Serving the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend

December 14, 2025

TODAY'S CATHOLIC

Volume 99, No. 42

TODAYSCATHOLIC.org

A Call to Educate All

ELL Teachers in the Diocese Aim to Help Non-Native English Speakers Learn the Language

BY KEVIN KILBANE

Teacher Erin Warden uses every minute when students enter her English Language Learner (ELL) classroom at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic School in Fort Wayne.

On a recent day, several kindergartners recited letters of the alphabet and then joined her in pointing out parts of their faces in time to a song. Warden, the school's ELL director, then read a story that used animals' clothing to discuss the concepts of too big and too small. During the 30-minute class, Warden also squeezed in other exercises and read a story about counting before students returned to their regular classrooms.

ELL lessons become more conversational as students get older. With second graders, Warden showed them a photo of a bear in a goofy pose and asked what the bear may be doing. "Looking for hamburgers," a boy said. "Dancing," and "Dancing while looking at the sky," other children suggested.

St. Vincent is one of several schools in the diocese that offers ELL instruction for students who are not native English speakers but whose parents want them to receive a Catholic education.

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Provided by St. Michael Catholic School

Mary Beth Kolter, English Language Learners (ELL) instructor at St. Michael Catholic School in Plymouth, top right, and her assistant, Ana Aguilar, left, play a learning game with two students in the school's ELL program. Kolter said English is a difficult language to learn, but their students all work hard to accomplish it.

Witnessing to the Works of Christ this Advent

BY FATHER ZANE LANGENBRUNNER

"Go and tell John what you hear and see."
– Matthew 11:4

On the Third Sunday of Advent, the Church invites us to continue pondering the figure of St. John the Baptist. John has changed locations since the last time we saw him, from the desert to a prison cell, and his portrait looks considerably different. Last week, he was the fiery prophet, proclaiming repentance and pointing boldly toward the coming of Christ. This week, he appears to doubt whether Jesus is the Messiah after all.

The place of John the Baptist's imprisonment and subsequent martyrdom was Machaerus, the royal city of Herod Antipas, located east of the Dead Sea. Though the city was destroyed by the Romans in 71/72 AD, it has been excavated in recent years and is now one of the best-preserved archaeological sites in the Holy Land. The ornate fortress-palace of Machaerus sat upon a hilltop, with panoramic views of both the Dead Sea and the West Bank of the Jordan River. One could even see Jerusalem from its towers, and it was probably built as a protective citadel for that holy city.

St. John the Baptist, however, saw little more than the dank walls of his prison cell. John was imprisoned by Herod Antipas (also known as Herod the Tetrarch) on account of his staunch opposition to Herod's illicit marriage to Herodias, his brother Philip's wife (see Mt 14:1-12). We know the grisly end of that story, but we do not often think of John's time in prison. In Matthew 4:12 we hear that he has been arrested, and he seems to be beheaded about halfway through Jesus' public ministry (see Mt 14:10). This means that John spent about a year and a half in prison, hearing vaguely of the "works of the Christ," receiving the occasional visit from his followers and even from Herod himself (see Mk 6:20), but largely he was left to his private thoughts and prayers.

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TODAY'S CATHOLIC

(ISSN 0891-1533)
(USPS 403630)

Official newspaper of the
Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend
P.O. Box 11169
Fort Wayne, IN 46856

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

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

MAIN OFFICE: 915 S. Clinton St., Fort Wayne, IN 46802. Telephone 260-456-2824. Fax: 260-744-1473.
BUREAU OFFICE: 1328 Dragoon Trail, Mishawaka, IN 46544. Telephone 260-456-2824. Fax 260-744-1473.

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

Today's Catholic may be reached at :
Today's Catholic,
P.O. Box 11169, Fort Wayne, IN 46856-1169; or email:
editor@diocesefwsb.org

The
Diocese of
Fort Wayne-South Bend

All Christians are earnest to speak the truth in charity and join with all peace-loving people in pleading for peace and trying to bring it about.
— Gaudiem et Spes, 78

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New Film Explores the Life, Legacy of Holy Cross Brother Columba O'Neill

BY LISA KOCHANOWSKI

Photos by Lisa Kochanowski

Bishop Rhoades addresses more than 150 priests, brothers, religious, and lay faithful gathered in McKenna Hall at the University of Notre Dame for a screening of "In Kind Love: The Life and Legacy of Brother Columba O'Neill, CSC" on Sunday, November 23.

"He was living what Jesus said in the Gospel: 'Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart,'" Bishop Rhoades said in the new documentary, "In Kind Love: The Life and Legacy of Brother Columba O'Neill, CSC." Bishop Rhoades added, "I hope that the cause will move forward and that Brother Columba would become the first saint from South Bend, Indiana."

Known as the "Miracle Man of Notre Dame," Brother Columba O'Neill was a member of the Congregation of Holy Cross and is currently under consideration for sainthood in the Catholic Church. A collaboration between NewGroup Media, the Midwest Province of Brothers, and the Congregation of Holy Cross, United States Province of Priests and Brothers, has produced this new documentary that includes interviews from Bishop Rhoades and members of the Holy Cross Congregation and tells the inspirational story of a man's quest to live a life of faith.

"This person who is emerging as a saint isn't the scholar, isn't the administrator. He was a shoemaker," said Holy Cross Brother Kenneth Haders, provincial superior of the Midwest Province of Brothers, Congregation of Holy Cross, in the new documentary. "I'm excited about the prospect of canonizing our brother Columba O'Neal."

Holy Cross Father Ronald Raab said in the film, "Through the Sacred Heart, Columba was a humble instrument of God's healing in the world."

The University of Notre Dame hosted the premier screening of the film on Sunday, November 23, the anniversary of the burial of Brother Columba. More than 150 priests, brothers, members of the religious community, and laypeople filled McKenna Hall on Notre Dame's campus to view the documentary. Following the presentation, visitors had the opportunity to listen to a panel discussion with documentary writer Sister Judy Zielinski, the director of faith and values programming at NewGroup Media, and film collaborator Edwin Donnelly, a temporarily professed seminarian with the Congregation of Holy Cross.

"For the film … to progress from its earliest conceptualization to a 45-minute absorbing visual reality is no easy task," said Holy Cross Brother Philip Smith, the archivist for the Congregation of Holy Cross and USA coordinator for Brother Columba's canonization cause. "It takes a village of committed professionals who combine their many skills to weave a tale created as a mosaic of Brother Columba's life. But of more importance to me is the commitment of Bishop Kevin Rhoades. We all owe him our thanks for agreeing that the life of the humble cobber, the miracle man of Notre Dame, is not only worth telling but that his devotion to the hearts of Jesus and Mary and the Sacred Heart must be told. Without his support, there would be no film. I shared my research on Columba with him in 2020. Since that time, he has provided unflinching support, and continues to do so, as Columba's cause for canonization progresses."

At the premiere, Bishop Rhoades shared the news that the U.S. bishops will consecrate the United States to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in June of 2026.

"During these coming months before the consecration happens in June, I think it would be wonderful to do all we can, connecting Brother Columba to this," Bishop Rhoades said. "I'm thinking of Sacred Heart badges and everything else that we will do in our diocese and then spreading this wonderful documentary during this time leading up to the consecration of our nation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus."

Pictured from left to right are Father Ronald Raab, CSC, Father Thomas Zurcher, CSC, Brother Philip Smith, CSC, Bishop Rhoades, and Father Richard Gribble, CSC, following the screening of a new film on the life of Brother Columba O'Neill.

Watch the Film

Bishop Rhoades and the Congregation of Holy Cross invite all the faithful to watch "In Kind Love: The Life and Legacy of Brother Columba O'Neill, CSC" at holycrossusa.org/brothercolumba.

Photos by Michael Caterina/University of Notre Dame

University of Notre Dame President Robert A. Dowd, CSC, presides over a Mass for immigrants and immigration reform at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart on Monday, December 1.

ND President Celebrates Mass for Immigrants, Reform

BY CARRIE GATES

On the evening of Monday, December 1, Holy Cross Father Robert A. Dowd, president of the University of Notre Dame, presided and preached at a Mass for immigrants and immigration reform at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. The Mass was held in response to a special message published on November 12 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in which the bishops expressed opposition to "the indiscriminate mass deportation of people" from the U.S. as well as to recent comments by Pope Leo XIV.

The beginning of Advent, Father Dowd noted in his homily, was a fitting time to celebrate the Mass.

"Advent is a season when, in a special way, we are called to prepare a place for the Lord Jesus in our hearts, in our minds, in our lives, and in our communities," Father Dowd said. "Advent is also a season when we are called to develop insight – a holy insight – that allows us to recognize the Lord Jesus as He comes to us."

Father Dowd observed that Jesus "comes to us in ways that are stunning for their ordinariness." Referencing the Mass' first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy, he said that God's people are to be especially attentive to the vulnerable in their midst, for "God continues to come to us in flesh and blood, especially the flesh and blood of those who struggle the most."

"While there are many vulnerable people in our midst here in our country and elsewhere in our world – and we Christians are called to recognize Christ present in them all – this evening, as members of the Notre Dame family, we join with our Holy Father, Pope Leo, and our bishops to pray that we might recognize Christ present in our immigrant population, many of whom are especially vulnerable these days," Father Dowd said.

> "It is imperative that we treat people who are in this country ... with the respect that their God-given dignity demands."
>
> **FATHER ROBERT A. DOWD, PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME**

Father Dowd noted that "it is important to recognize the right and responsibility of governments to decide who, when, and how to allow people into a country, including this one."

"There can be no doubt our immigration system in this country is broken, and has been for some time," he said. "There is need for reform."

"However," he continued, "it is imperative that we treat people who are in this country – many for several years, contributing to and enriching our country – with the respect that their God-given dignity demands."

Father Dowd exhorted the hundreds of attendees to consider how the community can work together to address the brokenness of the immigration system.

"At Notre Dame, we must do more than complain. We must deepen our understanding of the complexity of the situation and work with others to propose sensible and humane solutions," he said. "That's what universities are for."

Father Dowd concluded his homily with a call to pray for immigrants, for "sensible and humane immigration policy reform" and for "elected leaders and all who have the responsibility of governing and enforcing our country's laws."

"And let us pray that those of us who call ourselves Christians might be cultivators of hope by recognizing Christ in the vulnerable, serving Him there, learning from Him there, and standing with Him there," he said.

