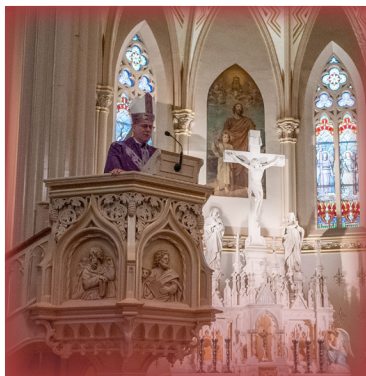


# TODAY'S CATHOLIC

Volume 97 No. 44

TODAYSCATHOLIC.org



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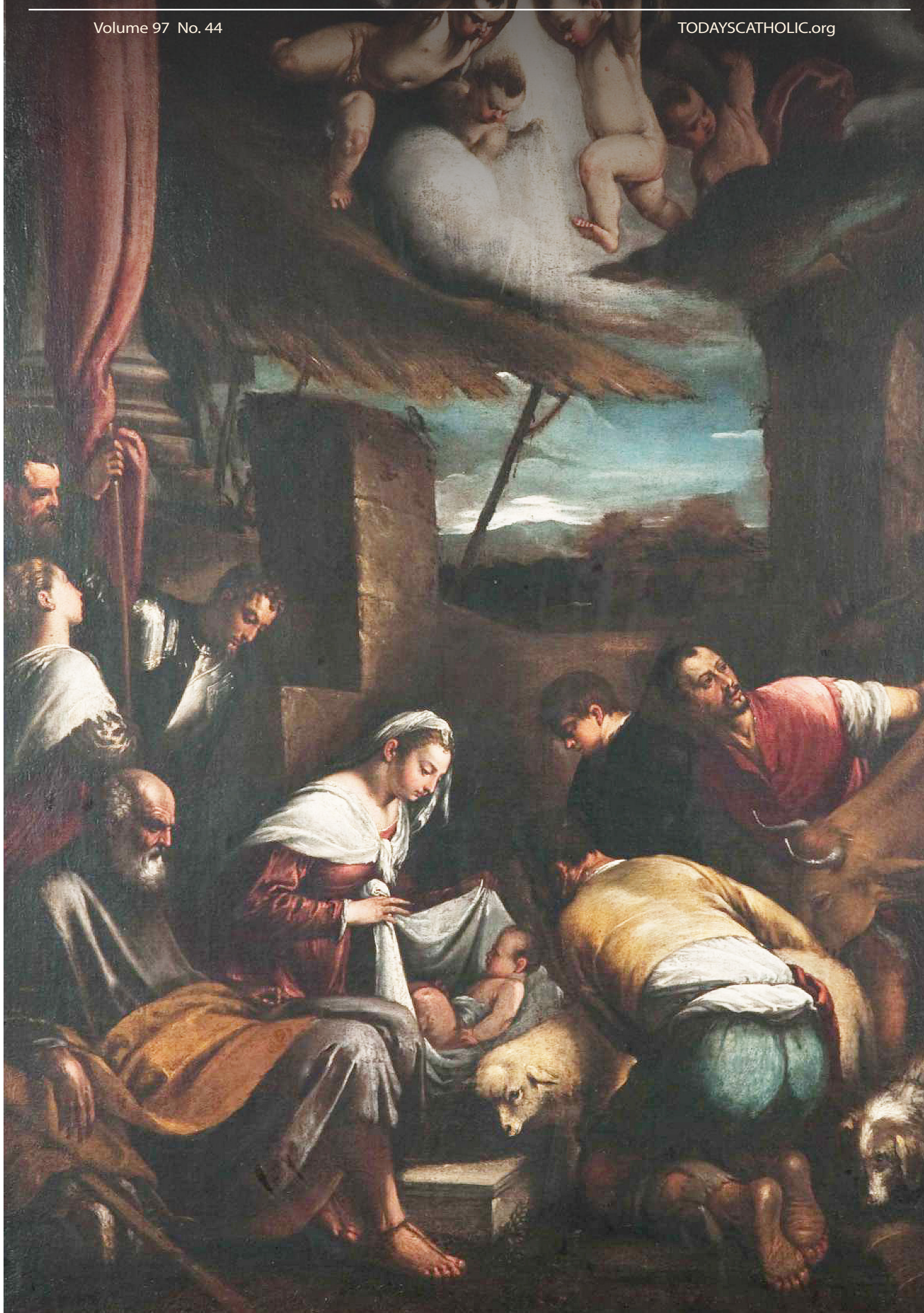
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Unknown Italian artist, "The Nativity," after Jacopo Bassano, after 1565, Oil on canvas. Radin Murphy Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame.

## TODAY'S CATHOLIC

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# St. Joseph, Mishawaka, Marks 175th Anniversary

BY MICHELLE MCDANIEL

On Sunday, December 10, Bishop Rhoades celebrated the 175th anniversary of one of the diocese's oldest parishes – St. Joseph Catholic Church in Mishawaka. All parish choirs sang for the special 11:15 a.m. Mass, and staff held a brunch in the school gym immediately after to mark the milestone anniversary.

Bishop Rhoades gave thanks for all of those who have been a part of St. Joseph's long history throughout the years, praying for all ancestors who worshiped and served at the parish. In his homily, he reminded the faithful about how God remains with us through turmoil and urged attendees to open their hearts to receive the Lord and make a highway for Him.

"For 175 years, St. Joseph's parish has been a spiritual home for thousands of parishioners who have drank here from the waters of salvation," he said.

In 1842, Father Edward Sorin and other clergy from the Congregation of Holy Cross were sent to northern Indiana to establish the school that became the University of Notre Dame. These Holy Cross priests, like the French missionaries before them, would come to Mishawaka to celebrate Mass and provide the sacraments.

On December 10, 1848, this missionary church in Mishawaka became an official parish called the Church of the Holy Angels. That original church building was destroyed by a fire 13 years later – which was believed to have been arson. They needed to rebuild, but the Civil War had just begun. The parish was already home to 125 families, almost all poor Irish and German immigrants. The parishioners made great sacrifices to rebuild the church and buy the land that shortly after became the parish cemetery.

Their new church was dedicated on December 8, 1861, and was given the title of St. Joseph, changing the patron of the parish from the guardian angels.

St. Joseph's grew considerably through the years, and the community came to need more room. In 1893, the current building was completed – a large church with Gothic-style architecture.

"You've had some very long-serving pastors over its history, and I'm very grateful to Father Chris [Lapp], who has been a pastor here for seven and a half years," Bishop Rhoades said. "Today in this Mass, we remember in prayer all the priests, sisters, and lay faithful who have served the Church's mission here at St. Joseph's these past 175 years. We give thanks for the heritage of faith



Photos provided by St. Joseph Parish

**Faithful in the pews look on as Bishop Rhoades speaks from the elevated ambo during a Mass on Sunday, December 10, to mark the 175th anniversary of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Mishawaka. Bishop Rhoades prayed for all those who have served the Church's mission at St. Joseph throughout the years.**



**From left, Father Christopher Lapp, Father Terry Fisher, Bishop Rhoades, and Father Kenneth Amadi sit during Mass on December 10 marking the 175th anniversary of the founding of St. Joseph Parish in Mishawaka. The Mass was followed by a brunch in the school gymnasium.**

they have left for us."

Bishop Rhoades concluded his homily with a prayer: "I pray that this parish will continue to flourish as an evangelizing community, one that reaches out to spread the Kingdom of Christ here in Mishawaka; one that continues to pass on the faith to your children; one that has a special love and care for the elderly, sick, and suffering."

After Mass, families walked to the school gym next door for brunch and fellowship.

Margaret Cabaniss, President of the Parish Council and parishioner for six years, organized the event. Outside of the gym, in the entrance hall, two tables held documents and information on the history of the parish.

"Our parish historians found articles that were written about

the dedication of the 'new' church building in the late 1800s; it's fun to think that our little 175th-anniversary celebration will be part of that history now," Cabaniss told Today's Catholic.

According to Cabaniss, preparing for the event was a shared enterprise among a variety of volunteers in the parish – families who help host a semi-regular post-Mass brunch, individuals who have been researching the history of the parish, and the choir members, altar servers, and "folks behind the scenes who helped make the Mass itself so beautiful."

Setting up the brunch specifically was the work of several different volunteers who helped cook food, decorate tables, and put together the historical display, as well as all those parish-



ioners who donated dishes to share.

"St. Joe's is a wonderfully generous community, so we had lots of hands to help," Cabaniss said. "We have parishioners whose families have been here since the mid-1800s, and it's wonderful hearing their memories about the community and the parish itself over the years."

Dozens of families attended the celebration brunch, and the line stretched out the door.

"The St. Joe family is a wonderful community," Cabaniss said. "It blends members whose ancestors and families have grown up in the parish, as well as recent transplants to the area, but I think everyone is made to feel welcome and as though they have a personal stake in the community – something that they can offer to help build up the parish family," she said. "Never is that more apparent to me than when we host events like this that bring the community together in prayer and thanksgiving, as well as celebration."

# Bishop Rhoades Confirms 13 at St. Anthony de Padua

BY KASIA BALSBAUGH

On Saturday, December 9, Bishop Rhoades spent the 19th anniversary of his ordination as a bishop administering the Sacrament of Confirmation on 13 young candidates at St. Anthony de Padua Parish in South Bend – the final confirmation Mass of the year for the bishop.

While it is unusual to have a confirmation Mass during the Advent season (the diocese's confirmations typically happen in the fall), Bishop Rhoades' role in the recent Synod of Bishops necessitated pushing some confirmations back in the calendar year. The confirmations at St. Anthony de Padua just happened to coincide with Bishop Rhoades' special anniversary.

Bishop Rhoades celebrated the Mass on the vigil of the Second Sunday of Advent, which provided the readings and prayers. He dwelt on Advent themes in his homily, building his reflections around Isaiah 40:3: "A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!"

"When we think about our lives, sometimes we get off the road," Bishop Rhoades said to the 13 young parishioners being confirmed, adding that the Christian's work is to make straight the highway for God in our lives. He said this was important especially for these times, which he called the



Photos by Kasia Balsbaugh

**Bishop Rhoades confirms 13 students at St. Anthony de Padua Catholic Church in South Bend on Saturday, December 9.**

"middle times" – Jesus' First Coming has already happened, but the world is still waiting for his Second Coming. Just like the Israelites in the time of the prophet Isaiah, Bishop Rhoades said, we are in exile.

Dwelling more specifically on modern times, Bishop

Rhoades mentioned the problems of anxiety and depression that plague many. "God wants to give us His peace and His joy," Bishop Rhoades said, adding later, "Whenever we are filled with anxiety, we need to come to the Lord."

Regarding the role of con-

firmation in their lives, Bishop Rhoades told the confirmandi, "You've already received the Holy Spirit at baptism. ... God loves us so much He gives us even greater strength in the Sacrament of Confirmation."

Bishop Rhoades then mentioned the sweet-smelling chrism oil used at confirmation, which is a blend of olive oil and fragrant balsam. Bishop Rhoades recalled St. Paul's words, "You are to be the fragrance of Christ in the world," he quoted.

"You're called to be saints," Bishop Rhoades added. "That's why I'm confirming you."

Fernando Garcia, in his first year as Director of Faith Formation at St. Anthony de Padua Parish, has been working with the confirmation class since August. He told Today's Catholic that the most important challenge of confirmation preparation is "learning to see and hear God in our daily lives."

"I think it is really exciting to work with young people as they begin to question and build a deeper picture of who they are," Garcia said of his ministry. "One of the graces of confirmation is to be rooted more deeply in our identity as beloved sons and daughters of God, and so I hope that confirmation preparation encourages them to see this reality as the most fundamental aspect of who they are."

Assisting Bishop Rhoades with the Mass were Father Arthur Ssembajja, Pastor of St. Anthony de Padua, Father John

Sollee, Deacon Mike Plenzler, and two visiting priests from Uganda. They and the congregation congratulated Bishop Rhoades after Mass on his anniversary.

Pope St. John Paul II named then-Father Rhoades a bishop in October of 2004, when he was Rector of Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Maryland. This was one of the last episcopal appointments John Paul II made before his death. Bishop Rhoades said this was particularly special because he had admired John Paul II for a long time, calling him "one of my heroes."

