

TODAY'S CATHOLIC

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Speakers Urge Men to Rekindle the Fire of Their Faith

BY JIM MOUNT

It's early in the morning on Saturday, February 24, in the Expo Hall at the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum in Fort Wayne. Vendors are setting up tables as several men in red fleece vests wander about checking final details and finishing up preparations for the annual Rekindle the Fire men's conference, which is about to begin. Soon, men come filing into the hall, where dozens of round tables await them and their peers, and they take their place among the settings.

In these days with political, moral, and spiritual turmoil, the need for guidance amid the confusion and social chaos – particularly among men – is needed more than ever as our society and culture become increasingly void of any spiritual bedrock, leaving a path forward clouded in philosophies and ideologies mired in falsehood and hatred for what's good and holy. Multiple speakers at the conference attested to the fact that the family has suffered greatly on account of this, as so many men have spiritually lost their way.

Scott Warden

Hundreds of men look on during the Rekindle the Fire men's conference at the Expo Hall at the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum in Fort Wayne on Saturday, February 24.

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Do the World a Favor: Go to Confession!

BY FATHER BOBBY KRISCH

There never seems to be a shortage of bad news in our world today. Every time we scroll through the news, it seems like one terrible thing after another. And, too often, we can feel completely powerless in the face of such evil. But we are not powerless, nor are we to lose hope, for Jesus tells us, "In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (Jn 16:33). In the face of such tribulation, there are two great things we can do. The first is that we can pray. We are called to pray always (1 Thes 5:17) because, ultimately, the fight

belongs to the Lord. But the second task might surprise you: go to confession.

There is no such thing as a private sin. Yes, we are fully capable of committing sins when no one else is around, but still, there really is no such thing as a private sin. No matter if we commit a sin against a whole group of people, or just one person, or if no one else is around, our sins do have an impact upon others. Sin certainly has a personal impact on the one who commits the offense, especially on his or her relationship with the Lord, but so, too, sin has an impact upon others around us. This is because we are all members of the Body of Christ.

All of us, young and old, are

members of the Body of Christ. As St. Paul tells us, "As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ" (1 Cor 12:12). Christ is the head of the body, which is the Church. Just as all parts of the body come together to form the whole person, so, too, all the members of the Church have dignity because they all belong to Christ and form the whole (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-26).

And St. Paul concludes, "If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy" (1 Cor 12:26). I'm sure

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PUBLISHER: Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades

PUBLICATION DIRECTOR: Nicole Hahn

Editorial Department

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Scott Warden

PAGE DESIGNER: Francie Hogan

VIDEO/SOCIAL MEDIA: Joshua Schipper

Business Department

BOOKKEEPING/CIRCULATION:

circulation@diocesefwsb.org

ADVERTISING ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE:

Erika Barron: ebarron@diocesefwsb.org

Website: todayscatholic.org

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Father Mike Schmitz Speaks
on Relationships at Notre Dame

BY KASIA BALSBAUGH

There's a joke about a husband who turns to his wife and says, "You're welcome."

"For what?" the wife asks.

"For the rib," the husband responds (referencing the Biblical story that Eve was made from the rib of Adam).

"Well, you were made from dirt," the wife responds.

Father Mike Schmitz contextualized the joke in terms of human relationship: "We always ask who's better."

Father Schmitz, a priest of the Diocese of Duluth, Minnesota, who is well known for his videos on social media and as host of the "Bible in a Year" and "Catechism in a Year" podcasts, came to speak at the University of Notre Dame on Saturday, February 24. His talk, "Life After the Apple: How to Love After the Fall," targeted the difficulty of man-woman relationships in our broken world.

Collette Doyle is a junior at Notre Dame and Chief of Staff of the Notre Dame student government, which was responsible for bringing Father Mike Schmitz to campus to speak. She said they have been planning for the event since last summer. The stakes were high, as last year's speaker was Bishop Robert Barron, Founder of the Catholic media apostolate Word on Fire. "We wanted to bring a notable speaker," Doyle said,

adding, "I'm so glad that it all worked out."

Father Schmitz spoke to a packed audience in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, with pews and seating filled and dozens more people standing in the back of the church. Many attendees were students, but many were families and others from Notre Dame and the broader community.

At one point in the talk, Father Schmitz read the opening of the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

"That is not true," Father Schmitz said. "Not because we're not created equal, but because the first line is, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident.' Look around the room. It is not self-evident that we're all equal. ... Some people are stronger than others, some



Photos by Kasia Balsbaugh

Attendees listen intently during Father Mike Schmitz's talk at the University of Notre Dame on Saturday, February 24.

people are taller than others, some people are smarter than others. ... Then along comes this truth revealed to us – not self-evident but revealed to us – that says no matter who you are, or where you come from, your health or your sickness, your intelligence or your lack of intelligence, your strength or your weakness, no matter if you're male or female, no matter your ethnicity or race, no matter – no matter anything, you've been created on purpose, good, and in God's very image. And that idea, we would never know this without Genesis Chapter 1."

Father Schmitz then walked through the first chapters of the Genesis story, adding commentary and humor as he went along. He described the Book of Genesis as "written from the eyes of a lover, from the eyes of a poet." Father Schmitz also

dwelt on the love Adam and Eve had for each other before the fall. He described the way Adam thought of Eve: "She's worth fighting for. She's worth loving. She's worth choosing."

"This is how it was in the beginning," Father Schmitz said.

After talking about the serpent's lies and the Fall – the rejection of God by humans – Father Schmitz addressed the lies we still tell ourselves. Men, he said, often experience the lie, "You're not enough; you need something to prove." Women,



Father Mike Schmitz speaks, Bible in hand, during his talk, "Life After the Apple: How to Love After the Fall."

he said, often experience the lie, "You're not worth loving the way that you are." After discussing how loving parents and spouses can quiet those lies, Father Schmitz added that turning to God, the One who loves us most, can ultimately silence those lies we tell ourselves.

"When that lie gets loud, look at the crucifix," Father Schmitz urged. "And ladies, see, that's what you're worth. You've already been chosen. ... Men, look at the crucifix. He trusts you. He believes in you. He says, 'You have what it takes.' But what's it going to take? Well, from now on, love after the Fall, it always involves sacrifice. Every time. It's going to take everything you have. But none of it is going to be wasted."

Maureen Schweninger, a Notre Dame graduate student, said this was her first time seeing Father Schmitz speak

in person, though she's been aware of him for years. She said the experience was "unreal" to an extent she had not anticipated. "He has the most profound and obvious charisma for preaching that I have ever known in person," Schweninger said. "And I frankly did not expect that."

Holy Cross Professor Laura LeGare, who saw Father Schmitz speak at the University of Notre Dame four years ago, said they were very similar experiences, including how packed the venue was both times Father Schmitz came. "He's very relatable, but what he says packs a punch and is so true," LeGare said. "It speaks to a lot of people's experiences, I think."

Father Schmitz's talk was livestreamed and is available to watch on YouTube at bit.ly/48yqNJU.

National Eucharistic Pilgrimage to Visit 11 Parishes Across Diocese

BY JOSHUA SCHIPPER

Officials with the National Eucharistic Revival announced on Thursday, February 22, detail of the four routes for the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage that will traverse the United States this summer. The Marian Route, which begins in Crookston, Minnesota, on May 17, will stop at 11 parishes in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend from July 5-10.

"A cross-country pilgrimage of this scale has never been attempted before," said Tim Glemkowski, CEO of the Denver-based National Eucharistic Congress Inc., in a statement announcing updated routes and related events. "It will be a tremendously powerful action of witness and intercession as it interacts with local parish communities at stops all along the way."

Father Julius Okojie, Pastor of St. Therese, Little Flower Church in South Bend, said that, even though the pilgrimage is still several months away, his parish will soon initiate preparations to welcome pilgrims to the diocese.

"I mean, how often do you get a national pilgrimage [to] pass through your parish?" Father Okojie asked. "It's a once in a lifetime experience, so we're going to be all in for it."

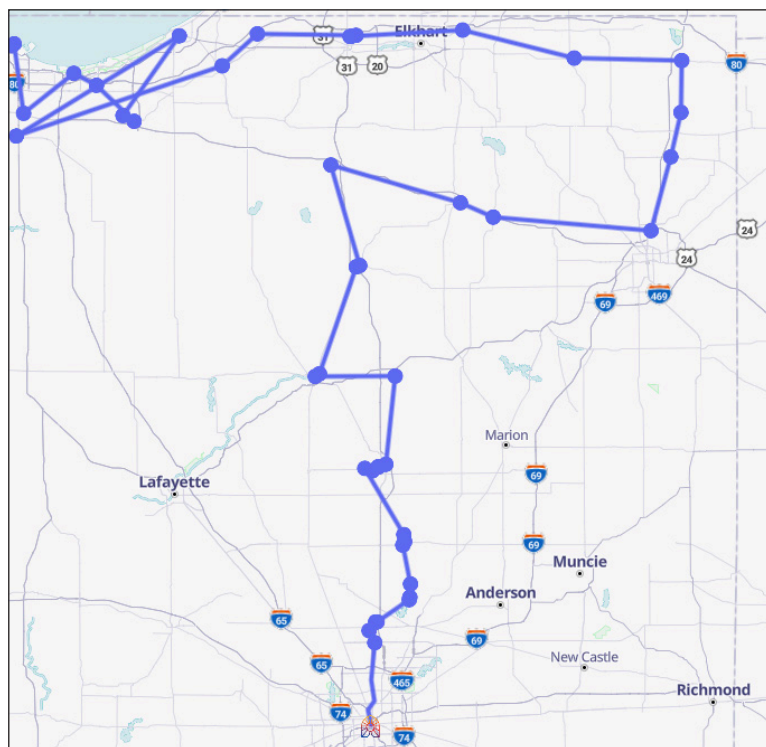
Father Okojie also spoke of the importance of reviving belief in the True Presence. Summarizing documents from the Second Vatican Council, he said that without the Eucharist, there is no Church.

"It is distinctive for us as Catholics that we have this Real Presence – not just real presence in the spiritual sense, the Real Presence in the actual elements of bread and wine."

He continued that he strongly believes that this experience would be a "great faith boost" for parishioners in the Lord's presence in the Eucharist and would "revamp their understanding of what it really means to be a Eucharistic Church."

Speaking of the Catholic community in South Bend, Father Okojie called this a great opportunity for members of the various parishes in the area to gather together and pray in a common space.

During his Q&A session at the Rekindle the Fire men's conference in Fort Wayne on Saturday, February 24, Bishop Rhoades was asked about the National Eucharistic Revival and the upcoming National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis. He spoke about his eagerness that one of the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage



This is the Marian Route of the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage that will be travelling through Indiana this summer.

MARIAN ROUTE

Stops in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend

- July 5: St. Therese, Little Flower, South Bend**
- July 5-7: Basilica of the Sacred Heart, Notre Dame**
- July 7: St. Mary of the Annunciation, Bristol**
- July 7: St. Joseph, Lagrange**
- July 7-8: St. Anthony of Padua, Angola**
- July 8: St. Michael, Waterloo**
- July 8: Immaculate Conception, Auburn**
- July 8-9: St. Vincent de Paul, Fort Wayne**
- July 9: St. Francis Xavier, Piercetown**
- July 9: Sacred Heart, Warsaw**
- July 9-10: St. Michael, Plymouth**

routes would be traveling through the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

"I'm really excited that this summer, the National Eucharistic Pilgrimages will take place – the four processions that will cover the whole United States, where the Blessed Sacrament will be carried in procession from California to Indianapolis, one from Brownsville, Texas, to Indianapolis, another one from New Haven, Connecticut, to Indianapolis, and then the one that will pass through our diocese, from Crookston, Minnesota, the source of the Mississippi River. ... I really want to encourage you to check it out when the Blessed Sacrament will be in your area. And I want to encourage you to come out, and invite others to come out, to give witness to your faith by coming out to honor Our Lord, to adore Him in the Blessed Sacrament."

All four routes of the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage, including the Marian Route,

will meet in Indianapolis this summer when the National Eucharistic Congress begins on July 17. The congress is the launch point for the final year of the National Eucharistic Revival that will encourage people to "go out on mission" to share the news of our Eucharistic Lord as the Church enters its universal jubilee in 2025.

Each pilgrimage route will be led by a group of "Perpetual Pilgrims," who will be young adults ages 19-29 who have been selected in an application process to travel the full length of each route. Their names will be announced on Monday, March 11.

People who wish to travel as a "day pilgrim" or attend a pilgrimage-related event along the routes may register online at eucharisticpilgrimage.org. Day pilgrims must make their own arrangements for meals, transportation, and lodging, as needed.

OSV News contributed to this report.



Public schedule of Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades

Wednesday, February 28, to Wednesday, March 6: Episcopal Ordination of Bishop-Elect Wimal Jayasuriya, Chilaw, Sri Lanka

Saturday, March 9: 4:30 p.m. – Mass with the Dedication of the New Altar, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, Fort Wayne



MARCH

- St. Joseph, Garrett: March 2-4
- St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Fort Wayne: March 3-5
- St. Casimir, South Bend: March 3-5
- St. Joseph, Fort Wayne: March 10-12
- St. Joseph, South Bend: March 17-19
- St. Joseph, Mishawaka: March 17-19
- St. John the Evangelist, Goshen: March 17-19
- Queen of Angels, Fort Wayne: March 17-19

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

LIGHT, from page 1

many of us have experienced how an injured muscle in one part of the body can throw off how the rest of the body feels and functions. Even something as small as a paper cut can have a negative impact on how we behave. So it is with members of the Body of Christ.

