TODAY'S CATHOLIC
100 YEARS OF SERVING THE DIOCESE OF FORT WAYNE-SOUTH BEND
VOLUME 100, NO. 2 | JANUARY 11, 2026
TODAYSCATHOLIC.org

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

30 Years of Serving God and Neighbor

Meg Distler Reflects on Three Decades of Leading St. Joseph Community Health Foundation

BY TIM JOHNSON

Meg Distler has a heart for service, and for more than 30 years, she served the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ and the community as executive director of the St. Joseph Community Health Foundation. As of January 1, Distler has relinquished that role to Matt Smith.

In a recent interview with Today's Catholic, Distler reflected on the foundation's early days, its evolution, and the faith that has sustained her work.

"When I started working for the Poor Handmaids in 1993, to do fundraising for St. Joe Hospital, that's what the foundation was there to do: to manage any restricted gifts coming into the hospital that were placed in the foundation," Distler said.

Those early years were exciting, she said, "because we were both raising funds for programs that the sisters had – programming that they had that wouldn't necessarily pay for itself but was important to the community." Among those efforts was fundraising for the St. Joseph Hospital burn center, a vital but costly service.

DISTLER, page 10

Tim Johnson

Meg Distler, who retired as the executive director of the St. Joseph Community Health Foundation as of January 1, stands next to the "Compassionate St. Joseph" sculpture displayed in a conference room at the foundation's Fort Wayne office. The artwork, depicting St. Joseph comforting a pregnant Mary on the road to Bethlehem, reflects the foundation's mission of walking alongside people on difficult journeys – a calling Distler said has guided her more than 30 years of faith-filled service.

Pope: Rights of Venezuelans Must Be Respected

BY OSV NEWS

Pope Leo XIV expressed "deep concern" following the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, by the United States in a large-scale attack.

After reciting the Angelus prayer with pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square on Sunday, January 4, the pope said the "well-being of the beloved Venezuelan people must prevail over all other considerations and lead to overcoming violence and pursuing paths of justice and peace."

Entrusting Venezuela to its patroness, Our Lady of Coromoto, as well as the country's recently canonized saints, Sts. José Gregorio Hernández and Carmen Rendiles, Pope Leo called on Catholics to pray and highlighted the need to respect Venezuela's right to autonomy and self-determination.

"This must guarantee the country's sovereignty, ensure the rule of law enshrined in the Constitution, respect the human and civil rights of all, and work to build together a serene future of

VENEZUELA, page 11

OSV News photo/Matteo Minnella, Reuters

A woman draped in a Venezuelan flag prays at the Church of the Most Holy Redeemer in Rome on Sunday, January 4, following a U.S. strike on Venezuela where President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, were captured the previous day.

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

PUBLISHER: Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades

Editorial Department
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Scott Warden
PAGE DESIGNER: Chelsea Alt

Business Department
BOOKKEEPING/CIRCULATION:
circulation@diocesefwsb.org
ADVERTISING ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE:
Erika Barron: ebarron@diocesefwsb.org

Website: todayscatholic.org
260-456-2824

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

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

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 befowre 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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ND Receives $50 Million Grant to Explore AI Ethics

BY CARRIE GATES

OSV News photo/Evan Cobb, University of Notre Dame

Meghan Sullivan, a philosophy professor and director of the Institute for Ethics and the Common Good and the Ethics Initiative at the University of Notre Dame, gives the keynote address at a Notre Dame summit on artificial intelligence on September 23, 2025.

The University of Notre Dame has been awarded a $50.8 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to support the DELTA Network: Faith-Based Ethical Formation for a World of Powerful AI. Led by the Notre Dame Institute for Ethics and the Common Good (ECG), this grant – the largest awarded to Notre Dame by a private foundation in the University's history – will fund the further development of a shared, faith-based ethical framework that scholars, religious leaders, tech leaders, teachers, journalists, young people, and the broader public can draw upon to discern appropriate uses of artificial intelligence.

The grant will also support the establishment of a robust, interconnected network that will provide practical resources to help navigate challenges posed by rapidly developing AI. Based on principles and values from Christian traditions, the framework is designed to be accessible to people of all faith perspectives.

"We are deeply grateful to Lilly Endowment for its generous support of this critically important initiative," said Holy Cross Father Robert A. Dowd, president of the University of Notre Dame. "Pope Leo XIV calls for us all to work to ensure that AI is 'intelligent, relational, and guided by love,' reflecting the design of God the Creator. As a Catholic university that seeks to promote human flourishing, Notre Dame is well-positioned to build bridges between religious leaders and educators, and those creating and using new technologies, so that they might together explore the moral and ethical questions associated with AI."

