



Photo: This 1622 painting titled "Adoration of the Shepherds" is by Dutch artist Gerard van Honthorst. The feast of the Nativity of Christ, a holy day of obligation, is celebrated on Dec. 25. (OSV News photo/Bridgeman Images)

A Christmas Message from Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Christmas blessings!
Whatever may be going on in our lives, relationships and the world around us, the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, is cause for rejoicing. Salvation is at hand!

We are currently in our second year of the National Eucharistic Revival, looking toward the 10th National Eucharistic Congress to be held in Indianapolis on July 17-21, 2024, for the entire Catholic Church of the United States.

We celebrate and proclaim the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist—His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity—which is made possible by the Incarnation of God becoming one like us in all things but sin through the birth of Jesus Christ.

Born into poverty during a time of great oppression and persecution for those awaiting a promised savior, Jesus dared to embrace the fullness of our humanity in order that we might share in His divinity.

In the Incarnation, the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, God is made intimately known to us.

Ever-present to us, especially in Word and Sacrament, divine grace enables us to rise above the oppression and persecution of this world to live as witnesses to faith, hope and charity in God's power to save, heal, reconcile and redeem humanity.

Making Himself perpetually available to us in the Most Holy Eucharist—marked by His life, passion, death and resurrection, from crib to cross—our Savior continues to nourish and sustain us as missionary disciples continuing to transform the world in His name. Amid the ever-increasing polarization, wars, violence and injustice, the



witness of our unity as the Body of Christ is needed as much as ever.

May our celebration of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ be a sharing in the joy of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, amid whatever hardships, challenges and uncertainties that we may be encountering.

May the spirit of Christmas prevail in our minds and hearts as we seek to exude the joy of the Gospel.

Praying that each person and family may experience a profound encounter with the person of Jesus Christ, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Charles C. Thompson

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Mensaje de Navidad del Arzobispo Charles C. Thompson

Queridos hermanas y hermanos en Cristo:

¡Bendiciones de Navidad!
Pase lo que pase en nuestras vidas, en nuestras relaciones y en el mundo que nos rodea, la Natividad de nuestro Señor Jesucristo, el verbo hecho hombre, es motivo de regocijo.

¡La salvación está cerca!

Actualmente nos encontramos en nuestro segundo año del Renacimiento Eucarístico Nacional, con la mirada puesta en el 10.º Congreso Eucarístico Nacional que se celebrará en Indianápolis del 17 al 21 de julio de 2024, para

Ver ARZOBISPO, página 2



Pope Francis greets people taking part in a living Nativity scene in Rome after an audience on Dec. 16 in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

While celebrating the Incarnation, remember Bethlehem, too, Pope says

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—When St. Francis of Assisi staged the first Nativity scene 800 years ago, he did so to remind people of the powerful, awe-inspiring truth that God became human in Jesus, Pope Francis said.

Nativity scenes are not simply works of art or folk art, the pope told hundreds of people involved in staging a live Nativity scene at the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome on Dec. 16.

Dressed as angels, shepherds, the Holy Family and the townspeople of Bethlehem 2,000 years ago, the amateur actors met Pope Francis in the Vatican audience hall just a few hours before their performance began.

When St. Francis staged a similar living Nativity in 1223, the pope said, he wanted “to represent in life the birth of Jesus to inspire in friars and in the people emotion and tenderness toward the mystery of God born of Mary in a stable and laid in a manger.”

The live setting, he said, was designed “to give substance to the representation—not a painting, not statues, but people in flesh and blood, in order to highlight the reality of the Incarnation.”

As St. Francis knew, “the purpose of the living Nativity scene is to reawaken wonder in the heart before the mystery of God who became a child.”

Pope Francis said that especially this

year people should keep the people of Bethlehem in mind when they see a living Nativity scene or a crèche in a home or church. “For them, it promises to be a Christmas of suffering, of mourning, without pilgrims, without celebrations.

“And naturally, this extends to all the inhabitants of the land where Jesus was born, lived, died and rose again,” he said. “We know the situation caused by the war, the consequence of a conflict that has lasted for decades.”

Immediately after meeting the living Nativity characters, Pope Francis held an audience with musicians who would perform that evening in a Christmas concert at the Vatican to raise money for Catholic education.

The pope spoke of the importance of songs as ways to hand down “stories and prayers” and express what people are thinking and feeling in a way words alone cannot do.

“Just think of all those teenagers who sing the songs of their favorite artists by heart because those words and music combine to evoke in them a powerful blend of emotions and associations,” he said.

Down through the ages, he said, Christmas has inspired a treasure trove of songs among people of all ages and all cultures. †



Pope Francis greets a woman taking part in a living Nativity scene in Rome after an audience on Dec. 16 in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



Public Schedule of Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

December 24, 2023–January 18, 2024

<p>December 24 – 10 p.m. Christmas Eve Mass at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, Indianapolis</p> <p>January 1-5 SEEK 24 conference in St. Louis, Mo.</p> <p>January 7 – 9:30 a.m. Mass at Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary, Indianapolis</p> <p>January 9 – 10:30 a.m. Priest Personnel Board meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center, Indianapolis</p> <p>January 10 – 11 a.m. Catholic Radio Indy at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center</p>	<p>January 11 – 8:15 a.m. Virtual Judicatories meeting</p> <p>January 11 – 10 a.m. Leadership Team meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center</p> <p>January 16 – 2 p.m. U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis Consultants, virtual</p> <p>January 17 – 10 a.m. Department heads meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center</p> <p>January 18 – 2 p.m. Legal Team meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center</p>
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ARZOBISPO

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toda la Iglesia católica de Estados Unidos.

Celebramos y proclamamos la presencia real de Jesucristo en la Eucaristía—su cuerpo y su sangre, su alma y su divinidad—que es posible gracias a la Encarnación de Dios haciéndose uno con nosotros en todo, menos en el pecado, mediante el nacimiento de Jesucristo.

Nacido en la pobreza durante una época de gran opresión y persecución para los que esperaban a un salvador prometido, Jesús se atrevió a acoger la plenitud de nuestra humanidad para que pudiéramos compartir su divinidad.

En la Encarnación, el nacimiento de nuestro Señor y Salvador, Jesucristo, Dios se nos da a conocer de una forma muy íntima. Siempre presente para nosotros, especialmente en la Palabra y los Sacramentos, mediante la gracia divina podemos elevarnos por encima de la opresión y la persecución de este mundo para vivir como testigos de la fe, la esperanza y la caridad en el poder de Dios para salvar, sanar, reconciliar y redimir a la humanidad.

Al quedar perpetuamente a nuestra

disposición en la Santísima Eucaristía—marcada por su vida, pasión, muerte y resurrección, desde el pesebre hasta la cruz—nuestro Salvador continúa alimentándonos y sosteniéndonos como discípulos misioneros que siguen transformando el mundo en su nombre. En medio de la creciente polarización, las guerras, la violencia y la injusticia, el testimonio de nuestra unidad como Cuerpo de Cristo es hoy más necesario que nunca.

Que nuestra celebración de la Natividad de nuestro Señor Jesucristo sea una participación en la alegría de la Santísima Virgen María y de san José, en medio de las dificultades, retos e incertidumbres que encontremos.

Que el espíritu de la Navidad prevalezca en nuestras mentes y corazones mientras procuramos ser reflejo de la alegría del Evangelio.

Orando para que cada persona y familia pueda vivir un encuentro profundo con la persona de Jesucristo,

quedo de ustedes en Cristo,

+ Charles C. Thompson

Arzobispo Charles C. Thompson

The Criterion and Catholic Center are closed from Dec. 22 to Jan. 1 for Christmas holiday

This week’s issue of *The Criterion*, which is our annual Christmas publication, is the last issue of 2023.

The Criterion will be published again on Jan. 12, 2024, and resume its weekly schedule.

The Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center will be closed from Dec. 22 through Jan. 1 in observance of the holidays.

Archdiocesan agencies will reopen at 8 a.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. †



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NEWS FROM YOU!

Do you have something exciting or newsworthy you want to be considered to be printed in The Criterion?

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Participants from all Indiana dioceses, plus four of five bishops, will take part in Indiana March for Life on Jan. 22

By Natalie Hoefler

When the Indiana March for Life began in 2018 in Indianapolis, it included participants from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis and the Diocese of Lafayette.

For the first time in its history, the event on Jan. 22 will include groups from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis and



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Indiana's four other dioceses—Evansville, Fort Wayne-South Bend, Gary and Lafayette—and bishops from four of them. Bishop Robert J. McClory of the Gary Diocese will be out of the country.

“The Supreme Court’s [June 2022] decision on *Dobbs v. Jackson* returned the legal issue of abortion back to individual states,” says Archbishop Charles C. Thompson.

“This has resulted in an effort of the Ecclesiastical Province of the five dioceses in Indiana to solidify a common voice and witness to the Church’s longstanding, Christ-centered teaching on the dignity of the person from the moment of conception to natural death.”

The expansion of the event includes “exciting” additions and changes,

says Brie Anne Varick, director of the archdiocesan Office of Human Life and Dignity.



Brie Anne Varick

Among them are participation by the New York-based Sisters of Life throughout the Jan. 21-22 events, including a new youth rally prior to the Mass for

Life—both of which will take place in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis.

Other additions include a pre-march rally and a slightly longer march route to the Statehouse.

The expansion of the event stems from what Varick calls a “movement of the Holy Spirit.”



Members of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis carry a banner during the Indiana March for Life on Jan. 23. (File photo by Natalie Hoefler)

The bishops ‘unanimously agreed’

Since the Supreme Court legalized abortion on demand in its Jan. 22, 1973, *Roe v. Wade* decision, national and local marches for life have taken place annually in solemn remembrance of unborn lives lost and to promote the pro-life cause.

Then, as Archbishop Thompson noted, the case was overturned and abortion regulation returned to the states in June of 2022.

As a result, says Varick, “a conversation was raised to the forefront among groups across Indiana as to where they would be sending [March for Life] pilgrims in 2023—to the national march [in Washington] or to the state march.”

Last year, a group from the Evansville Diocese decided to participate in the state march in Indianapolis.

“St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church was overflowing with [more than] 1,000 in attendance” for the Mass for Life preceding the march, says Varick. “Groups were on the floor and packed in the back.”

The Indiana March for Life planning team—consisting of members from the archdiocese, the Lafayette Diocese and Right to Life of Indianapolis—“started seeing the movement of the Holy Spirit,” she says. “We discerned whether it was time to expand so our presence, our voices could make a significant impact and change in our state,” she says.

They reached out to Archbishop

Thompson about moving the Mass to the Indiana Convention Center and promoting groups from the five Indiana dioceses to participate.

“He took this proposal to the Indiana bishops, and they unanimously agreed,” says Varick.

“Our plans include an intentional effort to provide an opportunity for evangelization and catechesis rooted in the respect life and social teachings of the Catholic faith,” says Archbishop Thompson.

These are especially “founded in the eucharistic celebration of the Mass as the source and summit of our baptismal call to holiness and mission, in preparation for our witness to the sacredness of life in the March for Life to our state’s capital.” †

Indiana March for Life 2024 schedule includes events on Jan. 21-22

Criterion staff report

As in years past, the 2024 Indiana March for Life schedule of events begins with a vigil at St. John the Evangelist Church in Indianapolis on Jan. 21.

The vigil includes a 7 p.m. Mass, followed by eucharistic adoration from 8-10 p.m. That time will include

prayer, music and a talk by one or more members of the New York-based Sisters of Life. Confession will also be available.

The day of the march, Jan. 22, kicks off with a youth rally for those in grades 8-12 and their chaperones.

The gathering will take place in the Indiana Convention Center from 9-11 a.m. Members of the Sisters of Life will offer

talks on God’s mercy and practical tips for living out the call to promote life. The rally will also include prayer and worship, music by Sarah Kroger, discussion time, an activity and the opportunity for confession.

Registration for the youth rally is required at cutt.ly/YouthRally2024 (case sensitive). Chaperones must complete safe environment training in their respective diocese by Jan. 7 to attend.

During the youth rally, all are invited to visit pro-life booths in the convention center.

The 11:30 a.m. Mass for Life—concelebrated by four of the state’s five bishops—will also take place in the Indiana Convention Center.

Groups, families and individuals

may pack their own lunch, eat at local restaurants or pre-order \$10 box lunches from St. John the Evangelist Parish by Jan. 8 at www.walkingwithmomsindy.org/travel, then select “Food.”

Right to Life of Indianapolis will sponsor a pre-march rally from 1-1:30 p.m. at the intersection of Georgia Street and Capitol Avenue.

Then all are invited to gather at Georgia and Illinois streets from 1:30-1:45 p.m. to assemble for the march to the south steps of the Indiana Statehouse from 1:45-2:30 p.m.

A post-march rally with speakers will take place there until 3 p.m.

For more information on the events, the schedule, travel and parking details, go to cutt.ly/INMFL2024 (case sensitive). †

Who or what helped you navigate the first years of married life?

The first years of marriage bear unique challenges for newlyweds as they adjust to each other and to their new state in life.

“The first years of married life need to be ‘accompanied,’ and newlyweds should not be left in solitude.” So says paragraph #74 of “Catechumenal Pathways for Married Life,” a 2020 document of the Vatican’s Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life. It also states that, “From the very beginning of married life, the couple needs to receive concrete assistance to live their interpersonal relationship in all sincerity” (#78).

For *The Criterion’s* upcoming Spring Marriage Supplement in February, we would like to hear from

“experienced” couples as a way to help Catholic newlyweds.

What helped you overcome challenges in the early years of marriage? Was there anyone who accompanied you in your first years of married life? If so, how did they help you grow as a couple as you adjusted to marriage? If you were to accompany a newlywed Catholic couple, what would you do to help them in those first few years?

Please send your responses to Natalie Hoefler by e-mail at nhoefler@archindy.org or by mail in care of *The Criterion*, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46202. Please include your parish and a daytime phone number where you can be reached. †



Pope’s prayer intentions for January

- **For the gift of diversity in the Church—** We pray that the Holy Spirit may help us to recognize the gift of different charisms within the Christian community and to discover the richness of different traditions and rituals in the Catholic Church.

See Pope Francis’ monthly intentions at archindy.org/popesintentions.



The Criterion

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson, *Publisher*
Mike Krokos, *Editor*

John F. Fink, *Editor Emeritus*

Editorial



People celebrate the arrival of the Peace Light of Bethlehem outside St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, Ukraine, during a ceremony on Dec. 10 to launch the Christmas season. (OSV News photo/Vladyslav Musiienko, Reuters)

May the shining light of Christ bring peace to our troubled world

When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So, they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them. (Lk 2:15-20)

St. Luke's Gospel during the Christmas Mass at Dawn on Dec. 25 shares the story of the Nativity of the Lord.

It reveals that our Savior was born in the lowliest of places, in a manger in a stable in Bethlehem since there was no room at the inn. Our faith teaches us Christ is born again, bringing hope for all, and we rejoice.

But as he recently told a group of children at the Vatican on Dec. 15, Pope Francis noted that the Christmas season is also a reminder to Christians that, despite hardships, God chose to join himself to humanity and still remains by its side. The above Gospel passage offers an example of the humility so often found in the Holy Family's life on Earth.

In an article posted by OSV News, the Holy Father said, "Christmas is a reminder that God loves us and wants to be with us."

It is a message that must resonate with us as disciples—that our Creator wants to love each of us and be with each of us despite the unrest we are witnessing in so many corners of the world. Ongoing prayers for peace during this season and beyond must continue.

The incarnation, the pope noted during a meeting with representatives from the Italian Catholic Action movement, "is a stupendous gift, and it brings with it another: that we may also love one another as brothers and sisters.

"How much we need this today,"

he added, "so many people, so many children suffer because of war."

It should break hearts when we realize countless children will be among those unable to celebrate Christ's birth this year because of the ongoing conflicts. Russia's continued fighting with Ukraine, Hamas' conflict with Israel and the civil wars in Myanmar and Yemen, among other places, have resulted in many casualties, with many of the victims being innocent children. How can this still be happening during a time of year when a message of peace should be the constant call for all humanity?

In his talk with the young people, the pope recalled that more than 3,000 children have died in Gaza since the outbreak of war in the Holy Land. Children were among the casualties in Israel as well when Hamas extremists invaded there on Oct. 7. We must also remember the more than 500 children who have died in Ukraine and the thousands who died during the years of war in Yemen, the Holy Father noted.