"May Notre Dame always be a community dedicated to growth, not only in knowledge, understanding, and technical expertise, but in wisdom and insight – the holy insight to recognize the mysterious presence of Christ in our midst."

Holy Cross Father Gerard J. Olinger, vice president for student affairs, closed the Mass with an invitation to join Father Dowd and himself in prayer at the Grotto on the university's campus, "to light a candle and to ask for the intercession of Our Lady as we navigate these conversations as a nation."

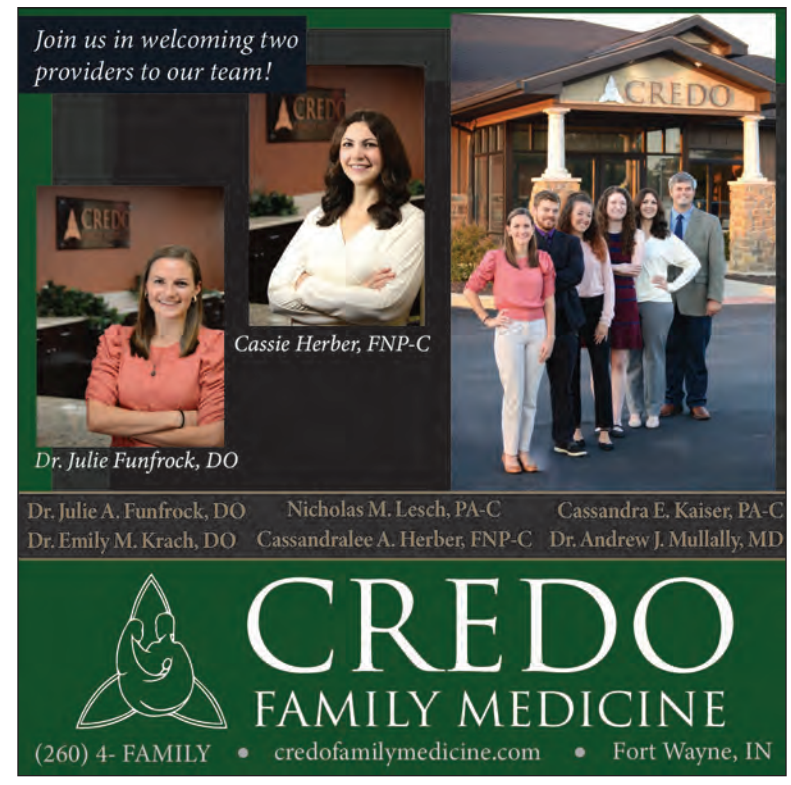
Father Dowd's full homily is available at president.nd.edu.

Carrie Gates is associate director of media relations for the University of Notre Dame.

PUBLIC SCHEDULE OF Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades

Veritatem In Caritate
(Truth in Charity)

- **Wednesday, December 17, at 10:30 a.m.** – Mass at University of Saint Francis Mission Formation Day, University of Saint Francis North Campus Auditorium, Fort Wayne
- **Friday, December 19, at 11 a.m.** – Mass and Employee Christmas Luncheon, Sacred Heart Church, Warsaw, and Grace College, Winona Lake
- **Saturday, December 20, at 11 a.m.** – Mass and Christmas Luncheon for Seminarians, St. Joseph – Hessen Cassel Church, Fort Wayne
- **Sunday, December 21, at 2 p.m.** – Mass, Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Fort Wayne



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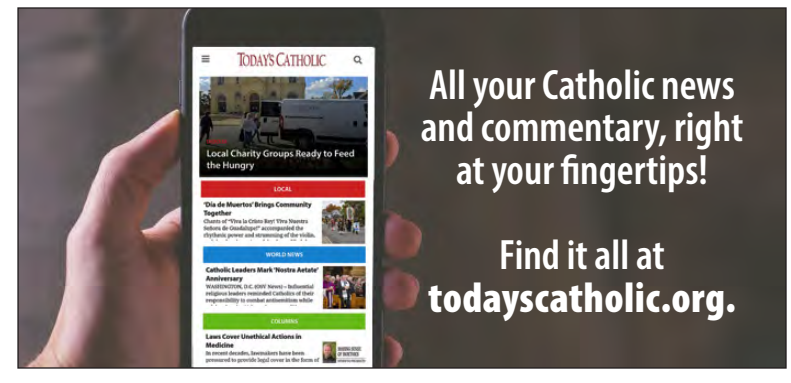

Celebrating Mary's Immaculate Conception

The Blessed Mother Is 'Our Sure Guide and Unfailing Support,' Bishop Rhoades Says

BY BISHOP KEVIN C. RHOADES

The following homily was given by Bishop Rhoades on Monday, December 8, the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Ege.

Today we celebrate one of the most beautiful feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary: the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. The mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary reminds us of two fundamental truths of our faith: first, original sin, and second, the victory over sin through Christ's grace, a victory that shines in a sublime way in Mary Most Holy.

The existence of original sin is glaringly obvious if we look around us, if we read or see the news, and also if we look within ourselves. We see the tragic consequences of the disobedience of Adam and Eve and a world virtually inundated by sin throughout human history. In his first letter, St. John wrote that "the whole world is in the power of the evil one." The evil one, Satan, symbolized by the serpent in Genesis, is the father of lies who deceived our first parents.

The Second Vatican Council described this situation after the fall as a battle. We read the following in Gaudium et Spes: "The whole of man's history has been the story of dour combat with the powers of evil, stretching, so Our Lord tells us, from the very dawn of history until the last day. Finding himself in the midst of the battlefield man has to struggle to do what is right, and it is at great cost to himself, and aided by God's grace, that he succeeds in achieving his own inner integrity."

The good news is that, after the fall, God did not abandon humanity. In fact, God announced that there would be victory over evil and that man would be restored to grace, to friendship with God. God said to the serpent: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel" (Gn 3:9). This verse in Genesis is called the Protoevangelium, the first Gospel. It was truly good news. It was "the first announcement of the Messiah and Redeemer, of a battle between the serpent and the woman, and of the final victory of her offspring" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 410). The woman is clearly Mary, the mother of Christ. She was uniquely associated with her Son's victory over sin since she was preserved from all stain of sin by a special grace of God.

"The Immaculate Conception" by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo hangs in the Prado Museum in Madrid.

That's what we celebrate today, that God kept Mary sinless from the first moment of her existence by virtue of the merits of her Son. She was redeemed by Him from the moment of her conception. And, by the grace of God and her cooperation with that grace, Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long.

Mary reflects the beauty of God resplendent on the face of her Son, the beauty that saves the world. In Mary, this beauty is totally pure and humble, free from all pride and presumption, as expressed in her words at the Annunciation: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Mary is the new Eve whose obedience overcame Eve's disobedience. Her Son is the new Adam. By His obedience unto death, Jesus made amends superabundantly for the disobedience of Adam.

Looking at Mary, we recognize the loftiness and beauty of God's plan for us all: to become holy and without blemish, as we heard in the second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In Mary's Immaculate Conception shines forth our vocation to holiness. She's our sure guide and unfailing support in our fight against sin and a constant encouragement for us to live in deeper communion with her Son, to adhere to Him with a living faith, to place our trust and hope in Him, and to love Him with our whole being. We can always count on her intercession as our tender, loving Mother.

As you know, the Immaculate Conception is the patroness of our diocese and of our nation. She is also the patroness of your parish here in Ege. When German settlers built a very small mission church here in 1864, this area was called Girardot Settlement. Our diocese had just been established seven years earlier, and the first bishop was a German immigrant, Bishop John Henry Luers. In 1875, a more spacious frame church was built. And this, your beautiful parish church today, was built in 1923.

Through all these years, God has been worshipped here, and our Blessed Mother has been honored here. I pray that on this, her feast, when we celebrate her beauty, goodness, and purity, we may be aroused to imitate her. She was the first and greatest disciple of her Son. She is the holiest of all the saints. We call her "the Queen of All Saints." May our Immaculate Mother intercede for you and all the parishioners of this parish, and for our diocese and our nation. May she help all of us to grow in holiness, to grow in God's grace through lives of faith, hope, and charity! May she always be at our side, interceding for us in our spiritual battle. She is Our Mother of Perpetual Help, helping us to open our hearts to God's grace like she did and guiding us in the way of her Son, the path of salvation!

O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee!

School Spirit

Your Schools, Your Stories

This academic year, Today's Catholic is partnering with the student media programs at all four Catholic high schools in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. Each week, student writers, editors, and photographers from Bishop Luers and Bishop Dwenger in Fort Wayne, Saint Joseph in South Bend, and Marian in Mishawaka will share their work on this new page, School Spirit, dedicated to telling the stories of their school communities.

Project Lead the Way

An Inside Look on the Biomedical Sciences Track at Saint Joseph High School

BY KYLIE HUFF

Photos by John Smolinski/Saint Joseph High School

Students of Saint Joseph High School in South Bend participate in classes for Project Lead the Way, which offers students hands-on opportunities to learn in the fields of science and biomedicine.

Project Lead the Way (PLTW) is a learning initiative that offers students of all ages the opportunity to develop the skills needed for college and real-world careers. Saint Joseph High School in South Bend offers students all three PLTW tracks – biomedical sciences, engineering, and computer science. The biomedical track consists of four yearlong courses: Principles of Biomedical Science, Human Body Systems, Medical Interventions, and Biomedical Intervention.

Principles of Biomedical Science asks students to analyze data, control hypothetical outbreaks, and promote living a healthy life. The course hinges on the fictional death of the character, Anna Garcia. Students in biomedical science develop necessary and on-demand skills that will help as they pursue further study toward a career in the biomedical field.

Human Body Systems is PLTW's version of an anatomy class. Students experience real-world medical scenarios to see medicine in action. They're instructed to diagnose and provide treatment to fictional patients in a rehabilitation center, keep their clients safe on medicine trips to remote locations, and work on research exploring aging and development.

Students of the Biomedical Interventions class explore scenarios such as designing a prosthetic arm and following the life of a fictional family to learn how to prevent, diagnose, and treat disease. Biomedical Innovations students use the knowledge they have gained through their past three years to innovate their own solution to the health problems of today.

"It can open doors," said Tracy Gergely, who teaches Principles of Biomedical Science at Saint Joseph.