With the support of a $539,000 planning grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. awarded in October of 2024, the Notre Dame Institute for Ethics and the Common Good spent the past year mapping the landscape of faith-informed work in AI ethics. Drawing on insights from more than 200 conversations with representatives of these various constituencies, the ECG created DELTA, a Christian-inspired ethical framework that stands for Dignity, Embodiment, Love, Transcendence, and Agency. The framework was launched at the inaugural Notre Dame Summit on AI, Faith, and Human Flourishing in September of 2025.

"Lilly Endowment's continued support enables Notre Dame to address one of the defining questions of our time – how to guide the use of artificial intelligence with wisdom, responsibility, and a commitment to human dignity," said John T. McGreevy, the Charles and Jill Fischer Provost. "As a leading global Catholic research university with deep partnerships across technology, faith, and academia, we are uniquely positioned to convene these conversations."

"The depth of engagement and support from the wide variety of participants at the Notre Dame summit for further development of the DELTA framework was most compelling," said N. Clay Robbins, Lilly Endowment's chairman and CEO. "Lilly Endowment is pleased to support this effort that acknowledges the beneficial opportunities AI offers while encouraging uses of AI that align with important moral and ethical values that draw from religious insights and traditions."

Notre Dame's DELTA network will be organized around interdisciplinary and intergenerational communities of practice focused on education, pastoral ministry, and public engagement. The communities of practice will come together to learn about and engage with the principles of the faith-based ethical framework. They will nurture relationships between those who are developing AI technology and those in education, workplaces, religious communities, and a variety of public settings who must discern ethical ways to use AI.

As part of the project, the ECG will launch a series of programs to encourage and support young adults to lead with convictions shaped by DELTA principles. In addition, by developing hubs in communities in Silicon Valley and the northeastern U.S., the institute will invite tech leaders and the public to engage with DELTA principles through issue-focused events and retreats.

Each community of practice will be supported by a timely, high-impact slate of resources, programs, and events that will enable and leverage sustained engagement with the DELTA framework, developing a common language and set of tools that will energize and guide conversations around the ethics of AI and its applications.

DELTA builds on collaborations already in place around technology ethics, including the university's partnership with IBM through the Notre Dame-IBM Technology Ethics Lab.

"Here at Notre Dame, we're committed to shaping public thought about how humans can flourish in an AI-driven world by drawing upon our Catholic and Christian tradition," said Meghan Sullivan, the Wilsey Family College Professor of Philosophy and director of ECG and the Notre Dame Ethics Initiative. "With this work, Notre Dame and ECG will deepen our mission to grow networks of corporate leaders, faith leaders, educators, storytellers, and others to advance ethics and the common good. Given the monumental impact that AI will have on our lives, this work is more vital than ever."

Notre Dame has always focused on ethics in both research and formation. In 2024, the university intensified its commitment to the field with the launch of the university-wide Ethics Initiative, which aims to establish Notre Dame as a premier global destination for the study of ethics, offering superb training for future generations of ethicists and moral leaders, a platform for engaging the Catholic moral tradition with other modes of inquiry, and an opportunity to forge insights into some of the most significant ethical issues of our time.

A signature element of the Ethics Initiative, the Institute for Ethics and the Common Good facilitates interdisciplinary research in foundational and applied ethics, coordinates projects that cross departments and units, and supports ethics-related education and public engagement efforts.

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

Pope Leo: New Year Marks Time to Usher in Era of Peace, Friendship

BY CAROL GLATZ

CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Pope Leo XIV blesses the faithful after celebrating Mass on the feast of Mary, Mother of God, and World Peace Day in St. Peter's Basilica on Thursday, January 1.

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – The world is not saved by threatening violence or by judging, oppressing or getting rid of others, Pope Leo XIV said during Mass in St. Peter's Basilica on Thursday, January 1, the feast of Mary, Mother of God, and the day of observance of World Peace Day. "Rather, it is saved by tirelessly striving to understand, forgive, liberate, and welcome everyone, without calculation and without fear."

Therefore, at the beginning of a new year with "new and unique days that await us, let us ask the Lord to help us experience at every moment, around us and upon us, the warmth of His fatherly embrace and the light of His benevolent gaze," Pope Leo said in his homily.