"Their memory, in turn, invites us to be lights for the world, to touch the hearts of many people, especially those who can stop the whirlwind of violence," the pope said.

Only by loving God and loving one another, the Holy Father continued, "can the world rediscover the light and the peace that it needs" and which was proclaimed by the angels who announced Jesus' birth.

As we enter this Christmas season and approach a new year, peace and light seem so unattainable for many of our brothers and sisters.

Our prayers must center on securing peace in war-torn countries. At this time of year that is naturally darkest, we must remember Christ brings inextinguishable light. At a time when many are tempted to believe in the absence of God, he becomes present once again and always.

May the shining light of Christ bring peace to our troubled world, this Christmas and throughout the New Year. Please Lord, may it be so.

—Mike Krokos

Be Our Guest/ Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan

Happy new year, losers!

It took place only a couple of days after I was ordained auxiliary bishop of my home archdiocese of St. Louis, back in 2001. De Smet Jesuit High School had invited me to offer the opening Mass of the school year, and I was very much looking forward to it.

Until, that is, the president of the student body rose to welcome me: "Bishop Dolan, we're glad you're here ... even though you are a big loser!"

There were gasps! Saddened, concerned faces of the faculty and sweat from me.

Then, he went on: "Yes, you are a loser. But, you're in good company. So am I; so are all of us students here. The world thinks we're all nerds, filled with stupid ideals about faith, morality, the Church, prayer, virtue, love and eternal life.

"And they can't understand why we would follow the biggest loser of them all, Jesus, rejected and ridiculed on a cross, a big flop. It's good to welcome another loser, Bishop Dolan. You remind us that, in reality, we are all winners, that Jesus is our victor, that the Church is our first-place team."

As is obvious, I've never forgotten that stunning welcome.

That comes to mind as our country has decided that our advocacy for the life of the innocent, fragile baby in the womb is a lost cause. Our exhilaration at the long-fought-for-and-awaited overturning of the calamitous *Roe v. Wade* decision of Jan. 22, 1973, has turned into depression as we watch state after state consider protection for the extremes of abortion on demand.

"You're losers," the well-oiled abortionists snicker, applauded by those who consider themselves "winners"—much of Hollywood, corporate millionaires, academics, the news media and poll-reading politicians.

They have a point. It can seem pretty bleak. True, there are encouraging facts as well, like the strong preference of most Americans for limits on abortion, and support for lifegiving alternative measures such as adoption, and help for moms with a crisis pregnancy.

Still, it doesn't look good. It actually kind of looks like Good Friday afternoon,

with many passionate pro-lifers worried and frustrated, and well-intentioned allies wondering if we should give-up and just accept the reality that we've lost this noble cause.

It's time for us "losers" to buck-up. In Nativity scenes all around us, we see the Holy Infant come into less than ideal circumstances and are reminded that our cause—protection of innocent, fragile human life, the tiny infant in the womb—remains the most pressing issue of justice and civil rights in our beloved country.

We "losers" know that abortion on demand—protected by law, for any reason or none at all—up to the actual birth of the baby, financed by our taxes (and forced upon the majority of physicians and nurses deeply opposed to it) is nothing less than a national shame and tragedy, and it must be changed if civilization is to endure.

Why are we shocked when we read that the rate of suicide is so high; that high school students brag about using assault weapons on their classmates; that so many risk their health, and even their life, with illegal drugs; that aggression, weapons, slaughter and war are commonplace, the convenient answer to any problem.

Why are we surprised? If, as Pope Francis reminds us, we can "throw away" the little baby in the sanctuary of the womb, or "hire a hitman to remove that life deemed inconvenient," how can we shudder at the other examples—suicide, mass shootings, drugs, war, violence—of the "culture of death?"

Those who push abortion on demand are the actual losers. The baby aborted always loses; the mom—and dad—suffer a sense of loss, even when they deny or suppress it; countries lose as we enter a demographic winter; and culture is defeated as the sacredness of human life is jackbooted.

Ask no more why our society has become coarse, raw, vitriolic, violent, callous.

As Mother Teresa observed, "A nation that allows and promotes the killing of innocent pre-born babies is the poorest in the world."

A new year is before us. In 2024, let us "losers" move from the grief of Good Friday to the resurrected truth of Easter Sunday. Life wins. It's time for the baby to win.

(Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan is the archbishop of New York.) †

Those who push abortion on demand are the actual losers. The baby aborted always loses; the mom—and dad—suffer a sense of loss, even when they deny or suppress it; countries lose as we enter a demographic winter; and culture is defeated as the sacredness of human life is jackbooted.

Letters Policy

Letters from readers are welcome and every effort will be made to include letters from as many people and representing as many viewpoints as possible. Letters should be informed, relevant, well-expressed and temperate in tone. They must reflect a basic sense of courtesy and respect.

The editors reserve the right to select the letters that will be published and to edit letters from readers as necessary based on space limitations, pastoral sensitivity and content (including spelling and grammar). In

order to encourage opinions from a variety of readers, frequent writers will ordinarily be limited to one letter every three months. Concise letters (usually less than 300 words) are more likely to be printed.

Letters must be signed, but, for serious reasons, names may be withheld.

Send letters to "Letters to the Editor," The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367. Readers with access to e-mail may send letters to critterion@archindy.org. †

ARCHBISHOP/ARZOBISPO CHARLES C. THOMPSON



Christ the Cornerstone

Mary's choice—to welcome Christ into her life—is one for us, too

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Lk 1:31-33).

God's promise to the chosen people of Israel was well-known and eagerly anticipated. What was not known was how or when this divine intervention would happen.

When the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary, a simple young woman, he told her some astonishing news. We have heard this story so many times that it has become familiar, but to Mary it must have been unbelievably strange.

According to God's messenger, Mary, a virgin, would conceive and bear a son and name him *Yeshua* (God saves). Her Son, a descendent of King David, would be called Son of the Most High and rule forever. Astonishing! Unthinkable! Impossible to believe without extraordinary faith in the providence of God. Thanks be to God,

Mary was blessed with a deep and abiding faith. She believed the mystery that was revealed to her by the angel, and she humbly agreed to assume the role chosen for her to become the Mother of our Savior.

The Church presents to us this mystery of our salvation, and Mary's acceptance of her role in it, on the Fourth Sunday of Advent. The astonishing truth of the Incarnation is brought home to us each year as we prepare for the Lord's coming again at Christmas.

Advent invites us to look beyond the present moment to the day when Christ will come again at the end of time—in equally unexpected and astonishing ways. We are challenged to be ready for the Lord's coming (as Mary was) by our prayer, by our reflection on God's word and by our selfless service to others.

The first reading for the Fourth Sunday of Advent (2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16) recalls the Lord's promise to David:

When your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm. ... I will be a father to him, and

he shall be a son to me. ... Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever. (2 Sm 7:12, 14, 16)

The fact that God had promised that a descendant of David would “rule forever” was well-known to the people of Israel. What was not known was what kind of ruler this long-awaited king would be. This, combined with uncertainty about when, where and how the Anointed One (Messiah) would come, constituted the mystery that the angel revealed to Mary.

According to St. Paul in this Sunday's second reading (Rom 16:25-27), “the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages” (Rom 16:25) has come to us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In him, we see the fulfillment of God's promise. We believe—after the fact—what Mary came to believe solely on the basis of the word spoken to her by God's messenger. And because she believed that the word of God was being fulfilled in her, Mary was able to say “Yes” and to immediately sing God's praise in the *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55).

What does this reflection on Mary's role have to teach us about preparing

for our Lord's coming again at Christmas? Here are just a few ideas: First, we are invited to imitate Mary in everything we do. Her prayer, her love for God's word and her commitment to serving others are powerful examples of what it means to eagerly await the Lord's coming.

Secondly, Mary's ready acceptance of God's will for her, in spite of whatever fear or uncertainty she naturally felt, shows us that we do not have to be paralyzed by our emotions. If we can turn everything over to the grace of God, we can say “Yes” like Mary did, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit to keep us safe and on the right track.

Finally, it's important to remember that Mary is here for us, and that she walks with us, as we walk in her Son's footsteps. God's love for us is astonishing. His desire to save us from the consequences of selfishness and sin never diminishes—no matter what we say or do. By her presence, Mary reminds us that God is near—now and always.

As we continue getting ready for the Lord's return, let's ask Mary to help us prepare for the amazing gift of her Son! A blessed Christmas to all. †



Cristo, la piedra angular

La elección de María de acoger a Cristo en su vida es igual para nosotros

“Vas a quedar encinta, y darás a luz un hijo, y le pondrás por nombre Jesús. Éste será un gran hombre, y lo llamarán Hijo del Altísimo. Dios, el Señor, le dará el trono de David, su padre, y reinará sobre la casa de Jacob para siempre, y su reino no tendrá fin” (Lc 1:31-33).

La promesa de Dios al pueblo elegido de Israel era bien conocida y esperada con impaciencia. Lo que no se sabía era cómo ni cuándo se produciría esta intervención divina.

Cuando el Arcángel Gabriel se le apareció a María, una joven sencilla, le comunicó una noticia asombrosa. Hemos oído esta historia tantas veces que se nos ha hecho familiar, pero para María debió de ser increíblemente extraña.

Según el mensajero de Dios, María, una virgen, concebiría y daría a luz un hijo y le pondría por nombre *Yeshua* (Dios salva). Su Hijo, descendiente del rey David, sería llamado Hijo del Altísimo y reinaría para siempre. ¡Asombroso! ¡Impensable! Imposible de creer sin una fe extraordinaria en la providencia de Dios. Gracias a Dios, María fue bendecida con una fe profunda y duradera. Creyó en el misterio que el ángel le reveló y aceptó

humildemente asumir el papel para el cual había sido elegida y convertirse en la Madre de nuestro Salvador.

En el cuarto domingo de Adviento, la Iglesia nos presenta este misterio de nuestra salvación, y la aceptación por parte de María de su papel en él. Cada año, mientras nos preparamos nuevamente para la venida del Señor en Navidad, recibimos la asombrosa verdad de la Encarnación.

El Adviento nos invita a mirar más allá del momento presente, hacia el día en que Cristo volverá al final de los tiempos, de forma igualmente inesperada y asombrosa. Se nos desafía a estar preparados para la venida del Señor (como lo estuvo María) mediante nuestra oración, nuestra reflexión sobre la Palabra de Dios y nuestro servicio desinteresado a los demás.

La primera lectura del cuarto domingo (2 Sm 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16) de Adviento recuerda la promesa que le hizo el Señor a David:

Cuando te llegue el momento de ir a descansar con tus padres, yo elegiré a uno de tus propios hijos y afirmaré su reinado. [...] Yo seré un padre para él, y él me será un hijo. [...] Tus descendientes vivirán seguros, y afirmaré tu trono, el cual permanecerá para siempre (2 Sm 7:12, 14, 16).

El hecho de que Dios había prometido que un descendiente de David reinaría para siempre era bien conocido por el pueblo de Israel. Lo que no se sabía era qué tipo de gobernante sería este rey tan esperado. Esto, combinado con la incertidumbre sobre cuándo, dónde y cómo vendría el Ungido (el Mesías) constituyó el misterio que el ángel reveló a María.

Según dice san Pablo en la segunda lectura del próximo domingo (Rom 16:25-27), “la revelación del misterio que se ha mantenido oculto desde tiempos eternos,” (Rom 16:25) nos ha llegado a través de la vida, muerte y resurrección de Jesucristo. En él vemos el cumplimiento de la promesa de Dios. Después de lo sucedido, creemos en lo que María creyó únicamente sobre la base de la Palabra que le transmitió el mensajero de Dios. Y porque creía que la Palabra de Dios se estaba cumpliendo en ella, María pudo decir “sí” y cantar inmediatamente la alabanza a Dios en el *Magnificat* (Lc 1:46-55).

¿Qué nos enseña esta reflexión sobre el papel de María acerca de la preparación de la nueva venida de nuestro Señor en Navidad? He aquí algunas ideas: En primer lugar, se nos invita a imitar a María en todo lo que

hacemos. Su oración, su amor por la Palabra de Dios y su compromiso de servir a los demás son poderosos ejemplos de lo que significa esperar con impaciencia la venida del Señor.

En segundo lugar, la pronta aceptación de María de la voluntad de Dios para ella, a pesar del temor o la incertidumbre que naturalmente sentía, nos muestra que no debemos dejarnos paralizar por nuestras emociones. Si podemos entregarlo todo a la gracia de Dios, podemos decir «sí», al igual que lo hizo María, confiando en el poder del Espíritu Santo para mantenernos a salvo y en el buen camino.

Por último, es importante recordar que María está aquí para nosotros, y que camina a nuestro lado, mientras seguimos las huellas de su Hijo. El amor de Dios por nosotros es maravilloso; su deseo de salvarnos de las consecuencias del egoísmo y del pecado nunca merma, independientemente de lo que digamos o hagamos. Con su presencia, María nos recuerda que Dios está cerca, ahora y siempre.

Mientras seguimos preparándonos para el regreso del Señor, ¡pidamos a María que nos ayude a prepararnos para el maravilloso regalo de su Hijo! ¡Que tengan una bendecida Navidad! †

Events Calendar

For a list of events for the next four weeks as reported to The Criterion, log on to www.archindy.org/events.

December 22-Jan. 6

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross Parish, 23345 Gavin Lane, Bright. **Bright Lights Drive-thru Christmas Light Display**, 6-10 p.m., free. Information: 812-512-1941, brightlightsdcc@gmail.com.

December 27

Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22143 Main St., Oldenburg. **Sisters of St. Francis Christmas Tours**, 6-7:30 p.m., cultural and themed Christmas trees and decorations, chime choir, refreshments, free. Information: 812-934-2475.

December 28

All Saints Parish, St. Joseph Campus, 7536 Church Lane, West Harrison. **Feast of the Holy Innocents Mass of Healing**, 6:30 p.m., for parents and families who have lost infants or children to miscarriage, stillbirth or other loss, free. To receive ornament with child's name, fill out form by Dec. 20 at tinyurl.com/himass23 or call 859-801-1293.

January 5, February 2

Women's Care Center, 4901 W. 86th St., Indianapolis. **First**

Friday Mass, 5 p.m., optional tour of center to follow. Information: 317-829-6800, womenscarecenter.org.

Our Lady of the Greenwood Church, 335 S. Meridian St., Greenwood. **First Friday bilingual celebration of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus**, Mass 6 p.m. followed by adoration until 9 p.m., sacrament of reconciliation available. Information: 317-750-7309, msross1@hotmail.com.

St. John Paul II Church, 2253 St. Joe Road W., Sellersburg. **First Friday Devotion**, 11:40 a.m., litany, consecration to the Sacred Heart, Divine Mercy Chaplet followed by noon Mass. Information: 812-246-2512.

January 6, February 3

St. John Paul II Church, 2253 St. Joe Road W., Sellersburg. **First Saturday Devotion**, 8 a.m., rosary, litany, consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, confession 8-8:30 a.m. followed by 8:30 a.m. Mass. Information: 812-246-2512.

January 7

Monthly Prayer with Sisters

of Providence: "Prayer on Martin Luther King Jr.," for single Catholic women ages 18-42, via Zoom, 7-7:45 p.m., seventh day of each month. Information, registration: Events.SistersofProvidence.org, 361-500-9505, jluna@spsmw.org.

January 9, Feb. 13

Church of the Immaculate Conception, 1 Sisters of Providence, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, St. Mary-of-the-Woods. **Taizé Prayer at the Woods**, 7-8 p.m., silent and spoken prayers, simple music, silence, virtual option available. Information: Taize.SistersofProvidence.org, 812-535-2952.

January 13

Providence Spirituality and Conference Center, 1 Sisters of Providence, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, St. Mary-of-the-Woods. **Teen Volunteering Opportunity**, 9 a.m.-2 p.m., ages 12-18, assist retired Providence Sisters. Information, registration: TeenVolunteer.SistersofProvidence.org, jluna@spsmw.org or 361-500-9505.

January 17, Feb. 21

Calvary Mausoleum Chapel, 435 W. Troy Ave., Indianapolis. **Mass**, 2 p.m. Information: 317-784-4439, catholiccemeteries.cc.

January 18, Feb. 15

Our Lady of Peace Cemetery and Mausoleum, 9001 Haverstick Road, Indianapolis. **Mass**, 2 p.m. Information: 317-574-8898, catholiccemeteries.cc.

