November 6, 2026

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MESSENGER

Serving the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky since 1926

Photos courtesy of St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs







(top) Volunteers smile as they prepare to serve food from the kitchen of St. Joseph's Noll Hall.

(center) A long line of people from the greater community wait for their food at a previous "Breaking Bread" community dinner. Except for August, these community dinners have been hosted by St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs, every month since their conception in April 2026.

(bottom) Guests to the October Breaking Bread community dinner paint pumpkins together. Similar themed community-building activities are offered at each event.

'Breaking Bread' community dinners support the St. Joseph community through free meals and fellowship

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

What started with three friends recognizing a need became a year of community blessings. When St. Joseph, Crescent Springs, parishioners Christie Pavia, Julane Becker and Tim McClanahan approached pastor Father Eric Boelscher with an idea to give back to the community by sharing meals, he responded by welcoming the idea — with an anonymous donor already in the wings to help them bring it to life.

From working with families through other parish and local programs, such as Cavaliers Care and St. Vincent de Paul, Ms. Pavia said that it was "very clear that, right in our own backyard … families are struggling."

These families rely on programs such as St. Vincent de Paul to help pay rent, afford groceries, baby formula, diapers and other necessities.

"It's so easy to lose track of who's in need right in your own backyard," Ms. Pavia said. And, with the help from their anonymous benefactor and the space available in the parish's Noll Hall, alongside the hands and aid of the parish community, the joint effort of the three friends was able to come to fruition — monthly community dinners they call "Breaking Bread."

These events are open to all in the community who wish to partake, offering a free meal and seasonal family activities to enjoy, from a bounce house to painting pumpkins.

"We've found that what started as making people feel welcomed and enjoying a free meal together, really turned into fellowship," Ms. Pavia said, sharing a story of a man from Madonna Manor who comes to the dinners regularly.

"He comes because he just wants to talk to people," she said, "and the kids," children of parish families who volunteer at the dinners, "sit down and visit with him."

"These dinners have reached all different types of people," said Ms. Pavia, with the events growing month by month. "We tell our volunteers that we have no idea who's walking through the doors tonight, but we pray that the Holy spirit has encouraged them to come, and we're going to love on them and welcome them with open arms."

"At St. Joe's," Ms. Becker commented, "we had just finished our undercroft — the whole point of redoing it was to build it for the community, to make this space a place where we can live our mission and the mission that Christ gave us."

Ms. Pavia, Ms. Becker and Mr. McClanahan's work is set to continue in November. The next "Breaking Bread" dinner is scheduled for November 15, featuring a thematic turkey dinner for the month. Thanksgiving meal kits, including donated turkeys and LaRosa's "Buddy Cards" will be given away to the community as well.

Notre Dame Urban Education Center recognized as Best of Kentucky 2026

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

The Notre Dame Urban Education Center, Covington, was recently awarded Best of Kentucky 2026 in the specialized education programs category. Erin Woods, executive director, said that she felt like this category was "meant for us."

"We can't go up against a school for the same type of support because that's not what we are," she said.

The NDUEC is a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Notre Dame that provides educational opportunities and family support for pre-K through eighth grade students in both private and public schools in Northern Kentucky.

"We provide an extended menu of academic support and enrichment opportunities," said Mrs. Woods. This includes what Mrs. Woods called a "continuum of educational services," which begins before kindergarten in the Early Learning program —designed to increase kindergarten readiness for four-year-olds.

Once students age out of the Early Learning program and begin school, they can continue their enrollment at NDUEC through the Homework Plus program. There, students are paired with a tutor for one-on-one support and enrichment opportunities, including the Stitch Studio and STEM garden.

In the Stitch Studio, students develop life skills on the sewing machine. "It's more like a brain break, but they're still learning. It's more hands-on," said Mrs. Woods. "We really try to make it make sense for the students, and so we want them to want to come to the Center and walk through our doors and be happy that they're there."

For one student, Charming, the STEM garden provides this outlet so that he enjoys his time at NDUEC. Together, the students, volunteers and staff work to raise produce and flowers from seeds, beginning indoors in February to plant in the beginning of spring to be harvested at the end of the season.

Charming explained that recently he was able to dig up the sweet potato plants, saying that his favorite part of the STEM garden was watching the seeds grow into big plants and discovering what they will look like.

Students at NDUEC can also participate in Summer Academics, protecting their hard-earned knowledge from the previous school year. Mrs. Woods explained that the Summer Academics program "builds and reinforces learning over the summer when learning loss is at an all-time high … make sure that our students maintain those core subject knowledge bases that they need so they don't start the next school year behind," she said.

Recognizing that learning begins at home, the fourth specialized program that NDUEC offers is a Family Support Night. "Those are quarterly family gatherings where we open the doors to the Center to all of our students and their families … We have a topic of interest and guest speaker, we have community resources, and it's really about camaraderie and having the parents become active participants in their children's education," said Mrs. Woods. "They're the first educators. The Center is here to help with extra stuff."

The Best of Specialized Education Programs in Kentucky award recognizes the Notre Dame Urban Education Center for the high-quality educational support provided for students and families. The award acknowledges the work of the staff and 300-plus volunteers that make the life-changing programs like the Stitch Studio and STEM garden possible.

"Receiving the 2026 Best of Kentucky Award is a meaningful recognition of NUDEC's more than 15 years of investing in children and families," said Mrs. Woods. "One student, one relationship and one opportunity at a time, NDUEC continues to make a lasting difference."

(right) Students at the Notre Dame Urban Education center work with Terri De Yong, enrichment coordinator, to put together a large puzzle, examining the pieces closely before deciding on its place.

(bottom, left) Program director Maria Goretti Schappert chats with a volunteer and students as they collect after-school snacks from the snack cart.

(bottom, right) Charming, a student of the Notre Dame Urban Education Center, stands in the STEM garden and counts off on his fingers all that plants need to live, including water, sunlight and air.



Bailey photos





Catholic Charities Commission prepares to finalize new strategic plan

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

Catholic Charities, Diocese of Covington, is preparing to finalize a strategic plan to present to Bishop John Iffert that will take its mission and ministries through the year 2030. This comes as a result of the planning commissions that took place as part of the Diocese of Covington's larger strategic planning process.

"The timing is providential that across the Diocese we're looking at some more substantive things," said Chris Goddard, executive director of Catholic Charities.

The strategic plan is broken into six distinct goals that come together in support of the outlined priorities which focus on care of the whole person while maintaining respect, dignity and mercy.

The first goal is rooted in Catholic Charities' programs and services. Working to provide whole person care where it is needed most, the goal moves beyond emergency relief toward stability for those that Catholic Charities serves.

"We're always looking at how do we uphold the dignity of the person … very interested in trying to help the person not just with their emergency basic needs, but how do we get them to a different, better place," said Mr. Goddard.

To do this, Catholic Charities is looking to the community as part of goals two and three — equipping the local Church to respond via the establishment of a parish ambassador network and the growth of the City of God Network. Both of these goals emphasize the priority of wrap-around care for those that call Catholic Charities looking for assistance.

"The whole idea behind the ambassador program is one to help parishioners across the Diocese understand who we are and where there are opportunities where they could help," said Mr. Goddard.

The ambassador network would help improve communication between Catholic Charities and the parishes as well as increased awareness of available resources. This collaboration would ensure that parishes are equipped to provide information to those in need.

"I think there's an opportunity to collaborate more efficiently for the sake of the people that we're trying to serve," said Mr. Goddard about the ambassador network and the City of God Network.

The vision for the City of God Network is that Catholic Charities becomes a resource hub for those in need of services beyond Catholic Charities provided ministries.

"It's connecting individuals with needs with organizations … Catholic Charities' role is being that connector of people needing help to people that can step up and help," said Mr. Goddard.

These first three goals are rooted in the gift of mercy.

(Continued on page 4)

Catholic Charities
Diocese of Covington
Extend a Hand. Change a Life.

Teens Encounter Christ retreat to arrive in Diocese in late November, spots still available

Bella Bailey
Multimedia Correspondent

Teens Encounter Christ (TEC) is a national lay ecclesial community devoted to providing older teens and young adults a community rooted in faith with retreats rooted in the Paschal Mystery.

As the Episcopal Moderator for Teens Encounter Christ, Bishop John Iffert has made it a priority since his arrival in the Diocese five years ago, to bring TEC to Covington. Now, the first TEC retreat is just a few weeks away on Nov. 21-23 and spots are still available.

Playing a large role in his own vocation and discernment journey, Bishop Iffert recommends TEC to anyone able to attend.

"I ask you all to come forward and give TEC not only a chance, but invest yourself in this and to be part of this growing community and our sense of how the young Church is growing in here in Covington," he said in a promotional video for the Diocese of Covington's TEC.

Angie Poat, diocesan youth minister, has been influential in supporting the TEC team in the Diocese as they prepare for the first retreat.

"I know that the TEC community is going to grow and thrive in the Diocese because of the fruit that it bears in people's lives, and because this is the Lord's will that he has brought it here with our Bishop," she said.