The Biomed track shows students things they will not encounter in traditional classrooms. The hands-on, problem-solving experience is helpful in any workplace – not just careers dealing with medical knowledge. The Biomedical track provides students with information and skills they will use in the medical and medical research fields, certainly, but it also teaches them vital skills for any career later in their life.

"Biomed has taught me many workplace skills like communication with others, problem solving, adaptability, creativity, and teamwork," said Human Body Systems student Stella Weller. "It offers many career options to pursue later in life and helps people develop on a personal level as well."

The Biomedical track's classes are all group-oriented, requiring students to be able to work well with others in small and large groups. From reconstructing a crime scene in Principles of Biomedical Science, to replating real bacteria in Medical Interventions, group work and collaboration are a fundamental part of the Biomed experience.

"There are students who surprise the teacher," Gergely said. "Some kids will learn that, hey, maybe this is something I want to do, and others will learn that this isn't something for them."

The crucial aspect is the opportunity to explore relevant experiences that typically students would otherwise have to wait years to encounter.

Freshman Rylan Rockwell said: "I went into Biomed wanting to be a lawyer. Then over the course of the class, I learned that a desk job wasn't what I wanted. I learned, with the help of Mrs. Gergely and the Principles of Biomedical Science class, that I want to go into veterinary medicine."

Through hands-on experience and the nontraditional class structure, students often discover what they really want to do in the future. The Principles of Biomedical students receive their initial exposure to the biomedical field with state-of-the-art equipment and activities with minimal instruction, forcing the students to think critically about their situation and learn what to do and what not to do through trial and error.

This year's biomedical sciences classes have already completed multiple projects. The Principles of Biomedical Science classes have already seen their model crime scene, and their investigation is underway. Students have finished their blood drop lab, in which they used pipettes to drop fake blood from different heights and angles in order to analyze what conditions create different kinds of blood spatter. Human Body Systems students recently dissected a cow's elbow and will use it as a model for a human's anatomy in their upcoming lessons. The Medical Interventions students wrapped up a lab in which they plated cultures of bacteria and allowed them to grow, and then they took samples from the cultures and plated them onto petri dishes treated with different antibiotics in order to learn which antibiotics work best against bacteria. The Biomedical Innovations students are currently testing water for bacteria in order to investigate what is making their fictional family sick.

The PLTW curriculum offers a special experience for Saint Joseph students as they discern potential careers while still in high school. Taught by seven teachers in the science and math departments, the program has grown steadily throughout the past decade. The emphasis on collaboration and project-based learning provides invaluable training that helps prepare them for the workplace regardless of the specific job they will eventually pursue.

One of the landmarks for Project Lead the Way is a coat ceremony for those students who have finished the third course in the sequence. Held each spring, the event celebrates the proud accomplishment of the biomedical students who reach this milestone.

Kylie Huff is a sophomore at Saint Joseph High School.

News Briefs

Pope Prays Mary Will Fill Believers with Hope

CNS photo/Lola Gomez

A firefighter places a wreath of flowers on the outstretched arm of a Marian statue near the Spanish Steps in Rome on Monday, December 8, the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Celebrating the solemnity as the Jubilee Year is ending, Pope Leo XIV prayed that "Jubilee hope" would "blossom in Rome and in every corner of the earth," bringing with it reconciliation, nonviolence, and peace."

3 Months After Shooting, Minneapolis Church Is Restored for Worship

MINNEAPOLIS (OSV News) – On a cold, wintery day, with the congregation gathered around Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis and Auxiliary Bishops Kevin T. Kenney and Michael Izen outside the main doors of Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis, the rite of reparation began on Saturday, December 6, that restored the space for worship. The special Mass was held more than three months after an August 27 shooting during an all-school Mass killed two students – 8-year-old Fletcher Merkel and 10-year-old Harper Moyski – and injured 18 students and three adults. The suspected shooter died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound at the scene, police said. Archbishop Hebda prayed outside the church, with temperatures in the low 20s. Accompanied by chanting of the Litany of the Saints, servers entered the church carrying incense, the cross and candles, followed by the bishops, vested in purple, deacons, and priests of the archdiocese in white vestments, other liturgical ministers, and all the assembly. The parish asked that the media not be allowed inside for the Mass. Materials prepared for the rite said that Archbishop Hebda and Father Dennis Zehren, pastor of Annunciation, sprinkled the altar and sanctuary, the church walls, and the congregation with the holy water. After the readings and Archbishop Hebda's homily, the altar was prepared for the celebration of the Eucharist, and the Mass proceeded.

U.S. Bishops Award More Than $7 Million to Home Missions

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) – Dozens of "home mission dioceses" across the nation have received much-needed financial support, provided by the generosity of U.S. Catholics through an annual collection. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops announced on Monday, December 1, that 69 mission dioceses and Eastern Catholic eparchies have been awarded a collective total of more than $7.8 million in grants. The 2025-26 allocations – which ranged from $10,000 to approximately $145,000 – were determined by the USCCB's Subcommittee on Catholic Home Missions, which met earlier in the fall to review grant applications. The awarded funds were made possible through the USCCB's annual Catholic Home Missions appeal. The collection, taken up in many dioceses and parishes on the last weekend in April, was established in 1998 to strengthen U.S.-based mission dioceses. Bishop Chad W. Zielinski of New Ulm, Minnesota, who chairs the USCCB home missions subcommittee, said in a statement that parishioners contributing to the appeal "bring faith, hope, and love where it is most needed," regardless of the amount of their gift." The donations "have a profound, positive impact on Catholics who face poverty or the isolation of being a small, minority faith," he said.

Louisiana Bishop Suspends Mass Obligation Amid ICE Crackdowns

BATON ROUGE, Louisiana (OSV News) – Amid immigration detention sweeps in Louisiana – part of an ongoing nationwide campaign by the Trump administration – Bishop Michael G. Duca of Baton Rouge has issued a dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass for those concerned for their safety. The dispensation, announced in a December 4 statement posted to the diocese's website, applies to Sundays and holy days of obligation and remains "valid until the individual Catholic determines it is safe to attend Mass again or this dispensation is revoked or amended." The bishop, who issued his decision "with a heavy heart," said that "many of the faithful genuinely fear immigration enforcement action" and urged prayer and reflection in lieu of Mass attendance. Bishop Alberto Rojas of San Bernardino, California, issued a similar dispensation on July 8, and the Diocese of Nashville also provided guidance in May on Mass obligations during immigration raids. "National security and the protection of human dignity are not incompatible," said Bishop Duca. "We must advocate for a just solution to this difficult situation in our country." Catholic social teaching on immigration balances three interrelated principles – the right of persons to migrate in order to sustain their lives and those of their families, the right of a country to regulate its borders and control immigration, and a nation's duty to regulate its borders with justice and mercy.

Papal Commission Votes Against Ordaining Women Deacons

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – A commission set up by Pope Francis to study women deacons has voted against the possibility of ordaining women deacons while also supporting more study on the issue. It also expressed hope that women's access to other ministries would be expanded. Pope Francis established the Study Commission on the Female Diaconate in 2020 as a follow-up to a previous group that studied the history of women deacons in the New Testament and the early Christian communities. The Vatican published the synthesis, including the results of votes the commission members took on eight different statements or "theses." One proposition that showed members split exactly down the middle was: "The masculinity of Christ, and therefore the masculinity of those who receive Holy Orders, is not accidental but is an integral part of sacramental identity, preserving the divine order of salvation in Christ. To alter this reality would not be a simple adjustment of ministry but a rupture of the nuptial meaning of salvation." When this statement was put to a vote among 10 members in February, it received five votes in favor, confirming its current form, while the other five members voted to remove it. A statement that received six votes against, two for, and two abstaining was: "The undersigned is in favor of the institution in the Church of the female diaconate as understood as the third degree of holy orders."

USCCB's Racial Justice Chair Discourages 'Dehumanizing Language' After Trump Somali Comments

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) – The chair of the U.S. bishops' Subcommittee for the Promotion of Racial Justice and Reconciliation on Friday, December 5, praised "the rich gifts that neighbors from diverse cultures bring to our communities." While Bishop Garcia's statement did not name President Donald Trump, it came after Trump took aim at Somali immigrants during comments at a Cabinet meeting at the White House on Tuesday, December 2, calling them "garbage." Trump's comments sparked controversy and were met with criticism by those who argued the language was dehumanizing or that his use of a vulgar term was unbecoming for a president. In his statement, Bishop Daniel E. Garcia of Austin, Texas said: "As Catholics, we believe that every person is beloved by God and created in his image. Each child of God has value and dignity." He added: "Language that denigrates a person or community based on his or her ethnicity or country of origin is incompatible with this truth. … I call on all – public officials, community leaders, and individuals – to refrain from denigrating and dehumanizing language. May we recognize the rich gifts that neighbors from diverse cultures bring to our communities."

More Than 11 Million Have Visited Notre Dame in Paris Since Its Reopening

PARIS (OSV News) – One year after reopening following the devastating 2019 fire, Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris is marking a major milestone: more than 11 million people have visited since last December, a number that is well above pre-fire levels. Rector Monsignor Olivier Ribadeau Dumas said the past year has been "extremely rich," as the cathedral's team worked to "relearn" how to welcome tens of thousands of daily visitors while preserving an atmosphere of prayer. Notre Dame has also become an emerging pilgrimage destination, hosting 650 pilgrimages. A highlight for many is the crown of thorns, now displayed every Friday, after firefighters famously saved it during the 2019 blaze. Visitors are also discovering the cathedral's newly restored chapels, from the Virgin of Guadalupe to Our Lady of Czestochowa. Monsignor Ribadeau Dumas said the goal is simple: "Everyone should be able to say, 'This is our Notre Dame.'"

Students Confirmed at Corpus Christi Catholic Church

BY KASIA BALSBAUGH

On Friday, December 5, Bishop Rhoades confirmed 14 young people, two of whom also received their first holy Communions, during a Mass at Corpus Christi Catholic Church in South Bend, with pastor Father Daryl Rybicki assisting at the Mass.

Because the confirmations took place on Friday of the first week of Advent, Bishop Rhoades in his homily explained that the Latin word from which "Advent" is derived, "adventus," means "coming." He continued that Advent prepares us for the celebration of the first coming of the Lord as a human child, and that it also hints at the second coming of the Lord at the end of time. He pointed out the existence of another coming of God to humanity, one in between these two: the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles at Pentecost, as the Holy Spirit was to come to the confirmands in the sacrament that day.