Thus, there is no such thing as a private sin. What one member does in the Body of Christ affects the whole. But just as one sin affects everyone, the grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation affects all of the Body as well. Yes, there is great personal gain for one who receives the awesome grace of the sacrament, but the whole of the Church benefits from this individual reconciliation as well. Thus, healing for the whole happens incrementally in the individual parts (c.f. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1469).

In his 1984 apostolic exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* ("Reconciliation and Penance"), Pope St. John Paul II summarizes this nicely: "This reconciliation with God leads, as it were, to other reconciliations which repair the breaches caused by sin. The forgiven penitent is reconciled with himself in his inmost being, where he regains his own true identity. He is reconciled with his brethren whom he has in some way attacked and wounded. He is reconciled with the church. He is recon-

ciled with all creation" (No. 31.5).

So, if we want to have an impact on the world this Lent, go to confession! The Body of Christ is wounded, and Jesus desires to extend His healing mercy to all those parts that are hurt. With the help of God's grace, we can do our part to restore what we have broken through our sins.

We can't control what people do around the world. We can't control what happens in our country or our state or our local community. Sometimes, we can't even control what happens in our own homes! But we can control what we do. We can control our response to the evil in the world. We can turn our lives away from sin and so turn back more fully to the Lord God. If you want to do your part to fight against the evils that plague us, then come to confession. Do your part by letting the Lord speak His love and mercy into your wounds and so heal you and the Body of Christ.

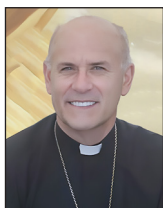
To that end, the light is on for you! Every parish in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend will have the Sacrament of Confession available on Thursday, March 7, from 6-8 p.m. Please take advantage of this great opportunity and keep us priests busy!

Father Bobby Krisch is a Parochial Vicar at St. Charles Borromeo Church in Fort Wayne.

Bishop Rhoades Expresses 'Solidarity' Amid Lawsuit in Texas

BY TODAY'S CATHOLIC,
OSV NEWS

On Monday, February 26, Bishop Rhoades, Chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Religious Liberty, expressed solidarity with faith-driven ministries to migrants and noted the special need to protect religious liberty. His remarks commended the February 23 statement issued by the Catholic bishops of the State of Texas following a lawsuit against a Catholic nonprofit serving migrants and asylum-seekers at the Southern border.



BISHOP KEVIN
C. RHOADES

"It is hard to imagine what our country would look like without the good works that people of faith carry out in the public square," Bishop Rhoades said.

"For this, we can thank our strong tradition of religious liberty, which allows us to live out our faith in full.

As the tragic situation along our border with Mexico increasingly poses challenges for American communities and vulnerable persons alike, we must especially preserve the freedom of Catholics and other people of faith to assist their communities and meet migrants' basic human needs. I

join my brother bishops in the State of Texas in expressing solidarity with those seeking simply to fulfill the fundamental biblical call: 'Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'"

Bishop Rhoades' statement comes on the heels of other Catholic leaders and local officials condemning an attempt by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton to shut down Annunciation House in El Paso, Texas, which officials in his office accused of "facilitating illegal entry to the United States" and "human smuggling," filing a lawsuit in an attempt to shut it down.

Paxton's lawsuit sparked immediate outrage from Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, who vowed in a February 22 statement supporting Annunciation House that the Church would "vigorously defend the freedom of people of faith and goodwill to put deeply held religious convictions into practice." He wrote, "We will not be intimidated in our work to serve Jesus Christ in our sisters and brothers fleeing danger and seeking to keep their families together."

Ruben Garcia, Director of Annunciation House, told reporters at a press conference on Friday, February 23, that the nonprofit has been providing basic resources such as food, shelter, and water to migrants and refugees who arrive at the border for nearly 50 years in consultation with the U.S. Border Patrol.



A family of migrants is dropped off by a transport contractor for the U.S. Customs and Border Protection at a shelter run by Annunciation House in downtown El Paso, Texas, on December 13, 2022.

OSV News photo/Ivan Pierre Aguirre, Reuters

"There are individuals who have decided that that should be illegal," he said.

In a February 20 statement announcing his lawsuit against Annunciation House, officials in Paxton's office alleged the group was a "stash house" facilitating illegal entry to the United States, a charge Garcia took particular umbrage with.

"I personally am taken aback by the use of words like 'smuggling,' to call our houses of hospitality 'stash houses,'" he said. "Is there no shame?"

Jerome Wesevich, a Texas RioGrande Legal Aid attorney representing Annunciation House, said officials in Paxton's office sent representatives to

Annunciation House demanding the group hand over documents within just one day and without judicial review, which he said was outside appropriate legal norms and requirements.

Wesevich said that courts, not the attorney general's office, are the appropriate arbiters of whether documents should be turned over, and, if so, then which documents.

"This should be an orderly process," Wesevich said.

"What has turned into this, a roomful of people," he said, gesturing at those gathered for the press conference, "could have been handled in a few emails between reasonable people. Instead, it appears that

Attorney General Paxton wants to use this request for documents simply as a pretext to close Annunciation House, and he did not realize what he was getting himself into. So, we feel that the law is pretty strong on our side."

Wesevich added, "Attorney General Paxton compounds his abuse of power by focusing it on a religious organization that is putting the Catholic faith into practice."

Annunciation House, Wesevich said, "does not decide who gets to come to the United States and who gets to stay here. ... Other people worry about those things," Wesevich said. "Annunciation House only provides basic services to vulnerable families – food, clothing, a place to lay their heads. America remains a free country where the law protects Annunciation House's right to do this work."

In comments at the press conference, Bishop Seitz reiterated his pledge that his El Paso diocese and the Catholic Church would stand by Annunciation House.

"This is not about politics," Bishop Seitz said. "It's about the Gospel."

Annunciation House operates several shelters in the El Paso area, assisting migrants and refugees with food, housing, and other assistance, as well as information about how to fill out the required legal documents to claim asylum in the United States.

**CONFESSION IN
EVERY PARISH**

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Social Justice Drives Advocacy for Undocumented Residents

INDIANA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE



BY VICTORIA ARTHUR

While the latest attempt to provide driving privilege cards for undocumented residents is stuck in neutral at the Statehouse, Indiana Catholics continue to advocate on this and other issues affecting the thousands who live and work in the state but cannot prove their legal status.

For the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC), the Church's longstanding commitment to social justice fuels these advocacy efforts – from supporting driving cards to opposing a bill that would crack down on so-called “sanctuary cities” that offer aid to the undocumented population.

“From its earliest days, the Catholic Church has stood in solidarity with the most vulnerable in our society,” said Angela Espada, Executive Director of the ICC, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana. “These are matters of social justice and of ensuring that people are treated with dignity and are able to obtain the basic necessities of life.”

A simple trip to work or to the grocery store is often a terrifying prospect for the approximately 100,000 undocumented immigrants in Indiana who must drive but do so without a license. For nearly a decade, legislation has been introduced in the General Assembly to provide undocumented residents with legal driving privileges – a move some lawmakers and advocates, from the ICC to law enforcement officials, believe would address basic human needs while offering larger economic and public safety benefits.

Driving cards would allow undocumented residents to drive legally and to purchase car insurance. They could not be used for voting or for other purposes.

Last year, for the first time, driving card legislation received a hearing at the Statehouse. During this year's short session of the General Assembly, companion bills were once again introduced in both chambers of the Legislature but did not receive a hearing.

“There are many people who feel very passionate about this issue on both sides,” Espada said. “You might hear people say that if (undocumented residents) don't have legal status it's because they didn't come here the right way, so why should they receive this benefit? Well, that's painting with a very

broad brush. There are a lot of people who are in very different stages of citizenship or having their asylum status approved, and there's a lot of bureaucracy. It's a lengthy process.

“It's also important to recognize that most people do not leave their home country because they want to,” she added. “They leave because they have to – because they can't provide for their families or because they fear for their safety.”

Felix Navarrete, the new Director of Hispanic Ministry for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, can relate all too well. Six years ago, he and his family fled their homeland of Nicaragua because of political unrest and government persecution of the Church. As state employees as well as individuals heavily involved in church ministry, Navarrete and his wife, Paholla, knew they had no choice but to leave with their four children, eventually settling in Indianapolis.

“Everyone was in shock – dealing with a new language, a new reality, a new culture,” said Navarrete, who is now in his second year in his role with the archdiocese. “I am in touch with so many people across our archdiocese, and I can see how people are struggling with so many things – not only with the language barrier but with not being able to drive safely to many places that they need to go.”

The Navarrete family found a home at Holy Spirit Parish and, later, at Holy Rosary Parish in Indianapolis and became actively involved in Hispanic ministries there. Now, Navarrete works both at the parish and archdiocesan levels to advocate for immigrants who face numerous challenges, recently becoming heavily involved with the first Civic Engagement Day held at the Statehouse.

All roads led to Indianapolis on that bitterly cold January day

as about 200 people representing the Hispanic community across the state converged to meet with lawmakers and make their voices heard, particularly on the issue of driving cards.

“I could see on their faces that they were acting by faith,” Navarrete said. “People from our Hispanic background are very humble, and sometimes they are afraid to speak out. But this was an incredible opportunity to not only advocate for something that will benefit people but also to empower new leaders in our Church. It was very powerful.”

Jesusa Rivera, the primary organizer of the event, understands deeply the humility of the Hispanic community and works every day to empower people, particularly farm workers, to use their voices to effect change.

At age 8, Rivera began working in fields alongside her parents, who left Mexico and met as farm workers in Texas. She endured the taunts of classmates and heard the stinging insults leveled at her mother by her employers and vowed to make a difference one day.

“These are the individuals who are putting food on our table – the food that we eat daily, and yet they usually don't make enough to feed their own families,” said Rivera, now a senior career coach for Proteus, which provides farm workers and their families with job training, education assistance, and emergency assistance in Indiana. “Not every American will take those jobs.”

Rivera described the fear that so often grips undocumented immigrants, many of whom she says drive hours each day to and from their work in the fields in this highly agricultural state.

“It's not being able to drive to work safely because you're always looking over your shoulder,

and when you see a police officer, you start praying in the vehicle and wonder, ‘Is this the day? Is this my day?’”

“Or it's not being able to go to Mass on Sunday, or to drive your children to school or pick them up, or to take your child from Lake County to Indianapolis for cancer treatment,” said Rivera, a member of St. Adalbert Parish in South Bend, where she helps minister to the large Hispanic population.

Rivera credits Bishop Rhoades for his outspoken advocacy on behalf of Hispanic and other immigrants. Just this week, Bishop Rhoades issued a statement expressing “solidarity with faith-driven ministries to migrants and noted the special need to protect religious liberty.”

“As the tragic situation along our border with Mexico increasingly poses challenges for American communities and vulnerable persons alike, we just especially preserve the freedom of Catholics and

other people of faith to assist their communities and meet migrants' basic needs,” wrote Bishop Rhoades, who serves as Chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Religious Liberty.

The bishop also called for “solidarity with those seeking simply to fulfill the fundamental biblical call: ‘Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’”

For Rivera and other advocates, the drive for positive change continues.

“We have a lot of work to do,” Rivera said. “It's one individual at a time, one parish at a time. This is a calling for me, and I'm not going to stop. I will keep going.”

To follow priority legislation of the ICC, visit indianacc.org. Those who sign up for ICAN receive alerts on legislation moving forward and ways to contact their elected representatives.



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U.S. Bishops Launch Teaching Initiative Called 'Love Means More'

WASHINGTON (OSV News) – “Love Means More,” a new teaching initiative of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has a statement of purpose, a website, and a promise to keep building the website to provide answers on a wide variety of questions about Catholic teaching on love, sexuality, and marriage. The premise speaks to the simple question of what “I love you” can portend. “Imagine sincerely saying this to someone for the first time and getting the response, ‘What do you mean?’ In that moment, the stakes would be too high to pause for a calm, honest exploration of this question. That’s why this site exists,” according to the website, lovemeansmore.org. The initiative is led by Bishop Robert E. Barron of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota, Chair of the USCCB’s Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth. Bishop Barron also is the founder of Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, author of numerous books and articles, and has a podcast and video presentations via YouTube. “Conversations about love, marriage, sexuality, family, and the human person can be confusing and polarizing,” Bishop Barron said in a February 21 news release, adding that he hoped the initiative would “help bring clarity and compassion to those questions.” “Love Means More” renews and replaces “Marriage: Unique for a Reason,” an initiative launched by the U.S. bishops in 2011.

