

The CATHOLIC TIMES

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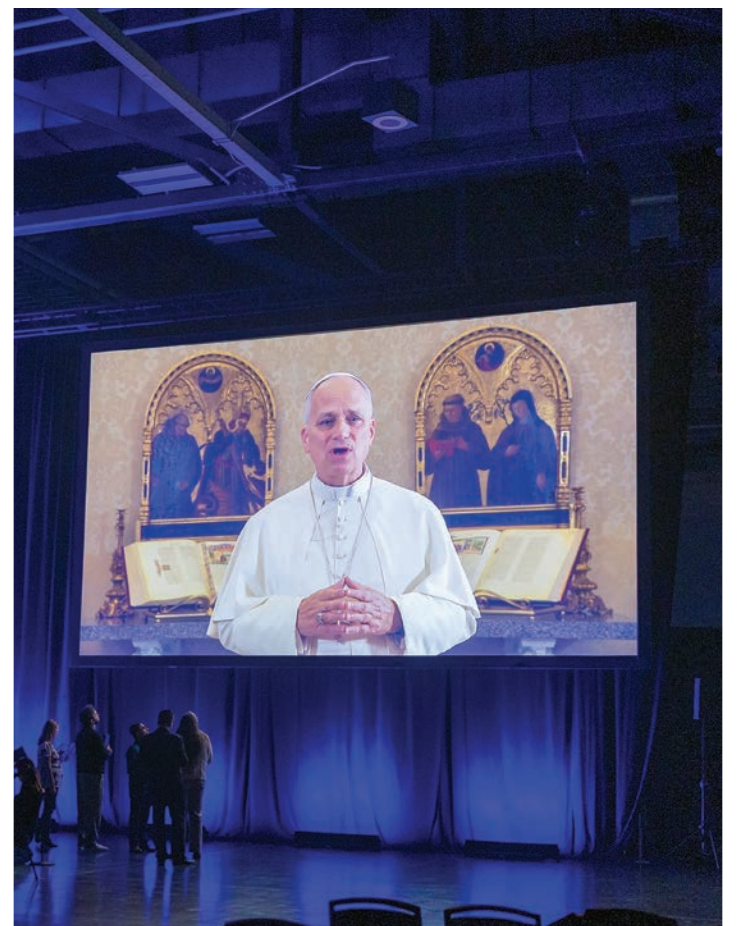
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SEEK26 in Columbus

Among the highlights of the SEEK26 conference, which brought more than 16,000 Catholics, most of them college students, to Columbus at the beginning of the new year were an opening Mass with Bishop Earl Fernandes and a video message from Pope Leo XIV, Page 3

SEEK coming back to Columbus in 2027

By Doug Bean
Catholic Times Editor

The SEEK conference will be returning to Columbus in 2027.

Organizers announced after the evening's featured presentations on Friday, Jan. 2 at SEEK26 in the Greater Columbus Convention Center that the annual five-day event will be back in Columbus for its 17th edition next January.

San Antonio, Texas, was also chosen as a host city for 2027, returning there for the first time since 2017.

"Across our country, SEEK26 showcased the passion that young adults, families and people of all ages have for our Catholic faith," Bishop Earl Fernandes said in a statement. "The Diocese of Columbus is thrilled to host the SEEK conference again in 2027. I know that the momentum of this conference will continue to inspire the vibrancy of our faith community, and I look forward to witnessing it again in Columbus next January."

Columbus, Denver and Fort Worth, Texas, served as host cities this year for more than 26,000 participants, including over 16,000 in Columbus.

"SEEK continues to grow as a movement of encounter, formation, and mission," said Tom Bruner, vice president of formative enterprises at FOCUS. "Bringing SEEK 2027 back to both San Antonio and Columbus allows us to welcome more people into this life-changing experience and to build on the incredible momentum that FOCUS continues to see every year."

Once again in 2027, the SEEK conference will provide opportunities for students, young adults, families, parish leaders, clergy, missionaries and bishops to encounter Christ through keynote addresses, workshops, daily Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, confession and fellowship.

FOCUS organizers said it expects Columbus to draw participants from the eastern and northern parts of the country and San Antonio from the south and west.

The Archdiocese of San Antonio wa ex-



Ohio State University students react to the announcement that SEEK27 will be in Columbus next January. Photo courtesy Sarah Lightle

cited to be named a host for 2027.

"With great joy and deep gratitude to God, I share my excitement -- together

with Auxiliary Bishops Gary Janak and Arturo Cepeda, as well as the entire Archdiocese of San Antonio and more than a million Catholics -- for the SEEK Conference coming back to San Antonio next year," Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller of San Antonio said in a statement.

"When SEEK was last held here in 2017 it was a 'game-changer' for our local Church, energizing thousands of missionary disciples here in South Central Texas, with the Holy Spirit present in a most powerful way. We eagerly await this new moment of grace, confident that the Lord will again touch the hearts of many young adults, awaken courage, and renew the Church across this country through their faith, questions, and their generous 'yes' to Christ."

Ticket sales for next year's conference are already underway. A \$50 deposit is required for college students. To register for the SEEK27 conference in Columbus, visit www.seek26.focus.org/columbus-oh/.

Diocese, seminarians promote vocations at SEEK

By Hannah Heil
Catholic Times Reporter

SEEK26, an annual conference hosted by FOCUS and held in Columbus this year along with two other locations, continued to draw a significant number of seminarians.

The number of men in formation for the priesthood attending the conference was a 43 percent increase from last year's conference, according to FOCUS.

In a recorded video played the opening night of SEEK26, which ran from Jan. 1 to 5, Pope Leo XIV encouraged attendees to be unafraid in answering Christ's call. The Holy Father noted that all young people are called to a vocation, and for some, that is the priesthood.

FOCUS reported that 16,115 attendees were present at the conference in Columbus as of Jan. 2. More than 5,000 attendees are attending the conference in Denver and another 4,000-plus in Fort Worth, Texas.

"When you see (nearly) 20,000 people in one spot who all just love the Lord, there's a lot of hope," Columbus diocesan seminarian Nick Arnold, 27, said.

Reaching as many of those individuals as possible is an important component.

Father Michael Haemmerle, 31, who serves as the vocations director for the Diocese of Columbus, said he hopes to attract strong men to the priesthood.

His efforts sparked an idea that drew hundreds to the diocese's vocations booth set up at SEEK26. A pullup bar stationed next to an information table challenged



Father Michael Haemmerle (second from left), vocations director for the diocese, and seminarian Absalom Hall talk with a SEEK attendee. Photo courtesy Sarah Lightle

young people with the number of chin-ups they could achieve.

"Guys love showing off how strong they are," Father Haemmerle said with a laugh. "So that's something to draw people over so that we can then have good conversations."

The pullup bar is also intended "to draw guys who want to be excellent," he noted. "Guys who are wimpy and soft don't want to do chin-ups. We want strong -- doesn't matter physically so much -- but strong men for the priesthood."

After putting their strength to the test,

young men had a chance to speak with Father Haemmerle and diocesan seminarians.

"The goal is to talk to them: 'Have you thought about the priesthood?' Then you see where the conversation goes," he explained.

"When you start asking those questions, you never know where it's going to go. It's gone all sorts of different places."

The first day of the conference, Father Haemmerle noted, the vocations booth had four sheets filled with names and e-mail addresses, equating to about 100 people. He estimated that the second day of SEEK26 brought several hundred more attendees to the pullup bar.

Father Haemmerle said he plans to contact individuals who provided their information and share with their diocese's vocations director.

Seminarians at the Columbus diocese's vocations booth also handed out seminarian posters to attendees and asked them to pray.

For men currently discerning a call to the priesthood, SEEK appears to be an affirmative experience.

"When you come here, you see not only other seminarians from across the country but then a lot of faithful Catholics. They'll stop and want to talk, and they're very supportive of vocations. So it just kind of reaffirms everything for me," said Absalom Hall, 39, a seminarian for the Diocese of Columbus.

Hall, who belongs to St. John Paul II Scioto Catholic Parish, is in his first year of theology and studying at the Pontifical College Josephinum on the north side of

Columbus.

SEEK offers a "Seminarian Experience" designed for men discerning the priesthood. The special track includes a welcome dinner, evening reception, dedicated location for Morning and Evening Prayer (part of the Church's Liturgy of the Hours prayed daily), seminarian-only impact sessions and a hospitality suite.

Several diocesan seminarians at the conference take part in the procession during Masses and assist at the altar.

"It's just been fantastic," Arnold said. "Being a Columbus seminarian, we've had a lot of role in the liturgy, whether serving Mass or had the opportunity to emcee the late-arrivals Mass, and then Morning Prayer."

Arnold, who belongs to Granville St. Edward the Confessor Church, is in pre-theology and studying at Mount St. Mary's Seminary of the West in Cincinnati.

This year's SEEK conference held at the Greater Columbus Convention Center is a special treat for the diocese's seminarians.

"I'm so used to traveling somewhere far away," Arnold noted. "It's great just to have it here at home."

"Oftentimes, events like these are in other cities -- a lot of times, bigger cities -- but having it here in Columbus is great," Hall added. "Families from Ohio, especially in the Diocese of Columbus, are able to make it that otherwise wouldn't."

"The diocese as a whole is very good about encouraging our young people to come to events like this, and this just makes it easier and more affordable for them. Hopefully, it continues."

The
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Diocese of Columbus

SEEK conference attendance tops 16,000 in Columbus

By Hannah Heil

Catholic Times Reporter

SEEK26, a conference hosted by FOCUS that drew more than 16,000 people to Columbus at the beginning of the New Year, concluded Monday, Jan. 5.

A record of 26,000-plus attendees attended the conference held Jan. 1 to 5 in three cities: Denver; Fort Worth, Texas; and Columbus, which served as the primary location and had 16,115 registered participants as of Jan. 2.

SEEK attracts thousands of college students, adults, parish leaders, clergy and missionaries annually from throughout the United States and other countries.

This year's theme, "To the Heights," was inspired by St. Pier Giorgio Frassati. The young saint, who was canonized last September, lived a life of holiness before succumbing to an illness at age 24.

Various tracks were offered at SEEK, including a seminarian experience and Making Missionary Disciples track for leading individuals to Jesus and His Church, geared toward clergy, youth ministers and religious educators.

The conference included daily Mass celebrated by bishops of dioceses across the country.

Eucharistic Adoration was offered daily in a designated chapel set up at the Greater Columbus Convention Center. Attendees also had frequent opportunities to receive the sacrament of reconciliation.

A conference-wide Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was held the evening of Saturday, Jan. 3. Thousands adored the Lord and received the sacrament of reconciliation that evening.

The impactful event followed a keynote address by Father Mike Schmitz, host of Ascension's Bible in a Year podcast, and Sister Mary Grace, S.V., of the Sisters of Life religious order, who resides with members of her community in Denver.

Two keynote addresses were held each evening of the conference and the morning of the concluding day.

The opening night of the conference on New Year's Day featured Matt Fradd, a husband, father and host of the Pints with Aquinas podcast based in Florida, and Sister Josephine Garrett, CSFN, who resides in Texas and is consecrated in the Sisters



Members of a Latino young adult group from Columbus were gifted the SEEK26 experience by the diocese.

Photos courtesy Sarah Lightle

of the Holy Family of Nazareth religious order.

Speakers the second night of the conference included Edward Sri, senior vice president of apostolic outreach at FOCUS, and Father Chase Hilgenbrinck, vocations director for the Diocese of Peoria, Illinois.

The fourth night's keynotes were delivered by Curtis Martin, founder of FOCUS, and Arthur Brooks, a New York Times bestselling author and professor at Harvard University.

SEEK26 concluded with keynotes from Lisa Cotter, a wife and mother of a FOCUS missionary family for 10-plus years, and Pete Burak, vice president at Renewal Ministries dedicated to renewal and evangelization in the Church, followed by a closing Mass.

Workshops and entertainment were also part of the conference, including a performance by musician Chris Renzema.

"Striking me the most is seeing how many Catholics can fit in one Greater (Columbus) Convention Center, ... but also, all the messages. Those have been so good, and they really center into my heart. They're really relatable," said Jetzemany Rincon, 22, a member of the Columbus Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Star of the New Evangelization bilingual parish.

She was gifted a SEEK26 conference experience by the Diocese of Columbus and came with members the parish's Hispanic young adult group.

"I didn't really have many expecta-

tions," she said of the conference. "I think I was just coming in, ... wanted it to be a surprise. I am super blessed to be here — I'm so happy to be here."

According to FOCUS, 11,744 students from campuses staffed by its missionaries were registered at the three host locations and 2,752 students, an increase of 64 percent from last year, attended from non-FOCUS campuses.

There was a 43-percent increase in seminarians from 2025 who attended. More than 50 bishops were also estimated to be present at this year's conference.

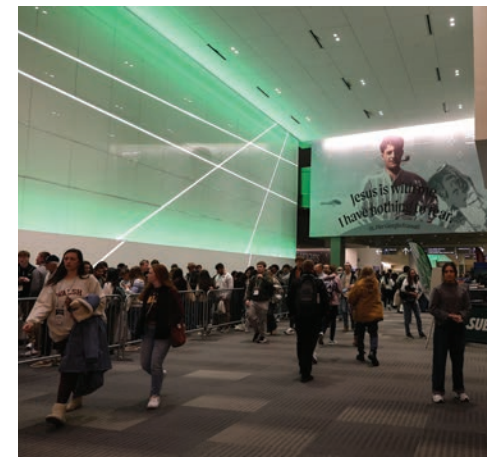
Bishop Earl Fernandes celebrated the opening Mass of the five-day event. Hundreds of priests, deacons, bishops and seminarians were present, including several from the Columbus diocese.

A notable highlight of the conference was a special blessing and message from Pope Leo XIV to SEEK26 participants. In a recorded video played after the opening Mass, drawing a thunderous applause from the audience, the Pope offered words of encouragement, prayer and hope.

"When I saw the Pope come on, I started crying because I realized that he has such a big Church ... and he was able to center down," Rincon reflected afterward.

The Holy Father asked attendees, "What do you seek?", a question posed centuries earlier by Christ in the Gospel of John.

Pope Leo recognized that many young people traveled to SEEK, restless, perhaps, and searching for meaning, fulfill-



More than 16,000 Catholics took over the Greater Columbus Convention Center for the SEEK26 conference on Jan. 1-5. Photo courtesy Andy Long

ment and direction. He encouraged young adults to consider their vocation and be unafraid in answering Christ's call.

In his homily, Bishop Fernandes pondered how Christ entered the world as a newborn baby so all people might be children of God.

He also reflected on Christ's mother, the Blessed Virgin, who gave her "yes" to God, carrying Him in her virginal womb. The opening day of SEEK26 on Jan. 1 coincided with the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God.

Hundreds of booths were present in the conference's Mission Way held at the convention center. The space included booths with SEEK sponsors, vendors and religious orders. Attendees could visit with consecrated religious and clergy, purchase souvenirs and learn about various Catholic organizations.

FOCUS was founded at Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas, in 1998, inspired by Pope St. John Paul II's call to the New Evangelization. The Catholic organization has since expanded to 250+ college campuses and parish communities.

More than 1,000 FOCUS missionaries journey in faith with students and parishioners, equipping them for Christ-centered evangelization and discipleship. The organization reaches nearly 60,000 individuals annually.

Buckeye Catholic supports SEEK26 as host school

By Hannah Heil

Catholic Times Reporter

SEEK26, held Jan. 1-5 in Columbus, presented a unique opportunity for Buckeye Catholic ministry at Ohio State University.

The university, home to missionaries who serve as part of the FOCUS organization, which hosts SEEK annually in cities across the country, served as the host campus for the conference this year.

"We were given a spot ... to have a booth and be able to be a presence for both our own students to come and have a home base during the conference but also spread the word about what God is doing at Buckeye Catholic to the broader Columbus community that's here," said Dana Dosen, assistant director of advancement at the Columbus St. Thomas More Newman Center, home of Buckeye Catholic campus ministry.

"Really, the students are here to encounter Jesus, and Buckeye Catholic is here that we would be transformed as a community,

but also to serve in a unique way because of us being the host."

Several SEEK attendees visited the booth to learn more about the college campus ministry.

The Newman Center's students and staff welcomed more than 16,000 individuals to Columbus for the conference, assisting with registration and helping reset rooms after various talks and impact sessions. Additional conference locations included Denver and Fort Worth, Texas.

SEEK includes daily Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, the sacrament of reconciliation, keynote addresses, workshops and entertainment. It attracts thousands of college students, adults, parish leaders, clergy and missionaries annually.

In addition to aiding the SEEK26 and FOCUS team this year, Buckeye Catholic students and staff "had the honor of getting to be emcees for the men's and women's concurrent sessions, and then also, directing people after Mass," Dosen said.

This year's SEEK26 conference location — a few minutes' drive from Ohio State's

campus — allowed a greater number of students to attend compared with previous years.

More than 350 students from Ohio State University and regional college campuses in the Columbus metropolitan area served by Buckeye Catholic participated in the conference. "That was a big help in encouraging students to show up," Dosen said.

FOCUS announced on Friday, Jan. 2 that next year's conference, SEEK27, will be held again in Ohio's capital city and in San Antonio, Texas. "Next year, I'm excited to see what participation will look like, and really, participation that, hopefully, spills over into transformation as well into renewal of our campus," Dosen noted.

Ohio State students Ben Andrews and Michael Meyer, who are involved with Buckeye Catholic, attended the SEEK26 conference. They participated in SEEK previously and shared their excitement at



Michael Meyer (left) and Ben Andrews were among the Ohio State University students taking part in SEEK26. Photo courtesy Sarah Lightle

See BUCKEYE, Page 4

Catholic Social Services project engages SEEK participants

By Hannah Heil

Catholic Times Reporter

More than 16,000 youth, families and faithful were reminded of their God-given dignity at the SEEK26 conference, hosted by FOCUS. That dignity extends beyond the walls of the Greater Columbus Convention Center.

Catholic Social Services (CSS), which serves senior, homeless and disabled individuals across the 23-county Diocese of Columbus, gathered attendees at SEEK26 to serve their brothers and sisters unable to attend – and afford a place to live.

CSS hosted a “pack event,” the first of its kind at SEEK. The service project was held Saturday, Jan. 3, the third day of the annual conference that runs from Jan. 1 to 5 this year in Columbus with additional locations in Denver and Fort Worth, Texas.

“Putting together kits for the homeless is what this is for,” Julie Naporano, vice president of development and communications at CSS, said of the event, “things that the homeless population will need, letting them know that they’re seen.”

“We love them; we care for them – without judgment. It’s part of our calling as Catholics to help one another.”

Participants – youth, clergy, consecrated religious sisters, children and adults – lined the airwall of the convention center, waiting their turn to assemble a kit. Collectively, participating SEEK attendees packed several thousand plastic bags full of items for those in most need.

The event, named Faith in Action, enabled faithful to take what they received spiritually in the conference’s keynotes, impact sessions and workshops and put it to good use.

“We’re all called to serve one another, and so, that is what faith in action is doing: ‘How can I help? How can I do something?’” Naporano explained.

“This is one piece of it. This is something that everyone can do.”

The pack event, which lasted approximately three hours, drew a significant crowd. In assembly-line style, volunteers compiled kits with socks, Chapstick, granola bars, hygiene items and other basic necessities.

“The thousands of people that have already registered to be a part of this project speaks loudly that people want to help,” Naporano said. “Part of our role, as well, at Catholic Social Services is to show people how and what they can do, and what are the needs.”

“Our president and CEO, Kelley Henderson, will be talking to the people that are doing this event about how to approach a homeless person and respecting their space because you’re entering into their home. To us, it might be a park bench. To them, it’s their home.”

Participants at the event could keep a kit to personally give to a homeless individual.

After the Faith in Action service project, cart-loads of kits were taken to be given to diocesan parishes, empowering parishioners to help their homeless brothers and sisters by distributing the kits.

Andrew Baugham, 25, a Dayton native and second-year FOCUS missionary at Howard University in Washington, participated in the event. SEEK26, he noted, was his fifth SEEK conference but the first with a service project of such a kind.

