

# The CATHOLIC TIMES

THE DIOCESE OF COLUMBUS' INFORMATION SOURCE

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# The CATHOLIC TIMES

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Bishop Earl Fernandes commended legislators for an Interim Final Rule affecting priests and religious working in the U.S. who hold R-1 visas. The change means they will no longer need to return to their country of origin for an entire year but instead need to return for only one week if their R-1 visa expires, Page 2.



### Scholarships help SEEK attendees

The diocese gifted scholarships to enable young people from ethnic communities to attend the SEEK26 conference earlier this month who otherwise would not have had the financial means to experience the five-day event, Page 2



## Catholic Schools Week

There's an abundance of good school news to report in the diocese. It includes scholarship funding, enrollment gains, a new school and more as the first month of 2026 comes to a close with the celebration of Catholic Schools Week, Pages 7-22

# Bishop Fernandes expresses gratitude for rule change on visas

Bishop Earl Fernandes issued the following statement on Thursday, Jan. 15:

My brothers and sisters in Christ, I want to take a moment to thank the faithful of the Diocese of Columbus for their support of the foreign-born priests and religious who labor in the Diocese. We have learned that an Interim Final Rule affecting priests and religious who hold R-1 visas was issued. This rule change means that they will no longer need to return to their country of origin for an entire year but instead will need to return for only one week if the R-1 visa expires.

We calculated that 21 priests and 13 sisters, who hold R-1 visas and are working in the Diocese, would have been affected, causing a disruption to the life of the Diocese. In the past year, one priest and three

religious were forced to leave the Diocese. This rule change provides some much-needed relief! We take comfort in knowing that sacramental and pastoral care will not be disrupted in our parishes, schools, hospitals, and prison ministries.

At the same time, I encourage all of the faithful to press for a permanent legislative fix and to support the Religious Workforce Protection Act. I want to thank Congressman Mike Carey, who represents the greater Columbus metro area, for his support and action within the House of Representatives. I appreciate his willingness to meet with me and his help in introducing this legislation in the House. He listened attentively to our concerns and showed initiative in seeking a constructive solution.

I also want to thank Congressman Jim Jordan for his willingness to hear the con-

cerns that surround this important legislation and how it would impact the Catholic faith community.

I was able to personally speak to Senator Bernie Moreno about the vital importance of this issue and of the legislation for the faithful across not only Ohio but our country, allowing our priests and religious to continue to serve the people of God through their ministries. Senator Moreno and I exchanged several calls and messages, and he intervened personally to work for the rule change that was issued yesterday.

I am deeply grateful for the commitment these representatives and others have made and continue to make so that our communities may continue to thrive with the assistance of missionary priests and religious.

The impact of our international priests and religious across the United States is pivotal in helping us build a civilization of love, assisting in the growth of the virtues of solidarity and fraternity, and providing the sacramental and pastoral needs of our people, an increasingly diverse group from around the world.

I urge you to continue to push for the passage of the Religious Workforce Protection Act with your representatives and ask for your continued prayers for all clergy and religious throughout our diocese and around the world, while offering prayers of gratitude for our civic leaders and for our priests and religious who continue to serve the members of our community.

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

## Ethnic communities benefit from diocesan scholarships for SEEK

By Hannah Heil  
Catholic Times Reporter

SEEK26, a conference hosted by FOCUS at the beginning of the new year, left an impact extending beyond its closing Mass on Monday, Jan. 5 in Columbus.

The annual conference is geared toward college students, adults, parish leaders, clergy and missionaries. This year's conference attracted about 26,000 attendees, more than 16,000 of whom attended in Columbus and the rest at satellite locations in Denver and Fort Worth, Texas.

The Diocese of Columbus, which served as the primary host of the conference held at the Greater Columbus Convention Center, gifted scholarships to young adults without financial means to attend.

The diocesan Office of Hispanic Ministry extended an invitation to Spanish-speaking parishes with young adult groups in the diocese. The office gifted 51 scholarships to Hispanic young adults, primarily between ages 18 and 30, including college students and individuals working full time, to attend SEEK26.

"When they heard from their parish office that we had this opportunity, they jumped on it, no hesitation. Within like, two days, we filled out all those spots that we had available," said Lisset Mendoza, director for the Office of Hispanic Ministry.

The young adults represented seven parishes: Columbus Christ the King; St. Thomas the Apostle; St. Agnes; St. James the Less; St. Stephen the Martyr; Our Lady of Guadalupe, Star of the New Evangelization; and Columbus-Powell St. Peter St. Joan of Arc.

During the five-day conference, participants attended daily Mass; keynote, impact and breakout sessions; workshops; Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament; reserved time for fellowship and entertainment; and had opportunities to receive the sacrament of reconciliation.



The diocesan Office of Hispanic Ministry gifted scholarships for Spanish-speaking young adults to attend the SEEK26 conference in January at the Greater Columbus Convention Center.

"Walking with them was truly a blessing, to see everything that was poured out into them and that they were able to get, just as simple as Adoration and the concerts, or even the speed dating that some of them participated in, and seeing that the Church is alive with so many young people just like them," Mendoza said.

"I'm still getting messages from some of them saying that this is a life-altering experience for them and that they now know their path that the Lord has for them in their life. They have no question. And I was just like, wow, that's all it took: SEEK."

SEEK26 helped the diocese's Latino students understand their identity as a child of God. The conference enabled several to identify their mission and purpose, Mendoza explained.

Latino young adults living in the diocese often struggle with issues of identity and belonging. Mendoza noted a pull that many experience between their Spanish-speaking family and English-speaking peers.

SEEK, "to be here in Columbus, our youth, they felt like they are part of the Church, the U.S. Church," said Father David Arroyo, C.R. (Congregation of Clerics Regu-

lar (Theatine Fathers)), vicar for Hispanic Ministry.

"It was special to hear part of the songs in Spanish – the worship songs – and the responsorial psalm, one verse in English, another in Spanish, for the Masses. For the Hispanic community ... we belong to the same U.S. Church."

Individuals attending SEEK26 on diocesan scholarships were also given opportunities to explore their vocation.

A record-breaking-size speed dating event at the conference drew thousands.

The Sisters of the Most Holy Savior of St. Bridget, who reside at the Convent of St. Birgitta, located near Columbus Holy Family Church, also provided a witness at SEEK. Consecrated sisters in the order – some of Hispanic descent – invited young women to their convent for dinner, a few discerning a call to religious life.

"Seeing the opportunity that they have now to be around other Catholics, ... for me, that's fulfilling," Mendoza reflected. "Giving them those opportunities that we, as young adults, wish we had and we didn't because of the same reasons."

Twenty-one diocesan scholarships were



Ethnic communities enjoyed attending SEEK26 in Columbus. Photos courtesy Sarah Lightle

also awarded to individuals of various other ethnic backgrounds.

Of the 17 ethnic communities in the diocese, nine communities were represented at SEEK26: Indian Tamil, Indian Syro-Malabar, Korean, Ghanaian, Nigerian, East African, Byzantine, Vietnamese and French.

Between one and three individuals from each of the nine communities received scholarships.

"I'm reading the e-mails from the families, those who sent their children, and some of them, they are telling me that it's a gift for 2026, SEEK," said Father Tesfaye Petros Botachew, director of the diocesan Office of Multicultural Ministries.

"I received another e-mail from one young boy, even he's thinking about his vocation because he has seen many things there, and he had time for prayer ... during ... Adoration."

While just five days in duration, Father Petros emphasized the great effect he expects SEEK26 to have on the lives of the diocese's ethnic faithful.

See SEEK, Page 3

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Subscriptions: (614) 224-6530

President & Publisher  
Bishop Earl K. Fernandes

Editor  
Doug Bean

Reporter  
Hannah Heil

Graphic Designer  
Kaitlyn Gough



- HCatholicTimes
- CbusCatholic
- cbuscatholic
- Diocese of Columbus

# The Catholic Times moving to all-digital reporting

By Jason M. Mays

Senior Director,  
Curial Office of Communications

Before coming to the Curial Office of Communications in 2022, I had the privilege of working at WCMH-TV NBC4 for more than 20 years. To set the stage, my employment in the newsroom began just after Y2K. Having survived what we all thought could have been the end of modern civilization when the calendar flipped from 1999 to 2000, the digital revolution started peeking over the horizon. Almost instantly, it moved with the ferocity of a tilt-a-whirl. Everything was becoming digital. In the news world, both in print and TV, the industry was evolving at such a speed that many smaller stations and newspapers couldn't compete. Daily tasks were more efficient, some automated, which resulted in the significant downsizing of newsroom staffs across the nation.

At the same time, the viewers' daily routines, which normally would land them in front of the television from 5 p.m. to after prime time every day or cracking open the newspaper over coffee, were fading. Viewers became users and now had access to news 24/7 on websites, primitive live streaming and something called social media. The days of people staying glued to their televisions to watch sagas like baby Jessica falling into a well and the emotional rescue that captivated the nation were a

thing of the past.

I distinctly recall sitting in my news director's office at the advent of social media discussing a website called "Twitter." He speculated that social media was a passing fad and that we should not spend much time or energy on it. Everybody makes mistakes. I don't think many people realized the monumental shift that was thrust upon all of us, globally, in every industry, as well as in home life.

Over 25 years later, not only has social media not fizzled out, but the digital sphere has become so ingrained in our day to day that it is subconsciously accepted as a prerequisite to living daily life. At times, that's frustrating to those of us who remember the good old days before the internet and smartphones. However, when we look at this through the eyes of faith, the aspects of the digital sphere are filled with incredible tools to reach humanity with the love of Jesus Christ.

The Curial offices of the Diocese of Columbus have the responsibility to be good stewards of what is entrusted to us by the clergy and laity. Spreading the gospel through a news resource takes at least two things; a willing heart that says "Yes," and funding. We are tasked with routinely evaluating and reevaluating stewardship, operations and practices. What does that have to do with the digital sphere? A lot.

Just before the flip of the calendar to 2026, the Office of Communications executed major overhauls on both the Dio-

## Final print issue Feb. 22

cese of Columbus and *The Catholic Times* websites. The changes allow for a more beautiful showcasing of content, accessible resources and improved real-time reporting. Maintaining the sites is more efficient and straightforward, and as an added perk, the operational costs have been slashed by 80%. In an age where everything is getting more expensive, this might sound too good to be true, but it is reality. It has taken the hard work of several diocesan staff over three years to get to this point. We're proud of it.

Over the past two years, we've seen an explosion in online consumption of *The Catholic Times*. Not only are we seeing user traffic from the United States, but across the globe. Believe it or not, the eyes of the world are on the 23 counties of the Diocese of Columbus.

Taking all of this into consideration, we are excited to move to the next chapter in the history of *The Catholic Times*, an all-digital publication. The conversation to move to an all-digital format has been going on for the better part of a decade. While it is bittersweet to end the physical paper,

it is the right time to shift our focus completely to the digital sphere. With the digital tools available to us, we have not only the exciting opportunity to change, but as good stewards, the responsibility.

In his Pillars of the "New Evangelization" homily at the Evangelization Leadership Summit in 2023, Bishop Earl Fernandes said, "Working together, we can better use the new technology to evangelize. The pulpit and the church bulletin will simply not do. New technologies, including marketing and data technologies and digital targeting of youth will be necessary."

For many years, *The Catholic Times* newspaper has been one of the primary tools for communicating with the laity across the 23 counties of the diocese as well as providing award-winning coverage about the beauty of our parishes, schools and people. That mission hasn't changed. Rather, we are refocusing our resources to be able to reach as many people as possible in a more cost-effective manner.

The Office of Communications is exploring several more ways to expand the digital presence and reach of the diocese. I'll keep you updated as these exciting initiatives come to fruition in the coming months.

Lastly, I'd like to take a moment to say thank you to everyone who reads *The Catholic Times*, both in print and digitally. We are proud of our talented writers, reporters and contributors, and are overjoyed to be able to share award-winning local Catholic content with you.

## SEEK: Ethnic communities benefit from diocesan scholarships, *Continued from Page 2*

"I can see that (SEEK) has its own impact on the life of each one of them, those who participated. ... The seminarians who were there, that also helped the young boys to ask themselves whether they wanted to join formation ... whether it's marriage or priestly life," Father Petros said.

"Seeing different congregations there, especially women's congregations that were there, this also helps the young girls to think about their future vocation – not only (young men) to the priesthood.

"I met someone from Ghana, and he was also touched by the situation, because

that's the first time for him to be here and to see. Many ... have the mentality, arriving in America ... that people (here), they don't have faith, so when you see these people, it's very inspiring."

FOCUS, formerly the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, was founded at

Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas, in 1998. The Catholic organization has since expanded to 250+ college campuses and parish communities.

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# Newark parish's Gifts for Baby Jesus helps young mothers, children

By Hannah Heil  
Catholic Times Reporter

More than 2,000 years ago, the gospels recount wise men bringing the Christ Child gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Faithful at Newark St. Francis de Sales Church today bring Him bottles, baby clothes and diapers.

Gifts for Baby Jesus, a program at St. Francis de Sales, collects gifts for Christ as three men did millenniums ago. Christ and His Blessed Mother, while not present in the flesh, are reflected today in young mothers and babies experiencing poverty, suffering and unforeseen circumstances much like the Holy Family did.

Every January, St. Francis de Sales parishioners are invited to bring items for the Christ Child.

The parish's Respect Life ministry has collected items for Heartbeats, located on the east side of Newark, for some time. The program began more than a decade ago, benefiting families in the community who come to the life-affirming pregnancy resource medical center in need.

A name change several years ago resulted in a significant uptick in donations.

"When we first initiated the theme, 'Gifts for Baby Jesus,' it just doubled – doubled – what the parishioners were giving," said Helen Sage, a longtime member of the parish Respect Life group.

"If we just said we're doing it for Jesus, I don't think it would have as much of an impact. The term 'Gifts for Baby Jesus' just seems to give a whole different perspective."

The collection runs through the end of the month, wrapping up around the feast of the Presentation of the Lord on Feb. 2, when the traditional Christmas season in the Church concludes.

In the past, a marble Nativity set of the Holy Family was displayed, inviting parishioners to bring their gifts to Christ. This year, faithful can lay their items before a statue of Mary holding her Son.



Gifts are placed before a statue with the Blessed Virgin holding the Christ Child at Newark St. Francis de Sales Church. Photo/St. Francis de Sales

The timing of the collection each year, Sage said, was inspired by "the idea of giving gifts during the Christmas season, and trying to not just give gifts to our own families, but those in need."

"The parish's annual Gifts for Baby Jesus outreach has been a profound blessing," affirmed Liz McCullough, executive director at Heartbeats for Life.

"Our vision is to cherish and protect every human life both in the womb and in strong families."

"These gifts meet critical, practical needs while conveying the love of Christ to mothers and fathers facing economic hardship. This not only blesses families materially but strengthens the culture of life in our community, decreasing pressures that often lead women to consider abortion."

Sage said bags of donated items at St. Francis de Sales are delivered to Heartbeats about weekly in January.