Based in the Paschal Mystery, the three days of TEC invite young people to die to themselves and their own earthly desires, and rise again in Christ, and with Christ to go and live his mission. Don Zengel, campus minister at Bishop Brossart High School, Alexandria, and TEC team member, said "the idea that we could bring kids from different schools — public and Catholic schools together — and they would get to know each other and at the same time do something, just seems like a beautiful way to weave a web of community love."

In order to properly run a TEC retreat, all moderators and volunteers are required to have attended a TEC retreat, either as an observer or a participant. The members of the TEC team in the Diocese therefore have branched out and attended TEC retreats across the region, observing the true wonder of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Mr. Zengel traveled to Peoria, Illinois, to observe a TEC retreat. "I enjoyed meeting people, young people who had received TEC themselves … seeing them get excited about what they were doing was a beautiful vision to think about the Covington area and how we could get young people doing something similar, giving back to each other," he said.

Once students participate in a TEC retreat, they are invited to help moderate and chaperone retreats, creating a self-sustaining retreat model.

"It's not a one-time program," said Mrs. Poat, "it's an

(Continued on page 4)

After last year's cancellation, Bambinelli to return for its fourth year in December

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

After a snowstorm caused a cancellation of last year's event, the diocese's Bambinelli blessing and Christmas tree lighting will be returning this year.

An annual tradition within the diocese started by Bishop John Iffert, it is inspired by a similar blessing given by the pope on Gaudete Sunday — the third Sunday of Advent — where the baby Jesus figures ("Bambinelli") from family nativities are brought forth to be blessed.

This year's Bambinelli will take place Dec. 13 after the 5:30 p.m. Mass at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. Proceedings will take place in the neighboring St. Mary's Park and Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium and will feature a live children's choir on behalf of Mary, Queen of Heaven, Erlanger, refreshments (including hot chocolate, pizza and homemade cookies baked by Curia staff) as well as the namesake event — a blessing of the bambinellis by Bishop Iffert, and the lighting of the Christmas tree in St. Mary's park.

The importance of the Bambinelli has to do with "getting families together for the holidays to keep the reason for the season," said Cindy Kraft, executive assistant to Bishop Iffert who is on the committee planning the Bambinelli. For her, this will be her first year in attendance — but she still expressed her excitement for the event.

"It's to remind people that this is what Christmas is," Chancery office manager and other committee member Carrie Hamberg commented, "we're blessing the baby Jesus."

These blessings people "take back into their homes, too," said Ms. Kraft, "and in their hearts, together. It's multi-generational."

A public and free event, families are more than welcome to participate in the blessing. A story about the origin of the Bambinelli blessing is even offered for younger children to sit in and listen to.



In this *Messenger* archive photo, Bishop John Iffert blesses the small baby Jesus, gently cradled in a young girls hands.

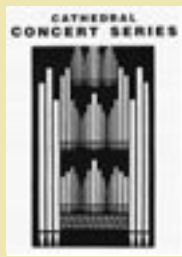
The Bambinelli started as a way to "keep Christmas and preparing for Christmas in a religious tone," according to Cathedral vice-rector and committee member Msgr. Kurt Kemo, who has been helping to orchestrate the Bambinelli since its first year.

With November already in the present, Ms. Kraft commented how as the planners "begin to feel time fold in on itself between now and Christmastime, it's important to take a step back and a break for this religious event."

AMERICAN GOAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Did you know?

With the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit Program beginning January 1, 2027, individuals will be able to donate up to $1,700, or $3,400 per married couple, to the Diocese of Covington's scholarship granting organization, American Goal. Donated funds can be earmarked for specific schools within the Diocese, ensuring that funds go to the individual's intended school.



Cathedral Concert Series Remembering Duruflé — A Musical Tribute

The Cathedral Concert Series welcomes organ students from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, Nov. 22, 3 p.m., for a special afternoon honoring French composer and organist Maurice Duruflé (1902–1986), commemorating the 40th anniversary of his death.

A man of profound and deeply personal faith, Duruflé drew inspiration from the ancient melodies of Gregorian chant, weaving them into music of extraordinary beauty, serenity, and spiritual depth.

This all-organ program celebrates his enduring legacy and the rich tradition of French sacred music. Experience the Cathedral Grand Organ's wide range of colors, power and expressive beauty as gifted young musicians bring this remarkable instrument to life.

The concert is open to the public, with no admission charge. A freewill offering will be gratefully accepted.

Visit www.cathedralconcertseries.org for more information about our 50th anniversary season.

Correction

The contact information provided for the Serra Club of Northern Kentucky in the Vocations Supplement of the Oct. 30 edition of the *Messenger* was incorrect. It should be Jeff Jehn (not Jenn) jeffjehn54@gmail.com. The *Messenger* apologizes for the error.

Bishop's Schedule

Nov. 8
Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 10 a.m.

Nov. 10
Sacrament of Confirmation, St. Agnes Parish, Ft. Wright, 7 p.m.

Nov. 11
Building Commission meeting, Curia, 2 p.m.

Sacrament of Confirmation, St. Therese Parish, Southgate, 7 p.m.

Nov. 12
Crosier Guild morning prayer and breakfast, Blessed Sacrament Church, Ft. Mitchell, 7:30 a.m.

Deans meeting, Curia, 1:30 p.m.

Sacrament of Confirmation, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington, 7 p.m.

Nov. 13
Religious Vicar and Consecrated Virgins meeting, Curia, 10 a.m.

Nov. 14-19
USCCB General Assembly, Baltimore

St. Thomas Parish celebrates renovation and reopening of Providence Center

Staff report

St. Thomas Parish, Ft. Thomas, celebrated a significant milestone with the reopening of the newly renovated Providence Center, transforming a historic former convent into new spaces for education, prayer and parish life.

The Oct. 24–25 celebration welcomed parishioners, school families, alumni and members of the community for an open house showcasing the building's transformation. Among the special guests were the Sisters of Divine Providence, whose connection to St. Thomas dates back to 1902, when the sisters helped establish St. Thomas School.

Originally constructed in the 1960s to serve as a convent for the sisters, the building had remained largely underutilized since the early 2000s. The extensive renovation, which cost approximately $1.5 million, has given the building new life, creating preschool classrooms, a music classroom, a library, gathering and meeting spaces, and a new Eucharistic Adoration Chapel.



Father Kelsch led parishioners in an Eucharistic procession, establishing the Blessed Sacrament in the newly renovated Adoration chapel, Nov. 2, marking the completion of the $1.5 million renovation project.

The project was far more than a cosmetic update. "It was everything," said Father Ross Kelsch, pastor, St. Thomas Parish. "At the lower level, the concrete had to be jackhammered out so that we could put in all new sewer lines. All new windows, all new electric, all new plumbing, all new walls and lighting. Essentially, it was a shell, and from there we replaced everything."

New flooring was installed throughout, and the former convent's shared bathing facilities were

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Teens Encounter Christ retreat

(Continued from page 3)

ongoing community."

To help host the first retreat in the Diocese of Covington, experienced TEC moderators from Dioceses across the country will travel to Covington, providing experience and expertise, emphasizing the strength of the TEC community.

During the three-day experience, participants can expect to hear witness talks from young people and older people. As well as intergenerational small groups, Mass, Adoration, reconciliation, recreation, "all of the components of most youth retreats will be there," said Mrs. Poat.

"They're planned with the whole premise that the Holy Spirit is guiding us. So even though it looks like we're going here and this is the way we're getting there, it might be different, but it's going to be beautiful no matter what," said Mr. Zengel.

"I hope that a year from now, two years from now, that there are so many kids … they hear such positive things about this that, not only are they willing to come and donate time and be a part of it, they want everyone around them to do the same," said Mr. Zengel.

To register for the first Teens Encounter Christ retreat in the Diocese, go to covdio.org/tec.

Catholic Charities Commission

(Continued from page 2)

Equipping the community and enabling Catholic Charities to continue to perform the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Mr. Goddard said that this "really builds on the whole Campaign of Mercy that Bishop [Iffert] launched with his initial campaign or strategic plan."

The fourth goal of the strategic plan is designed to spread the news of goals one, two and three — to make mercy visible.

"No one knows who we are," said Mr. Goddard, "so this really names it in terms of making ourselves more visible and trusted, inviting. People know that they can come to us and we'll help them work their way through the system."

In order to meet these goals, Catholic Charities must focus on growing its financial capacities and restructuring their internal governance system. Goal five focuses on the financial aspect of the strategic plan, building the capacity and freedom to serve.

"We could have the greatest plan in the world and the right people to execute it, but there's going to be a need for some resources," said Mr. Goddard.

One of the outlined priorities of this goal is to increase the annual fund from the 2026 fiscal year total $700,000 to a potential $1.3 million target by fiscal year 2029. "We need to raise the necessary funds in order to do what is in that plan," said Mr. Goddard.

