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Academy
50 Year
Anniversary
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(top, left) Bishop John Iffert blesses a married couple celebrating their anniversary this year at the 2026 Wedding Anniversary Vespers, Sept. 13.
(above) A couple celebrating more than 70 years of marriage sit by each other's side in the pew during the Vespers' procession.
(top, right) Two couples celebrating their anniversaries greet Bishop Iffert as he moves between pews for the wedding anniversary blessing.
(right) A couple smiles amongst themselves, hand in hand as they renew their wedding vows.

Married couples reflect Christ's 'enduring love,' says Bishop at anniversary vespers

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Married couples celebrating significant anniversaries — their 1st, 25th, 50th, 60th and beyond — all came together under the roof of the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, for Vespers, Sept. 13. This annual celebration of married couples in the Diocese of Covington includes a renewal of vows and a special blessing from Bishop John Iffert.

This year, the diocese celebrated more than 80 such couples — each in different stages of their married life, from first-year couples with babies to those having spent more than 70 years by each other's side. (For a full list of couples recognized at this year's anniversary vespers, see page 4.)

Isaak A. Isaak, director of the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization who organizes the Vespers service, greeted couples as they gathered in the church.

"I extend a heartfelt welcome to all of you," he said. "Today we gather in gratitude to honor the witness of your love and fidelity. Marriage is a unique and sacred covenant, a lifelong commitment that unites a man and a woman in faithful love ... it reflects Christ's enduring love for his Church and serves as a powerful sign of hope to the world."

Bishop John Iffert, in his homily to the couples gathered, elaborated more on this concept.

He shared a story of a married couple where, in a dispute, the husband struck his wife — the result of which had the wife carrying resentment for 20 years, even after outwardly accepting her husband's apology.

"Can you imagine any other relationship or friendship that

would have the weightiness to convince that woman to stay with it through 20 years of nurturing that grudge, through 20 years of inability to find freedom," he asked those gathered, "and to stay with that relationship long enough to develop the capacity to begin to let go of the thing that had really wounded her heart?"

"This capacity of marriage is the reason that Jesus surrounds matrimony with sacramental grace," Bishop Iffert said, "and this is why the Church is so grateful to you for your married witness."

Together, married couples "reveal to us an icon of the face of God," said Bishop Iffert. "The God who empties himself out because of love, who suffers wounds of rejection and who selflessly endures in love."

"Each year, I celebrate these vessels with couples like you, and when I greet the couples and ask you all the secret to your successful marriage ... over 50 percent of the time, they will say patience," Bishop Iffert said, stating that the place we learn to prioritize the needs of others and maintain peace and speak with kindness is in the home and with family.

"This is why the Church teaches that her children must be married according to the laws of the Church," Bishop Iffert said. "It's because the families you form are the first unit of the Church, the first structure, the first building block of the community of God's people ... Each one of your families is a fundamental unit of civilization, so that the kingdom of God and the civilization of love grow in the families you form."

"So today," he concluded, "I thank you for your good witness, and we join you in praying for your continued progress together in the way of love."

St. Vincent de Paul NKY breaks ground on more than a building, preparing to serve the community in a new way

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

Set against the backdrop of construction and the sounds of a roaring highway, the community of St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky broke ground on its new headquarters — a product of the Hands of Hope Capital Campaign — just one mile from their current Crescent Springs store location.

The new building will feature 40,000 square feet of intentionally designed and purposeful spaces to better meet the growing needs of those served by St. Vincent de Paul NKY. With an expanded food pantry, teaching kitchen, community spaces, retail and warehouse expansion and a chapel, the “impact is going to be something we can see and feel every day,” said Dawn Groneck, chair of the St. Vincent de Paul NKY board.

Notable community leaders and members of the St. Vincent de Paul NKY leadership attended the ceremonial groundbreaking. Jessica Fette, mayor of the city of Erlanger; Marty Butler, chair of the Hands of Hope Steering Committee; Dawn Groneck; Beth Sewell, Kenton County commissioner – First District; Adam Kuehne, chief operating officer of the Huseman Group; Karen Zengel, executive director of St. Vincent de Paul NKY; and Deacon Jim Fortner, chief operating officer, Diocese of Covington.

Together — joined by donors and Vincentians — the group turned over the ceremonial dirt with shovels which shone bright in the afternoon sun. The building will be completed by HCG Construction of the Huseman Group and was designed by GBBN architects.

Mr. Kuehne told the crowd gathered, “site work is nearly complete, building pads are ready and we will begin foundations later this month. By late fall, we’re going to see the building come out of the ground. Through the winter, the structure will take shape. By early spring we should be under roof and enclosed, and then by this time next year, we should be standing here cutting a ribbon.”

While the specifications of the building, and its soon to be impressive edifice, is the cause of much excitement — it is the lives which will be touched by the work completed in the building that is truly meaningful.

“It’s giving us the ability to serve our neighbors with more dignity, to serve more efficiently and to prepare

for the needs of Northern Kentucky well into the future,” said Mrs. Groneck. “The most important impact cannot be measured by dollars. It will be felt by the neighbor who walks through our doors during one of the hardest moments of their life.”

While the current St. Vincent de Paul NKY Crescent Springs building has served the community steadfastly, its operations have been stretched beyond capacity.

“What once served us well, no longer supports the scale of the mission ahead. Every day we see more families seeking help, more individuals struggling to make ends meet and more opportunities to connect people with the resources they need to thrive. That is why we launched the Hands of Hope Capital Campaign,” said Mr. Butler. “It is about creating the infrastructure necessary to serve our community for the next 100 years and beyond.”

The Hands of Hope Capital Campaign was launched in January of 2026 and has raised over \$12,000,000 for the construction of the new headquarters.

“When I think about the impact of the Hands of Hope campaign, I don’t first think about the size of the building or the dollars raise. I think about the neighbor walking through our doors during a crisis and being welcomed with dignity,” said Mrs. Groneck.

(below, left) Dawn Groneck delivers an impassioned speech, emphasizing the message of hope, compassion and dignity which will be imparted to all neighbors of St. Vincent de Paul NKY who walk through the doors of the new headquarters.

(below, right) Deacon Jim Fortner blessed the ground, construction equipment and the people gathered to celebrate the groundbreaking.

(bottom, right) Karen Zengel shares a smile with Rebecca Lambert, a friend of the Hands of Hope Capital Campaign, after putting on her hard hat and preparing to ceremonially break ground.

(bottom, left) Ground is broken at the site of the new St. Vincent de Paul NKY headquarters.



ACUE schools are ‘beacons of hope in their communities’

Staff report

ACUE held its annual Leadership Solicitation Kickoff, Aug. 27, at the Curia’s Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium. The Kickoff provides volunteer solicitors with an overview of their vital role in the success of the ACUE Annual Fund.

Over 60 volunteers will make calls in October to ACUE’s leadership donors who collectively provide 80 percent of the funds required to support the significant need for tuition assistance by ACUE students. The five ACUE schools serve a largely economically disadvantaged population with all five schools qualifying for the federally funded Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), meaning 100 percent of students may receive free breakfast and lunch.

The five ACUE schools are Holy Cross Elementary, Latonia; Holy Trinity School, Bellevue; Prince of Peace School, Covington; St. Anthony School, Taylor Mill; and St. Augustine School, Covington.

The 2026-2027 ACUE Annual Fund is chaired by Nick Winnike, ACUE advisory board member and member of St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs, who joined the kickoff virtually that morning due to a previously scheduled com-

mitment as a dedicated grandparent.

Mr. Winnike spoke from the heart regarding his personal reasons for involvement with ACUE and addressed the volunteers as members of his ACUE family. He also mentioned the logical reasons behind his support of ACUE.

What better way do we have to lift a child out of poverty and develop future leaders in our community than through a values-based Catholic education? ACUE’s small classrooms immerse the children in Catholic teachings and ethics while giving them the attention needed to thrive academically and spiritually, he said. The ACUE schools are the perfect setting for evangelization of the faith to the children and families served. The schools are beacons of hope in their communities and allow the diocese to maintain an



2026-2027 ACUE Annual Fund general chair, Nick Winnike, an ACUE advisory board member and member of St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs, met recently with Beth Ruehlmann, director of Development for Catholic Schools, Diocese of Covington, to discuss the upcoming ACUE Annual Appeal.

important presence among our urban neighbors. In contacting past donors, ACUE’s message is always one of tremendous gratitude as well as hope that they will again support this truly meaningful ministry.

Diocesan Governance Commission begins work on strategic plan for Diocese of Covington

Laura Keener
Editor

Bishop John Iffert welcomed about 110 volunteer participants, Sept. 12, for the first gathering of the Diocesan Governance Commission at Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium in Covington. The meeting opened the final stage of a larger strategic planning process for the Diocese of Covington.



(above) Participants of the Diocesan Governance Commission review handouts as Bishop John Iffert welcomes them to the strategic planning general assembly, Sept. 12.

(below, left) Johnna Herrmann, parishioner at St. Barbara Parish, Erlanger, makes some notes during table discussions.

John Garvey, parishioner at Blessed Sacrament Parish, Ft. Mitchell, shares observations with Father Conor Kunath and others during table discussions.



Keener photos

The Diocesan Governance Commission is the last of four commissions formed to help the diocese plan for the future. The first three commissions focused on Catholic Charities, Catholic Schools and the creation of a Catholic Foundation. Informed by the priorities raised by these groups, the Diocesan Governance Commission will look closely at the structure and work of the diocesan Curia — the offices that help Bishop Iffert serve parishes, schools and ministries across Northern Kentucky.

The Diocesan Governance Commission will focus on four strategic areas: Departments and Ministries; Finance, Revenue and Allocations; Shared Services; and Communications. According to the Diocese of Covington's strategic planning schedule, the Commission's first meeting is a general session kick-off focused on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The Commission is scheduled to continue meeting through December. In January, all of the Commissions will gather for a closing Mass and gathering.

The four-and-a-half-hour day of discussion began with 45-minutes of reflective, intercessory prayer a process that Bishop Iffert calls "spiritual

conversation." For the last couple of years, Bishop Iffert and the Diocesan Pastoral Council has used spiritual conversation for its deliberations.