Seven U.S. Cardinals Pledge to Help Ukraine Through New Fund

PHILADELPHIA (OSV News) – With Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine entering its third year, seven U.S. cardinals have become patrons of a new effort to heal the suffering of Ukraine’s people due to Russian aggression. On Tuesday, February 20, the Ukrainian Catholic bishops of the U.S. announced that their Metropolia Humanitarian Aid Fund has been restructured as the Healing of Wounds of the War in Ukraine Fund. The fund is aimed at “healing physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds inflicted by the criminal Russian invasion,” said the four bishops – Metropolitan Archbishop Borys A. Gudziak of the Archeparchy of Philadelphia; Bishop Paul P. Chomnycky of the Eparchy of Stamford, Connecticut; Bishop Benedict Aleksyichuk of the Eparchy of St. Nicholas in Chicago; and Bishop Bohdan J. Danylo of the Eparchy of St. Josaphat in Parma, Ohio – in a report accompanying the announcement. The U.S. Ukrainian bish-

Minnesota Catholics Pray for Fallen First Responders



OSV News photo/Anna Wilgenbusch, The Catholic Spirit

Father Jim Perkl, Pastor of Mary, Mother of the Church in Burnsville, Minnesota, who is a Burnsville police and fire chaplain, leads a Rosary outside Burnsville City Hall with members of the Catholic Watchmen on Saturday, February 24, for the three first responders who were shot and killed during a standoff with a Burnsville man who had barricaded himself with his family on Sunday, February 18. They also prayed for the perpetrator, who died by suicide.

ops said they were especially grateful to the seven U.S. cardinals – Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago, Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York, Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory of Washington, D.C., Cardinal Robert W. McElroy of San Diego, Cardinal Sean P. O’Malley of Boston, and Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey – who agreed to serve as patrons of the new fund, which will address the long-term, unseen wounds of the war.

National Shrine of a Beloved Philadelphia Saint Vandalized

PHILADELPHIA (OSV News) – The shrine of a beloved Philadelphia saint sustained an estimated \$20,000 dollars’ worth of damage in an apparent act of vandalism. Panels of three stained-glass windows were shattered at the National Shrine of St. John Neumann in Philadelphia in the early morning hours of Monday, February 19. The windows, depicting scenes from the 19th-century Redemptorist’s life, are locat-

ed in the lower church of the shrine, which is housed at St. Peter the Apostle Church. The saint’s remains – covered by a wax mask and vestments and encased in glass beneath the altar of the lower church – were unaffected by the attack. Staff at the shrine “discovered that someone had thrown a brick and stones” through the three windows, said Kenneth A. Gavin, Chief Communications Officer of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, in an emailed statement to OSV News. Detectives are investigating, and the incident may be related to similar vandalism that took place during the same time period at a historic African Methodist Episcopal church, a theater company, and a law firm.’

Theme for World Day of Migrants and Refugees Focuses on ‘Journey’

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – The Catholic Church’s focus for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2024 highlights its need to walk alongside displaced persons and to convey to

them God’s presence and guidance along their paths, officials with Vatican said. In a statement released on Thursday, February 22, the Vatican announced “God walks with His people” will be the theme for the 110th World Day, which will be celebrated on September 29. Pope Francis’ message for the World Day – not yet released – “will address the itinerant dimension of the Church with a particular focus on our migrant brothers and sisters, a contemporary icon of the journeying Church,” the officials said. They added that the Church’s journeying alongside its people, and in particular migrants and refugees, “is a path to be undertaken in a synodal way, overcoming all threats and obstacles, in order to reach our true homeland together.” The officials said, “During this journey, wherever people find themselves, it is essential to recognize the presence of God who walks with His people, assuring them of His guidance and protection at every step,” adding that “it is equally essential to recognize the presence of the Lord, Emmanuel, God-with-us, in every migrant who knocks at the door of our hearts and offers an opportunity for encounter.”

U.S. Bishop: Send Ukraine Aid Amid War, Religious Persecution

(OSV News) – A U.S. bishop is calling for peace in Ukraine and humanitarian aid for its people as Russia’s full-scale invasion has marked its second anniversary. “The magnitude of the suffering in the Ukrainian conflict continues to sear the conscience of the faithful,” said Bishop A. Elias Zaidan of the Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles, Chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on International Justice and Peace. In a February 23 statement, Bishop Zaidan pointed to the widespread damage inflicted by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Bishop Zaidan cited in his statement statistics from a United Nations report placing the number of Ukrainian civilians killed and injured at more than 30,000. “The Catholic Church, including many Catholic welfare organizations, are trying to meet these enormous needs both within Ukraine and in other countries impacted by this war which has raged on for two full years,” said Bishop Zaidan, adding that the USCCB’s annual collection for the Church in Central and Eastern Europe “has been critical in providing much-needed aid to the region.” Bishop Zaidan urged “the U.S. government to do all that it can to provide much needed humanitarian assistance quickly.”

At Least 15 Catholics Dead in Attack During Mass in Burkina Faso

DORI, Burkina Faso (OSV News) – At least 15 people were killed in an attack by gunmen on Catholics gathered for Sunday Mass in a Burkina Faso village on Sunday, February 25, according to multiple news reports. Twelve Catholics were dead at the scene in the village of Essakane, with another three dying while being treated at a health center, and two others wounded, according to a statement from Bishop Laurent Birfuoré Dabiré of the Diocese of Dori in northern Burkina Faso, which includes Essakane. “In these painful circumstances, we invite you to pray for the eternal rest of those who have died in the faith, for the healing of the wounded and for the consolation of sorrowful hearts,” the bishop said in the statement, written in French and shared on the bishop’s behalf by Father Jean-Pierre Sawadogo, the diocese’s Vicar General. “We also pray for the conversion of those who continue to sow death and desolation in our country. May our efforts of penance and prayer during this period of Lent bring peace and security to our country, Burkina Faso,” the bishop said.

Grant Helps Catholic Charities to Begin New Life-Skills Class

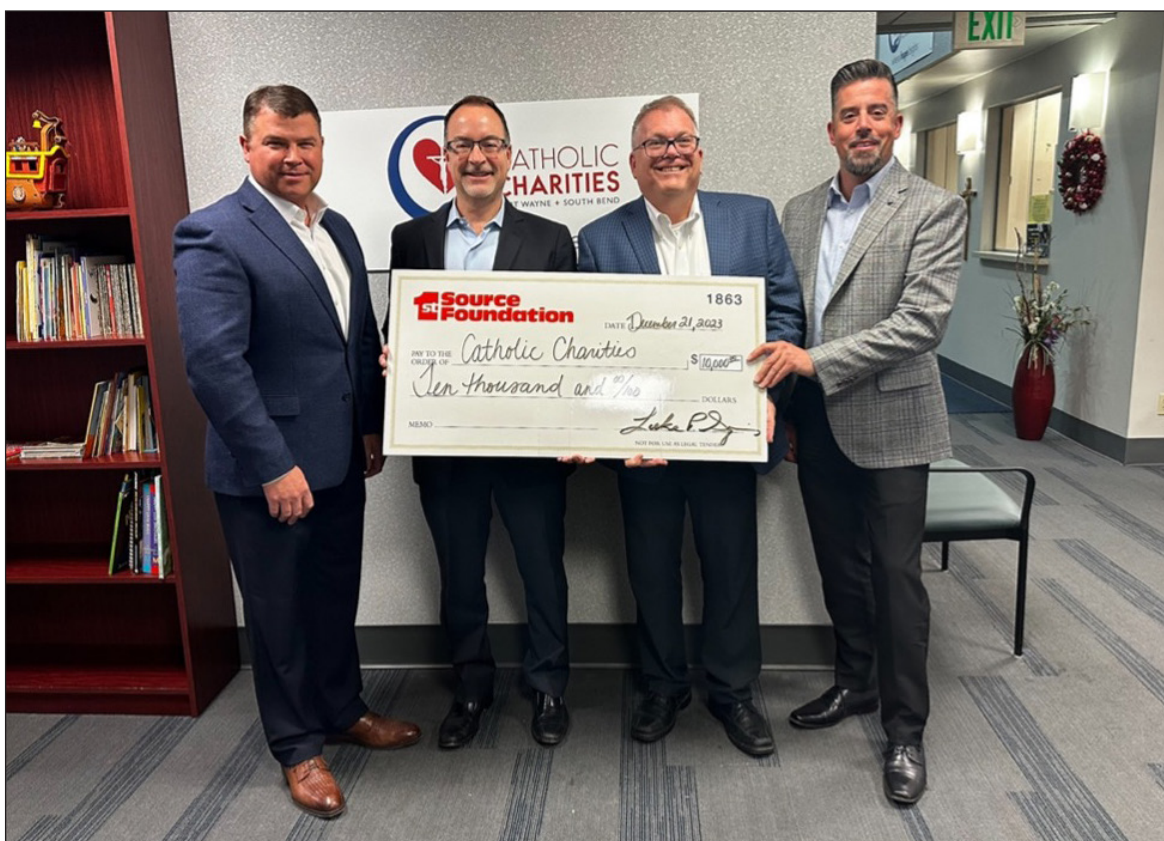
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend announced Monday, February 26, that it had received a \$10,000 grant from the 1st Source Foundation that will be used to help the organization begin a faith-based life-skills course as part of the agency's new strategic plan.

"1st Source Foundation is happy to support this life-skills course, which will provide opportunities for lifelong success for community members," said Luke Squires, Fort Wayne Regional President at 1st Source Bank. "We appreciate Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend's commitment to serving those in need in our community."

The 12-week course will cover 11 topics focusing on the whole person to aid them in overcoming common barriers to self-sufficiency.

Topics will include:

- Creating a positive mindset and resiliency
- Goal setting and action planning
- Healthy relationships
- Financial literacy
- Faith and family
- Career planning



Representatives of 1st Source Bank and Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend pose with a check that will help fund a new life-skills class for clients of Catholic Charities. The officials, from left to right, are: Jon Painter, Vice President of Business Banking at 1st Source; Dan Florin, CEO of Catholic Charities; Matt Smith, Chief Development Officer of Catholic Charities; and Luke Squires, Fort Wayne Regional President at 1st Source.

Built on a culmination of studied best practices with a proven correlation to higher

rates of self-sufficiency and overall wellness, the goal of the class is to educate and

equip our neighbors with the skills needed to move beyond their immediate needs

and build a foundation for long-term stability. Enrollees will be referred to the course from Catholic Charities of Fort Wayne-South Bend clients or from partner organizations. Qualifications will include whether the client is either currently employed or looking for employment, is self-motivated, and is committed to attendance for the full 12 weeks.

"Having served those in need for more than 100 years, Catholic Charities understands many of our neighbors were never taught how to balance their household finances or how to develop and cultivate healthy relationships," said Tiffany Goble, East and North Region Director at Catholic Charities. "Through no fault of their own, many families are struggling due to a lack of education around basic skills, not a lack of motivation. Going beyond temporary relief through the development of healthy habits, relationships, and a growth mindset aligns with our mission."

The classes will be piloted beginning this spring, and Catholic Charities expects to open enrollment this summer.

Court: Frozen Embryos Are Children Under Alabama Law

BY KATE SCANLON

(OSV News) – An Alabama Supreme Court ruling that frozen embryos qualify as children under state law has raised complex legal questions about artificial reproductive practices opposed by the Catholic Church.

The February 16 ruling responded to appeals brought by couples whose embryos were destroyed in 2020, when a hospital patient removed frozen embryos from storage equipment, destroying them.

The 8-1 opinion said the state's highest court has previously held "that unborn children are 'children' for purposes of Alabama's Wrongful Death of a Minor Act ... a statute that allows parents of a deceased child to recover punitive damages for their child's death." The judges found that parents' ability to sue over the wrongful death of a minor child applies to unborn children, without an exception for "extrauterine children."

"Under existing black-letter law, the answer to that question is no: the Wrongful Death of a Minor Act applies to all unborn children, regardless of their location," it said.

Elizabeth Kirk, Co-Director of the Center for Law & the Human Person at The

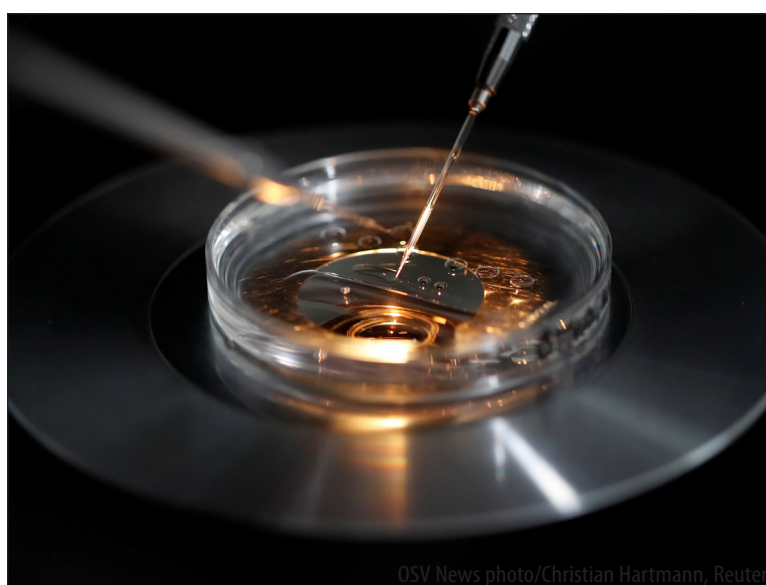
Catholic University of America Columbus School of Law in Washington, D.C., told OSV News that the cases in which the court had previously held that unborn children are "children" had "involved injuries to pregnant women and the subsequent deaths of their unborn children."

"Here, the court held that the word 'child' in the statute includes unborn children regardless of location, whether in or outside of a biological womb," she said.

The 1987 document from the Congregation (now Dicastery) for the Doctrine of the Faith known as *Donum Vitae* ("The Gift of Life") states that the Church opposes in vitro fertilization and related practices, including gestational surrogacy, in part because "the connection between in vitro fertilization and the voluntary destruction of human embryos occurs too often."