January 19

Northside Events and Social Club, 2100 E. 71st St., Indianapolis. **Catholic Business Exchange**, Indiana State Treasurer Daniel Elliott presenting "How Faith Drives Us," rosary 6:35 a.m., Mass 7 a.m., buffet breakfast and program following, \$18 members, \$24 non-members. Register by 4 p.m. on Jan. 16. Information, registration: cutt.ly/CBE-Reg.

February 2

Gainbridge Fieldhouse, 125 South Pennsylvania St., Indianapolis. **Covenant Resources Miscarriage Ministry Night with the Indiana Pacers**, 7 p.m., Pacers vs. Kings, discounted

prices range from \$30-\$58, includes free Pacers branded hat; food voucher for a hot dog, chips, and Pepsi product; chance to shoot a free throw on the court after the game, a portion of each ticket purchased will go back to the Covenant Resources Miscarriage Ministry, recommended to purchase tickets a month prior to the game. Information, tickets: 812-212-3463, contactus@covenantresources.org, tinyurl.com/crmmpacers24.

February 7

Monthly Prayer with Sisters of Providence: "Prayer on St. Valentine's Day," for single Catholic women ages 18-42, via Zoom, 7-7:45 p.m., seventh day of each month. Information, registration: Events.SistersofProvidence.org, 361-500-9505, jluna@spsmw.org.

February 17

St. Michael Parish, 11400 Farmers Lane N.E., Greenville. **The Eucharist and Your Marriage**, 4-7 p.m., Catholic therapist and author Greg Schutte presenting, second of "Three Great Dates" events sponsored by Catalyst Catholic

in New Albany Deanery (May 11, 2024: "Supporting Your Spouse's Dreams" with Steve and Jenni Angrisano), \$20 per person, includes dinner, childcare available, registration required by Feb. 11. Information, registration: catalystcatholic.org/3dates.

February 21

All Saints Parish, St. Joseph Campus, 7536 Church Lane, West Harrison. **Double Feature with noted Theology of the Body speaker Jason Evert**, 6-9:30 p.m., for adults and youth ages 13-17 accompanied by an adult, "Purified: A Life-changing Event for Families" 6-7 p.m., "Gender and the Theology of Your Body" 7-9 p.m. adoration and confession 9-9:30 a.m., \$25, \$10 discount for registered parishioners of All Saints in Dearborn County, St. Lawrence in Lawrenceburg, St. Mary in Greensburg and St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross in Bright by using code DCC at checkout. Information, registration: kimsprague@dcatholics.com, lnkiy.in/EvertDoubleFeature. †

Retreats and Programs

For a complete list of retreats as reported to The Criterion, log on to www.archindy.org/retreats.

January 3

Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22143 Main St., Oldenburg. **Contemplative Prayer**, in person or via Zoom, 2-3 p.m., Franciscan Sister Olga Wittekind presenting, freewill donation. Information, registration: 812-933-6437, center@oldenburgosf.com, oldenburgfranciscancenter.org.

January 4, 11, 18, 25

Creative Ways to Encounter the Divine (virtual via Zoom): "Hearing God's Voice" offered by Benedict Inn Retreat & Conference Center, 7-8:30 p.m. Thursdays, first of four stand-alone sessions (Jan. 11, 18, 25), Jan. 4 focus: poetry, Jan. 11 focus: nature, Jan. 18 focus: art, Jan. 25 focus: people and events and dreams, Benedictine Sister

Antoinette Purcel presenting, \$75 for four sessions or \$25 per session. Information, registration: benedictinn.org/programs, 317-788-7581, benedictinn@benedictinn.org.

January 9

Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. **Personal Day of Retreat**, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., \$40, includes private room for the day and lunch; spiritual direction available for additional \$30, must be scheduled in advance. Information, registration: benedictinn.org/programs, 317-788-7581, benedictinn@benedictinn.org.

January 12

Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22143 Main St.,

Oldenburg. **A Day of Quiet Renewal**, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., \$20, \$80 with spiritual direction. Information, registration: 812-933-6437, center@oldenburgosf.com, oldenburgfranciscancenter.org.

January 12-14

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. **TOBIT Marriage Preparation Weekend**, 7 p.m. Fri.-11:45 a.m. Sun., \$298 per couple, separate rooms, includes meals and materials. Registration: ftm.retreatportal.com/events, 317-545-7681, lcoons@archindy.org.

January 13

Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22143 Main St., Oldenburg. **Awakened Grief: Finding the Way Back to Joy**, 9:30-

11:30 a.m., Life Coach Richard Brendan presenting, \$30, \$45 with CEU. Information, registration: 812-933-6437, center@oldenburgosf.com, oldenburgfranciscancenter.org.

January 14

Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22143 Main St., Oldenburg. **Coffee Talks: Spirituality in the Face of Adversity**, 10:45 a.m.-noon, Oldenburg Franciscan Center spiritual director Mary Waskewich presenting on Holocaust survivor Simon Wiesenthal, freewill donation. Information, registration: 812-933-6437, center@oldenburgosf.com, oldenburgfranciscancenter.org.

January 19-21

Mother of the Redeemer Retreat Center, 8220 W. State Rd. 48, Bloomington. **Our Lady of Loreto and Her Litany**, 5 p.m. Fri.-11 a.m. Sun., Franciscans of the Immaculate Father Elias Mary presenting, \$50.70 commuter, \$241 single room, \$302.90 double, \$369.08 triple, \$433.12 quadruple, cost includes housing, three meals Sat. and one meal Sun. Information: 812-825-4642 ext. 1, MotheroftheRedeemer.com.

January 22-26

Saint Meinrad Archabbey Guesthouse, 200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad. **Winter Chant**

Workshop, Benedictine Brother John Glasenapp presenting, for directors of liturgical music and singers in parish liturgies, \$750 single, \$835 double, \$200 commuter. Registration: saintmeinrad.org/retreats.

January 23

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. **Day of Silence**, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., \$45, includes room, lunch, Mass and use of common areas and grounds, overnight stay available for additional \$32, dinner additional \$11. Registration: archindy.org/fatima, 317-545-7681, lcoons@archindy.org.

Mount St. Francis will offer program on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on Jan. 15

An evening retreat titled "In the Name of Love: The Life and Legacy of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." will take place at Mount St. Francis Center for Spirituality, 101 St. Anthony Dr., in Mt. St. Francis, from 7-8:30 p.m. on Jan. 15.

This event, led by Conventual Franciscan Father Vince Petersen, will include presentations, interactive

discussions and informative video sessions on the life and work of the renowned civil rights leader. Refreshments will be provided.

The event is free, but donations will be accepted. Pre-registration is required.

For more information or to register, go to mountsaintfrancis.org and select "Events" or call 812-923-8817. †

Sensory-friendly Mass set for Jan. 18 at St. Pius X Church in Indianapolis

A special Mass for anyone with sensory sensitivities will take place at St. Pius X Church, 7200 Sarto Dr., in Indianapolis, at 7 p.m. on Jan. 18.

The Mass will include sensory accommodations including, but not limited to, people with autism,

developmental disabilities and the elderly. The liturgy will also include lower lights, a shorter, more literal homily, with picture Mass aids and children's lectionaries available.

For more information, contact Shannon Farrell at 317-446-5507. †

Wedding Anniversaries

EDWARD AND DORINDA (JACQMAIN) THOMAS, members of Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish in Greenwood, will celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary on Dec. 26.

The couple was married in the Old Cathedral Church (Basilica of St. Francis Xavier) in Vincennes, Ind. (Diocese of Evansville), on Dec. 26, 1953.

They have five children: Faith Roell, Barbara Romaine, Earl and Edward II Thomas, and Joseph Winn.

The couple also has 43 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.



WILLIAM AND MARTHA (BAUER) BISHOP, members of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Milan, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on Jan. 5.

The couple was married in St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Church in Aurora on Jan. 5, 1974.

They have four children: Erica Alsip, Alison Williamson, Gregory and Kevin Bishop.

The couple also has eight grandchildren.



Announcements for couples celebrating 50, 55, 60, 65, 70 or more years of marriage are accepted. Go to cutt.ly/anniversaries or call 317-236-1585.

Growing spiritually improves mental health, as ‘faith does wonderful things’

(Editor’s note: This is the last in a series of articles addressing mental health, including the role of faith in seeking wholeness. Andrew DeHart, who is mentioned in this article, is a relative of the author.)

By Natalie Hoefler

“Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28).

These words of Christ speak to his desire for our wholeness. It is a mission the Church embraces, particularly in terms of spiritual and mental health. “We can’t separate our physical, psychological and spiritual aspects,” says Tom Konechnik, a Catholic mental health counselor at Integritas Psychological Services in Indianapolis, who is also a spiritual director. “That’s who we are and the way God made us as human beings. We’re one being with multiple aspects, just like the Trinity is one.”



Tom Konechnik

One of the Church’s oldest forms of such aid is spiritual direction.

Discerning ‘the movement of God within’

While spiritual direction has been part of the Church for millennia, an air of mystique swirls around the practice, says Beverly Hansberry, who has 15 years of experience as a spiritual director.



Beverly Hansberry

“Some think it’s only for priests and religious, or only for very religious people,” she says. “The truth is, it’s for all those who seek to look at their life experience through the lens of God.”

There are some things spiritual direction “is not,” Hansberry cautions. “It’s not counseling,” she says. “It’s not about fixing or problem solving. It’s not about telling a person what to do. It’s more about the director listening intently to the directee and helping that person to discern the movement of God within themselves.”

Since there is a connectedness between mind and spirit, Hansberry adds, “It’s possible that some emotional trauma or pain or other mental health issue may come to the surface in the course of spiritual direction.”

In those instances, spiritual directors are trained to suggest counseling and to have a list of counselors handy to recommend.

“It’s actually not uncommon to have a spiritual director and

a counselor,” Hansberry adds. “That can work very well.”

Konechnik agrees, noting that “quite a few studies support the idea that when people increase in spiritual health, they can improve in mental health. And for those with mental health issues, there are greater outcomes if they’re in counseling and also increasing in spiritual health.”

The archdiocese’s “Guidelines for Spiritual Direction” (cutt.ly/ArchIndySpiritualDirection) do recommend those seeking healing from emotional trauma or a mental health disorder first seek counseling.

“Counseling deals with coping mechanisms and making the necessary changes in life so the client can function on a daily basis,” it states.

“It is only then that the person has the self-possession and stillness to listen to the Spirit,” who, it notes, is “the real director in spiritual direction.”

Retreats can be a ‘game-changer’

Retreats are a concentrated dose of that “stillness to listen to the Spirit.” Some focus on the role of faith in healing from a specific type of emotional pain or trauma, like grief, suicide loss or abortion.

But some retreats deal with spiritual healing from any emotional pain or trauma.

For Andrew DeHart, one such retreat was “a game-changer”—the “Healing the Whole Person” retreat, based on the book *Be Healed* by Bob Schuchts, a retired Catholic therapist.

Both the retreat and the book look at sin developing as a coping mechanism to deal with emotional wounds, particularly when turning to the world for healing instead of to Christ.

For example, one might use gluttony to cover the pain of a childhood trauma. In Schuchts’ case, his turning away from God (pride) arose from the emotional hurt of his father deserting his family.

The retreat was an opportunity “to first drill down and identify my past wounds,” says DeHart, a former member of Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ Parish in Indianapolis who now lives in Texas. “From there, I could see where I subconsciously used sin as a Band-Aid to cover the pain.”

With wounds and sins exposed, the retreat (and the *Be Healed* book) points to encountering Christ through prayer and the sacraments as a path to healing.

“Being able to identify my wounds and work toward healing with Christ and the Church was freeing,” says DeHart.

He admits that healing is “an evolutionary, not a revolutionary process. It’s something we work on throughout our whole lifetime.”

Still, he says, “understanding woundedness and working with Christ through the Church has allowed me to experience my spirituality more deeply.”



Patty Moore offers spiritual direction to a directee at the Benedict Inn Retreat & Conference Center in Beech Grove on Jan. 4. (Submitted photo)

‘Faith does wonderful things’

“Working with Christ through the Church” points to one of the simplest spiritual aids for seeking wholeness, says Konechnik.

“The practices of prayer, daily Mass if possible, [eucharistic] adoration, confession—trying to grow in those practices as best as possible” can lead to an increase in spiritual and mental health, he says.

One prayer he often recommends to his clients is the Surrender Novena.

“There is something paradoxical about the realization that the first step toward healing is so often to recognize that I cannot do it alone,” he says.

Kile Stevens, who was featured in the first article of this series, finds comfort in Marian devotion in his struggles with bipolar-I disorder.

“When I was in my darkest pits with this disease, she has been my mother, especially Our Lady of Sorrow,” says the member of the Oratory of SS. Philomena and Cecelia in Oak Forest. “Because of her part in giving her Son over to the cross, she is able to understand all our pain, all our suffering. She is perfect, so she can guide us to Jesus perfectly.”

St. Ignatius of Loyola’s 14 rules for spiritual discernment have been a source of consolation for Tom Renken as he copes with pervasive depressive disorder.

“Especially rule eight,” says the member of Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish in Greenwood, who was also featured in the series’ first article. “It’s about telling yourself that the desolation will only last a little longer.”

With 2,000 years of teaching and writing by Church fathers, popes, priests, mystics, religious and saints, there is no end to the treasury of help the Church can offer to those seeking wholeness.

“Faith helps,” says Renken. “You think about the world differently when you know you’re loved.”

“It’s not always that simple,” he adds. “But when I remember to rely on it, faith does wonderful things.” †

Spiritual resources can provide help, healing from mental health issues

Compiled by Natalie Hoefler

Studies show that increasing in faith can help improve mental health, says Catholic mental health counselor and spiritual director Tom Konechnik.

The most basic forms of growing spiritually in the Catholic faith include prayer and frequenting the sacraments.

Below are a few other spiritual resources grounded in the Catholic faith that might be of help to those suffering with mental health issues. Links beginning with “lnkiy.in” are case sensitive.

Spiritual direction

For information on what spiritual direction is (and is not), guidelines for spiritual direction and help in finding a spiritual director in central and southern Indiana vetted by the archdiocese, go to www.archindy.org/worship.

General healing from emotional pain or trauma

—Healing the Whole Person retreat, jpiihealingcenter.org/events.

—*Be Healed* by Bob Schuchts

Healing from anxiety or stress

—*Jesus I Trust in You: A 30-Day Personal Retreat with the Litany of Trust*, by Sisters of Life Sister Maria Faustina Pia

Healing from your own or your parents’ divorce

—Surviving Divorce: For men and women seeking healing from divorce, begins on Jan. 17, 12 sessions through the course of three months, St. Jude Church, 5353 McFarland Road, Indianapolis, 7:30 p.m. Information: Patti Collins at 317-786-4371 or pcollins@stjudeindy.org.

—Being and Belonging: Annual retreat for Catholics who are divorced or separated, offered through Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. Call for the 2024 retreat date: 317-545-7681.

—Life Giving Wounds: for anyone age 18 and older affected by their parents’ divorce. Local retreat: May 3-5, Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. Information, registration: marriageandfamily.archindy.org/lgw, 317-545-7681. Other retreat

locations, online support groups and online resources: lifegivingwounds.org.

Healing from grief

—Abortion (for women): 1) Project Rachel and Rachel’s Vineyard Healing Retreat (dates not set for 2024). Information within archdiocese: projectrachel@archindy.org, 317-452-0054 or lnkiy.in/AbortionLoss. Information outside of archdiocese: hopeafterabortion.com. 2) Healing Hidden Hurts individual counseling in Indianapolis: healinghiddenhurts.org or 317-490-1267. 3) More resources: lnkiy.in/AbortionLoss.

—Abortion (for men): 1) Project Joseph Healing Retreat, held twice a year, the next one is on April 20-21 at an undisclosed location in southern Indiana. Information, registration: dlbangs1@gmail.com or 765-860-6006. 2) More resources: lnkiy.in/AbortionLoss.

—Loss of loved one: Awakened Grief: Finding the Way Back to Joy retreat, Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22143 Main St., in Oldenburg, Jan. 13, 9:30-11:30 a.m., \$30. Information, registration: 812-933-6437, center@oldenburgosf.com,

oldenburgfranciscancenter.org.

—Suicide loss survivors: You Are Not Alone, retreat and series of workshops offered through Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House. The 2024 dates have not been set, although they typically take place in the summer and fall. Check lnkiy.in/YouAreNotAlone for updates or call 317-545-7681.

