

# TODAY'S CATHOLIC

Volume 98 No. 1

TODAYSCATHOLIC.org

## Priests Claim Ninth Cupertino Classic

BY ERIC PEAT

**F**ifteen young men stood circled together at midcourt, singing the Salve Regina in a packed gymnasium.

It was a display of sportsmanship moments after a hard-fought game, but it was more than that; it was a reflection of the brotherhood of the priestly life, an appeal to the Blessed Virgin to guide our priests as they shepherd their flocks, and a demonstration of the joy of embracing God's call.

Such is the unique nature of the Cupertino Classic, the annual basketball game featuring the priests of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend vs. the diocesan seminarians. The event is designed to raise awareness about vocations to the priesthood and to religious life, while also fostering a friendly spirit of competition and entertainment for the laypeople of the diocese who have come to cheer on their current and future faith leaders. For the first time since 2019, the priests claimed victory, earning a 50-42 win against their seminarian brothers in the ninth chapter of the Cupertino Classic, which was held on Wednesday, December 27, at Bishop Dwenger High School in Fort Wayne.

"First and foremost, I hope that they saw an authentic witness to the Gospel," said



Eric Peat

Father Jake Schneider is blocked by seminarian Paul Cline during the Cupertino Classic at Bishop Dwenger High School on Wednesday, December 27.

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**The Notre Dame Folk Choir** will be touring the Midwest in January.

The choir will be singing at the **Sunday, January 14, 11:30 a.m. Mass** at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.



## TODAY'S CATHOLIC

(ISSN 0891-1533)  
(USPS 403630)Official newspaper of the  
Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend  
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Fort Wayne, IN 46856

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260-456-2824

Published weekly, except for the last Sunday in December and every other week from the fourth Sunday in May through the last Sunday in August by the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, 915 S. Clinton St., P.O. Box 390, Fort Wayne, IN 46802. Periodicals postage paid at Fort Wayne, IN, and additional mailing office.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Today's Catholic, P.O. Box 11169, Fort Wayne, IN 46856-1169 or email: [circulation@diocesefwsb.org](mailto:circulation@diocesefwsb.org)

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News deadline is 10 days prior to publication date. Advertising deadline is nine days before publication date.

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## Keep the Nativity at the Forefront of Christmas

BY ERIKA BARRON

On Christmas Eve of 2022, the streets of Fort Wayne were a slick sheet of ice, and the temperature was frigid. This past Christmas Eve could not have been more of a contrast, with a mild, calm, and clear night as the faithful gathered at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception at 10:30 p.m. to welcome the Christ Child. Mass was celebrated by Bishop Rhoades, and assisting him were Father Jacob Runyon, Rector of the cathedral, and Father Matthew Coonan, Pastor of St. Henry Parish in Fort Wayne and the diocese's Episcopal Vicar for Clergy. Deacon Caleb Kruse and Deacon Oscar Duarte also assisted.

Mass began with the triumphant hymn, "O Come All Ye Faithful," and verses were sung in both English and Latin, as Bishop Rhoades processed to the creche of the Lord, where he incensed the Nativity scene and kneeled in praise and honor of the Babe in the manger.

Bishop Rhoades began his homily by calling to mind the first Nativity scene created 800 years ago by St. Francis of Assisi.

"At that time, the faith had grown cold in the hearts of many people," Bishop Rhoades said. "Yes, they knew in their minds about the first Christmas. St. Francis wanted the people to experience in their hearts the beauty and joy of Christmas, the beauty and joy of our faith. He wanted to touch their hearts with the truth of God's love revealed in the humility, simplicity, and poverty of His birth."

Bishop Rhoades then shared the importance of keeping the Nativity of the Lord at the forefront of Christmas celebrations, despite the increasing secularization of this holy day.

He then went on to say that "by contemplating the Nativity, we are moved in our hearts to follow Jesus along the path of humility and self-emptying love, to practice and live our faith with joy and renewed conviction."

Bishop Rhoades then called for action in the form of prayer for all of those suffering the evils of war during this Christmas season, especially those in the Holy Land, where the Patriarchs and Heads of the Church in Jerusalem have called upon Christians to stand with the victims of the Israel-Hamas war by foregoing any of the usual festive celebrations and marking a more solemn holiday.

"The little town of Bethlehem, where joyous celebrations usually take place, is very subdued tonight," Bishop Rhoades said. "May we be in



Photos by John Martin

This Nativity scene at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Fort Wayne was incensed by Bishop Rhoades at the beginning of Mass on Christmas Eve.



A family kneels before the creche after Mass with a prayer to the Christ Child.



spiritual solidarity with the Christians of the Holy Land tonight and throughout the Christmas season, keeping these brothers and sisters in our prayers!"

Bishop Rhoades also asked for prayers on a personal note for the Catholic community of Holy Family Parish in Gaza, where he once celebrated Mass on a trip with Catholic Relief Services. During that time, he also visited the Missionaries of Charity located there. The sisters, whose order was founded by Mother Theresa, took care of disabled Palestinian children and the elderly.

"The violence, wars, and sufferings in the world today

and throughout human history cannot destroy the light of Christmas, which inspires an inner joy that no one can take from us," Bishop Rhoades proclaimed.

Bishop Rhoades concluded his homily with a short prayer to the newborn Son of God. He prayed: "O Babe of Bethlehem, Divine Savior of the world, you assure us of the triumph of love over hatred and of life over death. Save us from discouragement amid the challenges we face in our nation and in our world. Prince of Peace, come and stay with us! May the joy of your Nativity come into our hearts and reach to the farthest ends of

the world! May the light of Christmas shine forth in our world today like it shone forth in Greccio on this holy night 800 years ago!"

After Mass, families of all sizes and ages gathered to kneel and pray before the Nativity scene to honor the reason for this holy night, that the long-foretold Messiah has come!





# Saint Mary's College Reverses Transgender Admission Policy

BY GINA CHRISTIAN

(OSV News) – St. Mary's College in Notre Dame has reversed its recently updated admissions policy on applicants who identify as transgender, following public pushback and Bishop Rhoades' call to uphold Catholic teaching on the inherent connection between sex and gender.

In a December 21 statement provided to OSV News and addressed to the St. Mary's College Community, the board of trustees of St. Mary's College announced it would return to its "previous admission policy," which limited enrollment to women.

"When the Board approved this update, we viewed it as a reflection of our college's commitment to live our Catholic values as a loving and just community," the statement said. "We believed it affirmed our identity as an inclusive, Catholic, women's college. It is increasingly clear, however, that the position we took is not shared by all members of our community. Some worried that this was much more than a policy decision: They felt it was a dilution of our mission or even a threat to our Catholic identity. Moreover, we clearly underestimated our community's genuine desire to be engaged in the process of shaping a policy of such significance. As this last month unfolded, we lost people's trust and unintentionally created division where we had hoped for unity. For this, we are deeply sorry."

"Taking all these factors into consideration," the statement said, "the Board has decided that we will return to our previous admission policy."

A copy of the statement was posted to X, formerly Twitter, on Thursday, December 21, by St. Mary graduate Clare Anne Ath, Government Affairs Manager for the pro-life non-profit Human Coalition. Ath said that "generations of faithful Catholic SMC alums ... were prayerful on this matter and made their concerns known."

Also vocal was Bishop Rhoades, in whose diocese the

school is located.

In a detailed statement released on November 27, Bishop Rhoades had lamented the college's decision, saying that "it is disappointing that I, as bishop of the diocese in which St. Mary's College is located, was not included or consulted on a matter of important Catholic teaching."

He had urged St. Mary's board of trustees to correct the new admissions policy, which he said "(departed) from fundamental Catholic teaching on the nature of woman."

Bishop Rhoades said in his statement that "the desire of St. Mary's College to show hospitality to people who identify as transgender is not the problem. The problem is a Catholic woman's college embracing a definition of woman that is not Catholic."

In a new statement released on December 21, Bishop

*"There have been many voices responding to us from many places and perspectives."*

*"We have listened closely, and we have heard each of you."*

SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Rhoades said he was "happy and grateful that St. Mary's College has returned to its previous admission policy."

"I am grateful to the St. Mary's College Board of Trustees and administration for listening to the voices of the many students and alumnae who embrace the perennial truth of the Gospel and the Church's teaching that the human person is created by God with a sexual identity, embodied as male or female, with a unity of body and soul," Bishop Rhoades said. "I pray

for St. Mary's ongoing 'fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church' (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, No. 13), an essential characteristic of an authentically Catholic college or university. That message also includes love and respect for all our sisters and brothers, including those who may identify as 'transgender.'

"We must never separate truth and love, since the truth of the Gospel includes the fundamental commandment to love one another and love is only authentic if it is grounded in truth," Bishop Rhoades continued. "May truth and love abound at St. Mary's as it moves forward to bring unity to the college community."

The reversal negates an admissions policy approved by the school's board of trustees in June, which opened undergraduate admission to "applicants whose sex is female or who consistently live and identify as a woman."

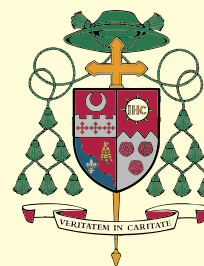
A November 21 email from college president Katie Conboy had advised students and staff that applicants who identify as transgender would be considered for admission in 2024.

While Conboy had asserted that the initial change was both "in line with best practices for today's college students" and St. Mary's mission, the board said in its December 21 statement that during a meeting in late December it had "reflected on the sense of division we have experienced in our campus community and among our extended alumnae family since this decision was communicated."