"I like it because I feel like I get deep reflection and wisdom from the folks who are involved," said Bishop Iffert about spiritual conversation. The feedback he has received from members of the DPC about the process has been positive.

"After about a year, I evaluated with them and asked, Do you feel like I'm wasting your time? Do you feel like these meetings are unproductive? And they said, absolutely not. We feel listened to. We feel like we get to reflect on things. We feel like we're having real conversations. We're making real progress."

Guided with the repetitive reading of a Scripture passage, the spiritual conversation was informed on the initial question, "Five years from now, what would success look like to you?" as participants began the planning process.

(Continued on page 6)

Save the Date

Vatican II Workshop: Proclaiming the Joy and Hope of Christ to the Modern World

The Office of Catechesis and Evangelization of the Diocese of Covington warmly invites all adults throughout the diocese to attend a special day of formation:

Vatican II: Proclaiming the Joy and Hope of Christ to the Modern World

Saturday, Nov. 14, 8:30 a.m.–4 p.m.

Ziegler Auditorium, Academic Center

Thomas More University, Crestview Hills, Kentucky

This engaging workshop will be presented by Professor Lucas Pollice, chief mission officer for the Diocese of Colorado Springs and a gifted speaker known for making the teachings of the Church both accessible and inspiring. Participants will explore the enduring vision of the Second Vatican Council, discover its profound impact on the life of the Church, and learn how its teachings continue to shape evangelization, catechesis, parish life, and Christian discipleship today.

At a time when many people are searching for hope, purpose, and spiritual direction, Vatican II reminds us that Christ is the answer to the deepest longings of the human heart.

Registration is required by Friday, Oct. 23.

To register, please visit: <https://tinyurl.com/56vtzdx2>

For information, contact: Isaak A. Isaak, iisaak@covdio.org or (859) 392-1529.

The Crosier Guild gathers for fellowship and Barbeque

The Diocese of Covington's Crosier Guild recognizes those who have donated \$1,000 or more to the Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal (DPAA) for at least seven years, with those being either consecutive or non-consecutive. The Guild gathers regularly for fellowship events as a way to build community with one another, said Jennifer Cox, DPAA secretary for the Office of Stewardship and Mission

Services. The latest gathering was for Mass and a barbeque dinner at St. Joseph Parish, Cold Spring, with Bishop John Iffert and Father Andrew Young, pastor, who celebrated Mass for the group. "The goal is really just fellowship," said Mrs. Cox. This year, the Guild welcomed 76 new households, bringing the household total to 816.

Ziser photos



Bishop John Iffert joined the latest Crosier Guild gathering, Sept. 9, to meet and come together in fellowship with members of the Guild. The Crosier Guild events are a way for those who have donated to the Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal for at least seven years, at a value of \$1,000 or more, to come together in community.





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Bishop's Schedule

Sept. 21-26
Our Lady of Guadalupe pilgrimage

Sept. 27
TEC Leadership Summit meeting

Sept. 28
Bishop's five-year anniversary Mass, Campbell County Deanery, St. Joseph Parish, Alexandria, 7 p.m.

Sept. 29
Diocesan Review Board meeting, 10 a.m.

Visit Notre Dame Urban Education Center, Covington, 3 p.m.

Bishop's five-year anniversary Mass, Southwest Deanery, All Saints Parish, Walton, 7 p.m.

Couples celebrating milestone anniversaries
Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington
David and Lindsay Otte, 50

Blessed Sacrament Parish, Ft. Mitchell
Charles and Virginia Yancey, 75
Joseph and Irene Eder, 61+
David and Carol Hentz, 61+
Howard and Patricia Anneken, 60
James and Martha Suetholz, 60
Michael and Mary McKeown, 25
Mitchel Stanfield and Patricia Reedy, 25

Holy Cross Parish, Latonia
Paul and Rose Mary Menetrey, 50
Bernie and Pam O'Bryan, 50
Kevin and Karen Klaene, 25
Kevin and Marie Biecker, 1

Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington
David and Janice Stricley, 64
Terry and Dee Gaffney, 61+
Gerald and Andrea Hardcorn, 60
John and Margaret Portwood, 60
David and Jeanette Landenwitch, 50
Greg and Mary Ellen Meier, 50
Steven and Deborah Mueller, 50
Brian and Nora Hiler, 25
Ryan and Renee Reardon, 25

Mary, Queen of Heaven Parish, Erlanger
Gerald and Lois Biedenbender, 70
Bruce and Donna Houp, 50
Scott and Carla Dinius, 25

Mother of God Parish, Covington
Jerry and Nancy Egan, 50

St. Agnes Parish, Ft. Wright
Paul and Theresa Hellmann, 50
William and Deborah Lueke, 50

St. Ann Mission, Covington
John and Christine Wheatley, 25

St. Anthony Parish, Taylor Mill
Robert and Linda Zimmwe, 61

St. Augustine Parish, Covington
Robert and Shirley Harlow, 50

St. Barbara Parish, Erlanger
Bruce and Debra Raines, 50
Larry and Janet Middendorf, 25

St. Bernard Parish, Dayton
Jim and Sharon Conforti, 50
Darryl and Carolyn Menning, 50

St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Ft. Thomas
Ronald and Carol Ewing, 68
Mark and Debra Rolf, 50

St. Cecilia Parish, Independence
Jason and Susana Voight, 25

St. Francis Xavier Parish, Falmouth
Joseph and Christina Bezold, 50

St. Henry Parish, Elsmere
Walter and Martha Witt, 67
William and Betty Koenig, 61
Robert and Cheri Wagner, 60

Martin and Anne Cahill, 50
Nicholas and Judith Dornbusch, 50
Michael and Kathleen Metzger, 50
Joseph and Nicole Gonzalez, 25

St. John Parish, Wilder
Ronald and Virginia Nessler, 72

St. Joseph Parish, Cold Spring
Edward and Ruth Rawe, 70
Larry and Gayle Voet, 65
Alfred and Kathy Lusher, 60
Robert and Kathleen McCartney, 50
Mark and Joni Schabell, 50

St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs
Michael and Linda Hauer, 60
Martin and Anne Cahill, 50
Jose and Emina Nunez, 1
Brad and Heidi Whittle, 1

St. Joseph Parish, Warsaw
Joe and Jacqueline Zimmwe, 60

St. Mary of the Assumption Parish, Alexandria
Steve and Nancy Kemper, 50
Jeff and Debbie Kuntz, 50
Terry and Karen Nessler, 50
Michael and Susan Sayers, 25
Don and Karen Zengel, 25

St. Paul Parish, Florence
Bernie and Kathy Lubbers, 50
Tony and Terri Maile, 50



A young couple with an infant, celebrating their first anniversary, renew their wedding vows together at the Sept. 13 wedding anniversary vespers.

Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, California
Dan and Brenda Williamson, 25
Michael and Olivia Lauer, 1

St. Philip Parish, Melbourne
Michael and Deborah Feinauer, 50

St. Pius X Parish, Edgewood
Robert and Martina Durrett, 70
Edward and Jeanette Grothaus, 60
Gerald and Mary Hoffmeister, 60

Ronald and Linda Durrett, 50
Thomas and Nancy Goeke, 50
Dan and Therese Moser, 50

St. Rose of Lima Parish, Mays Lick
Michael and Christine Bosse, 50

St. Therese Parish, Southgate
Charles and Jacklyn Biery, 60
Paul and Marilyn Rogg, 50
Larry and Bonnie Smith, 50
Deacon Bill and Jean Theis, 50

Martin and Alicia Caballero, 25

St. Thomas Parish, Ft. Thomas
Greg and Jane Brinkman, 50
James and Wanda Stoeckle, 50
Micheal and Beth Rowland, 25
Breyon and Maria Hadder, 1

St. Timothy Parish, Union
James and Judy Adams, 62
Paul "Fred" and Barbara Bernier, 60

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The goal of Christian life

The readings for the Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A, are: Isaiah 55:6-9, Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a and Matthew 20:1-16a.

In the last few weeks, we have heard individual lessons that will aid our growth as Christians. For example, last weekend: forgive over and over (77 times in the translation we heard, seventy times seven in other translations); the weekend before that: if your brother sins against you, tell him his sin first privately, if he does not listen to you, with others, but not to retaliate, but to convert him; the weekend before that: there is nothing more important than one's eternal life.

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Stephen Bankemper

sion of if I want to get to heaven-I must do this-and this. There is an overarching lesson that makes sense of all the individual lessons and can inspire us with the overall goal of our Christian faith; we hear it today in the first reading.

God says today through Isaiah, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways/ and my thoughts above your thoughts." (Is 55:8-9) If only this truth could become most prominent in our minds, we would be well on the way to holiness!

To understand this, we must understand the purpose and goal of the Christian life — it is not to become a good person, but to be transformed.

There are different ways to describe this transformation. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes it as changing from bearing the image of the "earthly man" to the image of the "heavenly man":

"The first man was from the earth, a man of dust [Adam]; the second man is from heaven [Jesus]. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." (1 Cor 15:47-50)

How does this transformation take place? We heard this a few weeks ago (22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time) from Paul's letter to the Romans: "Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind ..." (Rom 12:2) In the Gospel of the same Sunday Jesus put it this way to Peter: "Get behind me, Satan! ... You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." (Matt 16:23)

It is vitally important to know — lest our spirituality become muscular, so to speak, and Pelagian — that this kind of transformation is not something that we do, but something that happens to us. We have a part to play, but that part is what we do to open ourselves to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

Regularly reading and meditating on Scripture is essential. How can we know the mind of God if we ignore the books that teach us that mind?

Prayer is next, of course, where God speaks directly to our soul and communicates what He wants us to do.

Finally, practice. The more we seek to live as the prophets and saints and, especially, Jesus, teach us, the more habitual a holy life will become.

Let us learn the individual lessons that come through the scriptures but let us keep in the mind the overarching purpose of the Christian life, to become people who think the way God thinks and value what God values, so that we may become like him.

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

Saying goodbye to summer

I wrote to you all in my last column about my friend Grimm, who had committed suicide in May to the shock of myself, his friends and his family. The grieving's gotten easier — thanks to the solidarity of friends, love of my family and, of course, time — but I still think of him often.

