Baltimore Archbishop John Carroll seen in a painting by Gilbert Stuart.

they would object to a Catholic bishop in the new republic. Receiving no objection, the clergy petitioned the pope for such action.

Pope Pius VI (r. 1775-99) took the unprecedented step of asking the United States priests to elect their own bishop. Twenty-four of 26 priests selected Father Carroll, and on Nov. 6, 1789, Pope Pius elevated him to bishop. On that same date, the pope established the Diocese of Baltimore, the only diocese in America and one that covered more than 3 million square miles with upward of 40,000 Catholics.

Bishop Carroll was consecrated in 1790, and 18 years later he became the first archbishop in America. By the time he became archbishop, there were four more dioceses: Philadelphia; Boston; Bardstown, Kentucky; and New York all organized under the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Under Bishop Carroll’s auspices, St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore began training priests in 1791 with the first ordination two years later. Priests from outside the United States, and guided by Bishop Carroll, would continue to spread the Gospel and act as both missionaries and pastors in the following century and beyond.

Bishop Carroll, possessing the inspired gifts of wisdom and vision, was able to harmonize the different ethnicities populating the United States, including Dutch, Spanish, French, Irish and English, and gave much energy to catechizing Native Americans. His first synod in 1791 sought unity among the priests ministering to all these different

peoples.

Reading a historical account or biography of Bishop Carroll, it is easy to fit him among our nation’s Founding Fathers, in the manner of Washington and Franklin. While such a characterization has merit, it should not detract from his role as father of the American Catholic Church. He was a pious man who gave himself to the organization of Christ’s holy Catholic Church in the United States.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton was a friend of Bishop Carroll, and her biography by Agnes Sadlier provides a fitting tribute to Carroll’s character: “He had governed the American Church since the year 1784, first as Prefect Apostolic, then as Bishop, and finally as Archbishop. When he began his pastoral rule, he found the Church poor, persecuted and unorganized; he left it full of vitality, and the spirit of progress, with several Bishops, a numerous body of clergy, a population almost doubled in numbers, and possessing convents, colleges and a seminary. Long and arduous had been the labor of this mighty toiler in the Lord’s vineyard, and the vines were loaded with rich fruit, when the Master called him to his rest.” He died Dec. 3, 1815.

In recent years, Bishop Carroll has been accused of owning and even trading one or more enslaved people during his lifetime. Whether this flaw is the deciding factor, he has never been considered for sainthood, as his cause for canonization never opened.

US bishops ready nationwide prayer and action effort amid rising abortion rate

Peter Jesserer Smith
OSV News

The U.S. Catholic bishops are getting ready a nationwide call to prayer and action, with an official launch date of Aug. 18, to mobilize Catholics to address the rising abortion rate and the increased availability of an abortion-inducing drug.

“Every abortion involves the death of a child and harm to the mother. Now with easier access to abortion pills, the abortion rate is tragically climbing, along with increased health risks,” Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Bishop Daniel E. Thomas of Toledo, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities, said in joint remarks.

According to an estimate from Guttmacher Institute, a research firm for the abortion industry, 1.12 million abortions took place in 2025, marking a 21 percent increase from 2020. Guttmacher said 2020 marked “the last year of comprehensive national estimates” before the 2022 U.S. Supreme Court’s *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* decision. *Dobbs* overturned the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision and its related abortion precedents, returning the matter of abortion back to the legislative branch.

Guttmacher found the figures for 2025 were largely unchanged from the prior year, but suggested abortion numbers overall may be an undercount due to people acquiring abortion pills in advance or obtaining them by means other than U.S. abortion clinic providers.

Abortion rates in the U.S. bottomed out in 2017, when they were estimated to be just over 862,000, and began increasing again in the first Trump administration, which also approved the first generic for mifepristone, commonly called “the abortion pill,” in 2019. The pill is commonly used in combination with misoprostol for early abortion, although the same combination is also used in some miscarriage care protocols that were more recently recommended for consideration by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

Pro-life groups urge follow through from Blanche on policy permitting mifepristone by mail

Kate Scanlon
OSV News

As Todd Blanche was confirmed and sworn in as attorney general, a group of pro-life organizations urged him to follow through on his previous comments that the Trump administration would review a Biden administration policy permitting the shipment of mifepristone by mail.