Kirk said that "all of us should welcome laws and court decisions that comport with the truth of the human person, including the dignity of all human life from conception to natural death."

Opponents of the ruling said it would imperil access to an infertility treatment. The University of Alabama at Birmingham health system paused IVF treatments after the ruling.



A medical lab technologist operates an embryo vitrification during an intra cytoplasmic sperm injection process (ICSI) at a laboratory in Paris.

But Kirk called the ruling "a narrow matter of statutory interpretation, involving the state's wrongful death statute."

"It specifically avoided reaching broader questions such as whether unborn children are 'persons' in other contexts such as under the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution," she said. "Nevertheless, to the extent that IVF practices trigger application of the wrongful death statute, such practices could be implicated."

Dr. Paula Amato, president of the American Society for

Reproductive Medicine, said in a statement that "in its medically and scientifically unfounded decision, the court held that a fertilized frozen egg in a fertility clinic freezer should be treated as the legal equivalent of an existent child or a fetus gestating in a womb."

"The eight members of the court who approved this decision may view these things as the same, but science and everyday common sense tell us they are not," she said.

Amato argued that by "insisting that these very

different biological entities are legally equivalent, the best state-of-the-art fertility care will be made unavailable to the people of Alabama."

"No healthcare provider will be willing to provide treatments if those treatments may lead to civil or criminal charges," she said. "If the policy outcomes mandated under this decision stand, the consequences will be profound. Modern fertility care will be unavailable to the people of Alabama, needlessly blocking them from building the families they want."

Denise Burke, Senior Counsel with Alliance Defending Freedom, argued that the ruling "is a tremendous victory for life."

"The court ruled that unborn children created through assisted reproductive technology are children under Alabama law and therefore protected," Burke said. "No matter the circumstances, all human life is valuable from the moment of conception. We are grateful the court correctly found that Alabama law recognizes this fundamental truth."

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 238,126 patients underwent IVF treatment in 2021, resulting in 112,088 clinical pregnancies and 91,906 live births.

Bishop Holds Up Abraham, Paul, Peter, James, and John as Examples of Faith at Rekindle the Fire Mass

BY BISHOP KEVIN C. RHOADES

The following is the text of Bishop Rhoades' homily during the Mass for attendees of the Rekindle the Fire men's conference in Fort Wayne on Saturday, February 24.

My brothers, you came here today because you are men of faith who desire to be strengthened in your faith, to be educated in the faith, and to grow in your faith. "To live, grow, and persevere in the faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God and we must beg the Lord to increase our faith" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 162). Let us consider God's word in the readings today that nourish our faith. In fact, the Scripture readings we just heard give us examples of faith to help us and inspire us in our journey of faith.

We have Abraham whom we call "our father in faith," and we have the great apostle St. Paul. What St. Paul wrote to the Romans is a testament of his indomitable faith: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Paul firmly believed that God was for him and with him. That conviction gave him strength to persevere in his mission, to suffer for the sake of Jesus, and to even die for Him. We know about the many tribulations Paul endured. He was beaten; at one point he was nearly stoned to death; he was imprisoned; he was shipwrecked. How was St. Paul able to endure? Certainly, it was God's grace that sustained him, the grace that he opened his heart to receive and that inspired him to believe that God was with him, that God loved him. It was the faith expressed in those words: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" But why did St. Paul believe this? He tells us why. He writes: "If God did not spare His own Son but handed Him over for us all, how will He not also give us everything else along with Him?" Paul believed in God's love revealed in His giving His beloved Son for our salvation, in handing over His Son to death to take away our sins. He trusted God and so was able to persevere through suffering with this deep conviction of faith in God's love – the love that defeats sin, the love that triumphs, as evidenced by the Father raising His Son from the dead.

The other model of faith for us today is Abraham. We heard in the first reading the famous story of the sacrifice of Isaac. I prefer to call it "the



Scott Warden

Bishop Rhoades delivers his homily during Mass on Saturday, February 24, at the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum in Fort Wayne for attendees of Rekindle the Fire.

sacrifice of the ram," because even though Abraham was willing to offer his son in sacrifice, God stayed his hand, and the sacrifice was actually the ram that was offered up as a holocaust in place of Isaac. Clearly, God does not approve of human sacrifice, which was done in some religions at that time and in history.

Abraham had the strong faith that Paul had so many centuries later. Abraham had also believed that if God is for us, who can be against us? That's why he was willing to obey God's command to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham was willing to do this because he trusted in God, that somehow God would fulfill His promise of descendants and, if necessary, raise Isaac from the dead. Of course, as we know, God was testing Abraham's faith, and Abraham passed the test. As a result, God made the promise, the oath, that was the final form of the covenant with Abraham, that He would "bless Abraham abundantly and make his descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore."

Abraham is a model for us of walking with God throughout our lives in a relationship of faith, with trust in God even if we don't understand why some things happen in our lives that don't seem to make sense. Certainly, God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac made no sense, but Abraham still trusted God. St. Paul pointed this out in his letter to the Romans, where he wrote: "Abraham believed, hoping against hope, that he would become 'the father of many nations.' ... He did not doubt God's promise

in unbelief; rather, he was empowered by faith and gave glory to God and was fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to do" (Rom 4:18, 20-21).

We heard in the Gospel today St. Mark's account of the Transfiguration of Jesus. I have spoken about the faith of St. Paul and Abraham, but what about the faith of Peter, James, and John, the three fishermen called by Jesus to be His disciples and apostles and who were Jesus' inner circle? They, too, were on a journey of faith, but a pretty rocky one. I think we can all relate to them.

I've really enjoyed watching the series "The Chosen." I've watched the first three seasons and am looking forward to watching the fourth season. I love how the series, based on what we read in the Gospels, with creative imagination, presents the Twelve Apostles and their different backgrounds, different strengths and weaknesses, and different personalities, especially of the three closest to Jesus: Peter, James, and John. As men, I think we can especially relate to their naturally masculine strengths and weaknesses.

Think about the brothers James and John. These Galilean fishermen had especially strong personalities. Remember when they were traveling with Jesus to Samaria. Jesus sent a messenger ahead to find a place for them to stay. He came back and told Jesus that they were refused because they were Jews. What was the reaction of James and John? They were indignant that Jesus was being rejected, so they asked Jesus to call

down fire from heaven to consume them! Their zeal was impetuous, like Elijah, who called down fire from heaven to consume his enemies. Of course, Jesus rebuked them. He had to correct them. Clearly, James and John needed further training in discipleship. They needed to grow in spiritual maturity. I think we can all relate to that. We all need further training in discipleship. That's why you came here today.

James and John had good manly qualities, but they had bad tempers sometimes and were quick to anger. Not without reason, Jesus nicknamed them "the sons of thunder." With their tempestuous natures, they wanted to obliterate an entire village with firebombs from heaven. It's good that they were strong in character, zealous for Jesus, and firmly convicted – good masculine virtues. But they needed to learn to channel these virtues in the right direction as disciples of Jesus.

James and John, so zealous for Jesus, also had a pride that needed to be overcome. Remember, they once asked Jesus, as their mother had also asked Jesus, that they be granted the privilege of sitting on His right and left in the glory of the kingdom. This obviously really annoyed the other apostles. Jesus went on to teach James and John that whoever wishes to be great must be the servant. James and John had to learn to conquer

They needed to grow in spiritual

maturity. I think we can

all relate to that.

their pride and to grow in humility.

What about Simon Peter? He had such great natural virtues, especially virtues for leadership. But he really needed a lot of training from Jesus! Talk about needing to channel correctly one's masculine gifts! Think about Peter's character: active, enthusiastic, determined, and self-confident. He was a leader – he took initiatives. No wonder Jesus chose him to be the rock, the leader of the apostles and of the Church. But Peter was also impulsive, quick to anger, and sometimes overly self-confident. He was quick to jump to extremes. He got into

trouble from time to time, and Jesus needed to rebuke him. Remember when Peter tried to rebuke Jesus when Jesus gave the first prediction of His passion? Jesus rebuked Peter and called him Satan because he was basically steering Jesus away from His mission. Remember also when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, Malchus. Jesus had to tell Peter to put his sword back into its scabbard. He said to Peter, "Shall I not drink the cup that the Father gave me?" Of course, the worst thing Peter did was when he was in the courtyard of the high priest and denied being a disciple of Jesus. The cock crowed, and Peter realized the great sin he had committed. He broke down and wept. He was heartily sorry for having offended Jesus, and he repented. He detested the sin he committed. After the Resurrection, Jesus questioned Peter about his love for Him. Peter professed his love, and Jesus not only forgave Peter, He also confirmed the mission He had given Peter to be the shepherd of His Church.

There are many other episodes about Peter and his mistakes, and also his growth in maturity, but there's not enough time to recount them in this homily. Jesus had great plans for Peter, James, and John, His inner circle, so He manifested His glory to them at the Transfiguration. He was strengthening them for their mission, especially since He knew that His upcoming passion and death would be a trial for them.

Peter, James, and John did go on to do great things. They grew as Jesus' disciples into great leaders and great witnesses of the Lord, great saints. They learned to channel their natural dispositions in the right direction. Of course, they also received the gifts of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to help them. Peter became the great leader of the Church, as we see in the Acts of the Apostles. James became the first of the Twelve Apostles to be martyred. John, the beloved disciple, would write the deepest and most penetrating of the four Gospels. By the grace of God, Peter and the sons of thunder were able to overcome their weaknesses and become saints. They are great examples for us, as are Abraham and St. Paul. In this grace-filled season of Lent, may our sacrifices help us to grow, like Peter, James, and John grew, to become the men, the disciples, and apostles, that Jesus calls us to be!

REKINDLE, from page 1

To combat this erosion, seminars and groups have been formed to support Catholic men, to answer questions, and to shine a way and fill a void. Founded several years ago to meet these needs, Rekindle the Fire took root and flourished. Alternating between host cities South Bend and Fort Wayne – this year's was in Fort Wayne – Rekindle the Fire featured three speakers and Bishop Rhoades, each of whom touched on the state of the moral, spiritual, and social world that men find themselves in today, the confusion and pitfalls prevalent, and how Catholic men can overcome them.

The speakers included Father Dwight Longenecker, a married priest who converted from the Anglican church; Father Chris Alar, Provincial Superior of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception (a religious order of the Catholic Church that embraces the Society of Mary); and Chris Padgett, a convert to Catholicism who has served in various ministries for more than 30 years. Father Longenecker and Father Alar filled their morning sessions with powerful presentations that discussing the diabolical attacks on the world today and remedies to combat these attacks. In the afternoon, Padgett, who not only works as a Catholic speaker but also as a comedian, stressed the importance of being a good, compassionate, merciful husband and father.

In the opening session, Father Longenecker began with a brief introduction and mentioned that he was not only a priest but himself a husband and father. He explained that this was possible thanks to a "pastoral provision" made by Pope Benedict XVI to allow former Anglican pastors to become Roman Catholic priests.

Striding across the stage, Father Longenecker began the meat of his presentation by recounting the Communists of the Soviet Union and the devastating impact Russia had on the moral fabric of the countries held captive by this atheistic ideology. Father Longenecker went on to compare the Communist regimes in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere to the current atheistic communism, which, Father Longenecker maintained, is far more subtle and dangerous. The purpose of this current infiltration, he said, is to weaken – even eliminate – Christianity and its influence on public and personal life.

For his talk, Father Alar focused on spiritual warfare. Lively and animated, Father Alar delved into the theological beliefs about the fall of the angels and the consequential impact this had on humanity. He explained the belief one-third of the angels focused

Chris Padgett, above, speaks on the importance of men being merciful to their families. At right, organizers pay tribute to longtime Rekindle the Fire Executive Director Joe Brown, who died in 2023.

on worshipping God the Father, one-third worshipped the Holy Spirit, and one-third worshipped the Son of God – the last being too much for those angels filled with pride – notably Lucifer – which caused their fall. Father Alar described the "portals" that the devil uses to enter and confound humanity – namely, drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, astrology, the occult, and divination. Father Alar described the removal of prayer as catalyst for the infiltration of the demonic into society. He then laid out the weapons we can use against these: prayer (in Jesus name), worship (especially the Mass), adoration (which is especially appreciated by our guardian angels, as they are in the presence of God), fasting (which brings focus to prayer), Scripture (the word of God), sacramentals (saint medals, scapulars, etc.), and the sacraments themselves (especially the Eucharist, baptism, and confession). A highlight of Father Alar's talk was when he described the Sign of the Cross – something Catholics do regularly but perhaps forget the significance of what they are doing. "You're marking yourself for Jesus Christ," he said.

Padgett spoke on the importance of the family and his own pain growing up in a divorced and dysfunctional family. Padgett offered four disciplines fathers should follow to lead and build a strong, loving family. The first was sacrifice. "That's your job as a married man," he said. "You have to sacrifice to help your wife get to heaven. Marriage is going be way



harder than you could ever imagine, but – and this is what nobody will ever tell you – it's also way better than you can possibly imagine." The second discipline that is key for husbands and fathers is service. The third, Padgett said, is mediation, which is, as Padgett describes, "standing in the gap and being a representative between God and family, be a warrior for your family, and pray earnestly." His fourth and final discipline was to be an advocate for your family – to fight for them and for others through the corporal works of mercy. In other words, Padgett said, "Be Jesus to your family."