After being appointed bishop, then-Father Rhoades had two months to choose a formal ordination date. Because of his special devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe (during the confirmation Mass at St. Anthony, his crozier bore her image), he requested her feast day, December 12. Unfortunately, that day was unavailable, so he next requested December 9, the feast day of St. Juan Diego. On that date in 2004, he was ordained Bishop of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He became Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend five years later and has served the diocese ever since.

After telling his story, Bishop Rhoades ended the Mass with words of encouragement for the eighth graders whom he had just sealed with the Holy Spirit.

"Young newly confirmed Catholics, you give me a lot of hope," Bishop Rhoades said.

## Vatican Officials Explain How, When Same-Sex Couples Can Be Blessed

BY CINDY WOODEN

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

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

The document, *Fiducia Supplicans* ("Supplicating Trust") was subtitled, "On the pastoral meaning of blessings," and was approved by Pope

Francis during an audience with Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, Prefect of the dicastery, on December 18.

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

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

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

At the same time, the pope said, "pastoral prudence must adequately discern if there are

forms of blessing, solicited by one or various persons, that don't transmit a mistaken concept of marriage."

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

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

But in Catholic tradition, blessings go well beyond the formal ritual used in marriage

and other sacraments.

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

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

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

"When people ask for a blessing, an exhaustive moral analysis should not be placed

as a precondition for conferring it. For, those seeking a blessing should not be required to have prior moral perfection," it said.

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

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

# ND Football Chaplain Focused on Winning Souls, Not Games

BY SCOTT WARDEN

As a priest for the better part of 20 years, Father Nate Wills had preached in front of big crowds before. The Basilica of the Sacred Heart on the campus of his beloved Notre Dame, for example, seats somewhere in the neighborhood of 800 souls when the pews are packed. But this was different.

On the late morning of Saturday, September 23, Father Wills wasn't preaching from the pulpit at the basilica, nor in the dormitory chapel at Keough Hall, where he is a priest-in-residence. Instead, he was on the set of ESPN's "College GameDay," which was in South Bend ahead of Notre Dame's football game against Ohio State. More than 2.1 million people across the country had tuned in to hear ESPN's analysts break down the game; but what they got, for a short segment, was Father Wills,

dressed in blacks and wearing the white Roman collar, preaching about prayer medals and the life of St. Mark.

With green-and-gold-clad fans screaming in the background, ESPN reporter Jessica Sims introduced Father Wills, Chaplain of the Notre Dame football team, and asked him about the school's 100-year-old tradition of passing out saint medals to players before games. The 46-year-old Holy Cross priest told Sims (and the millions watching on television), "It's a great tradition here at Notre Dame, and it's just a reminder of the lives of holiness of the saints and that there are so many paths to Jesus."

Sims asked about the medal for the game against Ohio State, and as Father Wills spoke, viewers were shown a photo of four prayer medals with St. Mark's image on the front and the words "Pray for Us" on the back. Father Wills said: "Today's medal is a spe-



Provided by Notre Dame Athletics

**Holy Cross Father Nate Wills slaps hands with a fan before a recent Notre Dame football game in South Bend. Father Wills has served as team chaplain for the Notre Dame football team since 2018.**

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cial one. He was an evangelist, a friend of St. Peter, and somebody who used his gifts to build up the kingdom of God."

As he finished his minute-long homily, the crowd behind him roared.



While growing up in St. Paul, Minnesota, Father Wills said he began to discern a vocation to the priesthood during high school. Like countless Catholic young men of his generation, that seed was fully planted after making a pilgrimage to World Youth Day in Denver in 1993, when Pope St. John Paul II challenged the young people in attendance "to have the courage to commit yourselves to the truth" and to "open your minds and hearts to the beauty of all that God has made and to His special, personal love for each one of you." Hear the voice of Christ, the pope said. "Hear His voice and follow Him!"

At 16 years old, Father Wills accepted the challenge.

"It just made me think in a different way about how I was living out my faith and the personal ownership of my faith," Father Wills told Today's Catholic. It was in Denver where he realized that Christ "wants not only your heart, but something else: a response. So, I began asking, 'What does that mean?'"

Unlike many Midwestern Catholic boys, Father Wills didn't grow up dreaming about attending Notre Dame. But his older brother did. In the mid-1990s, Nicholas Wills fulfilled that dream by becoming a walk-on for the university's basketball team. It was only while visiting Nicholas on

campus that Father Wills fell in love with the school – and the religious order that ran it.

"I looked into some of the diocesan seminaries at the time. It just didn't hit right for me," he said. "I thought, 'Look, if this vocation is true, it'll be there after college,' and then I came to visit my brother at Notre Dame, and immediately I was like, 'Oh, this is the place I want to go.' It was perfect. It was exactly what I needed."

"It was guys who were asking tough questions and not taking simple answers about their faith," Father Wills said about the Congregation of Holy Cross. "Ultimately, the reason I came was because I saw people who were like me. And the reason I think I've stayed is because I love the mission and charism of Holy Cross, being educators in the faith. I love the idea of the cross being our hope. And honestly, the people within Holy Cross have encouraged and challenged me to be so much more than I ever could do on my own."

Father Wills was ordained a priest of the Congregation of Holy Cross in 2006. His first assignment was just off campus at St. Joseph Church in South Bend, where he had spent time as a seminarian and as a deacon. Now, along with his duties in Campus Ministry, Father Wills works for the university's Alliance for Catholic Education, where he teaches in the Remick Leadership Program, a 25-month graduate school program for aspiring Catholic school principals. He is also Director of the Higher-Powered Learning program, which empowers Catholic school teachers and leaders to use technology and educational best practices to meet the needs of

students of all levels of ability.

None of his academic experience, impressive as it is, qualified Father Wills for his most surprising and public role at Notre Dame.



Ahead of the 2018 football season, Father Mark Thesing, Chaplain of the football team, was taking on more responsibilities within the province of Holy Cross, and a new chaplain was needed. He and Father Peter McCormick, Director of Campus Ministry at Notre Dame, sketched out a short list of possible successors. They told Father Wills that his name was at the top of the list, and would he be interested?

"I said, 'Two things: First of all, I'm honored; that's really kind of you to ask,'" Father Wills said. "'And second,' I said, 'I need you to know: I don't know that much about football.' He said, 'Nate, we don't need you to call plays. We pay a lot of people a lot of money to know everything there is to know about football. We just need you to bring them to Jesus.' And I'm like, 'OK, I can do that. That's the priesthood.'"

Griffin Eifert, a Bishop Dwenger High School graduate and Notre Dame walk-on wide receiver, told Today's Catholic that Father Wills is "one of the most approachable guys on the staff. You'd think as a priest it would be kind of intimidating for other guys who aren't Catholic. But he goes up to guys, and guys go up to him who aren't Catholic. He's just really been there for us, and we can talk to him about anything."

While his flock might be bigger, stronger, and faster



Provided by Notre Dame Athletics

Father Nate Wills stands on the sideline at the Fiesta Bowl on January 1, 2022, in Glendale, Arizona. Father Wills told Today's Catholic that "every time I end up on the sidelines of a game where the crowd goes wild, and I see the guys run out of the tunnel, it's unbelievable."

than a typical congregation, the players, coaches, and staff members under Father Wills' spiritual care are all seeking the same answers to the same questions as everyone else who is engaged in their local Catholic communities.

"These are really smart kids who have come here to Notre Dame for a reason," Father Wills said. "They're great players, but they could have gone anywhere to play. Often, one of the reasons they're here in particular is they want to grow in their faith. ... Both coaches and players reach a level of

either notoriety or excellence or privilege where they realize, 'Wait, I've reached this level, and I'm still not finding happiness like I was promised. There's something else. There's something missing. What is it?' People here will be glad to say, 'It's Christ in your life; it's embracing living for Our Lord and living for others. It's giving your life away in service and in love that is the source of ultimate happiness. It's hearing the word of God and receiving Him in the Eucharist at Mass.' This part of the job has changed for Father Wills

through the years. Under Coach Brian Kelly, the team-only Mass ahead of home games was held on Friday nights at a variety of locations across campus. After he was hired as head coach ahead of the 2022 season, Marcus Freeman brought back the traditional game-day Mass at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart for players and staff. While he was enthusiastic about the change, Father Wills said there was a lingering question in his mind about whether he might need to alter his preaching style given that the Mass was being held just hours before kickoff.

"I had no idea what I was supposed to do in terms of preaching," he said. "I asked Coach Freeman when we moved Mass back to game day, 'Does this mean I have to get the guys fired up?' He said: 'Absolutely not. There are many hours before they actually hit the field. Keep doing what you're doing, which means preach the Gospel.'"

"I think my role is to just remind them of this fact: You are more than what you can do on Saturday," he said. "You are a beloved child of God before and after you've ever stepped on the field, and there's nothing that you can do in your life to change that identity. ... Because football will go away. Football will not always be there in your life. And there's so much more to you and to the world."



Father Wills knows that, as much as he's enjoyed his time as part of the Notre Dame football program, his time on the

sideline will eventually come to an end. He'll conclude his sixth season as team chaplain on Friday, December 29, when the 15th-ranked Irish play No. 21 Oregon State in the Sun Bowl in El Paso, Texas. Before, during, and after the game, through his prayer, his preaching, and his actions, he will continue to bring his flock to Christ.

"Every time I end up on the sidelines of a game where the crowd goes wild, and I see the guys run out of the tunnel, it's unbelievable," he said. "And the fact that the last thing we do before we leave the locker room is pray the Our Father together is amazing. Coach Freeman, after he gets the team fired up, he looks over at me and says, simply, 'Father Nate ...,' and then it's my time. That's ridiculous."

As he recounts all the "ridiculous" moments he's had as chaplain, he tells the story of his appearance on "College GameDay" back in September, with 2 million sets of eyes watching him preach.

"If you told me five years ago that at any point in my life I was going to be on ESPN GameDay, I'd say, 'Nah, you've got the wrong guy.' The fact that they let me basically even-

gelize for a minute straight, that was an amazing privilege. I was so nervous; I just hoped I didn't screw it up. But you know, it's amazing to see the impact that has had. For example, I got an email from a guy in Utah who happened to be watching the segment while he was getting ready for the funeral of his brother, who died suddenly, tragically. He thought it was pretty neat that there was a priest talking about his faith on ESPN. Then he heard me talk about the medal and St. Mark, which was his brother's name. In his email, he said, 'You know, this is an amazing moment where I think God is just telling me it's going to be OK.' He shared all this with me."

"That's a moment where I'm like, 'Who the heck am I?' I'm not worthy to do this," Father Wills said. "I am not worthy to stand in *persona Christi*. I am not worthy to be on this altar in front of all these people, many of whom are way holier than I am."

"I often think about the incredible privilege it is to do what I do, and I'm humbled to do it. I know it won't last forever, but I'm grateful to do it while I can."



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**Q: DO I HAVE TO GO TO MASS ON SUNDAY AND CHRISTMAS?**

**A: YES!** Catholics are obligated to attend Mass every Sunday and Holy Day (including Christmas). This year, even though the Sunday and Christmas obligations fall back-to-back, each has their own, distinct obligation. Catholics must attend a different Mass for each obligation - two Masses total.

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**OPTION 1**  
Any Mass after 4 p.m.  
on Saturday, Dec. 23

**OPTION 2**  
Any Mass on  
Sunday, Dec. 24\*

**CHRISTMAS OBLIGATION**

**OPTION 1**  
Any Mass after 4 p.m.  
on Sunday, Dec. 24\*

**OPTION 2**  
Any Mass on  
Monday, Dec. 25



DIocese of  
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\*Sunday evening Mass cannot fulfill both obligations at once, as there are two distinct obligations.

## Pope Says He'll Be Buried Outside the Vatican

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Pope Francis said he has decided to be buried in Rome's Basilica of St. Mary Major instead of in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican and that he has simplified the rites for a papal funeral. In an interview on Tuesday, December 12, with Mexican news outlet N+, the pope, in good humor, discussed plans for his own funeral as well as the trips he still hopes to complete during his pontificate. The pope said he had already discussed preparations for a papal funeral with his Master of Liturgical Ceremonies, Archbishop Diego Giovanni Ravelli. "We simplified them quite a bit," he said, and jokingly added that "I will premiere the new ritual." Breaking with recent tradition, Pope Francis said he has chosen to be buried at the Basilica of St. Mary Major because of his "very strong connection" with the church. "The place is already prepared," he said. Asked about his future travels, the pope said that a trip to Belgium is "certain" and that two other trips, to Polynesia and Argentina, are pending.