Heartbeats for Life in Newark provides clothing and more for infants and children of mothers in need

Photo courtesy Heartbeats for Life

"I would make sometimes two trips over to Heartbeats with what was left (at the church) each week," she said. "Sometimes it's just once a week, but sometimes it would be heavy enough that I'd have to make two."

Most-needed items at Heartbeats for Life include diapers – especially larger sizes, McCullough noted – wipes, baby bottles and formula, clothing and blankets. All baby-care items are given to families in need free of cost.

"St. Francis de Sales parish and Heartbeats are united in a shared commitment to the sanctity of life and Gospel witness," McCullough said.

"Parishioners have supported Heartbeats through prayer, volunteer engagement and generosity, demonstrating how parish life can tangibly reflect Christ's mercy and compassion."

In a 2024 Ohio impact report compiling pregnancy center state data, the Charlotte Lozier Institute reported pregnancy cen-

ters in Ohio provided \$22 million in services and material support to families. More than 125,000 women, youth and men received care and assistance statewide.

Heartbeats for Life, which serves individuals in Licking, Muskingum and Perry counties, offers pregnancy testing, limited ultrasounds, parenting education, referrals and after-abortion ministry at no cost.

Outreach extends virtually across the globe through Heartbeats' resource [www.HopeAfter.org](http://www.HopeAfter.org), offering post-abortion support groups in-person and online.

Parishioner support at St. Francis de Sales and the success of Gifts for Baby Jesus is likely because of Who is served.

"When you realize Jesus is living in that person, well, if you do it for that person, you're really doing it for Jesus," Sage reflected. "We know we're doing it for Heartbeats, but Jesus, we want to do whatever You want us to do."

## 40 Days for Life campaign begins in February

By Olivia Hornsby  
Greater Columbus Right to Life

Each spring, as we prepare for Lent and the 40 Days for Life campaign, I often contemplate the words of our Lord in St. Matthew, "Could you not keep watch with me for one hour?"

His words are, historically, a rebuke to the sleeping disciples. Perhaps many would say that, for this reason alone, the invitation presented by our 40 Days for Life Campaign to pray with us is an echo of the same rebuke, pointed toward a culture infatuated with abortion and consumed by distractions.

These words are also, however, a personal and ongoing invitation to accompany Christ in His suffering, to remain spiritually awake and anchored to both truth and hope, and to choose fidelity even when it is difficult or we are weary. It is in this sense that our Lord's words serve as a call to action for our Spring 40 Days for Life campaign.

The campaign runs for the duration of Lent – Feb. 18 through March 29 from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. each day. We are seeking to cover 480 hours on the sidewalk outside of the abortion clinic in prayer and witness. Can you keep watch with us? Can you pray with us, even for just one of those 480 hours?

We will be praying together at the Planned Parenthood abortion clinic lo-

cated at 3255 E. Main St. While 40 Days for Life is often described as a "prayer vigil," the local campaign is far more diverse, collaborative and sustained than many people realize. One by one, past 40 Days for Life campaigns have shut down abortion clinics – both locally and internationally. The local campaign supplements the work of year-round sidewalk counseling efforts in Columbus, bringing prayer and witness regardless of the clinic being open.

40 Days for Life is not just an intellectual or spiritual exercise, but an activity that bears tangible fruit for life; we know of nearly a dozen women who turned away from the abortion clinic last year after encountering team members during a campaign. Without our 40 Days for Life, those mothers would have been harmed, and those unborn lives would have been lost.

This spring, anchored in the truth of Christ's death and the hope of His resurrection, we know we can do even more. You can "Spring" into action with Greater Columbus Right to Life by adopting a day, partial day or hour on the sidewalk to help end abortion by 2033. Individuals, families, schools, churches and other groups are all invited to participate. Often, Respect Life Groups, Knights of Columbus or parishes will "adopt" a full or partial day of work to fill their hours with other volunteers dedicated to the cause of life.

If you have coordinated a day in the past, our scheduler and materials are available online at [www.gcrtl.org/40-days-for-life](http://www.gcrtl.org/40-days-for-life).

This year, we will have new materials and opportunities to support you. If you are interested in leading a day or partial day but have never done so – give us a call and we can walk you through everything. If you would simply like to participate on your own or with a friend – the full calendar is also open at the above website, and we are happy to help connect you with others from your parish.

In many ways, the impact of 40 Days for Life is quiet and unseen. It may be a private conversation that plants a seed, a woman who chooses not to enter the facility that day or a simple referral to abortion pill reversal that gives a woman another choice. Often, it is an experience that quietly grows your own faith and sense of purpose. In every case, it is consistent witness to so many in the community – rooted in prayer, personal sacrifice and the conviction that every human life has value.

As we continue to navigate difficult conversations about life, law and conscience in the tumultuous landscape we currently face after the passage of Issue 1, 40 Days for Life remains a steady expression of peaceful, prayerful community engagement for the cause of life. It is a powerful witness of ordinary people willing to show up, one hour at a time.

This Lent, will you pray with us for one hour? If so, visit [gcrtl.org/40-days-for-life](http://gcrtl.org/40-days-for-life) or give us a call at 614-445-8508.

### CAREER OPPORTUNITY

**Executive Director**  
**Greater Columbus Right To Life**

Greater Columbus Right to Life is currently seeking an individual to fill the role of Executive Director for the Organization. The executive director will have the opportunity to engage in the day-to-day operations of Greater Columbus Right to Life while advancing in critical leadership, organizational management and executive skills under the direction of the President and Board.

An ideal candidate will be a servant leader who seeks to grow Greater Columbus Right to Life and its mission to protect innocent human life from the moment of conception until natural death.

Demonstrable pro-life conviction is required, as are excellent writing skills, the ability to multi-task, and attention to detail. Previous leadership and management experience are strongly preferred, but we will consider early and mid-career applicants with strong qualifications. Applicants will be required to pass a BCII background check and complete Protecting God's Children or similar curriculum.

This is a salaried position with a flexible schedule but does require some evenings and weekends. Work environment includes office, field, event and some (mostly regional) travel. This position is budgeted for total compensation in the range of \$58,750 to \$63,000, commensurate with experience and qualifications.

Interested candidates should forward a resume, writing sample and cover letter to Beth Vanderkooi at [beth@gcrtl.org](mailto:beth@gcrtl.org). Applications will be considered until the position is filled.

# Vicariate of Catholic Social Doctrine animates mental health ministry

By Deacon Dave Bezusko  
Director, Catholic Charities

Is there a greater epidemic impacting our families, our community, more than mental health?

Studies show that 1-in-4 Ohioans experienced mental illness last year.

There are 1.3 million adults in our state struggling with substance use. Cost of care and a shortage of mental health professionals mean many receive no care. These are our kids. These are our families. These are our friends. These ... might include you.

The Psalmist cries out in Psalm 69: "Lord, in your great love, answer me!" The despair is real. So is the shame. The feeling of being an outcast. Of feeling trapped, living in bonds with no way out.

The prophet Jeremiah "hears the whispering of many. Terror on every side!" (Jer 20:10)

These passages sound to me like a cry of those in our midst who are bullied. Who struggle with self-esteem. Who hear the whispers, the voices, that cause them to second-guess their worthiness. Who struggle to get out of bed in the morning because life seems empty. Who, perhaps, because of a mental health condition, feel that God, and others, are distant.

It's OK to not be OK. Depression and anxiety are a part of the human condition. Not created by God, but a result of our fallen nature.

Scripture puts words to it. There are 52 psalms in the Bible with similar laments. It's not to be dismissed or denied. And yet it remains hidden. Because unlike a physical condition like a broken leg or bad cut, we don't see it. Those who don't experience it often don't understand. And the stigma surrounding mental health lingers.

A friend who works for the local Mental Health Board told me how she remembers when she was growing up that family members wouldn't talk about the "C-word." If someone had cancer, that was all "hush, hush." The stigma attached to mental illness causes many to hide the severity of their symptoms from loved ones. Stigma is the single greatest barrier to people getting treatment.

Unfortunately, the stigma surrounding

## The work of the Office of Catholic Advocacy & Social Doctrine



### SUBSIDIARITY & SOLIDARITY

David P. Lyons, PhD

David Lyons is the diocesan Director of the Office of Catholic Advocacy and Social Doctrine. He received his undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Michigan and his doctorate from the University of Chicago, where he taught for 12 years.

night, the business of gambling is another story.

In short, the gambling industry trades on the human appetites for distraction and excitement, drawing people into a web of habit and addiction that robs them of their self-control, their self-respect, their relationships and their very existence. The gambling industry does all of this under the masks of "freedom," "choice" and "free enterprise."

Whatever the advocates of industrial gambling call it, however, a social order that permits and encourages behavior that enslaves so many wills and leads to the destruction of families and lives is neither free nor just. Our commitment to human life and the common good, then, demanded that the

As Father Bob Penhallurick discussed in his Jan. 11 column, the Office of Catholic Advocacy & Social Doctrine works with the other offices in the Vicariate for Catholic Social Doctrine to promote the culture of life that the Church offers to the world.

What is that culture?

The culture of life is one that recognizes and protects the dignity of every human being as a beloved child of God. It calls for public policy that serves only the common good, rather than the narrow interests of a single class, race or other group. Observing the principle of subsidiarity, it insists that individuals, families, associations, parishes and local communities have the space to organize their own lives and common affairs, free from interference from more distant powers, unless absolutely necessary. Finally, given how modern technologies have brought all human beings into much closer contact and much greater danger than ever before, it teaches the solidarity of all mankind.

Of course, the foregoing prompts at least one obvious question: What does this look like in practice? Speaking for my office, it means, first of all, advocating for public policies that foster and extend the material conditions necessary to live a life that will allow us to know God, love our neighbor and become the people God made each of us to be.

For example, this past year my office worked with the Catholic Conference of Ohio to beat back efforts at expanding legal online gambling in our state. While there's no problem with a friendly bet over a football game, some buddies getting together for a low-stakes game of poker or a parish bingo

mental health can extend to our faith life. Many stop coming to Church due to the stigma. We think, "I should be able to pray my way out of this funk," as if someone could just pray their way out of their asthma or diabetes. "My depression is a sign of spiritual weakness. If only I would pray more, trust more, that would fix everything." So we don't seek help.

But mental illness is neither a moral failure nor a character defect. To suffer from a psychiatric disorder is not a sign of insufficient faith. On the flip side, just because someone is a faithful, devout Catholic does not make you any less immune to mental illness.

Dr. Aaron Kheriaty writes in his book, *The Catholic Guide to Depression*, that these diseases often come from neurobiological factors outside of one's control or devastating life experiences. But for those in the midst of depression, it can become increasingly difficult to pray, to maintain an awareness of the presence of God, to act with charity toward others and to trust in God. The lack of motivation and the inability to experience pleasure in any activity may lead a person to feel that prayer and good works are not worthwhile or to feel that God has abandoned them.

But that can't be further from the truth. Back to Jeremiah. "O Lord of hosts, you who test the just, who probe the mind and heart." God probes the mind, and the heart. Our mental condition, and our faith. And God cares! Jesus reminds us, "Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs on your head are counted. So do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows." (Matt: 10: 29-31)

You are worth so much to God that Jesus came to die on the cross for you. In fact, Jesus redeemed all of humanity and all of the human condition. Jesus even redeemed depression on the cross.

Because you know Christ's Passion was just not a physical torture. It was also a mental torture. Jesus experienced the same feelings of abandonment. The agony. The sorrow. Jesus was never clinically depressed. But He knows the symptoms all too well. His divine and human perfection made him capable of entering the depths of human darkness more pro-

foundly than anyone else.

Even in our mental health conditions, Jesus is with us. He will speak to us in that darkness. And it's possible for us to attach our suffering to His so that He can redeem it. It doesn't have to be for nothing.

Dr. Kheriaty says that depression need not utterly overwhelm those who are united to Jesus. Instead of separation from God, suffering can become a vehicle by which one is brought into deep intimacy with him.

Indeed, it was for some of our canonized saints who clearly suffered from mental illness in times before modern methods could diagnose and help their cases.

St. Therese of Lisieux likely had an anxiety disorder. But that struggle was the basis for her "Little Way" that earned her the title of Doctor of the Church.

St. Oscar Romero had OCD but fought through it to become an archbishop who was martyred while advocating the rights of the oppressed.

St. Benedict Joseph Labre was a 17th century homeless man who was turned away by all the monasteries and religious orders because of his mental health, so he devoted his life to living among the homeless and serving them. They said of him, "He may only have had half his mind, but he gave it completely to God."

And St. Dymphna is the patron saint of those living with a mental health condition. She was an Irish princess in the seventh century who inspired the people of Geel, Belgium, where she lived, to show compassion for those with mental illness. Over the centuries, the people of Geel invited people with mental illness to live and work in their community without any stigma or discrimination.

And this is something we are called to do. In our Church. In our community. Our family members, our co-workers, our neighbors with mental health conditions need spiritual support. And that's why the diocese will be working this year through the Vicariate of Catholic Social Doctrine to lean into the growing field of mental health ministry.

Mental health ministry provides vital spiritual accompaniment by offering a ministry of presence in the lives of people with mental illness and helps overcome the stigma and dis-

crimination that people living with a mental illness encounter in the Church and in society.

Mental health ministry is not a clinical resource and is not intended to serve as a substitute for treatment or counseling with a qualified professional. But it does have a place in a person's recovery. It recognizes the value of professional mental health care and the importance of collaboration with healthcare organizations and professionals, religious, clergy, educational institutes, counseling centers, teachers, nurses and other community organizations.

The path to mental wellness requires:

1. People who care
2. Places that are safe
3. Purpose and mission

The Church can provide all of these things and help those who struggle with mental health challenges to carry their crosses. Mental health ministry provides spiritual accompaniment on the journey with others as they experience God's presence, love and healing.

An advisory group is forming to animate mental health ministry in the Diocese of Columbus under the direction of the Vicariate for Catholic Social Doctrine. The advisory group will help establish priorities, set realistic goals and determine action steps that would make sustainable impact.

To help navigate boundaries between ministry and therapy and help us make connections to support our clergy, parishes, schools and our families. Visions of successful Catholic mental health ministries that are inspiring us include those taking place through the Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers, the Diocese of Phoenix and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

If you are interested in learning more about mental health ministry, visit <https://forms.office.com/r/BW7SUwFBcR> to take our interest survey or contact Deacon Dave Bezusko at [dbezusko@columbuscatholic.org](mailto:dbezusko@columbuscatholic.org).

And if you are struggling with a mental health condition, do not be afraid. Do not be afraid to seek or to continue treatment. May we know in our hearts that God cares. And is objectively here. Present with us. Whether we FEEL it or not. God probes the mind and heart. In His great love, He will answer us.

receive the sacraments. The liturgical practices of the Church are often misunderstood by state employees who would prefer a more standardized form of religious exercise, and that misunderstanding sometimes leads prison employees to block priests from bringing in candles or communion wine, or even from hearing confessions. In those instances, we work with representatives of the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction to remedy the misunderstanding and ensure that our Catholics in prison can remain in full communion with the Body of Christ, our true source of life.