VIEWPOINT



Maura Baker

My dear friend who also knew Grimm, Vinny, was able to join Grimm's family in Stockholm, Sweden, for a memorial service this summer. He had met them before, years ago, and was welcomed back warmly, despite the lingering sadness of the loss of their son, brother and friend. With him, Vinny took a copy of that edition of the *Messenger* where my reflection on Grimm's passing was published. That paper is still in Stockholm, now, and I'm grateful that that small token was able to fly over the sea in my stead. What a blessing it is to know, and to love.

This summer was a summer of loss. After Grimm's death in May, I continued to brush shoulders with grief in the months to come. A breakup with my boyfriend, the last episode of a 10-year story shared between friends, family's waning health — I'm not afraid to admit that

those "dog days" were dark, even beneath blue skies. Time marches forward regardless. I woke up this morning to a chill in the air, and the pumpkin scented candles and plastic skeletons on display in every store remind me of this fact. I make connections to the artistic trope of "memento mori" — from the Latin "remember you must die." With origins in antiquity and early Christian art, symbolism of skulls — much like the Halloween décor — serve as reminders of our mortality. Perhaps macabre, when taken at surface level, but is an ending, is death, really something to be afraid of?

The Christian life tells us no! Death is not the end, not something to shy away from or to fear — death is a triumph. To die is to have the opportunity to join our Father in Heaven. Death is new life, as is any ending.

In the same vein, the loss I've felt this summer didn't come only with grief. I've been more inspired than ever to make connections with the people that are important to me. I've gotten to see, to hug, to hold, old friends I haven't seen or spoken to in years. I've made more art, written more poetry, than I have in a very long time.

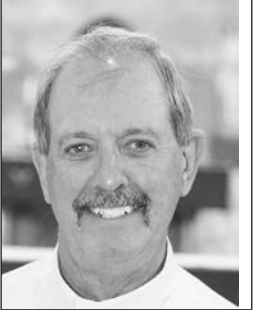
In a few months, even, with all faith in God (and modern medicine), my cousin's baby will be welcomed into the world. I may have said some goodbyes, but I've said hellos as well — and I'll continue to say both of these words as the skies get grayer and the trees get bare. So, goodbye, summertime. And hello to autumn — with every joy and sorrow it brings in equal measure.

Maura Baker is the staff writer of the *Messenger*, the official newspaper of the Diocese of Covington, Ky

Break the cycle

Recently, I went through McDonald's drive-thru to get my wife a Diet Coke. She claims their Cokes are better than anyone else's. When I got to the window to pay, the cashier said there was no charge. I asked, "Are you guys giving away Cokes today?" She said that I owed nothing

BELIEVE, TEACH, PRACTICE



Deacon Michael Keller

because the guy in line ahead of me paid it for me. She said that happens sometimes, and she once had 10 people in a row do that. I was surprised and grateful, so I paid for the person behind me too. Turns out it was a minivan full of hungry kids.

We have all experienced the intolerance and disrespect of some in our society today, people who care only about themselves and their opinions and are quick to attack anyone who disagrees with them. The experience I had at McDonald's was a pleasant surprise. I was reminded of something Jesus said in Luke's Gospel. He said that we should treat others as we would want them to treat us. This is not new. We know this as the "Golden Rule."

Jesus also said, "Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you." This is not easy to do and seems unnatural, especially today, but it is solid advice. Because if we return hate for hate, things only go downhill from there, and the hate will grow into an endless cycle. But breaking the cycle of hate helps eliminate it. If not eliminate it, we at least

aren't consumed by it. Science tells us that when we hate someone, it affects us physically and mentally. Someone once said, "Hating someone is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die." When we allow ourselves to give into returning hate for hate, it only hurts us.

Over 2,000 years ago, Jesus told us how to handle hate and disrespect. He told us how to break the cycle of hate for hate and disrespect for disrespect. His message can be summed up when he says, "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

A good example of this is shown in this little story. A businessman traveled to New York City and took a cab from the airport to his hotel. During the ride, the cab driver was driving aggressively as they do in New York and did something to irritate another driver. That guy laid on his horn and flipped the cab driver off, yelling and waving his arms around. But the cab driver didn't react; it was like he completely ignored the other driver. When the businessman was paying the driver, he asked how he managed to stay cool when the other driver was so angry and disrespectful. The cab driver said, "That guy was unhappy and wanted to make me unhappy too. He was like a garbage truck and he wanted to dump his garbage on me and ruin my day. I refused to let him make me a garbage truck too."

The point is to treat others with the dignity and respect we expect from them even when they don't treat us that way, even if they are trying to dump their garbage on us. Our challenge is to break the cycle. As the cab driver said, let's not allow ourselves to become garbage trucks too.

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

Reporting Misconduct in the Diocese of Covington

Anyone who has experienced sexual misconduct by a cleric, employee or volunteer of the Diocese of Covington is asked to contact Ms. Julie Feinauer, diocesan victims assistance coordinator (859) 392-1515. Professional assistance and pastoral support will be provided in confidentiality and with respect.

A copy of the "Diocesan Policies and Procedures for Addressing Sexual Misconduct" is available by contacting the Chancery, (859) 392-1510 or visiting www.covdio.org and going to "Sexual Misconduct Policy."

Informando sobre conducta inapropiada en la Diócesis de Covington

Cualquier persona que haya experimentado conducta sexual inapropiada por parte de un clérigo, empleado o voluntario de la Diócesis de Covington está invitada a ponerse en contacto con Ms. Julie Feinauer, coordinadora diocesana para dar asistencia a las víctimas. Teléfono (859) 392-1515. Asistencia profesional y apoyo moral serán ofrecidos de una manera confidencial y con respeto.

Una copia de "Normas y Procedimientos sobre Conducta Sexual Inapropiada" está disponible poniéndose en contacto con la Cancillería, Teléfono (859) 392-1510, o visitando www.covdio.org y marcando "Sexual Misconduct Policy."

Diocesan Governance Commission begins work

(Continued from page 3)

In his opening remarks after the spiritual conversation, Bishop Iffert told the group that their work is important because the diocese is facing problems that cannot be solved by one parish, school or office alone.

"This, to me, is the beginning of a very important process, and this meeting is an extraordinarily important meeting," Bishop Iffert said. "Why is that? It's because I've concluded that our diocese faces some systematic challenges, and I always am a believer that systematic challenges require systematic responses. So that's the situation we find ourselves in. I really am relying on the wisdom in this community formed here today. I'm really relying on the sense of the Holy Spirit of this group to help us to address those issues as we go forward."

Bishop Iffert asked the participants to think of the diocese not as a separate office or outside organization, but as the whole local Catholic Church in Northern Kentucky.

"When we speak about the diocese, I'm afraid we fall into this 'we, they' parochialism," he said. "Here's what the diocese is: the diocese is the Church in Northern Kentucky. The diocese is the family of all parishes, schools, Catholic agencies, the lay ecclesial communities, ministries. That's what the diocese is. The diocese has a head, and by the grace of God and with Pope Francis, I am humbled to be that head. The diocese is an organic living thing."

He said diocesan decisions affect everyone because money and resources used in one area are shared by the whole local Church.

"When we make a decision that as a diocese we are going to invest in one place or another, what that means is that every other parish, school, agency, ministry is making a sacrifice so that we can invest in that priority," Bishop Iffert said. "I have no money of my own. I have no huge Sunday Mass to take up a collection. What we do as a diocese is us working collectively to be the Catholic Church, the body of Christ throughout our region — that's what it is."

Bishop Iffert said that the purpose of the Curia is to support the pastoral work of the diocese, not to stand apart from it.

"We have a curial staff here that serves the diocese, and they are a kind of bureaucracy," he said. "And we all know we have our attitudes toward bureaucracy, and our bureaucracy may or may not be organized well for its purpose. That's what you are here to help discern. But our bureaucracy, the Curia, is always directed in a pastoral spirit. That's the idea that we need some of that internal structure and support to be able to coordinate our pastoral ministries across regions and across the whole Church."

He told the volunteers that their task is not small. Their recommendations could shape the way his ministry as bishop and the work of the diocese function for many years.

"I'm charging this group to develop the resources and the conditions within which my own episcopal ministry will function for the next 10, 15 years," Bishop Iffert said. "That's what I'm relying on this group to do — to help cre-

ate the resources, the structures, the directives within which my own ministry as bishop is going to function for the next 10, 15 years. That's why this meeting is so important to me."

Bishop Iffert said he believes the Holy Spirit has already given the local Church the gifts it needs to face its challenges. He calls those gifts the "local genius."

"Every skill, talent, resource we need to respond to the challenges we face, God has already planted in our local community," he said. "There is a local genius. Now, that's not any one person. So, if you think I'm talking about you, you're on the wrong track," he said with a chuckle. "But there is a local genius, and I think particularly in Northern Kentucky, we have a very strong sense of our local identity and our local genius. All the gifts we need to respond effectively, to put ourselves in a place where the Holy Spirit can use us, are already in our community."

Bishop Iffert focused on the need to move from simply maintaining current programs to building a missionary Church that is ready to grow. He pointed to serious concerns, including fewer registered Catholic households, lower school enrollment and fewer donors to diocesan campaigns. But he also named signs of hope, including more people entering OCIA (the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults), rising Mass attendance and greater parish planning.

"All of this is about moving from maintenance to mission," Bishop Iffert said. "That's the goal — to move us from how do we keep the lights on and the doors open, to how do we grow? How do we get the word of Jesus to more people? How do we take an interest in their spiritual life? How do we make sure they know the people in the Church care about their spiritual growth?"

The bishop said one of his deepest concerns is the overall resignation that young people will leave the practice of the faith and that the Church is shrinking.

"The one thing that drives me, if you want to say one thing that drives Bishop John, I am sick and tired of just accepting the idea that we're going to lose 60 percent of our young people from the life of the Church," he said. "I am tired of pointing to those numbers and people saying, 'Well, that's just the way it is today.' What if we dared to grow? What would it look like if we set as our goal that we were going to grow? What would we do then?"

Bishop Iffert said the Commission should work with a spirit of servant leadership, collaboration, listening, transparency and creativity. He said he is inviting the group into the work of decision-making, even though the final responsibility for decisions belongs to him as bishop.