"This has weighed heavily on our minds and in our hearts," said the board. "There have been many voices responding to us from many places and perspectives. We have listened closely, and we have heard each of you."

Founded in 1844 by the Sisters of the Holy Cross, St. Mary's College is located near the University of Notre Dame and has 1,600 students. As of 2019, the college has a \$201.6 million endowment.

*Gina Christian is a national reporter for OSV News.*



## Public schedule of Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades

Monday, January 8: 11 a.m. – Mass with Fertility Care Practitioner Interns, St. Felix Catholic Center, Huntington  
Friday, January 12: 9:30 a.m. – Mass and Pastoral Visit, Bishop Dwenger High School, Fort Wayne  
Sunday, January 14: 11:30 a.m. – Mass, Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Fort Wayne



## Priest Assignments

The Most Reverend Kevin C. Rhoades, Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend, has made the following assignments.

**Reverend Jose Arroyo**, from Pastor at St. Paul of the Cross Parish, Columbia City, to Administrator at St. Patrick Parish, Ligonier, effective January 23, 2024.

**Reverend Wilson Corzo**, from Pastor at Our Lady of Hungary Parish, South Bend, to Pastor at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Warsaw, effective January 23, 2024.

**Reverend Cyril Fernandes**, from Pastor at St. Patrick Parish, South Bend, and St. Hedwig Parish, South Bend, to Pastor at St. Paul of the Cross Parish, Columbia City, effective January 23, 2024.

**Reverend Benjamin Landrigan**, from Parochial Vicar at St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Elkhart, to Pastor at Our Lady of Hungary Parish, South Bend, effective January 23, 2024.

**Reverend Constantino Rocha**, from Pastor at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Warsaw, to Parochial Vicar at St. Patrick Parish, Fort Wayne, effective January 23, 2024.

**Reverend Eric Zimmer**, as Administrator at St. Patrick Parish, South Bend, and St. Hedwig Parish, South Bend, effective January 23, 2024.



## Deacon Assignment

The Most Reverend Kevin C. Rhoades, Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend, has made the following assignment.

**Deacon James Tighe**, to exercise pastoral care of St. Mary, Mother of God Parish, Fort Wayne, with Very Rev. Matthew Coonan to direct the pastoral care of St. Mary, Mother of God Parish, Fort Wayne, with the powers and faculties of a pastor, effective January 3, 2024.



For up-to-date information about Eucharistic Revival events and resources, visit [diocesefwsb.org/eucharist](https://diocesefwsb.org/eucharist) or [diocesefwsb.org/eucaristia](https://diocesefwsb.org/eucaristia).

## FORTY HOURS DEVOTIONS FOR 2024

### JANUARY

St. John Bosco, Churubusco: January 29-31

### FEBRUARY

St. Joseph, Garrett: February 11-13

Immaculate Conception, Auburn: February 18-20

St. Charles Borromeo, Fort Wayne: February 25-27



## CUPERTINO, from page 1

Father Brian Florin, Parochial Vicar at St. John the Evangelist in Goshen, moments after the game. "Here are real men who are down to earth – they love playing sports, they love each other as brothers, they love the people in the crowds – but they've given their life away to something. ... I hope that we were able to reflect back to the crowd that God calls real men to be priests and kind of instills that conviction, and that you can use your competitive talents to glorify Him and further His kingdom here on Earth."

After the evening began with Mass and adoration in the Bishop Dwenger chapel, both squads took the court for the 6:30 p.m. tipoff. All eyes were on the heavily favored priest team, recently bolstered by free agent acquisitions via ordination, which was expected to dominate a young and relatively inexperienced seminarian squad. However, seminarian Greenan Sullivan's deep three-pointer on the opening possession of the contest signaled that his team wasn't going quietly. Sullivan scored nine points in the first quarter alone, helping to offset a pair of triples from Father Terry Coonan and stake the underdogs with a 16-15 lead. Both teams struggled to score in a sloppy second quarter, and the seminarians took a 22-18 lead into the locker room.

"Our game plan was to win in aggressiveness, win in rebounds, and the game's going to take care of itself," said seminarian Paul Cline, who is spending his propaedeutic year at Bishop Simon Brute Seminary in Indianapolis. "It's going to be a messy game because we don't have the talent to make it a good game."

To help provide a spark in the second half, the priests turned to a secret weapon: Father Daniel Niezer, Pastor of St. Dominic in Bremen and the



Photos by Eric Peat

The priest and seminarian squads pose together with Father Jonathan Norton, Director of Seminarians, after the conclusion of the Cupertino Classic, which ended with a 50-42 victory by the priests.

Diocesan Promoter of Priestly Vocations, who had been working at the vocations table during the first half but suited up at halftime.

"Honestly, he said, 'Hey, can I just kind of be in the vocations booth and be present to young men who are interested in vocations?'" Father Florin said. "Ultimately, that is the purpose of this, right? It's a vocations event, so it's like, 'OK, absolutely.' And it was advantageous; we had seven guys and then eight with him, so he had fresh legs, and he's played enough basketball to know how to get open, so it worked out really well."

Father Niezer scored all eight of his points in the third quarter to help the priests rally for a narrow 33-32 lead entering the

final quarter. That's when they finally found their long-range shooting touch. A barrage of three-pointers from Father Ben Landrigan and Father Florin turned a slim advantage into a double-digit lead, thwarting the defensive strategy of the seminarians.

"If they're going to win, they're going to win shooting threes," Cline said of his team's mentality. "And Father Ben hit like five threes in a row, so there's not much we can do about that."

"I'd say the difference-maker for us was we started hitting shots in the second half," Father Florin said. "I think at the end of the third quarter to beginning of the fourth quarter, I think we had five threes, so that kind of lengthened the

gap. I gave Father Drew Curry the green light, and he took advantage of it. Then Father Ben had some shots, and I was finally able to get a few to go down, thank the Lord."

It was enough to help the priests capture their first Cupertino Classic since 2019, giving them a 5-4 edge in the overall series. Father Florin led a balanced scoring attack with 14 points, while Father Landrigan added nine (all in the fourth quarter), Father Niezer and Father Coonan each notched eight, and Father Paolo Degasperi added six. For the seminarians, Sullivan led all scorers with 28 points, while Cline and Andy Barnes each chipped in seven.

"I love Greenan," Father Florin said of his former semi-

More photos are available at [todayscatholic.org](http://todayscatholic.org)



narian teammate, whom he was guarding most of the night. "I've actu-

ally always looked up to him in terms of basketball. When I was at the seminary, we would do just a lot of training together for fun and really grew in brotherhood and friendship. So, to play him on the court now, it's a real fun opportunity, because I know he's going to pull the best out of me."

Even though the crowd was predominantly rooting for the priests – a factor that Father Florin finally got to experience in his first year on the priest squad – Cline said it was still wonderful to have the support of so many from across the diocese.

"Seeing everyone come together, especially all the priests and everybody's families, but then all the friends, too, from high school or the seminary, or even family friends that we haven't seen in a couple months because we're down at school now – it's great to have everybody come back together, especially around Christmas," Cline said.

Father Niezer concluded the evening by leading the entire gymnasium in prayer: "Bless all of our families who are gathered here, bless all of our parishes, and our diocese. Raise up saints among us, raise up great priests, great religious brothers and sisters, consecrated men and women, and beautiful families. May we always seek to do your will, and may we, through doing your will, lead others to the beautiful gift of your Son and to life eternal."

He then gave a final blessing and yelled "Go Priests!" into the microphone, a sentiment all those in attendance were glad to share with a roaring applause.

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Fans show their support for the priests at the Ninth Annual Cupertino Classic.



# Bishop to Vincentians: Serve the Poor like the Saints Did

BY KATIE MURRAY

On December 16, the Saturday of the Second Week of Advent, Queen of Angels Parish in Fort Wayne hosted a special Mass for the St. Vincent de Paul Society, where Bishop Rhoades made a powerful call for holiness and service to the poor in his homily.

The Mass began with a poignant collect prayer that sought the dawn of God's glory in the hearts of the faithful, scattering the shadows of the night and revealing them as "children of light" through the advent of the Only Begotten Son. Bishop Rhoades highlighted the beauty of this prayer, emphasizing its essence in seeking holiness.

"When the splendor of God's glory dawns in our hearts and we live as children of the light by Christ's coming to us, by grace, we become holy," Bishop Rhoades said in his homily. "We see this in the lives of the saints. At this Mass, I think particularly of the Vincentian saints who indeed lived as children of the light because the splendor of God's glory dawned in their hearts. Their lives scattered the shadows of the night as they extended God's light through their love and service of the poor."

Bishop Rhoades highlighted Vincentian saints, particularly St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac. Their lives, rooted in prayer and illuminated by the splendor of God's glory, served as beacons of light, dispelling the darkness of their time through love and service to the poor.

Of St. Vincent and St. Louise, Bishop Rhoades said: "Their charism and a foundation of all Vincentian spirituality was to find Jesus in the poor and the poor in Jesus. Sister Louise taught the Sisters to serve the poor 'with respect, mildness, cordiality, and compassion.' At the same time, St. Vincent de Paul's ministry to the poor kept growing and expanding throughout Paris, including his building homes for abused and neglected street children and orphans. St. Vincent and St. Louise's lives were deeply rooted in prayer. The splendor of God's glory truly dawned in their hearts, giving them the grace to pour out their lives in love for the poor and needy, showing them to be 'children of light' in the midst of the darkness of their time."

