

TODAY'S CATHOLIC

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Luers Captures 12th State Football Crown

BY ERIC PEAT

The 12 seniors on the Bishop Luers High School football team hadn't forgotten what happened the last time the Knights played for a state title.

In the 2020 Class 2A state championship, Bishop Luers saw a late double-digit lead evaporate and surrendered a game-winning field goal to Western Boone in the closing seconds of a 36-35 defeat – one that Knights Head Coach Kyle Lindsay called “the most heartbreaking loss in school history.”

So, when this year's seniors – who were freshmen on the 2020 squad – earned the opportunity to write their own ending to the story on Saturday, November 25, they left no doubt.

Bishop Luers dominated this year's Class 2A state title game from start to finish, routing North Posey 40-3 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis for the Knights' largest-ever margin of victory in a championship game. The victory marked the program's 12th state title – the third most by any school in state history, but its first since winning four straight from 2009 through 2012.

“It's a bit of a relief, to tell you the truth,” admitted Lindsay, who has coached all 11 seasons since the Knights hoisted their last championship trophy. “Just extreme pride in



John Felts

Bishop Luers players celebrate their victory in the Class 2A State Championship on Saturday, November 25, at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. The victory earned the Knights the school's 12th state football crown.

our group of seniors and all our players. ... They've learned a lot about themselves and about each other. They've emotionally and mentally matured more than any group I can remember. To put on a complete performance for four quarters, it's very special.”

“It really means everything,” Bishop Luers senior quarterback Kohen McKenzie told

Today's Catholic. “Ever since I was a little kid, I'd think of playing in a state championship, so it means a lot to do it with my brothers.”

Bishop Luers (12-3) led the entire game, as its offense, defense, and special teams all played starring roles. In fact, it was special teams that set up the offense for short scoring drives in the first half. After

senior Damiun Jackson blocked a North Posey (13-2) punt, senior Mickey Daring capped a 27-yard drive with a 1-yard touchdown run. The Knights then responded to a Viking field goal with an 81-yard kickoff return by sophomore Daveon Surry, setting up Daring for

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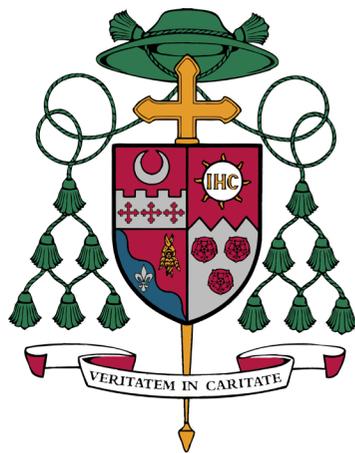
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[@diocesefwsb](https://www.instagram.com/diocesefwsb)Saint Mary's Compromising its Identity
as A Catholic Woman's College

Statement of Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades Regarding Change in Admission Policy at Saint Mary's College



I learned last week that the Board of Trustees of Saint Mary's College, a Catholic women's college in our diocese, has changed its admission policy and will now consider for admission not only applicants "whose sex is female," but also applicants "who consistently live and identify as women." In a letter to colleagues and students at Saint Mary's, the president explained that "Saint Mary's will consider undergraduate applicants whose "sex assigned at birth is female or who consistently live and identify as women."

The president's letter expressed a commitment to operate as "a Catholic women's college." It included a quote from Pope Francis about love for others and recognizing the value and worth of others. This was evidently part of the rationale for the change in admission policy. The letter states that Saint Mary's, "as an inclusive community leader," aims to continue to "create an environment where all women belong and thrive."

It is disappointing that I, as bishop of the diocese in which Saint Mary's College is located, was not included or consulted on a matter of important Catholic teaching. Bishops have a particular responsibility to "promote and assist in the preservation and strengthening" of the Catholic identity of the Catholic colleges and universities in their dioceses (cf. *Ex corde Ecclesiae* #28). For this reason, I am writing about this recent decision of Saint Mary's College.

One of the four essential characteristics of a Catholic college or university is "fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church" (*Ex corde Ecclesiae* 13). This institutional fidelity includes "a recognition of and adherence to the teaching authority of the Church in matters of faith and morals" (*Ex corde Ecclesiae* 27). In this new admissions policy, Saint



File photo

Mary's departs from fundamental Catholic teaching on the nature of woman and thus compromises its very identity as a Catholic woman's college.

To call itself a "women's college" and to admit male students who "consistently live and identify as women" suggests that the college affirms an ideology of gender that separates sex from gender and claims that sexual identity is based on the subjective experience of the individual. This ideology is at odds with Catholic teaching. In his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis wrote: "It needs to be emphasized that 'biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated.'... It is one thing to be understanding of human weakness and the complexities of life, and another to accept ideologies that attempt to sunder what are inseparable aspects of reality. Let us not fall into the sin of trying to replace the Creator. We are creatures, and not omnipotent. Creation is prior to us and must be received as a gift" (#56).

On many occasions, Pope Francis has re-affirmed the Church's teaching on the sexual embodiment of the human person and has criticized various forms of gender ideology. The letter from the president of Saint Mary's quotes Pope Francis on the importance of

love but does not mention the Holy Father's continual rejection of gender ideology – the same ideology behind this new policy. The Church has always rejected a dualistic anthropology that separates body and soul, and which consigns sexual identity to one's individual self-declaration. The new admissions policy at Saint Mary's College erroneously suggests that "woman" is a purely social category that anyone, regardless of sex, can inhabit.

The letter from the president also erroneously speaks of "sex assigned at birth," a common expression that conveys the philosophical understanding that sex is not an innate and recognizable aspect of our embodied nature, but an arbitrary category that can be changed. A person's sex can normally be ascertained long before birth. The sex of a person is discovered, not assigned. It is God who creates human beings as male or female. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: "By creating the human being man and woman, God gives personal dignity equally to the one and the other. Each of them, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his/her sexual identity" (#2393).

Pope Francis' important teachings on ecology are well-known, especially because of his beautiful encyclical *Laudato*

Si, On Care for our Common Home. The Holy Father has called attention to the environmental crisis we face in the world today. He has appealed to everyone to care for creation. In that same encyclical, Pope Francis addressed the importance of human ecology and respect for human nature. He writes: "The acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek 'to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it' (#155)."

No doubt Saint Mary's College desires to promote love, inclusion, and acceptance within the community. But it does not do so authentically



File photo

when it separates love from truth. In his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (*Charity in Truth*), Pope Benedict XVI wrote: "Only in truth does charity shine forth, only in truth can charity be authentically lived. Truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity... Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. Love becomes an empty shell, to be filled in an arbitrary way. In a culture without truth, this is the fatal risk facing love. It falls prey to contingent subjective emotions and opinions, the word 'love' is abused and distorted, to the point where it comes to mean the opposite" (#3).

Pope Francis also teaches about the intimate connection between truth and love in his first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei* (*The Light of Faith*). He writes: "Love requires truth. Only to the extent that love is grounded in truth can it endure over time, can it transcend the passing moment and be sufficiently solid to sustain a shared journey. If love is not tied to truth, it falls prey to fickle emotions and cannot stand the test of time. True love, on the other hand, unifies all the elements of our person and becomes a new light pointing the way to a great and fulfilled life" (#27).

At the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops this past October in which I was a delegate, we discussed the relationship between truth and love, especially in light of con-

troversial matters in our culture (for example, issues regarding gender, sexuality, and marriage). We affirmed together in the Synthesis Document that "Jesus brought to fulfillment the promise found in the psalms: 'Love and truth shall meet, justice and peace shall embrace. Truth will sprout from the earth and justice will come forth from heaven' (Psalm 85:11-12)." Affirming that truth and love are inseparable, we recognized that "if we use doctrine harshly and with a judgmental attitude, we betray the Gospel; if we practice mercy 'on the cheap', we do not convey God's love. The unity of truth and love implies bearing the difficulties of others, even making them our own, as happens between brothers and sisters. This unity can only be achieved, however, by patiently following the path of accompaniment."

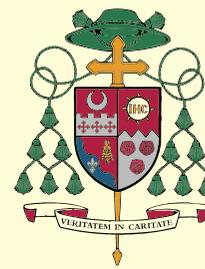
These statements from the Synod document are relevant to the issue at Saint Mary's College and to the Church's mission to "proclaim the truth in charity," as Saint Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians. To be true to its Catholic identity and mission, every Catholic institution has the duty to uphold the truth of the Gospel and to accompany with love all who struggle to accept and live the Church's teachings. This includes the truth about the human person created by God with a sexual identity, embodied as male or female, with a

unity of body and soul. When people feel distress about their sexual identity or feel that their identity does not align with their body, or even declare a transgender identity, we must love and accompany them as our brothers and sisters.

Following the example of Pope Francis, we are called to love, respect, and show compassion for everyone, especially those who are marginalized or experience ridicule, rejection, or even threats of violence or harm. We must stand in loving solidarity with all our brothers and sisters, including those who identify as transgender. However, such solidarity in love does not mean affirming an understanding of sexual identity that is not true. It does mean affirming every person's dignity as a human person created in the image and likeness of God and as a brother or sister in the family of the Church or in the human family.

The desire of Saint Mary's College to show hospitality to people who identify as transgender is not the problem. The problem is a Catholic woman's college embracing a definition of woman that is not Catholic.

I urge the Board of Trustees of Saint Mary's College to correct its admissions policy in fidelity to the Catholic identity and mission it is charged to protect and to reject ideologies of gender that contradict the authoritative teachings of the Catholic Church regarding the human person, sex and gender.



Public schedule of Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades

Monday, December 4: 10 a.m. – Meeting of Bishop's Cabinet, Archbishop Noll Center, Fort Wayne
 Tuesday, December 5: 10:30 a.m. – Advent Day of Reflection, St. Martin de Porres Church, Syracuse
 Tuesday, December 5: 3:30 p.m. – Meeting of Indiana Bishops, Archbishop O'Meara Catholic Center, Indianapolis
 Wednesday, December 6: 10 a.m. – Meeting of Board of Directors of Indiana Catholic Conference, Indianapolis
 Friday, December 8: 6 p.m. – Confirmation Mass, St. Mary of the Annunciation Church, Bristol
 Saturday, December 9: 4:15 p.m. – Confirmation Mass, St. Anthony de Padua Church, South Bend
 Sunday, December 10: 11:15 a.m. – 175th Anniversary Mass, St. Joseph Church, Mishawaka



Forty Hours Devotion



Parishes are Listed in Order by Date

DECEMBER

Most Precious Blood, Fort Wayne: December 3-5
 Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception: December 3-5
 St. Mary of the Annunciation, Bristol: December 3-5
 Immaculate Conception, Ege: December 7-8

2024

JANUARY

St. John Bosco, Churubusco: January 29-31

FEBRUARY

St. Joseph, Garrett: February 11-13
 Immaculate Conception, Auburn: February 18-20
 St. Charles Borromeo, Fort Wayne: February 25-27

MARCH

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Fort Wayne: March 3-5
 St. Casimir, South Bend: March 3-5
 St. Joseph, Garrett: March 3-5
 St. Joseph, Fort Wayne: March 10-12
 St. Joseph, South Bend: March 17-19
 St. Joseph, Mishawaka: March 17-19
 St. John the Evangelist, Goshen: March 17-19
 Queen of Angels, Fort Wayne: March 17-19

APRIL

St. Vincent de Paul, Fort Wayne: April 14-16
 Blessed Sacrament, Albion: April 14-16

For the complete schedule, visit diocesefwsb.org/eucharist.

Formerly Enslaved Couple Recognized as Underground Railroad Agents

BY RUBY THOMAS

LOUISVILLE, Kentucky (OSV News) – The late James Madison Smith Sr. and Catherine “Kitty” Smith, formerly enslaved Catholics, are being recognized as agents of the Underground Railroad.