Baugham was pleased with the opportunity to make faith a living reality.

“I think there’s a temptation to have



FOCUS missionary Andrew Baugham participates in Catholic Social Services’ “pack event” project on Jan. 3 at SEEK26. Photo courtesy Sarah Lightle.

a super high spiritual-minded, float-in-the-heavens type of spirituality, when I think real love is the type of spirituality

that floats in the heavens and then comes down to earth,” he said.

“I got a lot of guys over here from Howard ... helping out with the service, and so, that’s why I came to do it. It’s just what we ought to do.”

Diana Pagán, director of community engagement at CSS, interacted with several participants.

“It has been a humbling experience to see so many different people from all walks of life and all cultures and people,” she reflected. “I’ve even spoken to some brothers from Germany who have come together to make these ‘hope kits’ to support our homeless community.”

Duke University students Dominick Angelone, 19, and Ernest Binfon Jr., 19, also participated in the pack event.

The two students who study at the university in Durham, North Carolina, were eager to put their faith to work.

“(Speaker) Jeff Cavins was talking about being Catholic isn’t just about buying the book and reading the things and believing the facts. It’s not just about accepting and professing the faith. Part of professing the faith is actually acting on it, being charitable,” Angelone said.

“I think it was kind of perfect timing coming out of that (talk). Like, oh, look, here’s the chance to be charitable.”

“It’s just an amazing opportunity to be at SEEK and giving back,” Binfon Jr. added, “just giving to the community, serving others.”

Doctor’s presentation proves to be popular at SEEK conference

By Doug Bean

Catholic Times Editor

For more than two hours, students waited patiently in line to speak with Dr. Ashley Fernandes after his presentation at the SEEK26 conference in Columbus.

Many of them were medical school students or aspiring health professional students who wanted to understand from a Catholic physician’s perspective about balancing their faith with the secular worldview of life that some professors expect them to embrace.

“A lot of the students were asking about the conflict in navigating being a faithful Catholic and learning with excellence in a hostile environment,” said Ashley Fernandes, MD, Ph.D., a Columbus pediatrician, the associate director of the Center for Bioethics at The Ohio State University College of Medicine, and an associate professor of pediatrics at Nationwide Children’s Hospital in Columbus, who also holds a doctorate in philosophy from Georgetown University.

Dr. Fernandes had just given a talk on Friday, Jan. 2 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center titled “Secularist Medicine and Bioethics Think You’re Not



Dr. Ashley Fernandes speaks at the SEEK26 conference on Jan. 2. Photo courtesy Sarah Lightle

Special: Why You Need to Remember You Are,” to thousands of students during an afternoon session at the 16th annual, five-day event that brought more than 16,000 attendees to Columbus.

He estimated that he talked with more than 100 people afterward and said he was “happy to do it. That’s why I couldn’t turn away and go right after my talk. It

was heartwarming to see their passion for medicine and the Church.”

“I told many of them three things,” he said. “One was to be excellent at your craft, because that is one way to immunize yourself against criticism. And, number two, is to just be kind in every encounter because that’s how you really convey the love of Jesus to other people. You don’t have to say the word ‘Jesus’ to let people know that Jesus is present.”

“And then the third thing I told them is be likable. Be likable, because vulnerable people don’t need you to be an angry Catholic. Don’t be someone who’s defensive all the time. Don’t be someone who’s exclusionary. You have to be inclusionary, and if you do those three things, you can have a very successful career. Once you’re a true Catholic doctor, there’s so much good you can do for ‘the least of these.’”

Dr. Fernandes’ talk to the large crowd contrasted the beauty, dignity and transcendence of the human person with secular humanism and materialism.

He emphasized the importance of the question that Christ asked the Apostles in John 1:38: “What do you seek?”—while noting that SEEK is the name of the conference—this is a “profound question” that “should reverberate for all of you

throughout your whole lives.”

Dr. Fernandes then added that while we are called to seek God, the most revolutionary part of Christianity is actually that God actively seeks out us as well, no matter how imperfect one’s life might be.

“Over and over again, the writers of the gospels and scripture are trying to tell us God is looking for you—and there are no accidents in Scripture,” he said.

He pointed out that the word courage is mentioned several times in the scriptures – and that it’s important for everyone to sometimes come out of comfort zones to be disciples of Christ in the world.

“As a physician, I see every single day the face of Christ in the suffering,” said Dr. Fernandes, an older brother of Columbus Bishop Earl Fernandes. “And this is something we should not hide from because there are competing views of what constitutes a person.”

“In medical education today, we are not taught about the transcendence of a human person at all. In medical schools today, what many are taught is that the human person is a random collection of atoms and that when we die we basically

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BUCKEYE: Buckeye Catholic supports SEEK26 as host school, Continued from Page 3

having the conference in their home city.

The two Columbus natives, who are in their senior year of college, hail from Dublin.

“In high school, I always wanted to get out of Columbus because I thought there was always something greater, but the greatness is here,” Meyer said.

“I couldn’t have been more joyous ... because I think the Lord wants me here for at least the foreseeable future, and I couldn’t be happier because of how much is blossoming here.”

“My class, it’s very secular, but then, you come to a place like this, and it’s like, boom, the Church is alive among young

people,” Andrews added. “That’s exciting – it’s exciting that something’s happening.”

Andrews reflected on the continued growth at Buckeye Catholic. An increasing number of students are entering the Church at the Newman Center.

He appreciated Adoration, various talks

and an opportunity to encounter Christ at SEEK26.

“Having that deeper personal encounter, how much fun it is, it’s getting me excited to go back,” Andrews said, “and be able to pour into the dudes I serve that weren’t able to make it.”

Pope Leo offers special message for SEEK 26 on opening night

By Hannah Heil

Catholic Times Reporter

The five-day SEEK26 conference at the Greater Columbus Convention Center this year kicked off on Thursday, Jan. 1 with a 6 p.m. Mass celebrated by Bishop Earl Fernandes with hundreds of priests, deacons, bishops and seminarians present.

The bishop welcomed thousands of young people, families and individuals from across the country to Columbus.

Pope Leo XIV delivered a special blessing and message to SEEK26 participants. In a recorded video that drew thunderous ap-

plause from the audience, the Pope offered words of encouragement, prayer and hope.

He asked attendees, "What do you seek?" The question was posed centuries earlier by Christ in the Gospel of John.

Pope Leo recognized that many young people traveled to SEEK, restless, perhaps, and searching for meaning, fulfillment and direction in their lives.

He encouraged young adults to consider their vocation and be unafraid to answer Christ's call.

"Some of you, like Andrew and Simon Peter, may be called to the priesthood to serve God's people through the celebration of sacraments, through preaching the

Word of God, walking with God's people," the Holy Father said.

"Others may be called to religious life to give yourselves entirely to God. Others still may be called to marriage and family life.

"If you sense the Lord calling you, do not be afraid. Once again, let me emphasize: He alone knows the deepest, perhaps hidden, longings of your heart."

In Bishop Fernandes' homily, he reflected on the Church's Christmas season, which is celebrated from Dec. 25 to Jan. 6. He pondered how Christ entered the world as a newborn child so its people might be children of God.

"The Mighty God descended from the

starry heaven and became a child so that we might go up to heaven, toward the heights, as Pier Giorgio Frassati might say," the bishop remarked.

He also reflected on Christ's mother, who carried God in her virginal womb. The opening day of SEEK26 coincided with the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.

"She was the mother who, at the same time, was a disciple, who not only raised her Son but also heard the Word of God and kept it, even during her Son's rejection and Passion," Bishop Fernandes noted. "As Mother, she accompanied Him along the road to Calvary, becoming also our mother."

Young people's devotion, zeal for the faith striking to see at SEEK

Anyone who's concerned about the survival of the Catholic Church should witness a Mass at one of the SEEK conferences.

This past weekend in Columbus, more than 16,000 college students, young adults and families attended SEEK26 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center.

The conference was sponsored by FO-CUS, formerly known as the Fellowship of Catholic University Students. The organization has expanded its footprint to go beyond ministering at college campuses around the world to offering a missionary discipleship track to help lead the new evangelization in parishes.

Most of them came to the Mass celebrated by Bishop Earl Fernandes of Columbus on Jan. 1, the opening night of the conference, and also to morning Masses led by other bishops and archbishops from around the country during the five-day event.

It was an impressive sight to see a massive convention center hall filled to capacity on a chilly Saturday morning with faith-filled young people participating in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and praying the Holy Rosary that preceded the liturgy.

And they just didn't show up. They were engaged. They were reverent. They were holy. They were on fire for the faith.

Many young women could be seen wearing veils at Mass. Young men and women received Holy Communion with great devotion while kneeling on the hard concrete floor. The prayerful silence was noticeable.

Later that evening after the featured presentations, 5,300 souls lined up to receive the sacrament of reconciliation in a queue that stretched hundreds of yards through

EDITOR'S REFLECTIONS

Doug Bean

the convention center. And you thought a few people ahead of you in the confession line at your parish was a long wait!

Priests and religious were everywhere throughout the five days, engaging in conversations with the young people and setting an example that might encourage some of them to entertain the possibility of consecrated life. The number of seminarians in attendance was impressive, up 43% from the previous year.

A constant stream of visitors flowed in and out of the Adoration chapel throughout the conference to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. More than 17,000 took part in Adoration on Saturday night in the huge main hall of the convention center.

A number of the talks during the five days were so well attended that large meeting rooms were filled to capacity with the multitudes who wanted to hear the popular speakers, illustrating their desire to learn more about the Catholic faith and develop a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

Juxtaposing those images with a secular view that organized religion is dying leads to a much different conclusion. Young people are seeking the Lord. They want truth. They want tradition. They want a purpose in life.

Older generations lived through years of watered-down Catholicism before Pope St. John Paul II began to steer the Church back on course, starting in the last two decades

of the 20th century. Many of their children strayed from the faith due to the lack of proper religious instruction.

John Paul II remains a popular figure even among young people, some of whom at the conference were not yet alive when he passed into eternal life in 2005. The mere mention of his name during presentations usually elicited cheers from the crowd.

This year's SEEK conference was dedicated to St. Pier Giorgio Frassati, the holy young Italian (1901-25) who was canonized by Pope Leo XIV in September along with young St. Carlo Acutis.

It has been a long and difficult road to right the Church's ship, but young priests and religious and devoted lay people are leading a renaissance.

So, anyone who thinks Catholicism is for old people and that there's no hope for the future of the Church, think again.

Attend a Mass at Buckeye Catholic at the St. Thomas More Newman Center near Ohio State University's campus. You'll see masses of students coming to Mass and Bible studies or receiving instruction to become Catholic.

Local groups such as Young Catholic Professionals and the Frassati Society are doing well.

At some parish churches, there's a noticeable uptick in young couples with children attending daily and Sunday Masses.

Catholic schools are experiencing record enrollment in the diocese. Homeschoolers are raising a new generation of Catholics who are well versed in their faith.

Hopefully, it's a sign that parents are taking religion more seriously today.

In the Diocese of Columbus, parents



The Adoration chapel at SEEK26 was filled with students and adults spending time in prayer during the conference. Photo courtesy Sarah Lightle

are now required to become more actively involved in religious instruction, particularly when a child is receiving a sacrament. Without question, faith has to become a family affair if the Church is to thrive.

All of these signs offer great hope for the Church in the 21st century.

If SEEK is any indication and the momentum from the conference continues to build, the Church is positioned, it seems, to experience a renaissance of faith.

More work needs to be done, though. The zeal for Catholicism at SEEK needs to cascade down to parishes, schools and homes throughout the world.

But for all those Catholics in the older generation who have loved the Church their entire lives and fear for its survival, you can rest a little easier knowing that a new generation stands at the precipice of a revival.

DOCTOR: Presentation proves to be popular at SEEK conference, Continued from Page 4

become worm food," he said. "That's it. Nothing happens beyond what the physical body dictates. ...

"Religion becomes this 'funny hat' you can and should take on and off whenever you go to do your job. They're actually told in medical education that when you're a doctor you take off your religion when you put on your white coat -- and many feel compelled to believe it."

But he stressed that Catholics must uphold the dignity of the human person no matter how difficult that might be in a world that believes an individual's value is "dependent on what I think my own value is."

That view leads to radical individualism and a society in which humans seek to fulfill only individual desires.

Alternatively, he said the Catholic Church has a long tradition of upholding the dignity of the human person. Pope St. John Paul II articulated a vision known as Christian personalism in which "choosing the good is what fulfills you as a human

person ... and that means there's something truthful and good that transcends your own choices that you can't change by your own choice," Dr. Fernandes said.

"But when you do that, when you choose truth, you are truly free," he continued. "So, it is not choosing that makes you free. It's choosing the truth that make you free."

He went on to explain that Pope John Paul II said human beings were created to live in solidarity.

"A critical difference between the materialist premise and Christian personalism is we believe that we actually must be our brother's keeper, and the poor and the vulnerable—these are the people that are part of our communion of persons. ...

"It might even include people that you might not otherwise approach because they believe in things that are radically different than us. But they are also all part of this community of persons that we are called to lift up. The vulnerable, suffering, transcendent, mysterious, ineffable person is the central unit of value of existence,

and that's so incredibly important if you're going into any healthcare profession."

Dr. Fernandes used examples of a baby with Trisomy 21 (Down Syndrome), whose condition often results in abortion, and a man in Columbus who was homeless from age seven to 65 to illustrate the value of every soul that God has created.

"This man continued to believe in God no matter how much he was hurt," Dr. Fernandes said. "He was almost killed several times, living on the streets for that long. No matter how much he at times wanted to die -- and he almost died -- he believed in God, and his quote was, 'That's why I know he [God] is real. He wouldn't let me go.' That is an unbelievable testament of faith."

Keeping the sacredness of human life in mind, Dr. Fernandes told his listeners that "not all of you are going to be doctors or nurses, but whatever you do, seize that opportunity to elevate human life."

He reminded the audience that Pope St. John Paul II encouraged all people to be renewed in Christ.

Pope John Paul II said, "The new evangelization, of which you must be protagonists, begins in oneself, in the conversion of Jesus Christ. Live in intimacy with him. Discover the riches of this person and his mystery in prayer. Turn to him more in need of the grace of forgiveness."

"Seek him in the Eucharist, the source of life. Serve him in the poor. ... Do not be satisfied with mediocrity. ... The kingdom of heaven is for those who are determined to enter it." Dr. Fernandes stated that to do that "takes intention, that takes will. We need you. We need you to cast out into the deep and go further beyond. ...

"We must never, ever give in to the idea that we are not special, or a brother or sister who suffers is not special. And if we can do that, we can become the transcendent, dignified persons that we are all called to be."

Dr. Fernandes wishes to clarify that his views represent his own personal views and do not represent those of his employer(s).

Respect Life Office supports dignity of every person

By Father Robert Penhallurick

In the summer of 2024, Bishop Earl Fernandes asked me to become the Vicar for Catholic Social Doctrine and Director of the Respect Life Office for the Diocese of Columbus. These two roles are complementary in that the pro-life office forms part of the Vicariate for Catholic Social Doctrine. What was once the Department of Catholic Social Concerns is now a vicariate of three departments – the Department for Pro-Life Ministries, the Department of Catholic Charities and the Department of Catholic Advocacy and Social Doctrine.

The focus of these departments is our mission to recognize and support the dignity of every person from conception until natural death regardless of their state in life. ALL of us are equal before God and all of us are worthy of respect, love and service. Our role is to advocate, support and defend that dignity through witness, service and catechesis.

As Pope Leo XIV noted:

“While awaiting the Lord’s glorious return, we must not live a life closed in on ourselves, in a religious seclusion that iso-

lates us from others and from history. On the contrary, seeking the Kingdom of God implies the desire to transform human coexistence into a space of fraternity and dignity for all, without exception. There is a constant danger of living like distracted wanderers, unconcerned about the final destination and uninterested in those who share the journey with us.” -- Homily for the Jubilee of the Poor, Nov. 16, 2025.

So, how do these departments work and what is their focus?

The pro-life department works to build a culture of life in our society and to support pro-life ministry throughout the diocese. We work with parish respect life coordinators, Catholic schools and non-diocesan pro-life groups and are establishing our own programming and initiatives. This is now counter-cultural because so many have turned away from the Gospel. Human life is now devalued in so many ways and is often treated as expendable and only valued when it is of advantage to us.

Catholic Charities works to provide practical help and support that is firmly rooted in the Gospel and reflective of our Catholic values and concerns. We reach out to

help others experience the love and compassion of Christ, and to discover Him for themselves. Charity must always be more than simply helping people with their material needs. It must also lead others into the Kingdom by witnessing to the power of Christ’s love and sacrifice. New initiatives are being worked on to make our reach more impactful and to recognize that we must go out to others on the peripheries to serve so that the Gospel is proclaimed to everyone in our diocese.

Catholic Advocacy and Social Doctrine help us to be heard in the public square and to serve those who are often neglected and forgotten, pushed to one side because we don’t want to think about them being part of us.

The department serves the incarcerated by providing access to the sacraments, is involved in the fight against human trafficking and undertakes advocacy on behalf of the diocese at the Statehouse and with the Catholic Conference of Ohio. Support is also provided for pastors and parishes in deepening our understanding of the rich heritage of Catholic Social Doctrine that has been passed on to us.

Together, the Diocese of Columbus, under the leadership of Bishop Fernandes, continues to proclaim that the culture of life can overcome the culture of death.

Together, we remind all people that life is to be cherished, valued and supported. Other people, regardless of their stage in life, age or ability, are an end to themselves. Everyone has the right to be loved, valued, supported and raised up from conception until natural death. No one is ever beyond the pail of God’s mercy, and no one is disposable. We must never treat others as simply a means of resolving our problems or as strangers to be ignored or abused.

Like John the Baptist, we are called to be “voice of one crying in the wilderness” that is the culture of death. Together, we must prepare a way for the Lord in which every person is respected and valued.

Being pro-life means valuing life at every stage, unequivocally and unapologetically. Caring for the weak, the poor, the marginalized, the abused, and the weakest and most innocent, born and unborn children, is a responsibility. We must build a civilization of love and respond to violence with love and forgiveness.

Fruits of the Christmas season

By Mary Parker Kristof

During this Christmas season, St. Bernard of Clairvaux calls us to take “courage, you who were lost: Jesus comes to seek and save that which is lost. Ye sick, return to health: Christ comes to heal the contrite of heart with the balm of his mercy. Rejoice, all you who desire great things: the Son of God comes down to you that he may make you the co-heirs of his kingdom.”

Because the Incarnate Word has taken on flesh and become man, we are called to be great and joyful givers back to God. Only God can give us the strength to take courage, to save what is lost, and repent. God gives us the strength to praise Him, even in the difficulties and chaos of the Christmas season. Amid the commerciality and noise, the Christ Child born in the piercing cold of winter reminds us of the importance of loving the least among us,

especially children and families in need.

We are pleased to work with the The Catholic Times to highlight organizations that day in and day out help build a culture of life. We wanted to focus on those organizations that are in the more rural areas of our diocese or those that provide life-affirming pregnancy help throughout all 23 counties in the diocese.

With the alarming increase in the abortion pill, abortions are no longer confined to a clinic. They are happening at home. Oftentimes, women are alone and extremely vulnerable. With this being the case, our charity needs to extend further and deeper. Each of us is called to help be a missionary of God’s tender mercy and love. I hope that one of the fruits of the Christmas season will be that more people will feel called to help unborn children and mothers contemplating abortion.

It can be very intimidating to be pro-life. Or it may seem hard to find a concrete way to help. As Christ began his mission

within a family, the pro-life mission all begins there. I had the opportunity to teach students at Chesterton Academy of St. Benedict about human life. I was surprised by the depth of their questions and the seriousness with which they contemplated this issue. It may be hard to discuss, but we need to foster conversations with our children. They need to know that no matter what the circumstances, life is always valuable and there is always support. We must teach our children moral courage and compassion.