Prayers and saints

—Litany of Trust (in English and Spanish): sistersoflife.org/litany-of-trust

—St. Ignatius of Loyola’s 14 rules of spiritual discernment: lnkiy.in/Ignatius14Rules

—Surrender Novena: lnkiy.in/SurrenderNovena

—Our Lady of Lourdes, patroness of healing

—St. Benedict Joseph Labre, patron saint of those suffering from mental illness

—St. Dymphna, patron saint of mental health

—St. Oscar Romero, who suffered from obsessive-compulsive disorder

—St. Thérèse of Lisieux (the Little Flower), who suffered from depression †

Listening for the voice of God leads to life-changing moments that evoke awe and reverence in the hearts of people

(Editor's note: The Criterion invited our readers to share their stories of how God has made his presence known in their lives. Here are a few more stories in our continuing series.)

By John Shaughnessy

There are words and voices we don't necessarily want to hear in our lives, but sometimes we need to listen to them.

James Dickey has experienced that reality during two life-changing moments.



James Dickey

The first one occurred when he was a teenager. Seconds after leaving a party, he noticed that one of his shoelaces wasn't tied, so he stooped to tie it.

"I was only a couple of feet from the door, and on the other side of the door I heard my friends discussing all of my faults. I was crushed," recalled Dickey, sharing one of the stories from his book, *It's All True! A Sinner's Journey to the Truth*.

"Here's the great news. No one ever knew that I was standing outside the door to hear those comments, and I acknowledged the truth in their criticism. I was more than motivated to work on being a better person. That night will be forever engrained in my mind because it made me a better person."

The second moment came when he was an adult struggling to get along with a co-worker. When that situation continued for a long time, Dickey was convinced it would never change. Then, he says, he "actually felt God asking" him

to pray for the woman.

"So I started praying for this person every day, not begrudgingly, but from my heart," recalls Dickey, a member of St. Louis Parish in Batesville. "Amazingly, our relationship blossomed, seemingly overnight, and to this day we are friends."

Years later, Dickey looks back upon those moments and even sees God's presence in the one that occurred when he was a teenager—a moment that led him to work to become a better person.

Dickey says, "If you just say yes, a simple yes from your heart, he will show you every day that he is with you."

'It was a message to me from God and my dad'

There are moments in life that we never forget, especially the one that touch our lives with heartbreak and then lead us to a moment of hope and faith.

Deardra Cancilla Webb, a member of St. Michael the Archangel Parish in Indianapolis, has lived that reality in a moment involving her parents, Pat and Mary.

"My dad woke up one June morning, made himself a cup of coffee, sat down in his recliner and died," she noted in a handwritten letter.

"When my mother awoke and found him, she called me, as I lived only a block away. I immediately went to her. We called our pastor who also quickly came and gave my dad conditional last rites. The coroner and funeral home people came to take the earthly remains of my dad's soul away.



Deardra Cancilla Webb

"By then, my brother and sister arrived, so I left to give the sad news to my family. I was brokenhearted and dreaded telling them, but when I walked up on my porch, a lily I had planted from a pot to the ground was in full bloom. It had never bloomed before, but here it was in all its glory!

"I had just finished reading Elie Wiesel's book *Night*. A phrase from the book popped into my head, 'Life, life, new life.' It was a message to me from God and my dad that he had moved on to his new life in heaven.

"This whole scenario comes to me often and brings me peace and assurance that God is with me. Incidentally, the lily never bloomed again."

'I only need to listen and to do what God makes known to me'

Janine Schorsch refers to special moments in her life as "God-incidences"—moments when God's presence "evokes awe and reverence" in her heart.

One of those moments that stands out to her occurred during a weeklong silent retreat where she recognized Janet, a woman she had met on a previous retreat.

"At the beginning of the retreat, we were brought together to share what brought us to the retreat and tell a little about ourselves," Schorsch recalls. "Janet shared that she had completed writing a spiritual book.

"A few evenings later, even though it was a silent retreat, we were invited to attend a session about interpreting

dreams, as in the biblical sense of a message from God. Intrigued, I attended and saw that Janet was there as well. We each shared a dream that we had experienced, and the leader walked us through the symbolism of her interpretation of God's message, cautioning us to only accept her interpretation if it felt right."

When the leader gave her interpretation of Janet's dream, connecting it to her children, Schorsch could tell that it didn't resonate with Janet.

"I said a prayer for her to know God's message," says Schorsch, a member of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross Parish in Bright. "Later, in chapel, I very clearly sensed God's presence. He told me to tell Janet that her dream was not about her sons, but about her book.

"I wrote a note to Janet telling her about my experience and, even though she might think I was crazy, this message was truly from God: 'It's about the book,' I wrote in a note to her and slipped it under her door."

When Schorsch returned to her own room hours later, she found a note from Janet, who told her that she had been walking in the labyrinth when she heard a voice telling her that her dream was about her book.

"Wanting confirmation that this was truly God's voice, she asked God to give her a sign," Schorsch says. "When she returned to her room, my note was waiting for her.

"I have never forgotten that moment. It has given me the courage to listen to the still, small voice of God and to act on his will for me. I know that I don't need to orchestrate the outcome. I only need to listen and to do what God makes known to me." †

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Archbishop Charles C. Thompson blesses members of the Hispanic Ministry office's Pastoral Juvenil (youth ministry) at the end of a Dec. 9 Mass marking the feast of St. Juan Diego. St. Juan Diego's encounters with Mary on four occasions in December 1531 in Mexico began the Church's devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Also pictured is Felix Navarrete, archdiocesan director of Hispanic Ministry. (Photos by Mike Krokos)



Three-month-old Sarai Morales Barbon wears an outfit highlighting Our Lady of Guadalupe and her Mexican heritage during a Dec. 9 reception in the Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara Catholic Center in Indianapolis. The gathering followed a liturgy in SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis marking the feast of St. Juan Diego, the first Catholic saint indigenous to the Americas.



"Nelly y Carlos" perform on Dec. 9 during a reception in the Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara Catholic Center in Indianapolis. The gathering followed a liturgy marking the feast of St. Juan Diego. Both events were sponsored by the archdiocesan Intercultural Ministry Office.



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson and Deacon Emilio Ferrer-Soto, left, elevate the body and blood of Christ during a Mass marking the feast of St. Juan Diego on Dec. 9 at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis. Also pictured is Deacon Juan Carlos Ramirez.

St. Michael Parish in Charlestown celebrates Our Lady of Guadalupe

Criterion staff report

Members of the Hispanic community at St. Michael Parish in Charlestown did several things leading up to the celebration of the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Dec. 12.

Beginning on Oct. 28, a statue of the Blessed Mother visited 46 parish homes where the rosary was prayed each day.

On Dec. 10, the altar and the inside of the church were decorated, and on Dec. 11, a rosary procession took place

around the parish along with a concert featuring Agustina Baro Graf, a well-known Christian singer from Argentina. The gathering included songs and the *mañanitas* to the Blessed Virgin.

Another rosary was prayed on Dec. 12—Our Lady of Guadalupe's feast

day—and Father Jeyaseelan Sengolraj, the parish's administrator, celebrated a Mass in honor of the patroness of the Americas.

After the liturgy, another concert was held, and eucharistic adoration was celebrated as well. †



As part of its celebration of the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a mariachi band performs at St. Michael Church in Charlestown on Dec. 11. (Submitted photo)



Members of the Hispanic community at St. Michael Parish in Charlestown carry a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe during a procession on Dec. 11. (Submitted photo)

Vietnamese-made crèche at St. Joseph Church shares several messages

By Natalie Hoefler

Thoai Keeley and his wife Tam Dang were involved in the Vietnamese Catholic Community at St. Joseph Parish in Indianapolis. He served on the Vietnamese community's council, and she served as its secretary.



Thoai Keeley

About two years ago, they moved from Indianapolis to South Carolina. But Thoai returns to the parish once a year. Not for a holiday, but for a week during Advent. And not to see family—they're all in South Carolina.

The Vietnamese native returns to do what he has done for more than a decade: to build a crèche he spent the prior year designing.

"Thoai made our Nativity scene last Advent, and he started designing this year's Nativity scene the moment he left here last year," says Father Pious Malliar Bellian, a sacramental minister for the parish.

He says Keeley was in town building the crèche on Dec. 4-8, working "all day every day to build it. He had a little help, but really it was mostly him."

The scene stands 10 feet tall, 20 feet wide and 20 feet deep, spanning an entire corner of the church's narthex.

While Keeley has already returned to South Carolina, Father Bellian shared with *The Criterion* the details and symbolism the crèche-creator built into the massive Nativity scene.

Reminders of why Christ was born

The story unfolds upon "hills of rock" formed of carefully crushed and spray-painted paper.

For this year's crèche, Keeley "went back to the Old Testament by picking up the sin of our first parents,

Adam and Eve," says Father Bellian, noting the section lit by green light.

An apple tree stands there. Look closely to see a serpent hidden among its branches. A woman representing Eve crouches by the tree.

"Only half of Eve's face is shown to represent the guilt of sin," Father Bellian explains. "Thoai wanted to bring in the concept of the sin of the world through our first parents' sin of disobedience and how that severed their relationship with God—and ours."

It's because of that sin of disobedience that "Christ had to come into the world to save us," he notes, adding the scene "reminds me of 1 Sm 15:22, that God desires our obedience more than sacrifice."

The eye follows the "rocks" down to a scene of Mary and Joseph looking for a place for her to give birth to the Christ Child in Bethlehem. But they are turned away.

"This is meant to indicate another type of sin, the sin of indifference," Father Bellian says. "It's the indifference of people in Bethlehem. But we have not made much progress in overcoming the sin of indifference today."

From this scene the eye travels to the typical image of the manger surrounded by Mary and Joseph. Shepherds near the cave keep watch of their sheep, while overhead



This crèche in the narthex of St. Joseph Church in Indianapolis was designed and constructed by Thoai Keeley, a former member of the parish's Vietnamese community who moved to South Carolina but returns each Advent to design and build a new crèche for the church. (Submitted photo by Father Pious Malliar Bellian)

an angel appears, lit by the star of Bethlehem.

A window of blue appears at the top of the crèche.

"That represents heaven, which is made attainable through the gift of God's Son," says Father Bellian.

On the other side of the cave, the three wise men make their way bearing gifts for the Christ Child.

Behind them stands a structure with notches on its roof and wall.

"Thoai said that represents the palace of King Herod, who ordered the killing of the innocents" after learning from the wise men about the birth of a great king in Bethlehem, Father Bellian explains.

"Today we still kill our innocents through abortion or any type of violence that is happening," he adds. "This is a reminder we need to consider all human life sacred and inviolable."

'Emblematic of great devotion'

Father Minh Dũng appreciates the yearly sacrifices of Keeley and his wife in making the annual project a reality.

"It's 10 hours driving, and then staying here a week to make the manger," says the associate pastor of St. Joseph and chaplain of the Vietnamese community that worships there. "He is so kind and generous—and his wife, to let him come for a week. I really appreciate them."

So does Father Robert Hausladen, pastor of St. Joseph and of St. Susanna Parish in Plainfield.

"St. Joseph Parish is always very appreciative of the dedication and efforts Mr. Keeley and the Vietnamese make in decorating our church, especially with the wonderful crèches each Advent and Christmas," he says.

He adds that Keeley's continued commitment, even after moving to South Carolina, "is remarkable but not surprising, as it is emblematic of the great devotion many of the Vietnamese have to their faith community."

"St. Joseph is truly blessed to have so many people dedicated to sharing their gifts and talents along with their faith."

The crèche will be on display through Jan. 8. For hours when the church is open, call the parish office at 317-244-9002. †

With mixed results, pro-life activists prepare for a new round of ballot measures

WASHINGTON (OSV News)—The pro-life movement had a mixed record of success in its first full calendar year without *Roe v. Wade* in place, losing an Ohio ballot measure but also seeing the passage of new legislation limiting the procedure in some states, including Indiana, and new streams of support for pregnancy resource centers.

Ohio voters on Nov. 7 approved a measure to codify abortion access in the state's constitution, legalizing abortion up to the point of fetal viability—the gestational point at which a baby may be capable of living outside the uterus—and beyond, if a physician decided an abortion was necessary for the sake of the mother's life or health.

The Ohio results were not an outlier, as they followed losses for the pro-life movement in the wake of last year's Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* decision, which overturned the 1973 *Roe* decision and related precedent establishing abortion as a constitutional right. In 2022, voters in California, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, Vermont and Kansas either rejected new limitations on abortion or expanded legal protections for it.

Following Ohio, abortion advocates are seeking to hold comparable votes in 2024 in states, including Arizona and Florida.

Indiana became the first state in the nation to enact a new law extending legal protection to unborn babies in August of 2022. The state legislature's vote to significantly limit abortions in Indiana was quickly signed into law by Gov. Eric Holcomb. A suit against the law claiming it violated the state constitution was filed the same month. The Indiana Supreme Court upheld the law in June.

In 2023, several states passed legislation limiting the procedure, including Nebraska and North Carolina, which both limited the procedure after 12 weeks. Other states, including South Carolina, did so after six weeks.

The U.S. Supreme Court also took up its first major abortion case post-*Dobbs* concerning a challenge to mifepristone, an abortion-inducing drug. A decision is expected next summer in the midst of the presidential election.

Jeanne Mancini, president of the March for Life national organization and a Catholic, told OSV News that post-*Dobbs*, "states have the capacity to enact great laws."

"We know that nearly half of the states have enacted very life-protective laws," Mancini said. "And that's exciting to see. And, of course, the other half haven't and so we certainly have our work cut out for us there."

Emily V. Osment, SBA's (Susan B. Anthony) Pro-Life America's vice president of communications, told OSV News that "there have been 24 states that have put pro-life protections in place."

"That's an amazing feat, and that means that they have pro-life protections in place for babies in the womb at 12 weeks or earlier," she said. "So that's wonderful."

Both Mancini and Osment also lauded the work of pregnancy resource centers, with Osment pointing to a new 2023 study by Charlotte Lozier Institute, SBA's research arm, finding that such centers provided at least \$358 million in services in the previous year to pregnant women and families including pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, parenting education programs, baby diapers, wipes, formula, and clothing items.

Mancini also pointed to the organization's growing number of state marches for life, with 17 such events planned for next year at state capitals across the country. The group hopes to be in all 50 states in the coming years. (Indiana organizes its own March for Life, to be held on Jan. 22. See page 3 for more information.)

"There is a lot of cultural confusion right now about this. We're still sort of in the earthquake reverberations of what

the overturn of *Roe* means, and so many people are confused about that," Mancini said, explaining why state marches have become so important to the group.

The state marches, Mancini said, often have a Mass in the morning, mentioning one such event in Lansing, Mich., as particularly impactful because it "had almost all the bishops in Michigan drive out to Lansing that day for that Mass."

"Just that strength in numbers that they all made that drive for that Mass that morning, it was powerful," she said.

Asked about how they are preparing for the possibility of more ballot initiatives next year, Mancini said her group will work to change hearts and minds on the issue.

"There's also confusion over what the ballot initiatives are about, like so many people think that those ballot initiatives return the state to a pre-*Dobbs* sort of place policy-wise, but they take it much, much further than that," she said.

Osment said fundraising will also be a key part of SBA's efforts on potential ballot initiatives next year.

"We've learned a lot of lessons in Ohio and we are taking all of those lessons to allies in the states," she said. "And the number one lesson that we are saying is you better start raising money now." †

St. Maurice Parish in Napoleon celebrates 175 years of family-like faith

By Sean Gallagher

Mary Merkel grew up in a family with 17 children. So, when she and her husband Ray, with five young children of their own, went to Mass at St. Maurice Parish in Napoleon about 45 years ago, she felt like she was with family.

“It was such a warm, beautiful time during that Mass,” Mary recalled. “It meant so much to us. I just felt like I came home.”

“We were greeted right at the door by one of the older parishioners,” Ray remembered. “A different parishioner invited us over for coffee and donuts. That impressed me.”

“Our children loved the coffee and donuts,” Mary recalled fondly.

The Merkels and many other families in the parish family of St. Maurice came together on Dec. 3 with Archbishop Charles C. Thompson to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the founding of the Batesville Deanery faith community.

Father Binu Matthew, St. Maurice’s administrator since July, spoke of being impressed by the way parishioners worked to organize the anniversary celebration.

He also noted that it’s just emblematic of how the parishioners throw themselves into the life of the parish as a whole.

“I see in every meeting—whether it’s the finance committee or the parish council—they’re always looking to see what more they can do [for the parish],” Father Matthew said. “They’re always eager to do things.”