Bishop Rhoades went on to pay tribute to other Vincentian saints, including Blessed Frederic Ozanam, the primary founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and his mentor, Blessed Rosalie Rendu, who were commended for their dedication to ministering to



Photos by Katie Murray

**Bishop Rhoades processes out of Mass for members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society at Queen of Angels Parish in Fort Wayne on Saturday, December 16.**

the poor in 19th-century Paris. Their approach was not only to provide material assistance but also to extend genuine friendship to those in need, echoing the timeless message to "take good care of the poor."

"Blessed Rosalie taught Frederic and the first members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society to see Christ in the poor and to approach each poor person with humility as Christ's servants," Bishop Rhoades said. "The splendor of God's glory dawned in the hearts of Blessed Frederic and Blessed Rosalie, like it had dawned in the hearts of St. Vincent and St. Louise, leading them to bring the light and love of Christ to the poor and the suffering of their day. That light has spread throughout the world through

the work of the members of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society these past nearly 200 years."

Bishop Rhoades also paid tribute to lesser-known Vincentian saints, such as Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, whose life exemplified the splendor of God's glory from a young age. His commitment to daily holy Communion and his selfless service to the poor, motivated by love for Jesus, showcased a warm and pure faith that touched the lives of many.

"When [Blessed Pier Giorgio] joined the Society, he said, 'Jesus visits me every morning in holy Communion. I repay him with my poor means, visiting the poor,'" Bishop Rhoades said. "When he was asked how he could

stand the bad odors and unclean conditions of their homes, Pier Giorgio answered, 'Don't forget that even if the house you visit is very dirty, there you may find Jesus.'"

The congregation was reminded of the enduring legacy of these saints, emphasizing the truth and efficacy of the opening prayer, which was reiterated at the conclusion of the homily: "May the splendor of your glory dawn in our hearts ... that we may be shown to be children of light by the advent of your Only Begotten Son."

As the Christmas season approached, the faithful were encouraged to embrace the spirit of holiness and charity embodied by the Vincentian saints, finding inspiration in their selfless dedication to serving the poor and living as children of light in a world often overshadowed by darkness.



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## Papal Calendar for 2024

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – As the new year begins, Pope Francis will be the oldest reigning pope since the early 1900s and the third oldest in history. Having celebrated his 87th birthday in mid-December, Pope Francis' initial calendar for 2024 had just the essentials. A full slate of the usual papal liturgies and meetings are scheduled; bishops will continue making "ad limina" visits; Argentina will have its first female saint; the Synod of Bishops on synodality will conclude in October; and the jubilee year opens at the year's end. Pope Francis has continued to speak confidently about at least three countries he has on his wish-list for papal trips in 2024. The pope told the Mexican news outlet N+ that a trip to Belgium is already "certain" and that two others, to Polynesia and Argentina, are being looked into. He did add that any long-distance trips would have to be "rethought" because of his age.

## Exiled Nicaraguan Bishop Asks Other Bishops 'Not to Abandon Us'

MEXICO CITY (OSV News) – Since Christmas, Nicaraguan police and paramilitaries have detained more than a dozen priests, including an archdiocesan vicar, as the Sandinista regime escalates a campaign of terror against the Catholic Church. Pope Francis voiced his concern about the worsening situation of the persecuted Nicaraguan Church in his New Year's Angelus prayer, expressing his "closeness in prayer to them (the detained priests), their families, and the entire Church in the country," urging that Catholics "pray insistently" to find "a path of dialogue to overcome difficulties." Auxiliary Bishop Silvio José Báez – currently exiled in Miami – issued an urgent plea for solidarity, saying in a December 30 post on X (formerly Twitter), "I beg bishops and the world's bishops' conferences not to abandon us at this time; may they pray for the Church of Nicaragua, stand in solidarity, and raise their voices to denounce this persecution by the dictatorship against our Church!"

## Pope Benedict Remembered on Anniversary of His Death

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – As an expression of ongoing affection and gratitude for the late Pope Benedict XVI, Pope Francis led tens of thousands of people in St. Peter's Square in a round of applause for his predecessor

## 'Music Can Touch Hearts,' Pope Says



Photo credit

Pope Francis greets a group of children during a meeting with the International Foundation of Pueri Cantores in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican on Saturday, December 30. Pope Francis told the audience that "so many people, also young people, are prisoners of their anxiety or of boredom; song and music can touch hearts, give beauty, restore a taste and hope for life." Members of the children's choir at St. Pius X Parish in Granger were among those in Rome for the event. Read more on Page 14.

sor on the first anniversary of his death. "A year ago, Pope Benedict XVI concluded his earthly journey after having served the Church with love and wisdom," Pope Francis told an estimated 20,000 people gathered in the square for the midday recitation of the Angelus prayer on Sunday, December 31. Pope Benedict, who led the Church from 2005 to 2013, died on December 31, 2022, at the age of 95. "We feel so much affection, gratitude, and admiration for him," the pope said. "From heaven, he blesses and accompanies us." Before the Angelus, Archbishop Georg Gänswein, Pope Benedict's former personal secretary, presided over a memorial Mass at the Altar of the Chair in St. Peter's Basilica.

## Cardinal Says Vatican Is Not Moving Toward Accepting Gay Marriage

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – The Vatican's affirmation that a priest can give an informal blessing to a gay couple who asks for one is not a first step toward the Catholic Church recognizing same-sex marriages, said Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. "Those who say so either have not read the text or have 'bad blood,' if you will pardon the expression. The statement clearly and ad nauseam states that these blessings are non-

ritualized so that they are not interpreted as a marriage," the cardinal told the Spanish newspaper ABC in an interview published on Monday, December 25. The doctrinal dicastery's document, *Fiducia Supplicans* ("Supplicating Trust"), which was approved by Pope Francis, said that while the Church "remains firm" in teaching that marriage is only a life-long union between a man and a woman, in certain circumstances priests can give non-sacramental, non-liturgical blessings to "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."

## Church, World Must 'Respect, Defend, Esteem' Women, Pope Says

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – The world and the Catholic Church must respect and defend women and foster a motherly care for others to end dehumanizing cycles of violence, Pope Francis said during Mass on Monday, January 1, in St. Peter's Basilica for the feast of Mary, Mother of God, which is also the World Day of Peace. "The Church needs Mary in order to recover her own feminine face, to resemble more fully the woman, virgin, and mother, who is her model and perfect image, to make space for women and to be 'generative' through a pastoral ministry marked by concern and care," the pope said. The world too, he said, "needs to look to mothers and to women in order to find peace, to emerge from the spiral of violence and hatred, and once more see things with genuinely human eyes and hearts." In his homily, Pope Francis called on all societies to "accept the gift that is woman, every woman" and to "respect, defend, and esteem woman in the knowledge that whoever harms a single woman profanes God, who was born of a woman." The Mass marked the 57th World Day of Peace celebrated by the Church.

## Ukrainian Clergy Renew Calls to Support Country

KYIV (OSV News) – Sorrow, anger, and renewed calls to support Ukraine have been issued by Ukrainian Catholic and other Ukrainian clergy following a massive attack on Ukraine by Russia on Friday, December 29. More than 40 people were killed and 160 wounded after Russia unleashed a wave of close to 160 drones and missiles on civilian targets across Ukraine, targeting several cities, including Kyiv and Lviv. With at least 23 slain, Kyiv suffered its deadliest attack of the full-scale invasion, which launched in February of 2022 and continued attacks begun in 2014 by Russia. The invasion has been declared a genocide in multiple reports by two major human rights agencies. In a December 29 statement, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kyiv-Galicia, Head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, extended his "heartfelt condolences to all those who are burying their relatives who were killed by the Russian criminal hand." He added that "we send our love and deep concern to all the wounded, all those who have lost their homes, and who are grieving and crying," and asked God to "wipe away the tears of Ukraine."



# AROUND THE DIOCESE

## Mass and a Meal for Diocesan Employees



Photos by Scott Warden

On Thursday, December 21, employees who work in the Curia of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend and the offices of Catholic Charities of Fort Wayne-South Bend gathered in Warsaw for worship and fellowship ahead of the Christmas season. First, those who work in the diocesan offices – the Archbishop Noll Center in Fort Wayne and the St. John Paul II Center in Mishawaka – attended Mass at Sacred Heart Church in Warsaw. The Mass was celebrated by Bishop Rhoades, who was assisted by the priests who hold curial positions in the diocese: Father Mark Gurtner, Vicar General; Father Jacob Runyon, Judicial Vicar; Father Matthew Coonan, Episcopal Vicar for Clergy; Father Jonathan Norton, Diocesan Director of Seminarians; and Father Daniel Niezer, Diocesan Promoter of Priestly Vocations. Following Mass, dozens of diocesan and Catholic Charities employees, including CEO Dan Florin, gathered for a catered lunch at Westminster Hall on the campus of Grace College. During lunch, Bishop Rhoades hosted a trivia game where he quizzed those in attendance on diocesan history. Bishop Rhoades thanked the employees for helping the Church in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend serve its mission of bringing Christ to those within its boundaries.

## Ruth Chronister Retires after 31 Years



Joshua Schipper

After 31 years of service, Ruth Chronister celebrated her final day at Good Shepherd Books and Gifts with a special celebration of treats and 31-percent off on one item for all customers. The Good Shepherd Bookstore is located in the Archbishop Noll Center, downtown Fort Wayne.