In January, there is the National March for Life in Washington, D.C. I would encourage anyone who is able to attend. If you cannot make the trip, Adoration will be available at the Statehouse to pray for legal protection for the unborn. There will not be a Mass offered at St. Joseph Cathedral on Jan. 21, as has been the case in years past, since diocesan staff will be making a pilgrimage with the bishop to the March for Life.

In many ways, I hope and pray that the fruits of the Christmas season remain with the Office of Pro-Life Ministries. Life never comes into the world without a struggle. Even the Holy Family had a fair share of problems. We continue to collaborate with pregnancy help organizations to help mothers facing difficult circumstances. Soon, Project Rachel will be in the diocese. We are also working to help provide accompaniment to parents who have received adverse prenatal diagnoses, are experiencing a miscarriage, or who have lost a child. In every struggle, the Christ Child still wishes to comfort our hearts.

I humbly ask for your prayers that the Office of Pro-Life Ministries can help bring the love and joy of the Christ Child to all people, no matter the season.

Mary Parker Kristof is the associate director of the diocese’s Office of Pro-Life Ministries.

Pregnancy help centers provide lifeline of hope for families

By Heartbeat International

Across Ohio, pregnancy help organizations are quietly and faithfully offering women hope when they need it most. Within the Diocese of Columbus and throughout the state, these centers provide compassionate, life-affirming care that meets women at moments of fear, confusion and regret.

One of the most urgent services is abortion pill reversal, an option that is saving lives and restoring families across Ohio and the world.

Ohio is home to more than 130 pregnancy help organizations, ensuring that women facing unexpected or difficult pregnancies are not alone. These centers offer practical support, medical services and emotional care rooted in dignity and compassion. Their mission reflects long-held Catholic teaching on the sanctity of human life, which affirms that every human person is created in the image and likeness of God and possesses inherent dignity from the moment of conception.

Each year, the Church lifts up this truth in a particular way through Sanctity of

Human Life Sunday, inviting the faithful to reflect on the sacredness of life at every stage and to recommit themselves to protecting the most vulnerable. Pregnancy centers across Ohio embody this teaching not in theory but in action, walking alongside women and families with compassion, truth and tangible support.

For women who begin a chemical abortion and quickly regret their decision, abortion pill reversal can provide a critical second chance. Abortion pill reversal is an updated application of progesterone treatment that has been used safely since the 1950s to help sustain pregnancies at risk of miscarriage. It uses a bioidentical form of progesterone, the natural hormone necessary to maintain pregnancy, to counteract the effects of the abortion drug mifepristone when administered in time.

This protocol is coordinated nationally through the Abortion Pill Rescue Network, a program of Heartbeat International, with statistics showing that more than 7,000 lives have been saved to date.

Adrianna’s story is one example of how this life-saving option is making a difference in Ohio.

Already raising two small children, Adrianna faced an unexpected pregnancy and made a decision in a moment of panic. After beginning a chemical abortion, regret quickly set in. Unsure where to turn, she reached out for help and learned that abortion pill reversal was available.

Adrianna received prompt care, including an ultrasound that revealed her baby’s heartbeat was still strong. That moment changed everything. With compassionate support and continued care through her local pregnancy center, Adrianna carried her pregnancy to term.

Today, her daughter Brooklyn is alive.

Reflecting on her experience, Adrianna shared, “Without you, Brooklyn wouldn’t be here today.” Her words echo the Church’s teaching that life is a gift to be received, protected and cherished, even amid fear or uncertainty.

Stories like Adrianna’s are not rare. Pregnancy centers across Ohio consistently report that when women are given the opportunity to see their baby on ultrasound and receive judgment-free care, many choose life. These outcomes reflect the quiet, faithful work happening every

day through pregnancy help organizations serving communities for free throughout the Diocese of Columbus.

This work extends beyond pregnancy alone. Ohio’s pregnancy help ministries provide parenting education, material assistance, post-abortion healing, housing and ongoing encouragement for families at every stage. Their approach reflects the fullness of Catholic social teaching, recognizing both mother and child as worthy of care, compassion and protection.

As the Church observes Sanctity of Human Life Sunday and reflects on the dignity of every person, Adrianna’s story stands as a powerful witness to redeeming grace and new life. It is a reminder that grace often arrives through the faithful presence of ministries willing to answer a call for help with love and courage.

Supporting pregnancy centers means putting the Church’s teaching on the sanctity of human life into action. It means ensuring that when a woman reaches out in fear or regret, there is someone ready to answer, and that every life is met with hope, dignity, and love.

Foster mother wants to help ease concerns about process

By Tim Puet

For The Catholic Times

"Be not afraid!"

It's a phrase used often in Scripture. Jesus said it to his disciples when He approached them walking on water. It's associated with every appearance of an angel in the Old and New Testaments. It also was used often by Pope St. John Paul II.

It's the same message Stephanie Baird and a ministry with which she is associated, Springs of Love, have for prospective foster parents.

Baird has been a foster parent of four children for extended periods, has adopted one of them and was scheduled to complete the adoption process for a second on Thursday, Jan. 8. She has been involved with Springs of Love for several years and is starting a chapter of the organization at her parish, Columbus Immaculate Conception.

"I've talked to many couples about fostering and there's understandably a lot of concern about the process because it's not simple and there can be a lot of barriers to overcome," Baird said. "Springs of Love helps people discern not to be afraid of the process and helps them feel more comfortable with the whole idea."

"I'm not sure that I've helped any other couples become foster parents, but I've heard indications that this is what happened in a couple of cases. I also know of many people who have at least been inspired to do more about looking into being foster parents through Springs of Love."

"The familiar saying is that 'it takes a village to raise a child' and I've certainly found that to be true in our own case. Being a foster parent has impacted a whole community of people who have been involved with my foster daughter Gianna and Ray, who is about to become my foster son."

"They've followed the paths of all the children I've had in foster care to see where those paths have led. The result has been a lot of unexpected joy for us and for them because we've been willing to see where the journey takes us."

Baird; her husband, Joe; their 21- and 18-year-old sons and their 15-year-old

daughter all have been actively involved in the lives of 5-year-old Gianna, 3-year-old Ray and the other children for whom the family has cared.

"This has helped the older children understand the struggles so many families face," she said. "And it's brought so many blessings to our family. It's opened our hearts to help many people who need hope. I just hope they feel some sort of impact from our care."

Besides the four children the Bairds have hosted for extended periods, they've cared for several others for two days to two weeks or more to give other foster parents a respite.

Baird said she became a foster parent through her work as a labor and delivery nurse. She now is a care coordinator in a clinic for pregnant young women at Nationwide Children's Hospital.

"I'd see what would happen to children born to mothers addicted to drugs and knew they probably would go into foster care while their mothers were in rehabilitation," she said. "The moms in many of those cases don't make it through rehab, so they can get their children back."

"I was involved in pro-life activities and realized being a foster parent would be a way to put my pro-life beliefs into action, to practice what I've been preaching."

She said her husband had doubts about the idea but got on board after attending a training class with her and seeing a documentary about foster care.

Both took classes to become foster parents at the Bair Foundation in suburban Dayton. They also completed a home study, submitted references and background checks, had their home inspected for fire hazards and other safety issues and went through 24 hours of pre-placement training.

Their first placement was a boy named Deon, who stayed with them for a year before being adopted by a member of his family. They have stayed in touch with the adoptive mother and are Deon's godparents.

He was baptized at the same time as Gianna, whom they adopted at birth and is now in preschool. "She's smart, energetic, is meeting all her growth goals and will be playing soccer in the fall. And she loves



The Baird family

Ray," Baird said.

"Ray's a great little guy who has thrived under our care," she said. "There was one point where I thought he was going to be removed and placed with a different family, but that decision was reversed. I can't explain why that change happened, but it came on the day of my mother-in-law's death, so maybe it's a sign."

"Many prayers have been said on his behalf. Through our involvement in foster care, I've seen what I consider to be many miracles occurring through families being strengthened and friendships being made."

On its website, Springs of Love, the organization the Bairds are starting at Immaculate Conception, describes its mission as "to rise up more Catholic foster and adoptive families and to support those touched by fostering and adoption through educational programming, small groups and parish care teams."

It's based in Mount Vernon and was founded by foster and adoptive parents Greg and Kimberly Henkel of Mount Vernon St. Vincent de Paul Church. It's a sister organization of Springs in the Desert, an apostolate that accompanies parents struggling with infertility. The two combine to raise awareness of the need for loving families for the more than 400,000 children in foster care and countless children in need around the world.

Critical to the mission of Springs of Love is establishing care teams in parishes who will provide for the material needs of children in care, offer wrap-around support to foster families (including prayer, meals, child care, rides and mentoring), host foster and adoption awareness events and inspire more Catholics to consider fostering and adopting. According to Springs of Love, the 50 percent retention rate for fostering families increases to 90 percent when they are supported by a care team.

In April, Baird said she will be presenting a Springs of Love video series titled "Building and Belonging" at Immaculate Conception. The series will highlight stories of those who have been in the foster care system and of those who find joy, even amid pain, through fostering and adopting.

She said the videos are in the Augustine Institute's Formed series, which many parishes offer to their members, and have been seen on EWTN television. Baird also has done a podcast on foster parenting for Ohio Right to Life.

Springs of Love also has supported foster families by providing them with gift cards and household items and is planning a documentary on foster care and adoption.

For more on the organization, go to www.springsoflove.org.

Celebrating the Sanctity of Life in Coshocton

By Becky Armstrong

Every January, Christians in the United States observe Sanctity of Human Life Month. It is a time of prayer and public witness as we reflect on the beautiful, God-given dignity of every human being. For us at the Pregnancy Center of Coshocton (PCC), "Sanctity of Life" is more than a monthly theme — it is a daily encounter.

Moving through this month of reflection, we are filled with anticipation in our new location. In direct response to the call to protect the most vulnerable and reach unreached demographics, we will be focused on limited obstetrical ultrasounds and abortion pill reversal.

Introducing these services will transform our ministry. An ultrasound is an opportunity to see and believe. When a mother sees the flicker of a tiny heart beating on the screen and the delicate movement of a child, the abstract concept of "pregnancy" becomes the concrete reality of "my baby." Statistics consistently show that a high percentage of women who are at risk for abortion choose life after seeing an ultrasound. By bringing this to PCC,

we are providing a window into the womb that allows the "Sanctity of Life" to speak for itself.

Abortion access has moved into the home with easy accessibility to self-administered drugs that will end the life of a child. At PCC, we want to provide women the option of abortion pill reversal, a proven method to save both mother and child. PCC's focus will begin in local schools, which include the demographic most targeted for access to this egregious path.

Our perspective at PCC is rooted in the "Third Way" — a path that rejects the false choice between the mother and the child. To truly honor the sanctity of life, we must love both. This is why our focus will be integrated into our holistic support system.

Our "Earn While You Learn" program remains the heart of our accompaniment. Through this program, expectant parents earn "Baby Bucks" by participating in lessons on prenatal health, safe sleep and parenting. They then use these bucks in our boutique to "purchase" clothing, diapers, maternity items and other resources.

This model upholds the dignity of the parents, affirming that they are capable and supported. By providing these re-

sources through the generosity of local parishes like Sacred Heart in Coshocton, we show our clients that the Church's commitment to life does not end at the moment of birth — it is a lifelong commitment to the family.

In our rural community, access to immediate, life-affirming care can be a challenge. We continue to bridge that gap, ensuring that women in Coshocton County can find the truth and the help they need. We walk with parents by providing a safe, non-judgmental space where they are seen as children of God. Whether it is a teenager facing an uncertain future or a couple struggling with financial hardship, we offer the same message: You are not alone, and this life is a gift.

We are so very thankful to Sacred Heart and the diocese for 35 years of unwavering support. As we observe Sanctity of Human Life Month, we invite the faithful to continue joining us in our vision of "cherishing every child from conception and welcoming them into families that thrive."

Pray: We ask for your prayers for the men and women who will come through our doors. Pray that the scales fall from their eyes and they see the miracle within.

Support: Our goals for limited obstetrical ultrasounds and to reach the schools requires specialized training, equipment maintenance and increased volunteer support. We are specifically looking for a volunteer medical director and two volunteers dedicated to working with students in the schools.

Witness: Share the news that hope is growing in Coshocton. Let the women in your neighborhoods know that we are here to walk with them.

Sanctity of Life is not just a political stance or a theological point; it is found in the soft breath of a newborn and the courageous "yes" of a mother. As we look toward 2026, we are humbled to be the hands and hearts that welcome the weary and lost every day.

If you would like more information about our 2026 focus and how you can practically help, please contact me at directorofpcc@gmail.com or stop by 511 Walnut Street, Coshocton every Friday, 10 a.m. to noon or the first and third Tuesday from 5 to 7 p.m. We would love to give you a tour!

Becky Armstrong is the executive director of the Pregnancy Center of Coshocton.

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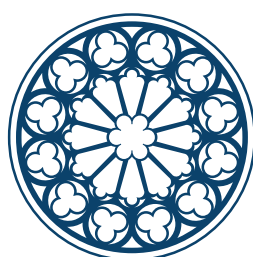
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Pro-life forces unify for new initiatives in Lancaster

By Kristin Garrabrant

Did you know that the word “marigold” is derived from the phrase “Mary’s Gold?”

Pious legend tells us early Christians in financial or spiritual poverty made offerings of marigold flower petals in lieu of gold coins at the feet of Our Lady.

Before explaining how Mary enters this story, we begin with what first took place in the fall of 2024.

During this time, parishioners from the Lancaster area began to express a desire to unite pro-life efforts with the hope of building a dynamic culture of life in their local community. With the blessings of Msgr. Craig Eilerman from the Lancaster Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption and Father Daniel Olvera of Lancaster St. Bernadette and Sugar Grove St. Joseph churches, parishioners joined forces to respond to Bishop Earl Fernandes’ pastoral vision to increase pro-life initiatives and outreach in the Diocese of Columbus.

This cluster of three parishes collaborated to form a respect life ministry, Pro Vita.

Pro Vita’s priority was to respond specifically to the mission call from Bishop Fernandes and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to accompany pregnant mothers (and fathers) in need of support.

After a local assessment of resources in Fairfield County, the need to provide pregnancy extension services was identified. This need included the development of intimate and lasting relationships with pregnant mothers in the community as well as supplementing them with material aid. Under the umbrella of Pro Vita, a sub-group of parishioners responded to this need by establishing a new initiative that would provide personal baby showers for pregnant mothers.

Mary entered this story by revealing herself to this group as the Queen of Mothers, symbolized by a golden marigold



Dr. Christopher Ryckman, a Catholic artist in Lancaster, created the Marigold Ministries logo.

flower. And so the name of this new Pro-life initiative was established as Marigold Ministries.

With this vision in mind, an inspired original painting (and logo) was created by Dr. Christopher Ryckman, a Catholic artist from Lancaster.

During Mass, Dr. Ryckman envisioned the image while gazing upon the statue of Our Mother in the Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption Church. The circle of marigolds symbolizes the rays of light that surround the Blessed Virgin in her glory while the marigold flowers represent the petals placed at her feet by pregnant mothers in need of support.

Marigold Ministries’ initial baby shower support has included cultivating friendships, sharing the good news of the gospel, and providing material aid to pregnant mothers. The vision is to expand services in the future to assist mothers with



Lancaster parishes have come together to form Pro Vita, a respect life ministry. Photos courtesy Marigold Ministries

transportation to appointments and to provide post-delivery meals and childcare.

After the first two baby showers in 2025, Marigold Ministries is slated to host its third baby shower next month. The success of the showers is due in large part to referrals vetted by pro-life partner, Pregnancy Decision Health Centers (PDHC) in Lancaster. PDHC has served as the bedrock of the pro-life movement in central Ohio for 45 years, opening its doors on January 22, 1981. PDHC founders Mike and Peggy Hartshorn are Lancaster natives and graduates of Lancaster Fisher Catholic High School.

It comes as no surprise that PDHC’s presence in the community has been enduring. This is evidenced by an annual gala in Lancaster that attracts nearly 400 guests as well as “Bottles for Life” campaigns in all Catholic churches and many non-Catholic churches in the community.

For more than 15 years, Fisher Catholic High School has been involved in various capacities with PDHC. Student volunteers serve at the Lancaster gala and compete in an annual “Battle of the Bottles” fundraiser to raise money for this life-saving ministry.

This month, PDHC will devote one school week to engaging with the students

at Fisher Catholic. PDHC’s director of the Common Sense Culture (CSC) program will spend four days at the high school.

The CSC program, designed as PDHC’s prevention education pillar, focuses on character development, teen pregnancies, sexual risk avoidance and respectful relationships.

On the final day of the week, PDHC’s community outreach coordinator will complete a two-part “Abortion in America” series with all theology classes.

In the Lancaster community, PDHC’s pregnancy support pillar has served women, men and babies for two decades.

One year ago, PDHC opened a new location in Lancaster. After an open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony, Father Bob Penhallurick, director of the Diocese of Columbus Office for Pro-Life Ministries, performed the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

This location has proved to be more visible and accessible to pregnant mothers, indicated by an increase of women walking into the center without a scheduled appointment.

PDHC’s final two pillars, Family Empowerment and Abortion Healing programs, provide the additional wrap-around services so many families need in the community.

“Behold how good and how pleasant it is for God’s people to dwell together in unity!” ~ Psalm 133:1

For more information about Marigold Ministries, send an email to MarigoldMinistries3@gmail.com. To learn more about PDHC services in Lancaster or to take a tour of their new location, email Kristin Garrabrant, community outreach coordinator, at KristinG@PDHC.org.

Birtheright of New Philadelphia has helped moms for 35 years

By Michelle Tope

“When my mom was pregnant with me, Birtheright helped her. Now I need your help.”

“I think I may be pregnant and don’t know what to do.”

“My husband was deported; I have a new baby who’s hungry; we live with my brother-in-law and we haven’t enough food.”

“My mother abandoned me. My only refuge was a drug house, but I fled from there with my toddler. I need help getting to the home of relatives who live out-of-state where we will be safe.”

“I am homeless.”

“Where can I find an obstetrician?”

“I came to you once for help but chose abortion. I am pregnant again. You welcomed me and did not judge me. I need your help now to have a successful pregnancy and delivery.”

“My daughter cannot care for her baby and I need help raising my grandchild.”

“It’s so hot outside, may my baby and I stay awhile in your air-conditioned home?”

“I have a student who is barely a teenager and pregnant; can you help?”

These statements are mere introductory snapshots into the challenges facing so many young women and girls who have graced Birtheright’s house in New Philadelphia in the past 35 years.

Our volunteers welcome each person with open hearts and a willingness to be of help. We view our presence as a calling that follows in the footsteps of Sister Claudine

Smith of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity.

Sister Claudine helped many facing unplanned pregnancies see their way to motherhood or adoption. Before her relocation in the 1990s from Tuscarawas County, she found that Birtheright International would help carry out her mission and Birtheright of New Philadelphia became charter members.

In addition to the hospitality of each volunteer, services are offered from a small house situated in a neighborhood of modest family dwellings that provide a home-like atmosphere rather than an institutional setting.

There are rooms that provide privacy for confidential conversations, pregnancy testing, and to try on gently used maternity clothing. Our living room area has a display of infant and toddler clothing in addition to essentials such as diapers, wipes, bedding, blankets, towels, etc.

Mothers may come in once each month to receive needed items until their children turn three years old. Each newborn receives a gift layette of new clothing and essentials. If an item is not available, Birtheright will seek to obtain the item or make referrals to others in our community who can help.

The community has a sizable population of immigrants of whom most are from Guatemala and comprise at least half of the women served.

Birtheright enjoys establishing these relationships, but still has quite a way to go

in enhancing communications. Volunteers and moms utilize modern technology to help, but that does not always work with those who speak primarily indigenous languages and it slows down relationship building. Yet Birtheright has gained much trust and respect. Assistance of translators available through Dover St. Joseph Catholic Church is appreciated.

One asset to help mothers in need is Bridges to Wellness (BtW), which was born out of a community collaborative of wellness-minded professionals.

With permission, mothers are referred to BtW for help to ensure they have the health care needed for successful pregnancies and deliveries of healthy babies.