That involvement of the parishioners in caring for the faith community is in part rooted in the fact that, for much of its 175-year history, St. Maurice has not had a resident pastor.

At 83, Ray Merkel is glad to see this participation continuing in younger generations.

“We the people of St. Maurice take ownership of our parish,” he said. “The people before us showed us how to do that. Our generation carried that on. Now we’ve passed it on to the next generation. They’re doing that and following up on it.”

The Merkels see the value that St. Maurice’s parishioners place in their faith community in part through their worship at Mass.

“Around here, we’re known as the singing parish,” Ray said. “There’s always singing. We have a lot of singers and musicians.”

“The music here is like being in heaven with the angels,” Mary added.

The Merkels also see people buying into the parish simply through the presence of so many young families at St. Maurice today. They noted that Masses on weekends can be kind of noisy with the sounds of crying babies and boisterous toddlers.

“For me, it’s a blessing,” Ray said.

“They’re talking to God,” Mary added.

One of those families with young children belong to Matt and Leslie Hicks. Both grew up in St. Maurice Parish



Standing at the altar, Archbishop Charles C. Thompson celebrates Mass on Dec. 3 at St. Maurice Church in Napoleon as part of a celebration of the 175th anniversary of the parish’s founding. Joining him at the altar are extraordinary minister of holy Communion Kevin Tunny, left, altar servers Mason Ryder, Macey Kinker, Sam Simon and Hudson Kohlman, retired parish life coordinator Franciscan Sister Shirley Gerth, concelebrants Father John Geis, Father Joseph Rautenberg, Father William Turner and Father Binu Matthew, and extraordinary ministers of holy Communion Susan Schutte and Vicki Wagner. (Submitted photo)

and now have three children ranging in age from 11 down to 1.

“To be able to stay at St. Maurice has been good,” Matt said. “It’s home to me. You feel welcome and involved at the same time. And when you can bring your kids there, knowing that that’s where you grew up, that feels great as a father.”

“St. Maurice is a place that brings me so much joy and has taught me the importance of having a strong faith,” Leslie said. “It has shown me how to love, work hard and always turn to God.”

Matt serves on the parish’s finance committee. Through that role, he’s seen the strong footing the parish built up through the leadership of Franciscan Sister Shirley Gerth, who served as its

parish life coordinator from 2010 until her retirement in July.

During that time, Sister Shirley oversaw many physical improvement projects at St. Maurice, most notably the building of a new parish life center.

“Sister Shirley helped us to get on a good path to succeed in the future,” Matt said. “Now we have a good priest here. It’s great. I would love to see my kids stay around and be a part of the parish going forward into their adult lives. The parish is in a good spot.”

“St. Maurice has a bright and strong future,” Leslie said. “I pray that someday my children and grandchildren will get to experience what St. Maurice has given Matt and I as children, teens, a newly married couple and now young parents.” †



Father Meinrad Tolle, then pastor of St. Maurice Parish in Napoleon, poses in a 1905 archive photo with first Communicants from the Batesville Deanery faith community. (Submitted photo)

Doctrinal dicastery explains how and when gay couples can be blessed

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—A Catholic priest can bless a gay or other unmarried couple as long as it is not a formal liturgical blessing and does not give the impression that the Catholic Church is blessing the union as if it were a marriage, the Vatican doctrinal office said.

The request for a blessing can express and nurture “openness to the transcendence, mercy and closeness to God in a thousand concrete circumstances of life, which is no small thing in the world in which we live. It is a seed of the Holy Spirit that must be nurtured, not hindered,” the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith said in a formal declaration published on Dec. 18.

The document, “*Fiducia Supplicans*” (“Supplicating Trust”) was subtitled, “On the pastoral meaning of blessings,” and was approved by Pope Francis during an audience with Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, dicastery prefect, on Dec. 18.

In his introductory note, Cardinal Fernández said questions about a priest blessing a LGBTQ+ or other unmarried couple had been sent to the doctrinal office repeatedly during the past few years.

The need for a fuller explanation of blessings became clear, he wrote, after Pope Francis responded to the “*dubia*,” or questions, of several cardinals in a letter released in early October.

In his letter, the pope insisted marriage is an “exclusive, stable and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to conceiving children,” which is why the Church “avoids all kinds of rites or sacramentals that could contradict this conviction and imply that it is recognizing as a marriage something that is not.”

At the same time, the pope said, “pastoral prudence must adequately discern if there are forms of blessing, solicited by one or various persons, that don’t transmit a mistaken concept of marriage.”

Cardinal Fernández said the declaration “remains firm on the traditional doctrine of the Church about marriage, not allowing any type of liturgical rite or blessing similar to a liturgical rite that can create confusion,” but it also explores the “pastoral meaning of blessings” in a way that opens “the possibility of blessing couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church’s perennial teaching on marriage.”

The Church “remains firm” in teaching that marriage can be contracted only between one woman and one man, he said, and continues to insist that “rites and prayers that could create confusion” about a marriage and another form of relationship “are inadmissible.”

But in Catholic tradition, blessings go well beyond the formal ritual used in marriage and other sacraments.

“Blessings are among the most widespread and evolving sacramentals. Indeed, they lead us to grasp God’s presence in all the events of life and remind us that, even in the use of created things, human beings are invited to seek God, to love him, and to serve him faithfully,” the declaration said. That is why people, meals, rosaries, homes, pets and myriad other things can be and are blessed on various occasions.

“From a strictly liturgical

point of view,” the declaration said, “a blessing requires that what is blessed be conformed to God’s will, as expressed in the teachings of the Church,” which is why the then-doctrinal congregation in 2021 excluded the possibility of blessing gay couples.

But, the new document said, Catholics should “avoid the risk of reducing the meaning of blessings” to their formal, liturgical use because that “would lead us to expect the same moral conditions for a simple blessing that are called for in the reception of the sacraments.

“Indeed, there is the danger that a pastoral gesture that is so beloved and widespread will be subjected to too many moral prerequisites, which, under the claim of control, could overshadow the unconditional power of God’s love that forms the basis for the gesture of blessing,” it said.

A person who asks for God’s blessing, the declaration said, “shows himself to be in need of God’s saving presence in his life and one who asks for a blessing from the Church recognizes the latter as a sacrament of the salvation that God offers.”

The Church, it said, should be grateful when people ask for a blessing and should see it as a sign that they know they need God’s help.

“When people ask for a blessing, an exhaustive moral analysis should not be placed as a precondition for conferring it. For, those seeking a blessing should not be required to have prior moral perfection,” it said.

At the same time, the declaration insisted that the Mass is not the proper setting for the less formal forms of blessing that could include the blessing of a gay couple, and it repeated that “it is not appropriate for a diocese, a bishops’ conference” or other Church structure to issue a formal blessing prayer or ritual for unwed couples. The blessing also should not be given “in concurrence” with a civil marriage ceremony to avoid appearing as a sort of Church blessing of the civil union.

However, it said, a priest or deacon could “join in the prayer of those persons who, although in a union that cannot be compared in any way to a marriage, desire to entrust themselves to the Lord and his mercy, to invoke his help and to be guided to a greater understanding of his plan of love and of truth.” †

Statement from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis on “*Fiducia Supplicans*”

The Declaration, “*Fiducia Supplicans*” from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, focuses on individuals regardless of their status or situations. This focus is consistent with the Church’s longstanding teaching and belief that no person is beyond the scope of divine mercy, healing and reconciliation.

A blessing, as noted in the document, is a pastoral gesture to those seeking divine grace in overcoming challenges or struggles in their lives.

Such blessings, the document stresses, are not to be issued as formal prayers or rituals, but prudently provided to those who request a simple blessing.

As stated in the Declaration itself: *Blessings are among the most widespread and evolving sacramentals. Indeed, they lead us to grasp God’s presence in all the events of life and remind us that, even in the use of created things, human beings are invited to seek God, to love him, and to serve him faithfully.* (#8) †

Pope celebrates 87th birthday with children of families in need

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—With song, cake and circus performers, Pope Francis celebrated his 87th birthday in festive style at the Vatican.

As in previous years, the pope spent his birthday on Dec. 17 in the Paul VI Audience Hall with the children of those assisted by the Vatican's "Santa Marta" pediatric dispensary, which gives medical supplies to families in need.

As soon as Pope Francis entered the room, one girl couldn't help but stand up and give the pope a hug. The children held up signs wishing Pope Francis happy birthday in Italian, sang to him and watched performers pull off acrobatic stunts, twirl plates and do tricks with hula hoops as the pope watched along, laughing and applauding. Seated alongside him for the show was Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner.

"For being able to see you, so many girls and boys, everyone here, thank you," the pope said to the children. "We have to prepare for a big party which will be next week: Christmas, the party in which we think of and remember when Jesus came to be with us."

Pope Francis asked the children to prepare their hearts for Christmas and for receiving Jesus. "Everyone think," he told them, "what will I ask Jesus? What will I ask Jesus this Christmas?"

He encouraged the children to think about their wish with their eyes closed in silence and to ask Jesus for it later.

A white cake decorated with an illustration of Pope Francis and children was then rolled out to the pope. After



Pope Francis is joined on his 87th birthday by children assisted at the Vatican's pediatric clinic in the Paul VI Hall on Dec. 17. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

the children gathered around the cake and sang "Happy Birthday" to "Papa Francesco," the pope blew out the lone candle and encouraged the children to steal a bit of icing with their finger.

Earlier in the day, Pope Francis prayed the *Angelus* with some 22,000 people gathered in St. Peter's Square. A group of children held up banners reading "Happy Birthday, Best Wishes Pope Francis." After the pope gave the final blessing, the crowd began singing "Happy Birthday" to the pope in Italian.

Also present in the square was a giant figure of the infant Jesus in a manger.

Many in St. Peter's Square had their own infant Jesus figures in hand to be

blessed by the pope, following an Italian custom of bringing to church the Jesus figure that will be placed in the Nativity scene for a blessing before Christmas.

"I ask that you pray before the Nativity scene for children who will experience a difficult Christmas in places where there is war, in refugee camps, in situations of profound misery," the pope said after blessing the figures. "Thank you for doing this, and Merry Christmas to all of you and your families." †

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Several Sisters of Providence celebrate significant jubilees

Criterion staff report

In 2023, 21 members of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods celebrated significant milestones in the congregation.

75-year jubilarians

Sister Laurette Bellamy is a native of Chicago. She entered the congregation on Feb. 2, 1948, and professed perpetual vows on Aug. 15, 1955.

Sister Laurette earned a bachelor's degree in music at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College in St. Mary-of-the-Woods and a master's degree in music at the Catholic University of America in Washington.

Sister Laurette served in the archdiocese in Indianapolis at the former Ladywood High School from 1950-52 and 1957-64, and as a volunteer for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul from 2015-16. She also ministered at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College in St. Mary-of-the-Woods from 1952-53, 1955-57, 1972-90, 1992-2010, as a volunteer at the former St. Ann Clinic in Terre Haute from 2005-11, in Bloomington as a volunteer at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul from 2006-14 and as a nursing home visitor for St. Charles Borromeo Parish from 2013-14.

Sister Laurette currently serves as a parish volunteer at SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi Parish in Greenwood.

Sister Eileen Dede was born in Terre Haute and grew up as a member of the former St. Ann Parish. She entered the congregation on Jan. 7, 1948, and professed perpetual vows on Aug. 15, 1955.

Sister Eileen earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and a master's degree in art education at Indiana University in Bloomington.

In the archdiocese, Sister Eileen served in Indianapolis at the former St. Patrick School from 1951-53, Holy Spirit School from 1959-63, Immaculate Heart of Mary School from 1965-67, St. Luke the Evangelist School from 1971-73, St. Thomas Aquinas School from 1973-77, and at Franciscan Health Indianapolis as an extraordinary minister of holy Communion from 2011-13, as a volunteer from 2014-16 and as a nursing home volunteer from 2013-14.

She also served at St. Malachy School in Brownsburg from 1955-57, at the former Sacred Heart School in Terre Haute from 1983-84, and as director of pastoral care at Health Care at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods from 1984-91.

Sister Eileen also ministered in the Evansville, Ind., Diocese and in California, Florida and Illinois.

She currently ministers in prayer at the motherhouse and as a visitor at Providence Health Care at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

Sister Jane Michael Dwyer is a native of Arlington, Mass. She entered the congregation on July 22, 1948, and professed perpetual vows on Jan. 23, 1956.

Sister Jane Michael earned a bachelor's degree in education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and a master's degree in education at Rivier University in Nashua, N.H.

In the archdiocese, she served at the former St. Margaret Mary School in Terre Haute from 1956-57.

Sister Jane Michael has also ministered in Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, North Carolina and Washington, D.C.

She currently serves as a visitor in residential services and Providence Health Care at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

Sister Dorothy (formerly Sister Margaret Eugene) Gartland is a native of St. Joseph, Mo. She entered the congregation on Feb. 2, 1948, and professed perpetual vows on Aug. 15, 1955.

Sister Dorothy earned a bachelor's degree in education at Saint Mary-of-



the-Woods College and a master's degree in elementary education at Indiana University.

In the archdiocese, she served at St. Malachy School in Brownsburg from 1957-59.

Sister Dorothy has also ministered in the Evansville Diocese, the Diocese of Gary, Ind., and in Illinois and Washington, D.C.

She currently serves in residential services at the motherhouse.

Sister James Michael Kesterson is a native of Indianapolis where she grew up as a member of St. Roch Parish. She entered the congregation on Feb. 2, 1948, and professed perpetual vows on Aug. 15, 1955.

Sister James Michael earned a bachelor's degree in education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and a master's degree in education from Indiana State University in Terre Haute.

In the archdiocese, she served in Indianapolis at the former St. Andrew the Apostle School from 1954-55 and 1965-68, at St. Jude School from 1978-2010 and as a catechist at St. Anthony Parish from 2010-14, at the former St. Ann School in Terre Haute from 1961-65 and at Our Lady of the Greenwood School in Greenwood from 1968-78.

Sister James Michael has also ministered in the Gary Diocese, the Diocese of Lafayette, Ind., and in Illinois and Massachusetts.

She currently serves in the archdiocesan archives and at Anna's House, both in Indianapolis.

Sister Grace Marie Meehan is a native of Chicago. She entered the congregation on Jan. 7, 1948, and professed perpetual vows on Aug. 15, 1955.

Sister Grace Marie earned an associate's degree in nursing from Illinois Eastern Community College, a bachelor's degree in education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and a master's degree in education at Indiana State University in Terre Haute.

In the archdiocese, she served at the former St. Agnes Academy in Indianapolis from 1950-51, at Our Lady of the Greenwood School in Greenwood from 1959-68, at St. Mary School in Richmond (now Seton Catholic School) from 1968-69, at St. Michael School in Greenfield from 1969-72 and at the motherhouse in leadership and in health care from 1972-84.

Sister Grace Marie has also ministered

in California, Illinois, Maryland, New Mexico and Oklahoma.

She is currently between assignments and is in residence at the motherhouse.

Sister Joan Mary Schaefer is a native of Cicero, Ill. She entered the congregation on July 22, 1948, and professed perpetual vows on Jan. 23, 1956.

Sister Joan Mary earned a bachelor's degree in education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and a master's degree in education at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind.

In the archdiocese, she served at the former St. Ann School in New Castle from 1951-53, St. Mary School in Richmond (now Seton Catholic School) from 1954-55 and at the former St. John Academy in Indianapolis from 1956-59.

Sister Joan Mary has also ministered in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend in northern Indiana, in the Gary Diocese and in Illinois, Massachusetts and Missouri.

She currently serves in residential services at the motherhouse.

70-year jubilarians

Sister Teresa (formerly Sister Ellen Maureen) Costello, is a native of County Galway, Ireland. She entered the congregation on July 22, 1953, and professed perpetual vows on Jan. 23, 1961.

Sister Teresa earned a bachelor's degree in education from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, a master's degree in education at Indiana State University, a master's degree in pastoral counseling at Emmanuel College in Boston and a doctor of ministry degree in spirituality at the Graduate Theology Foundation based in Sarasota, Fla.

In the archdiocese, she served at Providence Self-Sufficiency Ministries in West Terre Haute from 1995-96.

Sister Teresa has also ministered in Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

She currently serves as a volunteer at Providence Health Care at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

Sister Mary Catherine Duffy is a native of Indianapolis where she grew up as a member of St. Philip Neri Parish. She entered the congregation on Jan. 6, 1953, and professed perpetual vows on Aug. 15, 1960.