A highlight for longtime attendees was a tribute to former Rekindle the Fire Executive Director Joe Brown, who died on October 20, 2023,

after a battle with cancer. Men on the leadership team of Rekindle, clad in their trademark red vests, gathered on the stage to offer words of appreciation for the work Brown did in organizing the event.

According to his friend, Doug Fischer, Joe Brown was "the best man I've ever known and taken too soon." Fischer said Brown was instrumental in the growth of Rekindle the Fire, which began as a small gathering of men at St. Vincent de Paul Church in Fort Wayne and swelled into a yearly diocesan-wide conference. As the tribute proceeded, Brown was lauded as a man who "realized the importance of bringing men of the diocese together to pray, to listen to excellent speakers, and to

celebrate Mass so that we all could become better friends, husbands, and fathers for our families, our parishes, and our communities."

Bishop Rhoades concluded the afternoon with a Q&A session where he answered question on a wide range of topics, including the National Eucharistic Revival, the Synod of Bishops on synodality (and his participation in it), the biggest challenges he faced when becoming the bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend, the danger of gender ideology, and the confusion caused by the Vatican's recent document allowing priests to bless same-sex couples.

Today's Catholic will print a detailed recap of Bishop Rhoades' Q&A in next week's issue.

Photos by Scott Warden

We Have a 'God Who Chooses,' Bishop Says at Rite of Election

BY JIM MOUNT

"For the sake of Jacob, my servant, and Israel, my elect, I have called you by your name. I have taken you up though you have known me not."
— Isaiah 45:4

On a sunny but chilly Sunday afternoon in February – the First Sunday of Lent, February 18 – the pews of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Fort Wayne are full, as sponsors, catechumens, and candidates for full communion with the Catholic Church are gathered for the annual Rite of Election. Representatives from the various parishes in Fort Wayne and the surrounding area converge here at what Bishop Rhoades hails as the Mother Church of our diocese, where catechumens and candidates are presented to the bishop after a long season of prayer, meditation, and discernment.

The Rite of Election is an event that dates back to the early Church, where those joining the Church – catechumens (those yet to be baptized) and candidates (those baptized into other Christian traditions but on a path of conversion to Catholicism) – begin their final journey into full communion with the Catholic faith are welcomed and presented before the bishop.

The theme of the elect is prominent across the Scriptures, as throughout history God has called individuals to live in communion with Him and to bring that communion to the world.

In his homily, Bishop Rhoades gave several examples of God choosing places to be uniquely his own, such as Mount Zion and the Temple in Jerusalem.

"Of all the mountains in the world, God chose Mount Zion as His mountain, and of all the holy places around the world, God chose the Temple in Jerusalem as His special and unique dwelling place." Bishop Rhoades highlighted God's call to his Chosen People, His elect, not only the Israelites as a whole but certain individuals whom God called to bring light and justice to a world in darkness.

"God not only chose the people of Israel to be His people, but He also chose or elected particular individuals for special favor which He didn't give to others."

Bishop Rhoades brought up the question of God showing partiality and, to a certain extent, exclusion. How can a God who loves all of humanity be exclusive in His selections, showing favor of one group



Photos by Joe Romie

The annual Rite of Election was held at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Fort Wayne on Sunday, February 18, with Bishop Rhoades presiding.

over another, one person over another? Bishop Rhoades offered an explanation.

"In a culture which so highly values equality and inclusion, how can we believe in a God who appears to show favoritism or to be exclusionary? There's clearly a tension here. How do we resolve the tension? How is it that God elected one particular people to be His Chosen People, the Israelites? Didn't He thereby exclude the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the Greeks? Why did He choose certain individuals over others to lead and guide His people? To answer these questions and to resolve this tension, it is important to understand election in the biblical sense," Bishop Rhoades continued. "First of all, God didn't choose people because they earned it or because of their particular gifts. He didn't choose Israel because it was a great nation. In fact, Israel was the smallest of nations. He didn't choose Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, Moses, or David, or Solomon, or Isaiah, or Jeremiah for their greatness. In fact, the Bible emphasizes their weakness, their inefficiencies."

Bishop Rhoades reminded those in attendance that God calls people to Himself specifically for the purposes of calling for the conversion from sin, or for leadership in guiding His people out of darkness and into the light of His presence.

"The God revealed in the Bible is an electing God, a God who chooses. He chose David, not Saul. He chose Abraham to



be the father of His people. He chose Moses to be the liberator of His people when they were enslaved in Egypt. And He called and chose prophets to guide His chosen people."

Among the catechumens and candidates were students from the University of

Saint Francis: Catechumen Quin'Shawn Gordon, and Candidate Collin Siratei.

"I felt called by God," Gordon told Today's Catholic of his conversion experience. "It felt like a natural choice; it didn't feel like anybody was forcing or asking me to. It just

felt ... like a natural decision to come to."

"It feels crazy in a good way," he said simply, looking off for a moment, seeming to collect his thoughts on his experience. "It's an amazing feeling, honestly."

For Siratei, as a candidate, the feelings were similar.

"It was about this time last year, about the first day of the semester, when I felt the Lord calling me to His Church," Siratei said. "I didn't want to go back to my original church. I was non-denominational."

Siratei elaborated on how he felt the Lord speaking to him. "Well, you pass the church every single day," Siratei said about the on-campus St. Francis Chapel. "So I started going to daily Masses. ... I continued to like the community, to like the people and how they did things, and I finally made the decision that I would become Catholic," he added. "I'm feeling overwhelmed, euphoric almost. I'm feeling, like, forever happy and that this was the right decision. I felt this is just what God would want me to do."

During his homily, Bishop Rhoades explained to everyone present what it means when one makes a heartfelt decision to become Catholic.

"When you are baptized and confirmed, you will be given a mission. Candidates for full communion, in the Sacrament of Confirmation, you, along with our catechumens, will be sealed with Holy Spirit and strengthened for the mission you received at baptism. The Sacrament of Confirmation will unite all of you more firmly to Christ and strengthen you for the mission to spread and defend the faith by your words and actions as true witnesses of Christ."

In closing, Bishop Rhoades wished them well on their Lenten journey to the Easter Vigil, where they will come into full communion with the Church.

"What a joy it is for me – and our whole diocese – as you, catechumens and candidates, begin your final preparation for the Easter sacraments," Bishop Rhoades stated. "That joy will be even greater at the Easter Vigil. May you prepare well during this period of purification and enlightenment! We pledge our prayers for you during this holy season of Lent. And we ask the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Immaculate Conception, the patroness of our diocese, also to pray for you. May she, the chosen daughter of Israel, elected by God to be the mother of His Son, our Savior, watch over you who have been chosen to be disciples of her Son, and may you experience always her maternal love!"

Pope Proposes Lenten Resolution: Keep Your Eyes on Jesus

BY JUSTIN MCLELLAN

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – This Lent, Christians should become “seekers of light” by keeping their sights set on the light of Jesus through prayer and participating in the sacraments, Pope Francis said.

“This is a good Lenten resolution: cultivating a welcoming outlook, becoming ‘seekers of light,’ seekers of the light of Jesus, both in prayer and in people,” he told visitors in St. Peter’s Square before praying the Angelus with them on Sunday, February 25.

The pope had canceled his previous day’s meetings because of mild flu-like symptoms, Vatican officials said, but he spoke to the estimated 20,000 people gathered at the Vatican without obvious signs of difficulty.

Reflecting on the day’s Gospel reading from St. Mark, Pope Francis said that Jesus’ transfiguration – when He radiated before His disciples in a dazzling white light – “reveals to them the meaning of what they had experienced together up to that moment.”

“The preaching of the Kingdom, the forgiveness of sins, the healings, and the performed signs were, indeed, sparks of a greater light – namely, of the light of Jesus, of the light that Jesus is,” he said. “And from this light, the disciples are never to direct their eyes away, especially in moments of trial, like those of the Passion, which was near at this point.”

Pope Francis said the message of the Transfiguration is that Christians should “never direct your eyes away from the light of Jesus,” and he encouraged them to be like farmers who keep their eyes fixed on a distant point to stay in a straight line when plowing fields.



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Francis greets visitors gathered to pray the Angelus in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican on Sunday, February 25.

“This is what we are called to do as Christians while we journey through life: to always keep the luminous face of Jesus before our eyes,” he said.

The pope told Christians to “be open to welcome the light of Jesus,” who is love and “life without end.”

“Along the roads of existence, which can be tortuous from time to time, let us seek His face, which is so full of mercy, fidelity, and hope,” he said.

Prayer, listening to the word of God, and participating in the sacraments – especially confession and the Eucharist – “help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus,” the pope said.

“Do I make space for silence, prayer, adoration?” Pope Francis encouraged Christians to ask themselves. “Do I seek out every little ray of Jesus’ light, which is reflected in me and in every brother and

sister I encounter? And do I remember to thank Him for this?”

After praying the Angelus, Pope Francis marked the second anniversary of Russia’s full-scale attack on Ukraine.

“How many victims, people wounded, destruction, anguish, tears in a period that is becoming terribly long and whose end is not yet in sight,” the pope said, reminding some 20,000 visitors in St. Peter’s Square that Russia launched its major offensive on February

24, 2022.

“It is a war that not only is devastating that region of Europe but is unleashing a global wave of fear and hatred,” Pope Francis said.

Although his voice was deeper than normal, the pope did not show signs of feeling unwell; he did not cough or seem to experience trouble breathing as he has in the past when Vatican officials said, as they did on February 24, that he was experiencing “flu-like symptoms.”

Dozens of people in the crowd on February 25 held up rainbow banners bearing the word “Nonviolence” in Italian.

“While I renew my deepest affection for the tormented Ukrainian people and pray for all, especially for the numerous innocent victims,” the pope said, “I plead for that little bit of humanity to be found that will allow the creation of the conditions for a diplomatic solution in search of a just and lasting peace.”

Pope Francis also asked the crowd to pray “for Palestine, for Israel, and for the many peoples torn apart by war, and to concretely help those who suffer! Think of all the suffering; think of the wounded children – innocents!”

Casting his gaze even wider, the pope said he is concerned about the increasing violence in eastern Congo, and he joins the nation’s bishops in asking everyone to pray for peace, “hoping for a cessation of the fighting and the search for a sincere and constructive dialogue.”

Pope Francis also joined the bishops of Nigeria and the leaders of the Dicastery for Evangelization in denouncing “the increasingly frequent kidnappings in Nigeria.”

“I express my closeness in prayer to the Nigerian people, hoping that efforts will be made to ensure that the rapid spread of these incidents be curbed as much as possible,” the pope said.

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Bishop Rhoades Speaks on 'Unwanted Abortions' at Notre Dame

BY KASIA BALSBAUGH

Bishop Rhoades remembers being a high school student when the Supreme Court decided the landmark abortion case *Roe v. Wade*. "We were all appalled, like, how could this be?" he recalled.

Times have changed. Today, as a poll in The New York Times shows, more people in the United States identify as "pro-choice" rather than pro-life for the first time in two decades.

Bishop Rhoades celebrated Mass and spoke at an event sponsored by the University of Notre Dame's Right to Life Club on Monday, February 19. Though the event was organized by the student club, people of all ages from Notre Dame and the broader community attended. The title of Bishop Rhoades' talk was "Unwanted Abortions."

"I suggest that, given the way pro-choice or pro-abortion forces have framed the issue of abortion rights, perhaps we need to do a better job and use some new strategies in how we who are pro-life frame the issue by focusing more on unwanted abortions," Bishop Rhoades said.

When the Supreme Court overturned *Roe* in 2022 with its decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, Bishop Rhoades said he was "overjoyed" but concerned about cultural issues. "I was keenly aware, and still am, that the culture of death had not been defeated, and that there was still so much to do to build a culture of life in our nation," Bishop Rhoades said. "So, my joy over the *Dobbs* decision was tempered by the realization not only that abortion would continue to be legal in many states but that the minds and hearts of many Americans were still not with us."

Yet most abortions aren't necessarily desired. Bishop Rhoades brought up a poll in a peer-reviewed study he had recently encountered. According to an extensive poll of women who had had abortions, only 33 percent of respondents said their abortions were wanted, and 24 percent even described their abortions as "unwanted" or "coerced." More than 60 percent reported high levels of pressure from outside sources to abort, and around the same number of women said they would have preferred to give birth if they had had more emotional support or financial security.

Bishop Rhoades said the



Photos by Kasia Balsbaugh

Bishop Rhoades laughs while answering a question during the Q&A session after his talk on pro-life news at the University of Notre Dame on Monday, February 19.

issue of coercion into abortion has "not received enough attention" in the media or the culture. He brought up examples, including that of celebrity Britney Spears, who had an abortion as a teenager and later wrote, "If it had been left up to me alone, I never would have done it." Some cases even involve violence. "Women who are pregnant are more likely to die by homicide than die because of sepsis, high blood pressure, or any other medical condition," Bishop Rhoades related.

Here, the bishop said, is where pro-life programs are vital. Programs such as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Walking with Moms in Need initiative extend help to mothers across the nation. Programs formed for different situations are needed, too. Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend has a program in South Bend called ECHO, which helps pregnant teenagers finish high school.