Bishop Fernandes has also tasked my office with finding ways to respond to the evil of human trafficking. In furtherance of that mission, we've formed a human trafficking committee that will sponsor four summits this year to raise the awareness of the issue among pastors and parish staff, nurses, first responders, motel staff, law enforcement and people from other relevant occupations. The summits will also provide attendees with tools for identifying and assisting the victims of trafficking: those who are trafficked and the morally lost men who create the demand for sex trafficking.

Somewhat longer term, we're looking at a mobile clinic that can bring medical care to the victims of trafficking while also building relationships of trust with trafficking victims. Those kinds of relationships, more than any other intervention, is the best way to rescue trafficking victims and lead them to a life

I should also note that my office advocates for the right of incarcerated Catholics to

See ADVOCACY, Page 27

# Emmaus Road Fund records fourth straight year of double-digit growth

## Office of Catholic Schools

The Emmaus Road Scholarship Fund marked another milestone year in 2025, receiving a record \$5.6 million in donations, a nearly 25 percent increase over the previous year.

The latest total represents the fourth consecutive year of double-digit growth for the fund, which has now surpassed \$15 million in total donations since its establishment in December 2021. The \$5.6 million raised in 2025 will be distributed as need-based scholarships for the 2026–27 academic year.

“The Emmaus Road Scholarship Fund continues to be a blessing for families who desire a Catholic education for their children but have financial need,” diocesan Superintendent Dr. Adam Dufault said. “The Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly states that parents, having the first responsibility for the education of their children, have the fundamental right to choose a school ‘which corresponds to their own convictions.’ Emmaus Road Scholarships unmistakably support that choice and make Catholic education attainable for all.”

The fund was the first state-certified scholarship granting organization (SGO) in Ohio, receiving certification shortly after state lawmakers approved the tax credit in late 2021. The legislation allows Ohio taxpayers to redirect a portion of their state income taxes to SGOs to fund scholarships for students in grades K-12. In exchange, donors receive a dollar-for-dollar reduction in their Ohio income tax liability.

ity, up to \$750 for individuals or \$1,500 for married couples filing jointly.

Since its launch, the fund has helped address a growing gap in tuition assistance. While Ohio’s EdChoice Scholarship program has expanded access to school choice, diocesan officials note that those scholarships often do not cover the full cost of educating a student. At the same time, long-standing endowments established for tuition assistance have struggled to keep pace with rising demand.

“Our commitment has always been to make Catholic education affordable and accessible to every family who seeks it,” Dufault said. “The Emmaus Road Scholarship Fund has become a critical part of fulfilling that mission.”

Revenue growth since 2021 has been both steady and dramatic:

- \$65,000 in 2021
- \$1.9 million in 2022
- \$2.985 million in 2023
- \$4.5 million in 2024
- \$5.6 million in 2025

Since 2022, more than 6,500 scholarships have been awarded, with an average award of \$1,350. During the 2025–26 school year alone, more than \$4.1 million in need-based scholarships supported over 3,000 students enrolled in Catholic schools across the diocese.

In preparation for a historic shift at the national level next year, the Office of Catholic Schools intensified its outreach efforts in 2025 to increase residents’ awareness and understanding of the Ohio

See FUND, Page 11

The Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Columbus Proudly Celebrate Catholic Schools Week 2026!



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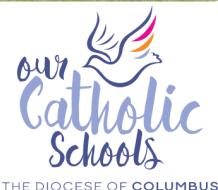


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# New Catholic school to open in fall

**By Hannah Heil**  
Catholic Times Reporter

For the first time in 30 years, the diocese will open a new Catholic school.

Ave Maria Academy, set to open this fall at Columbus-Powell St. Peter St. Joan of Arc parish, is the first parochial school to open in the diocese since Dublin St. Brigid of Kildare School was established in August 1996.

At that time, St. Brigid of Kildare was the first diocesan school to open in more than 35 years. And so, the founding of a new school can be recognized as a rare and significant event for the diocese.

"We are really blessed by the support we received from the people at St. Peter St. Joan of Arc ... from other Catholic schools that neighbor St. Peter St. Joan of Arc parish but also the support we've received from other Catholic schools throughout the diocese," said Father David Schalk, the parish pastor.

"I'm really looking forward to expanding the Catholic education infrastructure in central Ohio and being an ingredient in expanding options for Catholic education in our diocese."

Ave Maria Academy will begin with preschool and kindergarten classes this fall, adding an additional grade level each year through eighth grade.

The school will be based at the parish's St. Peter Church campus, located in northwest Columbus. The parish began renovations to the McEwan Center at St. Peter, originally built in 1980.

The school building will eventually accommodate preschool through second grade classes. The parish plans to build a new school at the Powell St. Joan of Arc Church campus, which will house grades three through eight.

"It's really exciting to build an unapologetically Catholic culture from the ground floor, and it definitely feels like we are doing something new, that we are – with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit – crafting something truly beautiful for God and for our diocese and for our parish," Father Schalk said.

Ave Maria Academy will partner with the Institute for Catholic Liberal Education (ICLE) to offer a Catholic classical education.

The partnership with ICLE will help the school select a curriculum, craft a pedagogy – or teaching methods – and craft a vision and framework for an authentically Catholic classical education.

"That's part of the difference that you'll see, this integration of our Catholic faith into all the subjects: bringing beautiful music, beautiful holy art into reading and math and science so that there's this integration of our catholicity throughout," said Dorothy (Dottie) Flanagan, who will serve as the school's principal.

"We won't be teaching in silos. We'll be teaching content the way it was meant to be taught, the way it was taught 2,000 years ago, matching the way human beings were made, Christian anthropology and allowing our students to explore and to dig deeper – to really form souls and disciples, and that's the ultimate goal."

Flanagan brings 35 years of experience in public education to Ave Maria Academy. She spent 34 years at Columbus City Schools, 21 of those years as a principal.

The head of Ave Maria Academy is an active member of St. Peter St. Joan of Arc parish, serving as a regular Adorer, lector and extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. Flanagan experienced a call to lead the new parochial school, she said, and a desire to support the work of the parish.

"I'm being formed through the Catechetical Institute and also being supported by the many wonderful people with the Office of Catholic Schools," she explained. "Sister John Paul, (assistant

superintendent for Catholic culture), is my mentor, so I'm learning every day, really, about the true and the beautiful with regards to Catholic education."

In addition to partnering with the ICLE, Ave Maria Academy partnered with the Little Servant Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, who minister in early childhood education.

Two consecrated religious in the order will relocate from Cherry Hill, New Jersey, to teach at the Columbus diocese's newest school. The old rectory at St. Peter will be remodeled as a convent for the sisters, one of whom will serve as a preschool teacher and the other as an educational aide.

The congregation of the Little Servant Sisters of the Immaculate Conception began under the spiritual guidance of Blessed Edmund Bojanowski in 1850s-Poland, reaching the United States in 1926.

"They'll be bringing their charism to Ave Maria Academy, and that will help form our Catholic identity and culture," Flanagan said.

The school is also hiring a kindergarten teacher and an additional preschool teacher and educational aide.

The academy, when opening this fall, will be more than two years in the making.

Discussions about a parochial school at St. Peter St. Joan of Arc began in the spring of 2024. A steering committee was created to raise funds and upgrade existing facilities.

A parent advisory committee came together in the last few months, helping implement the vision. The committee was composed of several potential parents who completed an initial interest survey in 2024.

Members of the advisory committee and St. Peter St. Joan of Arc parish considered various names for the school, ultimately deciding that it should reflect the Real Presence.

"What sets our faith apart is the Eucharist and our strong belief in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist," Flanagan explained. "Several names were generated, but we really wanted to focus on that."

"Mary, being the first monstrance, (a vessel that holds the consecrated host), and our devotion to Mary – Ave Maria Academy rose to the top of the list. It was a name that Father Schalk and Bishop (Earl) Fernandes both agreed on and thought was a good idea."

She added that the school's mascots will be the archangels.

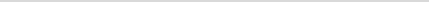
Partnership with the ICLE includes a three-year development plan. The school will continue partnering with the institute after that time, having access to conferences and staff development opportunities, such as instructional delivery methods for teachers.

"What you'll see when you go into classrooms ... is students thinking and wondering and observing and listening, using the senses that God has blessed humanity with to do something that no other animal can do ... think at high levels and feel at high levels so that we can learn and understand and create new knowledge based on truth and beauty of the human person."

"Really, rather than creating students who are college and career ready, our goal ... is ... to support the learning and growth and development of a student's intellect so that they can become good, positive, Catholic Christian members of society and impact the world."



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## Ready students share joy of reading through 2nd & 7 Foundation

Columbus Bishop Ready High School students brought their love of reading and service into local elementary classrooms this fall through the 2nd & 7 Foundation's literacy program. A cherished tradition at Bishop Ready, the initiative pairs older students with second graders to promote literacy and build meaningful relationships. The 2nd & 7 Foundation, active in schools nationwide, encourages young people to read while connecting them with positive role models to strengthen both academic and personal growth.

Throughout the semester, Bishop Ready student-athletes visited several Catholic feeder schools to read with students, encourage young learners and spark excitement about books. Each visit highlighted the joy of storytelling and the powerful influence mentors can have

in developing confidence and curiosity in young readers.

This year's visits included Columbus St. Mary Magdalene, Grove City Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Columbus St. Christopher, Columbus St. Cecilia, Hilliard St. Brendan the Navigator and Columbus St. Mary School in the German Village area.

Bishop Ready is grateful to its partner schools and the 2nd & 7 Foundation for providing opportunities that strengthen literacy, leadership, and community. As Scripture reminds us, "Give instruction to the wise, and they will become wiser still" (Proverbs 9:9). Through these visits, Bishop Ready students continue to lead by example — sharing knowledge, encouragement and faith.



Bishop Ready High School students read at Columbus St. Cecilia School through the 2nd & 7 Foundation. Photo courtesy Bishop Ready

## Ready students learn real-world lessons at Mid-Ohio Food Collective

By integrating classroom study with community engagement, Columbus Bishop Ready High School's advertising design class is giving students hands-on experience in the field of communications while deepening their understanding of service and ministry.

In this unique course, taught by Mr. Rob Wahl, students learn foundational concepts in advertising, branding and visual communication across a variety of contexts including corporations, schools, nonprofits and religious organizations. Students also explore how to develop their own personal brand, a skill that is increasingly important in today's digital and professional world.

Recently, the class visited the Mid-Ohio Food Collective to see these principles in action. The Collective is the largest hunger-relief organization in Ohio, partnering with more than 600 local agencies to distribute millions of pounds of nutritious food and provide support services to families across central and eastern Ohio.

During the visit, students learned about the organization's rebranding effort, which took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff members shared how the rebrand helped clarify the Collective's expanded mission not only as a food bank but as a leader in addressing food inse-

curity through innovation, education and community outreach.

Students observed how core elements of branding, from visual identity to messaging, play a vital role in communicating the organization's values and maintaining engagement with donors, volunteers, board members and partner agencies. A key takeaway was the importance of patience in the creative process. Effective branding does not happen overnight and requires collaboration, trust and buy-in from many stakeholders.

The group was also struck by the scale of the facility and the scope of the work being done there. Many students were surprised by the size of the operation and moved by how the Collective consistently "does more with less" to serve neighbors in need.

The experience reinforced how creativity and communication can be powerful tools for good. Students reflected on how being open to the creative process allows individuals to use their God-given gifts in service to others, lessons that translate not only to professional settings but to personal life and faith as well.

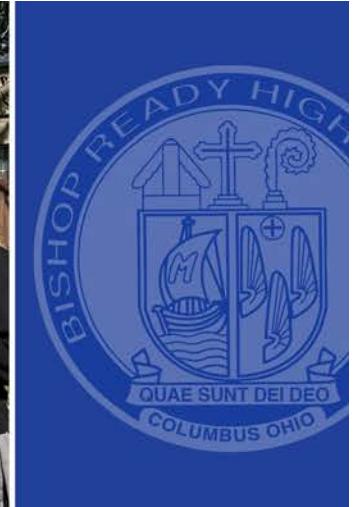
For Bishop Ready students, the visit offered a meaning-



Members of Bishop Ready's advertising design class are (from left) seniors Josie Forster, Nicole Adamski, Alexia Rawlings, Victoria White, Kayla Finigan and teacher Rob Wahl.

Photo courtesy Bishop Ready High School

ful example of how skills learned in the classroom can support organizations that live out Catholic social teaching and make a lasting impact in the community.



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# "Ms. Amanda" serving with heart at Bishop Ready

At Columbus Bishop Ready High School, students know her simply as "Ms. Amanda." As the director of food service, Amanda Blaine is a familiar and trusted presence in the lunchroom, greeting students by name, offering encouragement, and making sure every student feels welcomed, seen and cared for.

Her journey to Bishop Ready has been guided by both skill and heart. Ms. Amanda began working in the food service industry at just 14 years old, landing her first job at a catering company in Columbus. She earned her culinary degree in 2010 and went on to work in restaurants, hotels and even on a food truck. Each stop along the way brought new lessons, from recipes and techniques to menu pricing and inventory management, but the most meaningful discovery was how much she loved building relationships with the people she cooked for.

That passion found a true home at Bishop Ready.

"Taking the job as the food service director at Bishop Ready has been a dream come true," she shared. "It unites my passion for cooking and gives me an opportunity to connect with the community of students and faculty here."

That connection deepened in a pro-



Ms. Amanda made cupcakes for the entire school to celebrate her birthday.

Photo courtesy Bishop Ready High School

found way through her leadership of the school's participation in the Federal School Lunch Program. When Bishop Ready opted into the program during the 2022-2023 school year, Ms. Amanda committed herself to learning everything she could. Each year brought growth with more students qualifying, more funding secured and an expansion from lunch service to both breakfast and lunch.

Then, in the spring of 2025, she realized

something remarkable: The school had reached the threshold to pursue universal free meals for all students.

Ms. Amanda ran cost analyses, researched federal reimbursement scenarios, examined participation trends and studied the potential for policy changes. After careful discernment — and a deep breath — she submitted the application.

"When I received the email from our Ohio Department of Education specialist, I had tears in my eyes," she recalled. "I knew what this would mean for our families."

While more than 170 students already qualified for free or reduced lunch, Ms. Amanda knew there were many others who fell just outside the income guidelines, faced language barriers or avoided applying due to stigma. She also understood that for many families, even a small reduction in household expenses could make a meaningful difference.

"School meals are an essential school supply, just like pencils, paper, books, iPads," she explained. "I don't know how we can ask our students to give their best effort academically when they're wondering when or what they'll eat next."

Her instincts proved right. Since implementing universal free meals, participa-

tion has increased dramatically. Breakfast service has grown from about 20 students per day to up to 130–140 students on popular hot breakfast Thursdays. Lunch participation has soared from roughly 120 free or reduced meals to more than 300 meals served every single day.

"This is nothing short of amazing," Ms. Amanda said. "It surpassed my wildest dreams for this program."

Yet her service does not stop at the lunchroom doors. With the support of Principal Matt Brickner, Ms. Amanda continually looks for ways to live out the Gospel through action. Leftover food is donated regularly to Columbus Food Rescue, helping supply soup kitchens, food pantries and after-school snack programs throughout the community. She has also used the Bishop Ready kitchen to prepare meals for a nonprofit serving victims of human trafficking and is currently working to involve students in baking and delivering birthday cakes to children who might not otherwise receive one.