To support the increase in community outreach, agency and organization collaboration and fiscal responsibility, Catholic Charities deemed it necessary to review their governance structure. As part of goal six, the establishment of shared ownership, governance and success measurement, Catholic Charities will be dissolving the current corporate and advisory board structure, moving instead to a member corporation made up of five people. As defined in the strategic planning document, the member corporation would "preserve diocesan oversight while allowing the Board of Directors to manage day-to-day operations."

Mr. Goddard said, "It's meant to allow the governing board to operate independently, more autonomously, but at the same time, reserve powers of the bishop and the four others to approve the hiring of the CEO, to approve a slate of board members, but they're not going to be as involved in the annual plans and those kinds of things."

The work of the Catholic Charities Commission through the diocesan strategic planning process was "very" influential, said Mr. Goddard.

"If you don't have the right people, especially in leadership from the beginning, you more than likely could have a product that is not as good as what could turn out to be," he said, praising the involvement of the diocesan community in the planning process.

Mr. Goddard said about the plan, "if you're not intentional and you don't incorporate it in a plan, it'll never happen."



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COMMENTARY

The hope of Christians

The readings for the Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle A — are: Wisdom 6:12–16; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and Matthew 25:1–13.

I have never been able to understand how it is that non-Christians can truly deal with the loss of a loved one. There are certainly many beliefs out there as to what happens to someone when they die. There are those who believe that there truly is nothing after death, that once a person dies, that is it. The person ceases to exist entirely. Such a thought would only lead one to dread death and fear it.

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Michael Elmlinger

Certainly, there are those who believe in some form of an afterlife, but it seems to pale in comparison to the life that is promised to us by the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Indeed, it is only in the light of Christ that one can truly deal with the question of death and have the hope that death is not the end, but rather a new beginning.

That is what brings us to the second reading of this weekend from St. Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. In this letter, he deals with the question on the hearts of believers of what happens to their loved ones who have died before Christ's second coming. Will they miss out on this gift?

Paul answers this question by saying, "We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope" (1 Thess 4:13). By saying this, he is emphasizing to his audience that the hope they possess as Christians is different from the rest of the world. While the rest of the world may have some belief in an afterlife, it is baseless since it is not rooted in faith in Jesus Christ's Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension.

Instead, "if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep… For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first." (4:14, 16)

This response from Paul gets at the very heart of the hope that Christians are meant to have, the hope that Christ has conquered sin and death and that death has no power over Christians. Indeed, this is the only kind of hope that can truly face the question of death and not be met with despair or fear.

The reason for this is the fact that the hope of Christians is strongly connected to the faith of Christians. The faith that we have in Christ naturally leads us to the hope that he offers us in his great victory. That hope leads us to anchor ourselves in the reality that for us as Christians, that at death, "life is changed, not ended" (Preface I for the Dead).

It is the hope that allows us to believe that when our loved ones have died, it does not have to be the end, that there will be a time when we will see our loved ones once again and worship God face to face with them for all eternity. It leads us to hope that even though our souls may be separated from our bodies for a time, there will come a time when the Lord Jesus Christ will rejoin our souls to our resurrected bodies after the pattern of his own glorious body (Phil 3:21).

Certainly, we may grieve for the loss of a loved one, as Christ himself wept at the death of his friend Lazarus (cf. John 11:33-35). However, as St. Ambrose said when he was grieving the loss of his own brother, that hope is what prevents grieving from becoming sorrow that lacks trust in God; that he has indeed won for us that victory over sin and death and is willing to grant to those who believe in him and are a part of him to share in that wondrous victory.

We grieve, but we hope in the cross, in the salvific mission of Jesus Christ. In doing so, we look at death and say, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your victory; O death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor 15:54-55)

Father Michael Elmlinger is a priest of the Diocese of Covington, Ky. Father Elmlinger is currently studying Canon Law at the University of St. Paul, Ottawa, Canada.

Take comfort, your guardian angel is near

VIEWPOINT



Ronald M. Bertsch

November is National Adoption Month — a time to celebrate adoption stories. The Diocesan Catholic Children's Home (DCCH Center) is exceptionally proud of the Foster to Adopt Program's facilitated 183 adoptions and is anticipating another 17 over the next year. Every new family with forever bonds established is special.

This joy gives hope for the waiting children who yearn for their new family. Every adoption is also remembered for the loss birth parents and the child experience.

With the recent Feast Day of the Guardian Angels on Oct. 2, I began researching and learned more about St. Padre Pio's writings and experience with his guardian angel. I knew of Padre Pio's mystical life, bilocation, his stigmata and his extraordinary gifts in the confessional. What I did not fully appreciate was his ability to converse, understand and observe the spiritual realm. Padre Pio could visibly see and interact with his own guardian angel. Padre called him Angelina, which translates to Little Angel. They remained friends from childhood onward.

Every person is assigned a guardian angel; they stand in the presence of God as an immense gift from God, carefully selected for each person and demonstrating another level of God's excessive love for each of us.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that guardian angels illuminate, protect and function as a powerful intercessor. Never from coercion or beyond the will of the person, they work tirelessly as God's appointed living servants. The angel, just like God, never abandons, always forgives, and is always present like perfectly good soulmates.

Padre Pio caught my attention, and what I found so comforting is when he wrote that guardian angels do not work in isolation of one another and never out of God's divine will. They work within the communion of saints.

Whenever two people meet, or as in the case of parent and child relationship, family, or friends, the angels of these people meet and know each other, too. Not over time do they learn but instantly; they fully know and work in cooperation with one another. Even small brief encounters allow the engagement of our angels.

They are never enemies; they do not negotiate or wrestle for an advantage. They understand the state of each soul. They work in the prompting of our imaginations, our memory, our conscience. It is not coincidence.

Our angels will defend and keep their human from more harm when another struggling soul or a fallen angel is a bad influence. Moreso, they love to help bring God's graces to us. Always seeking a closer union for their person with God.

Even when pain accompanies the human soul, the angel may weep for the sorrow, but they also recognize how God can use that to bring a closer union with Christ. Just as Christ on the cross allows people to share in his suffering for the good that can come. This was illustrated with Padre Pio's own physical suffering and the thrashings he received from the evil one.

Through a story, Padre Pio exemplified this cooperation between angels. In 1940, a woman sought him for prayer to be reconciled to her wayward son. Padre Pio knew the story before the woman ever spoke a word, as he could see and hear her angel share with her son's angel and his own. He counseled her to keep writing to her son, even if he did not open the letters, and to keep praying. He said not one prayer or thought was wasted as her angel and her son's angel were in continual dialogue. Later, Padre Pio came to learn through the angels how the mother and son reunited.

At DCCH, the youth in the residential program attend Guardian Angel School. This brings so much more meaning and appreciation now. Knowing that it is not just our staff and therapists who are working to help heal the children, but all of our guardian angels are in full participation, both in the apartments and in school. Each mentor, each volunteer, each foster/adoptive parent is not working alone.

I have since shared with foster parents who worry about their child after saying goodbye or with children who are drifting away in faith to take comfort, keep praying and trust that their guardian angels are working with the child's angel. Each person who has ever been introduced to that child has their angel there to protect, illuminate and intercede. Let us all recite the prayer to our guardian angel and make sure we teach this to our children and grandchildren!

If you are interested in learning more about adoption, foster care or mentoring, please contact DCCHcenter.org or (859) 331-2040. Attend a special open house, Monday, Nov. 21, between 6:30 and 8 p.m.

Ronald M. Bertsch is director of Therapeutic Foster Care/Adoption for the DCCH Center for Children and Families, Ft. Mitchell.

Beneath our division lies a crisis of dehumanization

I've reflected before on the loneliness epidemic and suggested that perhaps beneath our loneliness is a crisis of friendship. We have more ways to connect than ever before, yet many of us struggle to build relationships capable of carrying the weight of life.

GUEST



Vincente Del Real

But there may be another layer to our loneliness that we need to confront: our growing inability to remain in relationship with people who disappoint us, disagree with us or hurt us. The crisis of division can also become a crisis of dehumanization. We live in a moment when it is remarkably easy to separate ourselves from one another.

Political differences divide families. Different perspectives end friendships. We organize ourselves into silos where most people think, vote and see the world as we do. Without realizing it, we can begin to treat disagreement as a question of dignity. But people do not lose their dignity because they think differently than we do. They do not lose their dignity because they make mistakes. They do not even lose their dignity when they sin.

This is one of the great challenges of Christianity: learning to see another person as God sees them. I often think about the parable of the prodigal son. We know the younger son's story well. He leaves his father, wastes his inheritance and eventually returns home broken. And yet, when the son returns, the father runs toward him. He knows exactly what his son has done. Yet he refuses to make his son's failure his permanent identity. He embraces him, restores him and celebrates his return.

It is easy to miss, but we are called to become like that father. In the inability to love past our differences, many of us have become like the elder son. The elder son stayed home. He worked. He followed the rules. He could clearly identify everything his brother had done wrong. But when his brother came home, he could not rejoice.