"No woman should feel forced to choose between her future and the life of her child," said Bishop Rhoades,

who emphasized the need to "practice what we preach." When researching Indiana laws, Bishop Rhoades said he was convicted to extend parental leave for employees of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

Bishop Rhoades and other pro-life advocates are supporting similar programs in the broader secular arena. Bishop Rhoades said two of the biggest touchpoints are affordable health care and workplace accommodations for pregnant and nursing mothers.

Unfortunately, not all pro-life laws make it. One such law, the Pregnant Students Rights Act, would require colleges and universities to disclose what they are doing to help pregnant students finish their degrees. This legislation was widely opposed, with no Democrats voting for its passage, Bishop Rhoades said.

A law that has been misused is the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, which requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations for pregnant employees. Some of these accommodations,



Michael Urban, Student Director of Spirituality for Notre Dame's Right to Life Club, introduces Bishop Rhoades before the bishop's lecture.

the bishop said, are simple, such as providing seating for pregnant workers or allowing them to carry water bottles. While the act was signed into law with the support of Catholic bishops, the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission has since used the act to require employers to provide paid leave for abortions. Bishop Rhoades stated firmly that this was not what the bishops had supported. "The intent of the law was to bring pregnant employees accommodations that allowed them to have healthy pregnancies," Bishop Rhoades said.

And, of course, some acts that are harmful from the beginning. Bishop Rhoades discussed the proposed Women's Health Protection Act, which would allow abortion at practically any stage of pregnancy nationwide, while disallowing many exemptions for religious liberty.

"The battle for life and the battle for religious liberty are intimately linked, especially in our nation today," Bishop Rhoades told those in attendance.

Bishop Rhoades also reminded the audience that the idea of religious freedom can never be invoked to support abortion or other immoral acts. "Religious freedom can be exploited, and when it is, it does harm," Bishop Rhoades said.

Bishop Rhoades ended the Q&A with an exhortation for the young people in the crowd. "I never would have dreamed this when I was your age, that this kind of stuff would be happening," he said, referencing contemporary attacks on life, sexuality, and

the family. "So, it takes a lot more moral courage today for you as young people."

Gerard Bradley, Professor of Law at Notre Dame, attended Bishop Rhoades' talk. Bradley said, "The pro-life cause in America – and by 'pro-life cause' I mean the project of saving unborn children from death by abortion and of working to make them equally protected by the laws against killing – needs all the help it can get right now. Bishop Rhoades' talks energized all of us present."

*"The battle for life
and the battle for
religious liberty
are intimately linked,
especially in
our nation today."*

BISHOP KEVIN C. RHOADES

Bradley added, "[Bishop Rhoades'] unequivocal and articulate pro-life homily and lecture are needed at Notre Dame ... to give clear and perspicuous witness to the truth that abortion kills the

most defenseless of our brothers and sisters in Christ."

Michael Urban, Student Director of Spirituality for Notre Dame's Right to Life Club, told Today's Catholic: "Bishop Rhoades is a talented speaker and always has great words of encouragement for those who are seeking to live out their faith in a world that opposes what is true, good, and beautiful. I wanted to have him on campus this semester for Right to Life because his wisdom and experience as a shepherd of the Church can provide lots of advice and inspiration to pro-life Catholic college students like myself."

In his homily during the Mass, Bishop Rhoades thanked the community for their witness to the dignity of all life. "I am deeply grateful to you who are members of the Right to Life Club, and university faculty for life here at Notre Dame. And you who refuse to stand idly by when the lives of our neighbors in the womb, our brothers and sisters, are at stake. You are committed to their protection, to the support of their mothers who are so often pressured and coerced to have abortions."

The Gospel reading for the Mass, which Bishop Rhoades called "appropriate," was the Last Judgment in Matthew 25: "I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink."

"Certainly, we can add to that list others who are vulnerable: the unborn, the disabled, and the elderly," Bishop Rhoades said in his homily. "What we do to them, we do to Jesus. What we fail to do for them, we fail to do for Jesus."



Bishop Rhoades addresses the attendees of the Notre Dame Right to Life Club's Mass on Monday, February 19.

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Contemplate Rebirth Through Christ's Living Water This Lent

BY FATHER MARK HELLINGER

"When I prove my holiness among you, I will gather you from all the foreign lands; and I will pour clean water upon you and cleanse you from all your impurities, and I will give you a new spirit, says the Lord."

For parishes that administer the Scrutinies (the rituals of verification of desire and preparedness for those to be baptized as adults) for the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults this Sunday, the encounter of Jesus and the woman at the well will be read for the Gospel. That Gospel, when placed in relation with the entrance antiphon for the Mass, provides a rich reflection for us as we approach the halfway point of Lent.

Two major points of focus are the image of water and the otherwise harsh sounding words of Christ to the woman. We are presented with the contrast of dead and living water – water that is polluted by sin and the water that God provides, which is deemed "living" because it gives life and because it is clean and pure and, therefore, able to clean

other things, "Which is true indeed both of material water and of that of which it is the type," St. Augustine writes. "For the water in the well is the pleasure of the world, that abode of darkness. Men draw it with the waterpot of their lusts; pleasure is not relished, except it be preceded by lust. And when a man has enjoyed this pleasure, i.e. drunk of the water, he thirsts again; but if he has received water from Me, he shall never thirst. For how shall they thirst, who are drunken with the abundance of the house of God? But He promised this fulness of the Holy Spirit."

The pursuit of carnal desires leaves the person always wanting more. A common example is eating food. The more one eats, the more the stomach desires and can fit. Thus, the pursuit of the dead water – the water this woman is drinking for sustenance only – results in greater thirst. But the spiritual meaning of this experience is deeper than the physical image. The woman, when offered the living water of the Word of God, is stuck in her worldly concerns. She wants the water Christ is promising to decrease her workload: "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be

thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." She misses the point.

But the living water Christ is offering to her, and to us, is the fulfillment of the promises of God. Here Christ is gathering from the foreign lands (a Samaritan woman) and is offering the water that will cleanse from impurity and grant a new spirit. We will see this dynamic in its fullness at the Easter Vigil, when the priest will pray over the new baptismal water: "May this water receive by the Holy Spirit the grace of your Only Begotten Son, so that human nature, created in your image and washed clean through the Sacrament of Baptism from all the squalor of the life of old, may be found worthy to rise to the life of newborn children through water and the Holy Spirit." The water of baptism is truly the living water of the Word Incarnate, which cleanses us of our sins, incorporates us into the Body of Christ that is the Church,

and puts within us the very spirit of God (perfected through divinization, the true end to which our lives are directed).

In that mode of thinking, it is unsurprising that Jesus responds to the woman's request by immediately pointing out that she has had five husbands and is with a sixth. Harsh words to our ears, but right to the point of what is holding this woman back from access to the living water she so desires. If we again consider the spiritual implications of this exchange, we can see that the spouse imagery connects to the soul. God's overwhelming image of choice when it comes to describing His relationship with His people is nuptial. It is found throughout the Bible. The nuptial imagery (of which Christian matrimony itself is a sacrament) of this relationship draws out its essential themes: indissolubility, total fidelity, and love stronger than death given expression in a sacred oath. Thus, the woman's

spiritual problem of infidelity to God's word is expressed in her carnal problem of the pursuit of her body's desires instead of being truly satisfied by God.

This leaves us with a powerful examination to make. How many spouses does my soul have? What are the things of this world that I place above God as my soul's true and only spouse?

Lent is the time to allow the Lord to make these things known so they can be brought back down to where they belong. And for help in that, we turn to baptismal grace – the washing of living water. For those to be baptized, it is baptism itself. For those already baptized, we turn to God's mercy in the Sacrament of Confession, by which we are returned to baptismal grace.

Father Mark Hellinger is Parochial Vicar at St. John the Baptist Church in Fort Wayne. He will write weekly reflections throughout Lent for Today's Catholic.

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Understanding the 'Feminine Genius' of All Women

BY JESSICA HAYES

The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect, and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with a spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid humanity in not falling."

These words from the closing message of the Second Vatican Council should continue to stir the hearts of women to recognize their dignity in God's design, knowing that their mission is necessary to the thriving of the human race – which, in our age, continues "undergoing so deep a transformation," and needs the message of the Gospel proclaimed by women who have allowed its power to take root and flourish in their own lives.

Pope St. John Paul II spoke about "the genius of woman" in her unique strengths; through them she makes the world "more human" and is essential to building a culture of life and love – in the Church and the world. Her "feminine genius" gives life – physically and spiritually – by her particular focus on the person. She devotes her attention more readily to persons rather than things, prioritizing wisely – because, quite simply, people are more important than things. Absent her influence, humanity runs the risk of falling into a "culture of death,"

A woman's genius lies in her perception of the whole person and participation in the ministry of Jesus by serving the one right in front of her.

whose characteristic feature, according to John Paul II, is a preoccupation with efficiency. Pope Francis has referred to our own as a "throwaway culture," where even human beings are deemed disposable when their care is inconvenient.

Her emphasis on human beings – and knowing that being present to them is of great value in itself – calls labor and activity back to its purpose: serving human flourishing. By her diligence, she protects work and progress from becoming merely "efficient"; her influence is needed in every sphere of life, connecting abstract ideas to their concrete expression down to the practical details, all at the service of persons, who fill her worldview on a daily basis and help her to see others as an extension of those she knows and loves.

The "feminine genius" reflects the heart of God in four important qualities, rooted in the special creation of her body and soul for motherhood, natural and spiritual: receptivity, maternity, sensitivity, and generosity. The importance of her nature for family life is obvious; she provides her own body as a place of welcome for her children and nurtures the development of those in her care, making her home a place that extends its welcome to others. Throughout the

history of the Church, and still desperately needed today, she has seen persons with her heart – the whole person – with a sensitivity to their needs and a generous offering of not just material resources but herself to accompany others with compassion.

Any study of Catholic women throughout the history of the Church reveals the beauty and power of the feminine genius. Consider St. Marianne Cope's generous response to the plea for aid to the lepers of Molokai. Inspired by the Holy Spirit's prompting of her heart, she said, "I am hungry for the work of God, and I wish with all of my heart to be one of the chosen ones. ... I am not afraid of any disease." She departed New York with several members of her religious community and served the isolated and abandoned for decades, miraculously preserved from leprosy herself.

Or St. Teresa of Calcutta's lifelong receptivity to the voice of God, hearing what she described as "a call within a call" to begin a new religious community devoted to caring for the "poorest of the poor." Her love for Jesus compelled her to provide a home for those most neglected – the dying poor – and she inspired many women to join in her mission to satisfy His thirst for souls.

While her work attracted the attention of the world, she was careful to point them to its source: her sisters attended Mass daily and offered an hour of Eucharistic adoration before they began their labor. "We are not social workers," she said, "we are contemplatives in the heart of the world."

St. Gianna Beretta Molla – a wife, mother, and physician – delighted in the unique opportunity she had in her profession to honor the presence of God in her patients, treating them with dignity and respect. Her lifelong fidelity to the Gospel culminated in her giving her life for her youngest child growing in her womb, insisting to the end that her physician "choose the child." She spoke of her decision as the serious circumstances of her pregnancy progressed: It was her responsibility to leave her children the legacy that only she could – their mother loved them and would have given her life for any one of them.

Blessed Chiara Luce Badano was a vibrant young woman striving to be the spouse of "Jesus Forsaken" in the Focolare movement who contracted bone cancer and embraced her suffering joyfully as her path to holiness. As she was confined to her bed, she spoke to the value of suffering: "I still have my heart, and with that I can love."

Many holy women were pioneers in Catholic education at every level – St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, St. Theodore Guerin, St. Katherine Drexel, to name a few – have left us a rich tradition of formation for young disciples, including those on the margins of society.

A woman's genius lies in her perception of the whole person and participation in the ministry of Jesus by serving the one right in front of her. Sometimes this service takes the form of silent accompaniment, affirming the value of the other simply by giving one's time and attention. In our parishes and communities, there are many examples of such women – who, like all the saints, are growing in holiness by loving the Lord – living with a sensitivity to others' need to be received, known, and loved. What gifts these qualities are to the Lord Himself when turned toward Him in prayer!

He, who is a Divine Person, awaits the return of His loving gaze from a soul that longs to be with Him. To these, St. John Paul begins his "Letter to Women" with deep thanks for their presence in every sphere of life – as wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, workers, and consecrated women:

"Thank you, every woman, for the simple fact of being a woman! Through the insight which is so much a part of your womanhood you enrich the world's understanding and help make human relations more honest and authentic."

Jessica Hayes is a Consecrated Virgin who serves as the Pastoral Associate for Liturgy at St. Vincent de Paul Church in Fort Wayne.

We Can Be More Merciful Without Courting Sacrilege

Controversy erupted surrounding the funeral of transgender activist Cecilia Gentili, which was hosted at St. Patrick Cathedral in New York City. Roughly 1,000 mourners turned out for the memorial for the former sex worker, who had battled sexual abuse, addiction, and homelessness.

Gentili was raised a Catholic in Argentina but was described as an atheist by The New York Times, but Gentili had been engaging more with Christianity in recent years. During the funeral service, which was initially planned to be a Mass but changed course during the liturgy to exclude the celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, a friend of Gentili's prayed for access to gender-affirming health care from the pulpit. Also, during the funeral, a performer sang "Ave Maria," changing the lyrics to "Ave Cecilia." The singer then danced up and down the aisles, while twirling red scarves. There were other things. Worse things.

Catholics have been outraged by the funeral.