Community Health Workers coordinate services, including translation, to meet the needs of pregnant women and their families. They in turn refer pregnant mothers to Birtheright.

Pray for unborn at Adoration in state capitol

To commemorate the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children, the Catholic Conference of Ohio is hosting Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at the Ohio Statehouse in the Thomas Worthington Center from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 22.

Adoration inside Ohio’s capitol in downtown Columbus provides an opportunity for those unable to travel to Washington, D.C., for the annual National March for Life to unite in prayer locally.

Welcoming women like family members is the first step in accompanying each one. So many have returned or have been referred by former moms in need, strengthening Birtheright’s resolve to be a non-judgmental place of support in times of need.

On any given day and at any hour, a volunteer is ready to assist girls and women who face an unplanned pregnancy and/or have young children to meet basic needs.

In 2025, Birtheright of New Philadelphia served more than 180 women and their children.

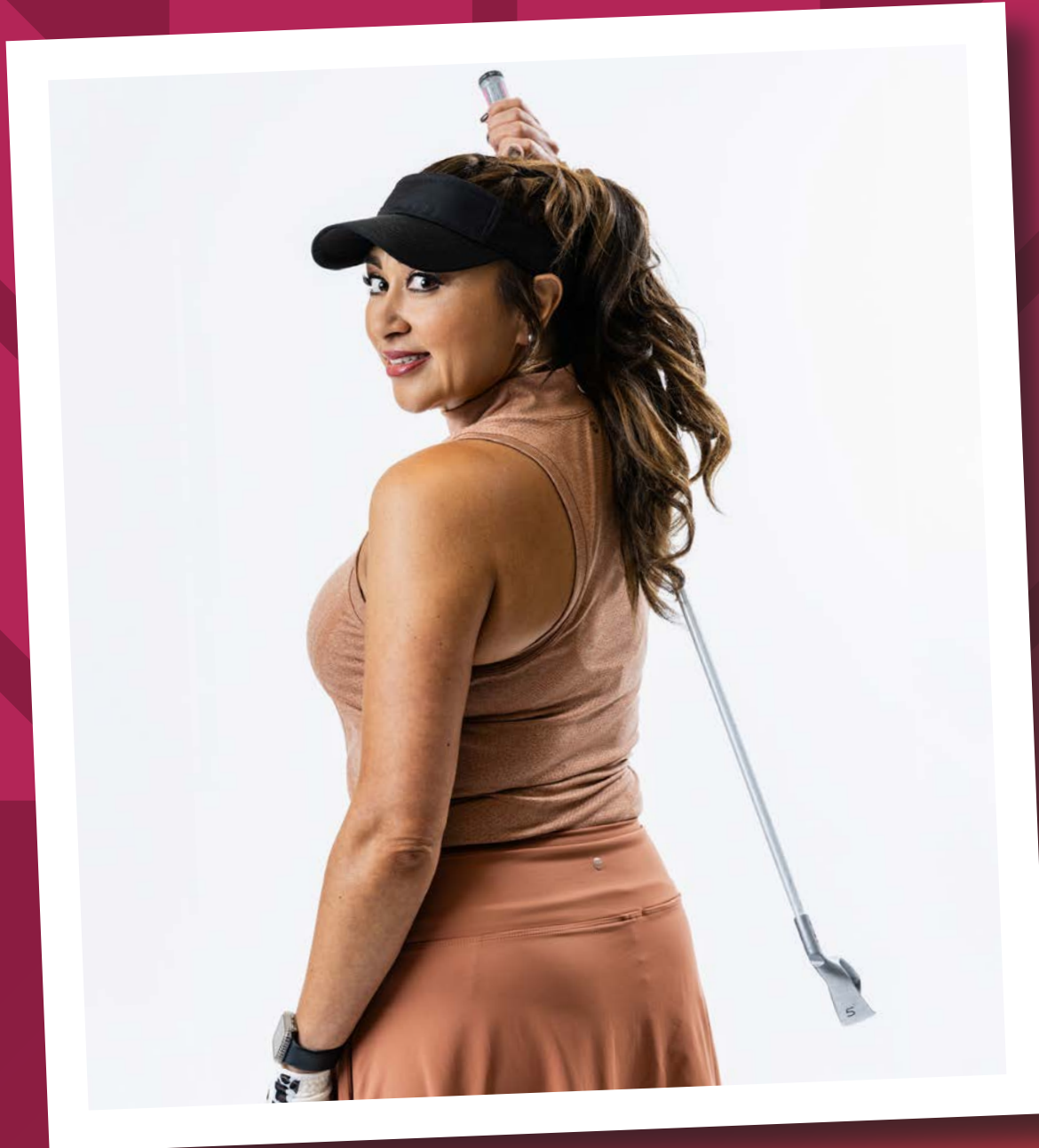
Birtheright.org maintains an online chat feature to connect women with a volunteer. Our email is newphiladelphia@birtheright.org

Michelle Tope is a volunteer and board member of Birtheright of New Philadelphia and a parishioner at Dover St. Joseph Church.

Catholics across the country are encouraged to observe a nationwide prayer vigil from Thursday, Jan. 22 to Friday, Jan. 23 to pray for an end to abortion and a greater respect for all human life in post-Roe America.

This year, there will not be a Respect Life Mass at St. Joseph Cathedral in January.

For details, directions and parking information for Adoration at the Ohio Statehouse, visit www.ohiocathconf.org/adoration.



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Surgery Patient*

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Simbang Gabi celebrated for 15th year in diocese

By Eric V. Yang
For The Catholic Times

Father Ramon Owera, pastor of Circleville St. Joseph Church, and the Filipino Catholic Community in the diocese celebrated the Christmas tradition of Simbang Gabi for the 15th year.

The traditional Novena of Masses, also known as Misa de Gallo (Spanish for "Rooster's Mass" because they started as early morning Masses during Spanish colonial period in the Philippines), are celebrated in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary and serve as a spiritual preparation for Christmas for Filipinos all over the world, with many devotees attending all nine Masses.

Columbus St. Josephine Bakhita Parish at St. Elizabeth served as the location for the nine Masses celebrated from Monday, Dec. 15 through Tuesday, Dec. 23. Fr. Owera was the main celebrant of the first eight Masses, at times joined by Father Anthony Davis, pastor of St. Josephine Bakhita, and Father Pius Ajuluchukwu, associate pastor at St. Joseph Bakhita, as concelebrants; and assisted by Deacon Jason Nguyen and Deacon Dean Racine.

As in previous years, local vendors were present after each Mass selling Filipino delicacies called kakanin for the attendees to enjoy. This added to the traditional feel of the experience of Simbang Gabi for many devotees.

Bishop Earl Fernandes joined the community as main celebrant for the last Mass on Dec. 23. Joining the bishop as concelebrants were Fathers Owera, Davis and Ajuluchukwu along with Fr. Tesfaye Petros Botachew, who serves as the diocesan director of multicultural ministry. Assisting in the Mass were Deacons Jason Nguyen and Dean Racine.

Miguel De La Torre, a diocesan seminarian at the Pontifical College Josephinum, served as the master of ceremonies. Another Columbus seminarian, Kevin Nega-ga, participated in the liturgy as an altar server along with Deacon-candidate Diep Bui, Orson Gariando, Alfin Rosario Maria Arockiaraj, Therese Nguyen and Louis Nguyen.

In his homily, Bishop Fernandes focused on the topics of promise of obedience and trust in God's promise. His Excellency first pointed out that the star lanterns, called parol, adorning the church reminds the faithful of Jesus as the Light of the World. He then continued that just as priests make promises of respect and obedience



Bishop Earl Fernandes joins the Filipino community on Dec. 23 at St. Josephine Bakhita Parish to celebrate the final Mass in a nine-day novena of Masses known as Simbang Gabi. Photo/Cedric Sze

to the bishop, "God also makes promises ... and as the faithful Father, (God) keeps His promises. God sent His only begotten Son to be born for us, to redeem us, to save us."

Bishop Fernandes reminded all that Jesus is the fulfillment of each of God's promises, and if this is understood, everyone will have clarity regarding life and vocation, which is the path God has chosen for each person. Just as the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph trusted the word of God, Bishop Fernandes encouraged those present to trust God. The bishop reminded all that Advent is the season to prepare hearts to trust God a little more.

In his closing remarks at the end of Mass, Bishop Fernandes said he would like to see vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life coming from the Filipino Catholic community. He also asked those present to pray for Latino brothers and sisters, many of whom were participating in Advent traditions such as Las Posadas.

After the Mass, Bishop Fernandes and approximately 250 attendees gathered in the Pastor's Hall for a potluck-style dinner reception, where everyone enjoyed fellowship, an abundance of delicious dishes and desserts, and songs and dances performed by members of the Filipino community.

Father Owera, who serves as chaplain for the Filipino Catholic Community, expressed his gratitude for the 15 years of Simbang Gabi. Asked to reflect on the past 15 years, he fondly remembers how Simbang Gabi began in Columbus.

"I arrived in Columbus on March 7, 2011, and resided at Holy Cross along with Fa-

ther Jerry Stluka, who served as pastor. A few weeks after my arrival, I met Filipinos who have been longtime Columbus residents, including Ed and Girly Punzalan, who soon discussed with me the possibility of starting the celebration of Mass in Tagalog on the first Saturdays of the month.

"We started celebrating the Mass in Tagalog at Holy Cross in July 2011. It was in October 2011 that the Punzalans suggested that we start the celebration of Simbang Gabi. We discussed this with Odee Dammarell, who is very active and well-known in the Filipino community."

The first Simbang Gabi was held at Holy Cross Church on December 15-23, 2011. The venue has changed through the years as Father Owera changed assignments and in order to accommodate the growing numbers of attendees. Finally, Simbang Gabi started being celebrated at St. Elizabeth in 2023.

As in the previous year, Father Owera and the Simbang Gabi committee (Rex Alba, Kaella Aliling, Ice Batino, Jewel Beriso, Jesse Cabungcal, Frances Horenstein, Joy Kouns-Lewis, Minda Li, Joy Polintan and Irene Sze) raised funds for a worthy cause. This year, the funds raised benefited the Leaven of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (LIHM) Sisters serving in Portsmouth. Mother Assumpta Tangan, LIHM, who along with some of her fellow LIHM sisters traveled approximately 100 miles to attend the last Mass and the dinner, expressed her gratitude for the funds raised to assist them in their ministry.

"Having experienced the Simbang Gabi

once again reminded me of the joyous preparation of Christmas in a cultural and religious way," she said. "It has been a strong and effective way to bring families and communities together. We thank Fr. Ramon and the committee for their generosity and support to the Leaven of the Immaculate Heart of Mary."

In addition to promoting the Simbang Gabi tradition to generations of Filipinos, the Simbang Gabi committee also aims to share the beauty of this devotion to others in the diocese. Among those who attended for the first time was Maria Arockiaraj Pushparaj of the Tamil Catholic Community, who attended with his son Alfin Rosario.

"I was grateful to be invited ... to the Simbang Gabi celebration hosted by the Filipino community," he said. "... it was truly a memorable evening. My son and I were both deeply moved by the beauty and reverence of the Holy Mass. The cultural program that followed was vibrant and heartfelt, showcasing the rich traditions and joyful spirit of the Filipino people."

"We enjoyed the warmth and hospitality of the Filipino community and the delicious food at the dinner after the final Mass, making the entire celebration a wonderful experience of faith, culture and fellowship."

The Filipino Catholic Community is one of four ethnic communities celebrating Masses regularly at St. Josephine Bakhita Parish. Filipino Catholics meet every first Wednesday of the month at St. Elizabeth, 6077 Sharon Woods Blvd., as a devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help. The evening starts with praying of the Holy Rosary at 6 p.m. followed by the novena and Mass.

The community also gathers every first Saturday of the month at 7 p.m. at St. Elizabeth for Mass celebrated in Tagalog, a language of the northern island of Luzon in the Philippines. All are invited to the Masses.

Eric V. Yang, Ph.D., is a parishioner of Columbus St. Peter Powell St. Joan of Arc and is an adjunct lecturer in the College of Liberal Arts at the Pontifical College Josephinum.

Simbang Gabi offers profound Christmas preparation

By Dr. Mauro Meruzzi
For The Catholic Times

Our first experience of the Simbang Gabi was in Australia. We were already in contact with some members of the Filipino community. The community was renowned for its deep faith, spirituality and beautiful traditions.

When my wife, Ivana Quadrelli, was in the Philippines for World Youth Day in 1995 and missionary activity, she was deeply impressed by the Filipino people's intense spirituality. That's why, when she saw that a novena was being prepared for Christmas in Columbus, she didn't hesitate to involve the family.

The atmosphere was a mixture of joy, fraternal communion, tradition, excellent food, hospitality, welcome, music and, above all, anticipation of the birth

of the Savior. Interestingly, regarding the spiritual intensity of the experience, we didn't notice any substantial difference between the Simbang Gabi celebration in Australia and Columbus. This demonstrates the strength of the tradition, which remains intact even in different places.

The sequence of the nine Masses in preparation for Christmas, despite its simplicity, conveys something more that is difficult to define. The Eucharistic celebration becomes the catalyst for an experience that involves the totality of the person. You can perceive the strength of the community. Joy and enthusiasm permeate everything. There is the joy of being together; everyone gives their best, even in their attire. But the real reason for the joy is the approaching Christmas. There is a sense of anticipation, trepidation and hope for a new life and for a



The closing Mass of the Simbang Gabi novena is celebrated on Dec. 23 at Columbus St. Josephine Bakhita Parish. Photo courtesy Cedric Sze

spiritual renewal of the person, the community and the world.

We haven't found a more effective preparation for Christmas than Simbang

Gabi. It's like a community spiritual retreat.

The message of Simbang Gabi is multifaceted and can be summarized in the following points: 1) Christmas should be awaited and prepared for with what is most precious to the Christian community. Christmas is not just an event of the past or an annual celebration; it is the new life that springs from Christ's eruption into history. 2) Tradition grounds and strengthens the community, giving it purpose and direction. 3) The community expresses its best when it welcomes and loves people, even those from outside. 4) The community becomes missionary when it organizes events that facilitate a personal experience of God through the involvement of the whole person.

Mauro Meruzzi, STD is an associate professor in the School of Theology at the Pontifical College Josephinum.

Bishop returns to women's reformatory for Christmas Mass

By Doug Bean

Catholic Times Editor

MARYSVILLE, Ohio -- It's safe to say that nearly everyone who attended Mass at the Ohio Reformatory for Women two days before Christmas would rather have been preparing for the birth of the Savior elsewhere.

It's difficult to be merry and bright during the holiday season while separated from family and friends. But for some of the women who participated in the pre-Christmas Mass celebrated for the third consecutive year by Bishop Earl Fernandes, the opportunity to come together as a community brought some joy to their world.

"In here, Christmas is what you make it," one of the women said after Mass. "It can be the darkest, saddest, miserable, most depressing time, or it can be full of ...

"My Christmas last year was really dark. It was really sad. And I came last year and went through the motions, but this year ... I feel a little better."

The morning Mass on Tuesday, Dec. 23 in the Religious and Recovery Services building at the Ohio Reformatory for Women (ORW) attracted a crowd of approximately 150 women – a majority of them are not Catholic – along with ORW staff and members of the Order of Malta, who actively engage in prison ministry.

Bishop Fernandes was joined at the altar by Father Joseph Trapp, ORW's Catholic chaplain and the pastor at Plain City St. Joseph Church, and assisted by diocesan seminarians. He celebrated the evening Mass for the Nativity of the Lord.

In anticipation of the bishop's entrance at the start of Mass, the large room was noticeably quiet after the singing of several traditional Christmas hymns. When it was time for the opening procession, the congregation joined in the singing of "O Come, All Ye Faithful" while women carrying the cross and serving as lectors approached the altar ahead of the seminarians, Father Trapp and Bishop Fernandes.

"We are celebrating at Christmas that God came down from heaven so that we might go up to heaven," Bishop Fernandes said later in his homily. "God came down from heaven to rid the world of all that misery and suffering and all that violence and sickness to bring healing and peace to our world. ...

"But when God came down from heaven ... he did not come in power and majesty to make us tremble before Him in fear. He came as a child."

The bishop's Christmas message continued with words of encouragement for the women.

"How powerful is the love of the Child Jesus for each and every one of us," Bishop

Fernandes said. "Who could not be moved by His immense love? And so, this Christmas, I invite you to be embraced by mercy and love itself by Jesus."

"It's not so much about what we have to do. People make all kinds of good resolutions. I would simply say, open your heart to Jesus. Open your heart to this child and let him be at work in you. Let His life, which He wants to share with you, be at work because this is the most powerful force in the whole world, the power of God's love."

Bishop Fernandes reminded the women that they are loved by God and not forgotten by society while reflecting on the first reading from Isaiah that the Lord came to free his people from the burden of death and sin.

"God does not abandon you," he said. "He comes to bring you Good News that He has given you His beloved son to be your savior, who is Christ the Lord. ...

"God came down from heaven to bring peace. You are called to be instruments of that peace. You are called to love your neighbor because you have first been loved by God."

"The manger scene, which we will bless, helps us visualize that love of God every time we pass by."

Near the end of Mass, Bishop Fernandes was presented a basket of hand-crafted polymer clay gifts from the women at ORW. Afterward, he greeted some of the women and posed for pictures during a reception.

Rebecca Tice, who led the Responsorial Psalm during Mass, expressed her gratitude for the bishop's presence. She said she was given a special pass from her job at ORW that allowed her to attend.

"He is awesome and we're so blessed that he comes here for us," she said of Bishop Fernandes. "It's a light in a dark world."

"Probably twice, maybe three times more (women) were here this year than last year. Even if you're not Catholic, hopefully they take something back, and that everybody received (the graces) they needed. ...

"You can let (Christmastime) be dark or you can decide that it's one of the highlights that we're allowed here. It was a highlight for me. It's a time to lift people, love your neighbor. I mean, look how much love He pours on us."

Heidi Schmidt, who led the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass, said the bishop's visit "gives us hope. He brings a different perspective. It's an honor to be here and have Mass with him."

After arriving at ORW in 2024, she said she has made positive strides in her faith. She was raised Catholic and attended Catholic school in Michigan.

"I'm so thankful I'm incarcerated and my family would tell you the same thing," she



Bishop Earl Fernandes presents his homily during a Mass at the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville on Tuesday, Dec. 23.

CT photos by Ken Snow



Bishop Earl Fernandes blesses the nativity scene at the Ohio Reformatory for Women during Mass.

said. "This past year I've been progressing with my faith and was reunited with my family. I think this has brought us back together. ... They believe in me."

Being away from her five-year-old son is difficult at Christmas, she said, "but I know there is light and hope at the end of the tunnel. I'm a far better person now with a better mindset."

"Yes, it gets hard. Everyone misses their family, sure, but the amount of people that came here today was big. So that's hopeful, and they came to the right place."

Also attending the Mass were several Catholic volunteers who come to ORW on Sunday afternoons to pray the rosary with the women.

"My rosary group was the first people I showed a picture of my son after I saw him for the first time after 2 ½ years," Schmidt said. "We can talk about things we can't talk about in the general population."

The Christmas Mass and the bishop's

presence served as a reminder for the women at the conclusion of the Jubilee Year of Hope that there is hope for everyone.

"It's easy to feel forgotten in prison," one of the women said. "You know, out of sight, out of mind. But the bishop doesn't forget us, and the Catholic Church doesn't forget us."

"A lot of what the Church does revolves around people who are incarcerated and people who are like society's castaways. It's a blessing how much the Catholic community in here helps you – the women who come in for the rosary and the women in here who were my first friends."

"When I got here, I was so broken, so lost. But when I discovered they offered Catholic Mass, it was something that was familiar, that I could do. They welcomed me with open arms and it was the first thing I did to try to feel normal again – and I'm really grateful for that."

Jubilee Year of Hope comes to a close

By Doug Bean

Catholic Times Editor

Bishop Earl Fernandes ushered out the Jubilee Year of Hope in the diocese during a Mass on the Feast of the Holy Family at St. Joseph Cathedral.