There is something painfully human about his reaction. When someone has hurt us, do we actually want that person to change? When someone admits, "I was wrong," can we allow that person to become more than their mistake? When someone we have judged begins to change, repent or return to God, can we rejoice? Or have we become so attached to their guilt that we no longer know what to do with their conversion? Our culture often encourages the latter.

Social media makes it possible for someone's worst moment to become their permanent identity. Our political divisions encourage us to categorize people quickly: good or bad, compassionate or hateful, with us or against us. Two thousand years after a crowd cried, "Crucify him," I sometimes wonder whether the human heart has completely lost its appetite for crucifixion.

We may not stand in a public square demanding a cross, but we remain remarkably interested in condemnation. And not so much in redemption. Pope Francis refers

(Continued on page 13)

Pope warns economic inequality threatens peace, urges politicians to serve common good

Josephine Peterson
Catholic News Service

The threat to world peace stems from economic imbalances linked to development that is "neither equitable nor respectful of creation," Pope Leo XIV said at his weekly general audience.

"This is a far-sighted vision, which was unfortunately borne out towards the end of the last century and which we see even more clearly today," he said Nov. 4 in St. Peter's Square.

Pope Leo said at the heart of the economy is work, which allows people to develop as individuals, provide for their families, express their talents, participate in society and build a better world.

But the Catholic vision of economic development must always be at the service of humankind and under human control, he said, citing the Second Vatican Council's pastoral constitution, "Gaudium et Spes." The pope also emphasized the council's call to eliminate discrimination against vulnerable social groups and migrants.



(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 Nov. 4, 2026.

"Work must never be distorted to the detriment of people, the common good or creation," the pope said.

The real challenge, he said, is offering everyone opportunities to make the most of their abilities. Unemployment, exploitation and working conditions that endanger health or life itself are "unacceptable," he said.

Pope Leo reiterated that workers have both the right and the duty to participate in decisions affecting their work, including through trade unions, and to resolve conflicts through dialogue and nonviolent action.

The pope's reflection was a continuation of his series of talks on the Second Vatican Council, and specifically on "Gaudium et Spes," which teaches that those making decisions about financial investments and economic planning have an obligation to provide for the needs of individuals and communities while balancing present-day consumption with the needs of future generations.

The document also touches upon the role of political authorities, he said, stressing that the political community "exists for the sake of the common good."

"The exercise of political authority must always be directed towards the common good, which must be structured and operate according to local and historical circumstances, but always with the good of the entire human family at heart," he said.

His remarks came a day after voters in his home country of the United States went to the polls for the highly anticipated midterm elections.

"It then considers the political community, which — whatever its historical form — also exists for the sake of the common good, which must be the aim of the exercise of civil authority," he said in his address to English-speaking pilgrims.

The pope emphasized that engagement in economic and political life in accordance with the Church's social teaching is a way of building peace.

"Politics that tends to the wounds of peoples and of those who suffer injustice offers grounds for hope for the future of humanity," he said, encouraging young people to follow the example of those who have faithfully served in these fields.

At the conclusion of the audience, Pope Leo noted that two beatification ceremonies would take place Nov. 7.

In Antigua Guatemala, Franciscan Father Augusto Rafael Ramírez Monasterio, who was killed in hatred of the faith in 1983, will be beatified. In Santander, Spain, Father Francisco González de Córdova and 79 companions, including priests, seminarians and laypeople who died during religious persecution in Spain in the last century, will also be beatified.

"These new blesseds make visible another part of the 'great multitude' of the Lord's friends," the pope said.

Pope Leo also asked for prayers ahead of his Nov. 6 departure for Uruguay, Argentina and Peru, describing them as countries "so dear to me."

"I ask you to accompany me with your prayers, so that the Lord may bless this mission," he said.



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

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

"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 online registration form: Register Here. Again, everyone is welcome to attend. Contact Isaak at iisaak@covdio.org or (859) 392-1529.

St. Joseph, Crescent Springs, will host a Women's Advent Day of Recollection, Nov. 7, 9 a.m.–2 p.m. This free event features keynote speaker Sister Marla Monahan, SND, inspiring women how to deepen their relationship with God day by day. Includes Mass, speaker, group discussion, confession and other activities. Lunch is provided. To register email dkittyallen@gmail.com or text (859) 957-7595.

St. Peter's COF Court #1492 will host its annual Matching Funds Turkey Raffle, Nov. 7, Social Center of Sts. Peter & Paul School, California, after the 5 p.m. Mass. There will be bingo, raffles and plenty of food. Proceeds benefit the needs of Sts. Peter & Paul Parish.

St. Joseph, Cold Spring is hosting a free showing of the full-length feature film "Cabrini", Nov. 13, 7 p.m. in the parish's Memorial Hall. Free popcorn and soft drinks also included, open to all. Film is appropriate for middle school age and up; under 16 must be accompanied by a parent or responsible adult. Questions? Contact Vicki Klocke at vklocke@stjoeparish.net or (859) 927-2291.

Thomas More University welcomes all to an astronomy public lecture and night sky viewing at Ziegler Auditorium, Nov. 14, 6–8 p.m. with speaker Austin Hinkel, Ph. D. — observations in the observatory to follow, weather permitting. The lecture will explore some clues of extraterrestrial life and examine what current research tells us about the possibility of life beyond Earth.

The St. Augustine Church, Augusta, bingo social, Nov. 15, 1–5 p.m., St. Augustine Saner Hall, must be over 18 to participate. Bingo, pull tabs, split the pot raffle, drinks and snacks provided. Entry fee $10; additional bingo cards optional. Weather permitting. Proceeds benefit St. Augustine Parish benevolence fund. After bingo, meal provided for players.

St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs, will be hosting a Breaking Bread community dinner, Nov. 15, 6–6:30 p.m., in Noll Hall. The dinner will feature a Thanksgiving-style turkey dinner. The community dinners are open to the public. Volunteers can contact the parish office at (859) 341-6609 for information.



Messenger Mic'd

The Diocese of Covington's *Messenger* has launched "Messenger Mic'd," a weekly podcast highlighting news beyond the news in the Diocese of Covington. New episodes are released every Saturday morning — scan the QR code or visit www.covdio.org/messenger to catch up on the latest news and be sure to tune into this week's episode.

6-8th grade students are invited to attend the fall edition of CONNECT26 on Nov. 20, from 4–9 p.m. at Thomas More University. CONNECT is a dynamic evening filled with games, food, small groups, worship and opportunities to grow in faith and friendship with other Catholic students from across the diocese. Cost: $30 (early-bird $20 if registered before 11/9). Register at https://covdio.org/youth/.

Join Father Timothy Schehr, of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, for an inspiring seven-session Scripture study series. Each session will be held at the Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, 10 a.m. and includes a 90-minute presentation and a 30-minute group discussion. The Book of Psalms, Nov. 21, 28 and Dec. 5; The Gospel of John, March 13, 20 and May 8, 15. Registration required, visit https://forms.gle/XsrspfqFVAWHWnzRA or call Isaak A. Isaak at (859) 392-1529 and leave your name and phone number. Hosted by the Diocese of Covington, Office of Catechesis and Evangelization.

TEC (Teens Encounter Christ) 3-day overnight retreat for high school juniors/seniors and all college-age students, Nov. 21-23. Attend the very first TEC retreat in the Diocese of Covington. Bishop Iffert invites all students to discover TEC, an important part of his own discipleship journey. Applications are now open. Space is limited — sign up early at https://covdio.org/youth/.

The Angelico Project will be hosting a November Architecture Tour, Nov. 21, 9 a.m., at St. Monica Church, Cincinnati. Visitors are welcome to step inside some of the region's most beautiful churches and discover the stories their walls, artwork and architecture tell with a new tour monthly.

World Youth Day 2027, Seoul, South Korea, July 30 to August 10, 2027. The Diocese of Covington is coordinating a pilgrimage to World Youth Day 2027 for young adults ages 18 to 35. Experience the universality of the Catholic Church in the presence of our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, alongside millions of young adult Catholics from around the world. Bishop John Iffert hopes to join the pilgrims along with a few priests and deacons from the diocese. Estimated cost is $5,500 per person and includes round-trip airfare, transportation, lodging, meals (from WYD) and tours. To reserve your spot, the initial payment of $800 is now due. The full amount must be paid by Monday, March 15, 2027. For more information, go to covdio.org/register/

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 center is also seeking volunteers to assist in the Early Learning Program, Monday–Thursday, 8:30-11:30 a.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.

Medical volunteers are needed at the Rose Garden Center for Hope & Healing. They are looking for medical professionals to volunteer at their free medical clinic. Needed are Doctors, Nurses and Nurse Practitioners to volunteer once or twice per week or once or twice per month. Interested parties can reach out at tfrosegarden@gmail.com.

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.

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.