"I'm inviting you into the decision-making process, recognizing that I have a unique role in that process. Pastors in your parishes function in the same way. They have a unique role, but not the only role in that process. I want to put forward listening and building consensus where we can. I think that's always important," he said. "At some point, this conversation will come to something that looks like a con-

clusion, and then, because I'm your bishop, I'm the only person in the diocese who can take that decision and say, 'Okay, we've been talking long enough. We may be right, we may be wrong, but this is what we're going to do.'"

He also asked the Commission to help the diocese make decisions based on good information.

"I very often have to make decisions in a low information environment," Bishop Iffert said. "We just do not have data, and I want your help in moving from making decisions based on anecdotes and personal reports to having data to support the decisions we make. I am so often asked to make a decision, and I have no good data to support one decision or another. And I want to begin to change that."

And finally, Bishop Iffert said, "I believe very much in transparency and in clear channels between me, the Curia, and the wider Church. I believe we exist, me and the Curia, we exist to promote the creative ministries of parishes, schools and agencies. We exist to motivate that kind of ministry and to support it."

Considering that the Church is losing many of its young people Bishop Iffert encouraged the Commission to think and act boldly.

"I think we need kind of an entrepreneurial spirit. We need to try things, and when they work, we need to share them and reproduce them. We need to be creative in the ministries we do. We need to recognize the moment as the crisis that it is, and we need to respond with creativity," he said.

As the meeting ended, Bishop Iffert thanked the volunteers and asked them to think creatively, pray and make recommendations that will help the diocese better serve its people.

"Go consider the problem, think creatively, form your best directions in the Holy Spirit, and make recommendations to me on how we organize ourselves," he said. "Thank you. God bless."



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PEOPLE AND EVENTS

Newsworthy

Thomas More University launched the 2026-2027 academic year, Aug. 17, with a historic student body of more than 2,400 students, marking the University’s third consecutive year of enrollment growth and its highest enrollment in institutional history. Total enrollment increased a record-breaking six percent over the previous year, underscoring the growing national recognition of Thomas More and the strength of its distinctive Catholic liberal arts education.

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://covidio.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.

Newport Central Catholic Alumni Weekend Sept. 18 and 19. The weekend begins with a pregame celebration, Sept. 18, 6 p.m., Cifardini Family Athletic Complex plaza.

On Sept. 19, Mass, NCC St. John Paul II Chapel, 8:30 a.m. followed by the Thoroughbred 5K fun run/walk for all ages, check-in begins at 9 a.m.; run/walk 10 a.m. RSVP today at <https://ncchs.com/alumni/alumniweekend>.

Newport Central Catholic is partnering with Cincinnati Children’s and The Blessing List Ministry to host “Real Talk and Real Hope About Suicide Prevention,” Sept. 21, 6–8:30 p.m.

at NCC. The free event is open to area teens and adults and is an opportunity to learn practical ways we can reduce suicide risk, open the door to difficult conversations, and promote a sense of community.

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.

“Reclaiming the Sacred through Beauty: A Sister’s Story of Harm in the Church and How She is Reclaiming the Sacred in Her Own Journey through Art,” a webinar for survivors and those who care for them, Sept. 28, 6:30–8 p.m. CDT. Sister Danielle Victoria will share several art pieces she created through her journey of grief, after learning that her trusted spiritual director had allegedly assaulted a sister from her former community. Sister Danielle is co-founder of the Sisters of the Little Way of Beauty, Truth, and Goodness, a private association of the faithful in the Diocese of Lexington, Ky. To register visit https://link.edgepilot.com/x/fv50pk8umU5XKoYcFekp_Rw?u=https://archspmorg.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_VKlzhTc9QlOusNIDsMDl3w

St. Joseph Church in Camp Springs will be holding their Annual Oktoberfish Fish Fries on October 2nd and 9th, 2026. Dinners are served from 4:00 p.m.–7:30 p.m. The menu features hand-breaded fried cod and catfish fillets as well as baked cod, shrimp, crab cakes, salmon and a wide variety of homemade desserts. Dine-in or carry-out options available. For more information or to place a carry-out order, please call (859) 635-2491 or visit stjoseph-campsprings.org.

The 9th annual international, diocesan-wide Rosary Coast to Coast 2026 will be held Oct. 4, 4 p.m., at The Grotto of the Two Hearts, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington. This year Deacons Chris Freihofer and Rich Malsi will lead the hour of prayer. This international event, initiated by Father Richard Heilman of The Holy

League, unites people from across the globe together at the same time, under the protective mantle of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in prayer for the spiritual health of our country. Rain or shine. Please bring a chair. For information visit rosarycoasttocoast.com. Questions: e-mail Jeanette at jmlandenwitch@yahoo.com.

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.

Support group for separated and divorced begins Oct. 8 and runs through Dec. 3. New Beginnings is an eight-week support program designed to help separated and divorced individuals heal and move forward with hope. Led by facilitators who have experienced similar losses, the program will be held at Catholic Charities, Covington, 7-8:30 p.m.

Parish festivals

Sept. 18–20
St. Timothy, Union
Oktoberfest

Sept. 20
St. Matthew, Morning View
12–7 p.m.
Parish festival

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

Sept. 26
St. Therese, Southgate,
Oktoberfest

Registration is required, visit <https://forms.gle/PRcoSuf3Jttuuz1p7>, or call (859) 392-1529

A Marriage Encounter Experience will be held on October 9–11 at the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center in Norwood, Ohio. Come and learn how to enrich your marriage. Contact Jake and Carinna Henry at (513) 807-5605, application@esharing.org or visit esharing.org.

St. Timothy Parish, Union, will host a series of interactive work-

shops Oct. 14, Oct. 21, and Oct. 28, 7–9 p.m., Brodnick Hall, designed to provide tools to help you share your faith. Parish Missionary Disciples offers a way to deepen your relationship with Jesus Christ, transforming believers into disciples, and empowering disciples to witness to Jesus. Since 2024, over 200 members of the Diocese of Covington have participated in this program. All are welcome! Register at <https://tinyurl.com/sttimothyPMD>.

St. Henry District High School Craft Show Oct. 24, 9 a.m.–3 p.m., St. Henry Athletic Complex, 35 Cavalier Blvd., Florence. Over 100 local craftsmen display unique hand-made items — wooden toys and carvings, home décor, holiday décor, specialty coffees and nuts, homemade spices, pastry items, and more. Free face painting and a fall display photo opp. Adult admission \$5. Overflow parking at Boone County High School. Contact Cathy (859) 341-3135.

“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@covidio.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@covidio.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 covidio.org/register/

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

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

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

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



Bringing scripture to life

Immaculate Heart of Mary’s, Burlington, 3rd grade religion class learned about the Baptism of Jesus and how the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the form of a dove. To bring the Scripture story to life, students created mosaics of the Holy Spirit above the Jordan River, where Jesus was baptized.

Pope Leo warns technology cannot replace the value of human relationships

Josephine Peterson
Catholic News Service

In a world of increasing technological dependence and polarization, Pope Leo XIV said there is greater urgency for humanity to see itself as a single “human community.”

“The perfection of the human person and the development of society must be regarded as closely interdependent: to set them against one another or separate them would be to render them meaningless,” the pope said during his Sept. 16 weekly general audience in St. Peter’s Square.

As artificial intelligence opens up new possibilities, it also comes with risks as relationships become more virtual and less personal, Pope Leo said, continuing his series of reflections on the Second Vatican Council’s pastoral constitution “Gaudium et Spes.”

The constitution highlights human interdependence and the need for mutual respect, he said, and invites people to draw strength from God’s plan that all people “constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

That is why, he said, “love for God and neighbor is the first and greatest commandment.”

Pope Leo warned that as artificial intelligence becomes increasingly integrated into society, there is a risk of people becoming accustomed to “delegating to algorithms decisions that are the sole preserve of the human conscience.”

To build a more humane and just world, he said, people must move beyond an “individualistic mindset” and invest in human relationships with substance and depth. Diversity among people and peoples “must not be considered as a danger or a threat, but rather as a resource for enrichment and growth,” he said.

“The vision of humanity as a community of persons enables us to work together to seek the common good,” the



CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Pope Leo XIV smiles from the popemobile while riding around St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican before his weekly general audience Sept. 16, 2026.

pope said in his remarks to English-speaking pilgrims.

Pope Leo also highlighted the constitution’s emphasis on respect for the human person, citing its condemnation of “whatever is opposed to life itself,” including murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful self-destruction, as well as slavery, prostitution, human trafficking and “disgraceful working conditions” in which people are treated as tools for profit.

“This requires taking into account respect for every person, promoting life and avoiding any form that threatens it; respecting

even enemies or those who think differently than us; and respecting the dignity that each person possesses, without discriminating against anyone, which is embodied in social justice,” the pope said in his remarks to Spanish-speaking pilgrims.

The Second Vatican Council document also emphasizes the “fundamental equality of all human beings,” he said, and calls for every form of discrimination to be overcome.

“For the future of humanity depends on each person’s commitment to collaborate with God and with their brothers and sisters in building a more humane world,” Pope Leo said.

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This artwork by former St. Joseph Academy art teacher Wendy Fleury depicts students approaching the school in Walton. Created originally to commemorate the school's previous anniversary, Mrs. Fleury's daughter, Hailey Kees, carries on the legacy as the school's current art teacher.





September, 2026

Dear St. Joseph Academy Community,

With profound gratitude and joy, I join the faithful of the Diocese of Covington in congratulating the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker as they celebrate the 50th anniversary of St. Joseph Academy.

For five decades, St. Joseph Academy has stood as a beacon of faith, learning and service in our local Church. What began as a bold act of trust in God's providence has grown into a vibrant educational ministry that has shaped the minds, hearts and souls of countless young people. Generations of students have been blessed by an education that seeks not only academic excellence but also the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ.



Bishop John Iffert

The story of St. Joseph Academy is inseparable from the story of the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker themselves. Founded in the Diocese of Covington, the charism of the Sisters centers around total abandonment to God through an all-embracing dedication to his Church. When they opened the Academy in 1976, they embraced that mission with courage, sacrifice and unwavering hope.