The Smiths, a freed married couple, are buried in St. Louis Cemetery in Louisville in a once-segregated section of the cemetery.

Officials with the U.S. Department of the Interior’s National Park Service announced in late September that the Smiths’ burial site would be included in the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. Its mission is to “honor, preserve, and promote the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight,” according to its website.

During the 1850s, worsening conditions for Black people in the South led the Smiths to move from Louisville to Jennings County, Indiana. Their farm – located about 29 miles from the Ohio River – became a shelter for enslaved people fleeing for freedom, said Deacon Ned Berghausen, who led the effort to recognize the Smiths.

Years earlier, James Madison Smith had purchased his freedom and that of Catherine Smith, and they were married in 1837 at St. Louis Church, now the site of the Cathedral of



In this 2022 file photo, Deacon Ned Berghausen stands in a once-segregated section of St. Louis Cemetery in the Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky. James Madison Smith Sr. and his wife, Catherine “Kitty” Smith, formerly enslaved individuals, are buried in this section.

the Assumption in Louisville.

In a recent interview with The Record, Louisville’s archdiocesan newspaper, Deacon Berghausen said that historical records show the couple were part of a community of free and enslaved Black Catholics who worshipped at St. Louis. The community “supported each other in faith and the

fight for freedom,” he said.

The Smiths “risked their lives for freedom for others,” said Deacon Berghausen, who serves at St. Agnes Church in Louisville. “I think they were moved by the Gospel,” particularly the Gospel of Luke where Jesus Christ said He’s come to proclaim liberty to captives.

M. Annette Mandley-

OSV News photos/Ruby Thomas, The Record



A headstone seen in an undated photo marks the burial site of the late James Madison Smith Sr. and Catherine “Kitty” Smith, formerly enslaved Catholics, in St. Louis Cemetery in Louisville, Kentucky. The free married couple are being recognized as agents of the Underground Railroad by the U.S. Department of the Interior’s National Park Service.

Turner, Executive Director of the Archdiocese of Louisville’s Office of Multicultural Ministry, said she received news of the recognition with excitement because it’s what the Black community needs to help them “keep on keeping on.”

“We as a Church will receive it as good news,” said Mandley-Turner.

The Smiths had “vision” and the kind of faith that helped many African Americans believe that “God would always be there to bring us through it no matter what,” said Mandley-Turner. “They (Smiths) had a life and they lived it as fully as they could, given the time.”

For Mandley-Turner it prompts the question, “If they could do that, what does it mean for us?”

She said the answer may be: “We have to keep on keeping on. We can’t allow what appears to be hopelessness to take away our dream.”

Deacon Berghausen, who is researching the history of Black Catholics and slavery in the archdiocese, agrees the Smiths’ story is good news.

“This is a story of freedom and a story of faith,” he said. “It’s a story about people whose story has been forgotten but deserves to be remembered and recognized.”

Beginning in the late 1830s, the Smiths lived in downtown Louisville in a community of more than 1,500 free Black individuals. The city’s population was 43,000, and an additional 5,432 enslaved people lived in the city, Deacon

Berghausen said.

James Madison Smith owned a hardware store in the city.

“I think of Smith, who owns this store in downtown Louisville without full rights,” and how individuals could have taken advantage of that, Deacon Berghausen said. He noted that historical records describe a fight in the streets between James Madison Smith and another individual.

“You get a sense of why they’d have to leave for Indiana when things get too oppressive,” said Deacon Berghausen.

Though they left Louisville, the couple remained connected to the Black Catholic community. Historical records show them returning to the city to witness weddings and baptisms of friends. The Smiths’ 23-year-old son, James Madison Smith Jr., died in 1868. He was buried in St. Louis Cemetery in the same plot as his parents, said Deacon Berghausen.

The couple also had a daughter, Mary Laurinda Smith, who became a well-known suffragist in Oregon.

Ruby Thomas is a reporter at The Record, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Louisville.

Staying Connected to the Faith

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The Most Reverend Kevin C. Rhoades,
Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend

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Resource Guides Catholics on Medical, End-of-Life Decisions

INDIANA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE



BY VICTORIA ARTHUR

Illustrated and illuminated by Church teaching, a free resource is now available to help Indiana Catholics express their health care wishes in advance if they are one day unable to do so themselves.

"A Catholic Guide to an Advance Directive" is a booklet designed to help individuals and families navigate the often complex medical, emotional, and spiritual issues surrounding treatment preferences and end-of-life care.

"This resource gives clear direction about these issues from a Catholic moral teaching perspective," said Alexander Mingus, Associate Director of the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC), which produced the booklet. "We hope it can be a helpful guide for individuals, family members, and even entire parishes, and we want everyone to know that it's available free of charge from the ICC."

The booklet, which is available upon request by emailing icc@archindy.org, includes background on moral and ethical considerations for Catholics regarding health care decision-making. It also outlines an advance directive, which is a document allowing individuals to state their health care preferences in the event of a serious illness or life-threatening situation, particularly when the person is rendered incapacitated and unable to express their wishes.

In addition, the booklet includes two copies of an Indiana Catholic advance directive – incorporating a statement of faith – that can be completed and signed.

"Advance directives are a way to give your family peace of mind," said Dr. Elliott Bedford, an ethicist based at Ascension St. Vincent Hospital in Indianapolis. "They're a means of helping you think about and express what you want so that your family doesn't have to guess."

Bedford, who serves as Director of Ethics Integration for Ascension Indiana, said he regularly shares the advance directive resource with families at the hospital, particularly in the intensive care unit. But he emphasized that, ideally, conversations about health care wishes should occur long before a family is faced with a dire medical situation.

"This is something that prudent, responsible adulthood calls us to do," Bedford said.



Provided by the Indiana Catholic Conference

"Advance care planning is not just about end-of-life issues."

In fact, Bedford said that completing an advance directive – particularly appointing a designated health care representative – should be a priority for everyone once they reach adulthood at 18.

"The first question I ask people to consider is, 'Who will speak for you if you couldn't speak for yourself?' That person would have to speak in the patient's voice," Bedford said. "So, first, designate that person, and then tell that person and everyone else who might be involved, 'These are the things I would want.'"

"People don't even have to focus on specific medical treatments. Instead, they should talk about their goals. 'I want to see my daughter graduate from high school. I want to see her get married.' It's about what you find meaningful and valuable in life."

Bedford, a member of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Carmel, added that undertaking this type of planning is "what we are called to do as Catholics." He praised the content and design of the advance directive resource, which he said reflects "the beautiful guidance of the Catholic Church in its long tradition." Fittingly, the chosen cover art is "The Death of St. Joseph," a 19th-century painting depicting the Holy Family as St. Joseph departs his earthly life with the Virgin Mary and Jesus at his side.

The booklet is an updated and redesigned version of an earlier resource the Indiana Catholic Conference released in 2007. The ICC undertook the revisions to reflect legislation

that passed the Indiana General Assembly in 2021, when lawmakers simplified and streamlined state law concerning advance directives.

"Respect for the dignity of life is the basis of Catholic social teaching," said Angela Espada, Executive Director of the ICC, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana. "Respecting the dignity of those who may not be able to care for or speak for themselves is crucial. We supported lawmakers' efforts two years ago to eliminate much of the confusion that had existed with regard to advance directives. Now people can appoint a representative with the certainty that their faith-directed wishes will be adhered to by that representative."

Dr. Daniel Capes, a hospice and palliative medicine specialist with Community Health Network in Indianapolis, guides families through these types of conversations every day.

"Medical care – particularly as one develops a chronic illness or is potentially nearing their end of life – gets really, really complicated," Capes said. "Advance directives help navigate people through a medically and emotionally complex time."

For Catholics, Capes added, there are moral questions to consider based on Church teaching, which makes the ICC resource particularly helpful. Capes said there are many misconceptions about where the Church stands on certain issues, with people often assuming that life must be preserved at all costs.

"The Church does a beautiful job of upholding life and the dignity of life balanced with

individual autonomy," said Capes, a member of St. Joan of Arc and Holy Rosary parishes in Indianapolis. "Patients and families are allowed to determine what is and what is not an extraordinary measure to preserve life based on the individual situation and the patient's preferences."

Capes often helps patients complete advance directives in his office or in their hospital room. Like Bedford, however, he encourages people to consider and discuss their medical wishes long before the need arises.

"Ideally, you shouldn't be in a crisis to have these conversations," Capes said. "The number one thing I always tell people, no matter how old they are, is to at least have a

health care representative or a health care power of attorney. It doesn't have to be a spouse or even a family member. It can be a friend. But it must be someone who knows you very well."

For those nearing the end of life, Capes said that proper advance planning offers tremendous comfort for patients and their loved ones.

"It's incredibly beautiful to see a person who is ready for death and at peace about it," Capes said.

Bedford echoed those thoughts.

"What I love about Church teaching is that when all of this is done well, there is such beauty that you see at the end of life," he said. "(Advance planning) takes the decisions off the shoulders of your loved ones and allows a grace and peace to enter into the situation. Then you can focus on the right priorities and on being with each other."

To receive a free print copy of "A Catholic Guide to an Advance Directive," email icc@archindy.org or call 317-236-1458. Electronic versions of the document are available in both English and Spanish at indianacc.org/bishopsstatements. The printed version is available in English and will be available in Spanish soon.

To follow the work of the ICC, visit indianacc.org. This website includes access to ICAN, the Indiana Catholic Action Network, which offers the Church's position on key issues. Those who sign up for ICAN receive alerts on legislation of interest to the Church and ways to contact their elected representatives. The 2024 session of the Indiana General Assembly will begin in early January.

Victoria Arthur is a correspondent for the Indiana Catholic Conference.

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Pope Recovering After 'Pulmonary Inflammation'

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Pope Francis is breathing easier after undergoing intravenous antibiotic treatment for pulmonary inflammation, the director of the Vatican Press Office said in a statement on Monday, November 27. “The pope’s condition is good and stable; he has no fever, and his respiratory situation is clearly improving,” Matteo Bruni said. On Saturday, November 25, Pope Francis canceled his meetings because of “flu-like” symptoms, and that afternoon he went to Rome’s Gemelli Isola Hospital for a CT scan of his lungs. “The CT scan ruled out pneumonia but showed pulmonary inflammation that was causing some respiratory difficulties,” Bruni said on November 27. The previous day, in a direct broadcast to St. Peter’s Square, where thousands of people were waiting for the pope’s customary Sunday Angelus, the 86-year-old Pope Francis told them, “Today I cannot come to the window because I have this inflammation problem in my lungs.” While some of his appointments were postponed, Pope Francis met early on November 27 with Paraguay’s President Santiago Peña Palacios, his wife, and entourage.

Pope: Threat of Church in Germany Moving Away from Rome

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Pope Francis expressed his concern about concrete initiatives individual dioceses and the Catholic Church in Germany as a whole are taking, including the establishment of a synodal council, which, he said, threaten to steer it away from the universal Church. “Instead of looking for ‘salvation’ in always-new committees and always discussing the same issues with a certain self-referentiality,” Catholics need to turn to prayer, penance, and adoration as well as reach out to the marginalized and abandoned, the pope wrote in a recent letter. “I am convinced (it is) there the Lord will show us the way,” he wrote in the letter dated Friday, November 10. Typewritten in German and signed by the pope, it was published in full by the German newspaper Die Welt on Tuesday, November 21. The letter was a response to four German laywomen who had written the pope expressing their “doubts and fears” about the outcomes of the Synodal Path, which began in December 2019 and concluded in March 2023. “I, too, share this concern about the numerous concrete steps that are now being taken by large parts of this local Church that threaten to move further and further away from the common

Israel, Hamas Free Captives During Cease-Fire



OSV News photo/Mussa Qawasma, Reuters

Released Palestinian prisoner Khalil Zamareh embraces his mother on Sunday, November 26, as he is received by his family outside his house near Hebron after being released amid a negotiated hostages-prisoners swap between Hamas and Israel. With the help of mediation from Qatar, Egypt, and the United States, a prisoner-hostage exchange and a temporary cease-fire were negotiated between the two warring sides. In all, 200 people held captive were expected to be released by Monday, November 27.

path of the universal Church,” he wrote.