SHDHS Athletic Hall of Fame

St. Henry District High School recently inducted 15 new members into its Athletic Hall of Fame.
Athletic Excellence Award: Chris Danks ('03), cross country and track and field; Gordon Doole ('08), cross country and track; Dave Faust, head basketball coach (1992-2025); Ray Hoffman ('45), golf; Krista Dowell Knapke ('93), soccer; Gerard Koop ('75), basketball and baseball; Ralph Landrum ('75), golf; Libby Leedom Nields ('13), soccer; Stephanie Niemer ('07), volleyball; Abbey Bessler Schuster ('13), volleyball. Father Bach Community Award: Daniel ('70) and Karen Riegler. Bill Tobergte Service Award: Steve Rice ('75); Denny Seibert; Jeff Schuler. (pictured above) Team of Distinction: 2010 KHSAA Girls Soccer State Champions.

St. Thomas Parish celebrates renovation

(Continued from page 4)

removed and replaced with six new restrooms, including accessible restrooms, restrooms designed specifically for preschoolers and a dedicated restroom for the Adoration Chapel.

Level 4 Construction, Ft. Mitchell, served as the primary contractor, working with CDI Electric and Dupont Plumbing, along with other subcontractors. Construction began in May, and the building was ready for use in about four months. Preschool classes began meeting in the building at the beginning of October, and work on the lower-level library was recently completed.

The project comes during a period of growth for St. Thomas School. Enrollment has increased from 222 students last school year to 319 students this year. Among those welcomed were 44 students from nearby St. Catherine of Siena School, which closed at the end of the previous school year. Father Kelsch noted that the growth is not due only to the closure.

"We've grown 44 percent year over year, so that's a huge jump," he said. "I don't know what you could attribute that to other than people belong here and they feel that."

The timeline for the project was swift. After a March 23 parish meeting to discuss how the parish could welcome families from St. Catherine, a plan for the Providence Center was proposed, and by April most of the funding had been committed. Father Kelsch said the idea was not new.

"We had always been toying with the idea of doing something with the Providence Center," he said.

Accommodating the growth required creative use of the parish's existing facilities. By relocating the preschool, library and music classroom from the main school building to the renovated Providence Center, St. Thomas was able to create additional homerooms in the main building. The school went from one homeroom per grade last year to two homerooms in every grade except seventh and eighth.

The project also created new opportunities for prayer, faith formation and community gatherings. The new Adoration Chapel has its own entrance and restrooms, allowing school activities and adoration to continue without disrupting one another. The chapel had been temporarily housed for about six months in a room off the church undercroft while the former chapel was converted into the music room. Adoration, which is available 24 hours a day by code, returned to its permanent home with a Eucharistic procession, Nov. 2. The multipurpose library space will also be used for OCIA meetings and for faith formation groups for adults and public school students.

"There's something beautiful about seeing a building with so much history given new life," said Father Kelsch. "For generations, the Sisters of Divine Providence helped shape the faith and education of our community. Now, the very building they once called home will continue that mission for generations to come."

The renovation was made possible through the generosity of parishioners, school families, alumni and other supporters. Father Kelsch said the major donors were all parishioners of St. Thomas.

"I'm incredibly grateful to our parishioners who stepped up to the plate and helped make this project a reality in such a short period of time," Father Kelsch said. "When we realized how quickly our school was growing and what needed to be done, our parish community responded with tremendous generosity. This project is a testament to their faith, commitment and belief in the future of St. Thomas."

More work may lie ahead. Father Kelsch said the school will need to find space for another homeroom or two next year. "There's only so much space to exploit, but there will be continual projects," he said.

"This renovation is about more than a building," said Father Kelsch. "It's about investing in Catholic education, welcoming new families, and creating spaces that will serve our parish community for generations to come."









(top, left) Father Ross Kelsch welcomes Sisters of Divine Providence to the blessing and dedication (top, right) of the newly renovated Providence Center at St. Thomas Parish, Ft. Thomas. Originally constructed in the 1960s the center served as convent for the sisters, then served as the dedicated Adoration Chapel until recent growth demanded strategic renovations.

The renovations included creating space for the (above, left) library and (above, right) pre-school. The gray floor with green and yellow accent tiles is a style continued from the main school

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New exhibit at the Museum of the Bible explores legacy of Blessed Stanley Rother

Kimberley Heatherington
OSV News

Violence bookended both the beginning and end of Blessed Stanley Rother's 46 years of life: Born in 1935 — during the fury of a Great Depression-era Oklahoma dust storm — the missionary pastor died in 1981, shot by masked assailants in the midst of Guatemala's almost four-decade civil war.

Recognized as the first U.S.-born priest and martyr beatified by the Catholic Church, he is now the subject of a new exhibit — "Blessed Stanley Rother: Ordinary Man, Extraordinary Shepherd" — at the Museum of the Bible in Washington. It opened Oct. 17 and runs through Oct. 1, 2027.

At an opening reception on Nov. 1 — All Saints' Day and the International Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians — speakers invited an audience of around 75 guests to befriend "the shepherd who didn't run" as an intercessor and contemporary witness to the often-perilous ministry of evangelization and solidarity.

Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, who is president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told guests he's often asked "what's it going to take" for Blessed Stanley Rother to become St. Stanley Rother.

"And I always respond the same way," said Archbishop Coakley. "I shake my head and I say, 'Man — it's gonna take a miracle.'"

The audience's wave of laughter indicated their appreciation of the quip; to become a saint, in general two verified miracles are required.

However — under canon law — when the Church formally declares a candidate a martyr, the requirement for a posthumous miracle is waived for beatification. On Dec. 1, 2016, Pope Francis officially recognized Father Rother was killed "in odium fidei" — Latin for "in hatred of the faith." Less than a year later, on Sept. 23, 2017, he was beatified at an Oklahoma City Mass attended by 20,000.

"Nothing short of a miracle will suffice — in order for Blessed Stanley Rother to become Saint Stanley Rother, he needs a miracle," continued Archbishop Coakley. "So that's why I never turn down opportunities such as this to introduce him to new audiences, or to tell his story."

Blessed Rother was born in Okarche, Oklahoma, the eldest of five children in a devout Catholic farming family. He developed a deep faith at an early age, entered Assumption Seminary in San Antonio after high school, and completed

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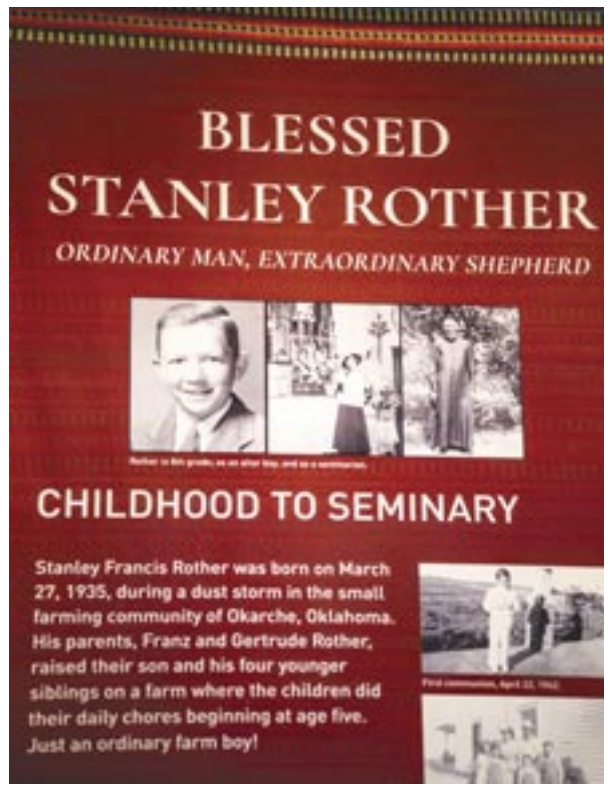


OSV News photo/Museum of the Bible

This is an undated photo of the Blessed Stanley Rother exhibit at the Museum of the Bible in Washington. Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City spoke about Blessed Rother at a Nov. 1, 2026, reception for the exhibit honoring the martyred Oklahoma priest for his translation of Scripture into an Indigenous language of Guatemala. The exhibit runs through Oct. 1, 2027.