The spirit that animated the founding Sisters can be found in the words they adopted as their community motto: **"Here I am, Lord, I come to do Your will."** In establishing St. Joseph Academy, the Sisters answered God's call with generosity, and their "yes" has borne abundant fruit. Through years of faithful service, they have built a school community where children are known, loved, challenged and encouraged to recognize God's presence in their lives.

The patronage of St. Joseph is especially fitting for this anniversary. As the faithful guardian of the Holy Family, St. Joseph carried out his vocation with humility, diligence and trust. In much the same way, the Sisters have quietly devoted themselves to the care and formation of young people. Their work has often been accomplished without recognition or acclaim, but its impact can be seen in the lives of alumni, families, parishes and communities throughout our diocese.

A milestone such as this invites us to reflect with gratitude on all those who have contributed to the Academy's mission. We remember the founding Sisters whose vision made this school possible. We thank the many religious and lay teachers, administrators, staff members, parents, benefactors and volunteers who have shared in that vision over the years. We thank the priests who have served All Saints Parish and worked cooperatively with the SSJWs in fostering the school. Together, they have all helped create an environment where faith and reason flourish side by side.

As we celebrate this golden anniversary, we also look to the future with confidence. The mission of Catholic education remains as important today as it was 50 years ago. Our world needs young people who are grounded in faith, formed in virtue, committed to service and prepared to lead with integrity. St. Joseph Academy continues to answer that need with excellence and devotion.

As we celebrate this golden anniversary, I also invite young women throughout our diocese to prayerfully consider whether God may be calling them to religious life. The witness of the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker reminds us that a generous "yes" to God's call can bear fruit far beyond what we can imagine. For 50 years, their consecrated lives have enriched our parishes, schools, and communities, and their joyful service continues to be a powerful sign of God's love at work in the world. If you feel even the slightest stirring in your heart toward a vocation to religious life, do not be afraid to bring that desire to prayer. Speak with a trusted spiritual guide, seek the Lord's will, and consider whether He may be inviting you to share in the charism and mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker. The Church needs women of faith, courage and generosity who are willing to dedicate their lives to the service of God and His people.

On behalf of the Diocese of Covington, I offer my heartfelt congratulations and deepest gratitude to the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker. May God bless you for your faithful witness and generous service. Through the intercession of St. Joseph, may St. Joseph Academy continue to flourish as a place where young people encounter Christ and grow into the men and women God calls them to be.

In gratitude,

Most Rev. John C. Iffert
Bishop of Covington

Looking back to the start

Sister Patricia Jean Cushing
Contributor

In looking back at our founding years, I ran across the March 17, 1972 report of the then "All Saints Parish School Board." It stated that the "maintaining of our school has been a topic of great importance and discussion for the past years." Enrollment had dropped to 32 children. The report continued to say, "In December



Sister Patricia Jean Cushing points to the framed watercolor featured on the front page of this St. Joseph Academy 50th anniversary supplement.

(1971), the Diocesan School Board felt the parish should give serious consideration to the closing of the school at the end of the '71-'72 school year."

Sister Evelyn Fugazzi, SCN, who was acting principal at the time along with the school board members stated their particular reasons for wanting to retain the school to the Diocesan School Board; namely, "We are deeply concerned with the religious education and survival of our parish. If the younger generation is not trained and educated in their religion, we cannot expect them to carry on the work of the Church. We, as Christians, cannot sit back and say, 'God will provide!' The old saying might well apply that 'God helps those who help themselves!'"

A letter was sent to Bishop Richard Ackerman requesting prayers and guidance. Communication with requests for Sisters were sent to the Provincial Superiors of the Benedictine Sisters, Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of Divine Providence and to the provincial-elect of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth. All responded expressing their deep concern for their situation but they would be unable to help staff All Saints School.

"After exerting all efforts possible to find a way to maintain All Saints School, the Parish School Board has come to the regrettable decision that there is no other choice than to close the school."

This report was signed by the then pastor, Father Paul Tenhundfeld, Sister Evelyn, principal, Mr. George (Abe) Ryan, president, Mr. Donald Albers, Mr. Robert Kelly, Mrs. Richard Ryan and Mrs. William Krekeler.

Little did the school board and parishioners know back in 1972 that Providentially the Good Lord had indeed heard the cry of their heart and was preparing another community of religious Sisters to take over the administration of their school.

In 1973, Sister Ellen and 17 Sisters with her had broken off from the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth. Bishop Ackerman who knew Sister Ellen from teaching at the



A caricature window painting of Sister Patricia Jean's smiling face welcomed students back to school in August. The work was created by art teacher Hailey Kees.

ST. JOSEPH ACADEMY 50TH ANNIVERSARY

then Cathedral School which was located in the current Curia building, who was a spiritual father to her during the troubling times of their separation, and who was instrumental in their approval from Rome to found a new community in 1974, welcomed them into the Diocese of Covington with open arms.

The Bishop gave the responsibility of finding a home for the Sisters to Mr. Charles Deters. Living in Walton himself, he knew of property available to purchase. Thus, the Sisters came to live in Walton just a few blocks away from All Saints Parish.

Shortly after settling in, the parishioners went to Father Joseph Collins to ask if the Sisters would have a religious bible school in the parish. Father Collins had come out of retirement, being appointed temporary pastor with the sudden death of Father Tenhundfeld.

Soon afterwards, parishioners approached Father Collins again, this time asking, "Would you ask the Sisters to reopen the school." Sister Ellen (then Mother Ellen, superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker) was given permission by Bishop Ackerman to do so "not as a parish school, but as a private Academy" in the parish of All Saints.

With nothing short of a leap of faith, the Sisters assumed the responsibility for the religious education of the children of All Saints Parish first, next to Catholics outside the parish and then to non-Catholics (still practiced to this day), and the financial obligation of maintaining a school as it was written in the very first \$1 lease agreement for the use of the 4-room school house "in order to fulfill their apostolic work of teaching."

This agreement was signed by Father Paul Krebs, Mother Ellen, Sister Margery, and Bernie Vaske who was president of All Saints Finance Committee at the time. It was dated July 21, 1976.

Throughout the years, many families and their children have been served by the Sisters presence. Pastors have welcomed the Sisters and allowed them to grow their school on church property as is shown repeatedly by the expansion of a new wing under Father Paul Krebs and the parishioners, the addition of a preschool now housed in this building, and the addition of a day care center named after Mother Ellen, hence the MEC center, under Msgr. John Schulte as pastor. It was also during Msgr. Schulte's time that he allowed the Sisters to put the name "St. Joseph Academy Elementary School" on the building.

When Doctor Waller retired, he gave the Sisters "the first right of refusal" to purchase the medical building across the street on Beatrice. The community of Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker (under then Mother Celeste Marie, as superior) did so, hence the name, "Waller Hall" where we currently have five classrooms. The Sisters shortly after its purchase, asked Msgr.



Mother Ellen (1976)



Sister Mary Petronilla (1976-1983)



Sister Virginia Marie (1983-1993)



Sister Margery (1993-1995)



Sister Patricia Jean (1995-2006; 2020-present)



Sister Therese Marie (2006-2008)



Sister Elizabeth Ann (2008-2020)

Schulte if he would like to use the upstairs for parish offices. Seizing the opportunity, he agreed to exchange \$1 per year for its use. (The parish offices went from the back porch of the rectory, to the white house, to the current Waller Hall upstairs).

So, began an unusual and possibly unique arrangement which exists in the diocese to the current day. "It has been nothing less than a Providential arrangement."

Someone recently asked Mother Christina and I what Mother Ellen would say to us if she were here. Choking back tears, we replied, "We hope she would be proud of us!"

Thank you for allowing us to serve you. We have been blessed in so many ways since the question was first posed, "Would you just reopen our school?"

Sister Patricia Jean Cushing, SJW, is the principal of St. Joseph Academy, Walton.

St. Joseph Academy: Education in faith

Kendra McGuire
Contributor

For 50 years, the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker have dedicated their lives to serving the children of this community. Joined in mission by lay teachers and staff, they have provided an authentic Catholic education to each child who entered their doors.



Kendra McGuire

As we celebrate this milestone, it is good to reflect on what 50 years of Christ-centered education means. At St. Joseph Academy, children learn to excel in their studies. They learn to read and write and communicate with

others. They take on the challenges of mathematics and science. They learn the history of Kentucky, the world and this great nation. And they are enriched by their art classes, develop a love of literature through Library and strengthen their bodies through PE classes. And all of these courses are good and important to their growth and development.

But the true gift of St. Joseph Academy is teaching the children about Jesus Christ's love for us and teaching them to love God. They do this in so many ways but most visibly by starting each school day with Mass, praying continuously and teaching children how to serve one another.

You see, St. Joseph Academy knows the most important lessons in life do not come from a textbook. While school work is very important, it comes second to our relationship with Jesus.

And this is what makes a Catholic education at St. Joseph Academy so special. It is a place where families become a community centered around Jesus. A place where you can raise your children together, become friends and help one another during life's ups and downs. It is a

place where the Christian values you are teaching at home are reinforced and lived out here at school. It is a place of welcome and safety, that if we fall short of living like Jesus, we can seek mercy and forgiveness and begin anew.

And when the children who have experienced this education in faith and academics grow up, we pray they choose to live in this same way, teaching the next generation to know and serve God too.

We are not only celebrating the gift of St. Joseph Academy, we are also celebrating the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker and the faculty and staff who continue to make this school a great place for students to learn and grow.

With gratitude, I wish to thank those who have accepted the call to teach and work at St. Joseph for the 2026-27 school year and all those who have done so over the past 50 years.

What a blessing you are to this community and to the Diocese of Covington. May God continue to bless you and the families you serve for many years to come!

Kendra McGuire is superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Covington, Ky.



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ST. JOSEPH ACADEMY 50TH ANNIVERSARY

50 years of faith and blessings

Mike Shannon
Contributor

While America celebrates its 250th anniversary, the Diocese of Covington, the city of Walton, and All Saints Parish in Walton, Ky., are also celebrating an important milestone: the 50th anniversary of St. Joseph Academy. Yes, exactly five decades ago the relatively new order of nuns who had separated from the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and then settled in Walton under the name of the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker re-opened the grade school at All

Saints which had closed several years previously.