Although the Jubilee Year did not officially end until the Solemnity of the Epiphany on Jan. 6, Bishop Fernandes and other U.S. bishops took the opportunity at Masses on Dec. 28 to commemorate a momentous year in the local and universal Church.

The Jubilee Year, which is observed every 25 years in the Church as a period of repentance and mercy, was launched by the late Pope Francis on Dec. 24, 2024, with the traditional opening of the Holy Door at St. Peter's

Basilica in Rome. Bishops around the world, including Columbus, began the Jubilee Year in their dioceses on Dec. 29, 2024.

Pope Francis' official Jubilee Year declaration *Spec Non Confundit*, or "Hope does not disappoint," was taken from St. Paul's letter to the Romans.

During the holy year, Bishop Fernandes designated St. Joseph Cathedral, Lancaster Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption, Columbus Our Lady of Guadalupe, Star of the New Evangelization and Somerset St. Joseph as diocesan pilgrimage sites where the faithful could visit to receive a plenary indulgence, or remission of the temporal punishment, for sins that have already been forgiven.

The Holy Father had granted that the faithful who are repentant, free from affec-

tion for sin and moved by a spirit of charity could participate by visiting a designated holy site. To gain the indulgence, an individual must have received sacramental confession, Holy Communion, pray for the Pope's intentions and engage in works of mercy and charity.

In addition to visiting the local pilgrimage sites throughout the world, Catholics traveled to Rome to walk through the Holy Doors in the four major basilicas, St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major, St. Paul Outside the Walls and St. Peter's.

Bishop Fernandes led several diocesan pilgrimages to Rome in 2025, including two in October.



The Jubilee Year of Hope officially ended on Jan. 6, the feast of the Epiphany. Photo/Anna Lincoln

See JUBILEE, Page 13

Ready basketball coach reaches 500-win milestone

By Tim Puet

For The Catholic Times

Tony Bisutti of Columbus Bishop Ready High School says that once he started coaching boys basketball at age 25, he knew he'd be doing it for decades to come.

"I was a teacher when I finished my degree work at Bethany (WVa.) College and didn't get into coaching for three years, but when I became an assistant to Vince Chickerella at (Columbus St. Francis) DeSales (High School), that's all it took to get me fully involved. I got the feeling before too long that this is what I was born to do.

"Coaching is an addiction, something I liken to a good disease. Once it gets into your blood, it permeates into you and becomes a big part of what you are."

Bisutti won his 500th game as a coach on Saturday, Dec. 20 when Ready defeated Bexley 79-59. His overall record is 503-259 as of Dec. 31. This is his eighth season at Ready, where he is 135-45.

He followed Chickerella in 1987 at DeSales, where he was 83-19 in six seasons, coached at New Philadelphia for two years, then became Dublin Scioto's first coach in 1995, leading the Irish to a 270-136 record in 18 seasons and twice winning Ohio Coach of the Year honors from The Associated Press.

He left coaching in 2013 and continued teaching business courses at Scioto for five years, then returned to the bench at Ready in 2018. His third state coach of the year award came from the Ohio Prep Sports Writers Association after a 2022-23 season in which the Silver Knights went 28-1, losing to Akron Buchtel in the state semifinals, the closest he has come to a state championship.

He said that group and his 2008-09 team at Scioto, which went 28-2, are the two teams that stick out in his mind from 37 seasons in coaching, 34 of them as a head coach.

He described the 2022-23 Ready squad as "the epitome of team basketball."

"They were the easiest team I ever coached because they carried out everything I wanted them to," he said. "Luke Ruth, Charlie Russell and Kayden Schaffer were all seniors on that team who went on to play college sports and were just dynamite in the way they meshed together. Kayden broke his ankle against Buchtel in the state semifinals and that may have kept us from the championship.

"The Scioto team in 2008-09 went 24-2 and lost in overtime in the regional finals to Columbus Northland, which won the state championship and had Jared Sullinger and Trey Burke, both of whom went on to outstanding careers in college and the NBA.

"I'm still close to players from both of those teams and it's like that with the best teams. It seems to me their players stick together more than most after they leave school," Bisutti said.

"As far as memorable players I've coached, there have been so many it's hard to single



Columbus Bishop Ready players, assistants and staff pose for a picture with coach Tony Bisutti after he collected his 500th career victory in high school basketball on Saturday, Dec. 20 against Bexley.

one or two out, but the Daniels brothers, Chris and Antonio, at DeSales come to mind right away." Chris died at age 22 in 1996 of cardiac arrhythmia during his senior season at the University of Dayton. Antonio played for Bowling Green and had a 13-season career in the NBA, winning a championship with the San Antonio Spurs in 1999.

"I've been fortunate to have many players go on to college and pro careers. When you have good athletes playing for you, they make you look good, and I've had a few," Bisutti said.

The 1979 DeSales graduate said his coaching style has been influenced mainly by Chickerella; Bob Lennon, his basketball coach at DeSales; and his baseball coach there, Bill Killian.

"What I learned from Vince was preparation, all the things it takes beforehand to get you in the right state of mind to play well and to adjust to your opponent," he said. "Vince was a great offensive and defensive tactician and I hope that's one of my attributes, especially the defensive part. A lot of the guys who knew me in high school might laugh at that because offense was my strong point as a player."

Like Bisutti, Chickerella had a long and successful career, coaching for 29 years at Columbus Linden McKinley, DeSales and Hilliard high schools and Capital University and winning state championships in 1967 at Linden and 1987 at DeSales. He also coached the Columbus Horizon of the minor-league Continental Basketball Association in the early 1990s.

"Bob Lennon and Bill Killian set a coaching example when I was in high school that instilled in me the ability to bond a bunch of different personalities into a unit that works together," he said.

"I was part of DeSales' first state baseball championship team in 1979. We've stayed connected for the 45 years since then because of how Bill got us to become a team." Speaking of Lennon, he said, "Bob's loss was a terrible blow because of the impact he had on so many young lives."

Lennon died in 2013 when his bicycle was struck by a car on a rural Delaware County road. He had been a teacher in the Diocese

of Columbus for 42 years, 40 of them at DeSales, where he was cross country coach for nearly all that period. He also was basketball coach there for six years and an assistant coach of track and field and girls basketball teams.

Bisutti said he was very intense as a young coach but changed his style as the years went by. "I remember in particular how after my first game as a head coach, a loss at Columbus Mifflin, I was up all night going over all my mistakes and wondering if we would ever win, especially after being an assistant on a state championship team the year before.

"The next game, we played Ready and won big, but I felt bad after that because I wondered if I'd left the starters in too long.

"I was a worry wart the first couple of years, but as you mature, you realize that it's not good to overthink. You learn how to manage things better and recognize there's so much you can't control," he said.

"Over the years, I've been fortunate to work with administrators including Pat Rossetti (principal) and Bill Callahan (athletics director) at DeSales, Marina David (principal) at Scioto and now Matt Brickner (principal) and Dave Oddi (athletics director) at Ready. Their support has provided plenty of encouragement."

Bisutti, 64, and his wife, Wendy, have a son, Antonio; two daughters, Stephanie and Christina; a stepson, Bryson Creed; and one grandson. Antonio was coached by his father at Scioto and went on to play in college at Otterbein and Ohio University. Stephanie and Christina both were Ready players, with Stephanie also playing at Ohio University.

Bisutti said high school players haven't changed much during his decades in coaching, "but what is different is the amount of parental involvement in many cases. You have to deal with parents much more now.

"The essentials of what I do as a coach haven't changed in 37 years, but I've modernized how things have been done over that time, making little adjustments in things like our drills and our mode of attack to keep things fresh.

"One good thing about the players I've coached is that they've mostly been play-



Coach Tony Bisutti led Bishop Ready to the state semifinals during the 2022-23 season. Photo courtesy Bishop Ready High School

ers who wanted to be coached and to learn. Knowing they're willing to listen helps you feel well-supported," he said.

"When I took over from Vince Chickerella, I learned the hardest thing for me as a coach, but the thing I had to do, was to be myself. You can't help but be influenced by the methods you've inherited from the coaches who have mentored you, but you know you're going to be different.

"Players know from the beginning that I draw a hard line on certain non-negotiables and that if they don't stick to them, they'll be on the bench no matter how well they're playing," Bisutti said. Some of his coaching rules are "Do sprint back on defense," "Always be ready to play in transition," "Because a shot is acceptable for someone else to take doesn't mean it's acceptable for you," "Everybody's different, but that doesn't mean everybody's equal" and "Defense does not mean inactivity when you're not on offense."

"Everybody's a role player," he said. "Some players are better shooters than others, some are screeners, some are rebounders, some are passers. Get five guys together who can see which role is best for them and you've got a chance at something special."

"Being at a Catholic school gives players a great chance to see the game as not just something you play, but something with an impact that goes through all your life," Bisutti said. "Every day, I try to talk to players about life in general rather than just basketball. I feel that's my duty as a coach. I may not be great about it, but I try to do my best."

Bisutti said he knows he's in the latter stages of his career but hasn't thought much about retirement. "I'm just trying to get through one day at a time and not looking too far down the road," he said. "I know it will be time to leave coaching when I don't feel like I'm enjoying it, but I haven't gotten there yet."

JUBILEE: Jubilee Year of Hope comes to a close, Continued from Page 12

"In reflecting on the Jubilee Year of Hope, there are several moments that stand out in my mind," the bishop said. "First, there was the election of the new Pope, which has brought us great joy. The diocesan pilgrimage to Rome, as well as the Jubilee for Educators and the Jubilee for Deacons, were also moments of grace with the people from the diocese."

Other Jubilee Year of Hope high points for the bishop were a Pentecost Mass at St. Joseph Cathedral and ordinations to the priesthood at Westerville St. Paul the

Apostle Church.

"The Vigil for Pentecost highlighted the great unity and diversity in the Diocese of Columbus, and, for me, it was a celebration of joy," Bishop Fernandes said. "Two other liturgies that really stand out for me were the ordination of three new priests and the reception of the final vows of Sr. Maria Aurea of the Sisters of Kilimanjaro."

In the homily at the Mass on the Feast of the Holy Family, Bishop Fernandes made several references to the Jubilee Year.

"In the opening dialog of the Mass, I

mentioned the rivers of grace that have flowed through the Jubilee Year," he said. "If you watch a river or a stream, it's always flowing. It never stops. You don't want to be still like a stagnant pool but let God's grace work in you.

"As the end of the year approaches, I invite you to reflect on the many graces that God has given you throughout the year, how he has blessed you, how many mercies he has shown you."

The bishop went on to encourage the faithful to be a light for others.

"When people see you and they ask, 'What is the reason for your hope?' it is my hope and prayer that you will say the reason for my hope is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Son of Mary ... Prince of Peace. He is the reason for our hope."

Pope Leo XIV, who was elected in May after Pope Francis' death, officially ended the Jubilee in the Church by closing the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica on Jan. 6.



OPEN HOUSES

The Fisher Catholic Community of Schools invites you to our Winter 2026 open houses!



JAN. 25
11am-1pm

Saint Bernadette School
1325 Wheeling Road | Lancaster, Ohio 43130
www.stbernadetteschool.com



JAN. 25
3pm-5pm

Saint Mary School
309 E. Chestnut Street | Lancaster, Ohio 43130
www.saintmarylancaster.org



FEB. 1
2pm-4pm

Fisher Catholic High School
1803 Granville Pike | Lancaster, Ohio 43130
www.fishercatholic.org

Affiliation with St. Stephen's Community House to end



DECREE

REMOVAL OF THE USE OF THE TITLE "CATHOLIC"
FROM ST. STEPHEN'S COMMUNITY HOUSE

ST. STEPHEN'S COMMUNITY HOUSE was affiliated with the Diocese of Columbus and eventually became a sole-member corporation of the Diocese.

At a meeting of its board on 4 December 2025, a vote was taken to separate from the Diocese of Columbus. The Bishop gave his consent to the recommendation of the board. This is seen as a solution to differing visions for this entity. The organization can continue to serve the community in a way acceptable to its board, in the best interest of its clients, and according to its philosophy.

This entity will continue to serve the community under a new name, which is to be decided upon at a later date.

No initiative can lay claim to the title 'Catholic' without the consent of the competent ecclesial authority (cc. 216, 300). The competent ecclesial authority capable of granting that permission is also competent to revoke it, in this case the diocesan bishop of the place of the organization.

THEREFORE, I decree that the entity formerly known as ST. STEPHEN'S COMMUNITY HOUSE is not a Catholic agency, has no affiliation with the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Columbus or otherwise, and may not use the title "Catholic." Its engagement with providing social services in central Ohio is praiseworthy; however, without ecclesiastical oversight, the use of the title Catholic in name, promotion, or implication is not permitted. This removal of this title is not a punitive decision, but rather a clarifying decision.

This is effective immediately upon being made known to ST. STEPHEN'S COMMUNITY HOUSE leadership and in the electronic Clergy Bulletin for the information of the clergy and parish staff who may have a relationship with this entity.

Given at the Diocese of Columbus Chancery Office on this 16th Day of December 2025.

Deacon Thomas M. Berg, Jr.
Chancellor

+ Earl K. Fernandes
Most Reverend Earl K. Fernandes
Bishop of Columbus



By Deacon Dave Bezusko
Director, Catholic Charities

In December, Bishop Earl K. Fernandes approved a recommendation from the St. Stephen's Community House Board of Trustees that the organization separate from the Diocese of Columbus and begin the process of becoming an independent nonprofit entity. St. Stephen's is no longer a Catholic, Diocesan-sponsored charity. The change ends a 106-year affiliation with the Diocese that began in 1919. As part of becoming independent, a new name will be selected and announced.

This mutual agreement concludes an eight-month process of self-reflection and research by St. Stephen's leadership. The Board was charged last spring to determine how the organization might renew and unapologetically express its Catholic identity to align with Diocesan priorities (Evangelization, Catholic Education and Formation, Vocations, and Social Outreach); or consider a formal separation.

Why is Catholic identity foundational for a Catholic charity? Because Catholic charities are called to be more than a secular social service agency or an extension of government services. Catholic charities are called to ministry. Catholic charities are amazing evangelization opportunities because they are places where we encounter people who need help -- maybe on their worst day -- and respond with the hope and love of Christ. We serve every person who walks through the doors, many of whom aren't Catholic or Christian, because they have the human dignity of being made in the image and likeness of God. We see Christ in them. They need to see Christ in us. We put our faith in action and we do it by embracing and living the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and providing opportunities to encounter Jesus.

A Task Force of St. Stephen's Board members and staff met two or more times per month from August through November, researching implications for mission alignment, financial impact, community relations, brand and identity, governance and

autonomy, legal considerations, and long-term vision. They conducted a series of public forums and surveys with hundreds of clients, funders, volunteers and staff.

While St. Stephen's had maintained its ties to the Diocese on paper, daily operations and culture became increasingly secularized over time, with minimal on-site Catholic participation and presence. Board and staff admittedly did not consider themselves an extension of Diocesan ministry, with donor and volunteer involvement tracked from a small handful of parishes.

The Task Force findings also revealed that the majority of the organization's stakeholders did not share our Catholic worldview, including the Church's understanding of human anthropology and family life. They believed that further realigning with the Church and openly expressing Catholic faith would alienate the predominantly non-Catholic base of clients and staff. They also did not share the Church's long-term vision for St. Stephen's Community House, citing desires to pursue new programming and support services that do not align with Church teaching. An organization had discerned its collective conscience and thus, the mutual separation was recommended to make official what was already a reality.

The organization was born in 1919 as the Barthman Avenue Catholic Community House on the south side. Bishop James Hartley acquired an old two-story theater with a large hall and asked the Catholic Women's War Relief to operate it. It served as a neighborhood center to help eastern European immigrants build community, and supported the workers in Steelton. The name changed to St. Stephen's Community House in 1924 in honor of the patron saint of Hungary. In 1965, St. Stephen's relocated to the Linden area to help an underserved area of the city. St. Stephen's acquired its current 63,000 square-foot home on East 17th Avenue in 1982.

The goal is to complete the legal transition by July 1, 2026. Staff will continue day-to-day work serving the community without interruption.

LIVE AND
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WEEKDAYS
AT 8AM



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ATHENS

Baptism of the Lord Year A

God's delight in our humble cooperation with Him

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7
Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10
Acts of the Apostles 10:34-38
Matthew 3:13-17

Not all pilgrim-tourist sites in the Holy Land are created equal; some are geared more to prayer, others somewhat to commerce. One particularly well-curated place along the Jordan River features a restaurant boasting a nice bar and shaded patio area with an extensive gift shop and picturesque views of palm trees overhanging an artificially tranquil rivulet. A few miles downstream, the filthy water of the same stream rusts away crudely at the handrails and dumps detritus from upstream unceremoniously at various levels during its temperamental overflow. That's the spot, fittingly, where Catholics commemorate today's feast: "Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him."

At each turn of history, God's faithful have anticipated their full and complete redemption, permanent relief from the evils that beleaguer them. As we come to the conclusion of the Christmas cycle, we might recall that the Incarnation was expected to accomplish this 2,025 years ago. Christ's earliest followers seem to have understood his mission as an immediate finale to salvation history, at least at first. But "a bruised reed he shall not break, and



SCRIPTURE READINGS

Father Tyron Tomson

Father Tyron Tomson is a priest of the Diocese of Columbus pursuing a Licentiate in Sacred Scripture in Rome.

a smoldering wick he shall not quench." The fragile group of chosen souls was only beginning its life of holiness as the Church, that precariously navigating Barque of Peter; the ultimate perfection of the universe would take some additional time and patience to include our willing collaboration.

Sacramental Baptism similarly initiates us into God's divine life without terminating our natural lives, leaving plenty of work left to do. That pattern seems evident in the public ministry of Christ as it is launched at this moment, occasioning "what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism." Thereafter, "He went

about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." Certainly, God had been with Him beforehand, as He was with us prior to our immersion into the saving waters. But like His miracles, supernatural experiences then become a regular Christian occurrence, flowing from this first moment of grace; God is not just with us, but within us.

Every archaeological dig of Jewish settlements from the time of Christ uncovers ceremonial washing pools. All the observant were concerned with ritual purity; defilement spread especially through unclean liquids, but living water would cleanse them. The Jordan River or Sea of Galilee could be used for this purpose.

By the time that blessed water has made it all the way to the Dead Sea, it has refreshed the land down the historic corridor from Galilee to Jericho, near Jerusalem. Seasonal creeks from the watershed intermittently contribute their volatile flow from the mountains along its way. Like a timid brook not daring to spill out into a river, John at first did not want to presume to minister to his Master but "tried to prevent Him." He was advised instead, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him." The Baptizer humbly assumes his proper role, just as we must also, participating in the actualization of God's Holy Will.

By obediently submitting Himself to the

Father's gritty plan for His sacred humanity, Christ modeled this cooperation for us all and then sanctified those cloudy waters, that they might in turn sanctify us. We are promised "in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him." The approval immediately reechoes, summoning us to the same virtue with divine paternal encouragement: "And a voice came from the heavens, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased.'"

Turbulence in the course of life upsets the smooth sailing we had perhaps envisaged; God's blessings don't always calm the storms, and we don't find ourselves floating serenely down a lazy river. Christ certainly didn't after His Baptism. Nonetheless, "The voice of the Lord is over the waters, the Lord, over vast waters ... The Lord is enthroned above the flood" and "The Lord will bless His people with peace." Inundated as we are by earthly worries, we don't contemplate the cosmic import of this element, an ancient symbol of deadly chaos, tamed and harnessed by the Lord of Life as His instrument for eternal salvation, each time we pass the font near the church door. Indeed, "The God of glory thunders, and in his temple all say, 'Glory!'" His vast ocean of mercy wipes clean the world's sloppy deluge. He delights to incorporate our personal muddy little trickles into His raging torrent of love.