Bishop Rhoades also stressed the importance of living by the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. For example, he said, sometimes we hope for things in life that may disappoint us by never coming to be: a favorite team winning a game or, more seriously, a loved one recovering from an illness. It's important, the bishop said, to always remember that our hope is in a person: Jesus. "Even if someone we really love dies, we don't grieve like people who have no hope," Bishop Rhoades said.

As Bishop Rhoades reminded the candidates, "That's what confirmation is all about: a special strength to live your faith with conviction and courage."

Bishop Rhoades also talked with confirmands about their chosen patron saints and asked them questions about Church doctrine. When the student who had chosen St. Albert the Great answered the bishop's question about the Immaculate Conception, Bishop Rhoades exclaimed, "I knew the one who chose the teacher of St. Thomas Aquinas would be able to get any question!"

One of the unique projects the young people completed as part of their confirmation preparation was to dress up and pose for photographs as their chosen confirmation patron saints. The photo projects were displayed at the church, showing students in robes and fake beards, with props of flowers and bishop's miters.

Bishop Rhoades complimented the group of confirmands on their sincerity and participation in the liturgy as well as their confidence in engaging with questions. "You give me a lot of hope," he told them.

The bishop encouraged the confirmands to continue practicing and evangelizing their faith: two interconnected actions.

"That's why you're being confirmed, so you spread the fragrance of Christ, the goodness of Christ, the love of Christ, to others," Bishop Rhoades said. "That's our mission. … If you spread the fragrance of Christ, the goodness of Christ, you will become saints."

Photos by Kasia Balsbaugh

The confirmands at Corpus Christi Catholic Church sing the processional hymn at the opening of their confirmation Mass on Friday, December 5, in South Bend.

A confirmand stands with his sponsor as he waits to be confirmed by Bishop Rhoades at Corpus Christi Catholic Church.

Confirmand Claire McKee brings up the gifts during the offertory of the confirmation Mass.

A confirmands stand with his sponsor as he waits to be confirmed by Bishop Rhoades on Friday, December 5, in South Bend.

Bishop Rhoades invokes the Holy Spirit over the confirmands during a Mass at Corpus Christi Catholic Church in South Bend.

ADVENT, from page 1

What was John thinking about during this year and a half? Perhaps he thought of examples of prisoners from sacred Scripture, like the patriarch Joseph (see Gn 39–41) or the prophet Jeremiah (see Jer 37–38). Perhaps he echoed the words of the psalmist, crying out to God for deliverance (see Ps 69:34; 79:11; 107:10-16; 142:8; 146:7). Perhaps he recalled the words of Isaiah quoted by Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth – "He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives … to let the oppressed go free" (Lk 4:18; see Is 61:1) – and wondered why they were not being fulfilled, in his case.

If it is a corporal work of mercy to "visit the imprisoned" (see Mt 25:36), it is because prisoners have significant struggles and needs that are often underserved. A 2024 umbrella review in the Lancet journal presented a comprehensive overview of public health outcomes among incarcerated individuals, noting substantially higher rates of treatable mental disorders and infectious diseases among those in prison. And in 2021, the Prison Policy Initiative identified several troubling mental health risks among prisoners, including family disconnection, loss of autonomy, lack of purpose, unpredictability in routine, and trauma from witnessing violence. Imprisonment is a harrowing experience, both mentally and physically, and these types of trials could be in the background of John's question to Jesus: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"

Wikimedia Commons

The painting "St. John the Baptist Visited in Prison by Salome" is by the 17th-century Italian painter Guercino.

The Lord knows that such a question cannot be answered with mere words. John has plenty of words; it is all he has left, at this point. And so, he sends John's disciples back to their master with deeds, with the works that prove His identity as the promised Messiah and Savior. He reminds them of the catalogue of mercies they themselves have observed: "the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the Good News proclaimed to them." Jesus does not answer the Baptist's disciples directly; He commands them to "go and tell." He commissions them to become His witnesses, to give testimony to the works of the Christ.

This Advent, we, too, are meant to become Christ's witnesses, especially to the downtrodden, the hopeless, and those who are suffering. Like John's disciples, we are meant to become not just message-bearers but conduits of grace so that the Messiah's saving works might be extended to more and more people. We are each invited to find our own John the Baptist – some person in need of encouragement – and recount to him or her what the Lord Jesus is in fact doing in our lives. And the more we witness to others about Christ, the more we will come to recognize Him for ourselves.

This was likely John's plan all along: to bring his disciples to Jesus with a probing question so that they might realize more perfectly Jesus is the Christ. The Baptist sends them to learn what he already knows, what he clings to by faith even in the midst of his afflictions. And his greatest joy comes not from the confirming words his disciples report but from the fact that they have now found the Messiah and have become His witnesses. May this become our greatest joy as well, on this Gaudete Sunday.

Father Zane Langenbrunner is parochial vicar at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church in Fort Wayne.

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Artist Finds Inspiration in 'Holy Men and Women'

BY PAULA LENT

Photos by Angelo Martinez/Holy Cross College

Holy Cross Catholic School art teacher Zack Okello poses in front of his work at the St. Joseph Gallery at Holy Cross College in South Bend. Okello's exhibit, "Holy Men and Women," runs through Friday, December 19.

Through his current art exhibit at Holy Cross College's St. Joseph Gallery, "Holy Men and Women," sacred artist Zack Okello reminds us that we are not alone. We exist within a wide ecclesial community of disciples: men and women building the Kingdom of God.

"Holy Men and Women" is part of Okello's ongoing work as a storyteller, a calling he discovered many years ago while studying art in his native Kenya.

Growing up in a small Christian community in Western Kenya, Okello said he was always creating art, capturing his environment. He combined his love of art with his strong Catholic faith when he pursued his education at a Catholic art school founded by Norwegian priest Father Hans Bergman. His experience there "inspired me to become who I am today," Okello said.

At the art school, Okello was greatly influenced by his new environment – learning figure drawing from Father Bergman in a building beside a church, where he was serenaded by the sounds of the choir's rehearsals wafting through the air – and found his niche in sacred art.

> "It started a long time ago, but the more I keep learning, the more I keep creating."
>
> **ZACK OKELLO**

As a sacred artist, he is part of a rich history.

"Especially in the Catholic Church, faith and art go a long way back," Okello told Today's Catholic. "And there's a rich tradition where popes used to commission artists to tell religious stories through art and create these beautiful spaces for people to pray there. I think that also keeps me going, keeps me wanting to create religious art – the fact that when I look at the history of faith and art it goes way, way, way, way back."

Within the realm of sacred art, Okello has a specific storytelling passion: delighting in sharing the stories of lesser-known disciples, especially women and people of color. He began on this path during art school, when he learned the story of Servant of God Cardinal Maurice Michael Otunga (1923-2003), the first Kenyan cardinal. Discovering a priest who was passionate about advocating for the voiceless and refugees in Kenya was very inspiring to Okello.

"I just admired him, and I would make drawings of him here and there. And I got commissioned to make a few pieces of different priests," Okello said of his first steps.

Since then, Okello has found no shortage of disciples to inspire him, and he feels blessed to be part of sharing their stories. Among the disciples depicted in the gallery is Haitian Venerable Pierre Toussaint (1766-1853), who spent nearly half of his life in slavery – part of that time in the United States. After gaining his freedom, he redeemed first his sister and then his future wife, with whom he later raised his orphaned niece. Toussaint became a prominent figure among Haitian immigrants in New York and was known for assisting with employment and housing needs, as well as creating a credit union. He also fundraised to create the first Catholic school for free Black children in New York before dying at the age of 87. Since Toussaint earned his living as a hairdresser, his portrait features hairdressing tools prominently behind him.

Venerable Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange (1784-1882) is another Haitian whose portrait is displayed in the exhibit. After coming to America by way of Cuba, Mother Lange established a school for Black children in Baltimore, funding the school herself. Continuing to make a significant mark on the educational landscape, Mother Lange later established the Oblate Sisters of Providence, who in turn founded St. Francis Academy, America's oldest continuously operating school for Black children. Okello tells her story by depicting her in a classroom with happily studious pupils.

St. Katharine Drexel (1858-1955), the founder of the first Black Catholic university, Xavier University in New Orleans, is also shown surrounded by students: some happily playing, one reading, and others sharing fellowship. Drexel's order, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, established Black Catholic schools in 13 states, in addition to 40 mission centers and 23 rural schools. In her portrait, she stands in front of a school building surrounded by schoolchildren.

Other disciples depicted in the gallery include St. Laura Montoya, the patron saint of orphans and those who suffer from racial discrimination; Felicity and Perpetua, well-known third-century martyrs; and Native American St. Kateri Tekakwitha.

The personal story of each portrait's subject has taught Okello something valuable.

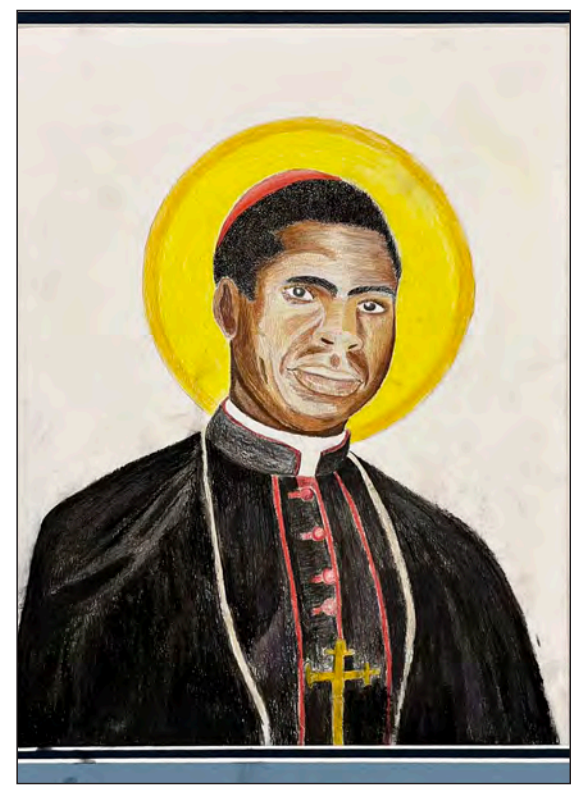
"The passion that they put into what they do inspires me," he told Today's Catholic, noting that "they're just people, good people who didn't have a lot but chose to be generous with the little that they had. And that inspires me and makes me want to participate in their stories being told."