Annual Collection to Help Elderly Religious

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) – Most U.S. dioceses will take up an annual collection on the weekend of December 9-10 to help approximately 24,000 elderly religious sisters, brothers, and religious order priests pay for retirement necessities, including health care. Through the National Religious Retirement Office, the Retirement Fund for Religious collection supports religious men and women who historically dedicated their lives to Church ministries, often with little to no compensation. Consequently, many men and women religious have insufficient retirement funds, especially in the face of rising health care costs. NRRO data shows just 6 percent of

reporting religious communities say they have sufficient retirement funding. The collection raised \$27.6 million last year, with more than \$975 million raised since the collection began in 1988.

U.S. Bishops Say Parishes Play 'Vital Role' in Evangelization

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) – Parishes play a “vital role” in bringing Christ’s transformative love to the world, said two U.S. bishops as a key document on social ministry marks its 30th year. “Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish” was approved by the U.S. Catholic bishops in November of 1993, and continues to serve as a roadmap for parish social ministry. The document’s title points to Jesus’ likening of the disciples

to salt and light, called to season and illuminate the world with the Gospel message (Mt 5:13-16). “Three decades after its release, we see the enduring importance of this guiding document,” said Archbishop Borys A. Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, Chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Bishop David J. Malloy of Rockford, Illinois, who in mid-November completed his three-year term as Chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on International Justice and Peace. “We continue to invite faith communities to integrate social ministry throughout the life of the parish, and to take up the call to be communities of salt and light, forming and sending the faithful to protect the least of these,” said Archbishop Gudziak and Bishop Malloy in a statement issued on Monday, November 20.

Real Bishop Behind 'Les Misérables' Is on Path to Sainthood

PARIS (OSV News) – The real bishop behind Victor Hugo’s famous “Les Misérables” character is likely to be beatified. The French bishops, gathered in Lourdes from November 3-8 for their plenary assembly, voted in favor of opening the diocesan process for the beatification of Bishop Bienvenu de Miollis (1753-1843), who was the Bishop of Digne from 1805 to 1838 and an inspiration for Victor Hugo’s character Bishop Myriel in the novel “Les Misérables,” published in 1862. Ordained a priest in 1777, he was bishop of Digne for 33 years during the troubled times that followed the French Revolution and in the era of Napoleon. He was particularly concerned about catechizing in rural areas and with educating the poorest. Renowned for his kindness, Bishop de Miollis was very attentive to the poor and beggars, whom he gathered together at the Hospice of Charity, and lived very modestly himself. In 1806, Bishop de Miollis took in a freed convict by the name of Pierre Maurin and looked for ways to help him regain his dignity – a story that inspired Hugo’s “Les Misérables.”

CDC: Abortions Increased During Last Year with Roe in Place

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) – The number of abortions in the United States increased in 2021, according to new data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For nearly 50 years following the Roe decision, abortion was legally considered a constitutional right. The Supreme Court overturned the Roe decision in June of 2022 with its decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, allowing both recent and long-established state laws restricting abortion access to take effect. The CDC’s annual report on abortion studies both the profiles of those undergoing abortions and by what means. The study only accounts for legal abortions in states that report their data to the federal government. Although the CDC requests data from all 50 states and Washington, D.C., it excludes California, Maryland, New Hampshire, and New Jersey because they did not provide data. New York City provided its own data. The report documented a total of 625,978 abortions in jurisdictions that reported their data, an uptick from the previous year. The data reflects the last full calendar year with Roe still in place.

On Thanksgiving, St. Mary Volunteers Serve 'Members of the Family'

"Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.'"
 — Matthew 25:34-36

BY KRISTA J. STOCKMAN

The Gospel of Matthew 25:31-46, the Judgment of Nations, is at the heart of the Thanksgiving Dinner provided by St. Mary Mother of God Catholic Church in downtown Fort Wayne.

"The reason we put this on is Matthew 25," said Patrick McBride, Chairman of the Thanksgiving Dinner for the past 15 years. It was his mother who suggested to Father Tom O'Connor in 1978 that they should have a sit-down meal for those being served by the church's soup kitchen. That Thanksgiving, the first sit-down meal was served; 45 years later, more than 1,500 meals of turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy, sweet potatoes, green beans, rolls, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie were served on Thursday, November 23.

McBride's brother and other family members continue to volunteer alongside him each year. For many of the volunteers, serving as a family is part of the tradition.

Jodi Camino of Atlanta was one of the more than 150 volunteers helping with this year's dinner. She was spending the holiday with her sister, who is a parishioner at St. Mary.

"I'm a big fan of churches that do actual ministry and service," she said. After volunteering, she expected they would go back to her sister's house and make "enchiladas or something." But, at the dinner, she spent time talking with Rick Lahmeyer, who has attended the dinner for many years. He's a former truck driver without a family to share the holidays.

"I'm a talker," Lahmeyer said, and coming to the dinner gives him a chance to have a good meal and meet new people. "I like talking to the volunteers."

For volunteer Gary Grider, the conversations are the highlight of the dinner. He's been volunteering on Thanksgiving for 19 years in a variety of jobs.

The Thanksgiving Dinner and the St. Mary Soup Kitchen operate entirely on donations. Those interested in supporting the outreach programs at St. Mary can donate online at osvhub.com/stmarysfw.



Photos by Krista J. Stockman

Volunteers served more than 1,500 meals – both sit-down and carry-out – in about three hours during the annual Thanksgiving Dinner at St. Mary Mother of God Parish. The meals included turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, rolls and butter, and pumpkin pie.

Now, he is the greeter, checking in volunteers and welcoming diners.

"My mother volunteered here and invited me," he said, and he's never at a loss for conversation topics. "One of the things my mom taught me was you have to know what's going on in the world so you can talk with people."

The comradery people find at the dinner is intentional.

"Father Tom trained us well. This is not just a parish, it's a family," said George Bachinsky, a St. Mary parishioner and volunteer. "Anybody who walks through the doors of the church, they are members of the family, and we treat them as family. We just feed them and talk to them and make them feel welcome."

Elizabeth Saunders said St. Mary's volunteers have made her feel welcome. She is a regular visitor to the daily soup kitchen, which serves 350 meals a day. She was in line early on Thanksgiving Day and appreciated the meal and kindness of the volunteers.

"It makes you feel less homeless," she said.



George Bachinsky talks with volunteers before guests arrive to the annual Thanksgiving Dinner at St. Mary Soup Kitchen in downtown Fort Wayne. "When someone walks through that front door, they are family," Bachinsky said.



Father Wimal Jayasuriya, Pastor of St. Mary, leads a prayer before Thanksgiving Dinner is served. "We take things and people for granted," he said. "This is a chance to be thankful for people, things, nature, and God. God gives, and He forgives."



Tracey Plenzler

Deacons of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend pose with Bishop Rhoades after Mass on Sunday, November 19, during their three-day retreat at Lindenwood Retreat Center in Donaldson.

Retreat Offers Deacons an Invitation to Pilgrimage, Love

BY DEACON MEL TARDY

In a joyful homily to permanent deacons at the closing Mass of their three-day annual retreat, Bishop Rhoades said that “the word of God invites us ... to live our lives as a pilgrimage, keeping our gaze on the destination for which God has created us.” That destination, he said, and the reason for our existence, is God.

The ordained ministers of the Catholic Church consist of three offices: deacons, priests, and bishops. A deacon – from the Greek word *diakonos*, which means servant – assists the bishop and his body of priests as a minister of the word, liturgy, and charity. A pilgrimage invites us to prayerfully retrace the footsteps of our spiritual ancestors in order to relive their experiences and faith. The deacon – a living icon of Christ the Servant – walks in Christ’s footsteps and lives a life of pilgrimage by prayerfully making himself the humble servant of all.

Unlike transitional deacons who, once ordained, soon transition to priesthood, permanent deacons are ordained to serve as deacons for life. Since most are also married, it was fitting on November 19, the Sunday before Thanksgiving, for Bishop Rhoades to say, “I give thanks to you, deacons of our diocese, and to your worthy wives.” Noting the qualities of a “worthy wife” from Proverbs 31, Bishop Rhoades commended the wives present for often complementing their husbands’ service by extending their own “hands to the poor” and “arms to the needy.”

Bishop Rhoades especially thanked those celebrating jubilee anniversaries, including 40-year honorees Deacons

Joseph Messina and James Walsh, and three Golden Jubilarians (50 years of service): Deacon Paul DeCelles, Deacon Eugene Egendoerfer, and Deacon Kevin Ranaghan (the only jubilarian able to attend, along with his wife, Dorothy). After Mass, Dorothy shared that her husband was the youngest in his class – so young that he needed a special dispensation to get ordained. As the senior deacon in the room, Deacon Ranaghan bore witness to the tremendous growth in diaconal vocations and said it would have been “hard to envision all of this! It was good to see everybody.”

When Bishop Rhoades ordained 11 permanent deacons in 2011, that first class in more than 25 years seemed huge. Since then, he has also ordained a similar-sized Spanish-speaking class in 2018 and an even larger English-speaking class in January of 2023. According to Deacon Joe Cochran, who was ordained in January: “It’s so great and such a blessing to see so many deacons – more than 40 – participating in the retreat. Just a blessing to be in the same room with everyone and sharing the same calling.”

The retreat was held November 17-19 at Lindenwood Retreat Center in Donaldson and featured bilingual facilitators, sessions, and common prayer to reflect the growth in diversity. It began on a Friday with Father Fernando Jimenez, one of two retreat facilitators, reminding the deacons that God is love and

“I love seeing the fellowship that all the deacons have and share.”

– *Andres Miranda*

God should be at the center of our lives. He exhorted the deacons to follow the two greatest commandments from Matthew 22:37-39: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,” which he said requires a life of prayer and sacrifice, and also, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Father Jimenez, reflecting on Matthew 25, as well as Christ’s holy sacrifice on the cross, said that we can’t love others properly unless we realize the depth of God’s love and sacrifice for us.

Bishop Rhoades’ Sunday homily reaffirmed the gift and giving of love. “We are called to live as children of the light ... thankful and joyful for the gifts we have received from the Lord [and] using these gifts to produce fruit for the Lord and His kingdom.” In Matthew 25, he said, “Jesus speaks of these gifts as ‘talents’ ... an immense sum of money,” but Jesus is speaking “more about the spiritual gifts He has bestowed upon us. His gifts of grace!” including His word and the sacraments. Moreover, “Pope St. Gregory the Great highlighted the gift of Our Lord’s charity, His love, as the greatest talent He has entrusted to us.” Bishop Rhoades said: “Ask yourselves what you are doing with the graces of your diaconal ordination. Are we producing good fruits for our Master? Or do we sometimes bury the gifts?”

On Saturday, facilitator Father Matthew Coonan, Episcopal Vicar for Clergy for the diocese, focused on holi-

ness using the Decalogue of Serenity by Pope St. John XXIII. Deacon Mike Madison said he “came away from Father Matt’s presentation with this challenge: *Being with* versus *doing for* [regarding] my balance with God.” Deacon Lou Giovannini added, “I especially enjoyed the Saturday session,” which emphasized that “our journey to holiness begins NOW and not some time into the future.” He admired how Father Coonan broke down “holiness into little bite-size pieces of the here and now” and applied them to the life of a deacon. “Great addition to my daily ritual.”