## Father Stephen Felicichia Honored for Artillery Service



Provided by Steve Lutz

On Thursday, December 7, Father Stephen Felicichia, Pastor of St. Mary of the Lake Parish in Culver, was recognized with the Honorable Order of St. Barbara at a ceremony at the Indiana Army National Guard Armory in Fort Wayne. This "Honorable Order" award is presented through the U.S. Field Artillery Association (USFAA), a worldwide professional organization of U.S. Army and Marine Corps Artillerymen/Veterans headquartered at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The St. Barbara award recognizes excellence in service to the artillery, outstanding professionalism, selfless service, and contributions to the promotion of the Field Artillery. Father Felicichia graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 2008 and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the Field Artillery. He served two separate one-year tours in Afghanistan. After his service ended, he began his priestly formation and was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend in June of 2021. The event at the armory drew about 150 actively serving military members and families, as well as veterans.



# World Youth Day Attendees Reunite, Share Fruits of Pilgrimage

BY JOSHUA SCHIPPER

Numerous pilgrims from the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend who participated in World Youth Day in Portugal gathered for a reunion on Gaudete Sunday at St. Paul of the Cross Parish in Columbia City. Nearly five months had passed since their return to the United States, and many shared about the fruits they reaped during their experience.

Bishop Rhoades celebrated Mass, and, during his homily, he touched on several themes in the context of the Advent season, including the theme of the most recent World Youth Day: Mary Arose and Went with Haste.

Bishop Rhoades said Mary went with haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth, then pregnant with John the Baptist, who leaped with joy in his mother's womb at the presence of the Savior in Mary's womb. Bishop Rhoades connected this to the meaning of Gaudete Sunday, as *gaudete* in Latin means "rejoice."

After Mass, Bishop Rhoades joined the pilgrims for lunch as they recalled the highlights of their epic journey.

Jocelyn Alcala, Associate Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry for the diocese, asked if any of the pilgrims wanted to share some of the graces they have seen bloom within the past five months. Pilgrim Ally Brown told the many gathered about what led

to her signing up for World Youth Day.

Brown had recently moved to South Bend from Ohio and joined St. Pius X Parish in Granger. She noticed in the bulletin that the diocese was taking a group to Portugal for World Youth Day and, having enjoyed the pilgrimage to Poland, she decided to sign up. She noted, however, that the tourism aspect of her pilgrimage to Poland had stood out to her more than the spiritual aspects.

She recalled praying to the Lord, "OK, my intention with you is to know you better, just show me who you are, and help me to know you better."

She said that her group welcomed her in, and that she made a particular connection with Father Terry Coonan, Pastor of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Fort Wayne, noting that they both attended the University of Dayton.

"I just started to know that the Lord was working and showing me how much He loves me, regardless of not putting all the pieces together yet."

Brown still expected some "big moment" of personal revelation or consolation, perhaps at Fatima, but she did not receive it. She soon realized that she was resisting how God was calling her to Himself.

"I was resisting, kind of white-knuckling, saying, 'I want to pray like this, I'm going to pray the Rosary, I'm going to do this, we're going to feel this way.'"



Photos by Joshua Schipper

Bishop Rhoades, above, and Ally Brown, below, speak during a reunion Mass and gathering for World Youth Day pilgrims on Sunday, December 17, in Columbia City.



She said that she felt God tell her no; instead, she said she felt Him calling her to pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament at one of the "Rise Up" sessions. Behind the monstrance stood a depiction of the Last Supper.

"Just looking at the beautiful image in that side chapel of the Last Supper and how He loves each of the apostles so perfectly despite their flaws, I knew in that moment that He loves me just like that – perfectly, in a

way that only He could."

Brown remembers, in that moment, that the feeling "washed over" her; from that moment and through the rest of World Youth Day, "it was so much more of an eye-opening experience for me and encountering so many people. Just walking around and seeing how God loves everyone so perfectly, so individually, and just realizing that should change how I approach everything in the rest of life."

Pilgrim Madison Kindler told the many gathered about her initial hesitation to attend World Youth Day. After praying about it, however, she felt called to go regardless of her personal reluctance and a feeling that she was not "independent enough" to go on a pilgrimage of this caliber.

"There was something that was just itching at me to go."

After a retreat in Huntington and more prayer, she traveled to Europe with nearly 300 other diocesan pilgrims. She recalled that while the first several days of the pilgrimage proved fruitful, an experience in Eucharistic adoration during a catechesis session stood out to her.

Kindler said she felt God asking her to look above the tabernacle where she saw the painting of the Last Supper. Her eyes were drawn to John.

"And as I was sitting there praying, I started to hear a melody that I've never heard before in my head."

Kindler, who has a background in music, said she began hearing lyrics in her head revolving around John, which led her to write a song about the apostle and her takeaways from World Youth Day.

Since returning from Lisbon, she said a theme she has been trying to live by is, "Let go, and let God," meaning to cast aside one's own will and anxieties and trust in God's plan.

Alec DeVries, another pilgrim, shared his testimony via email. He said one of the most unexpected takeaways from the pilgrimage was that he made friends with the members of his small group.

"This was very unexpected, but now that we have returned, it has been a joy to continuously spend time with them post-World Youth Day. I am so glad this seed was planted, because it has been a joy to have fellow believers support each other in our faith walk post-World Youth Day."

DeVries added that he had also prayed for discernment at World Youth Day, particularly about marriage. Having received spiritual confirmation about this during World Youth Day, DeVries and his fiancée plan to marry next summer.

At each table, pilgrims shared their experiences with one another. Pilgrims at one table shared stories about sleeping in a field with 1.2 million fellow Catholics, and how they had to track down scarce food once arriving at the campsite. Others shared the joys of meeting Catholics from other countries, reflecting on the universality of the Church.


The next international World Youth Day celebration will take place in Seoul, South Korea, in 2027.

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# Bishop to Seminarians: Make Mary Your Model of Faith

BY BETHANY BEEBE

The celebration of the Nativity marks the beginning of a mission that affected the world; likewise, God's newest ministers are discerning their futures and preparing to become effective in the contemporary Church.

On Wednesday, December 20, Bishop Rhoades ate and worshiped with the seminarians of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend ahead of the Christmas season at St. Jude Church in Fort Wayne. The seminarians, who recently returned for Christmas break, were invited to bring family or close friends.

Those in attendance at the Mass heard readings expressing holy anticipation of the coming of Christ. Bishop Rhoades said that since the Second Vatican Council, the O Antiphons have been sung as part of the Acclamation before the Gospel from December 17-23, proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament. "In each antiphon, we cry out 'Come!' since, even though the Messiah came 2,000 years ago, we pray for Him to come to us in the present, to come to save us, to give us His life and His grace, His healing, His love," Bishop Rhoades said.

The special Mass with the seminarians fell on the fourth day of the O Antiphons and described Jesus as the Key to the house of David who can free us from our prisons of sin, Bishop Rhoades said. "We invoke His royal power as the Son of David, the new King, to free us from sin and death. That's why God became incarnate, to open for us the way to eternity. He is the key that opens for us the gates of His eternal Kingdom of truth and life, of joy and peace."

The day's Gospel reading served as a reminder of a noteworthy facet of Gabriel's message being delivered, Bishop Rhoades said; Mary's betrothal was to a man of David's lineage, and the Davidic line's throne of power was promised to the Blessed Virgin's offspring. The New Testament offering makes reference to an Old Testament proclamation by Nathan to David: "Your house and Your kingdom are firm forever before me; Your throne shall be firmly established," Bishop Rhoades said. "Many of the Old Testament prophets foretold that a future heir of King David would free the people from their oppressors and usher in an everlasting kingdom."

Bishop Rhoades asked listeners to imagine what it must have been like for Mary, a faithful but common person, to be told she would carry the



Photos by Bethany Beebe

**Bishop Rhoades celebrates Mass for diocesan seminarians and their families at St. Jude Parish in Fort Wayne on Wednesday, December 20. Those in attendance gathered afterward for a Christmas luncheon.**



Messiah who would "rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." Doubly hard for her, Bishop Rhoades said, would

be grasping the notion of royal lineage over which the Child would grow to rule forever. "He would have the key of David," Bishop Rhoades said, "of the Davidic kingdom, but as the Son of God, He would have the key of the Kingdom of God, the key of heaven."

With the key to her life's calling, her vocation, Mary took action to make God's request a reality. "She actively and lovingly embraced God's will," Bishop Rhoades said, "not with passive resignation, not as some burdensome duty. She actively and lovingly embraced God's will." Bishop Rhoades pointed to Mary's visit to Elizabeth as one way she took action quickly.

He continued, calling Mary the greatest example of faith, service, and love that we have. "Mary trusted totally in God," he said. "She surrendered herself entirely to the Lord's plan. Mary enthusiastically sought to make her life a gift to God and joyfully accepted her mission."

Bishop Rhoades credited Mary and her landmark actions in forwarding God's hope of liberation for His children, Israel. "It is because of Mary's cooperation with God's plan for our salvation that the Incarnation took place, that the Son of David and Son of God was conceived and born, that the key of David became the key to the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom inaugurated by Jesus here on earth in the Church. Later, Jesus would give the keys to the Kingdom to Peter. United with Peter's successor, our mission is to spread Christ's Kingdom on earth."

Bishop Rhoades did not leave listeners with a message that the Good News was limited to days of old. "Our participation now in the life of the Church," he said, "is a participation already in the eternal Kingdom of God."

After the Mass, the seminarians and their guests were treated to a luncheon catered by Classic Cafe and sponsored by the Blessed Solanus Casey Society. The society's goal is to pray for and support seminarians and vocations. In the basement of St. Jude, the seminarians were introduced, Bishop Rhoades shared a blessing on the meal, and Christmas gifts were shared.