## Cardinal Becciu, Others Sentenced to Prison at Vatican Trial

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – The Vatican City State criminal court sentenced Cardinal Angelo Becciu to five years and six months in prison on two counts of embezzlement and one of aggravated fraud but found him not guilty of abuse of office or witness tampering. The 75-year-old cardinal's attorney told reporters his client would appeal. The three-judge panel of the Vatican court handed down the verdicts on Saturday, December 16. In addition to Cardinal Becciu, five other people were sentenced to jail time ranging from three years to seven years and were ordered to pay the Vatican millions of dollars in damages. Pending appeal, none of the six people given jail terms were taken into custody. The trial revolved around the Vatican's investment in a property in London's chic Chelsea district. But the way the deal was structured and restructured ended up costing the Vatican as much as \$200 million.

## Ohio Bishops Speak of Possible Diocesan Merger

COLUMBUS, Ohio (OSV News) – Two Ohio bishops told OSV News that a potential merger between their dioceses is part of their shared mis-

# NEWS BRIEFS

## The Wonder of the Nativity Scene



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Francis greets people taking part in a living Nativity scene in Rome after an audience on Saturday, December 16, in Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican. Pope Francis told those gathered that "the purpose of the living Nativity scene is to reawaken wonder in the heart, before the mystery of God who became a child."

sion "to advance the Gospel (and) to make disciples of all nations." In a joint letter issued on Monday, December 11, Bishop Earl K. Fernandes of the Diocese of Columbus and Bishop Paul J. Bradley, Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Steubenville, said they "have begun very preliminary discussions regarding the potential merger of the dioceses." The initiative, undertaken at the request of the Apostolic Nunciature, is still in its early stages, with the final decision to be made by Pope Francis after thorough consideration by the U.S. bishops and the Vatican's Dicastery for Bishops. A possible reshaping of the diocesan territories requires both temporal efforts and spiritual discernment, Bishop Bradley and Bishop Fernandes told OSV News. Population and priestly vocational decline have prompted the inquiry, with a goal of

meeting the current and future pastoral needs of the faithful in both diocesan territories.

## Having Child Out of Wedlock Does Not Bar Access to Sacraments

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Women who have conceived a child out of wedlock and have the courage to choose life for their baby "should be encouraged to have access to the healing and consoling power of the sacraments," said the officials with the Prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández was responding to a question from a bishop expressing concern for single mothers who abstain from the sacraments fearing the rigidity of their pastors and judgment from Catholics in their parishes. "It is

noted that in some countries, both priests and some laypeople prevent mothers who have had a child outside of marriage from accessing the sacraments and even baptizing their children," said the cardinal's reply, which was approved by Pope Francis on Wednesday, December 13, and was posted on the dicastery's website the next day.

## Pope Advances Sainthood Causes

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Pope Francis advanced several sainthood causes on Thursday, December 14, including the cause of St. Gianna Beretta Molla's brother, Capuchin Father Alberto Beretta, who died three years before St. John Paul II canonized his sister. Father Beretta was a missionary in Brazil for 20 years until partial paralysis from a stroke led the Capuchins

to bring him back to Italy. During a meeting with Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, Prefect of the Dicastery for Saints' Causes, the pope signed decrees recognizing the miracles needed for two beatifications: Mexican Missionary of the Holy Spirit Father Moisés Lira Serafin, who lived from 1893-1950 and founded the Missionaries of Charity of Mary Immaculate, and Spanish Discalced Carmelite Sister Ana de Lobera Torres, who was born in Spain in 1545 and was a close collaborator of St. Teresa of Avila.

## Court Rejects Illinois Law Restricting Speech Around Pro-Life Centers

ROCKFORD, Illinois (OSV News) – A federal court has struck down an Illinois law that restricted what the state's 100 pregnancy resource centers, but not abortion clinics, could tell patients. Judge Iain D. Johnston of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, Western Division, issued a permanent injunction against the Deceptive Practices of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers Act (SB 1909) in response to a lawsuit filed by the Chicago-based Thomas More Society, a public-interest law firm. Under the December 11 injunction, Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul agreed not to enforce the law, which declared both advertising and counseling by the centers, including sidewalk counseling, to be a "deceptive business practice." Violation would have imposed fines of up to \$50,000.

## Supreme Court to Review Challenge to Abortion Pill

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) – The U.S. Supreme Court said on Wednesday, December 13, that it would take up a case concerning the abortion pill – the first major case involving abortion on its docket since the high court overturned its previous abortion precedent in 2022's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision. The timing of the case could result in justices issuing their decision next summer amid the 2024 presidential campaign. A coalition of pro-life opponents of mifepristone, which is the first of two drugs used in a medication or chemical abortion, previously filed suit in an effort to revoke the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval of the drug, arguing the government violated its own safety standards when it first approved the drug in 2000. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's abortion statistics from 2021 showed 53 percent of abortions were carried out via medication.

# AROUND THE DIOCESE

## St. Adalbert Offers Honor to Our Lady of Guadalupe



Photos provided by St. Adalbert Parish

To mark the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Adalbert Parish in South Bend hosted a two-day celebration in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which concluded with a Mass celebrated by Bishop Rhoades on Our Lady's feast day, Tuesday, December 12. The parish community at St. Adalbert began the celebration with a presentation of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe, followed by a Rosary in her honor, and Midnight Mass marking the vigil of her feast day. On December 12, the parish celebrated with a dance, dinner, and Mass with Bishop Rhoades, which was attended by an estimated crowd of 1,000 people.



## Our Lady of Guadalupe Celebrated with Rosary and Song at St. Patrick



Provided by Rosie Sitko

The faithful gathered at St. Patrick Church in downtown Fort Wayne during the early hours of Tuesday to celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe with a Rosary and songs beginning at 4:30 a.m. Even at an hour when most would be asleep, many pilgrims attended with flowers in hand to offer the Blessed Mother on this special day. Later in the evening a Mass was celebrated in honor of Our Lady.

## Holy Cross School Makes Our Lady of Guadalupe Feast Day Memorable with Pageant and Procession



Provided by David Maguel

As Father Jim Fenstermaker looks on from the ambo, students at Holy Cross School in South Bend perform a pageant to celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Tuesday, December 12.

A Visit to Victory Noll Always a Pleasure



Photos by Nicole Hahn



On Friday, December 15, Bishop Rhoades traveled to Victory Noll in Huntington to talk to the Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters and others about his time taking part in the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October. Inside the chapel at Saint Anne Communities at Victory Noll, Bishop Rhoades told the sisters and other residents of the community about how he was one of only five United States bishops to be elected as a delegate of the synod. He told them about the theme of the synod on synodality being “Journeying Together” and that the three pillars are “Communion, Participation, and Mission.” Following his talk and a short Q&A, Bishop Rhoades celebrated Mass with those in attendance. The sisters then invited him to share a meal with them, which he graciously accepted.

# 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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Photo credit: Natalie Hoefer // Criterion

# Catholic Charities Makes Season Bright for Families in Need

BY LISA KOCHANOWSKI

Catholics worldwide await the birth of the baby Jesus, Savior of the world, during this Advent season. They are also preparing to celebrate the holidays with their families, including a delicious Christmas feast and a tree filled with presents underneath.

Mary and Joseph found themselves in dire need of shelter on the night Jesus was born. The generosity and empathy of an innkeeper allowed them lodging in a stable, a place to keep them warm and safe.

Families struggling because of inflation, sickness, and unemployment find themselves experiencing dire times this holiday season, and like the generous innkeeper, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend has helped families provide a memorable Christmas for their loved ones.

"When meeting with sponsored families this year, we heard many times that, without this program, Christmas wouldn't be financially feasible," said Hannah Finley, Organizer of the Catholic Charities Christmas Program. "This program is more than just giving presents; it is about delivering hope to those who are most in need during this holy season. We couldn't do it without the help of our donors who continue to go above and beyond with their generosity."

Each year, Catholic Charities West Region holds a Christmas program to provide gifts for children. This year, the program had an upgrade that removed many previous barriers for families to qualify and included food for the holiday table.

Previously, no one older than 14 received a gift, and all recipients were required to participate in case management. This year, the age requirement was moved to 18, case management was not required, and family packages included meals.

"It's been a really great turnout," Finley said of the event on Saturday, December 17. "From my perspective, people showed so much more gratitude to have those barriers to the program eliminated."

To meet the program's eligibility requirements, families needed to fall below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, children must be residing in the homes at all times and must be living in the West Region (St. Joseph, Elkhart, Kosciusko, or Marshall counties), and children must be younger than 18.

The program was funded through generous sponsorships, organizations, and donors throughout the community. Last year, 52 children were served, and this year, 157 children received presents. Families

were able to pick up packages and food through a drive-thru system in the parking lot of the West Region office on Miami Street in South Bend. Transportation issues were not a deterrent to participate, and a couple of lucky families were granted delivery service by members of the Catholic Charities staff.

This annual event allows the community to come together to help their neighbors in need, and gives families experiencing hard times the chance to find joy during a difficult time.

In Fort Wayne, on Monday, December 11, staff members and volunteers began the weeklong process of packing and delivering a record amount of Christmas gifts to struggling families, as 41 donors will begin dropping off presents for more an estimated 220 children, while the office in Auburn is expected to serve nearly 148 children.

"I hope they found awareness that the need in our community is very large and they enjoyed giving back to the community," Finley said about her hope for donors. For recipients, "I hope they get to smile and enjoy the holidays and that they can pay it forward in the future."



Photos by Lisa Kochanowski

Pictured from left to right are Patty Finley, Catholic Charities volunteer, Lorenzo Mercado, Christmas Program recipient, Juan Munguia, volunteer and neighbor, and Hannah Finley, Organizer of the Catholic Charities Christmas Program. The group helped to load the Mercado family car at the recent drive-thru Christmas program pick-up held at the Catholic Charities West Region office in South Bend on Saturday, December 16.



Lorenzo Mercado, left, and Camilo Velasquez, Donor Relations Manager for Catholic Charities, load items in Mercado's car at the recent drive-thru Christmas program pick-up held at the Catholic Charities West Region office in South Bend.



Joshua Schipper

Vickie Goenges packs items for Christmas families in the Fort Wayne and surrounding areas on Monday, December 11.

# HOLIDAY TRADITIONS: READERS SHARE

COMPILED BY TODAY'S CATHOLIC

During Advent in 2021, Pope Francis spoke of the importance of the symbols and traditions of the Christmas season and the role they play in bringing us closer to the Christ Child in the manger on that first Christmas. These symbols – especially Nativity scenes and decorated Christmas trees, he said – “bring us back to the certainty that fills our hearts with peace, to the joy of the Incarnation, to God who becomes familiar: He lives with us, He gives a rhythm of hope to our days. The tree and the Nativity scene introduce us to the typical Christmas atmosphere that is part of the heritage of our communities: an atmosphere of tenderness, sharing, and family intimacy. ... Let us allow ourselves to be enveloped by the closeness of God, this closeness that is compassionate, that is tender; enveloped by the Christmas atmosphere that art, music, songs, and traditions bring to our hearts.”

With this spirit in mind, Today's Catholic asked readers to share their fondest Christmas memories. The responses, found below, will fill you with nostalgia and warm your hearts.

From everyone at Today's Catholic, we wish you a merry Christmas, and we hope sharing memories from readers might become one of our own Christmas traditions.

## A Shared Christmas

I appreciate getting your publication. I was born in rural northeast North Dakota (close to Manitoba) back in 1933. We lived a quarter of a mile from a village of 60 people. When I was a senior in high school, every boy except one was on our basketball team. (We only had 11 boys in high school.) I've always been a Catholic, although my mother was a good Lutheran all her life. Even though my dad was Catholic and my mother was Lutheran, I never heard them disagreeing. I can remember one Christmas Eve when my dad and I went to our village Lutheran Church at 8 p.m. with Mom, and at midnight, she came with Dad and me for Midnight Mass.

Six years ago, I thought this up:

If Dad gives us a message ... take heed.

A message of things to come.

A message that one be brave and follow the path He will pave.