Sister Mary Catherine earned a bachelor's degree in education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and a master's degree in special education

at Indiana State University. She also received an honorary doctorate from the University of Indianapolis.

In the archdiocese, Sister Mary Catherine in Hispanic ministry at St. Mary Parish in Indianapolis from 1975-78 and 1987-88, in leadership with the congregation from 1975-86, in the Hispanic Education Center from 1987-2004, at the Marian Center from 2004-14 and with the archdiocesan Office of Refugee and Immigrant Services from 2015-21.

She has also ministered in California, Illinois and as a missionary in Peru.

Sister Mary Catherine currently serves as a document translator in the archdiocesan Office of Refugee and Immigrant Services and as a volunteer for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Sister Jane (formerly Sister Dorothy Jane) Gibson, is a native of Louisville, Ky. She entered the congregation from Sacred Heart Parish in Terre Haute on Feb. 2, 1953, and professed perpetual vows on Aug. 15, 1960.

Sister Jane earned a bachelor's degree in education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and a master's degree in elementary education at Indiana State University.

In the archdiocese, she served in Indianapolis at the former Holy Cross Central School from 1972-74, at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral Parish from 1974-77, at Cathedral High School from 1979-80, in community organization from 1980-92, as a caregiver from 1994-2008, as a volunteer at St. Rita Parish from 2008-10 and as a volunteer at Helping Hands in West Terre Haute from 2010-15.

Sister Jane also served in the Evansville Diocese, the Gary Diocese, and in California, Illinois and Ohio.

Currently, she ministers in prayer at the motherhouse.

Sister Carolyn Glynn is a native of Malden, Mass. She entered the congregation on July 22, 1953, and professed perpetual vows on Jan. 23, 1961.

She earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, a master's degree in education at DePaul University in Chicago and a doctor of ministry degree at the Graduate Theology Foundation.

Sister Carolyn served in the archdiocese at St. Anthony School in Indianapolis from 1958-61.

PROVIDENCE

continued from page 13

She has also ministered in California, Florida, Illinois and Massachusetts.

She currently serves as a driver at the motherhouse.

Sister Marilyn Ann Kofler is a native of Chicago. She entered the congregation on Feb. 2, 1953, and professed perpetual vows on Aug. 15, 1960.

Sister Marilyn Ann earned a Bachelor's degree in education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, a master's degree in education administration at the University of Illinois at Champaign, Ill., a master's degree from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and a doctor of ministry degree from the University of St. Mary-of-the-Lake in Mundelein, Ill.

In the archdiocese, she served at St. Malachy School in Brownsburg from 1959-61.

Sister Marilyn Ann also served in the Fort Wayne-South Bend Diocese and in Illinois, North Carolina and Texas.

She currently ministers in social justice advocacy in the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Sister Jeanette Marie Lucinio is a native of Evanston, Ill. She entered the congregation on Feb. 2, 1953, and professed perpetual vows on Aug. 15, 1960.

She earned a bachelor's degree in education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, a master's degree in religious studies at the University of St. Mary-of-the-Lake, a master's degree in divinity at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and a doctor of ministry degree at Chicago Theological Seminary in Chicago.

In the archdiocese, she served at St. Paul School in Sellersburg (now St. John Paul II School) from 1955-56, at St. James the Greater School in Indianapolis (now Central Catholic School) from 1959-60 and at the motherhouse as vocations office coordinator from 2017-20 and a volunteer from 2020-22.

Currently, Sister Jeanette Marie ministers at the motherhouse in residential services and health care ministries.

Sister Ann Paula Pohlman is a native of Indianapolis where she grew up as a member of St. Philip Neri Parish. She entered the congregation on Jan. 6, 1953, and professed perpetual vows on Aug. 15, 1960.

Sister Ann Paula earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, a master's degree in elementary education at Ball State University and a master's degree in religious education from Seattle University in Seattle.

In the archdiocese, she served in Indianapolis at the former St. Catherine of Siena School from 1968-71, at the former South Central Catholic School from 1974-76, at Providence Cristo Rey High School from 2006-2008, and in activities at the motherhouse from 2015-20.

Sister Ann Paula has also ministered in the Lafayette Diocese and in Florida, Illinois and Massachusetts.

She currently serves in residential services at the motherhouse.

60-year jubilarians

Sister Jeremy Gallet is a native of Chicago. She entered the congregation on Sept. 12, 1963, and professed perpetual vows on Sept. 29, 1973.

She earned a bachelor's degree in music education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, a master's degree in urban education at Indiana University, a master's degree in liturgy at the University of Notre Dame in northern Indiana and a doctorate in theology and the arts at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, Calif.

She has served in the Evansville Diocese and the Fort Wayne-South Bend Diocese, and in California, Illinois, Oregon and Texas.

Sister Jeremy is currently between ministries and is in residence at the

motherhouse.

Sister Elizabeth (formerly Sister Mary Andrew) Koressel, is a native of Elberfeld, Ind. She entered the congregation on Sept. 12, 1963, and professed perpetual vows on Aug. 15, 1971.

Sister Elizabeth earned a bachelor's degree in education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, a master's degree in elementary education at Ball State University and a master's degree in pastoral studies at the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis.

In the archdiocese, she served in New Albany at the former Central Catholic School from 1977-79 and the former St. Mary School from 1979-86, and at the motherhouse as administrator of the ministry of care from 2016-18.

Sister Elizabeth also ministered in the Evansville Diocese, the Fort Wayne-South Bend Diocese and in Illinois.

She currently serves as a volunteer in the ministry of care at the motherhouse.

Sister Patricia (formerly Sister Mary Philip) McGlynn, is a native of Chicago. She entered the congregation on Sept. 12, 1963, and professed perpetual vows on Nov. 24, 1973.

She earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and a master's degree in elementary education at Indiana University.

In the archdiocese, Sister Patricia served at Immaculate Heart of Mary School in Indianapolis from 1976-82.

She also ministered in the Evansville Diocese and in Illinois.

Sister Patricia currently serves as a volunteer caregiver in Illinois.

Sister Janice (formerly Sister Joachim) Ostowski, is a native of Berwyn, Ill. She entered the congregation on Sept. 12, 1963, and professed perpetual vows on Nov. 10, 1973.

She earned an associate's degree in business management and information at Triton University in River Grove, Ill., a bachelor's degree in education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and a master's degree in curriculum and instruction at the National College of Education in Evanston, Ill.

In the archdiocese, Sister Janice served at the former Saint Mary-of-the-Woods School from 1967-68.

She has also ministered in Illinois.

Sister Janice currently serves as a volunteer at Gottleib Hospital in Melrose Park, Ill.

Sister Denise Wilkinson is a native of Evergreen Park, Ill. She entered the congregation on Sept. 12, 1963, and

professed perpetual vows on Aug. 25, 1973.

She earned a bachelor's degree in English at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and a master's degree in counseling at St. Louis University in St. Louis.

In the archdiocese, Sister Denise served at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College from 1974-79 and 1980-89 and in Indianapolis at the Hispanic Education Center from 1991-93.

In the congregation, she served as a director of formation from 1993-96, as director of the Office of Congregational Advancement from 1996-2001, as vicar and general councilor from 2001-06, as superior general from 2006-16 and as a donor relations associate from 2017-19.

Sister Denise has also ministered in Illinois, Massachusetts and Missouri.

She currently ministers as a volunteer at the motherhouse.

25-year jubilarians

Sister Anji Fan entered the congregation on Sept. 17, 1998, and professed perpetual vows on June 25, 2006.

She earned a bachelor's degree in theology and religious studies at the University of San Francisco and a master's degree in mathematics at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

In the archdiocese, Sister Anji has served at Providence Cristo Rey High School in Indianapolis from 2008-09 and Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception in Oldenburg from 2016-21.

She currently is a student at the University of Louisville.

Sister Susan Paweski is a native of Chicago. She entered the congregation on Sept. 17, 1998, and professed perpetual vows on Aug. 14, 2005.

She earned a bachelor's degree in communications from the University of Saint Mary-of-the-Lake, a master's degree in education at National Louis University in Chicago, a master's degree in pastoral studies at Loyola University Chicago and a master's degree in Earth literacy from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College.

In the archdiocese, Sister Susan has served in the congregation's Office of Congregational Advancement from 2002-12.

She also has ministered in Illinois.

Sister Susan currently serves as co-director of Providence Associates for the congregation and resides in Brookfield, Ill. †

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SIMPLY CATHOLIC

Christ's birth is prepared for, celebrated in Advent and Christmas

By Amy Welborn

(OSV News)—For Catholics, great feasts like Christmas don't come at us out of the blue. In the secular world, "Christmas" seems to start in October! However, our approach to this holiday as Catholics must be different, and it can be.

We can put aside the worldly calendar; we can allow the ancient, rich tradition of the Church to surround and center us instead. And then, we will be enriched by truly celebrating a Catholic Christmas.

"God's sign is simplicity. God's sign is the baby. God's sign is that he makes himself small for us. This is how he reigns. He does not come with power and outward splendor. He comes as a baby—defenseless and in need of our help," Pope Benedict XVI preached in his homily for Midnight Mass in 2006. "He does not want to overwhelm us with his strength. He takes away our fear of his greatness. He asks for our love: So he makes himself a child."

A child is coming. As for any birth, we must prepare. The Advent season is a gift, rich with opportunities to ready our lives for the embrace of our Savior.

One powerful way to prepare for the gift of Jesus is to turn away from the outside noise and pressure and take a few quiet moments to pray with the Church. Use your parish bulletin, *The Criterion* or visit bible.usccb.org to look up the Mass readings for each day. If you can, take time to attend daily Mass; use it as a period of refreshment in the midst of the busyness all around.

Even during our most hectic times, we can still "watch and wait" with the Church. Everything else that we do during Advent can echo what we hear in God's word and the Church's prayer. Our Advent wreaths and Jesse Trees are physical reminders of the coming light and the prophecies fulfilled. When we celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation, we acknowledge our darkness and need, and rejoice in the light of forgiveness offered through the Child.

Joining our thoughts and prayers to those of the communion of saints whose feasts occur during this season—Ambrose, Lucy, John of the Cross, Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin and others—helps us hear John the Baptist's call along with these holy men, women and even children who have gone before us in faith. Just as they heard and responded, so can we.

During this season, we twice celebrate the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom we try to model in our own patient Advent waiting. On the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8), we celebrate the truth that she was conceived without sin. On the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Dec. 12), we celebrate Mary's appearance to the indigenous St. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin ("Talking Eagle") in Mexico in 1531.

St. Nicholas of Myra's feast on Dec. 6 is celebrated in many European countries as a day to share gifts—often candy, and often placed in shoes. As Europeans immigrated to the United States, various St. Nicholas traditions combined and emerged as Santa Claus. Sharing the story of the real St. Nicholas can help us emulate the generosity of his faith-filled life, which is, in turn, an expression of God's own generosity and the gift of Jesus.

When Christmas arrives, we have spent four weeks preparing for the Child. At last, the day to celebrate



Pope Francis carries a figurine of the Baby Jesus at the conclusion of Christmas Eve Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on Dec. 24, 2021. The Church's celebration of Christ's birth throughout the Christmas season invites believers to enter deeply into the mystery of the incarnation. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

arrives: The Father has answered our prayers, sending his Son as one like ourselves, humbly immersing himself in human life and speaking words we can understand, inviting us to love.

At Christmas, we celebrate God's gift of Jesus to the world. The very name of the day and the season—"Christ's Mass," derived from the Old English way of speaking of it—places Jesus, present to us in the Eucharist, at the center of the day. Might this Christmas be the beginning of a closer friendship with Jesus, nurtured by the Eucharist?

There are actually four different Masses for Christmas: the Vigil, Mass during the Night (traditionally called Midnight Mass), Mass at Dawn and Mass During the Day.

Each has a distinct theme and different readings, reflecting the richness of the mystery of the incarnation. Even though most of us will attend only one Mass at Christmas, it's a beautiful custom—and well worth our while—to meditate on the Mass readings from the others as well. This can deepen our appreciation for what God has done for us and the whole world in Christ.

Christmas is rich with symbols. We put up Christmas trees, Nativity sets and lights, all beautiful in their own right—and all symbolic of the deeper, richer dimensions of meaning that our faith brings to this season.

Christmas trees, being evergreens, speak to us of God's eternal life and love, embodied in Christ. They also recall the tree in the garden through which sin came into the world, and the tree of the cross by which that sin was conquered. Saying a prayer as we put up our tree, and making sure that some of our ornaments evoke the Nativity, can help bring this "home" to us.

The Nativity scene, or *crèche* ("crib" in French), was popularized by St. Francis of Assisi 800 years ago this year out of a desire to bring home the reality of the humility and love of Christ. Setting out the Nativity scene—saving the Child for Dec. 25 and the Magi for Epiphany—can be natural moments for prayer and reflection.

God gives the world his Son, who dwells among us, filling us with a love that must be shared. So we, on Christmas, give gifts. Contemplating the examples of gift-givers like the Magi, St. Nicholas and King Wenceslas can bring a new perspective to our own actions. Who is in greatest need, and what gifts can we give?

Many families have already discovered the joy of giving of themselves to others on Christmas Day: seeking out shut-ins, visiting residents of nursing homes or hospital patients, or serving the poor and the homeless. They reach out, as God reaches out to us in Christ. We can consider other alternatives as well: supporting charities in the name of our friends, or encouraging our families to center their gift-giving energies on those less fortunate in order to give as Christ has given to us.

We know as Catholics that Christmas isn't over on Dec. 26. Even just those first few days after Christmas invite us to continue to open our hearts to the Christ Child and what he brings.

There's the challenge of discipleship (St. Stephen on Dec. 26), the beauty of the Word made flesh (St. John the Evangelist on Dec. 27), the reality of opposition to Christ (the Holy Innocents on Dec. 28) and the blessing of family (Holy Family, the Sunday after Christmas).

Jan. 1 is the beginning of a new calendar year, but that's not the reason we celebrate it as a feast. On the Church's calendar, New Year's Day is both the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, and a day of prayer for peace.

We make all sorts of resolutions for a new year, but alongside those efforts, we say a different sort of prayer. God has come to us, not in overwhelming power, but in humility as a child. So, on this day, we pray that the new year might be marked by humility and peace, brought by Christ and modeled by Mary.

The Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, traditionally observed on Jan. 6 (the day following the familiar "Twelve Days of Christmas"), is transferred to a Sunday in the United States. "Epiphany" is rooted in the ancient Greek word for "manifestation," and it's the celebration of Jesus manifesting his glory as Savior to all nations of the world (symbolized by the Magi).

Epiphany is a gift-giving day in some cultures, as well as a day to ask for God's blessings on our homes. One particular blessing includes bracketing the initials of the traditional names of the Magi who visited the home of Jesus—Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar—with the year above the front entry door, usually in chalk, like this for 2024: 20+C+M+B+24.

In the scope of the universal Church, past and present, the Christmas season actually has two endings.

In the old Roman calendar, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord on Feb. 2 marked the end of the Christmas season. On this day, also called Candlemas, candles are blessed as a symbol of Simeon's recognition of the infant Jesus as the light to the Gentiles and as a way to bring the light of Christ home to burn all year. Even today, the Christmas tree and *crèche* in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican remain on display until Candlemas.

Likewise, the Baptism of the Lord, usually celebrated the Sunday after Epiphany, commemorates the final "Christmas" feast of our present Church calendar. As we hear the Scriptural account of the Father revealing the divinity of Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan River, we celebrate our own baptism, our "new birth" in Christ and inclusion in his body, the Church.

For Catholics, Dec. 25 is only the beginning of the celebration of Christmas. As others pack away the decorations, we continue to celebrate the gift of Christ, ever present for us in the Eucharist—a continual manifestation of God's loving care for us all year long.

(Amy Welborn is a freelance writer living in Birmingham, Ala. She is the author of many books on faith and spirituality for children, teens and adults. Her website is AmyWelborn.com.) †



A Nativity display is pictured at a shop in the traditional market of San Gregorio Armeno in central Naples, Italy, on Dec. 2, 2017. Such displays are a centuries-old tradition in the Church that celebrate Christ's birth. (OSV News photo/Tony Gentile, Reuters)

Correction Ministries/Deacon John Cord

Gifts to re-entry ministry help those seeking employment

The archdiocese's Corrections Ministry team received a beautiful gift from a donor this year. The anonymous donor had a nephew who was released from prison.