Okello said he often finds something to "relate to" in each story, and since he is an art teacher at Holy Cross Catholic School in South Bend, the number of men and women featured in the gallery who have made an impact in the sphere of education is perhaps unsurprising.

Okello said that when it comes to finding more disciples whose stories to tell, he's often inspired by asking himself who in the Church would be brave enough to stand up and speak to a challenge the world is currently facing: "What are we suffering from in the Christian community or just in the world? What is it that we are really suffering through? And in the Catholic Church or in the Christian community, who is brave enough to stand up and at least try to solve this in whatever way they can? That's how I go about it," he explained.

"It started a long time ago, but the more I keep learning, the more I keep creating."

Okello's exhibit, "Holy Men and Women," will be on display through Friday, December 19, in the Driscoll Lounge at Holy Cross College.



Works by Zack Okello displayed at Holy Cross College include depictions of Our Lady of Kisumu, left, and Servant of God Maurice Otunga, right.

ELL, from page 1

"The English Language Learners program at St. Vincent de Paul School focuses on students' learning, and that has helped my children through being able to communicate with their teachers and classmates," said Khup Ngaih Niang, a member of the local Burmese community who has two children in the ELL program. The program also helps her children accomplish their schoolwork and participate in class, said Niang, whose family came to America in 2011 seeking a better life and better education than was available in their home country of Myanmar.

Kevin Kilbane

Erin Warden, English Language Learners (ELL) program director at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic School in Fort Wayne, teaches English to kindergarten students through a variety of exercises, including having them say the letters of the alphabet. St. Vincent has more than 60 students from kindergarten through eighth grade in its ELL program.

Ministering to a Need

ELL programs evolved at some of the diocese's 44 schools because the parishes had families who didn't speak any English or weren't fluent in it. That ELL work carries out Catholic social teachings, said Amanda Arnold, who became the diocese's diverse learners director in July.

"It's saying, hey, it might not be exactly like we're used to or what we know comfortably, but it's OK to be uncomfortable and it's OK to learn and grow and to see every child and every family as God does – made in his image and likeness," said Arnold, who previously taught special-education students for about 18 years at diocesan schools in the Fort Wayne area.

The number of ELL students and their cultural backgrounds vary at each school.

At St. Michael Catholic School in Plymouth, ELL instructor Mary Beth Kolter and her instructional aide, Ana Aguilar, work with 28 ELL students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Last year, St. Michael had 37 children in the ELL program, said Kolter, a veteran classroom teacher now in her fourth year of working with ELL students.

This year, all her students speak Spanish as their native language, she said. In prior years, she also had students with home languages of Vietnamese and Chinese.

At Sacred Heart School in Warsaw, ELL teacher Liz Cauhorn works with 44 students who represent nearly a third of the school's total enrollment of 141 children in kindergarten through sixth grade. Her ELL students mainly come from Hispanic families, but the parish also serves a few Filipino students and has a couple of students whose families speak the Malayalam language from India, said Cauhorn, who is in her third year as the school's ELL teacher.

St. Vincent School in Fort Wayne has 64 ELL students this year in kindergarten through eighth grade, said Warden, who is in her fifth year at St. Vincent after teaching ELL students for about 10 years in public schools. A majority of her ELL students come from Burmese families from the Chin cultural group, who speak the Zo language, she said. She also serves a number of students of Mexican heritage, as well as children whose families came from the Philippines and Vietnam.

Other diocesan schools that list ELL faculty on their websites include St. Vincent de Paul School in Elkhart, and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and St. Joseph schools in Fort Wayne.

Assessing Skills

Schools usually learn about an ELL need once parents register their child for kindergarten. Parents must answer a survey about what language their family speaks at home. If the child or parents speak a foreign language at home, the school must screen the student to determine if he or she needs ELL instruction.

ELL students throughout Indiana then take the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) test each January to measure their ability to use the English language in speaking, writing, listening, and reading comprehension, Kolter said. Students must earn a 5.0 or better on the WIDA test to be considered proficient in English for their grade level. Once they reach that score, they are deemed to no longer need ELL classes.

Gaining English Proficiency

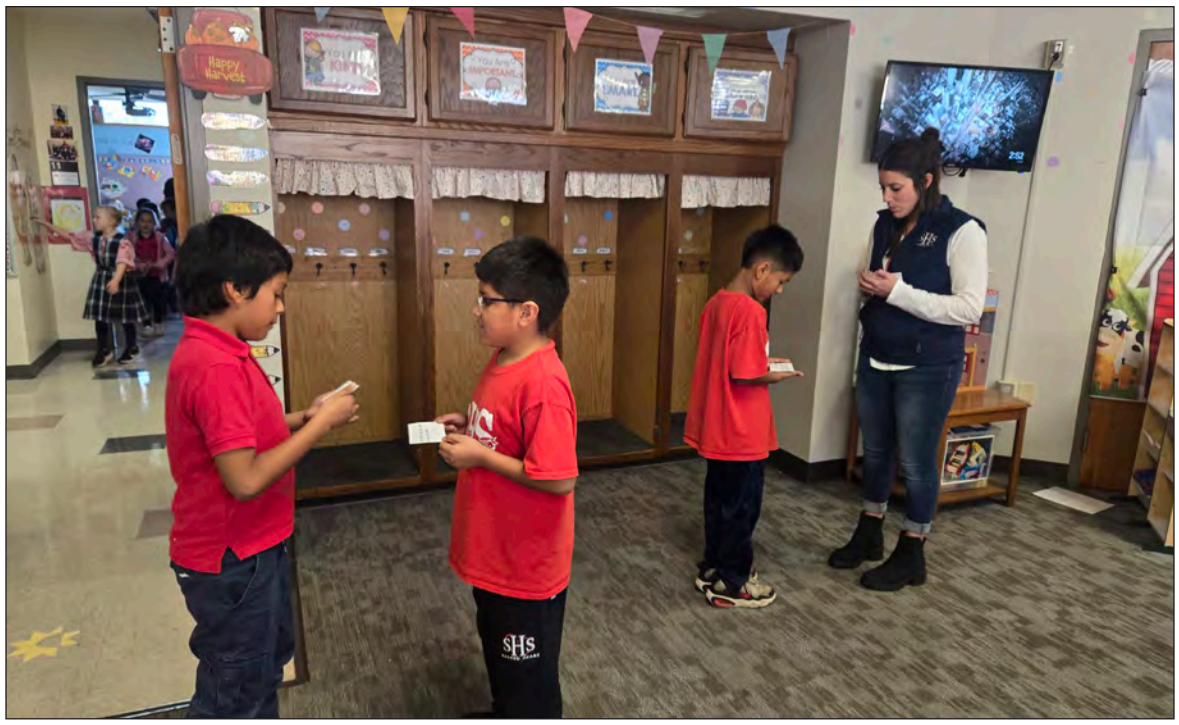
ELL teachers pack a lot of learning into the approximately 30 minutes a day they work with elementary-grade students. They also go into elementary and junior high students' classrooms to work with them if they need assistance there.

"They say you need exposure 77 times to use a word fluently and know it," Warden told Today's Catholic.

English isn't an easy language to learn. There are numerous exceptions to rules of spelling and grammar, Kolter explained. ELL students frequently also have trouble with the various endings on words and how the endings affect the meaning of words.

Teachers take a multifaceted approach.

"A lot of pointing, a lot of pictures," Warden said of working with students who know little to no English. "We do a lot of repeating of words. Short, concise



Provided by Sacred Heart Catholic School

Liz Cauhorn, right, English Language Learners (ELL) teacher at Sacred Heart Catholic School in Warsaw, works on English skills with students by using the learning activity "Quiz, Quiz, Trade." Each student takes a turn asking a question that the other answers. They then trade partners and repeat the process.

Kevin Kilbane

Erin Warden works with a student on understanding an assignment. Aside from her work during the school day, Warden and her assistant, Michelle Renninger, open their classroom about 45 minutes before school begins to assist ELL students who have questions about homework or other assignments.

sentences, not long. … Taking it slow. Giving them time to process and think about what they're learning."

For Cauhorn, "the ones I always start with would be visuals: How can we make it so they can picture it? How can you do a motion to help them remember or tie it with a word?" She also uses sentence stems where students fill in a blank in a partial sentence.

In addition, Cauhorn utilizes learning activities such as "Quiz, Quiz, Trade." Students take a card containing a question or vocabulary term and pair up with another student. One student asks the question on his or her card, and the other responds. They then reverse the process. Afterward, each student moves to a new partner to start again.

"Studies have found that our ELL students are only speaking 2 percent of the school day, so we are working on intentionally providing them these speaking opportunities," Cauhorn added.

Students make the most of their English instructional time.

"They all really want to do well, and they work hard," Kolter said.

Most students pass the WIDA test by Grade 5, the ELL teachers said.

Nurturing that growth is very rewarding, they noted.

"I really love the fact that I have a student all the way through, and you get to watch them grow," Warden said. "They come to you barely speaking anything and then, by the time they're in seventh and eighth grade, you've built that relationship with them – just like your own kids, really."

Supportive Environment

ELL and classroom teachers collaborate so ELL lessons reinforce what students are working on in their regular classes. ELL teachers also suggest ways to make language used in regular classes more accessible for ELL students.

"Our big goal is to maintain the academics," Cauhorn said. "We know they may not be proficient in English, but that doesn't mean they aren't capable of all these things. So, we just want to make sure they don't fall behind in those ways."

> "Part of my mission is to help understand all of the abilities these students have, all the gifts they bring."
>
> **LIZ CAUHORN**

The need for language assistance doesn't reflect students' overall abilities, Cauhorn emphasized.

"Part of my mission," she noted, "is to help understand all of the abilities these students have, all the gifts they bring."

Kolter learned that with a kindergarten boy whose family speaks only Spanish at home. On the English screening test, he scored well above his grade level, she said. He can draw a map of the world and name every country. He also can draw a map of the United States and identify all the states and their capital cities.

ELL teachers remain resources for their students even after they test out of ELL classes.

Kolter, for example, monitors her ELL students for two years after they pass the WIDA test, just in case they need any help. Warden and her assistant, Michelle Renninger, usually open their room 45 minutes before classes begin so they can assist students with understanding homework or assignments.

Celebrating Heritage

ELL teachers' support includes encouraging students to retain and celebrate their home country's language and culture.