"My faith compels me to serve God's people," she shared. "I am grateful that those opportunities go beyond the walls of Bishop Ready."

## FUND: Emmaus records fourth straight year of double-digit growth, *Continued from Page 7*

SGO tax credit. A new federal tax credit for school choice that was included as part of last summer's "One Big Beautiful Bill" is scheduled to take effect in January 2027, marking the first time a federal school choice program has been permanently enacted into law.

Dufault continued, "With this new federal credit on the horizon, we are entering an unprecedented era of educational opportunity for families, building on Ohio's already robust school choice programs and expanding access to Catholic education for generations to come."

### Not too late to give for tax year 2025

Donors can still support the Emmaus Road Scholarship Fund and receive a 2025 tax credit. Contributions made through the federal tax filing deadline of April 15, 2026 may be applied to the 2025 tax year.

Gifts may be designated for scholar-

ships to any one or more of the Catholic schools of the Diocese of Columbus. For more information or to make a contribution, visit [www.giveandgetback.org](http://www.giveandgetback.org).



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# Watterson grad returning to alma mater as chaplain

By Hannah Heil  
Catholic Times Reporter

Graduating from Columbus Bishop Watterson High School in 2014, Sam Severance might have imagined returning one day for an alumni event or maybe the occasional Friday night football game. The 18-year-old likely was unaware that 12 years later he would set foot in the building again as Father Sam Severance, the school's chaplain.

The young priest, 30, was assigned to service at Bishop Watterson this month. He is set to officially assume the role on Feb. 2.

The priest will take the position of the school's current chaplain, Father Paul Noble, who will serve at Mother Angelina McCrory Manor and the Villas at St. Therese senior living facility in Columbus.

Father Severance, who was ordained less than a year ago in May 2025, serves as parochial vicar at Hilliard St. Brendan the Navigator Church. He will continue his parish assignment while serving as Bishop Watterson's school chaplain.

Returning to his alma mater, he reflected, is "surreal" in many ways.

"After spending just a few moments in the school I realized that not much has changed," he admitted.

"I was able to walk through sophomore hall while classes were changing, and I remember thinking, 'It looks just like I remember.'"

While still unsure what his role will entail, Father Severance said he anticipates caring for students' sacramental needs:

celebrating the sacrament of the Eucharist and hearing confessions.

The chaplain also expects to attend sporting events, school activities and be present in classrooms.

He noted a desire to help students recognize God's call for their lives.

"My own vocation to the priesthood began at Watterson. I remember hearing the call to the priesthood in those very halls," he said. "Although I was unaware at the time what that would really entail, I now look back on it and see that God began tailoring my heart to the priesthood."

"It's not just me; the Holy Spirit continues to call the young people at Watterson to this day. I suppose it's now my job to help the young people at Watterson hear His voice."

Before high school, Father Severance attended Dublin St. Brigid of Kildare School. After earning his high school diploma, he went on to study at the College of Wooster, graduating in 2019 with a degree in philosophy.

Later that year, Father Severance entered seminary at the Pontifical College Josephinum in north Columbus, where he spent the next six years in formation for the priesthood.

His presence at Bishop Watterson going forward will serve as a witness to students, especially boys called to the priesthood. In their school chaplain, they might see someone much like themselves, who wore the same uniform, walked the same halls and said "yes" to being a priest.

Whether called to the priesthood, marriage or consecrated life, Father Severance will help students come to know the



Father Sam Severance celebrates Mass at Bishop Watterson High School, where he will become chaplain on Feb. 2.

Photo courtesy Bishop Watterson High School

One who is calling.

"I hope my priestly presence helps the students at Watterson fall in love with Jesus Christ," he iterated. "If I can help them see that God loves them and calls them just as he called me, then all will be well."

## Clergy assignments announced

The following clergy assignments were announced by the diocese during the weekend of Jan. 17-18.

**Reverend Paul Noble**, Chaplain, Bishop Watterson High School, to Chaplain, Mother Angelina McCrory Manor and Villas at St. Therese, Columbus, effective February 2, 2026.

**Reverend Sam Severance** to part-time

Chaplain, Bishop Watterson High School, continuing as Parochial Vicar, St. Brendan the Navigator Parish, Hilliard, effective February 2, 2026.

**Reverend Jacob Gordon**, from service outside the diocese to Parochial Vicar, St. Brendan the Navigator Parish, Hilliard, effective February 13, 2025.

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[bishop-hartley.org](http://bishop-hartley.org)

## Hartley serves as central Ohio location for Operation Santa's Sleigh

Columbus Bishop Hartley High School is honored to have served as one of the nine statewide locations for Operation Santa's Sleigh 2025, a beloved annual tradition coordinated by Light Ohio Blue, Light Ohio Red and the North Pole's own Santa Claus Protection Team.

On the evening of Dec. 23, more than 1,000 first responders from across central Ohio gathered on Bishop Hartley's campus as part of a statewide effort to deliver a visible message of hope, gratitude and holiday cheer to children, veterans and families spending the holidays in care facilities. An estimated 350 public safety vehicles assembled at Hartley before joining the coordinated statewide illumination event, turning on their lights to "light the way for Santa" and remind Ohioans that they are remembered and

supported during the holiday season.

"Bishop Hartley was proud to serve as a host site for this meaningful tradition," school leadership said. "Our mission calls us to transform lives through faith, service and community. Welcoming the first responders who give so much to our city and supporting the children and veterans they honor through this event was a privilege for our entire school family. Our students and staff were eager to play a role in this effort."

Operation Santa's Sleigh brings together law enforcement officers, firefighters, EMS personnel and other first responders in a statewide show of unity and compassion. The event lifts the spirits of patients, families and hospital staff while also offering first responders and their

families a moment of joy and connection during the holiday season.

Bill Swank, founder and organizer of the event, offered, "This year's Operation Santa's Sleigh was a tremendous success, bringing Christmas and holiday cheer to the many patients, their families and the incredible staff at Nationwide Children's Hospital and the Ronald McDonald House.

"The spirits of the first responders and family members in attendance were also lifted — thanks in large part to the

outstanding hospitality and efforts of the Bishop Hartley staff. Their support was instrumental in making this year's event such a success."

In addition to Bishop Hartley school leadership, the effort was supported and attended by Adam Dufault, diocesan superintendent of schools who also led the procession of vehicles from Bishop Hartley High School to Nationwide Children's Hospital.



Bishop Hartley High School hosted Operation Santa's Sleigh 2025, which connects law enforcement officers, firefighters, EMS personnel and First Responders. Photo/Bishop Hartley



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[cdstmatthew.org](http://cdstmatthew.org)

[www.stmichaelworthington.org](http://www.stmichaelworthington.org)

[stpaulk-8.org](http://stpaulk-8.org)

# DeSales design projects to honor St. Carlo Acutis, Blessed Mother

By Doug Bean  
Catholic Times Editor

Columbus St. Francis DeSales High School is dedicating several spaces in its building to honor recently canonized St. Carlo Acutis and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

During Catholic Schools Week from Jan. 25 through Jan. 31, a contest will be announced that gives students an opportunity to design artwork to be permanently placed in the graphic arts and computer classroom, which will be renamed the St. Carlo Acutis Technology Lab, and on Marian walls that pay homage to the Blessed Virgin.

Principal Dan Garrick said he anticipates that students will have several weeks to submit designs that will be judged by faculty members. The winners will likely receive a tuition grant or stipend.

"Within the space of the Carlo Acutis computer lab, we want to have a mural on one of the walls that would depict his life," Garrick said. "And we also want to have somewhere within the room a statue of St. Carlo Acutis."

"And on the Marian walls, the same type of thing. And we'll encourage (students) to be creative."

He said there also could be a digital component to the walls with a video display to go along with the images of Mary.

The two areas of the schools under consideration for Marian walls are a hallway that leads to the campus ministry office adjacent to the chapel and in a second-floor hallway where theology classrooms are located.

After the winning designs are announced, the project likely would start before the end of the school year and then be completed in the summer.

Garrick said the contest is similar to one that was initiated during his first year as principal in 2004-05 when students designed a stained-glass window in the northwest corner of the building to pay



St. Francis DeSales High School's graphic arts and computer classroom will be renamed the St. Carlo Acutis Technology Lab.

Photos courtesy St. Francis DeSales High School

tribute to St. Francis de Sales, the school's patron.

"And ultimately what ended up happening is the concepts or designs of three different kids ending up being blended to come up with that is our current stained glass window, and I see this happening the same way during Catholic Schools Week."

St. Carlo Acutis has been a focal point for students this year. Last summer's reading assignment was a book titled *Carlo Acutis, the First Millennial Saint* by Nicola Gori.

In addition, this year's senior class selected Carlo Acutis, who was canonized by Pope Leo XIV in September, as its patron saint. The tradition of each senior class selecting a patron that best personifies the interests of the students was started eight years ago.

A five-foot statue of St. Carlo will be placed the school's courtyard in the spring next to the previous classes' patron saints.

St. Carlo Acutis was an Italian teenager devoted to his Catholic faith who died at age 15 in 2006.



St. Francis DeSales students read a book on the life of St. Carlo Acutis last summer.

of activities planned for Catholic Schools Week.

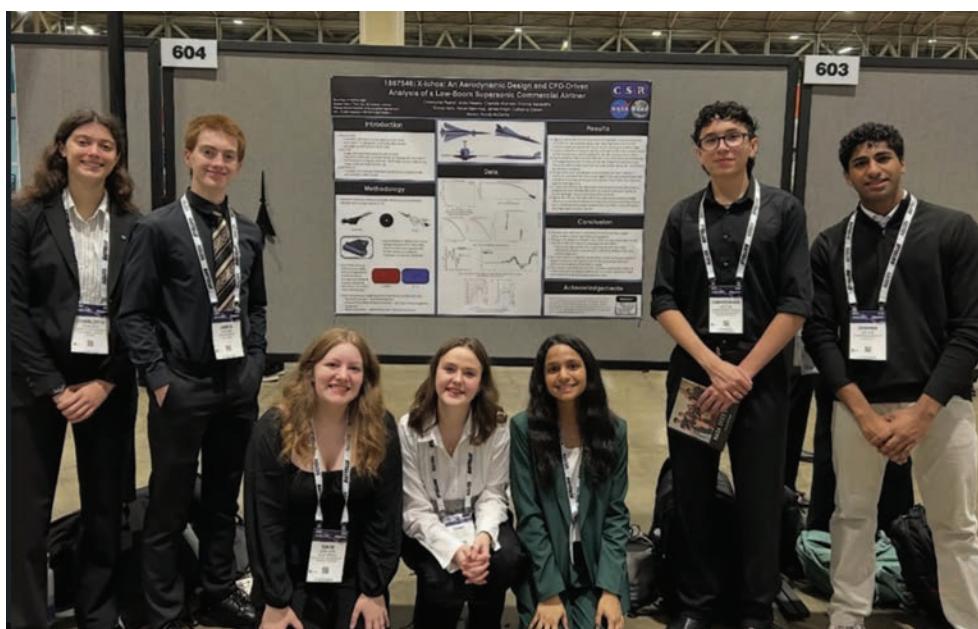
"We do a lot of fun things," Garrick said, "but we also want there to be a more significant message of our Catholic faith. We want this to be an opportunity to be a meaningful reflection ... to really pay homage to our Blessed Mother and to further make the connection that sainthood is not limited to those who are older but that we can all aspire to sainthood, even as young people."

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## DeSales senior participates in national project



Columbus St. Francis DeSales High School senior Emma Hahn (center) traveled to Louisiana last month to present at the American Geophysical Union (AGU) national meeting. She joined a team of students from across the country that shared their design, prototype and analysis on a completely original design for a quiet commercial supersonic plane modeled after NASA's X-59. The goal was to design a passenger plane that could fly over land with minimal disturbance. This group, named X-59: Lowering the Sonic Boom, began its research this past summer at the prestigious STEM Enhancement in Earth Science (SEES) high school internship program in collaboration with the University of Texas Center for Space Research and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). To help prepare for the recent AGU, she spent her NASA Independent Study class at St. Francis DeSales with science teacher Mrs. Mulligan, doing more mathematical and aerodynamic analysis of the prototype.

Photo courtesy St. Francis DeSales High School



Chesterton Academy of St. Benedict students, led by director Stephen Smith (right), sang original music composed by Smith during a "Festival of Lessons and Carols" on Dec. 12 at Columbus Holy Family Church. Photos courtesy Chesterton Academy of St. Benedict

## Chesterton Academy celebrates season with original music

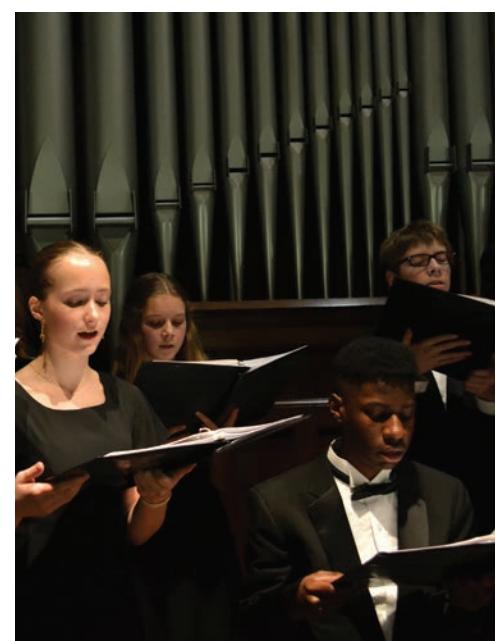
December 12, 2025, was a quiet, yet chilly Friday night as newscasters discussed the potential of a big snowstorm the following day. But in the shadow of winter weather grew sounds of great anticipation and news of great joy as the students of Chesterton Academy of St. Benedict presented their second annual Advent "Festival of Lessons and Carols" at Columbus Holy Family Church.

The highlight of the evening was the poem "All the Stars Looked Down" by the school's patron, G.K. Chesterton, the great 19th and 20th century English writer and convert to the Catholic faith. Instead of being a scene from 2,000 years ago, the poem brings the Nativity to life with beautiful imagery, putting the students and their audience in a humble stable alongside the Holy Family during the most sacred night.

Stephen J. Smith, the music teacher at Chesterton Academy, was inspired by this Christmas poem and composed original music to accompany the words so that the students could sing it. It has become a fast favorite of the students. Freshman Audrey Bellaire said, "I'm sad that we will have to wait until next fall to start singing this song again in class."

Chesterton Academy is the most recent addition to the diocese, having been recognized as an independent Catholic high school by Bishop Earl Fernandes in the summer of 2025.

The high school uses a novel method of education, teaching students in an integrated, classical manner with a minimalist approach to technology.



Chesterton Academy of St. Benedict students take part in the school's second annual "Festival of Lessons and Carols" on Dec. 12.

Classical education can be described as the cultivation of wisdom and virtue through meditation on the good, the true and the beautiful. As part of the Chesterton Academy curriculum, all students participate in the choir for four years.