The retreat intentionally included time for silence and communal prayer, as well as time to meet and socialize with the other deacons. Indeed, Father Coonan described the retreat and prayer as invitations to “give God the gift of our time.” Deacon James Summers appreciated time to pray and to “look at the causes and symptoms of things that pull us away from God, [such as] pleasure, popularity, and power. The retreat helped us understand how we can focus on the things that turn us back toward God.”

After the deacons-only retreat, many wives and family members attended the closing Jubilee Mass and luncheon with Bishop Rhoades. Andres Miranda, son of Deacon Orlando and Adalys Miranda, proudly said: “I love seeing the fellowship that all the deacons have and share. Being the son of a deacon, it’s awesome to see my father engaging in that

setting. It’s an example not just for me but for all others in the faith, as well.”

“We had a wonderful time, said Deacon Dan Avila. “It was such an inspiring opportunity to meet other deacons who’ve been in this ministry for longer than we have, and then to be welcomed. The event was such a wonderful thing for me and for all the members of our new class, so we just had a great, inspiring, restful, rejuvenating time.”

Despite the growth of the diaconate in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Bishop Rhoades lamented that “in some countries, the permanent diaconate has not been introduced at all” or that its implementation has been inconsistent. The recent Synod of Bishops in Rome recommended an assessment of diaconal ministry implementation since the Second Vatican Council; but while he was at the synod, Bishop Rhoades “sensed a great desire for the deacon’s ministry of charity, his service of the poor and needy, to be emphasized more.”

“This is our mission,” said Bishop Rhoades, “to bring God’s gifts to fruition, not for ourselves, but for Him, for the Church, for others.”

Deacon Ricardo Garcia Ramos took the homily’s message to heart: “We know that God is love – He gave His life for us on the cross. So this is to remind me that I need to love – and not just for myself, but I’ve got to give this love to everybody else in my community and my family ... the gift of God’s graces in the sacrament of ordination, I need to put those to work – not just for myself but for others.”

For as Bishop Rhoades said (quoting St. John of the Cross), “At the sunset of our lives, we will be judged on love.”

Diocesan Tribunal Addresses Questions about the Marriage Nullity Process

BY KASIA BALSBAUGH

Many people hold misconceptions about the marriage nullity process (commonly referred to as annulment) in the Catholic Church. A presentation on Wednesday, November 15, at St. Pius X Catholic Church in Granger intended to help fix that.

“Most Catholics do not understand annulments,” said Father Bill Schooler, Pastor of St. Pius X. “There are those who are afraid to take the first step in filing for an annulment. We are hoping that this presentation will help people understand, especially those in second marriages or those in RCIA who need to have their former marriages studied.”

Presenters at the November 15 event were Father David Violi and Anne Therese Stephens, both of whom are advocates in the Diocesan Tribunal, which handles marriage nullity cases in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. The role of the advocate involves guiding each petitioner (someone seeking marriage nullity) through the process.

Father Violi is a son of St. Pius X Church and currently serves as pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Bluffton. He is in the process of concluding the requirements for a decree in canon law. In addition to her position in the Tribunal, Stephens is an adjunct professor at the University of Saint Francis in Fort Wayne and is working on her dissertation pursuant to a doctoral degree in canon law.

Their presentation on the marriage nullity process outlined the Church's definition of marriage as well as the marriage nullity (annulment) process. Stephens and



FATHER DAVID VIOLI



ANN THERESE STEPHENS

Father Violi also addressed some common misconceptions on marriage nullity and answered questions submitted anonymously from audience members.

“Our hope, really, at the end of this is that in the Church's law, in canon law, you see the great love and the care for the People of God that is there,” Father Violi said.

The presentation began with an in-depth look at marriage inside and outside the Church, and in particular the Church's view of the Sacrament of Matrimony, which the Catechism of the Catholic Church and canon law both hold to be for “the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring.”

“To first start looking at annulments, we're first going to look at marriage, because in understanding marriage then we can begin to understand the annulment process,” Father Violi said.

He added, “This whole process, the overview of marriage and the annulment process, is to do everything in our power to help couples be prepared to enter into a lifelong commitment for a happy, a healthy, and a holy marriage.”

Father Violi also addressed how sacramental marriage is different from civil marriage.

“Marriage is a covenant,” Father Violi said. “Notice it is different than a contract. This is where the annulment process is different than a divorce. A divorce is the ending of a civil



Kasia Balsbaugh

Father David Violi explains the Catholic Church's view of marriage at a presentation on the annulment process at St. Pius X Catholic Church in Granger on Wednesday, November 15. Father Violi is a member of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend's Tribunal.

contract. An annulment isn't dealing with a contract; it's dealing with the covenant, the kinship, the familial relationship between two persons.”

Because the Church has such a different view of marriage than the secular view, an annulment is not just a “Catholic divorce.” Stephens and Father Violi emphasized that while divorce is the “dissolution” of a union seen as a contract, an annulment is a “declaration” that the marriage covenant was never truly entered into at all.

Stephens reviewed the reasons why a marriage can be declared to never have happened. As she explained, the three potential components to marriage nullity are form, impediment, and consent. The first concerns whether proper form was followed in the public celebration of the marriage. For instance, were there two witnesses and an authorized minister? Impediment concerns whether there was some reason preventing a valid marriage, such as a familial relationship between spouses or a pre-existing marriage bond.

Consent looks at the ability of the spouses to make the decision to get married – for example, was it freely chosen without force? Was each spouse intending to be faithful to the other?

Because the Church presumes marriages not proven otherwise to be valid, the overturning of such a view takes time and discernment. A marriage nullity process averages about a year in length. “The process really follows a process of a trial,” Stephens said. “It's an authentic investigation.” Proof has to be

collected, witnesses have to be interviewed, and the judge making the final call on the case – a priest with a canon law degree and usually parish responsibilities as well – has to weigh everything carefully. As Stephens put it, “The judge will basically answer to God for all the decisions he has rendered.”

Even with all this time and care going into each case, the person seeking marriage nullity is not charged a fee in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, thanks to the Annual Bishop's Appeal.

Stephens and Father Violi emphasized contacting your parish priest or the Diocesan Tribunal with any questions.

“We don't take these jobs because we're going to become millionaires,” Stephens said with a laugh. “We take this job because we love Jesus and we love His Church, and so we're here to help you in any way that we possibly can.”

Father Violi also stressed that the marriage nullity process is not supposed to be a hurtful one. “This is not an adversarial process. The point of the process is not to point blame at any party. If anything, it is meant to be the exact opposite. This is meant to be a healing process for both parties.”

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In Advent, We Prepare for the Coming of Christ – and His Second Coming

BY FATHER BRIAN ISENBARGER

I must admit, Advent is my favorite liturgical season of the year. Yes, I know the Christmas and Easter seasons are more important in terms of their recounting of salvation history, but Advent seems to be most akin to my lived experience of the Christian life. It is spent in anticipation and in waiting. Of course, everyone knows Advent is the season right before Christmas – and even secular organizations capitalize on the 25 days before Christmas by selling “advent” calendars with a new candy or a new beer to try each day before Christmas.

But even more fundamental than the joyful anticipation of Christmas, Advent invites us to look forward to the day when Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe, will return in glory. It also invites us to contemplate the Advent of our own entering into eternity when our mortal lives come to an end.

And all of this is quite fitting. As the days become longer, darker, and slower, holy Mother Church invites us to reflect on our own mortality. She invites us to realize that each day we are moving closer and closer to our final destiny. She is also clear in what we will encounter as we pass from this world into the next: death, judgment, heaven, and hell.

I was recently listening to an episode on the Hallow app (which I highly recommend if you are looking for a Christmas gift!) with Jesuit Father Robert Spitzer discussing the phenom-

As the days become longer, darker, and slower, holy Mother Church invites us to reflect on our own mortality. She invites us to realize that each day we are moving closer and closer to our final destiny.

ena of near-death experience. In the episode, Father Spitzer recounts some of the scientific data that has recently been collected regarding these phenomena, as well as individual anecdotes from people who were clinically dead and then returned to consciousness.

They were fascinating stories, because these people had lost all brain and heart activity for a substantial period of time, only to return to consciousness to recount what they had experienced. Their experiences, by and large, confirmed what we already know by faith in Jesus – heaven and hell are real. Heaven is better than we can possibly describe, and hell is more horrific than we can dare to imagine.

Often enough, it is very easy to forget these eternal realities. It is so easy to get caught up in the day-to-day duties and responsibilities of life that we forget we are actually going somewhere – that our actions now can have an infinite effect.

For the first Sunday of Advent, the responsorial psalm comes from Psalm 80 and says, “Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.” The psalm gives us an opportunity to ask

ourselves: What will it be like to see the King of the Universe face to face on Judgment Day?

One of the first images that comes to mind is from the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. When I was in seminary, I would occasionally go there to pray, and in the basilica’s apse there is an enormous image of a mosaic called “Christ in Majesty.” Christ is pictured in glory, with flames surrounding His head, His arms in a powerful position, and His face projecting a stern look of judgment.

Perhaps, this might be how you, too, imagine Christ in judgment. And, who knows, maybe when time comes to an end, this really will be how Christ appears. We can all look forward to that day in hope-filled anticipation.

In the meantime, I think we can look to the other ways in which Christ comes to meet us each and every day before we go to meet Him in eternity. For instance, before we meet the Just Judge in all His glory, we can meet Him in the tribunal of mercy when we go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Likewise, when we go to daily prayer or read the sacred

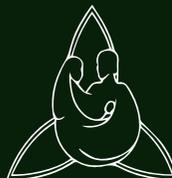
Scriptures, we can already speak with the One who holds our future in His nail-scarred hands. Most importantly, when we go to receive Jesus in holy Communion or adore Him during Eucharistic adoration, we can now be in communion with the One we seek to be in communion with for eternity.

When I imagine my last

day, I hope I will have had the opportunity to make a good confession and receive holy Communion before I meet the Lord. And when I go to meet Him in glory, my hope is that He will tell me: “It was great to see you earlier today. Welcome home.”

So how do we prepare for the coming of Christ this Advent? Seek the face of the Lord now! Find Him in the confessional. Find Him in the Eucharist. Find Him in the Scriptures. Find Him now so we can look forward to meeting Him in eternal glory!

Father Brian Isenbarger is a Parochial Vicar at St. Vincent de Paul Church in Fort Wayne.



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College Experience Leads Elkhart Native to Missionary Work

BY LISA KOCHANOWSKI

When Elkhart native Nathan Lindholm began college at Ball State University, he wanted nothing to do with his Catholic faith. Despite attending Catholic grade school during his primary-school years and receiving the sacraments, he didn't have a deep connection to his faith.

However, life circumstances changed his perspective, and Lindholm is now a FOCUS Missionary at Hope College in Holland, Michigan.

"What brought me to serve as a missionary with FOCUS was primarily my experience at Ball State University," Lindholm told Today's Catholic. "It wasn't until I had a hard first year and realized my need for God that I started to pursue something more."

His journey began with some familial guidance.

"My father invited me into his Exodus 90 group the summer before my sophomore year. Exodus 90 is an intense 90-day Catholic men's exercise based on prayer, aestheticism, and fraternity that aims to bring men into a greater freedom to love God and others. Despite this being the last thing on earth I would have ever done previously, inspired by the Holy Spirit, I said yes," Lindholm said. "In that, I started to see that instead of being restrictive, the Christian life made me freer than I'd ever been."

"In the fall at Ball State, I met a FOCUS missionary who invited me to a Bible study – and soon after, discipleship. This missionary became a dear friend, and I made other great friends there at the Newman Center. I began getting more involved, going to church for more than Sunday Mass. I began going to the chapel to pray daily, going to daily Mass and adoration. Throughout the next three years at Ball State, largely in part due to the FOCUS missionaries, my life was changed, and I fell in love with Jesus and my Catholic faith."

As his college career came to a close, Lindholm decided to apply to be a FOCUS missionary.