– Robert Flanagan



## Christmas Blessings

My special memories of our Christmas celebrations began in the late 1940s and continue to the present. We put up our Christmas tree the day after Thanksgiving. I have two Nativity sets. One from my

dad and mom, and one from me. We opened presents on Christmas Eve. For supper, we had homemade oyster soup. We had dozens of homemade cookies, oranges, grapes, and nuts to crack the old-fashioned way. I have two sisters and one brother.

I carried this tradition into my marriage of 52 years. Mass on Christmas Day was very special to us. My children, Angela and Douglas, always looked forward to seeing the large Nativity scene and all the beautiful flowers. Jim and I now have five grandchildren – Harmony, Ben, Ivy, C.J., and Tanner. Also, one great-great grandson, Swayer. My husband Jim and I have been blessed.

– Caroline Patrick

## Together for the Holidays

This picture might tell what Christmas meant to me. My husband was 86 years old when he died on January 6, 2016. As you can see, my family is always together for holidays. I have 9 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren. I have a grandson who died at 29 and a daughter at 53 from cancer.

I'm now 91 and the only living from our 11 children. I belong to Our Lady of Good Hope, and Father Mark Gutner is the Pastor. For my age, I'm in very good health. I always went to daily Mass, but now I don't drive. On Sundays, my daughter takes me to church. On Thanksgiving Day, we were all here to celebrate and thank God for the wonderful lives we have. God bless you.

– Patricia Kohaut



## A Christmas Lineup

One of our favorite traditions we have is to line the grandchildren up oldest to youngest and take a photograph! Also, they sing a Christmas carol before opening presents.

– Tom and Judy Burmeister



## My Nativity Set

Born in 1937, I entered first grade at Most Holy Name of Jesus Elementary School in Pittsburgh in September of 1943. As Christmas time appeared in the school, I quickly learned what a Nativity set included: Jesus, Mary, Joseph, some shepherds, sheep, perhaps a cow and donkey, and three kings. At that time, the tradition of our family was to put up our Christmas tree the day before Christmas, so I discovered on Christmas Eve that our Nativity set

consisted of Jesus, Mary, and a cow – all of which came with my dad from his family. They were mismatched pieces and family treasures, and they held a special place under the tree.

As World War II interrupted trade in such items, there were no pieces to buy that would match anything we had. As a blue-collar family, we had no money to buy the expensive,

more complete sets available. And so, these treasures remained our Nativity set until I was 13 years old. That Christmas season, my aunt, who lived with my grandmother two blocks away, brought home a whole Nativity set that she had bought in downtown Pittsburgh. It had a cardboard stable with Jesus, Mary, Joseph, a donkey, and a cow. The shepherd, some sheep, and three kings were pasted on an extension that folded neatly up and into the stable. The statues were stationed in such a way that the external ones matched the empty spaces of the internal ones. It looked like a cardboard box when folded. I was so in awe of my aunt's Nativity set that I had her buy one for me with the money I had received as a birthday gift that November. The new Nativity set was placed under the tree, but the old, humble treasures still had a place there, as well.

In 1967, I moved to Fort Wayne to teach at IPFW, but the Nativity sets stayed in Pittsburgh with my parents where I spent Christmas until they moved here in 1982. Somehow, the mismatched treasures never made the move. The house had been sold as if my mother were coming to Fort Wayne for a holiday, and she perhaps thought she needn't bring both sets with her and instead chose the one that I, her son, had paid for rather than the one that had come from the Friedel family. My completely furnished three-bedroom house meant that there simply wasn't room for everything, and only a few special items could come with my parents.

But this tale of my bond with the greatest symbol of Christmas now takes a turn. For the next 24 years – nearly a quarter century – that Nativity set was under my tree until 2006, when I spent Christmas Eve in Pittsburgh at my former neighbors' house. As an activity, we built log cabins out of a small milk carton, pretzels, and oyster crackers. When Christmas was packed away in January of 2007, the Nativity set was packed with the log cabin, as it was a treasure as well. Then, in 2008 and 2009, I spent Christmas in my Florida home and did not have the Nativity set with me. Preparing for Christmas in 2010, the Nativity set was opened and ... wow! Two years had passed since it had been out of the box, and it was covered in mold. It was absolutely devastating! The moldy cardboard stable was unusable, and I immediately discarded it after dislodging the statues from the cardboard. After 60 years of living under my Christmas tree, the statues had to stay. When I cleaned off the mold, the paint, too, came off. Not being an artist, I looked at the color they had left and took the easy and inexpensive solution: I bought a set of markers and colored the statues as closely as I could to what they had been.

Replacing the stable with one of an appropriate size took a couple of years. Now, in 2023, it sits proudly under my tree, 80 years after I discovered what a Nativity Set should contain. Jesus, never



# FOND MEMORIES OF CHRISTMAS PAST

having been painted, continues to look as good as He did those many years ago – indeed, just as do His teachings and Spirit.

My hope is that He is honored by the care He has received through the years.

– Art Friedel

## Christmas Choir

I still enjoy the time I sang in the Christmas Eve children's choir at Most Precious Blood as an eighth grader. This would have been in 1978.

– Richard Fletcher

## The Magic of Midnight Mass

My favorite Christmas memory is going to Midnight Mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception with my family, and then, when I was a freshman in high school, joining the Cathedral choir and singing at Midnight Mass. It was always so beautiful.

– Linda Manske Psota

## 'Happy Birthday' to Jesus

We have had a birthday cake for Baby Jesus for decades. Each candle has a tag with the handwritten names of the grandchildren. We sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus, and each grandchild extinguishes his or her candle. The youngest grandchild places Baby Jesus into His manger next to a porcelain statue of our Blessed Mother as we sing. This tradition began, as far as I know, by Agnes Van Gessel, my grandmother.

– Sarah Walter

## Sneaky Santa

My favorite memory is from when I was a child. After we ate dinner at my grandparents' house, my grandfather would take us out hunting for Santa, but we could never catch him. By the time we made it back to their house, we would have just missed Santa, who had delivered all our Christmas gifts!

– Joyce Harber Urban

## A Lofty Memory

Singing traditional Christmas carols in the choir loft since youth. I miss it.

– Miranda Dale

## The Crosier House

One of my favorite childhood memories is going to Midnight Mass at the Crosier House. It was just beautiful! They always had a huge tree by the stairs you went up to go to church. Afterwards, Brother Gene would come to our house, and we would have lots of good food! Of course, I'm sure I fell asleep very soon after we got home.

– Virginia Simpson

## My Favorite Mass

Going to Midnight Mass. It has and always will be my favorite Mass of the year. If I'm unable to attend, there always seems to be something missing from the Christmas season. Then, as a child, when I got older, we would come home and open gifts.

– Jenni Derrow-Stefanko

## Best Day of the Year

There were eight of us under 10 years old. The Christmas tree was put on top of the television to stay out of reach of little hands. On Christmas morning, it seemed like the entire living room was filled with toys. We went to Mass and couldn't wait to get home to play with everything. Aunts and uncles from out of town stopped over to visit. It was the best day of the year.

– Mary Keefer

## Polish Traditions

Throughout my childhood growing up in a Polish American home, Christmas Eve memories stand out. The youngest child, my sister, would look out on cold December skies to spot the first star and alert the family when spotted. That was our cue to sit at the table with an extra place set in case a stranger would come – maybe Christ himself. The table was laden with a dozen meatless foods – a dozen to symbolize the Apostles.

The oldest man, my father, would say a prayer and share a Christmas wafer, oplatek, with each of us, with a wish for "health, wealth, happiness, and a crown of gold in heaven." We each in turn would share the wafer and our good wishes with everyone at the table. It was hard not to see tears in my father's eyes as he looked at the abundance before us.

As I grew older, I began to understand my father's emotion. He was born in America but grew up in a small village in Poland in the 1920s and 1930s. His parents' small family farm barely produced enough to survive; often, the only food was potatoes. He told us often there would barely be enough for his parents, while the children, 10 or more as years went by, went to bed hungry. The parents had to eat so they could work the farm; that was understandable, but that didn't relieve the hunger pangs.

After eating, we would gather to sing *kolendy*, Polish Christmas carols, and some American carols, as well. By 9 p.m., we were getting ready for Midnight Mass. By 10 p.m., the church was full as the choir sang one carol after another. Then the joyous Mass!

The evening always carries a special significance for the blessings Our Lord brought to our lives.

– Patricia Lehman

## The Birth of Christ

When my kids were small, I baked a cake and decorated it with sprinkles. We lit a candle on top and sang "Happy Birthday" to Jesus. I loved watching their little faces light up. It also brought me to tears when I saw my children kneeling before the Nativity in prayer on their own.

– Terri Bonbrake

## Gathered Together

One of my favorite Christmas traditions began when I was a small child. Our family would get to open one gift from under the tree. Our parents would generally select the gift to be opened because it contained a new dress, homemade matching scarf, mittens, and hat, or a new shirt or tie for my brothers that could be worn to Midnight Mass at St. Michael the Archangel in Waterloo. Once married, we combined the tradition of gathering on Christmas Eve at my husband's mom and dad's house who lived just a few blocks from Queen of Angels, where his family attended. Therefore, it was easy to carry the tradition my family had begun all those years ago by gathering to celebrate Midnight Mass together. When our children were very small, we used to have to arrive at least an hour early so that we could get a seat and not have to stand through the entire Mass. It was so beautiful being able to listen to the carols that were sung and played by the very talented musicians during the time of waiting. Our children are all grown and live thousands of miles away, but we still enjoy the tradition of going to Midnight Mass at Queen of Angels and listening to the beautiful music that is played ahead of time.

– Anita Senesac

## Christmas Generosity

My favorite Christmas memory was at Midnight Mass when the Holy Spirit moved me to share the

generosity that my patrons on my mail route had afforded that year. After the Mass had ended, I asked Father Vankampen if he knew of anyone who was in need from the parish. A name and address were given, and as I was leaving church, the Holy Spirit prompted me to go there immediately.

When I arrived, I was surprised there were lights on at that hour. I knocked, and a young woman answered the door. I handed her the envelope, and she burst into tears. She said, "Just an hour ago, I was praying to God, 'Please help Christmas happen.'"

While I was walking back to my vehicle, I realized the moment the Holy Spirit spoke to me at Midnight Mass was in fact the moment the young woman was petitioning God.

This was more than 25 years ago when the Holy Spirit became very real to me, and each time I remember it, I am filled with the love of God.

– Patrick Kelker

## 'Poofel Dust'

I remember the excitement of my brothers and sisters more than 60 years ago when the lights on the family Christmas tree began to shine bright. That year was special, as the lights on the tree were blinking off and on, off and on. We had never seen this before! In our great excitement, our dad told us it was a special treat from Santa, as he sprinkles "poofel dust" over them, which causes them to turn off and on constantly. To this day, all my family remembers the wonder of "poofel dust."

– Father Dave Voors

## A Tasty Treat

Eating sour cherries at my Grandma and Grandpa Kimes' house.

– Lisa Emrick

## Honoring Loved Ones

My father passed away on December 18, 2003, at the age of 83. Since then, his adult children with family, along with our mom, have gotten together as a family on a Saturday closest to that day to celebrate his life. Each year, first we gather at St. Adalbert Church in South Bend for a Mass said in his honor. Afterward, we would continue the celebration by having dinner at one of our homes. This tradition continues to this day, but now it celebrates the lives of both parents, as well as a younger brother who departed from this earth a couple of months ago. In this busy world, it is so important that we have traditions that allow us to reflect, celebrate, and enjoy family.

– Paul Kowalski

## St. Elizabeth Carolers

A few years ago, our St. Elizabeth Ann Seton family began a tradition of Christmas caroling in the nearby neighborhoods during the Third and Fourth Weeks of Advent and then again on Epiphany. After caroling, we go back to our parish hall to warm up with hot cocoa, cookies, and fellowship.

– Jennifer Engquist



# 'He Is Going to be an Amazing Bishop'

## St. Mary Community Reacts to News of Father Jayasuriya's Appointment

BY KRISTA J. STOCKMAN

Parishioners at St. Mary Mother of God Catholic Church always knew Father Wimal Jayasuriya's time as pastor would be limited; they just didn't realize his next appointment would come so soon – or from Pope Francis himself in the form of Bishop of the Diocese of Chilaw, Sri Lanka.

"I knew he wouldn't be here as long as our previous pastors. I believe we only had nine in our first 172 years," Rosemary Mausser said. "When I suggested to him in 2020 that he would be here a long time, he said, 'No, my bishop needs me.' I just didn't know *he* would be the bishop."