Second Sunday of Ordinary Time Year A

Jesus begins to reveal mystery of kingdom of heaven

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6
Psalm 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10
1 Corinthians 1:1-3
John 1:29-34

The readings for today's celebration are a sort of follow-up of last Sunday's celebration. As a matter of fact, St. John the Baptist refers to the mystery of Jesus' baptism and makes known what he witnessed. Thus, today's celebration is a step forward to introduce us into the period of Jesus' public ministry in which He displays the mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven that He came to reveal and its eventual installment.

The Baptist, in his witness, uses two significant expressions to refer to Jesus Christ: Lamb of God and Son of God. Both of them are very well known from their use in Mass, traditional iconography, and liturgical music. The two titles present proleptically ("anticipate") the rest of the liturgical year, placing the focus on two essential aspects of Jesus's mystery: His Passion and Death (as Lamb) and His Resurrection and Glorification (as Son of God; see Psalms 2 and 110). These two titles, introduced here by the Baptist, are more fully presented, by way of very rich imagery, in the Book of Revelation, traditionally attributed to St.



SCRIPTURE READINGS

Father Ervens Mengelle, IVE, SSL

Father Ervens Mengelle, IVE, SSL, is an Assistant Professor of Scripture and Dean of Men in the School of Theology at the Pontifical College Josephinum. He holds a licentiate in biblical exegesis from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome with further biblical studies at the Toronto School of Theology.

John the Apostle, the same author of the Fourth Gospel (see Rev 5:6; 14:1; 19:7; pas-sim).

Today's liturgy highlights another aspect of the mystery as well. The first reading, which is always chosen in connection with the Gospel readings in the Sundays of Ordinary Time, prepares for it. It is a portion of

the Second Song of the Servant of the Lord Hymns (a total of four powerful prophetic poems in the Book of the prophet Isaiah describing a mysterious figure, the Lord's Servant, who suffers for the people, bringing light, justice, and redemption; last Sunday we heard the first poem, and all four are proclaimed during Holy Week). Reminiscent of Christmas' mystery, today's passage says, "You are my servant... through whom I show my glory. ... I will make you a light to the nations." Next Sunday's readings will echo this statement.

How will it be done? The Responsorial Psalm selected as a response to the first reading provides cues that contain powerful connections with the Letter to the Hebrews. First, it says, "I have waited, waited for the LORD, and he stooped toward me and heard my cry," echoed in Hebrews in this way: "he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect (teleioth  s), he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Heb 5:7-9). Later, the same Psalm is quoted in the Letter to the Hebrews: "when he came

into the world, he said: ... 'Behold, I come to do your will.' ... By this 'will,' we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ... by one offering he has made perfect (tetel  ioken) forever those who are being consecrated" (Hebrews 10:5, 9, 10, 14). Christmas is too close to Good Friday to forget how much it cost Him to fulfill His mission, when God's all-powerful word from heaven's royal throne leapt into the doomed land (see Wis 18:15) to finally shout "Per-fected!" (tet  lestai, John 19:30; see Heb 5:9).

Summing up, we can say that these two first Sundays of Ordinary Time offer biblical readings that support Jesus' status as the divine legate who came to proclaim and institute God's Kingdom among us. In the second reading, St. Paul, mindful of his mission that continues what Jesus did first, wishes for the Corinthians to share in that Kingdom: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." All of it is very well wrapped up by the Alleluia verse: "The Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. To those who accepted him, he gave power to become children of God."

THE WEEKDAY BIBLE READINGS

1-12/1-17 MONDAY 1 Samuel 1:1-8 Psalm 116:12-13,14-16,18-19 Mark 1:14-20	THURSDAY 1 Samuel 4:1-11 Psalm 44:10-11,14-15,25 Mark 1:40-45	1-19/1-24 MONDAY 1 Samuel 15:16-23 Psalm 50:8-9,16bc-17,21,23 Mark 2:18-22	THURSDAY 1 Samuel 18:6-9;19:1-7 Psalm 56:2-3,9-10a,10b-11,12-13 Mark 3:7-12
TUESDAY 1 Samuel 1:1-9-20 1 Samuel 2:1,4-5,6-7,8abcd (Ps) Mark 1:21-28	FRIDAY 1 Samuel 8:4-7,10-22a Psalm 89:16-17,18-19 Mark 2:1-12	TUESDAY 1 Samuel 16:1-13 Psalm 89:20,21-22,27-28 Mark 2:23-28	FRIDAY 1 Samuel 24:3-21 Psalm 57:2,3-4,6-11 Mark 3:13-19
WEDNESDAY 1 Samuel 3:1-10,19-20 Psalm 40:2,5,7-8a,8b-9,10 Mark 1:29-39	SATURDAY 1 Samuel 9:1-4,17-19;10-1 Psalm 21:2-3,4-5,6-7 Mark 2:13-17	WEDNESDAY 1 Samuel 17:32-33,37,40-51 Psalm 144:1b,2,9-10 Mark 3:1-6	SATURDAY 2 Samuel 1:1-4,11-12,19,23-27 Psalm 80:2-3,5-7 Mark 3:20-21

DIOCESAN WEEKLY RADIO AND TELEVISION: Mass Schedule: Weeks of January 11 and January 18

SUNDAY MASS
10:30am Mass from Columbus St. Joseph Cathedral on St. Gabriel Radio AM820, Columbus, FM88.3, Portsmouth, and FM106.7, Athens., and at www.stgabrielradio.com and diocesan website, www.columbuscatholic.org.

Mass from St. Francis de Sales Seminary, Milwaukee, at 7:30 and 10 a.m. on WWHO-TV (the CW), Channel 53, Columbus. Mass with the Passionist Fathers at 10:30 a.m. on WHIZ-TV, Channel 18, Zanesville. Check local cable system for cable channel listing.

Mass from Our Lady of the Angels Monastery, Birmingham, Ala., at 8 a.m. on EWTN (Spectrum Channel 385, Insight Channel 382, or Breezeline Channel 378). (Encores at noon, 7 p.m., and midnight).

Mass from the Archdiocese of Milwaukee at 6:30 a.m. on ION TV (AT&T U-verse Channel 195, Dish Network Channel 250, or DirecTV Channel 305).

Mass from Massillon St. Mary Church at 10:30 a.m. on WILB radio (AM 1060, FM 94.5 and 89.5), Canton, heard in Tuscarawas, Holmes, and Coshocton counties.

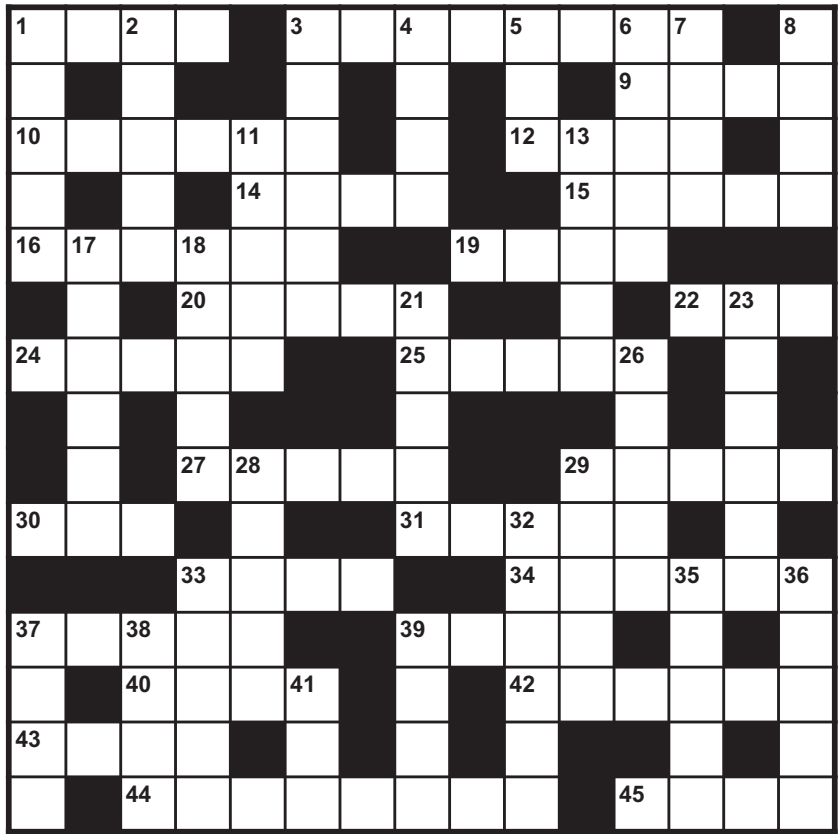
DAILY MASS
8 a.m., Our Lady of the Angels Monastery in Birmingham, Ala. (Encores at noon, 7 p.m. and midnight). See EWTN above; and on i-Lifetv (Channel 113, Ada, Logan, Millersburg, Murray City, Washington C.H.; Channel 125, Marion, Newark, Newcomerstown and New Philadelphia; Channel 207, Zanesville); 8 p.m., St. Gabriel Radio (AM 820), Columbus, and at www.stgabrielradio.com.

12:05 p.m. weekdays, 8 a.m. Saturdays, Mass from Columbus St. Joseph Cathedral on St. Gabriel Radio (AM 820), Columbus, and at www.stgabrielradio.com and diocesan website, www.columbuscatholic.org. (Saturdays on radio only).

Videos of Masses are available at any time on the internet at these and many other parish websites: Mattingly Settlement St. Mary (www.stannstmary.org); Delaware St. Mary (www.delawarestmary.org); Sunbury St. John Neumann (www.saint-johnsunbury.org); and Columbus Immaculate Conception (www.iccols.org). Check your parish website for additional information.

We pray the propers for Weeks I and II of the Liturgy of the Hours

CATHOLIC CROSSWORD



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- ACROSS**

1 "...the rich he has sent ___ empty" (Lk 1:53)

3 Certain vow

9 Biblical instrument

10 The day of the Resurrection

12 Bible section

14 "My punishment is too great to ___." (Gen 4:13)

15 Michelangelo's statue in the Vatican

16 Brothers of Joseph

19 OT historical book

20 This princess' conversion to Catholicism caused something of a national issue

22 There was no room here

24 "___ us peace"

25 Wise man gift

27 One of the faces in Ezekiel's vision

29 His name was changed to Israel

30 Commandment word

31 Jesus was baptized in one

33 "Urbi et ___"

34 Biblical heroine

37 "Regina ___"

39 Liturgy

40 Moses was floated down this river in a basket

42 Worship place in Jerusalem

43 OT wisdom book

44 School for the priesthood

45 Grandmother of Timothy
- DOWN**

1 Administer extreme unction

2 Church runway

3 Simon of ___

4 "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a ___" (1 Jn 4:20)

5 Popular Catholic TV sitcom actor Newhart

6 Church singers

7 "Take my ___ upon you" (Mt 11:29)

8 Wife of Tobit

11 Movie reviewer/film critic who was a former altar boy

13 Wealthy biblical land

17 Marian litany

18 Catholic sports figure Lombardi

21 It was touched to Isaiah's mouth

23 Australian Catholic actress Kidman

26 "For where your treasure is, there also will your ___ be." (Mt 6:21)

28 Possible Easter month

29 Father of David

32 Sacristy

33 Biblical food

35 Augustine was bishop here

36 Sea of ___

37 Long cloak-like vestment

38 Son of Seth

39 La Santa ___

41 An Old Testament high priest

Upcoming Feast Days

- 1-11
- The Baptism of the Lord
- 1-20
- St. Sebastian
- 1-21
- St. Agnes
- 1-22
- Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children
- 1-24
- St. Francis de Sales
- 1-25
- The Conversion of St. Paul the Apostle
- 1-26
- Ss. Timothy and Titus



All You Holy Men and Women,
Ora Pro Nobis

ELIZABETH SETON

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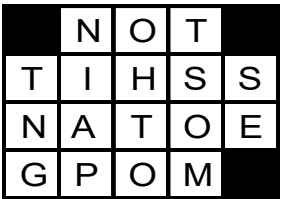
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Words of Wisdom

by Pat Battaglia, aka Dr. Fun

Draw a path from letter to letter to spell the words given in capital letters that completes the wisdom statement. Move one square at a time, up, down, right, left or diagonally until all letters are used once. Ignore any black squares.

When it comes to people giving ...



SOME STOP AT NOTHING

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PRAY FOR OUR DEAD

BELL, Jean, 90, Dec. 24

St. Paul the Apostle Church, Westerville

BEARD, James, 88, Dec. 24

St. Ann Church, Dresden

BRAY, JoAnn, 91, Dec. 23

St. Mary Church, Marion

COOK, Leila Marie, 81, Nov. 15

St. Mary Church, Marion

COUGHLIN, Carol A. (Comston), 84, Dec. 15

St. Paul the Apostle Church, Westerville

DAUGHERTY, Martha, 84, Nov. 21

St. Mary Church, Marion

DAVIS, Dr. Donald R., 94, Dec. 20

Immaculate Conception Church, Columbus

DERICK, Lena (Caputo), 89, Dec. 11

Our Lady of Victory Church, Columbus

DiPIERRO, Zephina "Rusti," 89, Dec. 18

St. Bernadette Church, Lancaster

FAIRCHILD, William J., 86, Dec. 27

St. Catharine of Siena Church, Columbus

HAMMOND, Marcella, 89, Dec. 20

St. Francis de Sales Church, Newark

HENDERSON, Mark S., 63, Dec. 21

St. James the Less Church, Columbus

HOPKINS, Perry, 82, Nov. 5

Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception Parish, Kenton

JOHNSTON, Patricia, 86, Dec. 20

St. Bernadette Church (formerly St. Mark), Lancaster

McCREARY, Jay L., 74, Nov. 17

St. Mary Church, Marion

MEAGHER, Paulette, 88, Nov. 27

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, Buckeye Lake

MELVIN, Mary A., 87, Dec. 19

St. Josephine Bakhita Parish, Columbus

MOLONEY, Mary Jane, 77, Dec. 26

Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, Ada

O'DORISIO, Mary Sue, 81, Dec. 3

St. Timothy Church, Columbus

PANIAN, Ruth Margaret, 103, Nov. 4

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, Buckeye Lake

PETERS, Robert H., 88, Dec. 18

St. Patrick Church, Columbus

SCHNEGG, Darren E., 57, Dec. 18

St. Brigid of Kildare Church, Columbus

SPIRES, Maryalice "Patty," 85, Dec. 24

St. James the Less Church, Columbus

THIEL, Wilfred Aloysius Sr., 95, Dec. 15

St. Mary Church, Marion

TRENOR, Mary P. "Pat," 80, Dec. 22

St. Peter St. Joan of Arc Parish, Columbus-Powell

VENTERS, Kevin, 56, Dec. 17

St. Peter St. Joan of Arc Parish, Columbus-Powell

WINTERS, Marilyn, 87, Dec. 21

St. Peter St. Joan of Arc Parish, Columbus-Powell

ZAMARELLI, Josephine L., 66, Dec. 24

Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church, Grove City

Beverly A. Kenny

Funeral Mass for Beverly A. Kenny, 90, who died Tuesday, Dec. 23, was celebrated Saturday, Dec. 27 at Westerville St. Paul the Apostle Church. Burial was at Resurrection Cemetery, Lewis Center.

She served as the church's organist for many years and also played the piano and accordion. She was a member of the parish rosary group and was a longtime volunteer at the Westerville Area Resource Ministry (WARM).

She and her husband, William, were for-

mer owners of Interstate Batteries in Columbus.

She was preceded in death by her husband and a son, Jim. Survivors include daughters,

Debbie Asmo Vanderson (Gary), Linda Yocca (Jeff), Mary Rossi (Tim) and Dianne Cook (Todd); sons, Don (Kellie) and Billy; a brother, Jim Prestel (Virginia); sisters, Phyllis Edgington (George) and Diane Phillips; 20 grandchildren and 29 great-grandchildren.

Salvatore Dinovo

Funeral Mass for Salvatore Dinovo, 69, of Xenia, who died Tuesday, Dec. 23, was celebrated Wednesday, Dec. 31 at Delaware St. Mary Church. Burial was at the church cemetery.

He was born on Oct. 4, 1956 to Anthony and Mary (Cooke) Dinovo and was a 1975 graduate of Delaware Hayes High School.

He worked in the family business, Dinovo Brothers Inc., a fruit wholesale company in Delaware, until it closed in 1984. Afterward, he was employed by AT&T in its internet department. In his younger years, he was a member of the St. Mary parish choir.

He was preceded in death by his parents and a son, Phillip Dunlap. Survivors include his wife, Lorie (Dunlap); sons, Salvatore (Amanda Elmgren), Brandon (Laura) Clark and Jacob (Tory) Rupe; daughters, Kristen (Kevin) McCoy, Elizabeth Dunlap and Michelle Rupe; brothers, Father Anthony Dinovo Jr., pastor of Newark Blessed Sacrament Church;

Charles (Colleen), Joseph (Allison), Philip (Kris) and Dominic (Carolyn); sisters, Ceena Baker, Peggy (Richard) DeClue and Mary Frances (Steve Blagg) and 16 grandchildren.

Kathleen E. Hamilton

Funeral Mass for Kathleen E. Hamilton, 65, who died Saturday, Dec. 20, was celebrated Saturday, Dec. 27 at New Philadelphia Sacred Heart Church. Burial was at Dover Burial Park.

She was born in Dover on July 18, 1960 to Thomas and Mary Elizabeth (Helbling) Hamilton.

She was a 1978 graduate of New Philadelphia Tuscarawas Central Catholic High School and earned a Bachelor's degree in

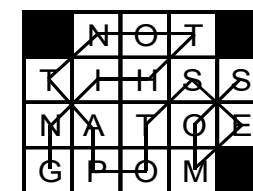
education from Kent State University and a Master's degree from Franciscan University of Steubenville.

She served for many years at Sacred Heart Church, first as youth ministries director and later as faith formation director, after returning to Dover to care for her parents. She also was a logistical coordinator in Tuscarawas County for the Gospel Road summer youth mission program of the Diocese of Columbus. Earlier, she spent more than 20 years as an administrator and instructor at YMCAs in Columbus, Lancaster, Bellefontaine and New Bremen.

She was preceded in death by her father, and a brother, Brian. Survivors include her mother; brothers, Jim and Mark; two nieces and a nephew.

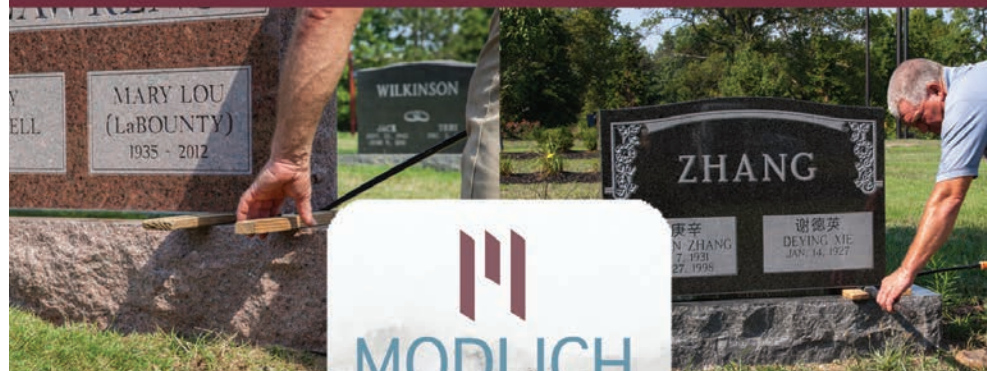
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Clergy Who Cook! adds online voting this year

By Doug Bean
Catholic Times Editor

The annual Clergy Who Cook! fundraiser for seminarians at the Pontifical College Josephinum in north Columbus is back in 2026 and promises to be better than ever.

The 16th annual event sponsored by the Friends of the Josephinum, a lay organization that provides support for seminarians and assistance with their personal expenses, will be held Friday, Jan. 30 in the Jessing Center at the Josephinum, 7625 N. High St., beginning at 6 p.m.

Clergy Who Cook! will feature 13 priests, deacons or religious participants who prepare a variety of dishes. Guests will have the opportunity to sample the culinary creations and vote for their favorites.

There also will be a live, on-site auction of items that includes Ohio State tickets, gift baskets and other items.