"I'm lecturing constantly about making sure they're keeping their own language," Warden said. "When they lose that, they lose their communication with their family."

One of Kolter's bulletin boards says, "'My superpower is being multilingual,' because I just try to foster in the kids that is such an amazing superpower. I tell them, you guys have to always hold onto this."

Many parish and school staff members at St. Michael in Plymouth speak Spanish, so Hispanic students receive a lot of support for their language and culture, Principal Robin Coffman told Today's Catholic.

ELL teachers also discuss and celebrate events and traditions in their students' cultures.

Positive Impact

Parents whose students are being serviced by ELL programs praise the teachers and the results they're seeing in their children

> "Whether children speak fluent English or not, whether they are from here or not, the Church calls us to open our arms to them."
>
> **ERIN WARDEN**

"The program focuses on the specific skills he needs to develop, and it has ignited his motivation to learn English, read more, and always do his best," said Clara Borda, whose son is in the ELL program at Sacred Heart School in Warsaw. "We have seen wonderful progress and confidence in his learning."

Borda, who describes her family as proud natives of Colombia, in South America, said they came to Indiana in 2021 when she was hired as a dual immersion teacher in the Warsaw public school district.

Borda said Sacred Heart's ELL program also benefits her son outside of school.

"The program has played a key role in helping him catch up in the (English) language and feel more confident," she said. "It promotes a love for culture and makes him feel welcomed, supported, and motivated. It has truly helped him feel part of the school and the community."

St. Vincent's Niang also believes the ELL program benefits her children beyond the classroom. It helps them adjust to living in the United States by improving their English proficiency and fostering a sense of belonging, she said.

Mission Oriented

Going forward, diocesan Diverse Learners Director Amanda Arnold hopes to provide ELL teachers with more encouragement and training. The programs still will look different at each school, she said, but she hopes they achieve a common result.

"Overall, my goal would be all of us in the schools, and even in our parishes, are doing everything possible to help ensure that the people who are coming into our schools and communities, whether they are English Language Learners or whatever different background they come from, have the opportunity to truly feel part of the community through communication, through understanding and respecting cultures."

Warden said she and other ELL teachers see their work as living out the Gospel call to welcome the stranger.

"The stories my students have told me about what they and their families have been through – fleeing violence and persecution in their home countries – are almost impossible for us in the United States to imagine," Warden said. "Whether children speak fluent English or not, whether they are from here or not, the Church calls us to open our arms to them, and our duty as Catholic educators is to meet them where they are and put them on a path to success."

Embracing the Lessons of Lent During the Season of Advent

SIGN, WONDER, SOWER, SEED

MOLLY JO ROSE

Why as a Catholic is it so easy to be a Lenten people and so hard to be Advent ones?

Last December, I sat in a friend's living room with a group of seven or eight women to discuss "The Passion of the Infant Christ" by Caryll Houselander. I was resistant to the book for reasons I couldn't quite explain, but still, it was a cozy book study. The smell of scones invited us as we walked through the door, and peppermint tea from Trader's Joe's steamed from mugs. I sipped my tea and tried to deal with my resistance as unobtrusively as possible.

Kathleen, a woman who is so quiet I am often reminded of how loud my life is when I'm around her, led the group with opening questions. These were followed by long silences born not out of a lack of answers but rather a comfort with thoughtful contemplation. After one of these silences, Kathleen asked what I thought of the book. My unobtrusive plans fell away, and I blurted, "I don't know. I'm struggling with it. I understand Lent so much better than Advent."

Kathleen laughed softly and nodded in agreement, saying, "That's a really Catholic thing to say."

And it really is. The sacrifice of Lent is more comfortable and familiar to me than the profundity of Advent. We are a Crucifix people who focus on the cross far more than the cradle.

We know how to fast. We know how to offer things up. We have all the stations showing us how to lift the cross over our shoulders and trudge toward Calvary. There just aren't the same actionable steps for Advent that there are for Lent. Or rather, there are plenty of actionable Christmas steps, but very little have anything to do with building a creche inside ourselves for the Infant Christ. On my list of "things to do" – now or in the very recent past – is wrestle with tree lights, make Chex Mix, take screens out of windows to hang wreaths on the house exterior, make Christmas candy, bake pies, shop for family, and get small gifts for the feast of St. Nicholas.

For Lent, conversely, I don't have to do anything. Not only do I not have to do anything, the whole season is defined by not doing, by deprivation, by less. What a lovely antidote for Christmas, this not doing. I could handle more of the not doing right now.

Shutterstock

It's this less we should embrace this season. In "The Passion of the Infant Christ," Houselander beautifully marries Lent and Advent. In it, she promotes a quiet, fallow Advent as we wait for Christ. "The law of growth is rest. We must be content in winter to wait patiently through the long bleak season in which we experience nothing whatever of the sweetness or realization of the Divine Presence, believing the truth, that these seasons which seem to be the most empty are the most pregnant with life."

Despite being full of activity, the season does often feel empty. It feels pregnant with an endless list of things to check off rather than with the promise of new life. Instead of peaceful anticipation, I busy myself with the making of Christmas, that all-consuming job of a parent. The house has to be dazzlingly lit and smell like cookies. Presents have to be carefully curated. There is so much to do that there is no opportunity for not doing, which is necessary for the growth that is inherent to the pregnant Christmas season. The question is: How do I bring in the restfulness of a penitential season into a season of celebration? How do I bring the less of Lent into Advent?

Stillness in any season is a challenge but particularly when Christmas carols ring nonstop. I want to participate in all the shiny merriment but not in ways that leave me empty. I know as a Lenten person that through less, I find more. This is the lesson I need to bring into Advent. I need to let the seed of Christ lie fallow in me if I want to be a part in His birth. Houselander says, "The crib showing the Nativity in all the cities and villages and Catholic homes of the world is not only there to commemorate Christ's first coming to earth, it is there as a symbol of Christ's birth in us."

So, let's busy ourselves with Christmas preparation in a new way. Let's embrace our wholly Catholic spirit of Lent and do less. Let's quietly build our nativities so that the seed of Christ can be born in us. In this season of celebration, let's commit to becoming an Advent people who finally, if only for this one season, restfully focus on the cradle.

Molly Jo Rose is a writer and English professor living with her husband and three children in Fort Wayne, where they are parishioners at St. John the Baptist. She walks a lot and writes a little.

In Preparing for Christ, We Await the Glorious Dawn of His Reign

THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MONSIGNOR OWEN F. CAMPION

Isaiah was between a rock and a hard place, so to speak. He realized that unwise alliances and behavior that pushed God aside put the Hebrews' kingdom of Judah at great risk. The prophet was convinced that if the nation did not return to God in genuine obedience and piety, then the whirlwind eventually would sweep away life as he and his contemporaries knew it.

He met dispute and outrage. It must have been frustrating, but despite the angry reaction to what he said on the part of many of his contemporaries, Isaiah unflinchingly called the people back to God.

It was not as if God would bring a terrible punishment upon the kingdom. Rather, the people, by their impiety, would create a nightmare for themselves.

The Epistle to James supplies the second reading. This epistle rarely appears in the liturgy. The identity of the author is unclear, and it leads to another question. The New Testament mentions four men with this name. Which, if any, wrote this epistle? Some insist that James, the foster brother of the Lord, was the author. (Here is the other question. Did Mary have other children? Ancient Christian writers surmised that James in this reference was a son from a previous marriage of Joseph, the eventual spouse of Mary. They reasoned that this must have been the case, as they believed, with the Church today, that Mary had only one child, Jesus.)

Regardless, this reading solidly establishes the author's faith that Jesus will be victorious. No power can exceed the power of the Lord. After all, the Lord is the Son of God.

While final victory undoubtedly will come, it will not necessarily come at a time that humans predict, and certainly it will not come at their bidding, but it will come.

So, the epistle urges strong faith – but also forbearance.

The third reading, from St. Matthew's Gospel, centers on John the Baptist, whose denunciations of sin in high places led to his arrest. (In time, they would lead to his death.)

Despising the Roman occupation of the land, pious Jews at this time yearned for a Messiah who would rid the Holy Land of the pagan intruders.

John gave another description of the Redeemer. He saw the Savior not as a warrior, commanding armies to slaughter the enemies of the One God of Israel, but the compassionate, truly holy leader and guide of the pious.

Jesus met this description, healing the sick, giving hope, and restoring life, lovingly coming to earth as God.

In the last verses, John affirms that Jesus is a prophet. In fact, John insists, Jesus is the greatest prophet.

Reflection

Ancient cultures often found the dawn awe-inspiring and also reassuring. As the sun creeps over the horizon, the sky presents a marvelous sight. It is not a sudden transition from utter darkness to bright light. Instead, everything changes to a gentle rose.

In the spectrum of color, rose is the blending of red and yellow. Pink combines red and white.

Traditionally, priests wear rose-colored vestments on this weekend – never pink – to remind us that dawn is here, the bright, golden light of Christ is about to burst upon the horizon of our world. It is overwhelming to consider. God so loved the world that He sent His Son to us, to give us life.

As in days of old, when the reappearance of the sun showed that all would be good, so Christians are reassured that they are secure. Jesus lives. He is with us.

Each of us sins. Each is imperfect. Advent is the opportunity to create a dawn within our hearts, and we invite Christ to come to brighten our lives.

READINGS

Sunday: Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10; Psalms 146:6-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

Monday: Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17a; Psalm 25:4-5ab, 6 and 7bc, 8-9; Matthew 21:23-27

Tuesday: Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13; Psalm 34:2-3, 6-7, 17-18, 19 and 23; Matthew 21:28-32

Wednesday: Genesis 49:2, 8-10; Psalm 72:1-2, 3-4ab, 7-8, 17; Matthew 1:1-17

Thursday: Jeremiah 23:5-8; Psalm 72:1-2, 12-13, 18-19; Matthew 1:18-25

Friday: Judges 13:2-7, 24-25a; Psalm 71:3-4a, 5-6ab, 16-17; Luke 1:5-25

Saturday: Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4ab, 5-6; Luke 1:26-38

A Match Made by Heaven

CALLED TO HOLINESS

JAYMIE STUART WOLFE

If you're not careful, planning a wedding can easily become a full-time job. But when you already have a full-time job and are moving to a new apartment, you've got to do everything in your power to keep that from happening. That has been our youngest daughter's situation since her engagement one year ago (of course, it's been our situation, too).