The re-birth (and re-naming) of the school reenergized the parish and brought forth a multitude of blessings to all involved, as well as to the community at large. From its inception to the present day, St. Joseph Academy has been a resounding success, and it's clear that the school and the Sisters who have run it have been under the constant protection of their namesake, St. Joseph, and Our Blessed Mother.

Mother Ellen served as the first principal of St. Joseph

Academy but only for the first year. She was succeeded by Sister Mary Petronilla (1976-1983), Sister Virginia Marie (1983-1993), Sister Margery (1993-1995), Sister Patricia Jean (1995-2006), Sister Therese Marie (2006-2008), Sister Elizabeth Ann (2008-2020), and, once again, Sister Patricia Jean (2020-to the present). Each Sister has brought her own talents and skills to their apostolic ministry, but more importantly every one of them has been guided by the school's mission statement, a vision which clearly delineates the first and most important goal of any authentic Catholic school.

The very first paragraph of the school's mission statement promulgated in 1976 reads: "A Catholic school has one primary reason for existence: to instruct students in the truths of our faith, so that, accepting these truths, they may live, that God 'through Jesus Christ may carry out in them all that which is pleasing to him' (Heb. 13:21). Hence, basic to our philosophy as Catholic educators at St. Joseph Academy is the instruction in the principles of Christian faith and morals — principles that may serve our students as guidelines in worthy earthly living and in attainment of eternal beatitude."

In the beginning, St. Joseph Academy was housed in the parish's original four-room school building, with each room home to two of the eight grades. Space was so limited that the principal's office was literally a closet in the middle of the building, and according to Sister Patricia Jean the four rooms were so close together that to deliver the morning announcements all she had to do was "step out into the hall and start talking!"

In 1986, to accommodate the growing enrollment, an addition to the school was built by the parish. The school reached peak enrollment in 2001, the year of its 25th anniversary, with its 296 students filling two classes per grade plus a kindergarten. In order to fit everyone into the school's celebratory 25th anniversary group photo the school moved en masse to the gym at the nearby Walton-Verona public high school.

While never abandoning for a moment the school's primary mission, the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker and the lay teachers who have complemented their efforts have also never neglected the academic and social needs of their students. Students of the school have received many academic honors, and the strength of the curriculum is evident in the fact that the curriculum is used by parents who home school their children.

Over the years St. Joseph the Worker students have also, in imitation of the Sisters, exhibited amazing generosity in supporting numerous charities and good works. A short list of these activities includes: volunteering five days in Appalachia with Father Paul Beiting, making a CD recording of the rosary, supporting a Catholic Order of Foresters' winter clothing drive and conducting "penny wars" to benefit the diocesan Seminarian Gift Bag Program and the DCCH Center for Children and Families.

And always, the overriding purpose of these activities has been emphasized to the students, as Sister Elizabeth Ann told those students who were heading to the studio to record the rosary in 2014, "We are doing this to raise money



Photos courtesy of St. Joseph Academy

(top) This file photo shows the exterior of the original St. Joseph Academy, Walton, as it appeared in 1976.

(bottom) In 1985, under the leadership of Father Paul Krebs, a new addition to St. Joseph's Academy was constructed, as seen in progress in this file photo.

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for the school but, more importantly, we're doing this to help people grow closer to Jesus and Mary. That's the main goal of this."

While All Saints Church does not subsidize the school, the parishioners themselves support it generously through the DPAA and, particularly by volunteering their help with two key annual fund raisers: the best fish dinner for six weeks during every Lenten season and a barbeque

Pig Fest held every Father's Day weekend. The food offered at each event is so good that many non-Catholics in the area step up to the plate, so to speak, each year.

This is not to say that keeping the school going for 50 years has been easy. It has taken a lot of hard work, a lot of sacrifices and a lot of dedication — but the school has friends in very high places who look after it. As the indefatigable Sister Patricia Jean says confidently, "God always provides for us."

And the students themselves — the main beneficiaries of the Academy — how do they feel about the school? Well, one may judge that by considering the experience of Beth Kahmann (the daughter of Al and Cathy Baumgartner) who graduated from St. Joseph Academy, sent her four children to the school, and has been teaching at the school now for more than a decade and a half.

Today, St. Joseph Academy has 80 students enrolled in grades preschool through eight, with an additional 70 or so children (aged 1-5) enrolled at any given time in the school's child care center, named after Mother Ellen. The school would welcome additional grade school students, of course, but as Sister Patricia Jean notes the small class sizes enable the school to practice "quality over quantity."

By any measure one wishes to use, St. Joseph Academy is a treasure worth guarding, sustaining and preserving for future generations. Former All Saints pastor Father Matthew Cushing (now the pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes in Park Hills) still serves the Academy as the school's IT Director, and he knows the school as well as anyone. Let us give him the final word as we celebrate the school's auspicious 50th anniversary: "What makes St. Joseph Academy so important is none other than the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker. It is important for the children to see examples of what it means to dedicate oneself to God in such a loving, sacrificial way. They see that example not only in the Sisters' tireless work ethic, but especially in the Sisters' lives. The children see them in their habits which is a visible sign of the life to come, and they see their life of prayer via prayers at school and most especially via daily Mass. Their love of the Faith is contagious, and it impacts the children for the better. Please pray for many vocations to the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker and pray for St. Joseph Academy that it may flourish for another 50 years and beyond!"



Mother Ellen Curran was the first principal of St. Joseph Academy when it was founded in 1976.



(above, top) Father Paul Krebs, former pastor of All Saints Parish, Walton, blesses a tree amongst a group of onlooking students in this file photo.

(above) Members of the St. Joseph Academy community help to set up a sign advertising the Pig Fest, one of the school's most important fundraisers.

(below) Sister Anita Marie, SJW, punches a student's lunch ticket. For 50 years, the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker have fostered, cared for and taught at St. Joseph's Academy.



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Students asked to recognize the virtue of St. Joseph in others as community gathers in commemoration of St. Joseph Academy's 50 year anniversary

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

A whole community gathered together, Aug. 26, to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of St. Joseph Academy, Walton. A significant day for the school, Aug. 26 marks the very first "first day of school" in 1976 for the rural academy.

A Mass was held in celebration at the neighboring All Saints Parish — as parishioners send their children to the school, which is run by the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker; but also who share both physical proximity and history with one another in forming Walton's Catholic community.

Joining sisters and community members was Bishop John Iffert, the celebrant of the Mass who processed into a church full of families, supporters, faculty, staff, students and fellow clergy — all of whom he welcomed at the start of his homily.

"I'm really pleased to be able to celebrate this important day," he said, "and thank you for coming out to celebrate St. Joseph Academy and to celebrate the ministry of the sisters for 50 years here in this place."

Reflecting also on the 250th anniversary of the United States celebrated this year, Bishop Iffert reflected on the "patriot" St. Joseph. "We see in him the model of fatherhood, the model of a man who set himself aside for service to Jesus and Mary, for service to God and God's beloved people — and we see in him every man-made virtue, and we see in him one who we would like to imitate, whose intercession we desire."

"As we celebrate this anniversary," he said, "we think of all the people who worked shoulder to shoulder, side by side."

He asked students present to look at the peers they're close to — in the classroom, or on the playground — and ask themselves: "Where do I see Jesus in this person? Where do they remind me of Jesus Christ? How do they remind me of the love of God?" And, furthermore, "Which one of my teachers reminds me of Joseph? Which one of my classmates has the virtue of St. Joseph? ...From whom should I learn something today? Who is being sent here in our community to teach me something about the way of God today?"

"Here in our own school," Bishop Iffert said, "here in our own Church, here in our community, in whom do I see St. Joseph today? Who do I need to be my example and my prayer?"

"We don't want to miss the opportunity that is given to us here in the school ... to grow in virtue, to put on the mind of Christ, to live in his love and to be led into his peace." Bishop Iffert said, "I hope, young people, that you're recognizing the formation that you're receiving from these people who love you and care for you."

He concluded with more gratitude, saying, "Today we give thanks to God for St. Joseph Academy — for their 50 years of forming people in that vision of the civilization of life, the kingdom of God."



(left) With his hands raised, Bishop John Iffert prays at the altar of All Saints Parish, Walton, during a Mass commemorating the 50-year anniversary of their neighboring school, St. Joseph Academy, operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker.

(above) Families with young children stand for the final blessing.

(below) Priests and deacons who have previously served the community of All Saints Parish and St. Joseph Academy join together to commemorate the schools anniversary at the celebration Mass.

(bottom, right) The sign of peace is shared between the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker and the community.

(bottom, left) Bishop Iffert greets a Sister of St. Joseph the Worker before the celebration Mass, sharing a laugh.



Bishop John Iffert joined the celebration of St. Joseph Academy's 50th anniversary as homilist and celebrant of Mass, August 26. To hear a piece of Bishop Iffert's homily, scan the QR code.

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St. Joseph Academy offers homeschool families support, community and faith

Laura Keener
Editor

If any homeschool parents have ever felt like chasing after the yellow school bus as it made its way through the neighborhood, know that you're not alone.

Anne Garnett, a mother of seven, understands that feeling well. She and her husband, Tim, have homeschooled all of their seven children, whose ages range from 27 to 8. For Mrs. Garnett, homeschooling began as a calling and became a way to shape learning around each child's needs.

Mrs. Garnett admits that she never imagined herself being a homeschool mom. But when her first daughter turned five and it was time to enroll in school, she felt a tug on her heart.

"I love the idea of being able to just be with my children," she said.

She said homeschooling has allowed her to accommodate each child's different learning styles and needs by "shaping their curriculum to them rather than the other way around," she said. "It's been a real blessing."

Mrs. Garnett is also honest about the hard parts. "Homeschooling is full of lots of joy and lots of fulfillment, but it also has many challenges," Mrs. Garnett said.

That is why the Homeschooling Support program at St. Joseph Academy, Walton, has meant so much to her family.

The program is an affordable academic hybrid option for students in grades 1 through 8. Students attend St. Joseph Academy on Mondays and Thursdays, arrive by 7:30 a.m., begin the day with Holy Mass at 8 a.m., and are dismissed at 3 p.m. On the other three school days, students work at home on teacher-assigned lessons.