After a record-setting year in 2025 that raised more than \$115,000, interest con-

tinues to be strong. Sponsorships and tickets for 2026 were sold out months in advance.

Because Clergy Who Cook! has become so popular and space is at a premium, the Friends of the Josephinum added a new feature this year.

For those who are unable to attend in person but would like to support priests, deacons or religious in the competition, voting for chefs is expanding online.

Anyone who would like to vote for a chef or make a donation can do so at www.pcj.edu/clergywhocook. The website includes a biography for the entrants, some of whom have participated for years and others who are newcomers in 2026.

"We want it to grow, to make it bigger and better," said Marci Maynard of the Friends of the Josephinum. "We thought this would be one way to do it this year, to spread out into the community, to create interest all over the diocese."

"It takes away some of the space limitations we have for people who want to contribute or come but just can't logistically get there. So, this gives them a way

to participate without actually having to physically come."

This year's chefs include Father David Arroyo, CR, the diocese's Vicar for Hispanic Ministry; Deacon Anthony Bonacci of Plain City St. Joseph Church; Father Tom Gardner, pastor at Newark St. Francis de Sales Church; Father Pete Gideon, a retired diocesan priest; Father Michael Hartge, vicar general and moderator of mission advancement for the diocese; Father Jacques Kik, pastor at Columbus Our Lady of Victory; Father Timothy Lynch, pastor at Columbus St. Mary, Mother of God Church; Father Paul Marich, OP, pastor at Columbus St. Patrick Church; Father Anthony Raj Bellamkonda Irudayam and the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary at Columbus Our Lady of Peace Church; Father Brian O'Connor, pastor at Canal Winchester Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish; Father Pat Toner, a retired diocesan priest; Father Nic Ventura, director of sacred liturgy at the Pontifical College Josephinum; and Fathers James Black, Tyler Carter and Jason Fox and Deacons Paul Zemanek and Frank

Iannarino of Dublin St. Brigid of Kildare Church.

To accommodate the ever-growing interest in Clergy Who Cook! in the future, the Friends of the Josephinum are considering an expansion next year to a larger venue that would provide more space for guests and chefs.

"It's a good problem to have," Maynard said.

She said Clergy Who Cook! has become the second largest fundraiser at the Josephinum behind the seminary's annual Good Shepherd Dinner.

"There's a growing need for us to raise funds for the seminarians," Maynard said. "It used to be that we would just help them with expenses if a parent died or got sick and they had to fly home right away or if they had a dental bill they couldn't cover."

"Now, we're helping them with tuition to go to Rome to study. We help pay for scholarships."

For more information and updates, visit www.pcj.edu/clergywhocook or www.pcj.edu/friends-of-the-josephinum.

Society for the Propagation of the Faith collection helps missions

By Zephрина Mary, FIH
Director, Diocesan Missions Office

The membership renewal for the Society of the Propagation of the Faith will take place during the weekend of Jan. 17-18.

The Church is missionary by her very nature since it is from the missions. Through faith and baptism, each of Christ's followers is incorporated as a living member in the Church and has an active part in her mission of salvation.

On behalf of His Excellency, Earl K. Fernandes, the bishop of Columbus, I would like to thank you for your generosity. I sincerely thank you on behalf of the Church's missionaries and the people whom they serve. Donors and their intentions remain in the prayers of missionaries. Please consider including the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in your will or trust. Your legacy will live on, and your life will touch the world for many generations!

The Society of Propagation of the Faith (SPOF) has a pontifical affiliation and its headquarters are in Rome near St. Peter's Square. The principal function is to carry the Christian faith to every part of the world. It is the central means for the Church to fulfill her missionary task and to bring Gospel to the poor in villages, city streets, clinics, and orphans of the developing world.

Prayer, sacrifice and charity are concrete ways to live a missionary and universal faith. In the words of His Holiness, Pope Leo XIV, "The courage to choose comes from love, which God shows us in Christ. It is he who loved us with his whole self, saving the world and thus showing us that self-giving is the way to our fulfillment." (Saturday, Dec. 20, 2025) His words encourage the faithful to be charitable to fellow men that is the ultimate goal of day-to-day life.

Mission always expresses a concern for the life of others and also it is the holiest duty of all the faithful to be witnesses to Christ through our lives and the explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ. Everyone needs to appreciate the families of missionaries, especially parents who have encouraged their sons and daughters to serve the Church.

According to the Second Vatican Council, the origin of the Church is the mis-

Society spreads the faith

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The weekend of January 17-18 is the Membership Drive for the Society for the Propagation of the Faith (SPOF). In becoming a member, you make a special commitment to the Church's mission "to all peoples and nations" by pledging daily prayer and financial help to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. Prayer, sacrifice and charity are concrete ways that offer to live a missionary and universal faith. Out of your generosity, the SPOF continues to open the hearts of believers to engage in the vastness of the missionary horizon through spiritual and material support for the proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

During the Membership Drive, let us pray for missionaries everywhere, especially who are sharing Christ's Gospel message around the globe. The Vatican's Society for the Propagation of the Faith is the main source of support for

the mission dioceses around the world. I am most grateful for your continuing generosity and support for this most important task of the Church. In more than 1,150 mission dioceses worldwide, priests, religious brothers and sisters, and lay catechists rely on the prayers and financial assistance of the members of the Propagation of the Faith.

I invite to you join in prayer and personal sacrifice made to God through the Society for the Propagation of the Faith so that what the Lord accomplished in many missionaries before us, may continue in the Church today.

Grateful for your solidarity with missionaries around the world and your renewed fervor for the Gospel, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Most Reverend Earl K. Fernandes
Bishop of Columbus

sions of the Son and the Holy Spirit as decreed by the Father, "the fountain of love," who desires the salvation of the whole human race (Ad Gentes 2-3). "Missions" is the term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel, sent out by the Church and going forth into the whole world, carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ.

St. Paul often speaks in his letters how the young churches of his time helped each other with their financial needs.

A friend in New England wrote to the Propagation of the Faith, saying, "I enclose \$500 for the missions. I wish it could be more, but I am living on a fixed income, which is not large. I try to stretch it and live economically. I have lived alone for more than 20 years ... do my own work and get my own meals with no help. I'm past 90 now. My husband and all my brothers and sisters are gone and I'm still here. Left to pray for them. Thank God for the privilege."

Another co-missionary from California said, "I'm giving this gift outright to God for the work in the Missions. There is so little I can do otherwise on account of age and poor eyesight. I'm just giving back to

God what he has given to me. This is to help spread his Gospel so that others can share in our beautiful faith."

Missionaries need assistance to carry out the needs of the poor people. A financial contribution could make a significant difference.

As Jesus told us, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations ... Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:18-20). This mandate was meant for each one of us because by Baptism we became missionaries. The faithful are privileged to continue the mission of Jesus through prayer, financial support and concern for the poor to reach out those who do not know Christ.

Many have followed the custom of enrolling themselves or their loved ones, living or deceased, as members of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. By doing so, they give an ongoing gift to members and the missions. It continues to open the hearts of believers to engage in the vastness of the missionary horizon through spiritual and material support for the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Some people give to the missions by going to mission places and some are going to missions by giving; without both, there are no missions.

The Church established by Christ, the Catholic Church, is intended for all nations and peoples. The Church is to unite all mankind into one mighty family under the Fatherhood of God, which is the goal of the missionary apostolate of the Catholic Church. The consoling part is the Church never turns from the basic task entrusted to her, that of proclaiming the Gospel to all nations.

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Different kinds of baptism?

St. Paul reminded the Ephesians that there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:5), calling them to unity. Today, Christians do not appear completely united on this point, since some distinguish between “water baptism” and “Spirit baptism.”

The distinction goes back to the teaching of the Anglican clergyman John Wesley (1703-1791), who became the founder of Methodism.

Wesley taught that baptism was a sacrament, an outward sign of an inward grace, instituted by Christ, including a washing with water as “a sign and seal of regeneration by his Spirit.” At the same time, Wesley taught that an adult could receive baptism without being truly born again, and that infant baptism did not complete one’s rebirth. “A man may possibly be ‘born of water’ and yet not be ‘born of the Spirit.’ There may sometimes be the outward sign, where there is not the inward grace.” Spirit baptism, he taught, led to “entire sanctification” that empowered the Christian to witness, serve, and live a holy life. Baptism was called the “first grace” and entire sanctification was called the “second grace.”

The rise of Pentecostalism in North America led to a further development and changing of these ideas.

Charles Fox Parham (1873-1929), originally a lay preacher in the Methodist Church, began a new movement called Holiness Pentecostalism in Kansas. Parting company with Methodism, Parham taught that there was a “third work of grace” called “baptism in the Holy Ghost” that empowered the Christian for service. He determined that speaking in tongues was evidence that one



A SHEPHERD’S CARE

Father Thomas Buffer

Father Thomas Buffer is the pastor at Columbus St. Cecilia Church.

had received that gift and taught this as early as 1891.

While Wesley had emphasized holiness, Parham shifted the focus to the ability to serve in power, including healing the sick. One of his students, William Seymour (1870-1922), helped spread the teaching about speaking in tongues as evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit at a church he led in Los Angeles; there the famous Azusa Street Revival began in 1906.

When the charismatic movement moved into mainstream Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church in the 1960s, the Pentecostal teaching on “baptism in the Holy Spirit” came with it.

Today, we see some Catholics uncritically embracing Pentecostal doctrines to such a degree that they have accepted and are teaching a distinction between different kinds of baptism, a distinction that is not

part of authentic Catholic understanding. For example, Encounter Ministries distinguishes “water baptism” and “spirit baptism.” Like Parham, they emphasize power over holiness, teaching that the effects of baptism in the Holy Spirit include “empowerment to do the works of Jesus” and “supernatural ministry.”

Authentic Catholic doctrine, as well as the way it is expressed in sacramental celebrations, does not recognize a distinction between “water baptism” and “Spirit baptism.” In the Catholic ritual for the baptism of infants, the priest or deacon mentions baptism “by water and the Holy Spirit” five times, referencing the words of Jesus to Nicodemus: “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit (John 3:5).”

The teaching of recent popes also affirms the unity of “water baptism” and “spirit baptism.”

In 1998, Pope St. John Paul II taught that the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan River “prefigured the gift of the Holy Spirit, which would be imparted to Christians in baptism.” Ten years later, Pope Benedict XVI, speaking on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, said, “Christ’s entire mission is summed up in this: to baptize us in the Holy Spirit, to free us from the slavery of death and ‘to open heaven to us’...” When Pope Benedict said this, was he speaking of a “baptism in the Holy Spirit” distinct from “water baptism?” No. We know this because he went on to say: “This is what happened for the 13 children to whom I administered the Sacrament of Baptism this morning in the Sistine Chapel.”

In other words, whenever someone receives the Sacrament of Baptism, he or she is baptized in the Holy Spirit. The Sacrament of Confirmation confirms and strengthens baptismal grace, reinvigorating the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the baptized.

Of course, those baptized as infants must choose to live out their baptism. Some never have the chance, because their parents and godparents do not follow through with their commitment and fail to give them a sound Catholic upbringing. Others, whether baptized as infants or as adults, fall away from the life of grace through indifference, or spiritual laziness, or by surrendering to serious sin. While we must recognize and respond to these obvious facts, we can do that without distorting or discarding the authentic Catholic doctrine of the sacraments.

Speaking to the recently baptized in July 2025, Pope Leo XIV offered advice that all the baptized should heed:

“Baptism introduces us into communion with Christ and gives us life. It commits us to renounce a culture of death that is very present in our society. This culture of death manifests itself today in indifference, contempt for others, drugs, the search for an easy life, sexuality that becomes entertainment and the objectification of the human person, injustice, etc.

“Baptism makes us witnesses of Christ. In the rite of Baptism ... we receive a candle lit from the Paschal candle. It is the light of Christ who died and rose again that we commit ourselves to keeping lit by nourishing it through listening to the Word of God and assiduous communion with Jesus in the Eucharist.”

Spiritual warfare: battle for the soul

By Chris Crum

Call it spiritual warfare ... or don’t. Call it the battle for your soul. Call it the fight to become who you’re meant to be. Either way, we know the battle, because we’ve felt it. It’s the ordinary temptation of “I’ll pray tomorrow,” “just one more time,” “it doesn’t matter.” And while we keep making little deals with comfort, we slowly become men stagnated by our mood and appetite and dulled by complacency.

It’s the quiet neglect of confession, the slow abandonment of prayer, and the numbing scroll that turns us into spectators of our own souls, until sin starts to feel normal and grace starts to feel optional. It’s a thousand tiny surrenders. And while we keep trading conviction for convenience, the enemy keeps running the same three plays -- temptation, discouragement, division -- until we realize we didn’t lose our souls in one dramatic fall ... we gave them away in installments.

The enemy doesn’t need our worship. He just needs us comfortable, distracted and domesticated, patient enough to function but not brave enough to change, religious enough to blend in but not courageous enough to lead.

We all say we want holiness. We ask God for it. But if we’re handed “holiness” like a trophy we didn’t train for, what happens? We don’t know how to carry it. We can’t comprehend it, appreciate it or live it. Gifts we didn’t grow into can feel less like blessings and more like burdens. God doesn’t make saints by flipping a switch. He makes us holy by shaping us into the kind of men who show up. Holiness grows the way strength grows under steady, repeated load. We don’t get real self-esteem from having a six-pack, we get it from being the kind of man who goes to the gym every day. And here’s the point: that’s the spiritual life.

This life isn’t about collecting spiritual medals. It’s an epic battle for souls, and the point isn’t applause at the end. It’s who we become in the fight. Worldly “stuff” can’t love us back. It can’t stand next to us when temptation hits, when suffering arrives, when our family needs us steady. But Christ can. He is not a distant general. He is with us. He fights beside us and within us. And the truth every soldier knows: Men aren’t heroic for ribbons. They fight for the brother on the left and the brother on the right. In spiritual warfare, we don’t become holy alone.

But here’s the hard truth: We don’t get to opt out. We can enter the battle or we can drift into it as bystanders, sitting on the sidelines critiquing the men who fight, wishing we had their courage, while refusing to see the nights they wrestled with temptation.

The confessions that broke their pride, the mountains they climbed while we quietly chose the easier road. In that sense, our spiritual life is self-assignment. We decide whether to pick up the armor of God or keep our hands in our pockets. Not because grace is optional, but because non-action is still an action. Drifting is still a direction. We will either be formed on purpose or formed by default, by appetite, environment, fatigue, the phone, the mood of the day.

So, the question is not whether a battle exists. The question is simple: Who is taking ground in our life right now, Christ, or whatever keeps pulling us away from Him?

God is offering us holiness, but it comes shaped like responsibility. It’s a daily decision to step onto the field and fight for our own souls, for our families, for our brothers. If we don’t choose the fight, the enemy is already prowling. Because the war is already in our house, already in our habits, already at our door. And the devil’s temptations won’t vanish because we got serious. If anything, we start noticing the fight more clearly. But by grace we also

become stronger at withstanding it. The battles don’t end; we change. We become more disciplined, more resilient, more free. And as we grow closer to Christ, we’re often entrusted with harder fights, not because God is cruel but because in His providence He is forming us and supplying the grace to carry real responsibility. The weight doesn’t get lighter; our backs get stronger.

We were not baptized to be decent guys with religious opinions. We were baptized to be saints, soldiers of Christ who can stand in the breach. And God will not hand us “trust-fund holiness” that leaves us soft and untrained. He loves us too much for that. God is forging us like a blacksmith forges steel: heat, pressure, repetition, endurance. And the forge often looks like our real life: mortgage, family, aging parents, inbox, bills, temptations; the ordinary battlefield where we learn to become men who can carry grace.

This is where we get it wrong: We think we’ll win by willpower alone. We won’t. We win by training with grace. A rusty sword won’t cut when we need it; a soul that hasn’t been to confession in years is fighting with broken armor. But thanks be to God, we can always return to the fountains of grace and be made battle-ready again. Confession is not a shame booth; it’s a field hospital. The Eucharist is not a symbol; it’s wartime food. The Rosary is not for “some guys;” it’s a weapon that keeps our hands busy with prayer when our minds want to run. And brotherhood isn’t optional; isolation is where the enemy does his best work.

Christ the King already won the war. We are not fighting for victory: we’re fighting from His victory. When we renounce sin and put on the armor of God, we’re claiming what Jesus already won. That’s why the enemy trembles when a man kneels, when a family prays the Rosary, when we receive the Eucharist with reverence.

So what do we do today, this week? Don’t

make peace with things we should resist. When the temptation to numb out hits, we don’t negotiate. We move. We put the phone down, change the room and say out loud, “Jesus, I trust in You.”

When discouragement hits, we don’t spiral. We return. We schedule confession, we get back to Mass, and we pray the Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel. We refuse the lie that “nothing will change.”

And when division creeps in, we don’t isolate, we don’t go silent. We choose communion. We text one brother, name the battle plainly, and ask for prayer. We counter the enemy’s playbook like men who know we are at war.

Then we step back into His forge. We let Him shape us, strengthen us, heal us, feed us and call us. We let the war make us real. Because this life is not about what we accomplish. It’s about who we become. God is forming us into the men we were made to be great men, great saints, men of great holiness. Not “trust-fund holiness” but crafted holiness: forged through repetition, resilience, fidelity, hope and communion.

So step onto the field. Strap on the armor. Take your place on the line. Because we fight for our souls, our families, our parishes and our brothers. The weight will not get lighter. But by God’s grace, our backs will get stronger.

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle.

Our Lady, Queen of Victory, pray for us. Jesus Christ, King of Mercy, make us men who fight and do not flee.

Vivat Jesus.

Chris Crum is state faith director for the Knights of Columbus and writes Strengthening Catholic Men in Faith, Brotherhood, and Service. He chairs the board of St. John’s Hermitage, renewing clergy for faithful ministry.

Is Mass and Adoration livestreamed the same as in person?

Dear Father,

I've been watching Mass on my computer screen for several years. But suddenly my pastor decided to stop livestreaming the Mass and adoration at my parish. Now I have to look elsewhere for Masses online, but there are fewer of them. Has there been some order from the Vatican about this?

-Claire

Dear Claire,

The Vatican regularly broadcasts the Holy Father's Masses. This is a unique situation, given that the pope is the pastor of the whole world. Most people have access to his Masses and preaching only through internet livestreaming and recordings.

Pope John Paul II founded the Vatican Television Center in 1983 in order to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth. He also wanted people to have access to "the pastoral ministry of the Supreme Pontiff and the activities of the Apostolic See," according to the Communication Office of the Vatican.

Then, in 2015, Pope Francis broadened the Vatican communications network, recognizing the complexity of multimedia information. Again, the pope's aim was to "better respond to the needs of the mission of the Church" (June 27, 2015 *Motu proprio*).

We see that the priority for broadcasting the Mass is the proclamation of the Gospel. It is never to be used for the aggrandizement of the bishop or priest, making himself a kind of movie star or seeking to rack up viewer hits.

With this filter of the priority of the

Gospel in mind, we can evaluate the usefulness of liturgical livestreaming. Papal liturgies have the highest need for broadcast for apparent reasons. It is proper that everyone in the world sees and hears the universal pastor, preaching Christ and leading all in prayer.

Additionally, countrywide and statewide events, such as the Eucharistic Revival and Congresses, are fittingly broadcast, especially since travel and attendance at such events are difficult.

During the COVID lockdown, livestreaming was often the only access that many people had to a distant "participation" in the Mass. Without the benefit of in-person attendance at Mass, people were encouraged to make a spiritual communion. A spiritual communion is a prayer that expresses the desire to receive communion when unable to receive actual communion at Mass.

Another use of livestreaming is for those who are homebound by sickness or some other disability. This includes those who are in nursing homes and hospitals. For the sick and disabled, watching Mass on TV or a digital screen can be both a comfort and a help to prayer.

Nevertheless, we are not merely spiritual beings. We have bodies, too. That's why the Son of God became man. He did not redeem us from sin by willing our redemption remotely from heaven. His Incarnation is continued through the sacraments he instituted, especially the Eucharist.