"The Cathedral only knew that family and friends were requesting a funeral Mass for a Catholic and had no idea our welcome and prayer would be degraded in such a sacrilegious and deceptive way," said Father Enrique Salvo, the Rector of St. Patrick's

Cathedral, in a statement. A Mass of Reparation has been offered, as directed by Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York.

So what are we to make of all this?

Gentili was a baptized Catholic. Baptism really affects someone, claiming them for Christ. Baptism delivers a permanent character, a seal on the soul that cannot be erased. And funerals are for the Church to intercede for the dead, to make amends for sins and failures committed on this side of eternity. It's a work of mercy to pray for the dead, especially those who need our prayers.

The mourners attending Gentili's funeral did not return the Church's compassion. Mercy was repaid with disrespect and scorn. But we shouldn't be appalled that we're being mocked.

The nations have always laughed at that which is most precious about our faith: mercy. Welcoming Gentili's funeral was an act of mercy by St. Patrick's, even if the funeral could have been better arranged. Some of the abuses that took place during the liturgy could have been prevented with additional layers of planning and caution.

This brings us to the real question: How much goodwill can or should the Church continue to extend, even when



THINGS CONTEMPLATED

FATHER PATRICK BRISCOE

that offer of charity and mercy is not returned? How compassionate and pastorally wise is it to open our doors to mockery or blasphemy?

Yes, we should be perceptive and shrewd. We must, as the Gospel says, "be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Mt 10:16). We need not intentionally surrender our pulpits to anti-Gospels. It is a false mercy to create a situation that allows people to sin against the Holy Spirit.

This was a terrible ordeal because of the sacrileges committed. It was also terrible that mourners felt that they had to mock the Church to honor Cecilia's memory. Cecilia Gentili needs our prayers, as do those who mourn the famous activist.

Father Patrick Briscoe is Editor of Our Sunday Visitor.

A Eucharistic Word: Viaticum, Food for the Journey

The days of the COVID-19 lockdown were a great opportunity to show love for those around us. And that was particularly true in the face of so much suffering and so many difficulties we encountered.

Like so many others, my family had its share of crosses to share at that time. My grandpa faced death with bladder cancer, spending almost a year at home in hospice care. My grandma began her own Calvary of sorts as she carried the cross of rapid cognitive and physical deterioration from Alzheimer's disease. The circumstances of her situation made taking up residence at a care home necessary, made worse by the lockdowns and the distance we had to keep from her and those with whom she lived. My grandparents certainly carried great crosses from 2020-22, as did so many in the world. And for those of us around them, it was a gift to help carry those crosses.

For me, it was a special privilege and joy to help them carry their crosses by bringing them the Eucharist in their infirmity. Given the inability for clergy to enter homes and institutions for regular distribution of the sacrament, I made provisions with proper authorities to



GUEST COLUMN

MICHAEL HEINLEIN

ensure my grandparents would not entirely do without holy Communion as they journeyed to death. Those occasions were certainly an opportunity for them to be strengthened and nourished by the sacrament's graces. They were a gift for me, too, as those surrounding the sick and dying are recipients of the Church's care and ministry as well.

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day," Christ said (Jn 6:54). Given the centrality of that reality for the sick and dying, the Church has long prioritized the distribution of holy Communion for them. Family and friends should take special care to ensure the local parish or institution's pastoral care staff is alerted to this purpose. If nothing else, one's pastor

HEINLEIN, page 17

Lent Reminds Us of Our Humanity – the Good and the Bad



THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MONSIGNOR OWEN F. CAMPION

Third Sunday of Lent

The Book of Exodus is the source of the first biblical reading this weekend.

In Hebrew history, the Exodus virtually was unsurpassed as an event of great significance, unless perhaps this distinction goes to creation itself. In the Exodus, the Hebrew people, enslaved and dreadfully mistreated in Egypt, escaped. Eventually, they found their new homeland.

None of this good fortune happened because of luck or human strategy. Rather, God's power led the Hebrews to a successful escape from Egypt. Moses, their leader in this endeavor, was chosen by God for the task.

As the flight was underway, Moses received from God and

then gave to the people what long has been called the Ten Commandments.

These familiar commandments formed the essential requisites for the relationship between God and the Hebrew people. By observing these commandments, the people fulfilled their obligations under the Covenant. It was as if the commandments were a legal contract, obligating both parties.

St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians goes to the heart of the Christian message. Christianity preaches Christ. In this reading, Paul asserts that Jesus is the key to salvation. So, the apostle declares, he preaches, "Christ crucified." It is a "stumbling block for the Jews, and an absurdity for the Gentiles." (The Jews, suffering under Roman oppression, and enduring so much, were inclined to regard Jesus as an imposter and blasphemer. Others, "Gentiles," regarded Jesus as a convicted felon, found guilty by the jurisprudence of Rome that proclaimed its extraordinary wisdom and perfect justice.)

For its Gospel reading, the

Church this weekend gives us St. John's Gospel.

This weekend's reading is one of the most familiar sections of the New Testament. It recalls the moment when Jesus, shortly before Passover, entered the Temple precincts and saw a brisk traffic in the things needed for ritual sacrifice. Furious, the Lord drove the merchants away.

He then hinted that the Temple would fall, a virtual blasphemy for many who witnessed this event, and then made the astonishing announcement that He would rebuild the colossal structure in three days. (It had taken many people many years to build the Temple in the first place.)

The Gospel reading sets the stage for Good Friday when the accusers of Jesus would refer to the Lord's prediction that the Temple would fall, claiming that Jesus was a blasphemer and a troublemaker. The Lord's prediction regarding the rebuilding of the Temple in three days looked ahead to the Resurrection.

The reading establishes Jesus as God's voice, and God's agent.

He was outdone at the exploitation of religious sincerity. Good people earnestly followed their traditions in praising God. The merchants used this sincerity for their own commercial benefit.

The people who wished to honor God were being used, making of them innocent prey for the selfish greed of the moneychangers.

This reading reveals something else about the bystanders. Many failed fully to grasp the Lord's identity. They scorned Jesus. They dismissed the words of Jesus.

Reflection

Lent reminds us of our humanity. Despite all the differences in lifestyles and scientific knowledge, nothing essentially makes us different from the people who were contemporaries of Jesus. We, as were they, are only humans, subject to human limitations.

Being human has its bright side. We congratulate ourselves, for example, on the brilliant accomplishments of human ingenuity, but, on the dark side, like the accusers of Jesus, we

often fail fully to see reality.

The surge of immigrants is a much-discussed, complex problem in this country. The pope, and American bishops, insist that truly understanding the situation requires seeing in each immigrant a human being, a precious child of God, whom any true Christian must love and respect.

Remember Jesus. See everyone, and everything, with the eyes of Jesus.

READINGS

Sunday: Exodus 20:1-17; Psalms 19:8-11; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25; John 2:13-25

Monday: 2 Kings 5:1-15b; Psalms 42:2-3, 43:3-4; Luke 4:24-30

Tuesday: Daniel 3:25, 34-43; Psalms 25:4bc-5ab, 6-7bc, 8-9; Matthew 18:21-35

Wednesday: Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9; Psalms 147:12-13, 15-16, 19-20; Matthew 5:17-19

Thursday: Jeremiah 7:23-28; Psalms 95:1-2, 6-9; Luke 11:14-23

Friday: Hosea 14:2-10; Psalms 81:6c-11b, 14, 17; Mark 12:28-34

Saturday: Hosea 6:1-6; Psalms 51:3-4, 18-21b; Luke 18:9-14

Our Call to a Cheerful Lent

If you are like me, perhaps Lent takes some getting used to. On the surface, it doesn't seem like a season filled with much joy. The notion of giving up things we delight in and fasting from food seems to be contrary to a life of joy. And yet, as I sat down to pray morning prayer with two of my brother priests on Ash Wednesday, the antiphon for the Cantic of Zechariah said the following, "When you fast, do not put on a gloomy face, like the hypocrites." Jesus says the same in Matthew 6:16.

So, if we're not supposed to look gloomy during this season of Lent, how are we supposed to look? I think St. Philip Neri can give us some insight. In reference to the pursuit of holiness, St. Philip said, "The true way to advance in holy virtues is to persevere in a holy cheerfulness." In other words, if we want our Lent to be a truly holy campaign, we are encouraged to ditch our gloomy faces for cheerful ones.

But why does St. Philip put such an emphasis on cheerfulness? I think his answer – and the answer of all the saints – is because they know that Jesus Christ is already victorious. He has definitively defeated sin and death and has invited

us into the supernatural life of grace. When Holy Mother Church invites us into this sacred season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, she is inviting us to take up the very weapons of that same victory.

By prayer, we participate in the very life of God. Fasting makes us realize that both our bodies and souls are made for heaven instead of for earth. And almsgiving is an expression of who God is in Himself – Self-Giving Love. Thus, these three traditional acts of Lent are truly a foreshadowing of the life we were made for. I think that is something worth celebrating!

The other reason St. Philip highlights cheerfulness as the path to holiness is because it is an expression of humility. In our own time, one of the greatest temptations is to take ourselves too seriously. As in every age, the temptation is to place ourselves at the center of attention, as if the world revolved around us. If we live in that way, certainly we have many reasons to have gloomy

faces. We see so much pain and suffering surrounding us, as well our own fears and anxieties about our lives and our futures. Think of how much time is spent in our culture seeking security in our digital



TWO CRACKED RIBS

FATHER BRIAN ISENBARGER

identities through social media and other such means. When we live in that place where we are responsible to create and sustain our own universe and our own identity, we inevitably begin to experience real gloom, because we were not made to bear the weight of the world on our own backs!

The truth of Christianity, on the other hand, is that we have been created out of infinite love by an all-good God and have been made for unending joy. By proclaiming Jesus Christ as both King and Redeemer, we admit that all of creation is His domain, and all pain, suffering, and death has been redeemed by His own death and resurrection. In other words, the Christian message is an invitation to free ourselves from our own self-absorption and move into the Kingdom of unending joy.

That's the same message of Lent. By prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, we move from placing ourselves as the center of existence to living in the Kingdom where Christ has already established His definitive victory. So cheer up! We don't need to have gloomy faces during this season of penance, because we already play on the winning team!

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

HEINLEIN, from page 16

can be asked to permit the family to bring holy Communion to their loved one.

Each of us will receive holy Communion one last time. In the course of sickness and death, the final reception of holy Communion before death is called viaticum, which means "food for the journey." Viaticum unites the dying person intimately with Christ in his or her passover from death to life. In ordinary circumstances, this should be arranged with attentiveness to the person's condition when there is at least a little time to spare. When it can be difficult for the

dying person to receive holy Communion, it is a consolation to remember that the fruits of the last Communion we've received do not have an expiration date and remain living, effective, and fruitful still. A spiritual communion could be recited with or for the dying person. Given its importance, greatest care should be taken that family and friends don't wait too long to request viaticum.

Even amid my grandma's own cognitive decline, it always amazed me to see how hardwired the faith remained internally. Even as receiving holy Communion became difficult for her at the end, there were glimmers of her awareness that shone

through the darkness of her illness, such as when she instinctively made the Sign of the Cross before receiving the sacrament or would respond "Amen" unprompted.

As I had the gift of witnessing that, it was hard not to grow in awe of our faith and the deep-rooted reality for believers that we cherish and desire the life Christ offers us in His body and blood. And He brings His grace to those who cling to that hope as they make their final push carrying His cross. And I found that grace came to those of us, who, like Mary, Simon, or Veronica, were privileged to help them along the way.

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

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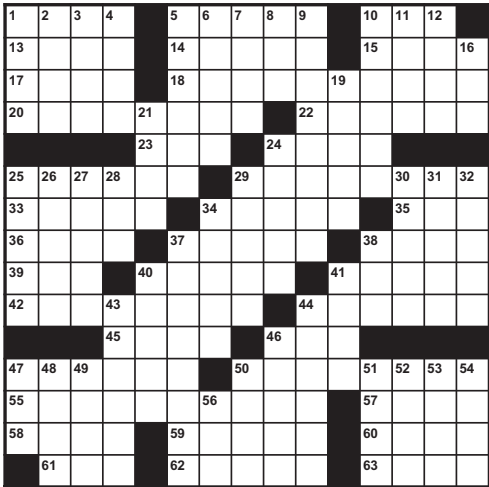
Gospel for March 3, 2024
John 2:13-25

Following is a word search based on the Gospel reading for the Third Sunday of Lent, Cycle B: Temple cleansing. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

- PASSOVER
JERUSALEM
HE MADE
DROVE
MONEY
OUT OF HERE
CONSUME ME
- JESUS
FOUND
WHIP
TEMPLE
CHANGERS
MARKET
DESTROY
- WENT UP
SHEEP
OF CORDS
COINS
TABLES
ZEAL
SPOKEN

ZEALOUS

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



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ACROSS

- 1 Jesus turned water into wine here
- 5 Capital of Jordan
- 10 ____1, papal license plate
- 13 Responsibility
- 14 Snare
- 15 Stuff
- 17 Printer fluids
- 18 ____of the Holy Spirit
- 20 Diabolically cruel
- 22 Examines searchingly
- 23 "I believe in ____ God..."
- 24 NT epistle
- 25 Biblical money
- 29 Supporter of a monarch
- 33 Nimble
- 34 Opposite of height
- 35 Definite article
- 36 Catholic singer Perry ____
- 37 Indian tent
- 38 Hosea, formerly
- 39 Soviet secret police
- 40 Long stories
- 41 Rite in the Catholic Church
- 42 Predict
- 44 Jesus description of some Parisees
- 45 Ewes' mates
- 46 "Son of" in Hebrew
- 47 St. John the Baptist is the patron saint of this country
- 50 Identified
- 55 Latin Mass
- 57 Yield
- 58 Teen scourge
- 59 Jesus asked whose was on the coin
- 60 Prison
- 61 OT prophetic book
- 62 Participant
- 63 Type of sch.