Democrats win control of House and Senate in landslide midterm election seen as Trump rebuke

Kate Scanlon
OSV News

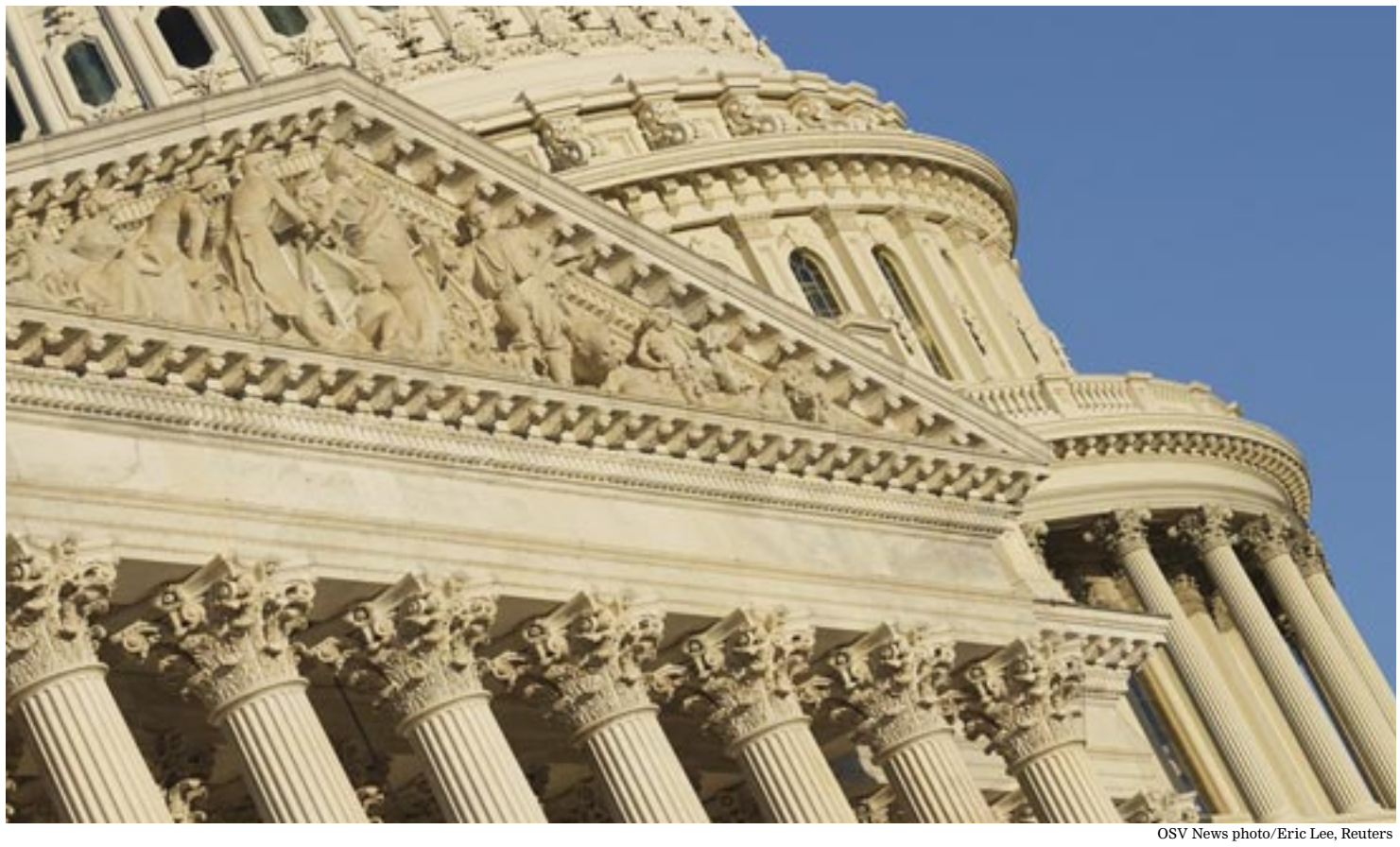
Democrats won control of both chambers of Congress Nov. 3 in a landslide midterm election, according to multiple projections, with significant ramifications for the final years of the Trump administration and its policies.

In major flips for Democrats, the party picked up Senate seats in typically Republican strongholds of Texas, South Carolina, Kansas, and Iowa. Democratic candidates also won races in key swing states including North Carolina, Ohio, Georgia, and Michigan. In Maine, Democratic candidate Troy Jackson defeated longtime Republican Sen. Susan Collins.

At press time, Senate races in Mississippi and Alaska were still too close to call.

Some of those Senate races — notably Texas and both Carolinas — had Republican Senate candidates that were effectively selected by Trump. In Texas, Trump backed scandal-plagued Attorney General Ken Paxton in his primary challenge to incumbent Republican Sen. John Cornyn. Paxton went on to lose the general election to his Democratic rival, state Rep. James Talarico, marking the first Senate victory for Democrats in the Lone Star State since 1994.

As of the morning of Nov. 3, Democrats were projected to win an 81-seat majority in the U.S. House, with estimates of 258 Democratic seats and 177 Republican seats.



OSV News photo/Eric Lee, Reuters

The U.S. Capitol Building is pictured in Washington Nov. 4, 2026, the morning after the U.S. midterm elections. Democrats won control of both chambers of Congress, which many analysts saw as a decisive rebuke of Republican governance in Washington.

John White, a professor of politics at The Catholic University of America in Washington, told OSV News, "This is a shellacking of such magnitude that it's hard to find a historical precedent. Probably the midterm elections of 1974 in the wake of Watergate."

White attributed the losses for the GOP to "corruption, costs, and cruelty."

Initial exit polling suggested that voters disapproved of Trump's job performance, including on several key issues: the economy, corruption, the Iran war, artificial intelligence, and his hardline immigration enforcement policies.

Trump, who previously told voters at rallies to "Pretend I'm on the ballot," said in a social media post Nov. 3 that "I wasn't on the Ballot and if I was, we would have won IN A LANDSLIDE! Thank you for your attention to this matter."

Robert Schmuhl, professor emeritus of American studies at the University of Notre Dame, who critically observes the modern American presidency, referenced that social media post in comments to OSV News, saying "Nothing could be further from the truth."

"At some 30 pre-election rallies, he kept announcing to audiences that they should vote as though he were on the ballot," Schmuhl said. "Clearly, the results show that the president and Trumpism are deeply unpopular and that the people want new leadership and a different political approach."

Incumbent presidents typically suffer midterm losses to some extent, analysts who spoke with OSV News said. But the magnitude of Republicans' defeats in House and Senate races across the country exceeded many initial estimates.

James Patterson, an associate professor of public affairs for the Institute of American Civics at the Baker School of Public Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and the co-author of "Why

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Postliberalism Failed," told OSV News, "The midterms during second administrations are always an uphill battle for a president."

"Remember that in 2014 Barack Obama experienced a similar result as last night's, one that became known as the 'shellacking,'" Patterson said. "That said, the GOP suffered the worst outcome possible, and that comes down to two factors."

Those factors, he said, were candidate selection, pointing to "the disreputable Ken Paxton or the inarticulate Mike Rogers," and unpopular Trump administration policies.

"Americans are unhappy with rapid price increases, and these are tied to the president's obsession with tariffs," Patterson said. "These were bad enough, but adding a conflict in Iran made prices worse. That said, the Democrats nominated professed socialists and won. They made the most of a good night and deserve as much credit as the GOP does blame."

Multiple analysts cast the results as the beginning of the end of the Trump era in American politics.

"Although Trump now becomes a limping and weakened lame duck, he will try to do what he can to stay at the center of attention. That's his nature," Schmuhl said. "But how successful he'll be at accomplishing anything major is an open question. The Democratic majorities in both the Senate and the House will challenge him at every turn. That's clearly what the voters want them to do."

"It's the dawn of a new era in American politics — and the sunset of Trump and his MAGA movement," he continued. "The consequences of Tuesday's voting will reverberate for years to come."

Patterson concurred.

"Does this spell the end of the Trump era? It does," he said. "Trump's coalition is not really one of party factions agreeing to a candidate but a personal brand that can win on a national stage. Lower-ticket imitations of Trump's brand struggle to win, and that is because they lack decades of branding."

Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, which works to elect pro-life candidates to public office, circulated a memo arguing that Republicans abandoned their base when it comes to abortion.

Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of SBA, said in a Nov. 4 statement, "Republican consultants got the campaign they wanted — and the defeat they earned."

"You cannot spend years telling your base to sit down and shut up, then act surprised when they don't stand up for you on Election Day. Republicans must stop running from the pro-life fight and start giving voters a reason to fight for them," she said.

While data about how Catholics ultimately voted is not yet clear, a Pew Research Center survey prior to the election found that among all Catholics, 42% said they planned to vote for the Democrat in their House district, 39% said the Republican, while another 19% said they were unsure or would select another party's candidate. It also found white Catholics and Hispanic Catholics divided sharply over which party's candidates they planned to support.

A subsequent survey commissioned by Network, a Catholic social justice lobby, found that undecided Catholic voters are a swing voting bloc, but reliably show up to the polls.

The historic midterm elections were also the first in which a sitting pontiff, Pope Leo XIV, who is a U.S. citizen, cast a ballot. Prior to the election, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops broadly encouraged eligible Catholics to vote, referring them to its document "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship" as a reference point for discerning their choices at the ballot box.

Those elected to the 120th U.S. Congress are scheduled to be sworn in on Jan. 3, 2027

Pro-life advocates pray at grave of 47 babies killed by abortionist Gosnell

Gina Christian
OSV News

On All Souls' Day Nov. 2, several Catholics gathered at a Philadelphia cemetery to mourn preborn children killed by notorious abortionist Kermit Gosnell.

"We're here today to remember those babies, the victims of Dr. Gosnell, that they are not forgotten," Auxiliary Bishop Joseph L. Coffey of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, told OSV News.

The archbishop, ordained as a priest of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, was on hand for a Nov. 2 memorial Mass and subsequent graveside prayer service for 47 babies found in Gosnell's West Philadelphia clinic in 2010.