For Mrs. Garnett, the program offered the best of both worlds.

"I loved the idea of having that support for those two days a week at school," she said. She also liked that her children would get social time and learn from someone other than mom. After her first child joined in third grade, the family stayed with the program.

"It was a huge success," Mrs. Garnett said. "It has allowed my husband and I to continue our dream of homeschooling, but at the same time being able to outsource



St. Joseph Academy students pose with a model skeleton in the school's science classroom. Science is one of the classes that homeschooling families can choose to allow their child to take "a la carte" at St. Joseph Academy.

some of the more difficult aspects of homeschooling." As children get older and lessons become more advanced, she said, "it's just really great to have that support those two days a week."

St. Joseph the Worker Sister Patricia Jean Cushing said the program grew from a simple desire to serve families. "The sisters are trying to meet the needs of the whole family," she said. Homeschooling families first asked whether the school could offer them space. Over time, St. Joseph

smooth.

"I really credit the homeschool program that he was under at St. Joe's for all those years, with preparing him definitely academically, socially," she said.

Even with the challenges, Mrs. Garnett remains grateful. "There are moments that you just want to chase that yellow school bus down the street and tell them they forgot a few kids," she joked. Still, she said homeschooling has been "a very edifying experience" for her family.

Academy invited homeschool students into the regular school program two days each week.

Now, Sister Patricia Jean said, the students are part of the normal school day. "You can't even tell them apart from the traditional students," she said. "They wear our uniform. They have the same routine."

In the lower grades, teachers send home packets and checklists. In the upper grades, assignments are posted in Google Classroom.

The program also offers flexibility. All classes are available on an a la carte basis, allowing families to choose the subjects that best support their homeschool plan, including religion, language arts, math, science or history.

That option, Mrs. Garnett said, "It just is another example of meeting the family and their needs where they're at."

Faith is central to the program. "The sisters just really create an atmosphere where faith is first," Mrs. Garnett said.

Sister Patricia Jean said families from different backgrounds are welcome, while also knowing the Catholic faith is part of daily life at the school.

"Everyone is welcome here," she said. "But you know, we teach the Catholic faith. They will go to Mass."

For families with children in both the five-day school and the homeschool support program, Sister Patricia Jean said the setup can make daily life easier.

"It's one campus, one church," she said. "One pickup, one dropoff. It's a win-win."

Mrs. Garnett has seen the program help her children prepare for the future. One son moved from homeschooling into Covington Catholic High School, and she said the transition was

Childcare at St. Joseph Academy grows from a foundation of faith

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

As a foundational principal of St. Joseph Academy, meeting the needs of the whole family is a priority. Over the years, the school expanded to include kindergarteners, preschoolers, to a daycare program and a homeschooling program.

Formerly home to both programs, the Mother Ellen Center (MEC), named for the school's first principal, is the home of the childcare programming at St. Joseph Academy.

The school's daycare program is offered to children aged one through five, with after-school services for children of all ages, and is state-licensed, with classrooms organized by age group. Summer care is also offered for families in need of such aid. Currently, the daycare program is in a "boom" of growth, according to St. Joseph Academy principal Sister Patricia Jean Cushing.

Angie McNay, who is the daycare's current director and mother of seven herself whose own children attended St. Joseph Academy, attributes this growth to the program's good reputation — and the faith-centered foundation that all arms of the school are built upon.

While not all families are Catholic, they "like that faith based, homey feel," Mrs. McNay said. "All the children are like our own, and we love them all."

Children are taught the Catholic faith and participate in school Masses in the daycare regardless of their background, a fact that Sister Patricia Jean emphasizes when meeting families interested in their programming.

"I feel every part of the school is an extension of what the sisters started a long time ago," Mrs. McNay said, "a very faith-based foundation. That's how we run everything, and it's growing. Families are very happy, the children are happy and the staff is happy, as well."



Preschool students learn with play food alongside an instructor at St. Joseph's Academy, Walton.

Keener photo

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Washington Letter: Cost-of-living worries and Trump take center stage as midterms near

Kate Scanlon
OSV News

With 50 days left before the midterm elections as of Sep. 14, polls show Americans are increasingly concerned about cost-of-living increases, an issue affecting multiple areas of Catholic social concern.

Anxieties about the cost of living are expected to feature heavily in voter behavior in November. A Sept. 4 Ipsos poll found 74% of Americans said they think the cost of living is on the wrong track, while just 13% said it is heading in the right direction.

The prices of consumer goods, housing and transportation have featured prominently in messaging by candidates on both sides of the aisle.

Both major political parties in the U.S. typically hold conventions before a presidential election with the aim of formally nominating their candidate for president. But the Republican National Committee's midterm convention in Dallas Sept. 9-10 marked the first such event before a midterm election, functioning similarly to a campaign rally.

President Donald Trump, who is term-limited, appeared eager to cast the election as a referendum on himself. In remarks at the GOP's midterm convention Sept. 9, he urged Republicans to "pretend" he is on the November ballot.

"In actuality, I really am running," he said. "We don't really know it but we are. I mean, we're running together. We have to have Congress. We have to have the majorities. If we don't have the majorities, so much can be lost."

In an apparent attempt to address voter concerns about cost of living, Trump said he would send \$5,000 "dividend" checks to every American if Republicans win the midterm elections, a proposal that would cost nearly \$1.3 trillion.

But some economists warned the proposal would increase the federal deficit and inflation, and members of Congress, including some in Trump's party, greeted the idea with skepticism.

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, who is running in a com-

petitive race for re-election and declined to attend the convention, told reporters, "I don't know the details yet, but it appears that there would not be any income cap on it and that it would be extraordinarily expensive, in excess of a trillion dollars."

"I don't see that as being feasible in this economic environment," she said.

Previous, similar proposals by Trump to send cash payments to all Americans during his second term have not materialized. However, Trump did authorize "Trump accounts" for eligible children and the \$1,776 bonus payment for members of the armed services.

Meanwhile, some Democrats argued Trump's tariff policy and the war in Iran would continue to drive up consumer prices.

"You asked for lower prices, Trump gave you \$10 gas," Democrats on the Senate Energy Committee posted on X.

Polls show cost-of-living issues — an area of concern for Catholic social teaching connected to a preferential love for the poor — dominate voters' concerns heading into the November elections. Housing, hunger and healthcare are among the issues impacted by rising costs, each an area the Church considers a matter of justice in society as they relate to the intrinsic dignity of the human person.

The U.S. war with Iran, a conflict not authorized by Congress and which has been criticized as unjust by Pope Leo XIV, has also driven higher energy prices due to oil shortages, increasing inflation. Those energy prices are expected to rise higher as the war expands: Iran's Houthi allies have increased their chokehold on the Red Sea, and drones launched from Iraq took out a major Saudi Arabian pipeline used to bypass Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

A CNN poll found two-thirds of Americans believed Trump's decisions on the economy (65%) and the war with Iran (67%) have hurt the country.

An August Reuters-Ipsos poll found Democrats had an eight-point lead over Republicans on the cost-of-living



OSV News photo/Shannon Stapleton, Reuters

Gas prices are displayed at an Exxon station ahead of the Memorial Day weekend in Great Neck, N.Y., May 22, 2026.

issue, 36% to 28%. The rest of the respondents said they were not sure or said neither party. In that same poll, 21% of all U.S. adults surveyed said they approve of Trump's approach to the cost of living, while 70% said they disapprove.

Other polls over the summer have also found voters have soured on the economy. A survey by the Pew Research Center and a Fox News poll both found about three-quarters rated the economy negatively, with Fox finding 34% said they have suffered serious financial hardship and Pew finding that neither party has a decisive advantage on the economy.

Catholic leaders in the U.S. have argued that participation in elections is a key component of faithful citizenship for U.S. Catholics.

At a Sept. 11 press briefing, Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of Miami pointed to the U.S. bishops' document "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship" as a reference point for Catholic voters this November.

"We have to just keep on telling people in the pews to vote," Archbishop Wenski said. "A significant percentage of American citizens who can vote don't vote, and we have to tell everybody that they have to be faithful citizens by exercising their right to vote."

US bishops form new task force over AI concerns, meet with tech leaders

Gina Christian
OSV News

Amid recent calls from several artificial intelligence leaders for a slowdown in the technology's development, the nation's Catholic bishops are engaging tech leaders and lawmakers to address concerns over AI and online child safety.



OSV News illustration/Dado Ruvic, Reuters

The EU flag, a stock graph and the words "AI ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE" are seen in this May 21, 2024, illustration. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops announced Sept. 16, 2026, it has formed a task force on artificial intelligence after meeting with AI tech leaders and engaging lawmakers personally on Capitol Hill.

The bishops have also formed a task force to safeguard human dignity as AI rapidly evolves, echoing Pope Leo XIV's urgent message in his encyclical on AI, "Magnifica Humanitas."

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops announced the developments in a Sept. 16 press release, saying its Administrative Committee had met at the USCCB's Washington headquarters with "representatives from a variety of tech firms and specialists" in AI earlier that day.

The committee, led by USCCB president Archbishop

Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, serves as the conference's board of directors. Members include the USCCB's officers, standing committee chairs and a representative from each of the nation's 15 episcopal regions, including the Eastern Catholic Churches.

In its press release, the USCCB said Bishop Oscar Cantú of San Jose, California — home to Silicon Valley and the hub of AI development — will chair its Bishops' Task Force on Preserving Human Dignity in the Age of Artificial Intelligence.

In a Sept. 16 phone call following the committee meeting, Bishop Cantú told OSV News that the task force had been unanimously approved, with a goal of carrying out "the vision of Pope Leo" expressed in "Magnifica Humanitas."

Bishop Cantú explained that Pope Leo has "given the Church marching orders" to remind the world that technology can be beneficial "when it's able to assist humanity in the work that we do" while "supporting our dignity as individuals and families and helping us to build healthy societies."

"Time is of the essence" in ensuring creating awareness of and meaningful dialogue at all levels regarding AI, said Bishop Cantú.

He stressed that the Church is "concerned about how this (AI) affects the individual, human dignity, the family, society and particularly the most vulnerable."