"It became clear to me that God wanted me to go and tell others of the great treasure I'd found," he said. "I was seeing all my peers around me who didn't know Christ and who were suffering. I became convicted of living a life of mission, bringing to them the reality and great joy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I accepted an offer from FOCUS to be a missionary and started my first year serving at Hope College in Holland, Michigan,"



Photos provided by Nathan Lindholm

Nathan Lindholm, back row, poses with the FOCUS missionary team on their first day at Hope College.

said Lindholm.

FOCUS, which stands for Fellowship of Christians in Universities and Schools, aims to fulfill the great commission of Jesus found in Matthew 19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." Missionaries are sent to college campuses because they believe that is where the fight for the hearts and minds of young people is happening.

"My role is to serve the students at Hope College, to walk with them in their journey of faith, calling them higher to lives of prayer and virtue, and equipping them to do the same for others. Day to day, my team and I spend an hour in prayer, go to daily Mass, lead Bible studies and small-group discipleship, spend intentional time with students, attend and put on student events, and lead mission trips," Lindholm said. "I've committed to be a FOCUS missionary for a minimum of two years. This is a full-time job, but the pay looks different than other jobs. All of the funds necessary to be on mission full-time are completely provided by generous family and friends who partner with me in this mission. People like my mission partners are the ones who make all that FOCUS missionaries do possible."

Lindholm said his experience on mission trips has been transformational.

"Something amazing that I've seen God do on mission has been how much He has moved the hearts of students to sign up for Seek24, FOCUS' national conference in January.

My team and I are the first FOCUS team ever at Hope, so not many students here knew what FOCUS was when we first arrived. Despite this, God has given fruit to our efforts, and currently there are 39 students signed up for Seek24. That's huge for a small school like Hope, and our campus is one of the leaders in Seek sign-ups

in the region," Lindholm said.

One of his goals as a missionary is to make a lasting change in the lives of the students he encounters. He wants them to be convicted to the Gospel and equipped to go out and live the mission in whatever way God calls them. He highly recommends joining the FOCUS journey to others.



After graduating from Ball State University, Elkhart native Nathan Lindholm is now a FOCUS missionary at Hope College in Holland, Michigan.

"FOCUS is an amazing apostolate, and God is doing great work through it. FOCUS really prioritizes the personal wholeness and holiness of its staff. If you want to make an impact in the world for Christ, FOCUS is a great way to do that," Lindholm said.

When his journey is complete, Lindholm plans to take his undergraduate degree from Ball State and create a life filled with fulfillment and joy.

"I studied computer science, so after my time with FOCUS, I plan on pursuing a career in software engineering. In between my first and second year on mission, I will be getting married to my beautiful fiancé, Sara, and starting a family. I'm so excited to see what the Lord has in store for us," Lindholm said.

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Walk-On Eifert Walks Away with Golden Memories

BY ERIC PEAT

Griffin Eifert had run out of that tunnel before. As a senior wide receiver for the University of Notre Dame football team, the Fort Wayne native and Bishop Dwenger High School graduate had donned the blue and gold two dozen other times throughout his four years in South Bend.

But this time was a little different. It was his last time in a Fighting Irish uniform.

"It's been a pretty emotional day," Eifert said moments after a 45-7 Senior Day victory over Wake Forest on Saturday, November 18. "Having a lot of family here means a lot. Just seeing them on the [Victory March] was pretty special. And then having them come down to the field was awesome, taking pictures. It was a great day overall."

As a preferred walk-on, Eifert had come to Notre Dame in 2020 with full knowledge that he may never see the field during a game. He still poured his time, effort, and energy into the program, enduring hundreds of workouts and practices as a member of the scout team. Though he dressed for every home game, he had never played a single snap of collegiate football. And while that didn't change in Eifert's final game – the 500th played at Notre Dame Stadium – neither did his positive attitude or his love for his team.

"I think I just like being around the guys, being in the locker room, creating those friendships, and then just playing football at the end of the day," Eifert said of what has allowed him to embrace his role from the first day he stepped onto campus. "Playing football with all my friends is what I love to do. I think that's kind of what drove me to stick it out these four years."

It's a team-first, other-centered mindset that his parents, Greg and Julie Eifert, have come to expect from their youngest child.

"I think just being a part of such an unbelievable football program, and the friendships that he's made," Julie said. "I think that's what drove him just to be a part of the program, and to build those relationships that he's made over the last four years."

"He just really seized the moment and wanted to be a part of it," Greg said. "And we told him whether he gets on the field or not, you're going to get a degree from Notre Dame, which is pretty special."

In fact, Eifert had dreamed of running out of that tunnel as a member of the Fighting Irish since his childhood. His oldest brother, Tyler, was an



Photos by Eric Peat

Eifert poses with his family and friends who came to watch his last home game as a member of the Fighting Irish.

All-American at Notre Dame, winning the Mackey Award in 2012 as the nation's top tight end. By the time Griffin was in high school and starring at Bishop Dwenger, he knew his goal was within reach.

"Bishop Dwenger was actually perfect for me," Eifert said. "We follow pretty much the same characteristics here – the determined, hard-nosed practices, the workouts, just everything Dwenger does. It's just a little more amplified here at Notre Dame. But overall, it's pretty similar and really helped prepare me for Notre Dame."

Eifert helped steer the Saints to a 25-3 record over his junior and senior seasons, capturing the Class 4A State Championship in 2018. As a wideout, he led the offensive unit in touchdown receptions both years, finishing his senior season with 30 catches for nearly 500 yards and seven scores. He also finished with a team-high five interceptions both years from his safety position on defense. When Eifert decided to join the Irish as a preferred walk-on, he leaned on the experience of his older brother, Grady, who was a walk-on for the Purdue basketball team and worked his way up to starting every game as a senior.

"Just going through the process as a walk-on – just showing up every day asking what the coach is needing of you, kind of executing it for the starters," Grady said of the advice and encouragement he passed along to his younger brother. "Griff's on the scout team, so just being prepared for that stuff. Just showing up and doing your job every day

was big for me, and I kind of pushed that on him, as well."

Eifert embraced it all as he pushed through the grind of each football season on the scout team: walk-throughs and lifting sessions on Mondays, film sessions and padded practices on Tuesdays and Wednesdays as he simulated the upcoming opponent's offense and special teams, run-throughs on Thursdays, and walk-throughs on Fridays.

"I love scout team," Eifert admitted with a smile. "I like being able to play free, make the defense look bad, compete against them, get better, and make them better."

The hard work and dedication impressed Tyler, a first-round NFL draft pick by the Cincinnati Bengals in 2013 who played professionally for eight years after graduating from Notre Dame. Although he's 10 years older than Griffin, Tyler said they have grown closer through their shared hobbies and talk almost every day.

"I'm just super proud of him – seeing him go through Notre Dame, get through the school part of it, which is not easy," Tyler said. "And then being here for four years as a walk-on, you're not sure if you'll play or not, but you know that you're helping the team on scout team. There's nothing like being part of a team, and I think that's what drives Griff – just doing his best to help the team win in any way that he can. And then having that camaraderie with the rest of the guys is just something you can't replicate anywhere else."

The relationships forged with his teammates has been a highlight for Eifert



Eifert and his immediate family pose together following Notre Dame's Senior Day victory over Wake Forest on Saturday, November 18.

from his four years with the Fighting Irish. Among the "lifelong friends" he has made through the football program is his former roommate and All-American tight end Michael

Mayer, who is currently a rookie with the NFL's Las Vegas Raiders. Other highlights include being on the sideline at Notre Dame Stadium for a double-overtime victory over

top-ranked Clemson in 2020, as well as last year's snow-filled home finale vs. Boston College.

Above all, Eifert has relied on his family and his faith to help him navigate the highs and lows of life as a walk-on at the University of Notre Dame.

"You're surrounded by faith," Eifert said of the campus. "The football team – you pray before every game, have Mass before every game. The Grotto is a really special place that I've taken advantage of. You're surrounded by it. It's Our Lady's university, and it's a really special place."

On Senior Day, it was made extra special by the guests in attendance. Twenty-five of Eifert's closest family members and friends came to cheer him on one last time. During the team's Victory March, where players and coaches walk from their pregame Mass at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart to Notre Dame Stadium, the Eifert clan held nothing back.

"On the walk, they were the loudest family out there," Eifert said. "As a walk-on, some of the guys came up to me and were like, 'Dang, Griff! I know you live close, but you've got a lot of family!' And I'm like, 'Yep, I've got a lot of family.' They're very supportive, and I appreciate everything they do for me."

This appreciation reached a crescendo moments later, when Eifert's name was announced during the pregame Senior Day festivities, and he ran across the field to embrace his parents to the roar of the crowd. For Greg and Julie, it marked not only the culmination of their son's collegiate career, but the end of an era.

"Today is just bittersweet for so many reasons," reflected Julie. "It's not just the final game for Griff. He's the youngest of four, so it's kind of our final tailgate and game watching a son play a sport. And I'm just so proud of Griff. He has such a good heart ... and he knows how much he's loved and how proud we are of him."

"I'm just proud of how he pretty much takes the bull by the horns and does the right things," echoed Greg. "He's always been a leader in everything that he does. It's just great to see."

Eifert's final run out of the tunnel before the game against Wake Forest may have carried added emotions, but it still shared a common thread with all the others: tangible moments woven together into an unforgettable experience.

"It was pretty special," Eifert said. "Seeing your mom cry is never what you want to see, but that was pretty special running out to them. And then when Our Lady sings before kickoff, that was pretty special. And lastly, the Alma Mater was emotional, as well. Overall, a great day, and I enjoyed everything about it."

'The Flock' Aims to Build Community at St. John in Goshen

BY DENISE FEDEROW

Two parishioners of St. John the Evangelist in Goshen recently started a podcast with the goal of bringing the parish community closer together.

Brian Sapp and David Post met at a Christ Renews His Parish retreat at St. John several years ago and discovered they lived close to each other. After the retreat, several participants started a men's group that became a Rekindle the Fire chapter. A mutual friend, Brian Krider, was involved on the diocesan level, and in 2021, Sapp and Post were slated to be co-chairs of a Rekindle the Fire conference in South Bend, but because of COVID restrictions, the live conference wasn't held.

Instead, the duo prepared monthly videos to help keep other chapters connected. They utilized the well-known speakers they had lined up for the conference and went around the diocese to interview priests and asked them to give closing prayers.

"That was so edifying and affirming for me to see the depth and love of these young priests throughout the diocese. We've had young priests at St. John's, but it really struck us that there are so many, and we talked about it on the way home," Sapp told Today's Catholic.

Post said going through that process gave him the confidence to start work on "The Flock" podcast.

Sapp, an experienced videographer and photographer, said, "I wanted to do a podcast, wanted to do more Catholic media, but I wasn't sure what that would look like, so when David came to me with the idea in April or May, the simplicity of it and the timing was right."

Sapp explained that Krider had just given him studio space in his business' building two days before Post came to him with the idea. Post told him, simply, "I have an idea. What if we just talk to parishioners?"

After pitching the idea to his wife, Jeanette, Post said he wanted to get her involved in the podcast, and they discovered that she had a talent for scheduling and organization. Post said having Jeanette in charge of booking the guests "has made it so easy – she's got the difficult job, and so does Brian; I have the easy part!" Post does the actual interviewing, and Sapp takes care of the recording, editing, and posting.

They did their first trial recording in June and wanted



Provided by Brian Sapp

St. John the Evangelist parishioner David Post, left, interviews Deacon Christian Nieves for an upcoming episode of "The Flock," a podcast about St. John the Evangelist parishioners. Deacon Christian's daughter, Mariel Nieves, is also shown.

to have a couple podcasts done before they approached their pastor at St. John, Father Royce Gregerson, who was "way more on board than I thought," Post said.

Sapp said, "I was a little apprehensive, but he had almost no reservations and started suggesting ways to promote it."