While we've exited the Advent and Christmas seasons, you can hear this beautiful Nativity poem at <https://tinyurl.com/CASBadvent>. The students will next perform during their spring concert in early May.



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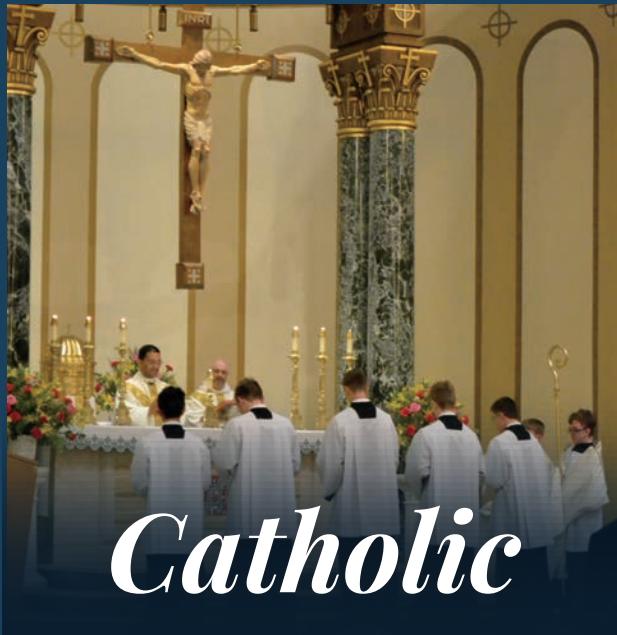


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## Eagle Scout project enhances Cristo Rey chapel

The school chapel at Cristo Rey Columbus High School received a thoughtful upgrade this winter thanks to the initiative of an ambitious student.

Sophomore Philip Corrigan had been pursuing the rank of Eagle Scout, the highest earned honor in Scouts BSA. The signature element of achieving this rank is the completion of a detailed service project that the scout must plan, develop and lead. It must benefit the community, a religious institution or a school. For Corrigan, selecting his service project was an easy decision and one that united his faith, school life and scout life — constructing kneelers for the school chapel at Cristo Rey Columbus.

Philip's service project began in the spring of 2025, when he came up with the idea to build free-standing kneelers, which the school chapel did not have.

"My Catholic faith is important to me and kneeling when the Eucharist is present is essential to the Catholic Mass," Corrigan said. "Without kneelers, it's hard for some people to do so."

After determining his project's directive, he sought approval for his idea from Assistant Principal of Student Services Katie Laufersweiler-Hanf, who oversees the school's campus ministry department and service initiatives.

"It was exciting to see Philip recognize a need for our school and want to do something to improve it," said Laufersweiler-Hanf, who held periodic check-ins with Philip as his project progressed. "To have a student select an Eagle Scout project that would benefit our school, specifically one that will assist our students and staff in celebrating Mass, was inspiring."

With the go-ahead from Laufersweiler-Hanf, he compiled a detailed proposal following the Scouts BSA guidelines, including an estimated budget, blueprints, list of materials, volunteer needs and more. He presented his proposal to his Scouts BSA council and received approval to begin his project. With summer break quickly approaching, he made the decision to wait until school resumed for the 2025-26 academic year to work toward its completion.

Once the school year began, he focused his efforts on fundraising for the materials needed to construct the kneelers: wood, hardware, foam padding and fabric. In



Cristo Rey Columbus High School students use the kneelers in the chapel that were constructed by sophomore Philip Corrigan (middle row right) for an Eagle Scout project

Photos courtesy Cristo Rey Columbus High School looking for."

In late November, the kneelers were brought to school and placed in the front rows of the chapel seats. They were completed just in time to put them to use for the school's Mass to celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on Dec. 8. With the successful completion of his service project along with other requirements, Philip earned the rank of Eagle Scout on Dec. 22 with Troop 310, Polaris District, Simon Kenton Council.

When reflecting on the project, he has high hopes for the impact it will have on the school.

"I hope the kneelers will help others feel more comfortable kneeling in the presence



Sophomore Philip Corrigan holds the kneelers he built for the chapel at Cristo Rey Columbus High School.

of the Eucharist, which in turn, further benefits our school's religious endeavors," he said.

Laufersweiler-Hanf also expressed enthusiasm for the widespread benefits of the project.

"Philip's project is a great example of the type of drive and initiative we see in Cristo Rey students every day," she said. "I hope other students are encouraged by the visibility of this project and feel empowered to make their own improvements in our community."

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Columbus St. Andrew School students began fundraising for Mary's Meals during the 2024-2025 school year. Since then, students have raised over \$13,000 for Mary's Meals. In September, Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, founder of Mary's Meals, came to St. Andrew to share his mission with students and express his gratitude for all that they have done to help feed children all over the world. This year, St. Andrew students designed and sold t-shirts and raised over \$5,000. Past fundraisers include penny wars and dollar bill wars during Catholic Schools Week, raffles to compete against teachers on Field Day and Move for Mary's Meals activities. Photo courtesy St. Andrew School



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## Our Lady of Bethlehem students hold baby shower for Blessed Mother

**By Lori Dulin**  
Principal, Our Lady of Bethlehem

As part of Advent preparations, the students and staff of Our Lady of Bethlehem (OLB) threw a baby shower for the Blessed Mother. What better way to celebrate the impending birth of our Savior? Serving students ages six weeks through Kindergarten, OLB is the perfect setting to foster respect for all life and focus on the relationship between mother, child and family.

In mid-December, OLB's multipurpose room was beautifully decorated in baby shower and Advent themes, and each student got the chance to spend time playing "Pin the Baby Jesus in the Manger," exploring different nativity sets and baby dolls, singing songs and fingerplays, making a manger craft, and eating some "donkey chow."

During the shower, students also worked to paint infant onesies and burp cloths for Mommies Matter, a pro-life ministry that joins pregnant women and single mothers on their journey. The event was also the catalyst for a weeklong diaper drive benefiting Bottoms Up Diaper Bank, a longtime partner of OLB, that "helps single mothers provide diapers for their

The Catholic Schools of Zanesville feel that it is important to support life in all of its stages. Campus ministries is making a conscious effort to support life by participating in the Corporal Works of Mercy. (Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the imprisoned, visit the sick, bury the dead).

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus states to his listeners, "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for the least brothers of mine, you did for me."

Campus ministries tries to provide tangible service projects that will reflect our Catholic beliefs and values.

Over the last four years, Bishop Fenwick School and Bishop Rosecrans High School have joined forces to collect items that will be available for families at Heartbeats, a pro-life women's center in Zanesville.

The list of items has changed over the years in order to meet Heartbeats' needs. In the past four years, the Catholic school community has collected over 8,000 wipes and over 7,000 diapers. Baby wash, lotion and cream were also gathered as well as over 100 wash clothes/towel sets.



Catholic Schools of Zanesville students hold some of the baby items that were collected for Heartbeats, a pro-life women's center, as part of a campus ministry initiative to perform the Corporal Works of Mercy.

Photos courtesy Catholic Schools of Zanesville

children." Since 2019, OLB has collected 43,304 diapers, and our students love it when Tim Welsh from Bottoms Up visits with the van to load them up!

The icon of Our Lady of Bethlehem is the young Mary, who said yes to God's call, on her own journey of faith and courage. Now in its 70th year, OLB employs her example to lead all children to her babe, Jesus.

Young children benefit most from experiential, hands-on learning. From infants crawling on the ground and holding stuffed nativity figures, to toddlers innately cradling dolls, to preschoolers spinning around to place the Baby Jesus in His creche, to kindergarteners forming a nativity scene on a piece of clothing, every OLBer is intimately connected to the unborn Jesus and the salvation story.

This event cultivated the innate characteristics in each of us to love, nurture and protect. Each is in us because we are created in His image and likeness. In turn, we must foster those inherently human qualities to learn to respect all life, knowing each of us is bestowed with human dignity.

OLBers come to know that an unborn child, just like the unborn Jesus, is already fully human. The baby is like us, is one of us, is part of our community, he/she matters and is special, unique. There is excitement that comes in waiting for a baby



A student at Columbus Our Lady of Bethlehem participates in an activity at a baby shower for the Blessed Mother before Christmas.

Photo courtesy Our Lady of Bethlehem

to be born. We are filled with joy as we get to meet Jesus and the babies that fill our families, schools and communities.

Through our Blessed Mother Baby Shower in the season of Advent, Our Lady of Bethlehem was honored and humbled to



Zanesville Catholic school students load diapers.

In 2022, Bishop Earl Fernandes stated, "The Diocese will continue to work to nurture Ohio families and will continue to accept the responsibility of supporting mothers and their children, and to fight for the right to Life for every human, born and unborn."

Bishop Fenwick Catholic School and Bishop Rosecrans High School are working diligently to create a culture of life at the schools by accepting Bishop Fernandes' challenge to take responsibility for supporting mothers and their children.



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**Educating PS - Grade 8**  
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**Educating Grades 9 - 12**  
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**Educating PS - Grade 8**  
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11:30 a.m.  
[www.blacschool.net](http://www.blsacschool.net)



**Educating PS - Grade 8**  
Sunday, February 22  
1 p.m.  
[www.saintvdpschool.org](http://www.saintvdpschool.org)

\*Event requires pre-registration. Please visit the school's web site for more information.

## LOCAL NEWS AND EVENTS

**Catholic Foundation scholarship applications now open**

The Catholic Foundation's scholarship application period is open for students in the Diocese of Columbus.

The application deadline is Friday, Feb. 27 for most scholarships and Friday, March 27 for the Ronald C. Sullivan Scholarship. Recipients will be notified in May.

A complete list of available scholarships, qualifications and application details can be found at [www.catholic-foundation.org/grants](http://www.catholic-foundation.org/grants).

The Foundation awarded over \$250,000 in scholarships last year, helping dozens of students pursue their goals — part of more than \$2 million invested in young people's education to date.

For questions about specific scholarships or the application process, contact Dan Kurth, vice president of grants and community impact, at 614-443-8893 or

dkurth@catholic-foundation.org.

**Academy headmaster to speak to men's luncheon club**

The Catholic Men's Luncheon Club meeting on Friday, Feb. 6 will feature a talk by Ismael Rodriguez, founding headmaster of the Chesterton Academy of St. Benedict, an independent Catholic high school in Worthington.

The meeting will follow the 11:45 a.m. Mass at Columbus St. Patrick Church, 280 N. Grant Ave. No reservations are needed. A \$12 donation is suggested to cover the cost of the lunch and meeting.

The event has no sponsor. If you are interested in sponsoring this luncheon or another, contact Dave Kilanowski at [dkilano@aol.com](mailto:dkilano@aol.com).

The club's next meeting, on Friday,

March 6, will feature a presentation of its annual Catholic Man of the Year award by Bishop Earl Fernandes.

**Hibernians history contest winners announced**

Clay Siemens of Worthington St. Michael the Archangel Church and Savannah Gaver of Dublin Jerome High School are the winners of the history essay contest sponsored by the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians Countess de Markievicz Division 1.

Siemens had the winning essay for grades 6 to 8 and Gaver for grades 9 to 12.

**West Jefferson Knights host euchre party**

Knights of Columbus Council 11224 is sponsoring its 11th annual euchre party

after the 4 p.m. Mass on Saturday, Jan. 31 at West Jefferson Ss. Simon and Jude Church, 9350 High Free Pike.

Admission is \$20 for those who only want to play cards, plus \$10 for food and beverages. More than \$2,700 worth of prizes have been donated.

There will be room for 64 players. For more information, contact Mark Mandel at 614-800-1534.

**Bishop to celebrate anniversary Mass at Our Lady of Peace**

Bishop Earl Fernandes will celebrate a Mass for Peace in honor of the 80th anniversary of the founding of Columbus Our Lady of Peace Church, 20 E. Dominion Blvd., at 4:30 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 24.

For more information, visit [www.olp-parish.org](http://www.olp-parish.org) or call 614-263-8824.

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**By Zephrina Mary, F.I.H.**  
Director, Diocesan Missions Office

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) invites you to help our brothers and sisters in the Catholic Church of Latin America and the Caribbean. The Church in Latin America Collection supports pastoral work and other spiritual programs in Latin America. This yearly collection helps to strengthen connections between the Church in the United States and the Church in Latin America. We are called to be the heralds of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I would like to thank you for your generosity on behalf of Bishop Earl K. Fernandes and the USCCB Committee in charge of the collection for the Church in Latin America.

Pope Leo XIV encourages us to hear the whisper of God's calling through his Mission message, "To be sure, the Gospel does not hide the resistance of darkness to the light. It describes the path of the Word of God as a rugged road, strewn with obstacles. To this day, authentic messengers of peace follow the Word along this path, which ultimately reaches hearts — restless hearts that often desire the very thing they resist" (Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026). Our support and gifts will bring the Gospel to the Universal Church. Therefore, there are no limits for charity,

**Help Church in Latin America**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) designates one collection every year to help the Church in Latin America. In the Diocese of Columbus, the collection will be held the weekend of Jan. 24-25. Our generosity is a tangible demonstration of our solidarity with the Church across our hemisphere.

Help is needed to strengthen the faith of the people. Your generosity supports ministries that bring Christ's mercy to prisoners, train catechists in remote rural areas and build up pastoral programs that address the crucial needs of the poor. By supporting this collection, you can also help nurture vocations for seminarians and religious sisters.

These funds enable our fellow Catholics in Latin America and the Caribbean — who are rich in faith but who often lack material resources — to participate more fully as disciples and to respond to their call to mission. This Collection has been a concrete commitment to unity and solidarity between Catholics in the United States and those in Latin America and the Caribbean.

I invite you to give generously. Your support truly makes a difference. I am most grateful for your loving response to God's call to build His Kingdom on Earth.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Earl K. Fernandes,  
Bishop of Columbus

and it becomes an apostolate for the salvation of souls.

The Latin American countries especially in Guatemala, Bolivia, Haiti, El Salvador and Belize need generous help. Particularly, in Guatemala, nearly two-thirds of children live in extreme poverty. Almost 50% of children suffer from malnutrition. Cross Catholic Outreach president Jim Cavnar

said, "Hunger and poverty clearly remain as a challenge for the poor, just as they were in Christ's time on Earth. The utmost need of a child is food. There is no way to stop the cry of a hungry child without providing food. To satisfy his/her hunger, we have to give food. And also, it is very necessary to feed the hungry with spiritual food which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As Christians, our baptis-

mal call obliges to encounter Jesus through our generous support. The support of the Church missions in developing countries has a marvelous effect in serving the poor as well as reaching out with spiritual food. Our contributions will be seen in God's treasury. The Gospel teaches us: "Give and it will be given to you (Luke 6:38)."

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God (CCC 1822)." In other words, the love of neighbor is inseparable from the love of God. It can be compared with both sides of a coin. As we know, God is the author of life and He is residing in our soul. He asks us to listen to the cry of others.

When we extend our hands and heart to the needy, we wipe the tears of many who endure hardships in life. The missionary spirit makes a difference in their lives by accomplishing evangelization, discipleship, building a church, housing and many other activities for the needy. Trust in God's promises and know that no gift will go unrewarded! Remember, "God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7)."