The Mass marked the 59th World Day of Peace celebrated by the Church. The pope's message for the world day, published in December, was dedicated to the humble, "unarmed and disarming" peace of the Risen Christ who loves unconditionally.

Thousands of people were present in the basilica for the celebration on New Year's Day, including young people dressed as the three kings who visited Jesus. A figurine of the infant Jesus was before the altar, in keeping with the Christmas season of celebration, and an image of Our Lady of Hope was to the side of the main altar as a sign of the Jubilee of Hope, which came to an end on Tuesday, January 6.

> "Through His eyes – first as a child, then as a young man and as an adult – the Father's love reaches us and transforms us."
>
> –POPE LEO XIV

In his homily, Pope Leo reflected on the mystery of Mary's divine motherhood, which "helped give a human face to the source of all mercy and benevolence: the face of Jesus. Through His eyes – first as a child, then as a young man and as an adult – the Father's love reaches us and transforms us."

By being born of Mary in a grotto, he said, "God presents Himself to us 'unarmed and disarming,' as naked and defenseless as a newborn in a cradle."

"He does this to teach us that the world is not saved by sharpening swords, nor by judging, oppressing, or eliminating our brothers and sisters," he said. Rather, the world is saved by seeking to understand, forgive, free, and welcome everyone with love.

Mary bearing the Christ Child represents "two immense, 'unarmed' realities" that come together, he said: "that of God, who renounces every privilege of His divinity to be born in the flesh, and that of a human person who, trustingly and fully, embraces God's will."

"Thus, at the dawn of the new year, the liturgy reminds us that for each of us, every day can be the beginning of a new life, thanks to God's generous love, His mercy, and the response of our freedom," Pope Leo said. "It is beautiful to view the coming year in this way: as an open journey to be discovered."

"Indeed, through grace, we can venture forth on this journey with confidence – free and bearers of freedom, forgiven and bringers of forgiveness, trusting in the closeness and goodness of the Lord who accompanies us always," he said.

Overlooking St. Peter's Square after Mass, Pope Leo urged Christians to help usher in "an era of peace and friendship among all peoples."

"The Jubilee, which is about to end, has taught us how to cultivate hope for a new world. We do this by converting our hearts to God, so as to transform wrongs into forgiveness, pain into consolation, and resolutions of virtue into good works," he said.

The Son of God also illuminates "the consciences of people of goodwill, so that we can build the future as a welcoming home for every man and woman who comes into the world," he said.

"The heart of Jesus, therefore, beats for every man and woman; for those who are ready to welcome Him, like the shepherds, and for those who do not want Him, like Herod," he said.

"His heart is not indifferent to those who have no heart for their neighbor: it beats for the righteous, so that they may persevere in their dedication, as well as for the unrighteous, so that they may change their lives and find peace," Pope Leo said.

Every unborn child reveals "the divine image imprinted in our humanity," he said, and he called for prayers for peace: "first, among nations bloodied by conflict and suffering, but also within our homes, in families wounded by violence or pain."

PUBLIC SCHEDULE OF
BISHOP KEVIN C. RHOADES
Veritatem In Caritate
(Truth in Charity)

- **Wednesday, January 14, at 9:45 a.m.** – Mass and Pastoral Visit, Bishop Luers High School, Fort Wayne
- **Sunday, January 18, at 5 p.m.** – Ecumenical Prayer Service, St. Jude Church, Fort Wayne

Faithful Rally Around Catholic Speaker's Dying Son

Tens of Thousands Followed Online as Paul Kim Prayed for His 5-Year-Old, Who Is 'Already in Heaven at Work'

BY GINA CHRISTIAN

(OSV News) – Catholic influencer Paul J. Kim announced his 5-year-old son, Micah, "flew into the gates of heaven like a shooting star" after succumbing to influenza and sepsis, and he said that Micah is now "already in heaven at work," inspiring others to turn to Christ.

Kim, a popular Catholic speaker and musical artist, announced his son's December 31 death in an emotional two-part Instagram video message posted on January 1, quoting several Scripture passages and stressing his unbroken faith amid the sudden and agonizing loss of his child.

"After fighting 11 hard days, Micah went home to the house of our Father," Kim said, breaking down in tears.

On December 21, Kim had called for prayers for Micah, saying in a written message on Instagram the child was "having a medical emergency right now" and was "headed to the hospital in an ambulance."

Throughout the following days, Kim had posted updates – including images of Micah in his hospital bed – and additional requests for prayers to "storm heaven," seeking the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Joseph, St. Michael, and the angels and saints.