When asked how they came up with the name Post said, "I wanted something short that really focused on our idea of highlighting the parishioners of St. John's, and I came up with 'The Flock.'"

They launched the podcast the first week of September, and they've been filling recording time slots twice a week. They've obtained guests by going through an old directory, asking guests to make suggestions, and when attending parish events, Jeanette will often ask someone if they would be on the podcast.

They were asked if any of the interviews surprised them.

"Every single one," Post responded. "Honestly, it always goes differently than expected."

"You think you know them, but then you get the chance to hear a deeper part of their story," Sapp said. "Like Donna Wiktorowski – I knew her and saw her come into the church, but then to hear her story – her parents were Old-Order Amish, and to learn her conversion was facilitated by listening to Catholic radio!"

He continued, "Or Kathy Fredrickson – learning how long she's been at St. John's and what the church was like then. Or Andrew Studebaker, a young man who just joined the church on his own."

They've received positive

feedback from parishioners who've said they've listened and enjoyed the broadcasts.

Post said, "One compliment I really appreciated was when Sister Colleen said she listened to an interview with someone she saw at church but didn't know and never talked to. Because that's the overarching goal – to connect people in the parish and have them get to know one another. It's hard to stir up a conversation and get much depth; hopefully this helps people get to know each other better."

Post and Sapp said they hope the podcast creates an icebreaker for someone to approach a parishioner they don't know and gives them something to talk about.

During the interview, Post typically asks parishioners to share about their background, how they ended up at St. John, what ministries they are involved with, and who in the parish has made an impact on them.

Post said there are two ways the podcast has helped his own spiritual life.

"Number one, it keeps me connected to the church community; and two, it's a bright spot in my week. If things aren't going well at work or life's stressful, I look forward to it. I enjoy it, and I enjoy listening to it afterward. It's energizing to hear someone share their love of the faith or what they love about St. John's; it connects you."

Sapp added that "it's hard sometimes for us to see how God moves in our lives, and to hear people's stories helps you reconnect and see God's love acting in other places and gives you the grace to connect

the dots and see Him acting in your life."

"The people we've interviewed might shy away from this, but it is inspiring to hear their faith, how they're living it and devoting their lives to God. It is inspiring to hear that," Sapp added.

Sapp said he has been thankful for "all the different ways people have helped. God's had His fingers in a lot of this. All the wonderful things we've gotten out of it shows He's involved. I don't want to presume we're doing what He wants, but I can't see anything but fruits from it, which is humbling in itself."

Both men spoke of how much they've enjoyed doing the podcasts.

Sapp said that producing "The Flock" has given him a chance to use his talents to serve God and the St. John community. "I've been doing media production my whole career, and it's work, but it doesn't feel like it. Everyone's been so supportive."

Post said if there was a chance to expand the podcast, he'd be open to it. "It's so enjoyable to do that it doesn't feel like work. I feel like we've been reinforced that we're on the right path. So many of our interviewees talked about Christ Renews His Parish as the gateway to community – it'd be awesome if this was a gateway for people to enter into the community and feel connected so that it's easier for them to do that and make that step."

"The Flock" podcasts can be found on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, YouTube, and on the parish's website, stjohncatholic.com.

NCYC Experience Helps Teen Strive to Be 'Fully Alive'

BY SOPHIA WHEELER

Joy – that is the one word I would use to describe the National Catholic Youth Conference experience. The event, held November 16-18 in Indianapolis, filled me with pure joy and excitement like I've never felt before. From crafts and games to singing out for the Lord, the joy of the young Church was indeed "fully alive."

The passion of the Catholic Church continues to burn. During the course of the event – and since returning home – I have been a witness to a true devotion and love toward Jesus Christ, Who is truly present – body, blood, soul, and divinity – in the blessed Eucharist.

I first traveled to NCYC as a freshman in the fall of 2021. I always felt as if I was a part of a small minority of Catholic youth who really cared about their faith. My attendance at NCYC changed my view of the Church. NCYC showed me firsthand the fire that was burning inside of so many high schoolers across our country. I was strengthened in my faith, and a new spark was lit in my heart. I wanted to take the energy and joy of Christ that I experienced back into my high school, my parish, and my family.

The National Catholic Youth Conference gave me the opportunity to see the Catholic Church on a larger scale for the very first time. This experience was



Photos provided by Sophia Wheeler

Youths from the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend take a photo in front of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument while exploring downtown Indianapolis during their November 16-18 trip to the National Catholic Youth Conference.

life-changing since, previously, I had only seen vibrant Catholic youth on a parish level. I was left speechless after witnessing

the number of teens all radiating the love of Christ on the first night at the opening ceremony. For me, it was the first step of

branching out into the larger Church, which later led me to attend World Youth Day in Portugal this past summer. NCYC introduced me to a Church so much bigger than my little Catholic circle. NCYC gave me the opportunity to meet people from states across the country.

One of the most memorable experiences from NCYC was Eucharistic adoration. It is so hard to imagine thousands of people all adoring Christ's True Presence in the Eucharist. The crowd at Lucas Oil Stadium went from singing, dancing, and yelling to reverently kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament. Before attending NCYC, I always heard older generations describe the Church as dying, but it was clear in this moment that they are wrong. This generation of Catholics doesn't just perform the actions of going to Mass and following the commandments, but they have a true friendship with Christ. They have a relationship with Him. The moment Jesus entered the stadium, the massive crowd went silent. A place that is normally filled with screaming fans awaiting a Colts touchdown was now filled with the Holy Spirit and more than 13,000 teens eagerly anticipating the coming of Jesus Christ.

The theme of this year's NCYC was "Fully Alive." Throughout the event, we learned what it means to be fully alive in a world where many people live as if they

are half-dead. NCYC is not just a conference or a retreat; it is a journey. As a Catholic family united together, we learned about creation, human dignity, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and the Eighth Day. The weekend was filled with life-changing speakers from across the country. We heard the message repeated throughout the weekend that "the Life of Man is the Vision of Christ." From the moment of creation, we were given destiny and dignity. We were given a purpose for life and for the struggles – and we were given worthiness. Father John Kartje, a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, who spoke on Thursday, November 16, told the crowd that "we are not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be revealed." As a youth living in a world that is full of comparison, these messages really struck me – messages of hope and purpose.

Throughout the conference, we were given opportunities to hear from many great speakers during breakout sessions. During some of the sessions I attended, speakers focused on topics such as being a part of the pro-life generation and the importance of spiritual friendships. Katie Prejean McGrady, a Catholic speaker, podcaster, and radio host, spoke to my heart about the challenges of friendship. She explained that "comparative and competitive natures sneak into our lives and ruin them." This served as a call for me in a world that



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A group from St. Jude Church in Fort Wayne takes a picture in front of the iconic NCYC sign at the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis.



Thousands of teens kneel during Eucharistic adoration at Lucas Oil Stadium as part of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis, which was held November 16-18.

so often tells us to leave others behind. Christ was calling me to realize what is important in life and how true Christian friendships are more important than selfish desires. We are made for community, and NCYC is the best example of a true Catholic family.

Before the closing Mass of NCYC, our group of pilgrims from the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend was blessed to have dinner with Bishop Rhoades. It was great to see that this “fully alive” Church was not something far off in the distance. This living Church could be found right in my own diocese. It was within my high school and my parish. This dinner with the youth of diocese was filled with joy. I felt so honored to have Bishop Rhoades attending NCYC alongside us. There were 22 bishops in attendance, and it was special having our bishop among them.

The entire experience of NCYC is life-changing, but the

moment the priests, deacons, and bishops began to process in for the closing Mass, my heart was changed forever. More than 200 priests, 22 bishops, and countless deacons and seminarians gathered together to celebrate Mass with us. This closing Mass was so beautiful, and the life of the Church was truly visible. Thirteen thousand voices gathered together to praise the Lord.

Bishop Joseph Espaillat, Auxiliary Bishop for the Archdiocese of New York – and, at age 47, the youngest bishop in the United States – gave a jaw-dropping homily at the closing Mass. He challenged the youth of the Church to live with joy rather than with fear. He told us that worldly fear creates anxiety and pain, and it takes away our peace and our faith. When we fall into worldly fear, we turn away from Christ’s challenge.

My experience at the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis has

taught me how to be “fully alive.” It has taught me what it means to live an authentically Catholic life, and it showed me the importance of community. Bishop Espaillat taught us three simple ways to stay “fully alive.” He said, “Have faith, have fun, and have family and friends.” These three simple tasks have changed my life since returning from NCYC. They have helped me to realize what is most important and to make Christ the center of my life.

Sophia Wheeler is a junior at Bishop Dwenger High School. She is a parishioner at St. Jude Parish in Fort Wayne.



The 12 attendees from St. Jude Parish in Fort Wayne take a break from the day to share lunch together at the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis. They catch up and share about their day so far.



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Learning About Eucharistic Desire from St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

My family made a recent visit to the new museum at the National Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg, Maryland. I've always been drawn to St. Elizabeth's story. I remember how it fascinated me as a child that she was both a mother and a nun, not to mention the first canonized saint born in our land.

The newly redesigned museum has much to offer any pilgrim. I went there that day hoping to find something about her life that could inspire our oldest son as he prepares for his first holy Communion in the spring. And, by God's grace, something that struck me anew on this visit was the love St. Elizabeth had for the Lord's Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament.

Something that particularly stuck out to me, thanks to one of the exhibits, was how significant St. Elizabeth's first holy Communion was in her life. Digging into this pivotal day in her life a bit more later, I came to learn that St. Elizabeth had so longed for the Lord the night ahead of her first reception of the sacrament that she lay awake "burning" with desire. And as she made the two-mile journey so quickly to the church that next morning, she wrote, it seemed her feet barely touched the ground.

Remarkably, this newfound love for the Eucharist, rooted in her newfound love for the Catholic faith, came about only

by providence and through much suffering. At 29, Elizabeth and her oldest child accompanied her husband to Italy in hopes his tubercular lungs might recover there. Those hopes were dashed, though, after the state quarantined them in such harsh conditions that Mr. Seton's death was hastened.

But she was not left in despair. God burst into her life in a most amazing and transformative way. A woman of faith already, raised in the Episcopalian tradition, Elizabeth was dumbstruck by the experiences she had at the Italian estate of her husband's friends – the Filicchis – where she became acquainted with Catholicism.

"How happy we would be," she wrote her sister-in-law, "if we believed what these dear souls believe, that they possess God in the sacrament and that He remains in their churches and is carried to them when they are sick."

Her Episcopalian sensibilities maintained no strength against the power of the Eucharist. Witnessing firsthand a Eucharistic procession, Elizabeth would later recall, "I fell on my knees without thinking ... and cried in an agony to God to bless me if He was there, that my whole soul desired only Him."

As I looked at the rosary St. Elizabeth received at her first holy Communion, I wondered what might come of my son's someday. Then I looked at what



GUEST COLUMN

MICHAEL HEINLEIN

she wrote, in her own hand, about that very day: "At last GOD IS MINE and I AM HIS." This is the beauty of a soul who longed for total union with Christ and found it only by passing through great suffering. But once she did, she couldn't keep it to herself. She set out to transform the world, nourished and sustained by the fullness of love contained in that tiny host.

Standing there, recalling St. Elizabeth's first holy Communion, I said a prayer for our son, that he might come to experience just that. And I longed to realize the full power of those words in his life and mine. That we might be so utterly transformed in the Eucharist, as was St. Elizabeth, that we might evermore long be made worthy to enter His kingdom in her footsteps.

Michael R. Heinlein is author of "Glorifying Christ: The Life of Cardinal Francis E. George, O.M.I." and a promised member of the Association of Pauline Cooperators.