This collection is a tremendous opportunity for all the faithful to participate actively in the evangelizing mission and ministries of the Church. Your gifts and prayers will be a great blessing for the poorest of the poor who benefit from this outreach of funds.

**Crucifix blessed in new Mount Carmel Dublin chapel**

A crucifix was blessed during a ceremony in the new Christ Our Hope chapel at Mount Carmel Medical Center's Dublin campus on Monday, Jan. 12. The new crucifix connects patients and family members to the hope that Jesus brings even in the most challenging health situations. It serves as a reminder that Jesus himself knows what it is to suffer physically and will help all who see it connect to the grace that comes from Christ. Photos courtesy Mount Carmel



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Third Sunday of Ordinary Time Year A

**Isaiah 8:23-9:3**  
**Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14**  
**1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17**  
**Matthew 4:12-23**

Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Mt 4:17)! We, people of the 21st century, enjoying so many privileges, freedoms and opportunities, have a hard time fully grasping these words. What to repent from? What kingdom? Speaking of the kingdom, mostly we think either of a territory or a system. Nevertheless, it is something very distant from our daily experience. Repent – what content should we exactly assign to it?

A good start is to listen to people who went before us. People who were closer to the events and the mindset. One of them is St. Gregory of Nyssa. In his writing, *The Life of Moses*, he explains what the most important thing in human life is. He says, referring to repentance, do not leave the passions and the selfish desires behind because you are afraid of punishment. Do not strive to get rid of weaknesses, sins and selfishness because you are afraid, as a slave, that God might punish you. Nor do it to gain something. Do not fast and fight vices because you desire to gain peace, joy, strength and happiness. Do not be like a tradesman, who makes a good deal. God wants you to be his friend. The Lord offers your friendship. The most important thing in human life is this and no other friendship. Consequently, there is

## What does it mean to repent?

only one reason for repentance: the fear of losing friendship with the Lord!

We need a little further explanation, since friendship today is something else than in the fourth, second and first centuries. Today, friendship is more or less few texts here and there, Christmas cards, a phone call or hanging out. This is not the friendship the Ancients talked about. We learn from Hellenistic and Roman writers that friendship was highly valued. It meant a very deep and authentic relationship. Unimaginable intimacy of two souls, far from any sexual or erotic connotation. Intimacy, in which you trust the other person. You share secrets. You keep secrets. We have common interests. You could rely on each other anytime. Even at midnight or early before dawn.

It is this intimate friendship that Gregory talks about. It is this intimate friendship that the Lord is offering. He became one of us, taking on himself all the limitations of human life to make such intimacy possible. Therefore, repent first and foremost means change your thinking about God and yourself. Repent means to redirect our attention and accept the meaning of Jesus' incarnation and baptism. His name means "The Lord saves", as the angel announced to Joseph (Mt 1:21). John was shocked that Jesus wanted to receive baptism (Mt 3:14-15). Why? Because it meant "I identify with sinners." St. Paul explains he was sacrificed as our paschal lamb, taking away our sins (1Cor



### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Father Robert Jager, Ph.D

Father Robert Jager, Ph.D., is pastor of Columbus St. John Chrysostom Byzantine Catholic Church.

5:7). He went so far as to accept death on cross to free us from eternal death. This is what he did for you, for me. He, Emmanuel – God with us, is waiting for you to return to him.

Kingdom of heaven needs an explanation as well. The kingdom of heaven in the Bible is not a territory, system or structure. It is God's active presence. It is him acting. In other words, in Jesus and through Jesus, God is acting in our lives. He has the power to change you. He has the power to make this intimate friendship a reality. Again, the Scripture confirms this. How did Israel experience the kingdom of God? How did they

know what it meant? It is in the events of exodus, when God freed them from the bondage of Egypt. When God opened the way in the Red Sea. When they saw the Egyptians drawn in the sea. When God led them for 40 years in the wilderness. When he sent them prophets ... Biblical hymns retained the memory of his active presence: I will praise the Lord for his marvelous deeds! (Ps 107:15)

So, Jesus challenges us to repent, to change our minds. To verify what we think of him and ourselves. But most of all, to trust that he can bring about this intimacy. This is the light he brings, fulfilling the prophecy: The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen (Mt 4:15-16).

Visiting families for house blessing, I passed by a church, that had a big announcement, saying, Christ talks to open hearts! I am convinced that Christ talks to everyone, but only open hearts can hear him. St. Gregory of Nyssa notes that Moses never stopped ascending, climbing higher and higher. He never said to himself "This is enough. I don't need to go closer to God." Never stop coming closer to Jesus. These two things are challenging us today: Repent, never stop and have an open heart so we may indeed be changed and become more Christlike!

Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time Year A

## Look to the Lord for justice

**Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13**  
**Ps. 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10**  
**1 Corinthians 1:26-31**  
**Matthew 5:1-12a**

To seek justice in a time when injustice is the way of the world is a difficult task. Seeking requires paying attention to what is happening. This brings to our awareness even more matters to be concerned about. When injustice is evident, but one has no power to change it due to the circumstances, it can feel like a prison and may well lead to despair.

The Prophet Zephaniah offers a different approach to the matter. We can seek justice, and find none, and then we can intentionally live in our poverty, allying ourselves with those who experience the injustice even more profoundly than we do ourselves. The world advocates fighting injustice at all costs. God's way invites some fighting directly, but then, when we realize our powerlessness, to allow God's own power to flow through us. This is not a passive stance, but an active stance of readiness to see the action of God right where it is needed.

We clearly live in a world that is bent on its own destruction, even though it often



### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Father Timothy Hayes

Father Timothy M. Hayes is pastor of St. Edward The Confessor, Granville.

pretends to be seeking its own version of immortality. Divisions are passed down from generation to generation. Grievances shape attitudes that fail to accomplish true justice and leave us all stranded in the mire. We are told that we have to "choose sides" and leave out those who are "other."

The prophets' call is to look to the Lord for the justice that we seek: "Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth, who have observed his law; seek justice, seek humility; perhaps you may be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger." Implied in this admonition is the truth that in the end, God Himself will achieve justice for us. Our hope is not in this world but in being sheltered by God in the face of whatever results of the injustice.

Lives are forged in suffering and in the face of injustice by discovering two realities: an inner strength that we never knew we had, and companions who are willing to walk with us amid the troubles we all experience, true friends who are also friends of our God. Holding on to our relationships with God and our neighbors even as we struggle accomplishes this.

Years ago, a contemplative religious suggested to me as a young person facing a new adventure that I should look at everything

twice. The intent, I believe, was for me to learn to capture the experience into my own heart. I also understood it to allow me to bring that experience home to those who were not with me at the moment. Both have proven to be wisdom for me.

In recent times, I have also learned that this attitude can be very helpful when facing great difficulties, times of injustice, especially in situations completely beyond my control. Surrender to whatever is happening

is not giving up. Rather, it is opening our eyes to see just what can be brought out of it.

God's promise is to share with us a wisdom that overcomes the world. He chose us, not because we are wise ourselves but because we have learned Who He Is. We are the remnant that is left, unnoticed, seemingly docile to the way things are, but with a weapon greater than a sword. Our actions are simple. We name things as they are and stand ready to open our hearts to the God Who is with us. The prophet describes how we are to be: "They shall do no wrong and speak no lies; nor shall there be found in their mouths a deceitful tongue; they shall pasture and couch their flocks with none to disturb them."

The Beatitudes invite us to acknowledge the brokenness of our world and the reality of injustice. They also set our eyes on the kingdom of Heaven. Looking up when we are weighed down gives us a wider perspective. Being humble, seeing others who are with us that are poor in spirit gives us the kingdom. We taste now what we long for. Look at everything twice. "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven."

### THE WEEKDAY BIBLE READINGS

1-26/1-31	THURSDAY
<b>MONDAY</b>	1 Kings 2:1-4,10-12
Malachi 3:1-4	1 Chronicles 29:10,11ab,11d-
Psalm 24:7,8,9,10	12a,12bcd (Ps)
Luke 2:22-40	Mark 6:7-13
<b>TUESDAY</b>	<b>FRIDAY</b>
2 Samuel 18:9-10,14b,24-25a,30-19:3	Sirach 47:2-11
Psalm 86:1-2,3-4,5-6	Psalm 18:31,47,50,51
Mark 5:21-43	Mark 6:14-29
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>	<b>SATURDAY</b>
2 Samuel 24:2,9-17	1 Kings 3:4-13
Psalm 32:1-2,5,6,7	Psalm 119:9,10,11,12,13,14
Mark 6:1-6	Psalm 37:5-6,30-31,39-40

2-2/2-7	THURSDAY
<b>MONDAY</b>	1 Kings 8:1-7,9-13
Psalm 132:6-7,8-10	Psalm 106:3-4,35-36,37,40
Mark 6:53-56	Mark 7:24-30
<b>TUESDAY</b>	<b>FRIDAY</b>
1 Kings 8:22-23,27-30	1 Kings 11:29-32;12:19
Psalm 84:3,4,5,10,11	Psalm 81:10-11ab,12-13,14-15
Mark 7:1-13	Mark 7:31-37
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>	<b>SATURDAY</b>
1 Kings 10:1-10	1 Kings 12:26-32;13:33-34
Psalm 37:5-6,30-31,39-40	Psalm 106:6-7ab,19-20,21
Mark 6:30-34	Mark 8:1-10

### DIOCESAN WEEKLY RADIO AND TELEVISION:

**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](http://www.stgabrielradio.com) and diocesan website, [www.columbuscatholic.org](http://www.columbuscatholic.org).

Mass from St. Francis de Sales Seminary, Milwaukee, at 7:30 and 10 a.m. on WWTO-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 Breezelane 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 DirectTV 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.

### Mass Schedule: Weeks of January 24 and 31

#### DAILY MASS

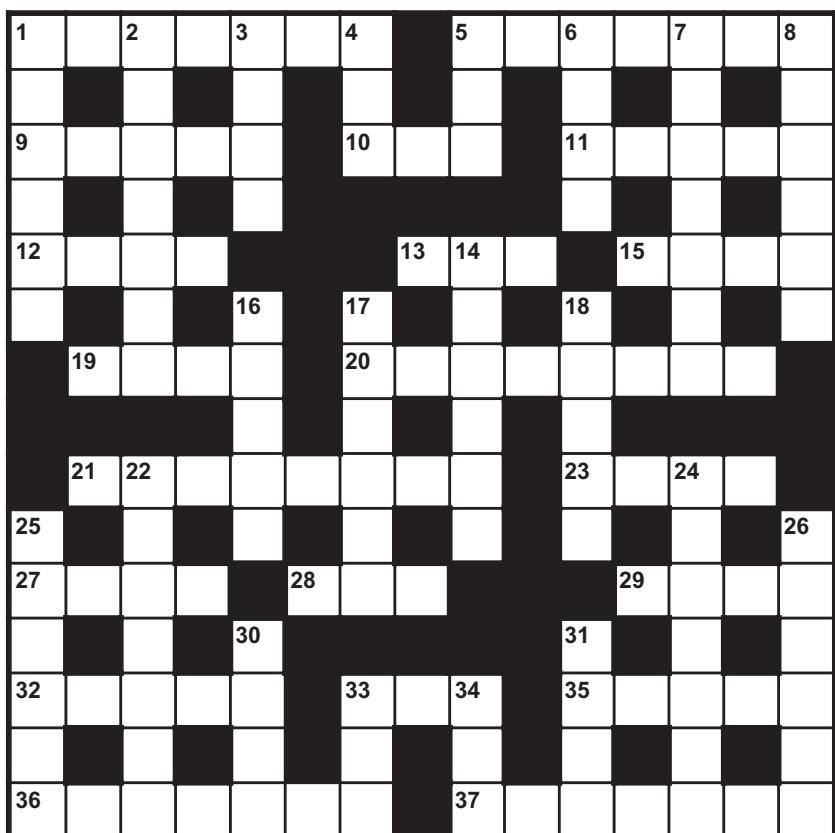
8 a.m., Our Lady of the Angels Monastery in Birmingham, Ala. (Encores at noon, 7 p.m. and midnight). See EWTN above; and on I-Lifetv (Channel 113, Ada, Logan, Millersburg, Murray City, Washington C.H.; Channel 125, Marion, Newark, Newcomerstown and New Philadelphia; Channel 207, Zanesville); 8 p.m., St. Gabriel Radio (AM 820), Columbus, and at [www.stgabrielradio.com](http://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](http://www.stgabrielradio.com) and diocesan website, [www.columbuscatholic.org](http://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](http://www.stannstmary.org)); Delaware St. Mary ([www.delawarestmary.org](http://www.delawarestmary.org)); Sunbury St. John Neumann ([www.saintjohnsunbury.org](http://www.saintjohnsunbury.org)); and Columbus Immaculate Conception ([www.iccols.org](http://www.iccols.org)). Check your parish website for additional information.

We pray the propers for Weeks III and IV of the Liturgy of the Hours.

## CATHOLIC CROSSWORD



## ACROSS

1 "... Dominus Deus Sabaoth"  
 5 Y-shaped vestment conferred by the pope  
 9 Catholic Canadian Prime Minister, Joe \_\_\_  
 10 First word of the first question of the Baltimore Catechism  
 11 Paul said he would travel here after leaving Rome  
 12 He took the animals two by two  
 13 Mass apparel  
 15 John Paul II's "The Gospel of \_\_\_"  
 19 Second word of the first question of the Baltimore Catechism  
 20 Catholic colony in America  
 21 This crosses the church  
 23 He was made from the dust of the ground  
 27 Jesus said it would be hard for such people to enter heaven  
 28 Governor Bush, convert to Catholicism  
 29 Biblical king who destroyed the worshipers of Baal  
 32 Diocese in Idaho  
 33 "...but you are making it a \_\_\_ of thieves." (Mt 21:13)  
 35 King David sent him into battle to be killed  
 36 First recorded Christian martyr  
 37 Sin against hope

## DOWN

1 Commandment that forbids taking God's

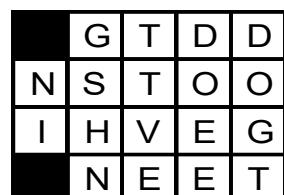
## Words of Wisdom

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.

Some people do ...



ODD THINGS TO GET EVEN

## Upcoming Feast Days

1-28 St. Thomas Aquinas  
 1-31 St. John Bosco  
 2-2 The Presentation of the Lord  
 2-3 St. Blaise  
 2-5 St. Agatha  
 2-8 St. Josephine Bakhita



All You Holy Men and Women,  
*Ora Pro Nobis*

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## Virginia M. Reade

Funeral Mass for Virginia M. Reade, 78, who died Saturday, Jan. 3, was celebrated Thursday, Jan. 8 at the Lancaster Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption. Burial was at St. Mary Cemetery, Lancaster.

She was born on Jan. 22, 1947 in Cambridge, Massachusetts to the late William and Mary Keith. She graduated from Winchester (Massachusetts) High School and received a Bachelor's degree from Simmons College in Boston.