Keeping it all under control doesn't look hard, at least theoretically. You just have to take a rational approach: Decide to keep things as simple as they can be kept, prioritize what's genuinely important, and let go of all the rest. I say all that as a testimony to what I have learned as a mother-of-the-wrangler in previous rodeos over the years.

But there's a reason "wedding planner" is a profession, albeit one our family has neither the desire nor the resources to pay for. Weddings seem to have a life of their own, one that resembles a giant snowball rolling down a mountainside – a havoc-wreaking globe that gains volume, velocity, escalating intensity as the date draws nearer. The most confident and well-matched couples can't seem to escape it. And even the most organized and undemanding bride still becomes overwhelmed by the sheer number of choices set before her. "Decision fatigue" is real.

Putting on a wedding is a big deal. But when you believe in the couple getting married, every sacrifice and expense seems worth the trouble. With every additional detail on that endless to-do list comes anticipation and joy.

I imagine that God's plan for salvation was a lot like planning a wedding. Since the moment He created humanity, the Father longed for us to share His life and love. Like a faithless fiancée, we failed to grasp the depth of what we had in Him, grasped for something else instead, and fell away. But God did not give up on us. He simply waited through the centuries and planned His next move.

In the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose Immaculate Conception we recently observed, God's wedding plans began to take shape. Saved from the stain of original sin at her conception, Mary was entirely pure and free from disordered desires. A bride herself, she alone would be worthy of ushering the Divine Bridegroom into the world – the fallen and human world of His bride, the Church.

Like a faithless fiancée, we failed to grasp the depth of what we had in Him, grasped for something else instead, and fell away. But God did not give up on us.

When you're planning a wedding, there's only one date that matters. Similarly, all of human history was centered on and directed to the incarnational moment. As the words of the Exsultet tell us, heaven was wed to earth in a match made not just in heaven but by heaven. In Nazareth, God became human, like us in all things except sin, so that we could become like Him – that is, so we could take His name as our own and become one with Him.

Salvation history is a love story, a romance between God and every human being. Think I'm pushing it? The Bible clearly tells us that the happily ever after we all long for is a marriage.

"As a young man marries a virgin, so your builder will marry you. As the bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (Is 62:5).

"I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of Him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason, my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:28b-30).

"Jesus said to them, 'Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them'" (Mt 9:15)? "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor 11:2).

It's easy to forget that we are called to the eternal wedding supper of the lamb not as guests, but as the bride. Heaven is the wedding God has been planning forever. There, we won't have to worry about vendors or venues. When the day of the Lord arrives, all to-do lists will disappear. The Bridegroom will come for His bride. Our only task is to be radiant and ready to welcome Him.

Jaymie Stuart Wolfe is Jaymie Stuart Wolfe is a Catholic convert, freelance writer, editor, musician, speaker, pet-aholic, wife, and mom of eight grown children, loving life in New Orleans. She writes for OSV News.

SAINT OF THE WEEK

VIRGINIA CENTURIONE BRACELLI

FEAST DAY: DECEMBER 15

Born in Italy in 1587, Virginia was unable to persuade her parents that she had a religious vocation. She was married at age 15 to the son of another notable Italian family. But he gambled, lived dissolutely, and died after only five years. Virginia, despite her unhappiness in the marriage, nursed him at the end. She vowed to live celibately thereafter, bringing up her two daughters and caring for abandoned children, especially girls. She founded several schools and the Sisters of Our Lady of the Refuge on Mount Calvary. She was canonized in her hometown of Genoa, Italy, in 2003.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for December 14, 2025

Matthew 11:2-11

Following is a word search based on the Gospel reading for the Third Sunday of Advent, Cycle A: signs of the one who is to come. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

OF THE CHRIST	DISCIPLES	LOOK
HEAR AND SEE	BLIND	SIGHT
LEPERS	DEAF	DEAD
RAISED	POOR	GOOD NEWS
BLESSED	SPEAK	THE WIND
MY MESSENGER	BORN	GREATER
THE BAPTIST	LEAST	KINGDOM

HIM?

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

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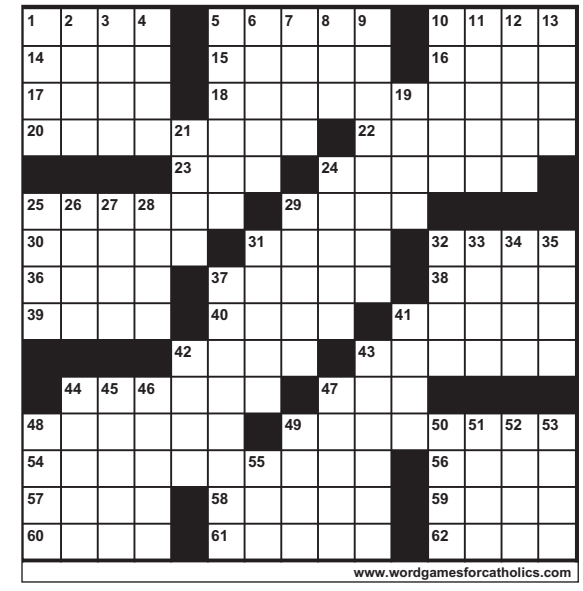

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ACROSS
1 Third Gospel
5 Twenty-six martyrs were crucified here in the 16th century
10 Father
14 Asian inland sea
15 Egg-shaped
16 On the ocean
17 Public walk
18 Father Christmas
20 Making the sign of the cross
22 Oppose
23 Buddhist temple
24 Empty the truck
25 Mount to which Abraham took Isaac
29 First shepherd
30 Growing old
31 Prophet quoted on the Civil Rights Memorial
32 Pops
36 Business bigwigs (abbr.)
37 Extents
38 Notion
39 ___ la vie
40 Coin
41 Harvests
42 Symbol of the Holy Spirit
43 Commandment that requires us to honor our parents
44 Ancient fortress in Israel
47 "How Great Thou ___"
48 The California mission road, El ___ Real
49 Breaking
54 Vocation
56 Inter ___
57 Is not (slang)
58 Son of Abraham
59 Tears
60 Droops
61 Avowed
62 Impetuous

DOWN
1 "Behold the ___ of God" (Jn 1:36)
2 Mountain range
3 Green vegetable
4 Old cloth measures
5 King of Judah who was the successor of Amon
6 ___-garde
7 Sharp pain
8 Letter letters
9 Proximity
10 Spicy sauce
11 "Let me repeat…"
12 Employ again
13 Cain traveled this direction from Eden
19 Monk's room
21 Booty
24 German submarine
25 Abbr. for two OT books
26 Double curve
27 Rivers in Spain
28 Learning ctr.
29 Rephrase
31 Bowl, perhaps
32 God, in Paris
33 Purim month
34 Justice, for one (abbr.)
35 Scarf
37 Blood condition
41 Drilling grp.
42 Decline
43 St. Therese of Lisieux is a patron of this country
44 "Ave ___"
45 Surrounded by
46 Uses a sieve
47 Like a loud crowd
48 IRS experts
49 Goodbye in Roma
50 Catholic author of The Liars Club
51 Hip bones
52 Bites
53 Deep wound
55 Vane reading

Answers on page 15

4 Ways to Follow St. Joseph This Advent

BY FATHER MICHAEL ACKERMAN

Unsplash

Socrates, in Plato's Apology, famously stated that "the unexamined life is not worth living." This axiom is certainly applicable to the spiritual life, and it is very relevant to one of our greatest patrons – St. Joseph. It is worthwhile to examine the lessons St. Joseph has taught us and consider how we can carry these with us on our continued Advent journey.

A well-known American comic once said that "it's the quiet ones you have to watch out for." Now, I am confident that he was not referring to St. Joseph when he said this. However, when we reflect upon the life of St. Joseph, we really know little about him. St. Joseph is as stealth as an international spy. There is no recorded dialogue from him in the Scriptures and no substantial curriculum vitae of record. He would be an excellent case for "Unsolved Mysteries" or the "X-Files."

However, the silence of St. Joseph teaches us volumes. Pope Benedict XVI, in an Angelus address from 2005, had this to say about St. Joseph's taciturn demeanor: "St. Joseph's silence does not express an inner emptiness but, on the contrary, the fullness of the faith he bears in his heart, and which guides his every thought and action."

1. Silence of **God**

The first lesson of St. Joseph for Advent then is to enter into the silence of God, which is teeming with grace, intimacy, and unconditional love. Joseph was not silent because he had nothing to say. He was silent instead because he wanted to listen to and follow God completely.

Pope Francis, in his apostolic letter Patris Corde ("With a Father's Heart"), wrote about the silence of St. Joseph. "His patient silence was the prelude to concrete expressions of trust."

Perhaps this Advent, we, too, can spend time in silent prayer, in quiet contemplation before the Blessed Sacrament, or even meditating on the words of Scripture in the recesses of our heart, as did St. Joseph. Doing so does not bear futility but instead fertility and joyful anticipation of Christ's coming into the world.

2. Service and Self-Denial

The second lesson St. Joseph teaches us is one rooted in service and self-denial. Pope St. John Paul II in his 1989 apostolic exhortation Redemptoris Custos ("Guardian of the Redeemer") writes this about St. Joseph: "His fatherhood is expressed concretely in 'his having made his life a service, a sacrifice to the mystery of the Incarnation and the redemptive mission connected with it; in having used the legal authority which was his over the Holy Family in order to make a total gift of self, of his life and work.'"

St. Joseph did not allow his own passions or selfish wants and desires to dictate his actions. Instead, Joseph was docile and receptive to the will of God. His preparation for the coming of Christ was not filled with shopping, fighting with relatives, and baking cookies. Instead, he invites you and me to be disciples who serve others first, not ourselves.

Now, this can take a variety of forms. We can volunteer our time at church or in our communities assisting at food pantries, homeless shelters, or rescue missions. We can assist those around us who are struggling right now financially, emotionally, and especially spiritually, either in person or through charitable organizations. Or we can make visits to those who are homebound, in hospitals, in nursing homes, or who are unable to celebrate the birth of Christ with family and friends for a variety of reasons. There is no "correct" way to serve, but the desire to do so must be rooted in Joseph's desire to serve God alone.