A Powerful Advent Lesson on Delayed Gratification

When my sisters and I were young, my mother would spend all Advent baking cookies and making candy. That may hardly seem remarkable; after all, countless millions of Christmas cookies are baked and consumed every year between Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. But my mother didn't eat any of the cookies she baked, and neither did we – not before Christmas, that is. Every sugar cookie, Polish wedding cake, fruit cookie, square of fudge, and chunk of peanut brittle was packed away in vintage green Tupperware or metal tins (depending on whether they were intended for us or for relatives and friends), to be brought out only once Christmas Day had dawned.

Four or five decades later, that seems remarkable, because what economists call "delayed gratification" is simply not part of American life anymore – and that's as true of Catholics and other Christians as it is of the average American. Fifty years ago, the question "What do you want for Christmas?" meant something different than it does today, when a couple of clicks on Amazon can satisfy the desire of a child of any age with next-day (or even same-day) delivery.



ALL THINGS NEW

SCOTT P. RICHERT

When I was a child, I thought as a child, which meant that, of course, I wanted to eat just one sugar cookie hot out of the oven or sneak one piece of fudge. But Mom never let me do so, because satisfying my desire wasn't the point of her baking. In fact, if anything, the purpose of all her preparations throughout Advent was the opposite: to increase my desire, and to direct it toward its proper end.

If you eat it before Christmas, a Christmas cookie is just a cookie.

My mother entered into eternal life in the early morning hours of November 1, All Saints' Day. Through the days and nights before she quietly passed from us, my father, my sister Monica, and I held those hands that had mixed and shaped and baked all of those cookies just a few feet away from where the hospital

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Advent Offers Us a Chance to Truly Encounter the Living God



THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MONSIGNOR OWEN F. CAMPION

First Sunday of Advent

This weekend, the Church begins Advent. It begins the use of biblical readings from Year B of its three-year cycle. It is also the beginning of a new liturgical year. Each liturgical year is carefully planned so that the seasons and the major feasts guide us through our very own worship into a closer relationship with God in Christ.

The first reading is from the third section of Isaiah, composed when the Jews were in a quite difficult situation. Years before, the exiles had been allowed to return to the Holy Land from Babylon, but this return brought the exiles home to no paradise. Life was miserable. The prophet called

for faith in God, not only as almighty, but as unrelentingly true to the covenant, to the divine pledge that God would protect the Chosen People.

The prophet appealed to God in the name of the people for relief but without saying that the people are being treated unfairly, at least in terms of God's care for them, although the prophet made clear that sin led the people away from God. This estrangement has produced their woes.

Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians provides the next reading. Counseling the Christians of Corinth was a challenge for Paul. Not only did temptation and vice surround them at every side, but they also argued among themselves. Paul had to call them to faithfulness, and he had to try to influence them to put their differences with each other aside.

He saw disciples as having enormous religious potential. Despite all odds produced by their surroundings and the human inclination to sin, they were able to draw more closely to God and also able to infuse

the goodness of Christianity into the circles in which they moved.

St. Mark's Gospel is the source of the last reading. It offers us a theme found quite often in the New Testament – namely that Christ will come to earth again. In this Second Coming, the Lord will be the great victor and the judge of all creation.

By the time the Gospels were written, even in the case of the Gospel of Mark, the oldest of the four as they now exist, Christians were numerous enough, and geographically distributed enough, to catch the public eye, but not numerous enough or powerful enough to stand against their enemies. The culture was an enemy. Soon, the political system would be an enemy.

Being a Christian became a capital crime, as the martyrs horrifically found out.

Understandably, the atmosphere was tense, uncertain, and frightening. Thoughts of the Second Coming naturally were appealing. Jesus will come again, but we know not when.

We do not know the future.

In the meantime, we must acknowledge God, live in God's law, and trust in our reward.

If we are with God, we need not fear.

Reflection

The formal prayers of the Mass are the united statements of all believers, spoken through and by the celebrant, to proclaim our faith but also our trust in Almighty God.

We speak with the priest in our faith and worship, but are we sincere? Are we good Catholics? Does the priest praying the Orations at Mass represent our genuinely authentic faith, our absolute commitment to Christ?

Mark's Gospel greatly assists us in forming solid faith. Only God is permanent and real.

Advent is an opportunity to achieve union with God, to realize that God's love for us is real.

If we respond to the opportunity given to us by Advent, then Christmas becomes not a national holiday, or even a holy

religious commemoration, but the moment when we encounter God, firmly believing that Jesus will come again, but also believing that here and now we know the Lord.

READINGS

Sunday: Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b, 64:2-7; Psalms 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:33-37

Monday: Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalms 122:1-2, 3-4b, 4cd-5, 6-7, 8-9; Matthew 8:5-11

Tuesday: Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalms 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17; Luke 10:21-24

Wednesday: Isaiah 25:6-10a; Psalms 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6; Matthew 15:29-37

Thursday: Isaiah 26:1-6; Psalms 118:1, 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a; Matthew 7:21, 24-27

Friday: Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Psalms 98:1-4; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38

Saturday: Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26; Psalms 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6; Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5a, 6-8

You Don't Really Know Who You Are

One of the most important rules for living in the world is: You are probably not who you think you are, and many others know you better than you know yourself.

This is an old-guy lesson, I'm afraid – one of those lessons one learns from long and painful, often embarrassing experiences. We charge into life full of certainties – among them the certainty that we know exactly who we are – and then we find out we don't. That usually happens in stages over time, and it's rarely fun.

We can easily see this in other people, because sometimes it's really obvious. The man who thinks he's God's gift to women and hits on women half his age, and doesn't understand why they don't respond.

The woman who thinks she's a ray of sunshine and never notices that people hide when they see her coming. The man who thinks he's a bold truth-teller who doesn't know he's usually wrong and blames his not having any friends on everyone else's unwillingness to hear the truth.

In one of the most terrifying passages in Scripture, Jesus speaks of the unexpected hour when the Son of Man returns and separates the sheep from the goats. The goats see themselves as sheep and protest Jesus' judgment.

They'd thought they were good, religious people – they'd have done anything for Jesus – and find the angels herding them to the down escalator. It turns out Jesus sees them differently, and He's the only one who sees clearly.

St. Augustine knew that we're all a mess, and such a mess that we don't know how much of a mess we are. As a theologian said to me, in his "Confessions," the saint teaches that "we are unavailable to

ourselves."

We hear Augustine's famous line – "Our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee" – as a truism, but for the saint, it was a hard-won discovery. He'd gone wrong in all sorts of ways following his restless heart because he didn't know who he was and, therefore, couldn't see who was the answer to all his questions and desires.

It's not a small thing, this ignorance. It hurts our relation to our Creator and Redeemer, and our relation to the world, especially the people who know us.

Here's a practical example that affects almost all our lives, thanks to both traditional media and social media: the belief that you must speak out, hard and loud, against the enemy. That you must go after them the way General Sherman went through Georgia. That you are 2023's Elijah facing the prophets of Baal.

We feel zeal for the good, and that feeling makes sense. We see error as a fire set by arsonists that will sweep through the building unless we stop the arsonists. We must warn everyone about the arsonists as loudly and forcefully as we can.

But if something must be said, must it be said by you? A lot of social media anger (and division in the Church) would be avoided if everyone tempted to speak out first asked themselves, "Am I the person to do this?"

Are you actually a prophet like Elijah with his role and his duties? Is that who you are and who God wants you to be? Maybe, but it seems unlikely. You're probably not articulate enough, clever enough, or holy enough. Few of us are, even among those of us who speak out for a living.

In any case, it is obvious



LIFE IN THE WORLD

DAVID MILLS

that many people who think of themselves that way don't have the gifts for it, and more importantly, don't have the character for it. Maybe they may become the person to speak out. They're not that person now.

The Greek St. Nectarios of Aegina, a holy man who seemed to other Orthodox a kind of fanatic because he took holiness so seriously, knew something about this. He distinguishes two kinds of zeal.

"The zealot according to knowledge," he said, "motivated by the love of God and his neighbor, does all things with love and self-effacement. He does nothing that might bring sorrow to his neighbor."

But the zealot "not according to knowledge is a ruinous man who turns the Gospel of grace and love upside down. His zeal is a seductive fire, a consuming fire. Destruction comes forth from him and desolation follows in his wake."

Who are we really? Which kind of zealot would we be if we tried speaking out? There's no easy answer, except to listen to those good people who know you and love you enough to tell you the truth. And to watch your language until you know.

David Mills is a columnist for OSV News. He writes from Pennsylvania.

choice, we are caught up in the here and now. There's work to be done, bills to be paid, clothes to be washed, children to be fed.

But as much as necessity may seem to force our hand, there's an element of choice in our actions, as well. And that choice involves not simply what we do but why we choose to do it. I do not know, and, of course, I cannot ask her now, whether Mom intended to teach us a lesson with her Advent baking. But as we talked with Father Charles, we realized that she had done just that. To be a Christian means to live always with a sense of longing, of that joyful expectation tinged with sorrow that comes from knowing that the greatest desire of our heart will never be fulfilled in this earthly life. That, perhaps more than

any other part of the Christian experience, is a reality that the modern world rejects.

A few hours after our mother passed from this life, my sister and I stood beside our father in the church where we had first received the gift of faith, and we sang with all the saints in glory of the life yet to come. And as we prayed for the repose of my mother's soul, we gave thanks for the years we had spent with her, and for the cookies and candy through which Mom had prepared us all for living that day and the rest of our lives in the deep longing for, and joyful expectation of, our reunion before the throne of God.

Scott Richert is the Publisher of Our Sunday Visitor. Visit OSVNews.com.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for December 3, 2023

1 Corinthians 1:3-9 / Mark 13:33-37

Following is a word search based on the Second and Gospel readings for the First Sunday of Advent, Cycle B: About being prepared. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

GRACE	PEACE	OUR LORD
ENRICHED	KNOWLEDGE	GIFT
REVELATION	FELLOWSHIP	HIS SON
TIME	WILL COME	A MAN
LEAVES	HOME	SERVANTS
CHARGE	EVENING	COCKCROW
MORNING	SUDDENLY	ASLEEP

AWAITING

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E V E N I N G I F T L W
N M P E G D E L W O N K
R O I L R H I S S O N Y
I R H T A D R E I J L D
C N S S C R M T F N E E
H I W T E O A D E C A M
E N O N H L C D H C V O
D G L A E R D K N H E C
I L L V D U N A C A S L
Y A E E R S O M N A R R L
C R F E C A E P F G O I
H O A S L E E P F E V W
    
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MARY DI ROSA

FEAST DECEMBER 15

1813-1855



Paula di Rosa left school at 17 to keep house for her father, an Italian textile-mill owner. She also took on the welfare of the factory girls, and she and the widowed Gabriela Echenos-Bornati nursed the sick during a cholera epidemic. Paula later set up a house for poor, abandoned girls and a military hospital. These charitable works evolved into the Congregation of the Handmaids of Charity, which was approved by the Vatican in 1850. Paula made her vows as Mary of the Crucified in 1852. She established convents in Dalmatia and near Verona, and died at home in Brescia after collapsing from physical exhaustion. She was canonized in 1954.

RICHERT, from page 16

bed was set up in the living room of the house that had been our family home for all but a handful of months of my parents' 56 years of marriage. Polish wedding cakes and peanut brittle were the last things on our minds as we prepared ourselves and one another for a life without her.