For retired Detective James Wood, who had discovered the babies' bodies stored in a freezer at Gosnell's facility, the occasion — his first visit to the grave — was both "special" and "surreal."

"When we discovered the babies, at first I just felt, 'I can't believe this is normalized,'" Wood said. "I could only imagine the thousands of babies that he had killed and disposed of this way."

After the late morning liturgy at St. Bridget Church in Philadelphia, participants drove in procession to the city's historic Laurel Hill East Cemetery, laying 47 roses in a wreath-like circle on the unmarked grave where the children are buried.

The commemoration was among several held nationwide in recent weeks to mark the National Day of Remembrance for Aborted Children. Officially observed this year on Sept. 12, the date of local gatherings can be adjusted to accommodate participants' schedules, particularly those of clergy, said Laura Gies, a Philadelphia-area pro-life advocate who organized the Nov. 2 event.

Gies said this year's commemoration was at least her fifth, continuing the efforts of earlier memorial organizers.

Kneeling on the grass at the gravesite, Gies sang "Isaiah 49," a hymn by Carey Landry and Carol Jean Kinghorn-Landry, the chorus of which quotes Is 49:15: "I will never forget you."

The group held a moment of silence, with prayers offered for the children, their families and women who have had abortions.

Participants also prayed for the soul of Gosnell, who died March 1 at age 85 in a Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, correctional facility, while serving multiple sentences for first-degree murder, involuntary manslaughter and drug charges.

For decades, Gosnell had operated what a grand jury report later called a "baby charnel house," performing late-term abortions amid medical and animal waste for a steady stream of low-income clients, most of them Black or Asian.

Gosnell would often complete the abortions by severing babies' spinal cords with scissors, a practice he described as "snipping" to "ensure fetal demise." Often failing to pay for authorized disposal, he stored partial and intact infant remains throughout the facility.

In 2010, Wood — then part of the Philadelphia District Attorney's narcotics investigations unit — began tracking a pill mill that Gosnell was operating out of his Women's Medical Center in the city's western section. Wood and his team closed in, and unwittingly stumbled upon what a grand jury report called a "baby charnel house" operated by Gosnell.

Father Rayford Emmons, a retired Philadelphia priest who celebrated the Nov. 2 Mass for the 47 babies, said he had

(Continued on page 14)



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Obituary

Sister John Margaret Walsh, CDP, died peacefully at Holy Family Home on Oct. 22, 2026. She was a professed member of the Congregation of Divine Providence, Melbourne, Ky., for 72 years. Born in County Clare, Ireland in 1936 to John and Nora Corry Walsh, she came to the United States and made her first profession of vows in 1954 and professed her final vows in 1959.

Sister John Margaret began her ministry of teaching elementary students in 1954 at St. Cecilia School, Independence. For the next 55 years, she taught in various Kentucky schools: In 1960-1965 at St. Aloysius School, Covington; from 1965-66 in Cynthiana at St. Edward School; from 1966-67 at St. Boniface School in Ludlow; and from 1967-1975 she was principal and teacher at St. Vincent de Paul School in Newport. After that, she moved to Lexington to Christ the King School as a classroom teacher again from 1975-1985; to St. Dominic School in Springfield from 1985-1995; and she concluded her years in the classroom at St. John School in Georgetown from 1995-2009.

After her teaching retirement she moved to St. Anne Convent in Melbourne and was available for many opportunities to serve at the Retreat Center, for the community at St. Anne's as house coordinator and receptionist and in a number of other ways, always willing to lend a hand with her smile and sparkling eyes. It was during that period that she was photographed for the National Retirement Fund for Religious; and that photo appeared on thousands of posters used throughout parishes in the United States during that year.



Sister John Margaret Walsh, CDP,

Sister John Margaret, known to many as Sister Chrissy, was a quiet, kind and generous sister, always ready to assist others. She taught many children how to knit, and she fashioned beautiful sweaters and scarves over the years. She was well loved and respected by her students and always ready to enjoy good fun.

Her brogue and quiet chuckle stayed with her throughout her life. Her gentle and friendly manner touched many people she interacted with over the years. At Holy Family Retirement Home, where she moved in 2021, she continued helping in many small but important ways, caring for the food cart from the kitchen to the health care center for each meal; distributing the daily paper, and bringing in the Saturday mail. She was truly one of the "worker bees" up until the time she began to decline just several weeks before her death.

She will be missed by her religious community, the Sisters of Divine Providence, her sisters, Bridget Thompson and Margaret Mulvey, nieces and nephews and her close friends. Her sisters Nora Gillen, Kathleen Reilly and Anne Keogh and her brother P.J. Walsh preceded her in death.

Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated in Immaculate Conception Chapel, Holy Family Home, Melbourne, Oct. 27 followed by burial in the convent cemetery. Memorials to the Congregation of Divine Providence, 5300 St. Anne Drive, Melbourne, KY 41059.

Blessed Stanley Rother

(Continued from page 9)

his studies at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Ordained a priest for what was then the Diocese of Oklahoma City-Tulsa in 1963, he served in Oklahoma parishes before requesting an assignment to the diocesan-run mission in Guatemala, where he pastored the Indigenous Tz'utujil Mayan people, celebrating Mass, helping with agricultural and community needs, and translating the New Testament into their language. The Guatemalan civil war created a dangerous environment for clergy, and Father Rother's name eventually appeared on a death list. While he briefly returned to Oklahoma, he ultimately went back to Guatemala in time to celebrate Holy Week — and was martyred.

"The more people know about him, and find in him an attractive, credible witness," Archbishop Coakley concluded, "the more people will come to him to seek his intercession, and pray for their needs, and give him the opportunity to intercede on their behalf."

Blessed Rother's martyrdom is hardly a tragic tale from the distant past; indeed, it remains current in a world where practicing the faith can literally be deadly.

Aid to the Church in Need — an international papal charity supporting persecuted and suffering Christian communities worldwide — reported Oct. 27 that conditions for Christians worsened in almost 56% of 18 countries examined over the past two years, and none recorded an overall improvement.

Brian Hyland, a senior curator at the Museum of the Bible, explained to the audience how the exhibit came to be installed at the 430,000-square-foot facility housing thousands of objects ranging over 4,000 years of biblical history.

While the Museum of the Bible is nonsectarian, it was established and largely funded by Steve Green, the evangelical Christian CEO of the Hobby Lobby arts and crafts chain and the museum board's chairman. The majority of the board are evangelical Christians as well.

"We've had a tradition here at the museum, for the last six years, of telling personal stories — but the way in which we've told these personal stories is to have them in a gallery," Hyland said.

The "personal story" exhibits, Hyland shared, have featured U.S. preacher Rev. Billy Graham, British author C.S. Lewis and Chinese church leader Watchman Nee, among others.

"Almost all of these stories have something to do with evangelization — something to do with spreading the word of God," Hyland continued. Blessed Stanley Rother, he said, is "a native son of Oklahoma; he's a Bible translator, he helped translate the New Testament into Tz'utujil; and he is a martyr and a missionary. Perfect story."

The small, four-case exhibit — which includes personal items — is fortuitously situated across from the illumiNations exhibit, where visitors can see the progress of current and ongoing Bible translations.

Sue Rother Bond, Blessed Rother's first cousin once removed, and author/illustrator of a children's book, "Blessed Stanley Rother: An Extraordinary Ordinary Life" (Bonds Between Us Publishing), told the audience she wasn't certain Blessed Rother "would like all of this — he was a very humble man."

The construction of the 53-acre, $50 million Blessed Stanley Rother Shrine in Oklahoma City followed his 2017 beatification and opened in 2023.

"But what I do know is, that if his story helped people with enthusiasm about their faith, and their enthusiasm about God — he would like that."

Rother Bond also tours a Blessed Stanley Rother puppet show for children.

The afternoon concluded with a presentation from Gary Gasse, co-founder and chief creative officer of Coronation Media, which, in conjunction with EWTN Studios, will in summer 2027 release a full-length Blessed Rother movie, "The Shepherd." A brief trailer screening revealed intense pacing and high production values.

In an interview prior to the reception, Archbishop Coakley told OSV News that Blessed Rother's life holds a message for all believers facing conflict.

"Like the Good Shepherd himself, he didn't respond to violence with violence. Stanley faced violent oppression in Guatemala — his parishioners were kidnapped, disappeared and murdered. And his response was always to teach the Gospel," the archbishop said.

"There were a lot of people in Latin America at that time turning to violent resistance to oppressive regimes. That was not Father Rother's path; he never resorted to violence," Archbishop Coakley continued. "He preached reconciliation; peace; forgiveness. That's one way I think we can resist attempts at polarization — and not being drawn into that kind of dynamic that's so evident in our moment in history as well."

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A crisis of dehumanization

(Continued from page 5)

to this as a "throwaway culture." Perhaps that mentality has also entered our relationships.

We may engage in relationships using a simple formula, You disagree with me: disposable. You voted differently: disposable. You failed: disposable. Eventually, we can protect ourselves from everyone who might disappoint, challenge or disagree with us, and then wonder why we are so lonely.