The Trump administration has sought to pause multiple state lawsuits seeking to roll back Biden administration-era eased restrictions on mifepristone, a drug commonly used for first trimester abortion, but which is also used in some miscarriage care protocols. The Trump administration has thus far left that regulation in effect while seeking to block those challenges, pending a promised FDA safety review, prompting frustration from pro-life advocates.

Advancing American Freedom, the think tank founded by former Vice President Mike Pence, said it led 35 organizations in sending a letter Aug. 7 to Blanche prior to his confirmation, calling on him to “honor his commitment to review President Biden’s Office of Legal Counsel’s December 2022 opinion on the Comstock Act.”

The Comstock Act of 1873 bans lewd materials, including contraceptives and abortifacients, from being sent through the mail, although it has not been enforced in recent decades. Some have suggested that the law, still on the books, could be used to ban abortion pills even in states that permit their use.

But the 2022 DOJ memo referenced by the AAF letter argued the law “does not prohibit the mailing of certain drugs that can be used to perform abortions where the sender lacks the intent that the recipient of the drugs will use them unlawfully.”

In their letter, the pro-life groups argued that during his hearing, Blanche said he would review the finding and should do so promptly.

“We thank you for pledging to evaluate whether the OLC opinion is consistent with the statute Congress actually passed and look forward to the result of your review,” they said.



OSV News photo/Evelyn Hockstein, via Reuters

Boxes of mifepristone under the label Mifeprex are seen April 9, 2024, at Alamo Women’s Clinic in Carbondale, Ill.

More than six of 10 abortions in the U.S. are performed through a combination of mifepristone and misoprostol, according to recent estimates.

A federal policy permitting distribution by mail of mifepristone was first issued by the Biden administration following the *Dobbs* decision. The policy has thus far been left in place by the second Trump administration, which approved a second generic for mifepristone in 2025 to the shock of pro-life groups.

The Department of Justice, under the current Trump administration, has also sought to block state challenges to the policy pending a promised safety review by the Food and Drug Administration. But the status and timeline of the FDA review are unclear.

Archbishop Coakley and Bishop Thomas stated that the FDA “has enabled a nationwide mail-order abortion industry by allowing abortion pills to be prescribed in telehealth appointments and sold both at neighborhood pharmacies and online, circumventing state laws that protect life in the womb.”

“This leaves women vulnerable to suffering an abortion alone at home, without any medical supervision,” they said. “It also sets up additional opportunities for exploitation by violent partners or human traffickers.”

The bishops said that from the official start of the campaign through the end of October, when the Church in the U.S. marks Respect Life Month, “the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities is inviting Catholics to join a focused effort of prayer and action to stop the spread of abortion pills.”

They urged Catholics to seek “the intercession of St. Joseph, Defender of Life” as well as to send messages to pharmacies and pharmaceutical companies that are involved.

The USCCB is gearing up to mobilize Catholics all over the U.S. with resources in time for the Aug. 18 launch of the campaign.

“We are setting up a simple on-line platform allowing users to click and send one message that will go to multiple entities, such as brick-and-mortar pharmacies and online pharmacies, distributors, and pharmaceutical companies,” Kat Talalas, assistant director for pro-life communications at the USCCB’s Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, told OSV News. “We are also developing educational resources about the abortion pill, which will help explain distinctions between miscarriage care versus ending the life of a child in an abortion.”

The Catholic Church teaches that all human life is sacred from conception to natural death, and as such, opposes direct abortion. Following the *Dobbs* decision, U.S. Church officials have reaffirmed the Church’s concern for both mother and child and have called for enhancing support to those made vulnerable to abortion through poverty and other factors.

Signatories on the Aug. 7 letter included Tim Chapman, AAF president, as well as representatives from SBA Pro-Life America, Students for Life of America and Americans United for Life.

Supporters of allowing mifepristone to be distributed by mail have argued that the law has long been considered antiquated, unenforceable, or unconstitutional. But some

(Continued on page 10)



OSV News photo/Jonathan Ernst, Reuters

Then-Acting U.S. Attorney General Todd Blanche attends a news conference at the Justice Department in Washington Aug. 5, 2026. A group of pro-life organizations urged Blanche in an Aug. 7 letter to follow through on his previous comments that the Trump administration would review a Biden administration policy permitting the shipment of mifepristone by mail. Blanche was confirmed as attorney general Aug. 8 and sworn in Aug. 10.

Pro-life groups urge follow through

(Continued from page 9)

have argued it should be repealed.