On Wednesday, December 6, Vatican officials announced that Pope Francis had appointed Father Jayasuriya as

Bishop of Chilaw, Sri Lanka.

The initial surprise of the announcement quickly gave way to acceptance, contentment, and humble pride, knowing Bishop-elect Jayasuriya has all the qualities necessary to guide his home diocese.

"I was shocked and first felt sadness for the loss to our parish, but then I felt joy that this unassuming man of God is being named bishop in his home country," St. Mary Parish Council President Kathleen Smith said. "He is going to be an amazing bishop. The Diocese of Chilaw is blessed to be getting this humble shepherd."

Bishop-elect Jayasuriya's quiet leadership quickly endeared him to the parishioners of St. Mary when he was appointed to the parish at the height of the pandemic.

"He was very sensitive



Dan Stockman

**Father Wimal Jayasuriya greets parishioners after Mass on Sunday, December 10, at St. Mary Mother of God Parish in Fort Wayne.**

to not step on Father Phil (Widmann)'s toes during the transition but very interested in how we did things," Mausser said, referring to the previous pastor of St. Mary, who led the parish for 15 years.

As he got to know the members of his parish, Bishop-elect Jayasuriya would often encourage members to

get more involved in the many ministries of St. Mary.

"I think he's made a real effort to bring people together and bringing people forward to use their talents," said Jane Wick, who has been a member of the parish for 50 years. "He's very warm and approachable. I'll miss him."

The ability to gently lead

*May God Be With Father Wimal as He is Ordained Bishop in Chilaw, Sri Lanka.*

*All the staff and faithful of St. Therese Parish in Fort Wayne*

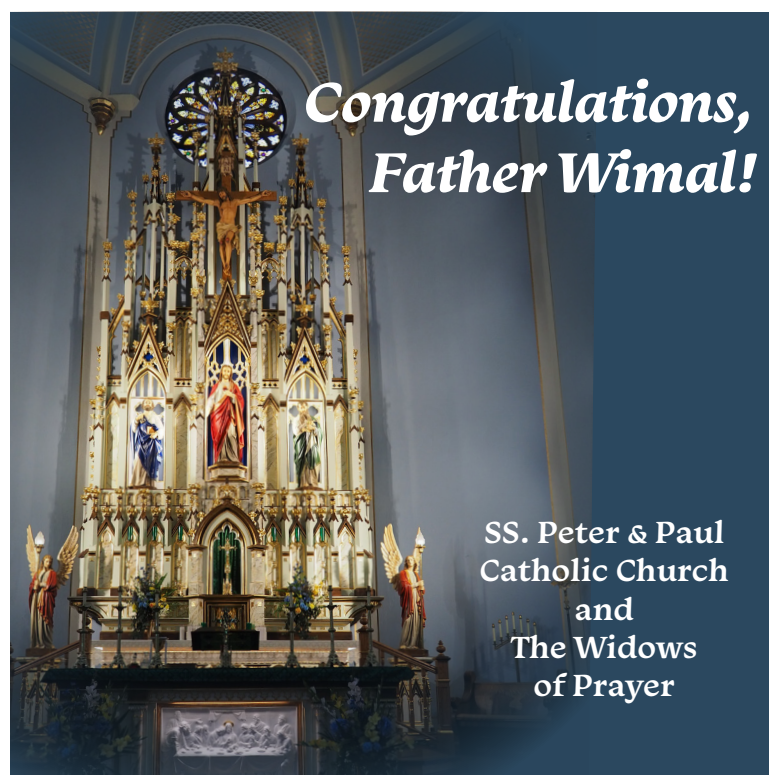


Father Wimal,  
Thank you for your generosity  
in service to the souls of  
St. Vincent de Paul Parish.

*Blessings*  
on your new appointment.



SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL  
CATHOLIC PARISH • FORT WAYNE



**Congratulations,  
Father Wimal!**

SS. Peter & Paul  
Catholic Church  
and  
The Widows  
of Prayer

people to where they are most needed and where their talents fit will be a benefit as he takes on a diocese, said parishioner Celeste Streicher.

"He's not afraid to reach out," she said as she stood in a long line of well-wishers patiently waiting to congratulate Bishop-elect Jayasuriya after Mass on Sunday, December 10.

The soft-spoken Bishop-elect was a frequent guest at parishioners' homes, who would invite him to dinner and family events. Val Vorndran, the weekend Soup Kitchen Volunteer Coordinator, welcomed him to her family's Easter dinner in April.

"He shared our traditional meal amongst the chaos of little ones from 1 to 16," she said. "He then joined us outside and taught us a yard game that is played in his home country. He watched and helped the kids with their egg hunt."

Mausser and Vorndran said Bishop-elect Jayasuriya has been especially dedicated to sick or dying members of the parish. In 2023, the parish lost two long-time members who were instrumental in many of St. Mary's ministries – Dottie Carpenter, Founder and Director of Ave Maria House, and Barb Chmiel, who was known as the "Parish Grandma" to many.

"He worked hard getting to know his parishioners and their families," Vorndran said. "He was extremely caring and accommodating to Dottie Carpenter and her family at the time of her death. He truly cared about her. He would tell me that he knew who truly loved to serve the poor."

As Bishop-elect Jayasuriya shared his news during Mass on December 10, he told those in attendance about his home



CONGRATULATIONS  
ON YOUR  
APPOINTMENT,  
FATHER WIMAL

ST. JOHN BOSCO  
CHURCH, CHURUBUSCO



Photos by Dan Stockman

Father Wimal Jayasuriya celebrates Mass for the feast of the Immaculate Conception on Friday, December 8, at St. Mary Mother of God parish.

diocese, something he didn't often talk about at St. Mary.

"When I came here, my priority was St. Mary's," he said. "Wherever we go, we have to give our total life for the bishop and for the people there."

The Diocese of Chilaw serves about 300,000 Catholics in an area where the total population is about 900,000, with the predominant religion in Sri Lanka being Buddhism. Bishop-elect Jayasuriya will shepherd 243 churches throughout his diocese.

"I have 243 St. Mary's back in my diocese," he said. After witnessing the dedication to serving the poor, Bishop-elect

Jayasuriya is confident in St. Mary's future.

"St. Mary is stable and will continue to be so," he said. The parishioners share that faith, while acknowledging the transition from one pastor to another is difficult.

"I think whoever comes to replace Father Wimal will be surprised and impressed at how well we, the parishioners and staff, operate and run our missions," Vorndran said. "We are a very unique parish. Many have the spirit to serve. No matter what the need, we always seem to find it. We roll up our sleeves and put in the work."



Father Wimal Jayasuriya greets Azalea (being held) and Francesca Silkworth after Mass on Sunday, December 10, at St. Mary Mother of God parish in Fort Wayne.



Monsignor Bill Schooler and Saint Pius X parish wish to congratulate

**Father Wimal Jayasuriya** on his appointment as the Bishop of Chilaw, Sri Lanka



SAINT PIUS X CATHOLIC CHURCH  
52553 Fir Road, Granger, IN 46530  
574-272-8462

St. Gaspar Parish, Rome City is happy to

**Congratulate**

Father Wimal Jayasuriya.



St. Gaspar wishes you many Happy Blessings as you take on the role of Bishop in Sri Lanka.



Congratulations,

Bishop-elect

Father Wimal Jayasuriya

May God bless you as you embark on your new journey.



St. Paul Chapel



St. Joseph Catholic Church



St. Anthony Catholic Church



File photo

## It's Christmas Already!?

BY FATHER BRIAN ISENBARGER

If it seems like this is the shortest Advent ever, it's not just you. It really is. In fact, the fourth and final week of Advent this year is smashed into exactly one day – December 24. Because Christmas falls on a Monday this year, the liturgical calendar has given us the shortest possible Advent of just 22 days. And, yes, you need to go to Mass twice to fulfill both your Sunday obligation and your Christmas obligation. There are no liturgical buy-one, get-one-free deals on grace!

Thinking back to childhood, it seemed like Christmas would never come. The anticipation of waking up on Christmas morning to find a treasure trove of presents under the tree seemed to be a far off and remote idea. And, yet, year by year, I have found the inverse to be more and more true. It now seems that Christmas comes sooner and sooner every year. There was once a wise older gentleman who told me that a week after Labor Day is Halloween. The week after that is Thanksgiving, and the next week is Christmas. Nine months later would then be summer. I'm not sure his math adds up in terms of months and days, but the sentiment certainly rings true!

And maybe on a spiritual level, that is how this Advent feels. If you blinked, it might feel like Thanksgiving was just yesterday. Even if your presents didn't make it on time, and even if you didn't finish writing all your

Christmas cards or making all your Christmas cookies, I think there is still some benefit to our unusual liturgical calendar this year. It is a stark reminder that our entire lives are truly an Advent. It reminds us that Christ will come to meet all of us at the end of our days, whether we are ready or not.

The fact is, all of us will go to meet the Lord with checklists unfinished and goodbyes left unsaid. Even for those who are most prepared, there could always be more that could have been done. In contrast, the example of the Blessed Mother in the Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Advent gives us an insight for how to best prepare for the Lord.

In the scene of the Annunciation, when Gabriel proclaims to Our Lady that she is to become the mother of God, the Church Fathers highlight that before Mary conceived the Christ Child in her womb, she had conceived Him in her heart. In other words, the Eternal Word took on Mary's heart before He took on Mary's flesh. When she uttered her fiat by saying, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, may it be done unto me according to your word," she was revealing what had already taken place in her Immaculate Heart – namely, that she had already been completely consumed by the Eternal Word of God in her mind and in her will.

That same Eternal Word that took on flesh in Mary's womb, and the same Holy Spirit that overshadowed her are not simply far-off and remote ideas like Christmas morning

was when I was a child. Instead, they are ever-present manifestations that our God is truly Emmanuel – God with us! The same God who came in the flesh on that first Christmas morning in Bethlehem is the same God who is present in the Eucharist when we go to our own local parish for Mass or adoration. Likewise, the same Word which was conceived in the heart and mind of Our

Lady is the same Word who is present to us when we open the Scriptures and hear them proclaimed.

So, there's no need to worry about making sure everything is "done" before we can enjoy our celebration of Christmas. After all, Christmas is the center of our lives. It's not simply a day or a week or a season. It's a Person. Jesus Christ is Emmanuel – God with

us. He is the same God present in a manger who is also present to us now, and who we will also meet in eternity. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (cf. Heb 13:8). For that, we can all have a merry Christmas!