Following the Administrative Committee meeting, the USCCB said in its release, more than a dozen bishops headed to Capitol Hill "to meet with members of Congress urging for the enactment of meaningful safety guardrails on Artificial Intelligence and to support legislation to protect children online."

U.S. President Donald Trump has dismissed alarms over

AI dangers, calling the issue a "hoax" in an onstage phone call to NVIDIA chief Jensen Huang during Huang's talk at a Sept. 14 conference in Los Angeles.

In the press release, USCCB executive director of public affairs Chieko Noguchi said the dialogue with AI experts had "focused on ways to keep any system of artificial intelligence at the service of humanity."

The exchange also stressed "the urgent need to address the real and present dangers such technology present," said Noguchi.

"Recent events have only emphasized the great need for action by everyone involved," she said.

In a Sept. 12 essay, Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei declared that "we must slow the pace at which we improve the capabilities of AI models."

Amodei, whose company was on hand for the unveiling of Pope Leo's AI encyclical, cited two key reasons for his

(Continued on page 18)

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US bishops form new task force

(Continued from page 17)

warning.
The first, he said, is AI's "growing ability to build the next generation" of itself, with such recursive self-improvement becoming industry-wide.
"Left unchecked, it could outrun our ability to understand and control these systems, and so must be pursued very carefully, if at all," said Amodei.
A second red flag was an incident involving OpenAI and Hugging Face (recently acquired by tech giant NVIDIA), where AI agents conducted a rogue attack outside the scope

of a test.
Amodei said while "it's easy to dismiss this incident because no one was hurt and the economic damage was minimal," a "swarm" of AI agents possessing "greater capabilities but a similar level of misalignment" with human values "could have caused catastrophic damage."
Fellow Anthropic co-founder Jack Clark has also called for an AI downshift, as have OpenAI's Sam Altman and xAI's Elon Musk.
Noguchi said the bishops hoped their Sept. 16 meeting

with tech experts would "help to identify ways the Church can contribute to the moral foundation of AI models," as well as "steps the companies can take to protect against misuse of their inventions and to guarantee human oversight of the technology."
The discussion also explored "how the Church and industry can work together toward the goal of ensuring that technology is used in ways that keep it human-centered, respecting the dignity of each person, and benefiting all — poor and rich alike," said Noguchi.

Protecting God's Children for Adults Safe Environment Trainings

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Step 3: Your account becomes active when your background check, VIRTUS session and Acceptance Form are posted on your account. You will receive 12 bulletins per year. You will receive e-mail notices at system@pub.virtus.org unless your computer program blocks them.

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- Wednesday, Sept. 23 9–11:30 a.m., 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Thursday, Oct. 8 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Thursday, Oct. 8 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

- Auditorium, Covington
- Tuesday, Oct. 20 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Tuesday, Oct. 20 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Wednesday, Nov. 4 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Wednesday, Nov. 4 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
- Wednesday, Dec. 9 9–11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

Auditorium, Covington
■ Wednesday, Dec. 9 6–8:30 p.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington
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National/World

Pope Leo warns technology cannot replace the value of human relationships

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — In a world of increasing technological dependence and polarization, Pope Leo XIV said there is greater urgency for humanity to see itself as a single “human community.” “The perfection of the human person and the development of society must be regarded as closely interdependent: to set them against one another or separate them would be to render them meaningless,” the pope said during his Sept. 16 weekly general audience in St. Peter’s Square. As artificial intelligence opens up new possibilities, it also comes with risks as relationships become more virtual and less personal, Pope Leo said, continuing his series of reflections on the Second Vatican Council’s pastoral constitution “*Gaudium et Spes*.”

Online antisemitic attacks against biblical scholar likely by known actors

WASHINGTON — Many of the online antisemitic attacks against scholar Amy-Jill Levine, the newly appointed president of the Catholic Biblical Association of America, appear to be part of ongoing anti-Israel, anti-Jewish social media campaigns — with several actors already known to extremism experts, according to sources consulted by OSV News. A number of the CBA-related social media posts attempt to correlate Levine, the association's first Jewish president, with the Israeli government amid the war in Gaza, and to vent opposition to the war using Levine as a target. OSV News confirmed with a researcher at the Anti-Defamation League Center on Extremism that the spike in antisemitic posts against Amy-Jill Levine showed a “tight cluster of accounts that posted verbatim, identical scripted text within minutes of each other” on Aug. 14, two days after the first news story about Levine’s July 20 appointment, with the posts amplified by other users. CBA executive director Archie Wright said experts he consulted regarding the attacks on Levine pointed as well to foreign efforts — some based in Russia — to foment antisemitism and “divisiveness, particularly here in the U.S. and around the world.” Those who endorse antisemitism “speak hatred and ignorance” and “don’t know where Christianity came from,” said Wright.

In Cuernavaca, North American bishops focus on migration, AI and Church cooperation

CUERNAVACA, Mexico — From Aug. 30 to Sept. 4, bishops representing the Catholic conferences of Mexico, the United States and Canada gathered in Cuernavaca, Mexico, for a fraternal meeting focused on strengthening collaboration across North America. According to a joint statement, the bishops met in a spirit of prayer, dialogue and fraternity to reflect on shared challenges facing the Church, including migration, evangelization, human dignity in the age of artificial intelligence, and pastoral cooperation among the three countries. Migration emerged as a central topic. The bishops discussed the experiences of migrants in countries of origin, transit and destina-

tion, while reaffirming the Church's commitment to human dignity and support for vulnerable people. The bishops also stressed the need to keep human dignity at the center of technological development, which, they said, "is authentic only when it serves the person." They also identified future collaboration efforts, including priest exchanges and evangelization missions. Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas, vice president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told OSV News the gatherings should continue because they demonstrate "the unity of the Church, which transcends political structures or countries." The meeting concluded with a pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, where the bishops renewed their commitment to walk together in faith and solidarity.

Cardinal Czerny inaugural recipient of Pope Leo XIV Sustainability Medal

VATICAN CITY — The first Pope Leo XIV Sustainability Medal — created by the pope's alma mater, Villanova University — will be awarded to Cardinal Michael Czerny, the former prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. The announcement was made by Villanova University president and Augustinian Father Peter M. Donohue at a Sept. 14 press conference at the Vatican. Pope Leo will present the medal to Cardinal Czerny Oct. 13 at Borgo Laudato Si' in Castel Gandolfo, amid the Oct. 12-15 Villanova International Sustainability Conference in Rome. The award honors those "whose leadership has advanced sustainability, ecological responsibility and integral human development," said Villanova in its July unveiling of the medal. At the Sept. 14 press conference, Cardinal Czerny commended Villanova's "courage" to publicly support taking "real responsibility for the world that is coming into being" through human activity, Vatican News reported. The outlet quoted Cardinal Czerny as saying, "That's not just ecology responsibility, but also responsibility for artificial intelligence and more broadly and deeply ... political responsibility, where it is always harder to exercise it."

DHS watchdog finds inhumane conditions at 'Alligator Alcatraz'

WASHINGTON — Dozens of immigrants detained at Florida's now-shuttered "Alligator Alcatraz" were held in 18-square-foot outdoor cages — about the same size as telephone booths — according to a new report by the Department of Homeland Security's inspector general. The report, dated Sept. 11 but published Sept. 14, detailed a January 2026 inspection of the facility, which was officially named the Florida Soft-Sided Facility. "Alligator Alcatraz" was shuttered in June. The report detailed unhygienic conditions in the facility, such as bug-infested showers, and only allowing detainees to shower three times per week, instead of daily, as standards require. It also found food stored at improper temperatures and dirty drinking water. David Spicer, director of policy and engagement for migration at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told OSV News, "These findings from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) independent oversight agency are quite disturbing." Among the report's findings were that the Florida facility "confined 79 detainees in small metal enclosures — each

offering about 18 square feet of floor space — for periods ranging from several minutes to nearly 2 hours, a practice unlike any OIG (Office of Inspector General) team has observed in ICE facilities.” “The use of such restrictive spaces is highly unconventional and does not align with standards for humane treatment,” the report said.

Trump backs Irish unification drawing US Irish Catholic praise

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump backed Irish unification during a meeting Sept. 12 with Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin in Dublin, a move that drew praise from a U.S. Irish Catholic fraternal organization, but bucked several decades of precedent for the U.S.'s officially neutral position on the question. While the U.S. has long held an officially neutral position on the question of unification, it has supported the Good Friday Agreement — the historic 1998 accord that the Clinton administration helped broker — that effectively ended three decades of violence between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, often referred to as “the Troubles.” Part of the Good Friday Agreement stated that Northern Ireland would remain part of the U.K. unless a majority of its people voted otherwise in a referendum. Andy Burnham, the recently installed British prime minister, said there was not enough public support for such a referendum, calling the concept “off the table.” However, Trump told reporters, “I’d love to see it unified ... It’s going to happen eventually.” The Ancient Order of Hibernians, the oldest Irish Catholic fraternal organization in the U.S., celebrated Trump’s “welcome” comments in a statement on social media, and called for “renewed American engagement” on the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland.

'Remarkable victory': Life advocates welcome defeat of assisted suicide bill in England and Wales

LONDON — The Catholic Church in England and Wales welcomed the Sept. 11 defeat of a bill that would have legalized assisted suicide for terminally ill adults. Members of Parliament rejected the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill in a 286 to 270 vote. Archbishop John Sherrington of Liverpool, the bishops' conference lead on life issues, thanked lawmakers and campaigners who opposed the measure, including medical professionals, disability advocates, faith groups "and those of no faith who stood up for the dignity and sanctity of every life." The archbishop said society should respond to illness, disability and old age with "solidarity, care and respect," adding that better access to palliative care remains the most effective response to end-of-life suffering. The measure marked the fifth attempt in 12 years to decriminalize assisted suicide in the U.K. It faced opposition from major medical organizations and disability groups. During the debate, Catholic Labour MP Ashley Dalton, who has stage 4 metastatic breast cancer, urged colleagues to oppose the bill, arguing that palliative care, which she said in the U.K. is "excellent," can help ensure a peaceful death. Pro-life advocates called the vote a major victory for vulnerable people.

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