Prior to his confirmation Aug. 8, Blanche signaled on a call with a predominantly Protestant Christian ministry that the Trump administration would be “putting practices and policies in place” to stop shipment of mifepristone by mail.

During a private call in late July, hosted by the White House Faith Office, Blanche told the group Intercessors for America that the Justice Department was “working hand in hand” with federal agencies and the White House “so that the Dobbs decision becomes permanent in every single state.”

He was referring to Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, the 2022 Supreme Court ruling that overturned the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, which had found that abortion was a constitutionally protected right, and returned the matter of restricting or regulating abortion to the legislative branch. A recording of the Blanche call, which appears to have since been removed from YouTube, was first reported by Politico.

“If states have said, ‘We are going to protect the unborn

and we’re going to protect every life from the moment of conception,’ we’re putting practices and policies in place so that other states and other organizations can’t attack that,” Blanche said on the call. “They can’t do things like they’re doing with mailing in mail-order drugs.”

A spokesperson for the Justice Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment from OSV News. But a Justice Department statement to The Hill claimed Blanche’s “comments have been mischaracterized and need to be understood in their full context, which was with respect to mail order abortion drugs, not a broader expansion of federal control over states.”

In an Aug. 8 statement regarding Blanche’s confirmation, Alexis McGill Johnson, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood Action Fund, said, “The Trump administration and its backers in Congress have, once again, shown people across the country that they will never stop their attempts to make it harder for people nationwide to get an abortion and will make it more dangerous to provide that care.”

“That’s exactly the opposite of what people want and the consequences could be deadly,” she argued.

Blanche, who was previously President Donald Trump’s

personal attorney, was sworn in Aug. 10 as attorney general after a contentious confirmation process during which Republican senators raised issues including a controversial \$1.8 billion “anti-weaponization fund” sought by Trump; objections to the way the Department of Justice handled the release of the Epstein files; and its approach to state challenges to a policy permitting distribution of mifepristone by mail, calling into question whether they would have the votes to confirm him without Democratic support.

But the Senate narrowly confirmed Blanche as attorney general in a 49-50 vote in the early hours of Aug. 8.

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, who is seeking reelection in a swing state in November, and Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, declined to support Blanche.

Without any Democratic support for Blanche’s nomination, and with Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., still absent from the upper chamber, every other Republican was needed for the confirmation. Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La., who was among the senators seen as key swing votes in the process, effectively allowed the confirmation to move forward by stating on the Senate floor he would vote to confirm Blanche.

World Youth Day 2027 in Seoul to be ‘a celebration of hope’

Courtney Mares

OSV News

Preparations are in full swing for World Youth Day 2027 in Seoul, South Korea, where Pope Leo XIV is expected to join young Catholics from around the world for the second World Youth Day ever held in Asia.

The Aug. 3-8, 2027, gathering comes more than three decades after the first World Youth Day in Asia, which drew 4 million to 5 million people to Manila with St. John Paul II in 1995, setting a Guinness World Record for largest attendance at a papal event at the time.

With one year remaining before the massive international Catholic youth festival, organizers say planning has intensified. Representatives from the Vatican’s Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life visited South Korea in July to review preparations and meet with bishops from dioceses that will host pilgrims in the diocesan days before the main event.

Archbishop Peter Soon-taick Chung of Seoul said the archdiocese has spent the past three years laying the groundwork for the gathering.

“The year ahead will be the time to complete our preparations and welcome young people from every part of the world,” Archbishop Chung said in a statement. “We will do everything possible to make WYD Seoul 2027 a celebration of hope and a witness to the hospitality and solidarity of Korea and Seoul.”

Registration opens in October

Before arriving in the South Korean capital, international pilgrims will have the option to take part in the traditional “Days in the Diocese” from July 29 to Aug. 2, staying with local communities in 15 dioceses across the coun-



OSV photo/Remo Casilli, Reuters

Pilgrims from South Korea celebrate Aug. 3, 2025, as Pope Leo XIV confirmed Aug. 3-8, 2027, as the dates for World Youth Day in South Korea. His confirmation came the day of the closing Mass for the Jubilee of Youth at the Tor Vergata open-air field.

try while experiencing the faith, culture, and traditions of the Catholic Church in Korea.

Registration for World Youth Day attendees is scheduled to open in October. The accommodation options will include a large-scale parish homestay program, designed to give visitors an opportunity to experience Korean family life, parish communities and local hospitality while staying with host families.

While World Youth Day is primarily intended for young people ages 14-30, all who wish to participate are welcome, organizers say.