DOWN

- 1 Cap under a nun's veil
- 2 Years in old Rome
- 3 Microwave
- 4 Org.
- 5 Mark with oil
- 6 Small rodent
- 7 Flame bait
- 8 One did Cleopatra in
- 9 Novice
- 10 Meal for Ezekiel?
- 11 Creche

- 12 It shows which way the wind blows
- 16 UK sports cars
- 19 David married his widow
- 21 "...thy will be ____."
- 24 John, Paul and John Paul
- 25 Small nails
- 26 Disco era phrase
- 27 Medieval concept that was never an official teaching of the Church
- 28 "Strange Magic" rock grp.
- 29 Refund
- 30 Knocker's reply
- 31 Clip wool
- 32 Numbers 13 through 19
- 34 Catholic French painter, Edgar ____
- 37 The Archdiocese of Hobart is found in this Australian island
- 38 Alley of Moo
- 40 Window cover
- 41 Sign of papal office
- 43 Businesses
- 44 Thin layer of wood
- 46 Catholic pastime?
- 47 Windy city transport initials
- 48 Diocese opening
- 49 El ____
- 50 Decree
- 51 Biblical trial word
- 52 ____presence in the Eucharist
- 53 Verge
- 54 Hold as an opinion
- 56 HBO competitor

Bernini's St. Peter's Masterpiece Disappears Until Holy Year

BY CAROL GLATZ

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Like a giant Tinkertoy construction, a skeletal tower of scaffolding slowly inched its way up the twisting bronze columns of the baldachin over the main altar of St. Peter's Basilica.

Workers on the ground picked through piles of shiny metal platforms, poles, clamps, and couplers to then hoist them up high with pulleys to their workmates above. They had begun erecting the scaffolding after Mass on Ash Wednesday, February 14.

The 100-foot-tall baldachin was set to be completely covered by metal scaffolding before Easter to allow a team of 10 to 12 restorers to begin cleaning, repairing, and revitalizing the masterpiece designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini in 1624 and completed around 1633.

The biggest problem facing the restorers "is getting there – that is, to be close enough" to the bronze and wood structures and many decorative details that need to be restored, Alberto Capitanucci told Catholic News Service.

Capitanucci, the Head Engineer of the Fabbrica di San

Pietro – the office responsible for upkeep of the basilica – said the baldachin is a monumental architectural structure that is as high as a 10-story building.

But it is mostly empty space with its four fluted spiral bronze columns, each set upon a massive marble pedestal alongside the marble steps leading to the main altar over the tomb of St. Peter. The most delicate part of the structure is the canopy above, he said, which is made entirely of wood.

The wooden ceiling "is the size of a vessel – that is, it was designed to be the wooden planking of a boat," Capitanucci said.

Despite its enormous size, Bernini wanted the baldachin to resemble the light, open, and airy cloth-covered canopy used in processions of the Blessed Sacrament. The term "baldachin" or "baudekin" comes from a special brocade fabric made in Baghdad and traditionally used for processional canopies.

The twisting pattern on the gilded columns makes them look lighter and draws the eye upward along decorations of snaking branches of olive and laurel, bees and lizards, until it reaches the top, which resembles canopy brocade and



OSV News photo/Yara Nardi, Reuters

Scaffolding is seen on Wednesday, February 21, surrounding the 100-foot-tall baroque sculpted bronze canopy, or baldachin, by Gian Lorenzo Bernini over the high altar of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican in preparation for its restoration.

tassels blowing in the wind, he said. The top of the baldachin is meant to look like "a billowing sail" of a boat.

The angels holding floral garlands and standing at the four corners are 13 feet high, he said, and four scroll-like ornaments, shaped like dolphin backs, go

from the corners up to a globe that supports a cross, which is 40 feet tall. There are four pairs of cherubs holding up the keys of St. Peter, a papal tiara, and the sword and book of St. Paul.

What looks small from below is, in reality, enormous in size, Capitanucci said, indicating that the bees on top are as long as a briefcase. Pope Urban VIII, who hired Bernini to design the baldachin, belonged to the Barberini family, whose coat of arms consists of three bees.

Capitanucci said they used drones to take more than 6,000 photographs of the hard-to-reach canopy and its inner ceiling featuring the dove of the Holy Spirit surrounded by golden fire. The up-close images will help them plan how to proceed with the restoration, he said.

The entire structure will be covered in sheer cloth to shield workers from the public, he said, and still let in lots of natural light.

Once the scaffolding is completely up, the wooden box now protecting the main altar will be removed so the altar can still be used for papal ceremonies for the rest of the year. The entire restoration should be completed by the end of December for the beginning of the Holy Year.

Franciscan Father Enzo Fortunato, Director of Communication for St. Peter's Basilica, told CNS the baldachin "is the linchpin of the basilica." It draws attention to the main altar, which is "the heart, where the Eucharistic sacrifice takes place, the Eucharistic celebration that is the source and summit of Christian life," he said.

The current restoration project, funded by the Knights of Columbus, marks only the second restoration since the baldachin was built, he said, the last restoration being in the late 1700s.

When works of art are preserved well, he said, it keeps alive the belief that "beauty leads to God" and it reminds people "what human genius can create."

The baldachin also symbolizes that it is possible for all people to work together to create something spectacular, Father Fortunato said. Many other artists worked with Bernini to build the masterpiece, including his fiercest rival, Francesco Borromini.

"This makes us understand that teamwork, working together, always bears beautiful and good fruit," the Franciscan friar said.

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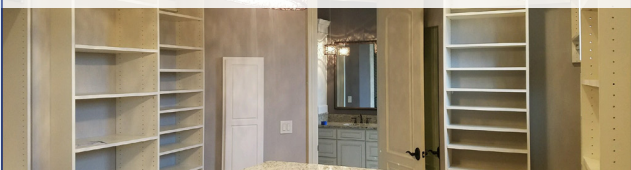
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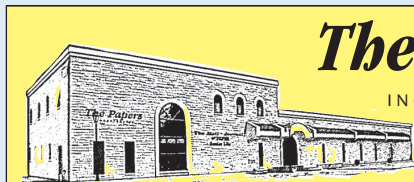
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WHAT'S HAPPENING carries announcements about upcoming events in the diocese. View more Catholic events and submit new ones at todayscatholic.org/event. For additional listings of that event, please call the advertising sales staff at 260-399-1449 to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

Lenten Vice Series

FORT WAYNE – A six-week series on vices will be held on Thursday evenings during Lent at 7 p.m. at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, 4500 Fairfield Ave. Speakers will be Father Paolo Degasper, Father Mark Hellinger, and Sister Benedicta Duna. For more details, visit saintjohnfortwayne.com, call Karen Glotzbach at 260-744-4393, or email parishsecretary@stjohnsfw.org.

Alive Series for Young Adults

SOUTH BEND – Alive is a weekly series of eight sessions with young adults (ages 18-39) to explore a surprising path toward a more abundant life through dispelling misconceptions and discovering a fresh approach to a relationship with God. The evenings include a delicious dinner, a relevant talk, and lively small-group discussion. Simply come as you are. Dinner is for free. Registration is required, and space is limited. The first gathering is Wednesday, March 6, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at The

General Cafe, 609 E. Jefferson Blvd. For more information, visit ablazemission.org/alive.

RETURN Mass and Stations of the Cross for Adult Children Who Have Left the Faith

GRANGER – A special Mass to pray for the return of adult children to the faith (or other loved ones) will be held on Thursday, March 7, at 6 p.m. at St. Pius X Church, 52553 Fir Rd. After Mass, the Stations of the Cross will be prayed with reflections particularly for this same intention. All are welcome for Mass and Stations. Co-sponsored by Ablaze Mission and Diocesan Marriage & Family Ministry. For more information on RETURN, visit ablazemission.org/return.

The Light is On For You – Confession in Every Diocesan Parish

This Lenten season, every Catholic parish in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend will have priests available for confessions on Thursday, March 7, from 6-8 p.m. If you have been reluctant to participate in this sacrament, have been

away for some time, or just find it difficult to get to an open confession time, this is a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with Christ and His Church. Visit diocesefwsb.org/light to learn more.

Mass Interpreted for the Deaf Offered in South Bend

SOUTH BEND – St. Matthew Cathedral Parish will 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.

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Marguerite Strass, 87, SS. Peter and Paul

Mishawaka

Tim Henthorn, 86, St. Monica

South Bend

Robert L. Miller, 97, St. Jude

March 1 Fish Fries

FORT WAYNE – Queen of Angels Lenten Fish Fry (Drive-Thru) 4-7 p.m.

NEW HAVEN – Fish Fry at St. John, New Haven, 4-7 p.m.

FREMONT – St. Paul Chapel's Fish Fry, 5-7 p.m.

FORT WAYNE – St. Vincents Boy Scout Fish Fry, 5-8 p.m.

FORT WAYNE – St. Joseph Knights Plan Fish Fry, 5-8 p.m.

MISHAWAKA – Knights of Columbus Fish Fry, 5-7 p.m.

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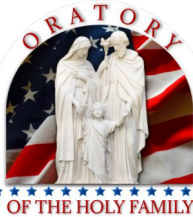
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CLASSICAL LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION
the Trivium and Quadrivium strengthen the
light of reason to see reality more clearly

MORAL AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
high ideals for lives of virtue and loving service

OBSERVATIONAL SCIENCE CURRICULUM
deep roots in the reality of the natural world

INTEGRATED HUMANITIES CURRICULUM
reverence for God's action in human history

MUSIC, ART, DRAMA and SPEECH
the love of beauty

AVERAGE CLASS SIZE OF 16 STUDENTS





Photos provided by Bishop Luers High School

Bishop Luers players, coaches, administrators, and cheerleaders pose with the state championship trophy at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis on Saturday, February 24.

Bishop Luers Girls Claim Seventh State Crown

BY GEORGIA LIEB

On Saturday, February 24, hundreds of Bishop Luers High School students, parents, alumni, and fans flocked to Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis to see if the school's girls basketball team could claim yet another state championship to add to the school's already crowded trophy case. Trailing by nine points at halftime, the outlook appeared bleak. But the Lady Knights outscored Brownstown Central by 17 points in the final two quarters to rally to a 44-36 victory to claim the school's seventh girls basketball state title, matching the most of any program in state history.

The Knights beat Brownstown Central to win their previously championship in 2011.

Sophomore Miley Wareing scored 12 of her game-high 17 points in the second half to lead the Knights. She added 10 rebounds. Senior guard Annika Davis capped off her Luers career with 10 points, while fellow senior Kyndal Tyree added 10 points for the Lady Knights.

When asked how winning her first state championship made her feel, senior Addie Shank said: "It was really cool. It was really exciting. It kind of felt surreal. After we won it, I just looked around and was like, 'OK, we just did it.' I'm letting it sink in this week."

Throughout the game, the BLHS mascot (Lu the Knight), cheerleaders, and pep band hyped up the crowd, and the student section very enthusiastically cheered their team on. Between the first and second



Senior Addie Shank, left, concentrates during the state championship game.

quarters, Bishop Luers football coach Kyle Lindsay received the 2024 IHSA Education Champion Award for his positive impact on the education of student-athletes in the school. In November, Lindsay led the Knights to that program's 12th state championship – third most in state history.

Regarding the girls' win at state, Bishop Luers Principal Scott Kreiger said: "The Bishop Luers community salutes our state championship girls basketball team. The girls displayed great competitive energy while also respecting the game through their sportsmanship toward the officials and other players. We are very proud of their accomplishments and by how well they represented Bishop Luers High School."

Following their championship win, Bishop Luers held



Bishop Luers football coach Kyle Lindsay poses after receiving the 2024 IHSA Education Champion Award for his positive impact on the education of student-athletes.

a pep assembly on Monday, February 26, to celebrate the Lady Knights. At the pep session, Coach Mark Pixley, who finished his 10th season with the Lady Knights by claiming his first state championship, thanked all those who supported the team during their title run.

"I'd like to thank the administration, all the fans for showing up – you guys filled the fieldhouse," Pixley said. "It was an awesome experience! It was great bringing home the state championship for basketball here at Luers." Pixley recognized all of the players and coaches, then said, "We do what we do at the Lu, and that's winning championships!" He invited the three senior athletes – Addie Shank, Davis, and Tyree – to say a few words and to hold up the state championship trophy.

At the assembly, Kreiger mentioned some interesting facts. "There are around 400 high schools in Indiana, and most of them never get the opportunity to do what you have done – not once this year, but twice!" Kreiger said. "This is the seventh state championship for the girls basketball program at Bishop Luers High School, and no school in the state has more!"

At the end of the assembly, Kreiger said: "It's not just about winning championships, it's about being good people. It's about being good students, it's about being good citizens, and that's where we are. This is just another reminder of how special Bishop Luers is. You are in a very special place, doing very special things. Never take that for granted."



Fans of Bishop Luers cheer during the state championship game.