But a few days later, when Father Charles Hall, the priest who had anointed Mom seven weeks earlier and who would celebrate her funeral Mass on November 6, asked us for a particular memory of Mom that would help him to understand who she really was, the first thing that came to mind was her Advent baking. Everything we do reveals something about where our heart lies. Too often, by necessity as much as by

Father Philip DeVolder, a Retired Priest of the Diocese, Passes Away

BY TODAY'S CATHOLIC

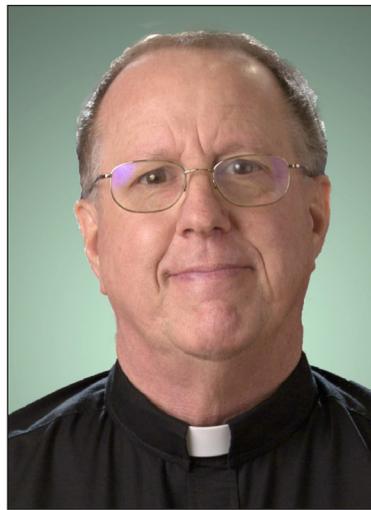
Father Philip "Phil" DeVolder of Huntington, formerly the beloved priest serving Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Warsaw, passed away on Friday, November 10, at his residence in Huntington at the age of 70. His priestly ministry lasted more than 40 years.

He was born on February 19, 1953, in Mishawaka. One of three children born to Mary Elizabeth (Geurs) DeVolder and Adolph Basil DeVolder, he is survived by his two brothers, James DeVolder (Port Charlotte, Florida) and Ralph DeVolder (South Bend), and his nephew, Bryon DeVolder (Mishawaka).

Father Phil found his calling serving the Lord and leading others to Christ through his ministry and love of God. He attended Indiana University South Bend with the intention of becoming a Spanish teacher. The school was not far from his home in Mishawaka, where he grew up and was a parishioner at St. Bavo Catholic Church. He realized that the path to become a Spanish teacher was not for him, so after a year in college, he went to work in a factory. It was during this time he received the call in his

heart to go into the priesthood, and with that he attended St. Gregory Seminary in Cincinnati in 1973 and completed his formation at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. In 1980, he received his degree and was ordained a priest.

His first assignment brought him to St. Mary of the Assumption Parish in Decatur. Three years later, he was assigned to St. Joseph Parish in Fort Wayne, then to St. Stanislaus Kostka in New Carlisle. In 1988, he moved into the central area of the diocese and ministered at Sacred Heart Parish in Warsaw before returning to St. Mary of the Assumption in 1995. His next assignment, almost 11 years later, took him to St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Elkhart. He went on to an assignment at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, which brought him back to Warsaw. In 2010, he began to serve at Sacred Heart once more. He moved to residency at St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Fort Wayne nine years later. The same year, Father DeVolder was appointed parochial vicar of SS. Peter and Paul Parish in Huntington. He served wherever he was appointed, and after a battle



FATHER PHILIP DEVOLDER

with cancer was declared in remission, he was assigned to a new chaplaincy at Saint Anne Communities at Victory Noll in Huntington. Since this last move, he enjoyed the ability to actively minister to the Saint Anne community.

Father Phil always greeted everyone with a smile, and even in ill health always had empathy and compassion for others. He dearly enjoyed celebrating Masses and preaching the Gospel, which embodied his genuine love of God.

Father Phil's funeral Mass was celebrated by Father Matthew Coonan, the Diocese

of Fort Wayne-South Bend's Episcopal Vicar for Clergy, on Wednesday, November 15, at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Warsaw. He was laid to rest at St. Joseph Catholic Cemetery in Mishawaka.

"Father Phil was well-loved at Sacred Heart," Father Jonathan Norton, Pastor of Sacred Heart Church, told Today's Catholic. "I have heard many stories of those whom he helped to become Catholic and learn about the faith. He has been praised as a great teacher and a humble man. All of Sacred Heart will miss him."

CAREER OPPORTUNITY



DIOCESE OF FORT WAYNE-SOUTH BEND

Director of Human Resources

The Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend is seeking a full-time Director of Human Resources. This position will be based in Fort Wayne and will require travel throughout the diocese. The position requires a bachelor's degree in human resources or business administration (master's degree preferred). The ideal candidate will hold a SHRM-CP or SHRM-SCP certification. This position oversees the hiring process, leave administration, safe environment, and provides support to diocesan parishes and schools on matters related to human resources.

Interested candidates should apply online at diocesefwsb.org/careers by December 15, 2023.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING?

WHAT'S HAPPENING carries announcements about upcoming events in the diocese. View more Catholic events and submit new ones at todayscatholic.org/event. For additional listings of that event, please call the advertising sales staff at 260-399-1449 to purchase space.

Little Flower Holy Hour for Vocations

FORT WAYNE – The Little Flower Holy Hour is sponsored by the Vocations Office. This monthly event is from 7-8 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month, September-May, at the St. Mother Theodore Guerin Chapel next to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Each month, the Holy Hour is led by a different priest or deacon. Join in praying for vocations. Contact Christine Nix at 260-422-4611 or cbonahoom-nix@diocesefwsb.org.

'Emmanuel' A Musical Journey Through the Story of Christmas

FORT WAYNE – St. Jude Parish, 2130 Pemberton Dr., will host a unique Advent experience, "Emmanuel" A Musical Journey Through the Story of Christmas by award-winning musician Tatiana 'Tajci' Cameron. She travels from Nashville, Tennessee, to offer an afternoon of music on Sunday, December 3, at 2 p.m. that will turn your holiday stress into a deeply spiritual and sacred season. Contact Julie Schleitwiler at 260-484-6609 or jschleitwiler@stjudefw.org for information.

Home for the Holidays

GRANGER – Learn steps to awaken faith in your adult children while they are home for the holidays on Monday, December 4, from 7-8:30 p.m. in the St. Pius X multi-purpose room, 52553 Fir Rd. (enter through Door 6,

across from the south playground). Sean Allen, Founder of Ablaze Mission, and Lisa Everett, Diocesan Director of Marriage and Family Ministry, will present practical steps to rekindle faith in young adults. Refreshments will be provided. The evening is free of charge, but please register so organizers know how many people to expect at ablazemission.org/ return.

St. Paul Chapel's Men's Rosary, Adoration, Benediction, and Fellowship

FREMONT – All men of the diocese are welcome to attend a night from 6:30-8 p.m., Wednesday, December 6, at St. Paul Catholic Chapel, 8780 E. 700 N., that will include praying the Rosary, adoration, benediction, and fellowship. There will be a short talk on the importance of men in the Church. Contact Jim Shiffler at 260-665-2259 or office@stpaulcatholicchapel.org for information.

Our Lady of Guadalupe Presentation Offered at Little Flower

SOUTH BEND – St. Therese Little Flower and Spanish Rose Dance Studio will present "Our Lady of Guadalupe from Spain to America" on Saturday, December 9, at 7 p.m., and on Sunday, December 10, at 1 p.m. in the St. Therese Little Flower Auditorium, 54191 N. Ironwood Rd. The dinner theater production will be portrayed by actors, dancers, singers, and musicians.

The Knights of Columbus will provide a taco bar one hour prior to presentations. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children 12 and younger at the door. For reservations call 574-329-2977.

'Elf Jr. – the Musical'

FORT WAYNE – Bishop Luers High School Performing Arts Theater will present "Elf Jr. the Musical" on Friday, December 8, at 7 p.m. and Saturday, December 9, at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. in the cafeteria, 333 E. Paulding Rd. Tickets are \$10 each. Call 260-456-1261 ext. 3110 for ticket information/purchasing. Contact Karlene Krouse at 260-456-1261 or kkrouse@bishopluers.org for information.

Sensory Friendly Masses Held at St. Vincent de Paul

FORT WAYNE – The 1:30 p.m. Sensory-Friendly Masses held every Sunday at St. Vincent de Paul, 1502 E. Wallen Rd., provide a safe, comfortable, and stigma-free setting for children and adults with sensory challenges, mental illness, or any kind of disability.

REST IN PEACE

Fort Wayne

Dustin Brown, 39, St. Charles

Granger

Christopher Haney, 38, St. Pius X

Mishawaka

Robert Botham, 46, St. Monica

James Holt, 83, St. Monica

Monroeville

Gerald Jacobs, 76, St. Rose of Lima

New Carlisle

Robert Louis Amico, 84, St. Stanislaus Kostka

Notre Dame

Sister Mary Pius CSC, 92, Our Lady of Loretto

South Bend

Robert Lisenko, 89, Cathedral of St. Matthew

Warsaw

Father Phillip DeVolder, 70, Sacred Heart

Send obituaries to obituaries@diocesefwsb.org.

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STATE CHAMPIONS, from page 1

another score from 6 yards out and a 14-3 halftime lead for Bishop Luers.

“Mickey is just a bruiser; it’s fun to watch him just batter through people, while also serving as the lead back for Gio Jimenez,” Lindsay said of his 1-2 punch in the backfield. “Mickey is undersold on how athletic he is. Gio’s got that pop, that big-play potential. He’s short in stature but a really strong kid.”

Meanwhile, the Knights’ defense made life miserable for the Vikings all day. Despite outscoring opponents by an average of 28 points per game entering the contest, North Posey’s offense repeatedly stalled after long drives. This, along with a physical Bishop Luers defensive line, kept the Vikings out of the endzone for just the second time all season.

“They were on their game and were disruptive up front,” Lindsay said of his defense, which racked up two interceptions and three sacks. “You can’t talk about Dame [Jackson] without talking about [senior] Wes Javins as bookends on our 3-4 defense; they’ve been phenomenal all year. They’ve put up some numbers that are very rarely seen on the football field in Bishop Luers history.” Jackson didn’t disappoint, amassing eight tackles (including four for loss), two sacks, a forced fumble, and a blocked punt.

In the second half, McKenzie went to work, tossing a trio of touchdowns – one each to Javins, senior Isaac Zay, and junior Jaylen White. McKenzie completed 7 of 10 passes for 126 yards behind an offensive line that not only gave him ample time to throw but also opened up running lanes for Daring and Jimenez. “The growth of our O-line from when the season began to now – they’ve really been playing at a high level, especially considering how young we were,” Lindsay said.

Jimenez added a 12-yard scoring run in the fourth quarter, part of a 13-carry, 98-yard day. “My line did their job, and I knew that I had to trust them,” said Jimenez. “Coach Lindsay had put trust in me, to put the ball in my hands. I knew if he was willing to do that, I had to make things happen.”

The Bishop Luers offense made things happen every time it reached the red zone, scoring touchdowns on each of its four trips inside the Vikings’ 20-yard line – compared to a lone field goal in North Posey’s two red-zone trips. The Knights accomplished this feat despite only possessing the ball for less than a third of the game and

running just 34 offensive plays.

The season looked bleak for the Knights early on, as they began the season 0-2 after getting blown out by East Noble (45-7) and New Haven (36-7).

“What people don’t know is we knew what we were capable of after those first two games,” Jimenez said of his team, which rallied to win six straight games to claim a share of the Summit Athletic Conference title. “We knew that there’s plenty of time to put things together and trust each other. That’s exactly what we did, and we got to the state championship.”

“We just bonded together,” McKenzie said. “We sat down before the season and talked about what we wanted to accomplish this year. We said we wanted to win a state championship and bring the winning tradition back to Luers. I love these boys – I love them like my own brothers; they’ll always be brothers to me.”

Lindsay knows the feeling. As a former Bishop Luers quarterback who helped lead the Knights to state titles in 1999 and 2001, he’s ecstatic that this

group got to experience the same emotions – especially the seniors, whose development throughout the last four years made it all possible.

“Some seniors really grew into leadership roles – that was really needed coming into this season with all the inexperience we had,” Lindsay said. “It speaks to the character and leadership that they developed. The kids just had a constant positive presence, which was a collective effort by our senior class and by our assistant coaches, who have done an excellent job modeling what you want to see from a Catholic school.”



Photos by John Felts

The Bishop Luers Knights take the field at Lucas Oil Stadium before the Class 2A state championship game on Saturday, November 25.

More photos are available at todayscatholic.org



Damium Jackson, left, and Gio Jimenez receive the state championship trophy after Bishop Luers captured the Class 2A state title beating North Posey.



Knights Head Coach Kyle Lindsay receives a medal following Bishop Luers’ 40-3 victory against North Posey.