Advice for prospective WYD pilgrims

Across the world, parishes and dioceses have already started preparing young people to participate in the pilgrimage to South Korea — which despite being the first non-Christian majority country to host World Youth Day — has a unique Catholic history with the witness of thousands of Christian martyrs who were killed for their faith.

Father Michael Duck Young Kong, a parish priest at St. Mary of the Cross Catholic Parish in Mordialloc, Australia,

has been giving talks to the Catholic Youth Australia group and Melbourne’s archdiocesan preparation team on the history and culture of Catholicism in Korea.

He has also turned to social media to help young people prepare, drawing on his Korean heritage to share language tips and what young pilgrims can look forward to when visiting to one of Asia’s largest cities.

“I think the first impression many young Catholics will have when they arrive in Korea is the sheer energy of Seoul — its pace, scale and intensity,” he told OSV News. “Seoul is a vibrant, modern city, and that can feel overwhelming at first, but I actually see that as part of the gift of pilgrimage. It is an invitation to receive what is unfamiliar with an open heart and a spirit of gratitude.”

Father Kong said he is hopeful that “God will awaken something deep and lasting in the hearts of young people through World Youth Day in Seoul” through an encounter with “a living Church, a universal faith and holiness,” adding that World Youth Day could become “a moment for every young participant to respond to the vocation to which they have been called.”

A pilgrimage in the footsteps of Korea’s martyrs

The Catholic Church in Korea has a distinct identity shaped by “the witness of lay believers, by martyrdom and by a long history of perseverance under pressure,” he said.

With no priests at first, the early Church in Korea was led by young lay believers who gathered in secret to study Scripture and live out the Gospel. They strived to continue their life of faith even amid harsh persecutions that spread over one hundred years, leading to many martyrs. Pope Francis beatified 124 Korean martyrs during his apostolic journey to Seoul in 2014 and Pope John Paul II canonized 103 martyr saints.

“Pilgrims will feel a strong sense of piety, communal faith, and public witness,” Father Kong said, expressing hope they will leave Seoul “with a stronger faith, and with a greater desire to say ‘yes’ to God in their daily lives.”

In Spain, a group of young Catholics from Seoul are giving pilgrims along the Camino de Santiago a taste of Korean culture by offering traditional Korean dance and Kpop performances Aug. 4-12 to promote World Youth Day. Another group from the Archdiocese of Seoul traveled this month to the Diocese of Fukuoka in Japan to raise awareness about the major event happening next year.

World Youth Day theme song gets a pop release

Organizers marked the one-year countdown to World Youth Day 2027 with the release of the event’s official theme song, “Confidite, Ego Vici Mundum,” meaning “Take courage! I have overcome the world.” The song, selected from 434 entries, including 294 from outside Korea, was written by Korean composer Francis Jiyeon Kim.

The World Youth Day 2027 anthem was released in a both a pop version and a classical version and can be heard online on YouTube. The international version of the hymn has lyrics in six languages.

The official World Youth Day prayer can also be found online in multiple languages. The prayer includes a line asking the Lord to “Kindle the flame of the Korean martyrs’ faith in our hearts, making us into disciples who live out the Gospel of peace, love, and truth.”

(Continued on page 11)



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Diocese of Covington contributes to new national garden dedicated to healing for abuse survivors and all Catholics

Katie Yoder
OSV News

A national garden in the nation's capital proposed by survivors of clergy sexual abuse promises to foster healing not only for survivors but also for the Catholic Church as a whole. "We can't heal alone," said Mike Hoffman, chair of the National Healing Garden Working Group. "We want to heal with you, with our Church, with the bishops, with the priests. We want to heal together," added the executive director of the National Catholic Restorative Justice Initiative, a group dedicated to restorative justice for survivors of Catholic clergy abuse. Hoffman, a survivor of childhood sexual abuse by clergy, and Deacon Bernie Nojadera, executive director of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection, spoke with OSV News about the efforts behind the National Healing Garden, which will be on the grounds of The Catholic University of America in Washington. The garden is planned for the east side of Caldwell Hall by the St. Francis Peace Garden.