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

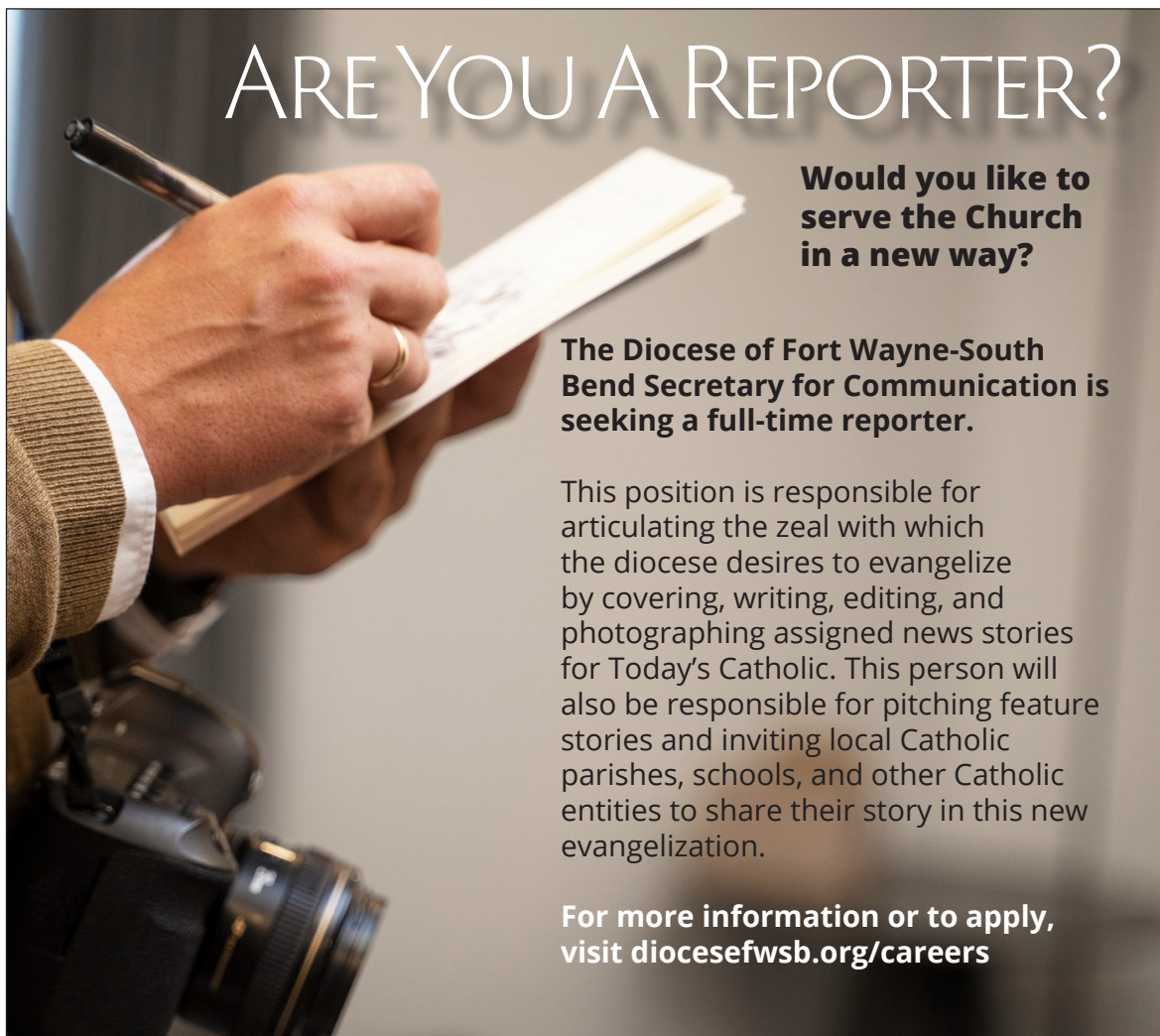
## ARE YOU A REPORTER?

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# Christmas Mass an Opportunity for Reconnection with Faith

BY LISA KOCHANOWSKI

For priests, holiday Masses are like the Super Bowl for football teams or the Oscars for entertainers – a time when people come out in droves to celebrate. It's a time when non-regular spectators join the celebration of moments they've missed during the year.

In the Church, parishioners world-wide use Christmas Mass as a chance to reconnect with their faith journey, enjoying the beautifully decorated altars and festive music exalting from the rafters. Few things leave a stronger impression on children than the chance to look at the manger scene filled with animals, shepherds, Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus.

Father Osman Ramos of St. Joseph Catholic Church in LaGrange said he sees a significant increase in attendance, especially at the 5 p.m. Mass on Christmas Eve. "We usually have a lot of young people that consider themselves Catholics but don't practice their faith regularly," Father Ramos said. "We have 30 percent more people, maybe."

At St. Charles Borromeo in Fort Wayne, Father Tom Shoemaker sees a similar increase at Christmas Masses. "While it is very difficult to count heads, it is easy to count the number of hosts that are put out for consecration at Masses," he said. "Last Christmas at St. Charles, we served holy Communion to 30 percent more people than a typical Sunday."

According to Father Shoemaker, "through the bulletin, through pulpit announcements, and through various ministries, we try to make a big push for parishioners to invite friends and neighbors to Christmas Mass. I point out that this is the perfect chance to evangelize. Christmas is a time when people are at least giving some thought to the faith. For someone who doesn't regularly attend a church, a family making a simple invitation, 'Would you

*"For the person who has not been regularly practicing the faith, it is God who touches a heart and calls. However, we want to do anything we can to assist. Our great dream is that Christmas Masses for all of us will be a life-changing encounter with the Lord."*

like to join us for a Christmas Mass?" could lead to an important encounter with God."

Having unfamiliar faces in the crowd allows priests and parish communities an opportunity to connect with those who might have left the Church or Catholics from out of town. This unique circumstance can also require a slight change of approach to the homily.

"One of my favorite methods to connect with those people is to include a story of my personal experience with the Lord," Father Ramos said. "I try to put myself in their shoes. I love sharing how I found the sense to my life in Jesus and how plenty happy I am. I want the same for them."

Monsignor Bill Schooler of St. Pius X Parish in Granger said he makes sure the Christmas Mass homilies aren't too lengthy, "and we do our best to preach about the mystery of the Incarnation in ways that people can easily connect with," he added.

"I think about a few things. One is to make sure there is a message that is attractive and beautiful that can catch their attention," said Father Ryan Pietrocarlo, Pastor of St. Adalbert and St. Casimir parishes in South Bend. "Luckily, Christmas and Easter, two times when more people come to Mass, offer beautiful messages of the Incarnation and the Resurrection that can reach the human heart and remind us how much God loves us. I try to convey that these events are not just historical events, but they are realities that reach the human heart today and are relevant for your life. Then, I make an invitation – an invitation to think about how these events impact your life today and an invitation to follow Christ more

closely, by having a prayer life and going to Mass. I don't want to be judgmental in any way, but [I want to] convey that the faith is beautiful and means something to your life."

Priests from across the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend said Christmas Masses offer many ways for those who have fallen away from their faith to reconnect to God.

"On the one hand, I think that they come to Church those days because it's just a part of a tradition that they have in their families and lives," Father Ramos said, "but on the other hand, I'm pretty sure that there is a little seed of faith in their hearts, and Jesus takes advantage of this to draw them to Himself. And then, of course, the very special joy that Christmas has in itself – like lights, decor, mangers, carols, and memories – help to reconnect these people with their faith, and they know they find all of that in a church during Mass."

Father Pietrocarlo said these Masses offer "another point of contact for them with Christ, and I hope for a positive experience. Fallen away Catholics usually have some negative experience ... they associate with the faith, so their presence at Mass provides the opportunity for them to have a positive experience." He added: "That is very important to me, that they have a positive experience and hopefully one that is beautiful and moves their heart. I hope that they have an encounter with Jesus in some way when they come to a holiday Mass, if it be Christmas, Easter, or another day, or if it is through the music, the homily, a Scripture reading, a prayer, a stained-glass window, or by being greeted kindly by a parishioner. All of these are

— Father Tom Shoemaker

opportunities for someone to encounter Jesus and begin walking back to Him."

Some parishes use this increased attendance as an opportunity to offer ways in which parishioners and visitors can build up their spiritual lives beyond the Christmas season.

"Everyone who comes to Mass will be offered a free connection with [the prayer and meditation app] Hallow, which the parish purchased," Monsignor Schooler said. "The bulletin offers many different ways to connect with the parish. In particular this year, we have purchased many copies of 'Habits for Holiness,' by Father Mark-Mary Ames. Everyone is invited to sign up for a free book, along with an invitation to join a small group to discuss the book. We hope that people will take advantage of this opportunity to be part of small groups throughout the year," shared Monsignor Schooler.

At St. Charles Borromeo, Father Shoemaker said the priest celebrating the Mass offers a welcome to the guests of the parish. "Oftentimes, we also offer words of welcome at the end of Mass. In addition, I offer a hospitality announcement, letting people of other faith traditions know that they are welcome to kneel when the others do, or to be seated, and that they are welcome, if they would like, to come forward with their arms crossed for a solemn blessing at Communion time. I think it is important to acknowledge that not everyone in the crowd is Catholic and to be sure that non-Catholics know they are welcome and feel comfortable if they are not familiar with the liturgy," Father Shoemaker said.

Answering a calling from

God to visit the altar on Christmas can be the first step back to an active faith life or the first step of someone considering joining the Catholic Church.

"I think the role of the priest and all the ministers are really essential," Father Ramos said about ways of affecting visitors. "Our kindness and warmth play an important role in this season. On my part, I must be vigilant with three things: my sincere and reverent attitude during Mass, to prepare a good homily, and to pray for those people in the silence of my heart during Mass."

At St. Pius X, Monsignor Schooler said, "We hope that visitors will leave having celebrated Christmas with a Mass that includes beautiful music and a knowledge that they are always welcome here."

"Our hope and dream is that visitors who come for Christmas will find an encounter with God and that they will also find a friendly encounter with the people here," Father Shoemaker said. "For the person who has not been regularly practicing the faith, it is God who touches a heart and calls. However, we want to do anything we can to assist. Our great dream is that Christmas Masses for all of us will be a life-changing encounter with the Lord."

Father Pietrocarlo said Christmas Mass "can be the first encounter and can plant the seed of faith. It can be the first moment to have people think about coming back to an active faith life. I think after this moment, it is very important that a parish makes known that these people are welcome here, that they can come to Mass, attend a ministry, speak with a priest. Just knowing that the door is always open to them is key. But also, I think if they are invited by the people they went to a holiday Mass with, that helps to have them come back. They can begin to think, 'I had this beautiful experience at this holiday Mass, but it does not need to be the only time, this can be a regular part of my life.'"

# Pray the Breastplate of St. Patrick at the Manger

Of all the things and people to be present at the birth of Jesus Christ, there were shepherds! I probably would have been more surprised if there were not shepherds. After all, David was a shepherd boy from Bethlehem. David taught us to pray, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Ps 23:1). And Christ fulfills David.

Imagine the life of a shepherd, his days spent under the vast expanse of open sky, hills, and valleys stretching out before him. St. Patrick, a shepherd himself, was no stranger to this way of life. And then, on that glorious night, the angel of the Lord announced the Good News of Christ's birth to shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem. Patrick, too, found God while pasturing sheep.

The shepherd of shepherds will lead the way through unknown paths of life. He sent His angel to lead shepherds to Him. And find Him they did. But regardless of what comes, each step can be taken with the assurance that the Incarnate Lord walks alongside them. In solitary pastures and on stormy nights, every shepherd will pray, "Christ with me."

The shepherds of Bethlehem, who lived as one with their flocks, discovered on Christmas night a shepherd who lives as one with them. Their lives entwined with their sheep, they find a savior whose life will be inseparable from theirs. "Christ

before me," the shepherd humbly prays, kneeling before the infant King's crib.

Christ is there when the shepherd rises in the crisp morning air, when he sleeps beneath the starry canopy, when he breaks bread at the end of a weary day's toil. In all these moments, "Christ behind me, Christ within me" becomes a whispered assurance that the incarnate God is there — in waking and sleeping, in moments of rest and labor. "Christ beneath me, Christ above me. ..."

The shepherd's life mirrors the encompassing nature of the Incarnation. Christ isn't a distant figure but an ever-present companion, woven into every aspect of the shepherd's life. "Christ on my right, Christ on my left. ..."

This discovery of the presence of Christ is not hypothetical. Luke's Gospel tells us: "They made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds" (Lk 2:17-18). And just as God called the shepherds, He calls us. "Exactly the same sign has been given to us," Pope Benedict XVI said. "We, too, are invited by the angel of God, through the message of the Gospel, to set out in our hearts to see the Child lying in the manger."

Weakness and sin and all,



## GUEST COMMENTARY

FATHER PATRICK BRISCOE

He calls us. Like a shepherd, He calls us. He calls us to come to Him, to see the Babe among the animals and know that He is near. "Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down. ..."

The mystery of Christmas is the mystery of discovering Christ among us and carrying Him with us from this day on. Never do we have to be alone. Never do we have to fear. Never do we have to agonize about the way we should go. Love has come, and love will lead us. "Christ when I arise. ..."

And, please God, may others see His love in me. "Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me. ..."

This Christmas, I'm praying the Breastplate of St. Patrick at the manger. And I hope you will, too. Together, we can think of the shepherds, and in so doing, may we find again the Good Shepherd, who first revealed His love in the manger.

Father Patrick Briscoe is Editor of Our Sunday Visitor.

# Christmas in Solidarity with Christians in the Holy Land

As in all too many Christmases past, sobriety blankets the city of Bethlehem, where Christ's birth is jubilantly celebrated each year. The joyous preparations that typically mark the approach of the feast of the Nativity have taken on a different hue. The Israel-Hamas war has cast a shadow of sadness and pain on the small city, halting the usual festivities and inflicting further suffering on innocent lives.

While as of this writing Bethlehem hasn't yet seen fighting, the Christian community there has been severely affected by the war. Residents depend on tourists and pilgrims to sustain the local economy. Because of the war, Bethlehem's typically bustling streets — in recent years hosting more than 150,000 visitors during the Advent and Christmas seasons — are quiet.

The Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem issued a powerful statement on Friday, November 10, calling for Christians to observe this year's Christmas feast soberly. "We, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, call upon our congregations to stand strong with those facing such afflictions by this year foregoing any unnecessarily festive activities," they wrote.

## GUEST COMMENTARY

OSV EDITORIAL BOARD

In times like these, when the weight of loss, displacement, and economic hardship bears down heavily, the call to stand in support of those afflicted reverberates deeply. It's a call not just to observe but to engage in advocating, praying, and generously contributing to alleviate the suffering of the victims of war.

Their plea for solidarity and a return to the essence of Christmas urges us, too, amid the grim realities of conflict, to forgo extravagant celebrations and instead focus on the spiritual significance of this holy season. In fact, it captures something of that first Christmas in Bethlehem. After a long journey, Mary and Joseph witnessed the birth of Jesus Christ among the animals, without even a room in an inn. Jesus, in his incarnation, took on our humanity in its trials and tribulations, offering solace and hope. Similarly,

OSV BOARD, page 17

# It Is Never too Late to Turn to Christ to Seek His Mercy



## THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MONSIGNOR OWEN F. CAMPION

### Fourth Sunday of Advent

The first reading for this weekend is from the Second Book of Samuel. Once, the two Books of Samuel were a single volume. Translations through the centuries divided this one volume into two.

David is the principal figure in these books. The ancient Hebrews looked upon David as much more than a king. Beyond all else, he was God's chosen representative, given the kingship so that laws and circumstances would provide an atmosphere in which the people more fervently would be loyal to God.

For this weekend's second

reading, the Church offers us a reading from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Scholars say that Paul of Tarsus authored this epistle, and that this epistle was his theological masterpiece. For this reason, it appears first in sequence among the 14 epistles attributed to Paul.

As indicated by its title, Paul sent this epistle, or letter, to the Christian population of Rome. In the first century A.D., Rome was the center of the Mediterranean world in every respect — political, economic, and cultural. It was the largest city in the Roman Empire. Not surprisingly, Rome, the great imperial capital, had within its borders a great array of ideas and religions, Christianity among them.

In this weekend's reading, as often elsewhere, Paul asserts his own vocation as an apostle. His vocation from God came so that "all the gentiles" might know, believe in, and obey God, "who alone is wise."

For the final reading this weekend, the Church proclaims a beautiful part of St.

Luke's Gospel — the Infancy Narrative. It is the story of the Annunciation, the event when Gabriel, the angel, came into the presence of Mary, a young Jewish woman, in Nazareth in Galilee, to inform her that she would be the mother of the long-awaited Redeemer.

The reading abounds with meaning. Luke makes clear that Mary was a virgin. Her maternity of the Redeemer would not result from any human relationship. God, as Creator and the provider of order to the universe, can do anything. The Redeemer will be the Son of God, David's successor, the hope of the world.

His coming would fulfill God's promises, spoken by the prophets through all the ages, to bring life and salvation to the people.

Vital to the message of the story is Mary's response: "I am the maidservant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say."

God's mercy never ceases. His outreach is not a conquest. Each person must freely choose to turn to God.

## Reflection

When the Second World War ended, allied troops in Germany captured several of Adolf Hitler's principal accomplices, who were indispensable in creating the greatest reign of terror ever seen on earth.

American soldiers guarded them in a prison. An American Army chaplain, a Franciscan priest, was assigned as chaplain. The priest tried to bring the German figures to peace with God. One of them, from a Catholic background, would have nothing of it. Making no apologies for the evil committed by his commands, hatred spewed from his heart.

Many urged the priest to forget this man, but the priest said he would never give up. The Church never gives up on anyone. Christ never gave up. Ignoring insults, he continued to try to interact with the German.

Convicted of terrible crimes, and sentenced to death, soldiers led the German to the scaffold, the priest walking beside him, refusing to give up.

On the scaffold, the German paused. "My Jesus, mercy," he said. The priest absolved him. The man died at peace with God.

A dramatic story, but with one day of Advent left, it reminds us that it is never too late to turn to Jesus, wholeheartedly, truly, and joyfully.

## READINGS

**Sunday:** 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Psalms 89:2-5, 27, 29; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38  
**Monday:** Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalms 98:1-6; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18 or John 1:1-5, 9-14  
**Tuesday:** Acts 6:8-10, 7:54-59; Psalms 31:3cd-4, 6, 8ab, 16bc, 17; Matthew 10:17-22  
**Wednesday:** 1 John 1:1-4; Psalms 97:1-2, 5-6, 11-1; John 20:1a, 2-8  
**Thursday:** 1 John 1:5-2:2; Psalms 124:2-3, 4-5, 7cd-8; Matthew 2:13-18  
**Friday:** 1 John 2:3-11; Psalms 96:1-2a, 2b-3, 5b-6; Luke 2:22-35  
**Saturday:** 1 John 2:12-17; Psalms 96:7-8a, 8b-9, 10; Luke 2:36-40

# Like the Angels on High, Give Glory to God

You may notice a curious phrase repeated multiple times in the readings at Christmas: “Do not be afraid!” We hear it proclaimed on Christmas Eve, as the angel comforts Joseph with the knowledge that the Child in Mary’s womb is the Son of God, and we hear it again in the liturgy of Christmas afternoon, as the angel choir appears to tell the shepherds the joyful news about the Savior of the world, newly born in nearby Bethlehem.

When you hear the word “angel,” what comes to your mind? Is it a chubby little baby with wings, floating among the clouds? (And if that’s not what first came to your mind, I’ll bet you are picturing it now!) We owe this angelic image to the Renaissance artist Raphael, who painted two cherubs (technically called “putti”) at the bottom of his 1512 masterpiece known as the “Sistine Madonna.”

This is the season of the year when it’s easy to believe that angels are all around us. We hear about them in the liturgy, we see them in our Nativity scenes, we sing about them in our carols (“Angels We Have Heard on High”), we laugh at their antics in our favorite movies (Clarence in “It’s A Wonderful Life”). But what can we know, if anything, about actual angels?

The existence of angels is a truth of the faith, well attested to in Scripture and Tradition from the earliest days of the Church. But what are they? “With their whole beings the angels are *servants* and messengers of God” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 329). The word means “one sent,” which describes their function, not their nature. As to *what* they are, angels are purely spiritual creatures, with will and intelligence, more perfect than all visible creatures (cf. CCC, No. 330).

Angels make multiple appearances throughout sacred Scripture, from the earliest chapters of the Book of Genesis, where we read about the angels who guard the

entrance to the Garden of Eden after the fall of Adam and Eve, to the Book of Tobit, where we meet the Archangel Raphael, who serves as Tobias’ traveling companion and protector. In Numbers Chapter 22, we read the humorous story of the angel who stopped the foreign prophet Balaam on his journey to curse the people of Israel, causing his donkey to veer off the road and unceremoniously dump poor Balaam onto the ground. (You’ll be pleased to know that Balaam got the message, and eventually prayed a blessing on Israel rather than a curse.)

In the New Testament, we meet the King of Angels, Jesus, for whom and by whom the angels were created. In addition to the angelic tales we hear in our Christmas liturgies, we also read about the angels who attended to Jesus during His 40 days in the desert (cf. Mk 1:14). Jesus taught His disciples about the existence of the guardian angels, who accompany each child while also beholding the face of God (cf. Mt 18:10). An angel appeared to strengthen Him in His sorrow in the Garden of Gethsemane (cf. Lk 22:43). And after the Resurrection, angels explained to the women at the tomb what had happened to His body (cf. Lk 24).

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read about how St. Peter was freed from prison by an angel, though he thought he was dreaming the whole thing (cf. Acts 12). In his Revelation, St. John tells about the trumpet-blasting angels who herald the Lord Jesus’ return before the final judgment. He then describes the heavenly liturgy, which, fittingly, sounds like the celebration of Holy Mass, where countless angels (accompanied by the saints) sing songs of praise before the altar at the wedding feast of the Lamb.

Once you begin to look for them, you see angels everywhere in sacred Scripture.

There is one particular angelic appearance that I think of often, as it’s frankly terrifying. At the beginning of the Old



KEN HALLENIUS

## HUMOR IN THE MIX

Testament Book of Ezekiel, the prophet recounts an encounter with the cherubim, who are the angels who accompany the throne of God. His description of these four angels is hard to fully comprehend, as he writes about seeing enormous beings, human in form but with bull hooves for feet, bright as polished bronze, each with four faces, four wings, and eye-covered wheels within eye-covered wheels, surrounded by burning torches and flashes of lightning, making a roaring noise like “many rushing waters” (Ez 1:4-24).

From Ezekiel’s description of the angels, it’s easy to see why, when they are sent by God to a person to deliver a message, they are wise to begin with a word of assurance: “Do not be afraid!”

But even when the message is a stern word of warning or an urgent call to repentance, angels, ultimately, are ultimately a sign that God does indeed love all that He has created. When we reflect upon the fact that each and every person ever to exist has a guardian angel beholding the face of God, we can be assured that God cares for each and every one of us, and that we have a powerful heavenly protector who we can call upon to be strengthened in temptation or danger (as Jesus was at Gethsemane, or as St. Peter was in prison). And this message is truly one of comfort and joy.

In this Christmas season, let us not be afraid to sing with the angels, “Glory to God in the highest!”

Ken Hallenius is a syndicated radio host and podcaster living in South Bend.

## SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for December 24, 2023

Luke 1:26-38

Following is a word search based on the Gospel reading for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, Cycle B: The Annunciation. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

GABRIEL	TOWN	NAZARETH
VIRGIN	JOSEPH	HOUSE
DAVID	PONDERED	GREETING
FAVOR	GREAT	THRONE
FOREVER	NO END	SPIRIT
OVERSHADOW	THE CHILD	BORN
NOTHING	IMPOSSIBLE	WORD

## THE MESSENGER

T O W N O T H I N G J L  
A H T E R A Z A N J O W  
E D E G H T C H O V H C  
R R C C L T H P E S O J  
G E L I H T I R I P S H  
A V E L B I S S O P M I  
B E S U O H L I B N B V  
R R O V A F A D O D E I  
I O F D N A N A R F O R  
E F O L I L Y V N O G G  
L W G R E E T I N G W I  
P O N D E R E D N E O N

### OSV BOARD, from page 16

this call by the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches encourages us to stand shoulder to shoulder with our suffering brethren, mirroring Christ’s compassion and solidarity.

First, we must pray for peace. May Almighty God see fit to swiftly end this conflict. We must pray for our fellow Christians, for the protection of innocent life, and for an end to fighting.

We must not only pray, however. We must channel the spirit of giving by extending our support. We must support those families who choose to remain the stewards of these sacred places. We should support them by purchasing rosaries and crucifixes and Nativities from their woodshops (often offered in many parishes here in the United States during Advent). We should donate to the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land and the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem to contribute to the upkeep of the irreplaceable shrines in their care and to support their humanitarian work.

Finally, we should offer small fasts or make other choices to go without this year to express our solidarity with those who lack basic needs. Christians suffer not only in Bethlehem but in Gaza, where urgent humanitarian needs

abound. The Council of the Heads of Churches in Jordan has canceled all Christmas festivities this year out of respect for those who have died in the recent fighting. Celebrations will be restricted to liturgies and quiet gatherings.

The significance of standing in solidarity is illuminated by the hope it offers. It embodies the vision of a New Jerusalem, not only as a physical place but as a state of being – a realm where suffering is alleviated and peace reigns supreme.

As we prepare our own Christmas celebrations, let us heed this call for a profound shift in focus. Let us turn our gaze toward empathy, prayer, and tangible support for our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land.

May this Christmas be a testament to our collective commitment to walk alongside those in need, just as Christ walked among us. Let our actions reflect the true message of Christmas – a message of love, compassion, and unwavering solidarity with the afflicted. This Christmas, may healing flourish in the land where the Prince of Peace was born.

The Our Sunday Visitor Editorial Board is comprised of Father Patrick Briscoe, Gretchen R. Crowe, Scott P. Richert, and York Young.