3. Simplicity

Third, St. Joseph teaches us a lesson of simplicity. The world in which we live is overly complex. We are so enamored with gadgets, technology, fashion, and entertainment that we often miss what is essential. That is not the world of St. Joseph. Pope Benedict, in an Angelus address from 2006, says this about Joseph's simplicity: "His greatness, like Mary's, stands out even more because his mission was carried out in the humility and hiddenness of the house of Nazareth. Moreover, God Himself, in the person of His incarnate Son, chose this way and style of life – humility and hiddenness – in His earthly existence."

St. Joseph was not out to make a name for himself. He was no social media influencer. Instead, the raison d'être for his life was to remain humble before God.

St. Joseph invites us during Advent to slow down and to appreciate the people, blessings, and encounters with God taking place in our lives. Presents, decorating, and entering the wild world of retail are probably not the best ways to prepare for Christ. Instead, spending time with our loved ones, sharing faith and experiences, or even making a personal retreat is of benefit in keeping things simple. However, there is another thing that simplicity does: It allows us to increase our trust and dependence upon God.

In Patris Corde, Pope Francis wrote about the "creative courage" of St. Joseph. "God finds a way to save us," he wrote, "provided we show the same creative courage as the carpenter of Nazareth, who was able to turn a problem into a possibility by trusting always in divine providence." St. Joseph, because he was not distracted by the trappings of culture, was able to have fortitude in God's plan because of his simple trust in a God who loved him. This same trust is accessible to us if we keep it simple.

4. Sacrifice

Finally, St. Joseph teaches you and me the value of sacrifice. Sacrifice is necessary for all of us in our vocations, and any parent, spouse, priest, religious, or dedicated single person knows the value and necessity of this. In his book "The Mystery of Joseph," Father Marie-Dominique Philippe writes of St. Joseph's suffering: "There is no doubt that the sword of sorrow penetrates Mary's heart the most deeply, but it pierces Joseph's heart as well. In their common suffering, in their shared sadness and anguish, Joseph and Mary come to know a new degree of intimacy; together they bear the first fruits of Jesus' apostolic life."

St. Joseph invites you and me in the struggles of life to unite our pain to the cross of Christ. Suffering is always a mystery, but it is not devoid of meaning. The more that we unite our pain and struggles to Christ, the more that we draw into the infinite love, mercy, and forgiveness of God. Joseph, in denying his own objectives, wants, and desires, makes his will one with God. We are also called, like him, to unite and sacrifice. This can be done through charitable giving, fasting, increased prayer, or giving things away we do not need. Regardless, sacrifice is crucial to ready the way for Christ.

This Advent presents an opportunity to increase our desire to emulate this great saint so loved by Our Lady and Our Savior. Silence, service, simplicity, and sacrifice are not easy pills to swallow, but they do lead us closer to Christ and salvation. May the anticipated joy of Advent lead all of us to a deeper love of the Christ Child through the intercession of St. Joseph.

Father Michael Ackerman is a priest of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. He wrote this for Our Sunday Visitor.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14
Breakfast with Santa
10 a.m. – 12 p.m.
FORT WAYNE – St. Peter's Knights of Columbus Council is planning its annual Breakfast With Santa at St. Peter's Parish Hall-Pavilion, 506 E. Dewald. Breakfast will be served immediately following the 9 a.m. Mass in the pavilion. Please make plans to attend for egg casserole with biscuits and gravy. You-know-who might make an appearance!

Handel's Messiah Concert
2:30 – 4 p.m.
ANGOLA – The Steuben County Festival Choir directed by J. Joseph Peters and accompanied by members of the Fort Wayne Philharmonic will be performing selections from George Frederick Handel's Messiah. The performance will be held at Trine University's T. Furth Center for Performing Arts, 500 W. Maumee Street. Tickets are available online for $10.

German Christmas Concert Weihnachtskonzert
4 – 5 p.m.
FORT WAYNE – The Fort Wayne Männerchor/Damenchor will perform a concert of German Christmas music at St. Peter's, 518 E. Dewald Street, on Sunday, December 14, at 4 p.m. The program will include favorite traditional carols as well as German Christmas choral music.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16
John Angotti Advent and Christmas Concert
6:30 – 8 p.m.
FORT WAYNE – St. Joseph Church is very excited to host a free concert by John Angotti at 2213 Brooklyn Ave. John is a Catholic recording artist and published author of liturgical music. Joining him will be his full band accompanied by a joint choir composed of singers from St. Vincent's Church and St. Joseph Church. A goodwill collection will be taken.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20
Keep Christ in Christmas Rosary Rally
12 – 12:30 p.m.
FORT WAYNE – During this Advent season, let us join together in a public square Rosary rally outside the Allen County Courthouse (corner of Berry and Clinton Streets) on Saturday, December 20, at noon. We will invoke the Blessed Mother's intercession to help our country to remember the reason for Christmas through the recitation of the Rosary and other Marian prayers. The rally will take about 30 minutes and will be a much-needed witness to the secular world.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21
Light in the Darkness
6 – 9 p.m.
SOUTH BEND – This year, the Fourth Sunday of Advent is also the day with the shortest amount of sunlight. This season of joyful anticipation and celebration can be difficult for people who are lonely, grieving, estranged from family, or otherwise struggling to navigate the physical and mental darkness. Holy Cross Parish is holding a special time of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament that Sunday, December 21, in the Mary Chapel located in the Father Jacob Smith, CSC, Parish Center, 920 Wilber St. Come anytime between 6-9 p.m.and spend some time in the warmth and light of Christ. Members of our parish's Social Justice Ministry will be there to greet and pray with you.

REST IN PEACE

Fort Wayne
Elisa Jordan, 85, St. Joseph
Joanne Miller, 81, St. Mary Mother of God
Daniel Holly, 80, St. Peter
Judy Bengel, 88, St. Vincent
Thomas Kronstain, 76, St. Vincent
Robert Pequignot, 72, St. Vincent
Norma Troutner-Troyes, 83, St. Vincent

Mishawaka
James Barnes, 58, Queen of Peace
Catherine DeVreese, 67, Queen of Peace
Denise Patterson, 62, Queen of Peace
Rosemary Stetson, 98, St. Joseph
Diane Tjaden, 71,St. Joseph
Mary Ann Weber, 97, St. Monica

South Bend
Efrain Diaz, 73, St. Adalbert

Wabash
Berry Lee, 74, St. Bernard

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S	A	G	S	■	S	W	O	R	E	■	R	A	S	H

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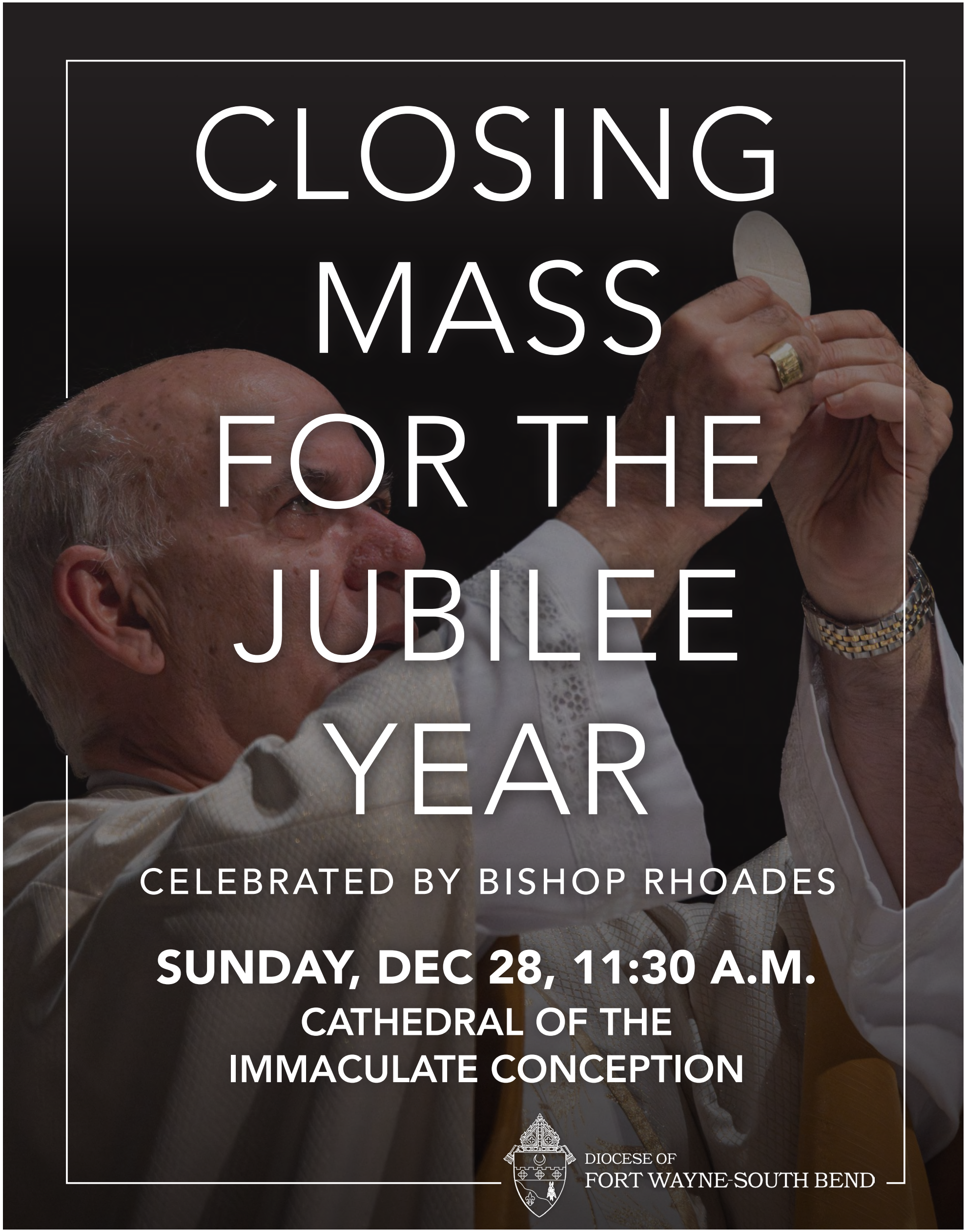

CLOSING MASS FOR THE JUBILEE YEAR

CELEBRATED BY BISHOP RHOADES

SUNDAY, DEC 28, 11:30 A.M.

CATHEDRAL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

DIOCESE OF
FORT WAYNE-SOUTH BEND