In a statement, Peter Kilpatrick, president of Catholic University, said that the garden "will serve as a tangible sign of God's mercy and an extension of our commitment to lift up human dignity." The university is managing fundraising efforts as well as collaborating on the design. Organizers are seeking to raise \$200,000 by spring 2027 to fund the garden that will include flowers, shrubbery, seating, plaques and a prayer labyrinth representing the nonlinear pathway of healing. Last week, Bishop John Iffert of Covington authorized a donation of \$1,000 in support of the garden from the Diocese of Covington. The garden, which is currently being designed, will serve as a healing space for survivors of clergy abuse and for anyone who has been abused or impacted by abuse. "Our outreach is to all survivors across the country of any kind of abuse ... no matter their faith background, no matter where they came from and no matter who the perpetrator was," Hoffman said.



Submitted

A rendering of the proposed National Healing Garden on the grounds of The Catholic University of America in Washington.

The vision statement by the National Healing Garden Working Group — a group of seven clergy abuse survivors and other members including Auxiliary Bishop Evelio Menjivar-Ayala of Washington driving the garden — reflects this desire. Members of The Catholic Project, a Catholic University initiative dedicated to collaboration

(Continued on page 13)

(Continued from page 10)

Volunteering opportunities at WYD Seoul
Volunteering opportunities are available during the upcoming World Youth Day. Organizers anticipate about 30,000 volunteers, including 10,000 serving in central operations in roles such as pilgrim assistance, interpretation, event management, medical services and safety, along with 20,000 parish volunteers across the Archdiocese of Seoul. So far, 378 volunteers, including foreign residents in South Korea and international long-term volunteers, are already involved in preparations. Registration for additional short-term volunteers in South Korea and abroad will begin alongside pilgrim registration in October. Organizers said volunteers will receive training and spiritual formation. Youth ministers to visit Korea in September
About 250 Catholic youth ministry representatives from bishops' conferences around the world will travel to Seoul to get an introduction to Korean culture at the Second International Preparatory Meeting Sept. 14-17. The meeting, jointly organized by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life and the World Youth Day organizing committee, will coordinate planning to take into account the needs of international delegations, while giving the Catholic youth ministers a taste of Korean culture. For young people still undecided about making the journey to Seoul for World Youth Day, Father Kong's advice is simple: "Go and see." "So many young people today are carrying real questions and anxieties about their lives and their futures. I would encourage them that this gathering could become a moment where they glimpse a light in the midst of that," he said, adding that it is an opportunity "not only for believers, but also for young people without faith to encounter the presence of God." He said the invitation reflects the World Youth Day 2027 theme, "Take courage, I have conquered the world" (John 16:33).



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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.

Prospective candidates may send a cover letter and comprehensive resume, including compensation history and references with email contacts, to Very Reverend Ryan Maher, V.F. by email to rmaher@covdio.org, or by mail to 1101 Madison Avenue, Covington, KY 41011.

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The Finance Office of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington invites qualified, actively practicing Catholics to apply for the full time position of Payroll Coordinator. This important Curia role requires a personable, self-starting individual who likes numbers and detail, and who is good with both. This position calls for someone who will thrive in a fast-paced work environment. Requirements include a general working knowledge of payroll operations and basic bookkeeping, and some prior experience with payroll software. Applicants should submit a resume with cover letter and compensation history, along with references including contact email addresses, by mail, fax or e-mail to:

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New national garden

(Continued from page 11)

between clergy and laity in the wake of the Church's sexual abuse crisis, were also part of the working group from the beginning, including Stephen White, former executive director, and Sara Perla, acting director.

"As clergy sexual abuse survivors from across the United States, in relationship with the Church, we offer empathy and acknowledgement to all survivors of any kind of abuse," the statement reads. "In this sacred healing space, we invite the entire Body of Christ into the journey of accompaniment and reconciliation, imploring God's mercy to bring healing to the lives of everyone harmed by abuse in the Church."

It concludes: "Pledge with us to continue working to respect, protect, defend, and restore the dignity that all deserve as children of God."

The garden is put forth in relationship with the Church, particularly the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on the Protection of Children and Young People. As liaison between the working group and the bishops' committee, Deacon Nojadera said the working group of survivors did the heavy lifting for this new project.

"In the end, I'm hoping the Church transforms, converts and ends up even a healthier and holier Church — and that's going to be with the assistance of our survivors, of our survivor-victims, who, in a way, are showing us what it is they need for this healing, for their healing," he said.

The garden also has the prayerful support of nine bishops and archbishops, eight Catholic organizations, five Catholic academic institutions and three parishes.