This man had no work clothes and no way to purchase the steel-toe boots and other items he would need to get a job in construction. This led to him not being able to secure a job in the field he knew best. He ended up homeless and desperate.

The donor did not want this to happen to other men and women, so he asked that we find a way to help men and women coming home.

We approached the Indiana Department of Corrections (IDOC) about the gift we received. We asked how we might be able to use the gift to help people. We learned that not having the proper work items is an issue for many women and men being released from incarceration.

IDOC has people dedicated to helping them find jobs, called HIRE coordinators. But even if employment is found, many people are turned down if they do not have the proper clothing and shoes on day one of the new job. IDOC does not have funds or a process for providing these items. So, when we discussed this new donation and what it was for, the IDOC people became very excited.

We set up a form that the HIRE coordinators send to me. I then order these items on Amazon and have them shipped directly to the HIRE

At the current rate, we will have exhausted all of our funds by January 2024. We want to keep helping these people rebuild their lives by getting a job. So, we need more donors to help us.

coordinators. Every time I place an order, I feel like Santa Claus!

Knowing that a few simple items can greatly change someone's life is amazing. We have provided items for more than 200 people since we started this program in July. These items include every kind of work clothing you can imagine.

The donor asked that some of these funds be used for worship aids and other religious items in prisons. So, we also have purchased Bibles and rosaries for use in the prisons and jails. In addition, we were able to use some of these funds to provide Christmas gifts for young men at the Putnamville Juvenile Center, including books, Bibles, socks and snack foods they cannot normally get.

When we first received the extremely generous donation, we thought the money would last for a very long time. However, the demand for these gifts has continued to rise dramatically. We are now receiving more than 10 requests per week.

At the current rate, we will have exhausted all of our funds by January 2024. We want to keep helping these people rebuild their lives by getting and keeping a job.

So, we need more donors to help us. For more information about how you can support our re-entry ministry in various ways, please contact me.

(Deacon John Cord is the Coordinator of Corrections Ministry for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. For more information on supporting the office's re-entry ministry, contact Deacon Cord at 317-432-6604 or e-mail jcord@archindy.org.) †

Faith and Family/Sean Gallagher

Christmas gifts we know about in advance are sometimes the best

Sometimes, the best gifts we can receive at Christmas are those that we know about in advance.



As a father, I've enjoyed seeing my sons be surprised when they open an unexpected gift on Christmas morning.

I get a lot of satisfaction also from seeing my wife Cindy look through the photo album that I give her each year at Christmas.

For some 20 years now, I've had prints made of 30 to 40 family photos taken since the previous Christmas. I put them in an album, complete with information on each photo written on their backs and next to the photo in the album itself.

Cindy always says it's the best gift she gets each Christmas. She loves to sit down and look at all the photos, marveling as she relives moments in the life of our family from the previous year.

And just as some gifts we know about in advance are the best, some gifts also grow in value over time.

The family photo album that I give to Cindy each year is the proverbial gift that keeps on giving. They boys themselves like looking at the albums to see photos of themselves when they or their brothers were younger.

Viewing albums from several years ago often brings Cindy to tears as she takes in just how much our family has changed in what seems like so short a time.

In our life of faith as Catholics, we learn from a young age the great gift we received at Christ's birth in Bethlehem when he gave himself to us. So, we're not surprised or astounded by it like the shepherds or the magi were at the first Christmas.

We don't need that experience to know the greatness of the gift we receive in Christ's birth.

But perhaps its value can grow in us through time as our relationship with him grows, like the way Cindy cherishes more as the years go by the family photo albums I give to her each Christmas.

This can happen in a special way as we open ourselves to the reality that the gift Christ gives us in his birth comes to full flower in the Eucharist.

At Christmas, we are simply witnesses of his birth in the Spirit. In the Eucharist, Christ not only gives us himself. He goes further, drawing us into himself in holy Communion.

It's then that we can become like another kind of Christmas gift that parents value greatly.

Children often want to give Christmas gifts to their parents and do so by making some kind of gift on their own. My boys, for example, have given Cindy and me at Christmas simple art projects they've worked on in school.

By themselves, these gifts are of no great objective value. But to us as parents, their worth is inestimable. We see, touch and feel in them the great love our children have for us.

So, when Christ empowers us in the Eucharist to give ourselves in him to our heavenly Father, we become a child's Christmas gift to his or her parents.

We may not have much from our daily lives to offer up to our him, especially with all of the faults and failings that mark our lives.

But when they are given to him in communion with his Son in the Eucharist, their worth becomes infinite.

This Christmas, open your hearts to the great gift in Christ's birth and the Eucharist that you know in advance you'll receive. And, in Christ in the Eucharist, give yourself as the best of Christmas gifts to our heavenly Father. †

Guest Column/Sr. Nancy Usselman, F.S.P.

Pray the news, pray the media, and imbue the culture with Christ

Though they're gifts from God, living and working behind our media screens can sap our energy and leave us feeling listless and spiritually dry. Growing our spiritual lives while immersed in a digital world requires a media spirituality that centers us in Christ, the perfect communicator.



Blessed James Alberione developed Pauline spirituality to root modern-day communicators and media users in the Word and the Eucharist. Alberione's

spirituality of communications follows the example of the greatest evangelizer and lover of Christ, the Apostle St. Paul.

Pauline spirituality

In Alberione's thinking, St. Paul did not wait for people to approach him, but instead he went forth to proclaim Jesus to every person he encountered in the ancient world—Jew, Greek, Roman or Arab.

His message always drew on the culture around him, making connections for people with the stories, poets and orators of the times. Paul realized that cultural stories often touch upon humanity's deepest yearnings.

When in Athens, he went to the Areopagus, the "public square" of learning and philosophizing, there discovering altars raised to various gods. When he saw the altar to an "unknown god," Paul found the hook to attract his audience.

Human beings long for a connection with our Creator, in whose image and likeness we are made. So, he quotes from their poets and writers to speak to them of the One God, creator of all, and of Jesus Christ, Redeemer of humanity. He started with the people's culture to address their deepest desires and lead them to Christ.

In 1958, Blessed Alberione wrote about how media apostles must imitate the example of Paul: "St. Paul held all peoples in his heart. He affirmed that his heart had opened wide to embrace all nations. In his intentions, his prayers and his desires all were present. We are to have love for people, therefore, and show it especially toward those who live in the darkness of ignorance. We are also to nourish zeal for the salvation of all people not with words, but with action—the apostolate performed with fervor and love."

The public square

The darkness of ignorance proliferates our media feeds.

We can prayerfully consider how to address the intellectual confusion of our day through our media interaction. St. Paul guides our approach in communicating the truth of the human person and humanity's ultimate search for God, through a

As disciples of Jesus, like Paul, we enter the "public square" with the Gospel of Christ seeking to change hearts by pointing out the beauty, truth and goodness of God present in the world and in the cultural stories of our day. Each one of us can do our part.

passion for the Gospel and love for each human being we encounter, in-person and online.

To be authentic communicators of truth, we need to be imbued with Christ, the goal toward which we tend as missionary disciples.

The Pauline media spirituality of Alberione roots us in Jesus Master, as way, truth and life for humanity, present tangibly in the Word of God and the Blessed Sacrament. These are the pillars of a media spirituality.

As communicators, we listen attentively to the Word in the Scriptures, meditate on it, and sit at the feet of the Master present in the Eucharist. There, like Mary, we experience "the better part" (Lk 10:42) and become imbued with Christ so to go forth and communicate Christ in the digital spaces and with our neighbors face-to-face.

As disciples of Jesus, like Paul, we enter the "public square" with the Gospel of Christ seeking to change hearts by pointing out the beauty, truth and goodness of God present in the world and in the cultural stories of our day. Each one of us can do our part.

Praying the media, praying the news

Though we are surrounded by media and sometimes feel the need to break away to pray in silence, we can also pray the media we use each day. We can pray the news.

As we scroll through our social media feeds, or watch a news broadcast, or listen to a podcast, we consider the situation in our world. We offer intercessory prayers for all that we heard or read.

Instead of feeling anxious and disturbed by the news, we make this a regular practice to grow in media mindfulness and discernment regarding media messages and to raise up the needs of the world to God.

St. John Paul II called Blessed James Alberione "the Apostle of the New Evangelization," who gave the Church a spirituality for everyone who engages with media.

To be Christ's missionary disciples, we can pray the media we use each day and communicate Christ in the Areopagus of the digital culture.

(Sister Nancy Usselman, a Daughter of St. Paul, is director of the Pauline Center for Media Studies in Los Angeles and a media literacy education specialist.) †

The Nativity of the Lord (Mass during the Day)/

Msgr. Owen F. Campion

The Sunday Readings

Monday, December 25, 2023

- Isaiah 52:7-10
- Hebrews 1:1-6
- John 1:1-18

The Church presents four separate liturgical celebrations for Christmas, the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord.



The first celebration is a Vigil Mass celebrated the evening before Christmas. The second is for Mass during the night, traditionally at midnight. The third is for Masses celebrated at dawn on Christmas. And the fourth is for

Masses occurring later on Christmas Day.

For the Masses during the day, the Church first provides a reading from Isaiah 52. It is from the third section of the Book of Isaiah and was composed when Hebrew hearts could not have been heavier. Disgust and despair filled the air. The times, in every respect, were wretched. No end seemed to be in sight.

The prophet told the people that if they obeyed the law, in keeping with their covenant with God, things would improve through their cooperation with God's grace.

The second reading comes from the Epistle to the Hebrews. As implied, this epistle was meant for the Jews. It places Jesus at the center of God's long-promised redemption of the world and triumph over sin and hopelessness.

Victory over the forces of evil is one way to look at it. Also seen in the coming of Jesus is proof of God's unshaken and eternal love for everyone.

St. John's Gospel furnishes the last reading. It is not a recollection of the birth of Jesus. Among the four Gospels, only Matthew and Luke directly report this event. John and Mark never refer to it, certainly not in the sense of giving details.

This reading, however, is most appropriate for Christmas. It describes who Jesus was and is. It defines the august and profound identity of Jesus. Life comes through the Lord. He is light in a world filled with utter darkness. No power can extinguish the light of Christ.

Jesus came into the world, bearing God's mercy and enlightenment. God had

promised salvation. The holy and just, such as St. John the Baptist, trusted in this promise.

The Lord came as a human. This is why Mary always has been so important to Christians. As the mother of Jesus, the only earthly parent, Jesus received human nature from her.

His humanity is the glory of and the key to the wonder of salvation.

Reflection

The Gospels give no specific time of the day for the actual birth of Jesus, but Christians long have assumed that the Lord was born during the night because, in St. Luke's Gospel, angels informed the shepherds of the birth while the shepherds were watching their sheep during the night.

Taking this imagery, the Mass during the day on Christmas takes place in the sunshine, proclaiming that Jesus is "the light of the human race, shining in the darkness" (Jn 1:4-5). Truer words were never spoken, for civilization or for each person.

The birth of Jesus bettered human life forever. His teachings are the ideals which have enriched untold millions, past and present. He affected human life infinitely more than has anyone else.

To look at the new day more personally, ask if the coming of Christ has brightened your life. How has it brightened the path ahead of you? Has it warmed your heart? Do I more clearly see my needs and the needy around me?

Do you rise to the new day with vigor and with firm intention to fill your heart and your world with the warmth of the Lord's love?

Perhaps the preceding night was dark with doubt and hurt. The brilliant sunbeams of life in Christ clarify everything, heal everything. Perhaps anger filled the night. The warm sunshine of Christ calms and soothes. Perhaps want and fear of want tormented the night. The Lord's mercy abundantly provides all that truly matters, sense of purpose, peace of heart, hope and true joy. †

Daily Readings

Monday, December 25

The Nativity of the Lord
Christmas Night (midnight)
Isaiah 9:1-6
Psalms 96:1-3, 11-13
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-14

Dawn

Isaiah 62:11-12
Psalms 97:1, 6, 11-12
Titus 3:4-7
Luke 2:15-20

Day

Isaiah 52:7-10
Psalms 98:1-6
Hebrews 1:1-6
John 1:1-18
or *John 1:1-5, 9-14*

Tuesday, December 26

St. Stephen, the first martyr
Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59
Psalms 31:3cd-4, 6, 8ab, 16bc-17
Matthew 10:17-22

Wednesday, December 27

St. John, Apostle and Evangelist
1 John 1:1-4
Psalms 97:1-2, 5-6, 11-12
John 20:1a, 2-8

Thursday, December 28

The Holy Innocents, martyrs
1 John 1:5-2:2
Psalms 124:2-5, 7b-8
Matthew 2:13-18

See READINGS, page 20

Question Corner/Jenna Marie Cooper

Church beliefs, laws and practices are found in many books and documents

Is there an authoritative recommended single source of information on all the Roman Catholic traditions such as behavior and rituals in church and prayers for appropriate occasions? (United Kingdom)



ANo, unfortunately there is no such resource.

Even when we're considering canon law properly so-called, there is no one single master document that contains every law in the Church. Although, of course, the *Code of Canon Law* is a good general starting place, there are many relevant laws which are not in the code.

For example, liturgical law is true law within the Church, but it is typically included within the context of the liturgical documents themselves rather than in the *Code of Canon Law*.

Furthermore, there is such a thing as "proper law," meaning laws that apply only to a specific territory or group of people. For example, a diocesan bishop can issue proper law for his

own diocese, and most religious communities have their own proper law in the form of their statutes and conditions.

There are some instances when a local bishops' conference can make binding policy. A good example of this is how in 2011 the bishops' conference of England and Wales reintroduced mandatory Friday abstinence from meat for all Catholics in their territory. And of course, many if not most unofficial traditions and customs have a strong local or cultural component.

Besides law technically speaking, there are other kinds of documents, called

"instructions," which determine specific ways in which a law is to be carried out. Less formal clarifications on questions of law from various Vatican dicasteries also need to be considered. Occasionally a pope will modify the *Code of Canon Law*, meaning that the nearest hard copy of the code might be obsolete in some sections.

But to attempt a more practically useful answer to your query, if you have questions about Catholic liturgy a good first step would be to check the "General Instruction of the *Roman Missal*" (GIRM), which is essentially the "instruction book" for how Mass is to be celebrated. The GIRM addresses not only the actions of the priest, but also the role and participation of the faithful in the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

The GIRM discusses some related issues as well, such as how the sanctuary should be decorated and maintained. If you have questions about other rituals or sacraments, often the liturgical text themselves will include a similar introductory section.

If your questions are more related to faith and morals, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* would be a helpful place to start. The catechism is meant as a summary of core Catholic beliefs and is widely available both in print and online—and there are a few searchable web versions of the catechism that make it fairly simple to navigate.

In terms of prayers for various occasions, there is a *Book of Blessings* that most priests would have access to. But if you as a layperson would like to pray in a way that is more in tune with the Church's calendar of liturgical seasons, you might try incorporating all or some of the Liturgy of the Hours into your life of prayer.

The Liturgy of the Hours is a series of liturgical prayers that are meant to be prayed at specific times of the day and which also closely mirror the Church's cycle of seasons and feast days.

For "behaviors in church," I suppose at least some of this might be more a matter of courtesy and common sense more than adherence to official written policy. Canon law doesn't explicitly tell us to be generally quiet and reverent in church, but it makes obvious sense to do this out of respect for those who come into church to pray.

(Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News. Send your questions to CatholicQA@osv.com.) †

My Journey to God

Jesus, Our Lord and King

By Sandy Bierly

Jesus is coming!
The time is drawing near.
Let us open our hearts,
To welcome him.

Jesus comes in the silence,
To our Bethlehem town.
He comes to a manger so slowly,
Wearing a King's crown.

Jesus is not of this world.
The angels proclaim,
Singing Gloria in the highest,
To our newborn King.

Jesus brings glad tidings,
And peace to all men.
He is our Savior,
Our Lord and our King.
Let us welcome him!

(Sandy Bierly is a member of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in New Albany. Photo: Depicted here is a Nativity scene in the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican on Jan. 3, 2021.) (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



Rest in peace

Please submit in writing to our office by 10 a.m. Thursday before the week of publication; be sure to state date of death. Obituaries of archdiocesan priests serving our archdiocese are listed elsewhere in *The Criterion*. Order priests and religious sisters and brothers are included here, unless they are natives of the archdiocese or have other connections to it; those are separate obituaries on this page.