Just as genuine human relationships require a physical presence, so with Christ, who insists on being present to



SACRAMENTS 101

Father Paul Jerome Keller, OP, S.T.D.

Father Paul Jerome Keller, O.P., S.T.D., director of the diocese's Office of Divine Worship, is a priest of the Dominican Province of St. Joseph. His doctorate is from Rome in sacramental theology. He currently assists at Columbus St. Patrick Church.

us physically in the Eucharist through transubstantiation. He gives himself to us and asks that we give ourselves to him through Holy Communion.

A livestreamed Mass can never substitute our presence at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. At Mass, we receive untold graces as we offer our due worship to God. Our physical presence enables greater union with God, even amid distractions.

A livestreamed Mass may be the occasion for prayer, but it does not suffice for the reality any more than an email exchange between two lovers who rightly insist on each other's presence. Even a Zoom video can never replace real presence.

Some people mistakenly think that watching Mass on a screen, whether

livestreamed or recorded, makes up for going to church. We are obliged to worship God at Mass. A Mass on a screen does not fulfill divine worship any more than a postcard makes up for being on a luxury vacation. Someone who is truly impeded from going to church, say on account of illness or extreme weather and the like, cannot be obligated to attend Mass. Therefore, there is no obligation to view the Mass on a screen.

The same is true of Eucharistic Adoration. A livestreamed image of the Eucharist exposed in a monstrance is just that: a distant image. It's telling that we would find it silly (and certainly idolatrous) to genuflect to the image of the Eucharistic Host on the screen. The image may offer a distant focal point for prayer, but it cannot replace the reality of Christ's presence.

Finally, technology allows people who are otherwise unable to attend in person to witness special religious events. Relatives who live on another continent, for instance, can see a family wedding, ordination or a funeral. These are matters of convenience, not necessity.

The bottom line to judge the usefulness of video presentations of sacred events is to make sure that we are doing all in our power to give our whole selves to God, making robust efforts to be present to him who has traveled from heaven to live among us and give himself to us. *Questions about the sacraments should be sent to sacraments101@columbuscatholic.org.*

Why the birth of Christ matters



CALLED TO TEACH, NOT JUDGE

Dr. Marlon De La Torre

Dr. Marlon De La Torre serves as the senior director for the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis in the Diocese of Columbus. His professional catechetical background spans more than 30 years.

moral state. The fact that the Son of God offered himself as the Lamb of God who came to take the sins of the world should matter to you and me.

Why should the birth of Christ matter to you and me? Because it is the distinctive sign and reality of our Catholic faith. It reveals both the mercy and love God has for us through His Son, Jesus Christ, who literally came to die for our sins. The author of the letter to the Hebrews reiterates this point, where he proclaims:

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have

taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,' as it is written of me in the roll of the book." (Heb 10:5-7)

Again, to understand the why behind the birth of Christ, it is essential to address the truth behind this act of love, as to how you and I are no longer under the control of sin and death. The significance of the Nativity of our Lord is that it allows us to see who God truly is: a loving Father whose desire is for us to be with Him for all eternity in heaven. The human drama that surrounds the birth of Christ, from Herod's maniacal attempt to kill the Christ-child even at the cost of so many Holy Innocents, to the flight of Joseph and Mary to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath are overshadowed by the joy of Jesus' birth.

Born under the gift of poverty and humility, the birth of Christ represents how we should embrace His birth with humility and a poverty of the spirit. It also means that we are called to docility to the will of God, willing to serve with grace and charity in the proclamation of Christ as Lord, Savior, and King. We see the same response from the Shepherds who encountered the Angel sent by God and then received a salvific proclamation about the Son of God.

And in that region, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to

all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased." When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (Lk 2:8-20)

Upon journeying to Bethlehem and encountering Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus, they were overwhelmed with joy and left praising and glorifying God. The birth of Christ matters because it reveals God's love for man through His Son, Jesus Christ, and that we are no longer slaves to sin. May the joy of the shepherds resonate in our hearts, compelling us receive the birth of Christ with joy, humility, and a docility of heart to Him.

Merry Christmas!

There is a particular verse in the second letter of St. Peter where he reminds us that the salvific message of Christ fulfilled through his death and resurrection has granted us the opportunity to escape the corruption of the world, fueled by misplaced human passions, by becoming partakers of the divine nature. (2 Pet 1:4) The significance of this last statement underscores an important point about the birth of Christ: Jesus came so we could be in full communion with the Father through Him. The Catechism expands on this important reality as follows:

For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God. "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God."80 "The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods. (CCC 460)

The significance of becoming a partaker in the divine nature of Christ means that our participation in Christ's passion requires us to die to sin and seek Jesus' gift of grace through the sacramental life, beginning with baptism. In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul reiterates the importance of the coming of Christ to redeem us from the law of man and to be adopted as sons of God. (Gal 4:3-6) The entire Incarnational discourse that is the birth of Christ reveals the depths of God's love for us that he would offer His only-begotten Son as a ransom for our pitiable

What are you waiting for?

We have all heard the challenging phrase, “What are you waiting for, Christmas?” This simple phrase is meant to motivate one to action.

The origin of the phrase is unknown, and its intent could be understood in many ways. A response could be, “OK, let’s go.” Perhaps, “pack your patience” as a proportional response in jest. I like to think of it as a reminder that there is work to be done, and if we are waiting for the perfect moment then we may not ever get going. As we soon end the celebration of the Christmas season, we might also think about what’s next on our journey as disciples.

Christmas gift!

My grandmother on my father’s side of the family was known for her wit and humor. Grandma Henderson was always the first to crack a joke and had a full vocabulary of words that were aligned with Southern Appalachian culture. I would often ask for a translation when a word or phrase did not register. One such statement that occurred every time we would open her front door for a visit was “Christmas gift!” She was genuinely glad to see us, but what was the meaning of



SERVING AS NEIGHBORS

Kelley Henderson

Kelley Henderson is a Third Order Carmelite who serves as President and Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Social Services. He is a member of Columbus St. Joseph Cathedral and serves in volunteer leadership roles with Catholic Charities USA, Inter-Provincial Lay Carmelite Commission, and Mission and Culture Committee at Mount Carmel Health System.

“Christmas gift,” especially in the middle of July. It was not until after she was gone that I looked it up. It is a southern phrase that simply reflects the joy of something, specifically something or someone that

you “claim” as a gift on Christmas morning. Although this phrase obviously originated on a holy occasion, my grandmother adopted it as an affirmation of all whom she held dear year-round.

What are we waiting for?

Our Christmas celebration this year included a close of the Jubilee Year of Hope. We were challenged to be pilgrims of hope, and to find new purpose on our journey of discipleship. I would like to think that I grew in some profound way, but the way of the pilgrim is often subtle. Our daily choices build upon each moment until our path becomes clear. We are called to “go” to “serve” to “love.” These are all words of action and move us forward with a living faith.

Are we still waiting? Are we still waiting for that perfect Christmas when our path becomes crystal clear? Jesus only asked his disciples to “follow me,” and the rest would come later with faith. I think the question posed is appropriate given the challenges facing our world today. Our faith, and might I be so bold to say, our “faith in action,” is what disciples are called to.

Where can you demonstrate your faith

in action? For my elderly grandmother, it was in sharing joy to all she loved every time she encountered them. For you, it might be serving a neighbor with a gift of your time, talents or treasure.

A gift of self

For our God, it began again through a gift of self, 2025 years ago. God was and is, always, already there. Yet, God chose to begin again with a gift that would be an example of what we should do as well. A gift of time is a gift of self, and that might be a good place to start.

What are you waiting for? Pick up the phone and call a loved one, volunteer at your parish or serve at an organization like your Catholic Social Services. We need your help now more than ever before, and what better way to start the new year than in the choice to follow as a re-motivated pilgrim of hope.

You can begin again, or for the first time; it matters all the same. As my grandma would remind us, the “Christmas gift” does not just happen once a year but can be anytime you choose to express your faith in action.

Learn more about getting involved with Catholic Social Services at www.serveasneighbors.org

Stovetop spirituality: the kitchen as chapel

The older I get, the more I crave a practical spirituality — one tied to dirty dishes not pristine libraries, one that recognizes hungry bellies along with hungry hearts.

Some days, talking theology feels beside the point. We are living it as we match

mittens and pack snacks. We pray as we start the car, and zoom! Off we go, bringing the light of Christ to our meetings and tournaments.

Last year, I interviewed Mark Berchem, founder of NET Ministries, the Catholic

evangelization center he launched 44 years ago. Upon his retirement, I asked about his winning approach to the apostolate.

“None of us had any theological training,” he told me. “All we had was our real-life experience: ‘This is what God has done in my life. I know God is real. He wants to be real in your life too!’”

Over time, Mark came to embrace that. “Somebody once told me: ‘If it’s not practical, it’s probably not spiritual,’” he said. “The integration of faith and life is what happens at NET.”

That statement stuck with me. God wants to meet us in the here and now, the knotted shoelaces and jammed zippers, the dash to the gas station, the smile from the cashier. He loves us through the minutiae of daily life.

That’s why, for me, I hesitate to draw the line between cookbook and prayerbook. When I’m holding a collection of tried-and-true recipes, it can feel like much more.

This year, my mother-in-law gave us a treasure: a beloved parish cookbook. Titled “Our Favorite Recipes,” it was created by members of St. Patrick’s Church in Ryan, Iowa — a tiny town named after a priest, Father Patrick Ryan. Its palette is cream and cinnamon: yellowed pages, brown spiral binding, a sepia-toned photograph of the church.

It begins with The Kitchen Prayer: “Lord of all pots and pans and things, since I’ve not time to be a saint by doing lovely things or watching late with Thee or dreaming in the dawn light or storming Heaven’s gates, make me a saint by getting meals and washing up the plates.”

The prayer concludes: “Warm all the kitchen with Thy love and light it with Thy peace. Forgive me all my worrying and make my grumbling cease. Thou who didst love to give men food, in room and by the sea, accept this service that I do, I do it unto Thee.”

The pickles and jams and rolls follow, with cookies outnumbering casseroles by a ratio of 10 to 1 and dozens of pies rounding out the desserts. It was a fundraiser for their beloved house of worship, completed



TWENTY SOMETHING

Christina Capecechi

Christina Capecechi is a freelance writer from Grey Cloud Island, Minn.

through late nights and phone calls, wrapped in prayer and dusted with flour. The practical in the spiritual. Follow these steps, feed these people, offer it up.

Emily Stimpson Chapman’s new cookbook does the same. “Around the Catholic Table” from Emmaus Road Publishing combines heartfelt essays with delicious recipes, wrapping stories around each one: a beloved rigatoni, a hearty vegetable beef soup, a carrot and ginger soup that can brighten “the grayest February days.”

The cookbook is peppered with Emily’s beliefs both as a Catholic and a cook. “I am a firm believer that if you top a fruit crisp with yogurt instead of ice cream, it is a breakfast food, not a dessert,” writes the 50-year-old mom of three from Steubenville, Ohio.

In her final essay, Emily explores the deeper meaning of cooking for her family. “I believe that when they eat what I’ve made, my mind, my heart, my strength, my energy, my creativity and my tenacity in some mysterious way become theirs too,” she writes. “In the kitchen, I have found intimacy with Christ, who gives his life to us in the form of food.”

Practical and spiritual. Sustenance for a long Tuesday — and a foretaste of heaven.

HOLY HOUR FOR VOCATIONS

JOIN US EACH 1ST THURSDAY TO PRAY FOR AN INCREASE IN PRIESTLY VOCATIONS

JANUARY 1ST - ST. CATHARINE, BEXLEY

10:00 AM MASS

11:00 AM HOLY HOUR

FEBRUARY 5TH - ST. PETER, COLUMBUS

5:30 PM MASS

6:00 PM HOLY HOUR AND CONFESSIONS

MARCH 5TH - SETON PARISH, PICKERINGTON

8:30AM MASS

9:00 AM HOLY HOUR

APRIL 2ND - HOLY THURSDAY

MAY 7TH - ST. PAUL, WESTERVILLE

5:00 PM – HOLY HOUR

6:15 PM MASS

JUNE 4TH - TBD

JULY 2ND - TBD

Let's give one another the gift of patience

As this new year unfolds, I've been thinking about the virtue of patience and the vice of impatience a lot. What brought this to the forefront of my thoughts was the passage from St. James during the Third Sunday of Advent last month.

"Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another, that you may not be judged. (Jm 5:7-9)."

When my pastor, Msgr. Stephan Moloney, preached that Sunday last month, he said, "Waiting is difficult for us modern Americans. The slightest frustration of our plans can put us in a rage. Unexpected and unforeseen delays are like torture for us. By far, the most often-confessed sin I hear from adults is impatience. It is a virtual epidemic (Dec. 14, 2025)."

As I considered this through the holidays and into the New Year's Day, I recalled some specific examples of people being impatient – the number of times I've seen people running red lights deliberately, driving dangerously fast and putting others in jeopardy by almost hitting them. Rudeness in various places came to mind also. And I mean really rude people. Those recollections led me to comment to myself, "Wow, that's really gloomy."

We all have our lists of sad stories like those – things we've all seen, things we've all been on the receiving end of,



THE CHANCELLOR'S ARCHIVE Deacon Tom Berg Jr.

Deacon Tom Berg Jr. has served the Diocese of Columbus as its Chancellor since 2012 and as a deacon at Columbus St. Andrew Church. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees in journalism and a master's degree in Catholic pastoral studies.

and on and on. So, I think I'll skip further ruminations on the negative stories and focus on what we can do to help.

During that homily, Msgr. Moloney also cautioned against dwelling too much on the negative and wallowing in impatience: "If we find ordinary patience so difficult, how will we endure the storms of life and the things that shake our faith as we await the coming of the kingdom?"

St. Paul in his letter to the Romans summarized Jesus' great commandment: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:10)."

Unhealthy impatience and its results are exactly what Jesus' commandment is getting at. Endangering others and not

being willing to take a little pause – giving in to rage over little things – and so many other things like those are the complete opposite of the way Jesus tells us to care for others, which is loving them like we love ourselves.

When we see those incidents of selfish impatience, we see examples of people unwilling to love others as they love themselves. There is a self-absorption at work that has nothing to do with loving others whom we encounter. In each of those kind of situations, we see that if those angry people had the gift of even a little patience, there would have been much more peace and harmony rather than negative feelings by those who could not calm themselves and negative feelings by those on the receiving ends of those injurious incidents, insults, and those whose safety are endangered on the streets and highways.

In 2018, during one of his homilies, Pope Francis said that impatience ignores proper limits. He urged that congregation that day to understand that patience means bearing our difficulties – bearing our crosses – and not forcing our difficulties onto others (Daily Mass, Casa Santa Marta, Feb. 12, 2018).

That means if I'm frustrated because of slow traffic, I'm not to take it out on others. If I'm in a hurry, I'm not to ignore safety rules. If something is wrong with what I ordered, I should ask for the error to be corrected pleasantly and with a smile. I have the right to expect an error to be corrected, but I don't have the right to be uncharitable or even hateful about it.

In that same homily, Pope Francis said, "There are many limits in life, but

impatience doesn't want them, it ignores them because it doesn't know how to dialogue with limits. There is some kind of fantasy of omnipotence ..."

Those words from the Holy Father remind us that patience means we need to recognize and accept that nothing is perfect and we are going to run into difficulties and delays. So, let's commit ourselves to dealing with those frustrations with kindness and charity instead.

Jesus gives us another way by telling us that where two are more are gathered in His name, He is there with them. Think about that (Mt 18:15-20).

I'd like us to go forth into this new year with this in mind: Let's try to make our everyday encounters with others into gatherings in Jesus' name, encounters that invite Jesus to be among us so that our interactions with others are holy.

Let's make patience the key to getting all of our encounters with others started the right way – the way of Jesus Christ. Let's all start giving others the gift of acting with patience. Let's also relax, take it easy, slow down a bit. Let's make it easier to let Jesus into our hearts and minds – Him in us and us in Him. God is infinitely patient with us, especially when we sin and do wrong. Let's return that favor to the Lord.

One of my prayers in this new year is that our acts of patience will be those little flames of hope that ignite the bright lights of charity and love, shining the path for others away from the seductions of evil and toward our infinitely loving and patient Lord.

Semiquincentennial prep with HBO

Having recently lamented in this space that book reading is on life support in these United States, I find myself in the awkward position of recommending a made-for-television series as good preparation for the nation's 250th birthday, which will soon be upon us. In fact, though, if you're going to do just one thing over the next six months to recollect what a marvel the birth of this country was — not to mention its survival into adolescence — you can't do better than watching, or rewatching, the HBO miniseries, "John Adams," based on David McCullough's eponymous (and wonderful) book.

Directed by Tom Hooper, who won an Academy Award for "The King's Speech,"

"John Adams" has to rank with the best television series ever made.

The visuals are stunning, from the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary Boston through the foppish Paris of Louis XVI to the nascent, muddy Washington, D.C., and, at the end, Quincy, Massachusetts, and Monticello, Virginia, as Adams and Thomas Jefferson die on the same day: the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

The acting is superb. Paul Giamatti's Adams captures the complex personality of one of the greatest, if typically least regarded, of the Founders: a farmer, lawyer, diplomat and politician, irascible at one moment, lovable in the next, always honest, sometimes too unyieldingly so. Laura Linney is brilliant as Abigail Adams, her husband's "dearest friend," and a woman of high intelligence and valor. In Stephen Dillane's Jefferson, we meet the principal author of the Declaration in his various and sometimes contradictory personae as Virginia aristocrat, searching intellectual,



THE CATHOLIC DIFFERENCE George Weigel

George Weigel is the Distinguished Senior Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C. George Weigel's column 'The Catholic Difference' is syndicated by the Denver Catholic, the official publication of the Archdiocese of Denver.

cagey politician and irresponsibly abstract theorizer about the French Revolution. The Adams-Jefferson relationship is in many ways the fulcrum of the series, as the two men grow into friendship, achieve a close collaboration, become bitter political enemies, and are finally reconciled through a series of letters in which each tries to explain himself to the other.

Then there are the magnificent set-piece scenes. The tension is palpable as the Second Continental Congress takes its final vote on the resolution declaring that "these colonies are, and of a right ought to be, free and independent states," each delegate knowing that he risks being hanged for treason. Then there is John Adams' initially fraught, but ultimately triumphant, meeting with King George III as the newly independent United States' first diplomatic

representative to the old mother country, the two men finding within themselves the nobility to recognize the decency in the other. And any patriot will feel an urge to stand and salute as George Washington takes the oath of office as president.

The high drama of June-July 1776, movingly staged by director Hooper and intensified by Rob Lane and Joseph Vitarelli's marvelous score, raises an old question with contemporary relevance: How could so diverse a group of men, divided by regional prejudices, religious sectarianism, social conventions and personal histories agree on so momentous and dangerous a step as declaring their independence from what was then, and would long remain, the world's greatest empire? Perhaps it was because, amid their many differences, they shared the essential rudiments of a common moral culture.

They had all read the King James Bible, and whatever their divergent (and in certain instances, rather bizarre) theological views, they believed that the hand of Providence somehow guided history, and that the task of upright men was to follow that guidance, whatever the cost.

Many of them shared a common legal sensibility, having been formed intellectually by Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. Shakespeare had forged for them a common, elegant tongue, whose rhythms could be

deployed to great persuasive effect. And, whether rich or poor, they understood how gentlemen behave, and they refused to act the cad. As we watch those men watching each other while the vote for independence is taken, we're reminded that this country at its founding shared a baseline moral code that proved sufficient to bind it together and sustain it through a difficult war for independence — and beyond.

And if we ask ourselves why there is no one of the stature of the least of those Founders in high public office today, "John Adams" suggests an answer: because our public moral culture has been eroded by assertive individualism and crass utilitarianism to the point where the mortar capable of binding together a republic that is *e pluribus unum* — one from many — has largely dissolved, leaving vulgarity to reign in its place.

Catholicism's public task in this semiquincentennial year is to draw the nation's attention to that, and to teach, with clarity and compassion, the timeless truths that were declared self-evident, and proved liberating, 250 years ago.

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