The garden draws inspiration from other, more local healing gardens across the country, including one in Chicago, which Hoffman was also behind, and five in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

Hoffman, who also serves as chair of the Hope and Healing Committee of the Archdiocese of Chicago, said the Chicago garden helped him in his healing journey. He first came forward to tell his story of clergy abuse in 2006. He called a meeting with the late Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago, a Catholic University alumnus, his "major healing milestone." As a Church leader, the cardinal apologized to him.

"One reason why I'm here today is because I could unburden myself to Cardinal George, and he could hear that," Hoffman said of their 2008 meeting.

Hoffman stressed the importance of placing gardens in public, visible spaces. He said how these gardens are used is also important. The Chicago garden, which has been in place for over a decade, holds an annual child abuse prevention prayer service attended by hundreds.

"That's healing to me," Hoffman said. "The issue has driven so many of us apart, and here is a healthy and healing space that has brought us together."

He said organizers plan to hold similar events in the national garden.

The creation of a national garden, or "a permanent site of healing, prayer, and accompaniment for victim-survivors of clergy sex abuse and The Dallas Charter | USCCB for the broader Church," is one of four proposals identified by Hoffman's NCRJI.

Hoffman suggested the garden's opening might coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Dallas Charter in 2027. The charter, formally called the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," is a set of procedures from the USCCB for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy and prevention of further acts of abuse.

At the USCCB, Deacon Nojadera hoped the garden will remind God's people that "they are wonderfully created in the image and likeness of God" and of "the reality that every one of us is unconditionally loved."



Obituary

Sister Ann Middendorf, OSB

Benedictine Sister Ann Middendorf passed away Aug. 10, 2026. She was 99 years old.

Sister Ann was born on October 30, 1926, to William A. and Mary E. Brueggen Middendorf and given the name Margaret Ann. Ann was the fourth of five children, with two sisters and two brothers.

Ann graduated from Villa Madonna Academy in 1945. She received her BA degree in Music from the College of Mount St. Joseph in 1949. Ann taught Special Ed at a private school and third grade at Blessed Sacrament in Ft. Mitchell. In 1952 she entered St. Walburg Monastery. The following year she became a novice and received the name Sister Ann Joseph. First profession followed in 1954, perpetual in 1957, silver jubilee in 1979, golden in 2004, her 60th in 2014 and her 70th in 2024.

Sister Ann taught at diocesan elementary schools for several years before beginning her studies at Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee, Wis., from which she received her MA in Special Education in 1967. Her thesis explored the need for Special Ed in the Covington diocese. She taught Special Ed at Mother of God and Riverside-Good Counsel Schools from 1962 to 1975 working with Sister Wendeline and several other sisters. In 1975 her ministry took a new turn. Ann studied at Bethesda Hospital to complete her training in Clinical Pastoral Education in 1976.

Sister Ann spent her years as a pastoral associate at Holy Cross and Blessed Sacrament Parishes from 1975 through 2002. She visited the homebound, brought Communion, visited by phone during inclement weather, and worked in parish RCIA programs. She did not retire from this ministry until 2002 at the age of 76.

Sisters Ann and Rose lived at St. Mary's House on the St.



Sister Ann Middendorf, OSB

Walburg property for 36 years. They hosted card games, New Year's Eve and Derby Day parties for the sisters. Ann and Rose extended hospitality to sisters who enjoyed the above-ground swimming pool in their back yard. Their large garden provided an abundance of vegetables; they were happy to share an oversupply of tomatoes, and, of course, zucchini.

In 2007 Ann and Rose moved to the monastery's first floor. Sister Ann continued to listen to and pray with people, continuing her ministry by phone and often driving sisters to appoint-

ments. Sister Ann moved to the infirmary in 2013. Aging well into her nineties, Sister Ann still remembered names and would wave to all passers-by.

She is preceded in death by her parents, her sisters Dorothy Miller and Sister Mary Middendorf, OLVM, her brothers Bill and Dick. She is survived by many nieces and nephews and her Benedictine community.

Sister Ann donated her body to the UC College of Medicine. Vigil service will be held at 7 p.m., Sunday, August 16, 2026. Memorial Mass will be celebrated at 5 p.m., Monday, August 17, 2026. All services will be held at St. Walburg Monastery.

Memorials are suggested to St. Walburg Monastery, 2500 Amsterdam Rd., Villa Hills, KY 41017; www.stwalburg.org.

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The 'common good'

(Continued from page 5)

for all persons to work for the good of others as though it were our own good.

If common good is truly common — and if it is not diminished by being shared — then we all have a moral mandate to pursue it for others as though as for ourselves. When it is (approximately) achieved for one, it is no less achieved for all.