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# Hispanic Youths Reenact Mary and Joseph's Journey to Bethlehem

BY JOCELYN ALCALA AND MARIA SOLIS

The Fort Wayne area *jovenes* (Hispanic young adults) worked together to put on a *posada* that was held on Thursday, December 21, at the Archbishop Noll Center in downtown Fort Wayne. The *jovenes* from the Alpha series (an evangelization program that includes a video, meal, and small-group discussion) came together to put on a *posada* that commemorates and celebrates the coming of Jesus.

*Posada* is a Spanish word for "inn," and the *Posadas Navideñas*, which recall events leading up to the Nativity of Jesus, are a focal point of Christmas traditions in Mexico. In the *posada*, the pilgrimage of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem in search of an inn is reenacted to commemorate their journey. On December 21, the night began by praying the Rosary along with Bishop Rhoades in the Noll Center Chapel. Following the Rosary, Bishop Rhoades offered his blessing upon the group.

Alicia Guzman (dressed as Mary), Jonathan Hernandez (dressed as Joseph), and Jose Solis (dressed as the donkey that carried Mary and Joseph) helped reenact the Holy Family seeking shelter at the inn. The reenactment included three

songs that were sung in the procession to the banquet prepared by the Alpha *jovenes*.

Many of the families who attended the *posada* really enjoyed the gathering, particularly the Lopez family, who told Today's Catholic that the event was "a great way to start the Christmas season in a community, and we hope this continues next year."

The Bryan family said, "We love the fellowship and the reciting of the Rosary as a Catholic community, both English and Spanish."

La Familia Lopez also mentioned that this event created an atmosphere of belonging and the coming together of many parishes. The family said the *posada* brought them and their daughters much joy in seeing everyone together and rejoicing in the Lord. They said they felt very welcomed and loved, and that the event impacted their faith. They said they hope the event becomes a Christmas tradition. Attendees told Today's Catholic that the *posada* was a great way to end the Third Week of Advent as one community sharing joy and getting to know one another.

An estimated 100 people attended the *posada*, including five of the diocese's seminarians who were on Christmas break. The night was filled with Mexican food, music, laughter, and treats. It concluded with

the breaking of a pinata by the children in attendance.

The Alpha *jovenes* who helped make this event possible were Maria C. Solis, who organized the *posada*, as well as Maria G. Solis, Jose Solis, Jonathan Hernandez, Alicia Guzman, Caroline McMasters, Erika Martinez, Yesi Martinez, Carlos Leiva, Vanessa Vasquez, Troy Powell, Augusto Larrosa, and Karen Pantoja. It was overseen by Jocelyn Alcala, Associate Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry for the diocese. Organizers said they were excited to see this fruit of the Alpha Program and invite any *joven* (Hispanic young adult) who is interested in participating in the weekly evangelization program to reach out to Alcala at [jalcala@diocesefwsb.org](mailto:jalcala@diocesefwsb.org).

**Hispanic youth lead a Christmas posada at the Archbishop Noll Center in downtown Fort Wayne on Thursday, December 21. The group prays the Rosary with Bishop Rhoades, top, and reenacts Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem. Afterward, those in attendance enjoy a meal together.**



Photos by Scott Warden

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# Why Offering Masses for Loved Ones Is the Greatest Gift

BY ERIC PEAT

**I**t was two years ago in the spring when Carol Bunt received a divinely inspired gift idea for a young couple's wedding.

"This came from Jesus," prefaced Bunt, a parishioner at Our Lady of Good Hope in Fort Wayne. "I was in the adoration chapel praying, 'What in the world can I give them for their wedding gift?' I was pondering that, and I asked Jesus a couple times, and the idea came into my mind to do an anniversary Eucharistic pilgrimage. It just came flooding in."

The resulting gift: 12 monthly Masses offered for the couple at different parishes throughout the next year, each celebrated on the day of the month of their wedding. Bunt had all 12 dates and locations printed and framed as a wedding gift – one that was particularly meaningful not only to the couple but to Bunt, as well.

"It was a joyful experience to schedule all of those," Bunt told *Today's Catholic*. "As time went on, it really was inspiring me. I think it was confirming the importance of intercessory prayer through Masses for families and couples."

Bunt's experience is a beautiful illustration of the significance of having Masses offered for loved ones.

The Mass is the highest form of prayer in the Catholic Church, as it unites the faithful with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Monsignor Michael Heintz, a priest of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend who is currently serving at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland, said this is what makes the Mass such a powerful way to intercede on one's behalf.

"The Mass is offered once by Christ," Monsignor Heintz said. "By His providence and grace, Jesus has allowed that one perfect sacrifice to be made present again whenever a church celebrates Mass. He did it once in a way that was definitive and unrepeatable. Whether it's celebrated in a small parish or privately by a priest or at St. Peter's [Basilica]

in Rome, it's all a participation in the one sacrifice of Christ."

It has long been a custom in the Catholic Church to offer Masses for loved ones who have passed away. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "From the beginning, the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God" (No. 1032).

Our prayers for the deceased can help expedite their heavenly journey, said Jessica Hayes, a Pastoral Associate at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Fort Wayne.

"For those loved ones who have died, we can't assume the state of their soul, but we have the great virtue of hope that they'll be in heaven forever," Hayes said. "We keep them in prayer, ask the Lord to purify their souls, and make them ready for Him. That's the foundation of theological hope that we're given in baptism."

In fact, by virtue of our baptism, Heintz said, there's a spiritual bond that connects us to all other baptized believers. "All the threads of friendship and affection that knit us together in life do not unravel with death," Heintz said. "We know we can pray for the dead because this bond cannot be broken by death. This also exists among the living. There is a spiritual bond, a connection that exists among us – even if we've never met each other, that bond is real."

Thanks to that bond, while Masses are most commonly offered for the deceased, they can also be celebrated for those still living. Whether it be for a birthday, a wedding anniversary, a celebration of receiving a sacrament, or healing from an illness, a Mass can be offered for almost any intention. Hayes has experienced firsthand that prayer – and specifically, the Mass – is the greatest gift that can be given.

"My parents have [a Mass] offered every year on the anniversary of my consecration," said Hayes, who was consecrated as a virgin in 2015. "It shows my parents' faith in the Mass and their desire to give

a gift that has fruits beyond anything else they can give me, because it's a prayer from the Lord Himself. ... It recognizes the importance of that day for my own vocation, and any one person growing in holiness is a gift to the whole Body of Christ."

Although the graces that come from a single Mass are of infinite value ("You can't quantify the sacrifice of Christ," as Monsignor Heintz pointed out), there is still reason to offer multiple Masses for a specific intention. Every Mass that is celebrated on one's behalf serves as a reminder to pray for that person. "If I have 45 Masses said for someone I care about, that's 45 opportunities for me to remember them," Monsignor Heintz said. "It's as much about the benefit for the one offering the Mass as the one who the Mass is being said for."

In addition, there's no need to worry if a Mass is offered for a deceased loved one who

is already in heaven. Since God knows the state of a person's soul, Hayes said we can trust that the "the Lord will apply the fruits to wherever they are needed most. Nothing offered to the Lord is ever wasted." Monsignor Heintz also mentioned that "God's saving work is not limited by a temporal category," so He is able to work outside of time itself. That means our prayers today can be applied to any person across all of time, since God knows eternally all the prayers that will ever be said for a given soul.

Additionally, one does not need to be Catholic to have a Mass offered for them. Masses can be said for those of any faith tradition – or who do not practice any faith.

Finally, while an offering of \$10 is traditional when requesting a Mass intention, Monsignor Heintz stressed that it isn't a necessity.

"You can't charge for the celebration of Mass,"

Monsignor Heintz said. "If someone ever contacts a church, they never say, 'Here's how much it costs.' An offering is customary, and historically, the reason is to cover the cost of bread and wine for the priest who is celebrating. But it's not required, and a priest can't refuse to offer a Mass for someone because they don't have money."

Those interested in offering a Mass for a particular intention can simply call their parish office to make this request. There are also online opportunities available by visiting [mymassrequest.org](http://mymassrequest.org), where Mass intentions can be requested from missionary priests around the world through the Seraphic Mass Association. Regardless of the method, Bunt said offering a Mass is always an unrivalled gift.

"We tell our children, 'We don't need anything, but you can always have a Mass said for us.'"



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# Living the Joy like St. Philip Neri

It was just before Pentecost in 1544, and a young man named Philip was praying in the catacombs of the Church of St. Sebastian in Rome. As he immersed himself deeper and deeper into prayer, he experienced a mystical revelation that would change his life forever. There appeared to him a giant ball of fire, which came into his mouth and lodged into his heart – and both his life and his heart would never be the same.

From that moment on, Philip spent the rest of his life physically burning with the divine love of the Holy Spirit. His heart would throb so violently that as he would walk into a room, cups and plates on tables would shake, causing others to refer to him as the “human earthquake.” And at the end of his life on earth, doctors performed an autopsy on this extraordinary man to see what his heart physically looked like. What they found was no less astonishing than the man himself. They discovered that Philip’s heart had physically enlarged so much that it actually broke two ribs from the inside out.

St. Philip Neri was known as the “Second Apostle of Rome” for his extraordinary evangelical work in 16th-century Rome, and he went on to found the Oratory way of life, which brought secular priests together in common prayer. Perhaps, most notably, he is the patron saint of joy. He was well known to have had a remarkable sense of humor and great love for laughter.

Like Philip, I also had an experience of the Holy Spirit on the eve of Pentecost a couple years ago. No, I didn’t break any ribs, nor did I swallow a Holy Spirit fireball, but I was ordained to the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Philip, too, was a priest – and one who overflowed with the joy of the Gospel. So between his Pentecost experience and his exuberant joy, I have found Philip to be a kindred spirit and have entrusted my priesthood to his prayers and fatherly care.