She spent nearly 50 years as a teacher, developing a national award-winning Lat-

in program at Lancaster Fisher Catholic High School, where she also coached volleyball, softball and cheerleading.

Survivors include her husband of 55 years, Father John Reade, a retired priest of the Diocese of Columbus who was ordained in 2009 after being a member of the Episcopal clergy; a son, Brendan (Kerry); a daughter, Sharon (Benedict) Reade Boyden; a sister, Sharon Keith; four grandsons, four granddaughters, a great-grandson and a great-granddaughter.

## Richard J. Rolwing

Funeral Mass for Richard J. Rolwing, 96, who died Wednesday, Jan. 14, was celebrated Monday, Jan. 19 at Reynoldsburg St. Pius X Church. Burial was at Holy Cross Cemetery, Pataskala.

He was born in Indiana on March 18, 1929 to Edward and Rose Rolwing and grew

up in Cairo, Illinois.

He received a Bachelor's degree in philosophy from St. Paul's College at the Catholic University of America, a Master's degree in theology from the University of Notre Dame and a doctorate from the University of Iowa.

After completing his doctoral studies, he taught theology at Iowa, Xavier University in Cincinnati and the University of Dayton.

He wrote books, essays, op-ed articles and gave lectures about the Catholic Church and participated in many Catholic academic associations. He and his wife welcomed many foster children. At his parish, he was a member of the Knights of Columbus and the choir and served as a lector and an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist.

He was preceded in death by his parents and four siblings. Survivors include his wife of 61 years, Patricia (Gardner); sons, Jon (Amy), Rich (Krista) and Patrick (Andriana); daughters, Julia and Mary Jane; three granddaughters and three grandsons, including Father Joseph Rolwing, parochial vicar at Columbus-Powell St. Peter St. Joan of Arc Church.

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## PRAY FOR OUR DEAD

**ALLEN, Joan H., 98, Jan. 8**  
Our Mother of Sorrows Chapel, Columbus

**KOLATTUKUDY, Dr. Pappachan E., 88, Jan. 4**  
St. Andrew Church, Columbus

**ARNOLD, Donald "Tom," 74, Dec. 21**  
Ss. Peter & Paul Church, Glenmont

**LISTON, Joseph, 80, Dec. 10**  
St. Mary Magdalene Church, Columbus

**BOWES, Thomas, 63, Dec. 21**  
Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption, Lancaster

**LITTLE, Linda (Rossi), 62, Dec. 19**  
St. Joseph Church, Dover

**CAHILL, Ramona, 80, Dec. 16**  
St. Mary Magdalene Church, Columbus

**MARMON, Jodie, 64, Dec. 11**  
St. Mary Magdalene Church, Columbus

**CAPOTS, Raymond E., 88, Dec. 27**  
St. Peter St. Joan of Arc Church, Columbus-Powell

**MODELICH, Helen M. (Rains), 96, Jan. 5**  
St. Margaret of Cortona Church, Columbus

**CASEY, John Charles, 89, Dec. 31**  
Ss. Simon & Jude Church, West Jefferson

**MONTELL, James D., 93, Jan. 7**  
St. Paul the Apostle Church, Westerville

**CERVI, Lynn M. (Felice), 82, Jan. 4**  
Our Mother of Sorrows Chapel, Columbus

**NETTLER, Daniel J., 67, Jan. 2**  
Church of the Resurrection, New Albany

**COUGHLIN, Robert J., 79, Dec. 21**  
Our Lady of Victory Church, Columbus

**NYE, William, 89, Jan. 2**  
St. Charles Preparatory School, Columbus

**DEVINE, James A. Jr., 85, Dec. 24**  
St. Paul the Apostle Church, Westerville

**O'LEARY, Thomas M., 79, Dec. 19**  
St. Charles Preparatory School, Columbus

**DRAKE, Kenneth M., 86, Dec. 27**

St. Francis de Sales Church, Newark

**PETERS, Delores (Mastri), 85, Dec. 24**

St. Joseph Church, Dover

**DUNNIGAN, Keith A., 81, Jan. 2**

St. Brigid of Kildare Church, Dublin

**PHILLIPS, Chris, 84, Jan. 2**

Holy Spirit Church, Columbus

**FOLEY, Kathleen, 87, Dec. 4**

St. Mary Magdalene Church, Columbus

**SCHNEIDER, Eilene, 94, Dec. 15**

Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption, Lancaster

**GROVE, Diane Maureen, 78, Dec. 22**

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

**SHUMAKER, Stephen R., 72, Nov. 28**

Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption, Lancaster

**GUITTEAU, Thomas J., 84, formerly of Columbus, Dec. 20**

Christ the King Church, Toledo

**SIEVERS, Robert J., 80, Dec. 31**

St. Joseph Church, Plain City

**JOHNSON, Gordon Lee "Gordy," 93, Jan. 4**

St. Nicholas Church, Zanesville

**SITTERLEY, Sarah, 77, Dec. 12**

Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption, Lancaster

**KARABINOS, Mary A., 72, Dec. 20**

St. Leo the Great Oratory, Columbus

**VACHERESSE, Joseph Michael, 62, Dec. 29**

Ss. Simon & Jude Church, West Jefferson

**KELLEY, Alice M., 91, Jan. 10**

St. Paul the Apostle Church, Westerville

**WEHNER, Marilyn A. 87, Dec. 13**

Our Lady of Peace Church, Columbus

**KIBLER, Larry R., 73, Jan. 1**

St. Brigid of Kildare Church, Dublin

**WEHNER, Ronald J., 92, Dec. 13**

Our Lady of Peace Church, Columbus

**KILBARGER, Edward, 88, Dec. 3**

Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption, Lancaster

**WHITE, Donald, 87, Dec. 31**

Sacred Hearts Church, Cardington

**KNEISEL, Robert Sr., 76, Dec. 24**

St. Paul the Apostle Church, Westerville

**WINKELMES, Erin K. (Scott), 60, Jan. 12**

St. Nicholas Church, Zanesville

## Sister Thoma Swanson, OP

Funeral Mass for Sister Thoma Swanson, 97, who died Friday, Jan. 9 at the Mohun Health Care Center, was celebrated Saturday, Jan. 17 at the Motherhouse of the Dominican Sisters of Peace. Burial was at St. Joseph Cemetery, Columbus.

She was born Joan Swanson on Dec. 5, 1928 in Kent to A. Murray and Marie (Green) Swanson.

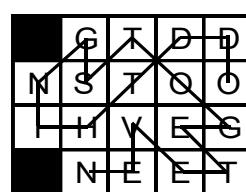
She was a graduate of Kent Roosevelt High School and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in art and English from Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee in 1950, a Master of Arts degree in art from the University of Notre Dame in 1958 and a Master of Fine Arts degree in painting and printmaking from the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York in 1968.

She entered the congregation of the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs (now the Dominican Sisters of Peace) in 1950 and professed her vows on July 9, 1952.

In the Diocese of Columbus, she taught English and art at Columbus Bishop Watterson High School from 1955 to 1964 and was associated with the Milo Arts community in Columbus from 1999 to 2017, when she became an artist at the Motherhouse. She continued her artwork as part of a ministry at the Mohun center from 2022 until her death. She also was a teacher at St. Mary High School and Albertus Magnus College in New Haven, Connecticut.

From 1986 to 1998, she served as a missionary in Chimbote, Peru, where she taught and worked with women to develop handcrafted items for sale. She produced many paintings, tapestries, stained glass windows and murals as commissioned artwork in Peru and the United States.

She was preceded in death by her parents and her brothers Andrew and Thomas. She is survived by nieces and nephews.



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## Singing happy birthday at Mass?

Dear Father,

At the end of each month, my priest wants to acknowledge parishioners' birthdays and anniversaries. Before the final blessing, he asks those with birthdays to stand. He then asks us to sing happy birthday to them. For the anniversaries, he says a blessing for the couples. I don't think it's appropriate to sing the birthday song out loud in church. What is your opinion on this? Is it irreverent?

-Frank

Dear Frank,

You are correct about the happy birthday song at Mass. It's quite irreverent.

For all the clergy who claim that Vatican II loosened the formality of the liturgy, I like to remind them of what the actual document about the liturgy says. In the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (no. 22.3), we read: "Therefore no other person, even if he be a priest, may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority." We find no exceptions to this Vatican II rule.

Liturgical law stipulates that during the Concluding Rites of the Mass, after the Prayer after Communion but before the final blessing, necessary but brief announcements may be made (see General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 90). Citing birthdays and anniversaries is not necessary, and singing "Happy Birthday" is not brief.

What's next? Announcing upcoming

surgeries or work anniversaries or sports results of the parish school teams?

Adding things to the Mass (and other liturgies) that don't belong there, especially secular matters, is most inappropriate and just plain wrong. I recently posted in this column about the solemnity of the Mass, even in a so-called simple early morning weekday Mass.

At Mass, we are privileged to hear the word of God and to worship God through the sacrifice of the Word made flesh on our altar. The Mass is a sacred prayer offered in a sacred place. For that period of time, we set aside, to the best of our ability, anything that is not involved in the direct worship of Almighty God.

Someone might argue that the priest should first end the Mass and then sing happy birthday for certain people. This would be to forget that we are still in a sacred space, set aside for the worship of God. We are demeaning the sacred by imposing profane activities in that space.

Moreover, many of those in attendance will have just received Holy Communion. As the bishop of Columbus has recently instructed, the time immediately after Mass is meant for each person to make an act of thanksgiving to God for the gift of the Eucharist. Even if a person did not receive Communion, he or she should still offer thanksgiving for the gift of being part of the holy sacrifice and for being in the presence of the Eucharistic Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, Jesus Christ himself.

The appropriate place for singing "Happy



### 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.*

Birthday," "Happy Anniversary," or "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" and other profane music, including so-called classical music pieces such as Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," is anywhere other than at the sacred liturgy or the celebration of any of the sacraments.

It may not be failproof, but a good test is to ask whether what Father Ricky Relevant wants to add to the Mass is about glorifying God or about someone other than God, including Father himself.

The part you ask about blessings needs

more nuance. A general blessing is given at the end of Mass. It is for everyone in attendance who desires to receive a blessing and is spiritually disposed to receive it. Someone attending a Catholic funeral Mass but practicing another religion would most likely not be disposed to receive the blessing.

At certain times, other blessings may be added to the Mass. For instance, there are a number of specially composed solemn blessings found in the Roman Missal. The priest may not *ad lib* these blessings. He must read them as printed.

If a priest desires to offer a special blessing for certain groups, he is welcome to do so after the dismissal and final hymn of Mass. In this case, he should return to the sacristy, remove his chasuble and re-enter sanctuary to bless those who remained for some minutes after their Eucharistic thanksgiving. Such blessings might include prayers for expectant mothers, or to enroll people in the Angelic Warfare Confraternity and other devotional practices.

For those celebrating wedding anniversaries, there is a special rite in the Order of Celebrating Matrimony (a ritual book that all priests have) called "The Order of Blessing a Married Couple within Mass on the Anniversary of Marriage." It is foreseen that the main anniversaries, such as the 25th, or 50th, or 60th years, are blessed, not each and every annual anniversary.

To the Blessed Trinity be the glory!

*Questions about the sacraments should be sent to [sacraments101@columbuscatholic.org](mailto:sacraments101@columbuscatholic.org).*

## Modern-day apostles?



### A SHEPHERD'S CARE

Father Thomas Buffer

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

day apostles as the NAR does. In Catholic tradition, the word "apostle" can mean three different things. First, the original 12 as well as men like Paul and Matthias who could serve as witnesses to the Risen Christ and establish the essentials of his Church. Second, "apostle" refers to the mission of all the baptized to sanctify the world and spread the Gospel. It is in this sense that Pope John XXIII called Sister Elena Guerra "modern-day apostle of the Holy Spirit" when he beatified her in 1959. Third, a leader in bringing the Gospel to a specific place or group can be called an apostle; e.g. St. Francis Xavier is called "the apostle of Japan," and Saints Cyril and Methodius are called "apostles to the Slavs." In no case does it mean anything like the definition of "modern-day apostle" put forth by the Latter Rain and NAR.

Catholics believe that bishops are not apostles, but successors to the apostles.

We speak of apostolic succession, but not apostolic continuation. The last apostle died a long time ago. A necessary component of apostolic succession is apostolic tradition; i.e., faithfully handing on the teaching of the apostles. In the third century, St. Irenaeus of Lyon spoke of both apostolic succession and the apostolic tradition:

"In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the Apostles and the preaching of the truth have come down to us. And this is a most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the Apostles until now, and handed down in truth" (Adversus Haereses, III, 3, 3: PG 7, 851).

Without a faithful handing on of the teaching of the Apostles, there is no apostolic ministry today. Pope Benedict XVI observed that "the apostolicity of ecclesial communion consists in fidelity to the teaching and praxis of the Apostles, through whom the historical and spiritual bond of the Church with Christ is assured. The Apostolic Succession of the episcopal ministry is a means of guaranteeing the faithful transmission of the Apostolic witness."

Part of the apostolic tradition, for Catholics, is the hierarchical leadership of the Church, the "divinely instituted ecclesiastical ministry ... exercised in different degrees by those who even from ancient times have been called bishops, priests and deacons" (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1554).

The tendency to reduce the definition of "apostle" to a charismatic leader called directly by God, however faith-filled and gifted that person might be, goes against

the Catholic understanding of apostolic succession. No one can be an apostolic leader today without being part of a chain that goes back to the 12 and others who were witnesses to the Risen Christ.

In Catholic thought, a present-day apostolic leader is a witness entrusted with a mission by other witnesses, someone who has authority to carry it out only because it has been given sacramentally from others who have already received the mission. While the word "apostle" means "one who has been sent," Catholics do not believe that God appoints apostles directly without working through the leadership structures he established within his apostolic Church.

Once we know the authentic Catholic teaching on this matter, it is rather startling to find a Catholic writing the following about lay Catholics: "We need a new method of ministry that orients us toward leadership development to reach the masses. An apostle is one whom God sends. He or she has the ability to raise up preachers and teachers, evangelists and pastors. An apostle forms other apostles into leaders, and then, in turn, knows how to form leaders."

What are we to make of such a statement? Catholics who say things like this, while constantly speaking of world changers, transforming cities and nations, etc., have been influenced by the NAR to such an extent that they are presenting a teaching about modern-day apostles that is incompatible with Catholic tradition.

## ADVOCACY: The work of the Office of Catholic Advocacy and Social Doctrine, *Continued from Page 6*

that's worthy.

The office has also developed relationships with Gov. Mike DeWine's Human Trafficking Task Force and Attorney General David Yost's Human Trafficking Initiative. I've also joined the attorney general's Human Trafficking Commission and serve on the commission's Legal and Legislative Subcommittee to look

for more high-level policy responses to trafficking.

Like gambling and so many other social pathologies to which we turn a collective blind eye, human trafficking destroys lives: the lives of the trafficked, the lives of the Johns and the lives of whole families. Trafficking, far from what some might claim about

prostitution or "sex work," is not a victimless crime: it attacks the dignity of all involved, for some of them it brings death, and for all of us it erodes the conditions for healthy family life and a wholesome social order.