Moreover, if common good is the achievement of the conditions for true human fulfillment, some laws, policies

and public institutions can never be compatible with common good.

Euthanasia, abortion, contraception, torture, pornography, prostitution, surrogate parenting, capital punishment and restrictions on freedom of religion, assembly and travel are all detrimental to authentic human fulfillment and flourishing.

While some of these things will always be subject to democratic compromise, the requirements of common good give us Catholics a mandate to work toward chang-

ing hearts, minds, laws and regulations, such that they are more consistent with genuine human development. One cannot simultaneously be committed to the common good and affirm any of these social maladies. And that's a start.

Kenneth Craycraft is a professor of moral theology at Mount St. Mary's Seminary and School of Theology in Cincinnati. This column is adapted from Chapter Three of the author's book "Citizens Yet Strangers: Living Authentically Catholic in a Divided America."

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.

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■ Thursday, Aug. 27, 6:30-9 p.m., Diocesan Catholic Children's Home, Ft. Mitchell

■ Tuesday, Sept. 1
6-8:30 p.m., St. Joseph Parish, Cold Spring

■ Thursday, Sept. 3, 6-8:30 p.m., St. Joseph Parish, Parish Hall, Warsaw

■ Wednesday, Sept. 23
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■ Thursday, Oct. 8
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NEWS BRIEFS

National/World

Pope Leo XIV offers prayers, condolences as bishops urge solidarity following Colombia earthquake

BOGOTÁ, Colombia — Catholic leaders in Colombia are calling for national unity and urgent aid after a magnitude 7.4 earthquake struck the country Aug. 10. The quake, centered in the northwestern department of Chocó, killed at least 132 people, injured over 570, and collapsed dozens of buildings across major cities. Geologists reported it as the strongest tremor to shake the nation in a decade. In a joint statement, the Colombian Bishops' Conference urged citizens to respond to the tragedy as "one family" through prayer, generosity, and support for rescue workers. In Manizales, where historic churches — including the Cathedral Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary — suffered severe structural damage, Archbishop José Miguel Gómez called on the faithful to lean on their faith and care for those suffering. Dioceses nationwide and Caritas Colombia have activated emergency networks, opening relief collection points to distribute food and essential supplies to shelters and hard-hit communities. In a telegram to the president of the Colombian Bishops' Conference, Pope Leo XIV offered prayers "for the eternal rest of the deceased" for the "speedy recovery of those affected by this tragedy." The message — signed by the Vatican secretary of state, and published Aug. 11 — expressed the pope's spiritual closeness, his gratitude to those working in "in the search, rescue, and assistance efforts for those affected" and asked God "to pour out upon the beloved Colombian people the gifts of spiritual strength and Christian hope."

Vatican announces 'disarming technology' will be theme of next World Day of Peace

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican announced Aug. 11 that Pope Leo XIV's message for the 2027 World Day of Peace will focus on "disarming technology" and the moral responsibility of political leaders. The theme will be "Disarming Technology, Serving Peace. Politics as Preventive Responsibility," according to the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. "His Holiness wishes to draw attention to the moral responsibility of those called to serve in the public sphere, and he urges all people to uphold the dignity of the human person and to contribute to the building of peace, beginning by 'disarming technology,'" the dicastery said. The message will draw on Pope Leo's encyclical "Magnifica Humanitas" and warn about risks of entrusting military decisions to artificial intelligence. The announcement comes after Nobel laureates, inspired by the pope's encyclical, gathered in Rome July 16 to sign a declaration urging a global treaty banning artificial intelligence from nuclear launch systems. The Jan. 1 observance, which is the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, will be the 60th World Day of Peace, a tradition begun by Pope Paul VI.

Hong Kong's Father Benedict Chao, world's oldest Trappist monk, dies

HONG KONG — Trappist Father Benedict Chao, the world's oldest Trappist monk and a survivor of communist persecution in China, died July 31 at the Abbey of Our Lady of Joy on Lantau Island, Hong Kong. He was 108. Born in 1918 in Hebei

province, Father Chao entered the monastery and was ordained in 1949 — the same year the Chinese Communist revolution forced the monastic community to flee. After surviving years of anti-religious violence, he spent time in exile in Canada and Utah, where he learned dairy farming skills before helping reestablish the monastery in Hong Kong. He later served as prior from 1974 to 1998. In a statement, the order honored his lifelong dedication to silence, prayer and labor. Following his death, Sister Sebastiana Yamaguchi Teruko of Japan, 107, is now the world's oldest living Trappist nun. Father Chao's funeral is scheduled for Aug. 14.