A long time ago, my dad told me that there were two ways to go through life – happy or sad. He also said going through life happy – filled with joy – would be a lot easier. I tend to agree! Not to mention, it is much more fun!

In a time in our world when the levels of frustration and unhappiness tend to increase year by year, with deaths of despair (suicide, drug overdoses, and liver diseases) also mounting, I think St. Philip gives us an opportunity to reexamine the proposal of the Gospel as what it truly is – an invitation to the fullness of joy. After all, Jesus tells his disciples, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be full” (Jn 15:4).

The difference between the mere pleasure offered by the world and the joy offered by the Gospel is rooted in relationship. St. Thomas Aquinas rightly points out that joy is the fruit of love, which results when a lover is with his beloved. In



## TWO CRACKED RIBS

FATHER BRIAN ISENBARGER

other words, it is the act of abiding in the presence of the Beloved that we can live the life of joy. Because our God is Emmanuel – God-with-us – and He has poured forth the Spirit of His love into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5), we have the ability to live in the presence of God at all times. The result, of course, is that by abiding in the Divine Presence, we can also live a life filled with joy at all times – even while suffering the trials of our fallen human condition.

So, throughout the coming year, my goal with this column is to share with you the joys of life from abiding with Jesus. I will give you a glimpse into my own experience of abiding (more or less!) with Him – in parish life, in rectory living, and in the other day-to-day realities of priesthood here in our diocese. I also hope to share a few laughs with you along the way – in the spirit of St. Philip. Who knows, maybe the Holy Spirit will fill us with such joy and laughter that we, too, will end up with two cracked ribs!

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

# Remembering, and Missing, Pope Benedict XVI

A year out from his death, I dearly miss Pope Benedict XVI. He was the pope of my coming of age. The generation of priests above me feel this way about Pope St. John Paul II; older priests, Pope St. Paul VI and Pope St. John XXIII.

When I began paying attention to my faith in high school, I was formed by Pope Benedict’s theology and speeches. I remember vividly his election and his words to the Church in his first homily as pope. And I remember that homily because he asked a question that every believer needs to face.

What did he say that has stuck with me all these years? Pope Benedict asked: “Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to Him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom?”

Christianity is a matter of surrender. Surrendering is a lesson we need to learn over and over again. We must continually give ourselves to Christ



## GUEST COMMENTARY

FATHER PATRICK BRISCOE

to renew our trust in Him. Pope Benedict lived in surrender to Christ and can help us to better surrender to Him.

For Pope Benedict, that journey of surrender began in the liturgy. He recounted to the journalist Peter Seewald being greatly interested in what happened at Mass, including his delight in using a missal – beginning in the second grade – to explore the Latin liturgy. He called it “a voyage of discovery.” Elsewhere, Pope Benedict likened the liturgy to play. He said, “Play is a kind of other world, an oasis of freedom, where for a moment we can let life flow freely.” The liturgy wasn’t oppressive for him, it was supremely liberating – a relief from the cares of the moment, allowing his heart and mind to be given over to the work of Christ.

That discovery of Christ is open to us all in our worship.

BRISCOE, page 13

# Epiphany Celebrates the Salvation God Has Offered to Us All



## THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MONSIGNOR OWEN F. CAMPION

## Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord

This weekend, the Church invites us to celebrate the feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, one of the most revered feasts in the Christian calendar.

Clear and distinct in the first reading from the third section of the Book of Isaiah is a brilliantly triumphant note. Why? The long, dreary exile of the faithful Hebrews in Babylon has ended. It was not all rejoicing, however. For those who returned to the Holy Land, life was not easy. The land was decimated.

Despite this, the prophet insists, a new day will come! It is not necessarily a prediction of material success, although

this would be a part of it. Rather, the new day would come when the Chosen People realized their vocation. Then, when they returned to God, the world would see the majesty and power of the great God of Israel.

For its second reading, this liturgy presents a selection from the Epistle to the Ephesians. In the first generations after Jesus, as converts increased the numbers of the Christian community, great interest began to surround the question of who was the object of the salvation secured by the Lord. Prompting this interest was the fact that so many new converts were from pagan backgrounds. It intensified when, in short order, once-pagan Christians outnumbered the Jewish Christians.

Part of the message of Jesus was that, throughout the ages, God had spoken through, and to, the Chosen People, the descendants of Abraham, the Hebrews. Now, God spoke to all through Christ. Gentiles could expect salvation. This promise undergirds this read-

ing. Salvation procured by Jesus is open to any human being.

St. Matthew’s Gospel furnishes the last reading, the story of the Magi who came from the “East” to find, and then to adore, the newborn “king of the Jews.” The story is unique to Matthew.

The story situates Jesus, the newborn son of Mary, in the great train of God’s saving works. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the birthplace of David, who as king established his own covenant with God. David ruled the Chosen People, but he was much more than a political leader. His task was to bring the people to God, and God to the people.

The Magi were searching for the “king of the Jews.” The title often appears in the stories of Jesus offered in the Gospels. Christ’s kingship was the subject of Pilate’s interrogation when he tried Jesus. It was inscribed on the placard that was placed atop the cross as Jesus was dying.

The Lord is king. His majesty eclipses all else. His law is

perfect.

The Epiphany presents several questions. Who were the Magi? No one knows. Where was their home? We know only that they came from the mysterious East. How many of them? Tradition says three. The Gospel is silent.

The Gospel is emphatic, however, in telling us that they were searching for something deep, profound, and enduring. They found all in Jesus.

## Reflection

At the time of Jesus, salvation, with its promise of God’s mercy and eternal life, was seen as being primarily, if not exclusively, available to the Chosen People. Jesus was a Jew, born of a Jewish mother. Could people of other nationalities expect to be saved?

The message of this feast is that all people may hope for salvation through Jesus. None is preferred. None is excluded. All are beloved.

Nationality is not the issue, but sin, fear, guilt, or indiffer-

ence separate people from God or from a sense of being with God.

On this feast, the Church calls us to come to the Lord, born of Mary, the king of the Jews, the lamb slain on Calvary. He belongs to us all.

## READINGS

**Sunday:** Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalms 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13; Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12

**Monday:** Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Psalms 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10; Mark 1:7-11

**Tuesday:** 1 Samuel 1:9-20; (Responsorial Psalm) 1 Samuel 2:1, 4-5, 6-7, 8abcd; Mark 1:21-28

**Wednesday:** 1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20; Psalms 40:2, 5, 7-8a, 8b-9, 10; Mark 1:29-39

**Thursday:** 1 Samuel 4:1-11; Psalms 44:10-11, 14-15, 24-25; Mark 1:40-45

**Friday:** 1 Samuel 8:4-7, 10-22a; Psalms 89:16-17, 18-19; Mark 2:1-12

**Saturday:** 1 Samuel 9:1-4, 17-19, 10:1; Psalms 21:2-3, 4-5, 6-7; Mark 2:13-17



# Whether It's Abortion or Blessings, 'Accompaniment' Will Be Messy

It's not an easy discussion, but it's one Catholics should have. The United States just watched an abortion drama in Texas that ended when 31-year-old Kate Cox, then more than 20 weeks pregnant, left the state in order to procure a legal abortion. The Texas Supreme Court had ruled that Cox and her doctor had not demonstrated that possible complications to her pregnancy (including previous cesarean sections and what doctors called a "high risk" of developing gestational hypertension and diabetes) arose to a life-threatening level.

Testing showed the child in utero had trisomy 18, a condition that is usually fatal before birth or within the first year of life. In a statement, Cox declared, "It is not a matter of if I will have to say goodbye to my baby, but when. I'm trying to do what is best for my baby and myself, but the state of Texas is making us both suffer."

First, let's acknowledge that nothing about this situation was simple or easy, no matter how much one's pro-life instincts might argue otherwise. It is unthinkable that a pregnant woman, particularly one who knows the joy of holding her newborn children, as Cox certainly did, would receive a trisomy 18 diagnosis without feeling grief, fear, heartache, and a very human instinct to want to "just make this situation go away."

Lots of women with problematic or "crisis" pregnancies have had that thought, however fleeting. Most human behavior moves upon a balance beam of love and fear; though human imagination can and does build upon both, our ability to entertain fear often leads to dread-filled anxiety that overshadows all else and becomes reflected in our actions.

It is at that point the choice for abortion is usually made. In

a case like Mrs. Cox's, one can easily imagine all the specters whispering fear into her heart: "How can you dare to love what you know you will lose? Why tempt a third C-section on a heartbreak of a baby, instead of one you can love and raise?" Ugly, ugly questions, but they're the sorts of questions a fearful heart, trained toward pragmatism in our utilitarian society, will allow and entertain until they all begin to sound pretty reasonable, and the notion that one truly can love and accompany a less-than-perfect baby is forgotten.

"Accompaniment" is the key notion here, one we increasingly jaw about within the Church, even as we try to figure out what it actually looks like or to define its parameters.

For instance, one could certainly argue that consenting to deliver and love an imperfect baby for as long as it survives is a wrenching bit of self-sacrificial accompaniment to an infant soul.

But a parent facing such a grievous situation would need accompaniment, too. This would have been the time for the Church – leadership and laity – to have told the Cox family (even if they were not Catholic), "We will accompany you as you go through this very difficult pregnancy; we will be there as you hold your child and witness the life your baby has; we will be there as you say goodbye, too. We will be there for you, in all you need, in the service of your life and the life of this precious soul that has been entrusted to you by God."

To my knowledge, we Catholics, as a Church, did not do that.