BARNHORST, Scott, 60, St. Louis, Batesville, Dec. 9. Father of Amanda and Michael Barnhorst. Son of Cliff and Wilma Barnhorst. Brother of Robin Eckstein, Donald, Randell and William Barnhorst.

CRITES, Charleen D., 82, St. Martin of Tours, Martinsville, Dec. 8. Mother of Victoria Katterhenry, Brenda Scrotten and Edward Crites. Sister of Luana Blue and Larry Knudtson. Grandmother of 10. Great-grandmother of one.

DWYER, Joanne, 94, Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Indianapolis, Nov. 19. Mother of Paula Beloat, Marian Borondy, Janis Curtiss, Edward and Herbert Dwyer.

Sister of Patricia Shockley. Grandmother of 12. Great-grandmother of 10.

JAISLE, Rita J., 81, Holy Family, Oldenburg, Dec. 9. Mother of Maria Keefe, Emily Voegelé, Andrew and Daniel Jaisle. Sister of Janet Samples. Grandmother of eight.

KEHOE, John A., 87, SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi, Greenwood, Nov. 30. Father of Coleen Alley, Maureen Little, Mark and Mike Kehoe. Grandfather of eight. Great-grandfather of six.

KREUTZJANS, Edward M., 88, St. Mary, North Vernon, Dec. 9. Husband of Sandra Kreutzjans. Father of Debbie Hatfield, Cathy Hyden, Patti Litzy, Julie Webster and Jim Kreutzjans. Grandfather of 15. Great-grandfather of 30.

LAWSON, Wren M., infant, SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi, Greenwood, Dec. 4. Daughter of Meghan Carver and Eric Lawson. Granddaughter of Michael and Leigh Ann Lawson, and Edward and Andrea Carver.

ROBINSON, Charles, 83, St. Luke the Evangelist, Indianapolis, Dec. 4. Husband of Diane Robinson. Father of Maggie, Christopher and Matthew Robinson. Brother of Mary Allen, Daniel, Joseph and Robert Robinson. Grandfather of six.

SCHEBLER, Wilbur A., 85, St. Louis, Batesville, Dec. 8. Husband of Norma Schebler. Father of Barbara Carpenter, Deb Kohrman, Beth Preston and Tom Schebler. Brother of Carolyn Heppner, Alvin, Kevin and Randy Schebler.

A light shines in the darkness



Lucy Jackson, a student at Lumen Christi Catholic School in Indianapolis, wears a wreath of candles as she processes on Dec. 13 in Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Church in Indianapolis on the feast of St. Lucy as other students look on. The procession followed a centuries-old Scandinavian tradition in which, in the dark of December, a girl would process while wearing such a wreath on the feast of the fourth-century virgin martyr whose name in Latin means "light." (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Grandfather of nine. Great-grandfather of 11.

SMITH, Victoria A., 65, St. Simon the Apostle,

Indianapolis, Nov. 27. Wife of Robert Smith. Mother of Sarah Jones and Ryan Smith. Sister of Brenda Dages and

Kellie Martin. Grandmother of one.

STIPP, Mary Margaret, 93, St. Vincent de Paul, Bedford,

Dec. 5. Mother of Claudia Bennett, John and Robert Stipp II. Grandmother of six. Great-grandmother of five. †

AI must serve human potential, not compete against it, pope says

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—All forms of artificial intelligence should be used to alleviate human suffering, promote integral development and help end wars and conflicts, not increase inequality and injustice in the world, Pope Francis said in his message for World Peace Day 2024.



Pope Francis

"Artificial intelligence ought to serve our best human potential and our highest aspirations, not compete with them," the pope said in his message for the Jan. 1 commemoration.

The message, "Artificial Intelligence and Peace," was addressed to all men and women in the world, and in particular to heads of state and government and the leaders of the different religions and civil society. It was released on Dec. 14 at a Vatican news conference.

The pope's message highlighted the "need to strengthen or, if necessary, to establish bodies charged with examining the ethical issues arising in this field and protecting the rights of those who employ forms of artificial intelligence or are affected by them."

The impact of any form of artificial intelligence "depends not only on its technical design, but also on the aims and interests of its owners and developers, and on the situations in which it will be employed," he said.

Positive outcomes "will only be achieved if we show ourselves capable of acting responsibly and respect such fundamental human values as 'inclusion, transparency, security, equity, privacy and reliability,'" the pope added.

The huge advances in new information technologies, he said, "offer exciting opportunities and grave risks, with serious implications for the pursuit of justice and harmony among peoples."

Many urgent questions need to be asked, he added, including, "What will be the consequences, in the medium and long term, of these new digital technologies? And what impact will they have on individual lives and on societies, on international stability and peace?"

Pope Francis said, "We need to be aware of the rapid transformations now taking place and to manage them in ways that safeguard fundamental human rights and respect the institutions and laws that promote integral human development."

Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, told reporters at the Vatican on Dec. 14 that, "like any other product of human ingenuity, artificial intelligence is acceptable if it serves the common good, protects the inalienable value of the human person and promotes fundamental rights.

"Artificial intelligences already exert huge influence and will increasingly do so," the cardinal said. "But we do not know where AI will take us in politics and commerce, culture and the environment and so on, so everyone needs to be better informed about developments as they occur, to speak up and take responsibility."

In his message, the pope pinpointed specific technologies and advancements in the world of artificial intelligence that require urgent attention and oversight such as: machine or deep learning; surveillance systems; social credit or ranking systems; and lethal autonomous weapons systems or LAWS.

The weaponization of artificial intelligence through LAWS, he said, "is a cause for grave ethical concern. Autonomous weapon systems can never be morally responsible subjects," and so "it is imperative to ensure adequate, meaningful and consistent human oversight of weapon systems."

Nations are responsible for regulating AI at home, and "international organizations can play a decisive role in reaching multilateral agreements and coordinating their application and enforcement," Pope Francis said, calling on the global community of nations to work together to

adopt "a binding international treaty that regulates the development and use of artificial intelligence in its many forms."

Regulation should aim not only at preventing harmful practices but also at encouraging best practices, he added.

Fundamentally, he said, in a world of seemingly limitless technological possibilities, people risk falling prey to a "technocratic system," which "allies the economy with technology and privileges the criterion of efficiency, tending to ignore anything unrelated to its immediate interests."

"In an obsessive desire to control everything, we risk losing control over ourselves," he said. "In the quest for an absolute freedom, we risk falling into the spiral of a 'technological dictatorship.'"

"Inspired by a Promethean presumption of self-sufficiency, inequalities could grow out of proportion, knowledge and wealth accumulate in the hands of a few, and grave risks ensue for democratic societies and peaceful coexistence," he said.

Barbara Caputo, a professor of computer engineering and artificial intelligence at the Turin Polytechnical University, told reporters at the Vatican news conference that while AI isn't new, what is different today is the amount of information collected on individuals and "the concentration of resources" in so few hands.

The concentration of data, human talent, economic resources and computer capabilities in the hands of fewer entities means that profit will be their only or overriding motive, she said. "The pope reminds us with his message that artificial intelligence is made by people for people, and it must go back to being for everyone so it can really be an instrument for peace."

She supported the pope's call in his message for adequate education and methods of training.

"We must commit ourselves to ensuring quality technical training in artificial intelligence for all young women and men, all over the world, who wish to put their talents to use in this discipline, with dedication and enthusiasm," she said.

The more "authoritative technical voices" there are from all over the world, she said, the more they can bring "the richness of their experience, history and culture to the technical development of the artificial intelligence to come."

Pope Francis said he hoped his message "will encourage efforts to ensure that progress in developing forms of artificial intelligence will ultimately serve the cause of human fraternity and peace. It is not the responsibility of a few but of the entire human family." †

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Investing with Faith/Kimberly Pohovey

Thanks for keeping the love and hope of this holy season alive all year

Remember when we were children? Then, a whole year felt like an eternity, and it seemed as if Christmas would never come.



As we get older, however, we discover that what our grandparents used to say is true: time really does fly more quickly with each passing year! I'm not sure how, but December has managed to sneak up on us, and Christmas is—once again—just a breath away.

It doesn't matter whether you're finished by November 1 or the last one to check out on Christmas Eve, there's no escaping holiday bustle. We're all busy making plans and preparations for how we will celebrate Christmas this year.

The buzz is everywhere. Decorating, shopping, wrapping, cooking and baking, gatherings and all the logistics that go along with them: there's a lot on our plates. It's all worth the effort

because Christmas gives us a chance to catch up with those we love, to make warm and lasting memories with family and friends.

But these wintry days also call us to reflect. They invite us to rediscover for ourselves why the world stops on Dec. 25, and why we should too. These brief weeks lead us to ponder how a newborn baby lying in a manger halfway around the world 2,000 years ago still has the power to draw us together around him.

As Catholics, we know the reason. Jesus isn't merely the son of Mary. Christ is the Son of the Most High. Jesus is the love of God wrapped up in swaddling clothes and given to each one of us personally. He is the only Christmas gift that matters, and the only one that lasts.

Of course, giving and receiving gifts add to the joy of Christmas. But what if the spirit of giving was as much a part of June as it was December? What if Christmas didn't end? The good news is that it doesn't have to.

That idea was voiced by Phillips Brooks when he wrote "O Little Town of Bethlehem." Many of us know the

words of the first verse by heart.

*O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.*

Far fewer have ever had the chance to hear verse three.

*Where children pure and happy
Pray to the blessed Child,
Where misery cries out to thee,
Son of the Mother Mild;
Where charity stands watching
And faith holds wide the door,
The dark night wakes, the glory breaks,
And Christmas comes once more.*

All of us who work for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis and its Catholic Community Foundation are grateful to those who have lived a life of generosity and stewardship during the past year. Your support for the many

ministries of the Catholic Church here in central and southern Indiana keeps the love and hope of this holy season alive all year.

You have answered the hopes and fears of neighbors in need. You have listened for the cry of those in misery with watchful charity in your hearts. Your faith has held the door open for others to experience the compassion of Christ.

And because you have, God's glory has broken through the darkness. Because of you, Christmas comes once more.

Wishing you all the blessings of Christmas, now and always.

(Kimberly Pohovey is the director of major and planned gifts for the archdiocese. Tax or legal information provided herein is not intended as tax or legal advice. Always consult with your legal, tax or financial advisors before implementing any gift plan. For more information on the Catholic Community Foundation, visit www.archindy.org/CCF, e-mail ccf@archindy.org, or call 317-236-1482.) †

Pope simplifies papal funeral and says he'll be buried outside the Vatican

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis said he has decided to be buried in Rome's Basilica of St. Mary Major instead of in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, and that he has simplified the rites for a papal funeral.

In a Dec. 12 interview with Mexican news outlet N+, the pope, in good humor, discussed plans for his own funeral as well as the trips he still hopes to complete during his pontificate.

Still recovering from what he described as bronchitis that has affected him since late November—prompting him to cancel a planned trip to the United Arab Emirates—the pope said he feels

"quite well" physically and continues to improve. Yet asked if people should be concerned about his health, he responded, "Yes, a little bit, yes. I need them to pray for my health."

The pope said he had already discussed preparations for a papal funeral with his master of liturgical ceremonies, Archbishop Diego Giovanni Ravelli. "We simplified them quite a bit," he said, and jokingly added that "I will premiere the new ritual."

Pope Francis celebrated the funeral Mass for Pope Benedict XVI in January 2023 following a rite based on, but not identical to, a papal funeral, since Pope

Benedict was not a reigning pope at the time of his death.

Breaking with recent tradition, Pope Francis said he has chosen to be buried at the Basilica of St. Mary Major because of his "very strong connection" with the church. Pope Leo XIII, who died in 1903, was the last pope not buried at St. Peter's Basilica. Pope Leo's tomb is in the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome. Six popes are buried at St. Mary Major; the last to be interred there was Pope Clement IX in 1669.

Pope Francis said he wants to be buried in the Marian basilica because "it is my great devotion," adding that he would visit St. Mary Major on Sunday mornings when he traveled to Rome before becoming pope. Pope Francis often prays before the icon "Salus Populi Romani" ("health of the Roman people") displayed in the basilica before and after his international trips to entrust his safety to Mary.

"The place is already prepared," he said. †

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St. Simon the Apostle, Indianapolis, IN

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St. Simon serves a pre-K-8 enrollment of approximately 650 students within a Christ-centered and nurturing environment, and is dedicated to the spiritual and academic development of the whole child. Our multi-faceted curriculum prepares our students for a life-long commitment to education, the Catholic faith, and stewardship, and we are blessed with an outstanding teaching and administrative staff, and the support of engaged and invested parents. We are also blessed to be part of a faith-filled Catholic community in a thriving and vibrant parish.

Questions, along with resumes and any other supporting documentation (i.e., cover letter, references, letters of reference, etc.) should be directed to:

Anne Krieger from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis' Office of Catholic Schools
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Pope Francis condemns targeting of unarmed civilians in Gaza



Pope Francis

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis condemned the Israeli military's killing of two Christian women sheltering at a Catholic parish in Gaza and an attack on a convent, noting that in the current fighting "unarmed civilians are targets for bombs and gunfire."

After praying the *Angelus* with some 22,000 people in St. Peter's Square on Dec. 17, the pope decried the Dec. 16 sniper attack

on the compound of Holy Family Parish in Gaza where, he said, "there are no terrorists, but families, children, people who are sick and have disabilities, sisters."

He also named the mother and daughter—Nahida Khalil Anton and Samar Kamal Anton—who were killed in the parish compound.

"One was killed as she tried to carry the other to safety. Seven more people were shot and wounded as they tried to protect others inside the church compound," said a statement by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which also specified that they were shot by a sniper of the Israeli military.

The statement added that Israeli forces fired three rockets on a convent in the church compound belonging to the Missionaries of Charity, where 54 disabled persons lived, rendering the home uninhabitable.

"Let us pray to the Lord for peace," the pope said, asking people to "not forget our brothers and sisters who are suffering because of war in Ukraine, in Palestine and Israel, and in other conflict zones."

"As Christmas approaches, may the dedication to open paths of peace be strengthened," he said. †

READINGS

continued from page 17

Friday, December 29

Fifth Day within the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord
St. Thomas Becket, bishop and martyr
1 John 2:3-11
Psalm 96:1-3, 5b-6
Luke 2:22-35

Saturday, December 30

Sixth Day within the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord
1 John 2:12-17
Psalm 96:7-10
Luke 2:36-40

Sunday, December 31

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph
Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14
Psalm 128:1-5
Colossians 3:12-21
or *Colossians 3:12-17*
Luke 2:22-40
or *Luke 2:22, 39-40*

Monday, January 1

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God
Eighth day of the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord
Numbers 6:22-27
Psalm 67:2-3, 5-6, 8
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:16-21

Tuesday, January 2

St. Basil the Great, bishop and doctor of the Church
St. Gregory Nazianzen, bishop and doctor of the Church
1 John 2:22-28
Psalm 98:1-4
John 1:19-28

Wednesday, January 3

The Most Holy Name of Jesus
1 John 2:29-3:6
Psalm 98:1-3, 6
John 1:29-34

Thursday, January 4

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, religious
1 John 3:7-10
Psalm 98:1, 7-9
John 1:35-42

Friday, January 5

St. John Neumann, bishop
1 John 3:11-21
Psalm 100:1-5
John 1:43-51

Saturday, January 6

St. Andre Bessette, religious
1 John 5:5-13
Psalm 147:12-15, 19-20
Matthew 1:7-11
or *Luke 3:23-28*
or *Luke 3:23, 31-34, 36, 38*

Sunday, January 7

The Epiphany of the Lord
Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13
Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12

Monday, January 8

The Baptism of the Lord
Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7
or *Acts 10:34-38*
Psalm 29:1a, 2, 3ac-4, 3b, 9b-10
Mark 1:7-11

Tuesday, January 9

1 Samuel 1:9-20

(Response) *1 Samuel 2:1, 4-8*
Mark 1:21-28

Wednesday, January 10

1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20
Psalm 40:2, 5, 7-10
Mark 1:29-39

Thursday, January 11

1 Samuel 4:1-11
Psalm 44:10-11, 14-15, 25-26
Mark 1:40-45

Friday, January 12

1 Samuel 8:4-7, 10-22a
Psalm 89:16-19
Mark 2:1-12

Saturday, January 13

St. Hilary of Poitiers, bishop and doctor of the Church
1 Samuel 9:1-4, 17-19; 10:1a
Psalm 21:2-7
Mark 2:13-17

Sunday, January 14

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19
Psalm 40:2, 4, 7-10
1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20
John 1:35-42

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