Of course, forgiveness does not mean pretending nothing happened. Mercy does not eliminate accountability. Some relationships require boundaries, and reconciliation is not always possible or prudent. But even when boundaries are necessary, dignity remains. There are wounds too deep to overcome through good intentions. There are people whom, if we are truthful, we simply do not know how to love.

Christianity is not asking us to manufacture feelings we do not possess. It is inviting us to allow God to give us a heart more like his. Perhaps in our prayer we can ask God to let us see people like he does, and to let us love like he does. Do not let us become the older son. To not allow my wounds, my politics, my pride or even my certainty that I am right make me forget the dignity of the person in front of me.

There is one final detail in the parable that gives me great hope. The father does not only run toward the younger son. He also goes outside to find the elder son. The father's mercy is big enough for both.

In this divided and lonely moment, especially with the politically charged midterm elections behind us, perhaps our greatest task is not simply to determine who is right and who is wrong.

Perhaps it is to become more like the father: people capable of truth without cruelty, disagreement without contempt, justice without abandoning mercy and forgiveness that leaves room for someone to come home. Because if we want to overcome our crisis of loneliness, we must also confront our crisis of division. And if we want to overcome our division, we must begin by refusing to dehumanize one another.

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

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Pro-life advocates pray at grave of 47 babies

(Continued from page 11)

prayed in front of Gosnell's clinic while it was still open — when, as Bishop Coffey noted, the late abortionist's practice was largely "under the radar" in terms of public awareness.

After authorities exposed Gosnell's crimes — which included the death of 41-year-old Bhutan refugee Karnamaya Mongar, who received a fatal dose of Demerol at the clinic — the scale of the horrors "didn't really surprise anybody," since pro-life groups had long drawn attention to the facility, said Father Emmons.

"Our question was, 'How many other places were doing exactly the same thing?'" he said.

Wood said that "seeing Karnamaya Mongar's baby through that plastic bag" during the 2010 raid on the Gosnell's clinic "hit my heart."

"I could only imagine the thousands of babies that he had killed and disposed of this way," said Wood.

In May 2013, Gosnell was found guilty of first-degree murder in the deaths of three babies, involuntary manslaughter in Mongar's death, and 229 violations of Pennsylvania abortion regulations.

Following Gosnell's 2013 convictions on those charges, the Philadelphia medical examiner's office interred the aborted babies' remains at Laurel Hill.

Sixteen years after discovering their bodies, Wood — who throughout his law enforcement career has drawn on his deeply held Catholic faith — reflected on what he would tell the deceased children.

"I would say, 'I'm sorry for what happened to you. I wish your parents would have made a different decision,'" Wood said.

And, he added, "I would tell them, 'You can come and help us … to change things in this world that we live in today.'"



OSV News photo/Gina Christian

Pro-life advocate Laura Gies kneels at the unmarked grave of 47 preborn children whose bodies were discovered in 2010 at the Philadelphia clinic of abortionist Kermit Gosnell. Convicted in 2013 of multiple murder, involuntary manslaughter and drug charges, Gosnell died in prison in 2026. Gies and fellow pro-life advocates joined in Mass and graveside prayers for the slain children Nov. 2, 2026, at their burial site in Laurel Hill East Cemetery in Philadelphia.

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National/World

Pope Leo 'clinically fit' for whirlwind Latin America homecoming

ROME — Pope Leo XIV is set to make his first trip to Latin America as pope Nov. 6-17, a demanding 12-day journey that Vatican officials say he is eager to undertake despite having lung cancer surgery just weeks ago. Speaking at a Nov. 3 Vatican briefing, Holy See Press Office Director Matteo Bruni said the pope will travel with only "the ordinary medical assistance" and requires no special equipment. Doctors have determined he is "clinically fit to undertake this trip," he added. The visit will take Pope Leo to Uruguay, Argentina and Peru, where his decades of missionary service helped shape his pastoral vision. The pope, who first arrived in Peru in 1985 and later served as bishop of Chiclayo, will celebrate nine public Masses, visit seven cathedrals and lead two stadium prayer vigils. Maria Montserrat Alvarado, the new prefect of the Dicastery for Communication, said the pope is "excited" and hopes to "share his message of peace and encounter with the world." Alvarado said the trip has two central themes: a homecoming to the region that formed him as a pastor and a call for healing, dialogue and peace. She also predicted reporters can expect plenty of unscripted moments, saying "he's going to give you a lot of improvised texts to work with."

Pope Leo XIV encourages Catholics to pray for the dead

ROME — On All Souls' Day, Pope Leo XIV celebrated Mass at Rome's Campo Verano Cemetery, urging Catholics to pray for the dead and remember that death does not break the bond between the faithful and Christ. Surrounded by the tombs and monuments of the city's largest cemetery, the pope said the bond between the living and the faithful departed is not broken by death but transformed. Through prayer, he said, Catholics accompany their loved ones on the journey toward full communion with God, a reality already glimpsed in the Eucharist. All Souls' Day is dedicated to praying for those who have died, especially the souls in purgatory, and November is traditionally a month of remembrance of the dead. In his homily, Pope Leo reflected on the Beatitudes, focusing on Christ's promise: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." He offered special prayers for people grieving recent losses, particularly families devastated by war. "May the tears of so many mothers, so many children, and so many elderly people touch the consciences of those who have the power to silence the weapons," he said. The pope is scheduled to celebrate another memorial Mass Nov. 5 for cardinals and bishops who died during the past year.

Pope Leo's envoy witnesses hunger in war-torn Ukraine

ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine — A papal envoy visiting war-torn Ukraine was confronted with two stark realities: the dangers of the front line and the growing hunger faced by thousands of civilians. Archbishop Luis Marín de San Martín, Pope Leo XIV's almoner, traveled to Ukraine Oct. 27-30 to deliver humanitarian aid and express the pope's solidarity with people affected by Russia's full-scale invasion. During his visit to Zaporizhzhia, roughly 2,000 people lined up outside the Cathedral of God the Merciful Father for bread distributed by the Albertine Brothers. "I think he experienced the reality of war. He came into contact with it," Auxiliary Bishop Jan Sobilo told OSV News. The bishop said the papal almoner was especially moved by the number of people seeking food. "He looked at that crowd and was shocked that there were so many hungry people." The visit came amid ongoing attacks. A Russian drone struck a municipal bus near the papal delegation's lodging, while another aid group reported missile strikes near the cathedral. Church-run relief efforts remain a lifeline. The brothers' bakery produces up to 1,500 loaves several times a week, helping thousands displaced by the conflict. Bishop Sobilo warned that winter, shrinking donations and the war's psychological toll on children are deepening the crisis.

'That's Amore': Notre Dame beats Villanova in season opener

ROME — Augustinian friars watched anxiously courtside, Vatican officials cheered from the stands and fans in costume bishops' miters sang "That's Amore" as Notre Dame defeated Villanova Nov. 1 in the Eternal City Tip Off. It was a basketball season opener unlike any other, made possible by the first U.S.-born pope, who grew up hearing "Go Irish" in Chicago, but cheered for Villanova as a university student. During a papal audience with 6,000 fans, alumni, and athletes the day before game day, Pope Leo dribbled a golden basketball in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall and joked about which team he would be rooting for. "Growing up on the South Side of Chicago, we oftentimes heard, 'Go Irish!'" Pope Leo said. "But, as you all know, Prevost graduated from Villanova. So the pope doesn't take sides. Prevost has another opinion, but we won't do that now." On the court, Notre Dame's men rallied late to edge Villanova 74-72, while the Fighting Irish women won 99-75. Pope Leo, who did not attend the basketball games, reflected on the spiritual value of athletics in his meeting with the athletes, saying sports teach cooperation and bring people together. Fans at the games told OSV News that the audience with the pope was the weekend's highlight.

Poland's constitutional crisis deepens, bishops plead for reconciliation

WARSAW, Poland — Poland's political crisis deepened Oct. 30-31 as a dispute over control of the Constitutional Tribunal sparked protests, police intervention and an emergency return by President Karol Nawrocki to the country. The confrontation erupted after a notice appeared on the tribunal's website announcing the suspension of its president and vice president. Anna Korwin-Piotrowska, a judge elected by the current parliament, said she had assumed responsibility for the court's administration. Tribunal leaders rejected the move, saying the website had been unlawfully taken over and questioning her legitimacy. Protesters gathered outside the tribunal in Warsaw, and police detained three people after demonstrators breached a fence. As tensions mounted, Poland's Catholic bishops appealed for calm. In an Oct. 31 statement, the bishops' conference warned the dispute "is leading to a profound crisis of the state." The bishops called for dialogue, peaceful solutions and national reconciliation. Church leaders across the country echoed that message. Cardinal Konrad Krajewski urged prayer, fasting and sacrifice, saying, "Many Poles did not sleep last night. Please, I ask you to pray for our homeland, for those who govern. For wisdom, for good judgment, so that they bring peace, not division." Other bishops called for reconciliation, respect for the rule of law and prayers for social peace.



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