Accompaniment can be difficult and even messy. Recently, the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith released a statement on the blessing of irregular unions, including same-sex couples, and the matter is jolting because

categorized. It was no secret that he wanted to be a priest, and in a hostile climate, he had to learn to defend himself. "By itself studying theology doesn't make a person better," Pope Benedict admitted to Seewald. But, he continued, "It helps to make him better when he doesn't pursue it just as a theory but tries to get a better understanding of himself and of man and the world as a whole in what he reads and then tries to appropriate it as a form of life." Precisely because he understood theology as a form of life, Pope Benedict's mind was given to Christ.

For Pope Benedict, Christianity couldn't be abstract



ELIZABETH SCALIA

## GUEST COMMENTARY

– make no mistake – despite how some are underplaying and others are overplaying the news, the highly pastoral document is a signal change to how things are understood and how they will proceed from here on.

It's all about accompaniment, this declaration, but – both theologically and pastorally – some will doubtlessly find it confusing and, yes, messy.

We need to figure out what we're doing about accompaniment and decide whether we, as a catholic and apostolic Church, mean to accompany the whole world through difficult things (in which case we might have been the missing presence that may have helped Kate Cox make a different decision). Or whether accompaniment will mean something more pastorally comfortable but less catechetically precise – landing somewhere between "Come, deepen your relationship with Christ" and "Do what you will as long as you're a good person, because God always loves you."

It would probably be wise to begin small on accompaniment until we figure out how to navigate it theologically, pastorally, spiritually, collectively, and personally. Because outreach accompaniment cannot help but put real skin in the game, regardless of which issue we're working on.

Accompaniment is good. But, yes, it's going to be messy.

Elizabeth Scalia is the Culture Editor for OSV News.

or theoretical. Christianity is an event, a reality. Christ is a person to be known with the mind and loved with the heart.

In the end, the pope was right. "If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful, and great." And it is this that I am most grateful for, the way he helped me to let Christ into my life.

It's a curious thing to feel so attached to someone I never met, but then again, our heroes shape us.

Father Patrick Briscoe is Editor of Our Sunday Visitor.

## SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for January 7, 2024

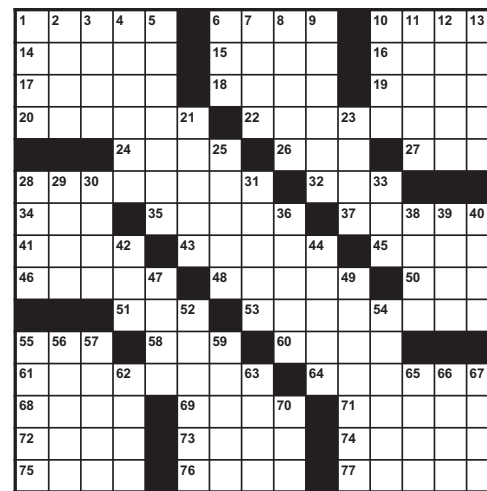
Matthew 2:1-12

Following is a word search based on the Gospel reading for the feast of Epiphany: The Magi meet Herod along the way. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

JERUSALEM	RISING	PRIESTS
PEOPLE	INQUIRED	MESSIAH
BE BORN	BETHLEHEM	JUDEA
LEAST	RULERS	ISRAEL
SEARCH	CHILD	FOUND HIM
STOPPED	ENTERING	HOUSE
TREASURES	WARNED	A DREAM

## A DELAY

J	O	E	N	T	E	R	I	N	G	K	I
L	K	C	H	I	L	D	H	N	E	B	N
S	F	J	O	C	M	I	I	F	E	E	Q
E	O	L	E	A	R	S	I	T	U	B	U
R	U	T	E	R	I	A	H	G	U	O	I
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T	P	O	M	E	S	S	I	A	H	M	N
M	B	R	D	G	S	T	O	P	P	E	D



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### ACROSS

- 1 Niche for storing consecrated oils
- 6 Protectors of the first amendment (abbr.)
- 10 Oaf
- 14 Company newbie
- 15 Reveal indiscreetly
- 16 Spanish pot
- 17 Diocese of Honolulu greeting
- 18 Island in the Caribbean
- 19 Still
- 20 Sign regarding a canine
- 22 Brother of Joseph
- 24 Obstacle
- 26 Bigger than med.
- 27 20's US Catholic politician
- 28 Grass cutters
- 32 Congregational initials
- 34 George Gershwin's brother
- 35 Fabric of jeans
- 37 One who helps you find a vacant seat in the pews
- 41 Promised \_\_\_\_\_
- 43 Swellings
- 45 Crunchy snack
- 46 Sears subsidiary
- 48 Lofty nest
- 50 Color TV pioneer
- 51 Aachen article
- 53 Administered
- 55 Hairy Addams cousin
- 58 There have been 13 popes with this name
- 60 Trillion (pref.)
- 61 Meeting for the election of the pope
- 64 Biblical hunter
- 68 Musical instrument
- 69 "...all run the \_\_\_\_\_ but only one wins the prize" (1 Cor 9:24)
- 71 Lyric poem
- 72 Louse eggs
- 73 English public school
- 74 Portable papal throne, \_\_\_\_\_
- 75 "Let it stand"
- 76 Tear apart
- 77 Wooded

### DOWN

- 1 Evil king of Israel
- 2 Unit of distance
- 3 "By the sweat of your \_\_\_\_\_ you shall eat bread" (Gen 3:19)
- 4 Go over again
- 5 Longed for
- 6 Phone button letters
- 7 Heavy stick
- 8 Trademark
- 9 River in central Africa
- 10 Catholic comedienne of "Your Show of Shows"
- 11 South American ruminant
- 12 Stan's partner
- 13 Curses
- 21 Consumed
- 23 Biblical king who destroyed the worshipers of Baal
- 25 Mystic St. Catherine who aided the sick during the plague lived in this Italian city
- 28 Land of \_\_\_\_\_ and honey
- 29 Biblical name for Syria
- 30 Site of first miracle
- 31 Favored
- 33 Winter hrs. in the Diocese of Cheyenne
- 36 Treasury of \_\_\_\_\_
- 38 Presley co-star who became a nun
- 39 "\_\_\_\_\_ homo"
- 40 \_\_\_\_\_ to Emmaus
- 42 A parish position (abbr.)
- 44 Seductively beautiful woman
- 47 "...and there was no man to \_\_\_\_\_ the ground" (Gen 2:5)
- 49 Weirddest
- 52 "\_\_\_\_\_ My God to Thee"
- 54 Girl Scout, sometimes
- 55 These art pieces have much symbolism
- 56 Husband of Anna
- 57 US government obligation
- 59 Egg-shaped
- 62 \_\_\_\_\_ la vie
- 63 Coll. course
- 65 Traveled
- 66 Drooling dog of comics
- 67 Sea of refuge for David
- 70 "...world without \_\_\_\_\_ Amen"

Answer key can be found on page 15

### BRISCOE, from page 12

All of us need that freedom from the worries that trap and ensnare us in the moment. To have our anxieties soothed and our worries calmed and our anger quenched – even if just for the duration of a Mass. But the more we give ourselves over to the freedom of the liturgy, the more we will find that freedom begins to rule our life. And bit by bit, surrender to Christ comes with more and more ease.

The other great aid for Pope Benedict was the intellectual life. Growing up in Nazi Germany, he remembers everyone being defined and



## St. Pius X Students Sing in Rome



Provided by St. Pius X

Twenty-three members of the children's choir at St. Pius X Parish in Granger flew to Rome to participate in the 44th International Congress of Pueri Cantores. Held every five years, the congress gathers children's choirs from around the world for a weeklong celebration of sacred music. To kick off the event, the St. Pius X choir performed at the Basilica di Sant'Andrea della Valle. The children were scheduled to perform at a Mass celebrated by Pope Francis in St. Peter's Basilica on Monday, January 1, the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.

### CAREER OPPORTUNITY



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#### 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](http://diocesefwsb.org/careers).



### 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](http://diocesefwsb.org/careers)

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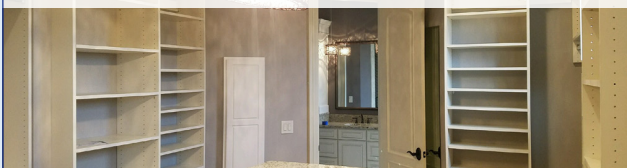
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# WHAT'S HAPPENING?

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.

**St. Therese Church to Host Epiphany Concert**  
FORT WAYNE – St. Therese Catholic Church, 2304 Lower Huntington Rd., will host an Epiphany concert on Sunday, January 7, at 7 p.m. There is no charge, but a free-will offering will be taken up to benefit the parish's St. Vincent de Paul Society. All are welcome. Presented by the Music Ministry of St. Therese under the direction of Beverly Rieger, the Epiphany concert will feature the musicians of St. Therese as well as David Ling as guest violinist, Joe Davis as guest soloist, and Allen Goebbert as guest organist. After the concert, all are invited to a reception in the parish hall.

**St. Veronica's Circle**  
NEW HAVEN – All women are invited to the second quarterly meeting of St. Veronica's Circle at Orchid Events and Catering, 11508 Lincoln Hwy E., on Tuesday, January 9, from 5:30-7 p.m. St. Veronica's Circle was established to provide funding to Catholic nonprofit organizations and/or organizations that are aligned with Catholic teaching. Contact [stveronicacircle@gmail.com](mailto:stveronicacircle@gmail.com).

**Ephphatha Women's Retreat 2024**  
HUNTINGTON – An Ephphatha women's weekend retreat will be held on Friday, February 2, at St. Felix Catholic Center, 1280 Hitzfield St. Contact Sarah Bishop at 260-450-6987 or [ephphathawomensretreat@gmail.com](mailto:ephphathawomensretreat@gmail.com) for more information.