Latin America: Bishops express solidarity with Colombia as death toll surpasses 250

BOGOTÁ, Colombia — Bishops' conferences across Latin America are pledging prayers and financial aid for Colombia following a massive 7.4 magnitude earthquake that struck Aug. 10, killing at least 254 people. The quake, one of the strongest in the country's history, severely impacted cities including Pereira, Cali, Manizales, and Quibdó, where emergency crews continue working around the clock to rescue victims trapped beneath collapsed buildings. In an Aug. 11 letter, leadership from the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council, known as CELAM, expressed deep communion with the Colombian people and promised targeted assistance for vulnerable communities, including displaced families and indigenous groups. Church leaders from Mexico, Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and Chile also issued messages of solidarity. Mexican bishops announced plans to coordinate humanitarian relief through Cáritas Mexicana, while CELAM urged all regional conferences to help Colombia rebuild not only homes and infrastructure, but hope for the future.

Massachusetts bishops: Eliminating 'any legal restraint' on late-term abortion 'gravely immoral'

BRAINTREE, Mass. — Eliminating "any legal restraint on late-term abortion" is "a radical measure which is gravely immoral," the Catholic bishops of Massachusetts said. The bishops made the comments in a July 29 statement issued in response to the July 22 passage by the Massachusetts House of

Representatives of a measure removing prior legal restrictions on abortion after 24 weeks of pregnancy. Senate passage followed on July 31, the last day of that chamber's formal session. On Aug. 10, Gov. Maura Healey signed the bill — "An Act Prioritizing Patient Access to Care" — into law. Healey, a Catholic, is a longtime advocate of a legal right to abortion. The new law allows physicians to perform abortions after 24 weeks of pregnancy if in their "professional judgment" it is medically necessary. In Massachusetts, abortions after 24 weeks had previously been allowed only to preserve the patient's life or their physical or mental health, or in cases of lethal or severe fetal abnormalities. "As Catholic bishops we have a moral responsibility to present and uphold Catholic teaching and the sacred God-given dignity of every human life from conception to the natural death," the bishops' statement read.

Israeli strikes cast doubt on White House peace plan as Catholic leaders call for prayers

WASHINGTON — Further Israeli strikes in Gaza cast doubt on the White House's peace plan for the Gaza Strip, a University of Notre Dame scholar told OSV News. The strikes came soon after Trump announced a new "milestone" toward implementing the White House's 20-point peace plan, which prompted renewed calls for prayers for peace from Catholic leaders. Trump said in a July 30 statement that the Board of Peace's agreement for the complete disarmament of Hamas and Israel's withdrawal from the territory was a "critical step" towards implementing the remaining provisions of the White House's 20-point peace plan, which Israel and Hamas signed in October 2025. Mary Ellen O'Connell, a professor at Notre Dame Law School who specializes in international law and conflict resolution, told OSV News Aug. 5, "There is no peace now in Gaza, and there has been no peace since President Trump announced a ceasefire in October 2025." She said that "Israel has slowed the pace of its air attacks in general ... but never stopped." She pointed out that on Aug. 2, Israeli attacks killed an estimated 18 Palestinians and that while the Israeli military has pulled back from some positions but "not to the positions agreed." In an Aug. 3 statement, Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, chair of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace, said he was "heartened by news of an agreement" and called for "intense prayers for the success of these negotiations."



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Seminarians prepare for a return to seminary education

As teachers, faculty, staff and students of Diocesan schools prepare to return for another year of faith filled, Catholic education, our seminarians also prepare for the beginning of another year of discernment and formation at seminary. As part of their preparation for the new year, the seminarians participate in picture day at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, and gather with the Serra Club for Vocations for the annual seminarian picnic.

This year the Diocese of Covington is sponsoring six seminarians: Michael Schulte, third year configuration student at St. Vincent Seminary, Latrobe, Pennsylvania; William Fuller, third year discipleship student at Pontifical College Josephinum, Columbus, Ohio; Joseph O'Bryan, second year discipleship student at Pontifical College Josephinum; Even Ihrig, first year discipleship student at St. Vincent Seminary and newcomers Joseph Dierker and Jacob Schuetter, who are both entering their propaedeutic year at Pontifical College Josephinum.



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