It also leads to the deaths of countless innocent children: when a trafficked woman gets pregnant, the chances are incredibly high that her trafficker — her abuser and

torturer — will put relentless pressure on her to get an abortion. Trafficking, then, is a life issue to the very core, and in working to rescue its victims, we are working to protect the lives and dignity of baby girls and boys, children and adolescents, grown women and men, and all of our families. We, each of us, are called to do no less.

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# Christmas Mass brings light into dark prison world

By Michele Williams  
For The Catholic Times

A month ago, we celebrated the Nativity of Jesus with a beautiful Mass at the Ohio Reformatory for Women. Today, I still see the "light that has shone" upon this prison.

The first verse of the first reading from Isaiah 9:1-6 proclaimed, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone." For the incarcerated such as myself, when taking the verse literally, it becomes a profound and hope-filled statement for our future.

2025 was the third consecutive year where Bishop Earl Fernandes celebrated Christmas among inmates, inside a cinder-block and tin chapel, surrounded by electric double fences topped with razor wire. He and his special guests were the manifestation of bringing light to the land of gloom!

The first year Bishop Fernandes came, I was a nervous wreck because as the musician/soloist I'd never played/sang in the presence of a bishop. The second year, I was comfortable around him but twice as nervous because he brought Gov. Mike DeWine and First Lady Fran DeWine. This year, I got a grip and was able to truly enjoy my musical efforts because his guests were Knights and Dames from the Order of Malta. I didn't know these people, I had never met them, but they felt like home -- it was a weird and unexpectedly comforting feeling.

Our chapel was absolutely packed with guests from the Diocese of Columbus, ORW staff and over 150 inmates. The Mass had been announced as "Open for All," resulting in the majority of the

congregation being non-Catholics, and it was wonderful! What an opportunity to demonstrate our style of worship.

Coincidentally, the biggest section of inmates was seated nearest to me (to the right of the altar), so I was able to discreetly signal when to stand, respond or sit. That helped raise the overall comfort level and sense of community.

A few friends watched me closely, following my lead, and their participation quickly rippled through others. From my vantage point at the keyboard, it was quite heartwarming. While they may not have understood everything, the level of respect shown served as a great equalizer.

I'd been awaiting Bishop Fernandes' homily with blessed hope, particularly since the Jubilee Year of Hope was coming to an end. I just knew he would have a special message for us. My mantra all year long had been *spes non confundit* "hope does not disappoint" and it didn't! However, I certainly didn't expect him to say that he had a special papal blessing for us at the end of Mass! And that was just the beginning of his homily. It only got better from there.

Bishop Fernandes delved into the reading from Isaiah. I was very moved that he associated inmates as the ones who walk in darkness and in the land of gloom since it is so true! Prison is gloomy and dark -- that's part of the punishment. Ironically, though, I have found that my faith sees better in the dark. I discovered it by accident in 2021, when my parole was denied for the fourth time. Darkness, devastation and depression sucked me in like quicksand so I couldn't see anything, let alone what God was doing or allowing at the time. But I believed. I knew my faith saw Him when I couldn't. I endured in the dark for quite a while, letting faith guide

me eventually to solid ground.

Anyway, Bishop Fernandes encouraged us repeatedly to open our hearts to Jesus and the power of God's love. That's what faith had done in the dark to get me out of the quicksand! His words were validation, confirmation and exactly what I needed to hear -- or see in the light of a new day!

He went on to quote, "For every boot that tramped in battle, every cloak rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for flames." He used it as a rather dramatic reference to our crimes, emphasizing that forgiveness comes with taking responsibility. While I have faced and taken the ugly responsibility of my crime, personal forgiveness has been more of a challenge because I feel such deep remorse for what I did and the pain I caused.

For many years, I didn't think forgiveness could coexist with remorse. Then I learned it's not an either/or condition; it can be both. That point was driven home when Bishop Fernandes said, "I don't know what many of you have done, and quite frankly I don't care. I came here to bring the forgiveness, love and light of God to you through His Son, Jesus. You have to take responsibility to allow His forgiveness into your heart. Open your heart to Him."

He said, "God sent his Son to the outcasts and margins of society too, and you can come to Heaven because of Him." The directness of his words were only eclipsed by the intensity and compassion in his voice. I felt and I saw on the faces of my fellow inmates pure relief, awe, joy and tears. It was the most straightforward declaration of love and worth I'd ever heard. The Amens and affirmations that rang through the congregation were like angel whispers echoing from one side to the other.

At the end of Mass, Bishop Fernandes

gave us the papal blessing. It was the third of only three entrusted to bishops of every diocese by Pope Leo XIV to bestow on congregations in exceptional situations. And our bishop had saved this one for us! I was so overjoyed and overwhelmed that now I can't remember anything beyond, "His Holiness, Pope Leo XIV loves you and

... "Even so, with this extraordinary blessing, I felt his presence, and the power of the Holy Spirit that washed over me was like a holy waterfall.

After Mass was a small reception where I was able to come "out of the waterfall," so to speak, unwind and enjoy fellowship with many of our guests. I spent time chatting with three Knights of Malta; I love that prison ministry is within the sphere of their mission -- defending the faith and caring for the poor. They were so genuine, energetic, funny and welcoming that I didn't feel like an inmate but almost a real person.

All too soon, it was time to go. It was 10:53 and Formal Institutional 11:00 Count was quickly approaching. Count time waits for no one. Seriously!

So after a few more quick hugs and "Thank yous," I hustled all the way across the compound to my housing unit. My respite from prison life was over and everyone else had to get back to life in America. But you know what? It was LIGHT! Gratitude and love had lifted the darkness and gloom, enabling me to walk in a great light. I see that light every day now and it strengthens my faith, inspires me, and gives me hope. Merry Christmas ad infinitum.

*Michele Williams is incarcerated at the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville.*

## I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me



### LOADS OF LAUNDRY AND LOVE

Rachel Romantic

*Rachel Romantic is a wife and mom of two who loves to spend time with her family and make memories together outside in the garden. She is also the Communications Coordinator at New Albany Church of the Resurrection.*

need.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit come to mind and I imagine perhaps we don't always think to apply them to everyday typical life and reserve them for matters explicitly spiritual. But why not use these gifts in matters of daily life? The Holy Spirit offers these gifts through the Sacrament of Baptism and are strengthened in Confirmation to help us live out our lives connected to our Lord. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of God.

With our daughter's allergy, I look especially toward the gifts of counsel, fortitude and fear of God. In praying for the gift of counsel, my husband and I ask

the Lord to bless us to best understand what we need to do as Elizabeth's parents concerning her allergy. Dealing with an allergy such as this is something totally new for us as parents, and even in a matter such as this, we want God to walk with us as we discern what is best for our daughter's health. We ask for fortitude so we do not grow weary as we navigate this situation.

As I mentioned above, we as parents know that this suffering is not part of God's plan, but asking for the strength to always keep that in mind can help us as we work through any unknowns ahead. Finally, we ask to be blessed with the gift of fear of God. This one sounds odd at first, but this gift aims to orient our lives so that we are afraid of being separated from the Lord, not that we are fearful of the Lord as it initially reads. Even with a challenge such as this, we are called to praise the Lord. It is also an opportunity for us as parents to unite our suffering to Christ's on the cross and to offer that for the sake of our daughter. Be it the emotional or mental weight of learning to manage this allergy, or any suffering for that matter, we can try to become closer to Christ even in this scenario.

It is also important for us to remember that things like pain and suffering were never a part of God's design

for us as humans. They are a result of sin entering the world through Adam and Eve's transgressions in the garden. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, we read, "God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil" (CCC 385). Knowing this is a comfort for us too and helps us to stay close to the Lord in painful situations.

Just as we don't want our daughter to experience pain and suffering, the Lord does not want His children to suffer.

I pray that this is something that passes for our daughter so that she can live a life without dietary restrictions, but I know that even if it doesn't, we will be able to navigate it together with the Lord. We can't make it go away -- we are limited in that sense -- but we can figure out the best path forward because we have Christ by our side to give us strength.

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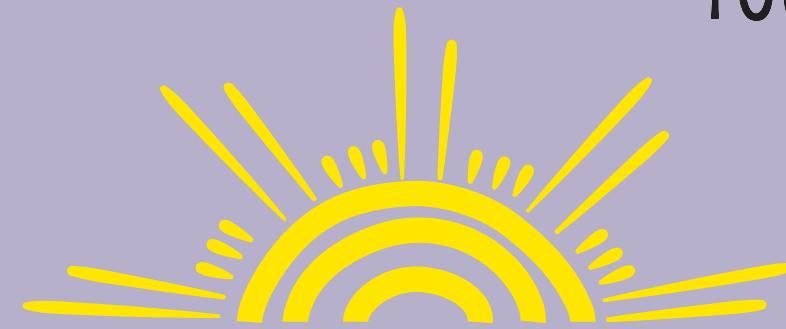
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REGISTRATION

# The vital role of humility in diaconal ministry

This is the third column in a series on deacons and diaconia.

As I continue these reflections on deacons and the diaconate, and now that we've talked some about who deacons are, another area to explore is what I'm going to call mindset – the attitude – approach – how deacons can and should relate to others in the clergy and laity, in diocesan and parish structures. I want to offer a consideration of the most effective ways for deacons' minds and hearts to be set.

This aspect of our ministry is the bridge between who we are and what we do as deacons. While who we are is to be the strong foundation on which our diaconia grows and is built up successfully, we also want that bridge from who we are to what we do to be strong as well – to be structurally sound.

Regarding the diaconal mindset, I want to touch on several facets that make deacons effective: humility, strength, holiness, gratitude and the role of intermediary. My starting point is humility.

I'll call this the first pillar in the bridge I'm talking about. This is so, so very important to being a deacon – the first pillar we need to put down in our lives as deacons. No deacon can truly succeed if he does not embrace humility – really grasp it and hold it tight. To me, it's another vital key to being successful and happy as a deacon. A deacon who does not understand and cherish humility and



## 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.

live it actively will find himself unhappy – maybe slightly so – maybe even so unhappy he's miserable.

Let me start with a thought from Pope Francis: "Firstly, I expect you to be humble. It is sad to see a bishop and a priest showing off, but it is even sadder to see a deacon wanting to put himself at the center of the world, or at the center of the liturgy, or at the center of the Church. Be humble. Let all the good you do be a secret between you and God. And so, it will bear fruit." Pope Francis to the Deacons of Rome, June 19, 2021

There it is. Right out of the gate, as the old adage says, and what a great thought to begin with. Pope Francis, who himself

is a wonderful sign of humility and service, very clearly called deacons to humility and said exactly how to do that. He was a great example to follow.

This was not a guideline or suggestion he offered. He said, "I expect you to be humble. Not 'It would be nice,' not 'I invite,' not 'I encourage,' not 'I recommend.' 'I expect.' These are the words of a father giving clear direction and instruction to his children – and I consider our Pope a spiritual father to all clergy in the world.

For those of us who are parents, I encourage you to think of what goes through or went through our minds when we said "I expect" or its equivalent to our own children. It was not open to negotiation. We wanted cooperation. In the spirit, the Holy Father was very clear, and it's vital we all follow that directive, especially deacons as ordained signs of diaconia.

I know our own Bishop Earl Fernandes embraces humility as well. The first time I spoke with him when we were preparing to announce his appointment as Bishop of Columbus, I said to him, "I look forward to serving you." His answer was, "Thank you. I look forward to serving you." There are plenty of times at an episcopal Mass when I vested that I saw Bishop Fernandes donning both a dalmatic and a chasuble. As the Bishop, he embraces and cherishes his diaconia along with his role as the shepherd of our diocese. Like the Pope, he is another example for all people – clergy and laity

alike – to follow.

Lastly, and most importantly, in walking the path of humility, we are doing as Jesus said and did. In the Gospel of Matthew, He gives this instruction: "Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Mt 23:12)."

Jesus' earthly ministry was a series of examples of humility, from His birth in the stable to His death and resurrection. He humbled himself by sharing in our humanity and we have the opportunity to share in his divinity. The path to that divinity lies in reminding ourselves every day that the only way to get there is by letting go of that illusion that we control our destiny and putting God in charge, doing that day after day, week after week, and year after year.

Jesus teaches us that we will achieve this by understanding that there is one master in life, and it is the Lord and not us. To live a life of humility means actively recognizing that God is in charge and not assuming that we are the master of our fate and existence, seeking to have faith in him continually as well as determining and carrying out his will for us, avoiding the assumption that we alone know best, avoiding the instinctive desire to put ourselves first. In the end, the path to true happiness lies in God's way, the way of living and thinking humbly.

# The evangelist in Stanley Prison



## 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.

confessions of faith. After asking himself in a letter to his wife and children, "Why is my mood not down at all, sometimes even light-hearted?" and then answering his own question — "I guess because so many people whom I have even never met are praying for me is the main reason" — this 21st century martyr-confessor gave thanks for what his conversion to Catholicism and his current ordeal had taught him, in words reproduced on that Christmas card:

I am always in God's presence because of (those) prayers. I am so thankful the Lord gave me a new life, a life I was (previously) blind to — a life of true peace, joy, spiritual concreteness and meaning — as opposed to my muddling in life in pursuit of purposes bound into the narrowness of my ego before. Now I am free because I can see.

Jimmy Lai would never claim to be a theologian, but he displayed here a profound grasp of what we mean by professing our belief in the "Communion of

Saints" when we pray the Apostles Creed. Just as the human eye cannot see itself, human beings can be blinded to the truth about ourselves, our obligations, and our eternal destiny when we're caught in the trap of our egos. To be liberated into human and spiritual maturity, we need others — others who can help us see ourselves clearly, thereby giving us the capacity to see the world truly.

That is what happens in the Communion of Saints. Others introduce us to Christ. Others help us to see ourselves as forgiven and redeemed, thereby helping cure us of the myopia caused by egotism. Others sustain us and help us grow by their prayers, for no authentic prayer ever goes unheard. Jimmy Lai knows that and lives it. Through the prayers that sustain him, he can "see" his suffering during almost five years of an otherwise wretched imprisonment as an occasion of grace, in which he participates in Christ's continuing redemption of the world.

The policies of Xi Jinping, the absolute ruler of China, aim to make China the world's preeminent power, in payback for what Mao Zedong called its "century of humiliation" at the hands of exploitative foreign powers. Greatness as measured in the immediate moment can be illusory, however. In the first half of the 16th century, King Henry VIII bestrode England like a colossus. Yet today, it's Thomas More — the man Henry Tudor unjustly imprisoned for refusing to bend his conscience to the autocrat's will — who is remembered as the "man for all seasons": the man whose example has drawn others into the Communion of Saints for over four centuries.

Those who find an analogy here with 21st-century Catholicism's most famous political prisoner, Jimmy Lai, will understand what Pope St. Paul VI said about witnesses being evangelists, and what that means for living the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) today.

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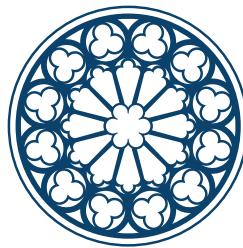
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