**Sensory-Friendly Masses Held at St. Vincent de Paul**  
FORT WAYNE – The 1:30 p.m. sensory-friendly Masses held every Sunday at St. Vincent de Paul, 1502 E. Wallen Rd., provide a safe, comfortable, and stigma-free setting for children

and adults with sensory challenges, mental illness, or any kind of disability.

**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. Learn more 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 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.

## REST IN PEACE

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<b>Fort Wayne</b> Charles D. Bitler, 76, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton	Kathleen Klemme, 80, St. Vincent de Paul	Sister M. Blanche Rausch, 93, Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration
Rita G. Koomler, 95, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton	Charlotte Kruchten, 80, St. Vincent de Paul	<b>New Carlisle</b> Victor Antkowiak, 83, St. Stanislaus Kostka
Kathleen Herald, 81, St. Charles Borromeo	<b>Granger</b> Marla Dixon, 70, St. Pius X	<b>South Bend</b> Gloria Havener, 99, Christ the King
Carolyn Offerle, 89, St. Charles Borromeo	Ruth Eileen O'Brien, 94, St. Pius X	Ruth Elaine Christianson, 84, Holy Cross
Larry Rose, 81, St. Charles Borromeo	Patrick Rienks, 53, St. Pius X	John Robakowski, 81, St. Adalbert
Earl Wittkamper, 85, St. Charles Borromeo	<b>Huntington</b> Joseph W. Swada II, 46, SS. Peter & Paul	
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Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) is the statewide coordinating body for the five Roman Catholic Dioceses in Indiana. Its basic purpose is to serve the spiritual, moral, and material well-being of the people of the state:

- by serving as the official spokesperson for the Bishops and Catholic faithful regarding state and national matters
- by representing the Church and developing cooperative relationships where common public policy interests exist with religious and civic, social and governmental units
- by serving as liaison between the Catholic Church in Indiana and national Catholic groups in areas of common public policy interests

Candidates must be practicing Roman Catholics with an in-depth knowledge of the faith and Catholic social teachings. Excellent oral and written communication skills along with demonstrated analytical and organizational ability are required. An advanced degree (or equivalent experience) in one or more of the following related fields is preferred: theology, political or social sciences, philosophy, or education. Previous employment or volunteer experience in the Catholic Church, ideally involving administration, is preferred. The preferred starting date for the position is July of 2024.

Please e-mail a cover letter, resume, and list of references by February 5, 2024, to:

**Andrea Wunnenberg**  
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# Eucharistic Congress Offers 'Once-in-a-Lifetime' Opportunity

As 2024 begins, many will use the beginning of a new year to embark on a weight loss journey, commit to reading more books, vow to exercise more, and get their finances in order. Some use the beginning of a calendar year as an opportunity to dive deeper into their faith. With the National Eucharistic Revival ongoing and the historic National Eucharistic Congress taking place this summer in Indianapolis, 2024 is the perfect time for spiritual renewal. The congress, which will be held on July 17-21 at Lucas Oil Stadium, will bring laypeople, clergy, and religious from across the country with the aim to foster among the faithful a deeper devotion to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

Those involved in the event told *Today's Catholic* that the congress provides a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Catholics.

"Disneyworld and Legoland aren't going anywhere," said Katie Prejean McGrady, a speaker, award-winning author, and host of "The Katie McGrady Show" on the Catholic Channel on Sirius XM, who will serve as the Impact Session Emcee in Indianapolis. "This Congress is this summer, and I think it's really important for families to see the breadth, depth, and beauty of the Church in America."

McGrady continued: "This past summer, my daughters were able to come to the Sunday Mass of a Steubenville Youth Conference I was hosting. After Mass was over – a Mass filled with gorgeous music, checked-in and deeply devoted teenagers, and profound preaching that inspired the entire congregation – my 6-year-old turned to me and said, 'Mommy, is Mass always like this here? Because if it is, that was so great.' It was amazing to see her faith lit on fire in a new way because she experienced this sort of 'Upper Room' of young people gathered together to pray and worship together," McGrady told *Today's Catholic*. "The coals burned a bit brighter because there were more of them. I think that's what this Congress can do for us, in our families and in our own hearts. It's a chance to be lit on fire in a new way, to feel the sense of community and togetherness, to learn and to pray, and then to go home and light fires of faith in our parishes and communities."

Damon Owens, an international speaker and evangelist, is Executive Director of Joyful Ever After, a National Parish Engagement Officer for Communio.org, and an Impact Session speaker. He said he is honored by the invitation to speak at the congress and believes his work in marriage



KATIE PREJEAN MCGRADY

catechesis and as Director of the Theology of the Body Institute brought him this opportunity.

"I'm glad early on they saw the connection that I see very clearly, that any discussion around Eucharist, certainly Eucharistic revival, has to involve marriage," Owens said. "There's a direct connection between marital revival and Eucharistic revival, and that's going to be the focus of my talk. The invitation really was for me a confirmation that they see that as well."

"I'm excited about what really is an invitation to marital revival," Owens continued. "And I don't just mean in a moral sense, I mean in a real experience of joy, just as in the Eucharist where we have this one flesh union with Christ. A little bit of theology, but it's so practical that we're called to have the Eucharist so that we can be in intimate communion with God. He made that possible. We didn't create that. We didn't invent that, but we're invited to it. And a Eucharistic revival is about reviving the intimacy that we have with Our Lord who's the only begotten Son of God the Father."

Owens told *Today's Catholic* that we have to accept the invitation each of us is being offered.

"If we don't participate, there's no possibility of a revival," he said. "Revival isn't something that happens to us; it's something we enter



DAMON OWENS

into. It's something we allow to transform us. And I would invite people to be part of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that is an invitation from Pope Francis, an invitation from our leadership, from the Church, and therefore from Christ, for us to revive – really, to re-live, to reawaken the life of Christ in our everyday life. And only we know what that everyday life is. It's ours, it's a gift. So, to attend to this event is to really raise your hand, to stand up and say, 'I want new life. I want more joy. I want my faith not to be just a part of my life, but to animate it – literally, to be its soul,'" said Owens.

Mary Healy an author, international speaker, and professor of Scripture at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, is an Impact Session speaker and encourages people to join this monumental moment in history.

"The Church in the U.S. today is often marred by polarization, disillusionment, discouragement, and fatigue," Healy said. "We have not had a Eucharistic Congress since 1941. There is a great need for a rekindling of our hope! There is an extraordinary power in a whole national Church together turning our faces toward the Lord, worshiping Him, and asking for His blessing. I believe this event will truly bring revival and help launch a new wave of evangelization so that more people in this broken world can come to know the



MARY HEALY

saving power of Jesus," Healy said.

Healy served for three years as a consultant to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis. She said she feels privileged to see the vision for the Eucharistic Revival unfold under the leadership of Bishop Andrew Cozzens of Crookston, Minnesota.

"It has been amazing to see the creativity, energy, talent, prayer, and fervor with which the congress is being prepared, and the number of lives that have already been touched by it. And I have no doubt that the Lord has much more in mind," Healy said.

At the congress, Healy said she is planning to talk about the healing power of Jesus, who gives Himself to us and draws us into the whole mystery of His passion in the Eucharist.

"Everyone is in need of healing on some level – physical, emotional, relational, or spiritual, or all of the above – and the Lord loves to heal. My hope is that people's faith will be stirred up to realize just how much the Lord desires to heal them, so they can actually experience His healing through the Eucharist," Healy said.

Healy, Owens, and McGrady said the congress provides a unique opportunity to connect with fellow Catholics from around the United States to reconsecrate hearts to the

source and summit of our faith.

"The witness of families at the Eucharistic Congress will be, I think, one of the most profound things we experience this summer in Indianapolis. I just have this picture in my head of kids and their moms and dads kneeling on the floor of an NFL football stadium, arms raised in worship before the Blessed Sacrament, heads bowed in awe as we kneel before Our Lord, and it moves me to tears just imagining the collective power of praise and community in that moment. This is a moment for a movement, and hopefully it sparks fires in the hearts of our kids that can set a new generation ablaze with a love of the Lord, and that fire can be lit at the congress. We'll be there, no doubt about it, and I can't wait to experience it as a family," McGrady said.

Healy agreed, saying: "In my experience, an event like this where a huge number of people gather in Christ's name is an occasion of tremendous grace, often life-changing grace. I would encourage people to attend the whole event if possible, because each day will have its own unique character, new insights, and surprises of grace."

Owens believes this opportunity is especially important for families. As the father of eight, traveling with 10 can be a challenge, but attending something of this magnitude can be life-changing for people of all ages. Owens encourages fellow dads to make the trek with their families. The location of something in the United States gives even more reason to attend. Unlike events such as World Youth Day that are overseas and require passports and extensive travel, this event is happening close to home for many. Owens said his first stateside event was the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. He was in awe and appreciated the chance for an American Catholic experience.

"Having this here in the United States, in the Midwest, here in Indianapolis, gives everyone access here in the United States to participate in a community that we just don't get the opportunities to do. It's more than our parish," Owens said. "It's more than our diocese. It's more than even our region – the North, the South, the West, the Midwest. This is an American opportunity to build and to live as an American Catholic community, authentically. And there's really no way to replicate this anywhere else. It really is a once-in-a-lifetime moment."

For a detailed list of schedules and speakers, and to purchase five-day passes or single-day passes, visit [eucharisticcongress.org](http://eucharisticcongress.org).

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