## SABINUS OF SPOLETO AND COMPANIONS

DIED 303    FEAST: DECEMBER 30

An early martyr named Sabinus was claimed by several Italian cities. One tradition from the fifth or sixth century said Sabinus was a bishop arrested with two deacons, Marcellus and Exsuperantius, during the persecution of Emperor Diocletian. The Governor of Etruria had the deacons scourged and racked when they made confessions of faith; both died from the tortures. The Governor had Sabinus’s hands cut off when he would not worship a statue of Jupiter; Sabinus was taken back to prison where he healed a blind boy, other prisoners, and even the Governor, who with his family became Christians and martyrs. Sabinus reportedly was executed at Spoleto and buried near there.

# Hand-Crafted Items Put to Good Use

BY JILL A. BOUGHTON

**D**o you love to knit or crochet? Does every child and grandchild in your family already have a hand-made blanket, hat, and scarf? If their closets are already stuffed from the things you've made, there are many others in the community who could use your help as the weather turns colder.

The Christ Child Society of South Bend has a suggestion: hand-knit or crochet a baby blanket, a sweater, or a little hat for a newborn. You can choose the colors and patterns, as long as you don't use wool, which can irritate baby skin. The Christ Child Society would also be delighted to accept handmade hats and mittens to go along with the new coats they give to every preschool or grade-school child referred to their generosity.

Nationally, the Christ Child Society was founded 136 years ago in order to provide layettes to newborn babies. To this day, all 46 chapters begin with this objective before adding other items or services for under-resourced children, such as coats and clothing, or educational programs. Babies born to moms up to 150% of the poverty level in St. Joseph County receive a layette from the Christ Child Society of South Bend. According to Layette Chair Anne Choinacky, "Each 'baby shower in a bag' includes a blanket, hat, sweater, towels, play outfits, body suits, gowns, bottles, sleepers, receiving blankets, and the book, 'Goodnight Moon.'" Those who are born early receive both a preemie layette and a newborn layette to use later. Layettes are also provided for foster children and babies whose families have lost everything in a disaster, such as a house fire. This amounts to more than 300 layettes a year, as well as 50 preemie layettes. In fact, the Christ Child Society of South Bend had already donated 360 layettes between January and mid-November of 2023.



Provided by Jill A. Boughton

Including handmade garments and blankets in every layette is a treasured tradition. One mom recently told members she has the sweater her mother received when she was born and plans to pass it on

to her baby. While the home-made blankets can be any size, volunteer Susan Wendowski notes that "some blanket patterns include decorative holes. Although these are very attractive, they should be avoided.

Holes that are too large allow baby's legs and arms to become tangled in them." Sweaters, in sizes 3 to 9 months, may have long or short sleeves. Hats of

all colors, shapes, and patterns do a wonderful job of keeping a tiny head warm. Preemie size hats are especially helpful.

Members of the Christ Child Society make some of the items themselves, and others come from crafting circles, local churches, and individuals of all ages. A recent Facebook post was shared hundreds of times, leading to a generous response from knitters and crocheters. However, there is still a great and ongoing need.

Donations can be dropped off at the Christ Child Clothing Center any Tuesday or Wednesday morning, or you can mail them to 2366 Miracle Lane, Mishawaka, IN, 46545. A volunteer can even come and pick up your handiwork. To arrange that, e-mail [info@christ-childsb.org](mailto:info@christ-childsb.org). Anne Choinacky, Chair of the Layette Committee, will be happy to field your questions about the project.

Although the need for hand-crocheted or knitted layette items is year-round, Christmas is a special time of year for a society dedicated to the Christ Child and eagerly seeking Him in the face of every new baby.



## St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic School

### SECURITY/SRO

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School is currently looking for long-term Security/SRO (Student Resource Officer) for A.M. duties (8 a.m. to noon) to include providing security, assisting with safety protocols, as well as interacting with the students and staff in a positive way. Candidates must be a police officer.

For information, contact the Dean of Students, Stan Liponoga, at 260-432-4001 or [sliponoga@seascsfw.org](mailto:sliponoga@seascsfw.org).

**Apply at [diocesefwsb.org/careers](https://diocesefwsb.org/careers)**

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## 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](https://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](http://todayscatholic.org/event). For additional listings of that event, please call the advertising sales staff at 260-399-1449 to purchase space.

**Theology on Tap begins Winter Series**  
FORT WAYNE – Young people in their 20s and 30s are invited to the Winter Theology on Tap Series titled, “The Light Shines in the Darkness.” The weekly series runs every Tuesday from January 16 to February 13. Individuals of any faith are encouraged to attend. The events take place at 2Tom’s Brewing Company, 3676 N Wells St. Doors, food, and bar service open at 7 p.m. Weekly talks begin at 7:30 p.m. Come for the food, drink, and fellowship, explore your faith, and invite a friend. Learn more about the series at [diocesefwsb.org/tot-fw](http://diocesefwsb.org/tot-fw). Contact John Pratt at [jpratt@diocesefwsb.org](mailto:jpratt@diocesefwsb.org) or 260-399-1412.

**Mass Interpreted for the Deaf to Be Offered in South Bend**  
SOUTH BEND – St. Matthew Cathedral Parish and the Diocesan Deaf Ministry are partnering to offer an interpreter for the deaf to be present for Masses on the first Sunday of the month at 4 p.m., Saturday evenings, and on the second, third, and fourth Sundays of the month at 11 a.m. at St. Matthew Cathedral, 1701 Miami St. If you would like to raise awareness for the Deaf Ministry and assist in its efforts to provide support for the deaf

members of the Catholic community in our diocese, contact Allison Sturm at 260-399-1452 or [asturm@diocesefwsb.org](mailto:asturm@diocesefwsb.org).

**Andrew Dinners Planned in Diocese**  
FORT WAYNE/GRANGER – The annual Andrew Dinners are open to young men ages 16-30 who are interested in learning how to discern their vocation and learn more about seminary and the priesthood. New this year, the evenings will begin with a Holy Hour on Thursday, January 4, at 5 p.m. at St. Vincent de Paul Church, 1502 E. Wallen Rd., in Fort Wayne, and the next night, Friday, January 5, at St. Pius X Church, 52553 Fir Rd., in Granger. The Holy Hour is open to the public and is followed by dinner and conversation for the young men attending. For more

information, Contact Christine Nix at 260-422-4611 or [discernpriesthood@diocesefwsb.org](mailto:discernpriesthood@diocesefwsb.org).

**Little Flower Holy Hour for Vocations**  
FORT WAYNE – The Little Flower Holy Hour is held 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 in downtown Fort Wayne. The Holy Hour is led by a different priest or deacon each month. Join in praying for vocations. Contact Christine Nix at 260-422-4611 or [cbonahoom-nix@diocesefwsb.org](mailto:cbonahoom-nix@diocesefwsb.org).

**Ephphatha Women’s Retreat 2024**  
HUNTINGTON – An Ephphatha women’s weekend retreat will be held on Friday, February

## REST IN PEACE

<b>Auburn</b> George Michael Davis, 74, Immaculate Conception	Mary Schory, 95, St. Jude	Lance Malling, 84, St. Joseph
<b>Bluffton</b> Geoffrey Frank, 68, St. Joseph	Francis Jastrzemski, 95, St. Vincent de Paul	Joanna Meersman, 92, St. Joseph
<b>Fort Wayne</b> Suzanne Marie Stalf, 82, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton	Jerome Minnick, 75, St. Vincent de Paul	<b>New Haven</b> Theresa Maroney, 85, St. John the Baptist
Thomas W. Meyers, 66, St. Joseph, Hessen Cassel	Nancy Pestow, 93, St. John the Evangelist	Gloria Yagodinski, 92, St. John the Baptist
Sally J. Miller, 75, St. Joseph, Hessen Cassel	Fernando Ysais, 84, St. John the Evangelist	<b>South Bend</b> Steven Louis RoKop, 88, St. Jude
	<b>Mishawaka</b> William Kestermeier, 93, St. Joseph	<b>Wabash</b> Linda Bozell, 74, St. Bernard

2, at St. Felix Catholic Center, 1280 Hitzfield St. Contact Sarah Bishop at 260-450-6987 or [ephphatha.womensretreat@gmail.com](mailto:ephphatha.womensretreat@gmail.com) for more information.

**SUBMIT EVENTS at**  
[TodaysCatholic.org/event](http://TodaysCatholic.org/event)

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adore  
him*





## ENCOUNTER VOCATIONS. ENJOY THE GAME.

December 27 | Bishop Dwenger High School | Fort Wayne  
Free Admission | Game Start 6:30 p.m.  
Mass at 3:45 p.m. in chapel  
Adoration to follow until 6 p.m.  
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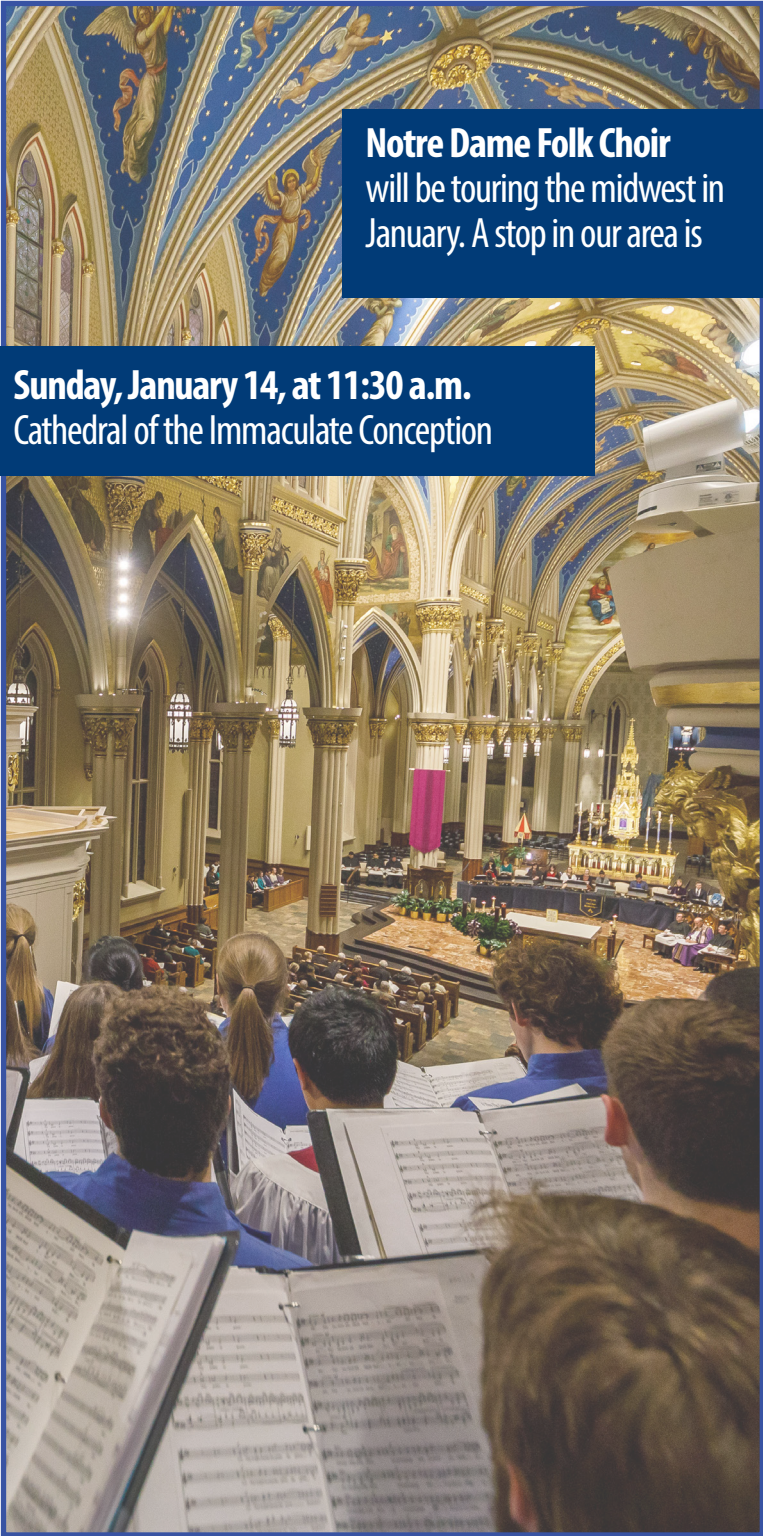
*Merry Christmas*

“TODAY IN THE TOWN OF DAVID A SAVIOR HAS BEEN BORN TO YOU; HE IS THE MESSIAH, THE LORD.”  
— LUKE 2:11



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