The prayer campaign and Kim's daily social media updates attracted tens of thousands of participants around the world – with Catholics and non-Catholics alike interceding for Micah's recovery, said Kim.

On December 22, Kim posted on Instagram that Micah was "currently on life support" and asked for "prayers for a miracle" through the intercession of Venerable Fulton J. Sheen – "or for the grace to peacefully surrender our amazing little boy to the arms of the heavenly Father who gifted us with him and redeemed him through Christ our Lord."

> "Christ prepared his heart through those sacraments. That's what the sacraments are about. It's not our work; it's God's work through the Church."
>
> **– PAUL KIM**

Later that same day, he said that Micah's scans showed "his brain activity is not present" and that the child had received the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick during the 3 p.m. hour of Divine Mercy, which commemorates Jesus Christ's suffering on the cross and forms part of the Divine Mercy devotion.

The boy's hospital room became "sacred ground," with multiple priests visiting and Mass celebrated "right at Micah's bedside," as supporters sent the family relics of various saints, said Kim.

Micah received his first holy Communion, with a priest dropping "some Precious Blood in his mouth," as well as the Sacrament of Confirmation, Kim said.

"Christ prepared his heart through those sacraments," Kim said. "That's what the sacraments are about. It's not our work; it's God's work through the Church."

The battle for Micah's healing continued over the next several days, showing signs of an upswing even as the child was placed on life support.

On Christmas Day, Kim and his wife appeared together in an Instagram video filmed at the hospital, with Kim stating doctors had reported Micah's heart vitality had increased, even as no brain activity was detected.

On the eighth day of the illness, Kim wrote that "Micah is a fighter," showing "steady vitals" as well as slowly improving lung functioning although he remained on a respirator.

But two days later, Kim advised that Micah had his "first of three brain death tests" and that "nothing showed that he was responding."

Describing the moment as "the 11th hour," Kim continued to call for prayer, not only for Micah's healing but so "that God would be praised through this entire process."

In his January 1 Instagram video updates announcing his son's passing the previous day, Kim said, "God is using the life of my 5-year-old to truly save souls and change the world."

Kim pointed to "people from all around the world" and from "every continent, praying for my boy throughout this ordeal." He thanked everyone for their prayers.

He described how another family decided to have their own critically ill infant, who was receiving treatment at the same hospital as Micah, baptized – with Kim performing the baptism after consulting with his spiritual director.

"How does this happen in the midst of all that we're going through?" Kim pondered in his January 1 message.

He believed that Micah – who may have "already been with the Lord" due to the "catastrophic injury to his brain" – had "set up that arrangement."

"He prayed and interceded in heaven ... for that baby girl," said Kim.

While admitting that he has "a lot of questions for God," Kim said, "Micah is not dead. Micah is alive. He is alive in Jesus Christ, who saved him, who redeemed him on the cross, who prepared him in every which way, who gave the grace to me and my wife, as his parents, to prepare his heart for eternity."

And, said Kim, "That's the greatest gift, aside from life, that we could have ever given him."

OSV News/Paul Kim's Facebook page

Micah Kim, the 5-year-old son of Catholic influencer Paul Kim, died on New Year's Eve 2025 following an 11-day hospitalization after he contracted a severe case of the flu, which triggered sepsis and seizures. He is pictured in an undated photo.

Catholic speaker and musician Paul Kim announced on New Year's Day that his 5-year-old son, Micah, had passed away after a lengthy hospital stay. Tens of thousands of people online followed Kim throughout Micah's journey.

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.

Marian Protects Teens from Overuse of Screens

How the High School Community Promotes the Good of Students Through Offline Learning

BY McKENNA ROUSSEVE

Screens are everywhere. We see them in our homes, schools, workplaces, restaurants, grocery stores, and more. Although technology is important for growth as a society, it can have many negative effects on teenagers. The average teen spends around eight and a half hours on screens per day, according to an article entitled "Constantly Connected: How Social Media Can Affect Your Child," which was published on the website healthychildren.org.

Teenagers who excessively use screens and technology often end up having mental health struggles, a harder time learning, and a poor faith life. As the world advances, technology is going to become more common, which poses a threat to the minds of young people.

At Marian High School in Mishawaka, the faculty and staff do their best to promote learning offline in order to further support students in their academics, social life, and faith journey.

From an academic standpoint, Marian's teachers have noticed that students work well without screens. Not only do students tend to understand class material better on paper but they also have healthier communication with teachers. Staring at screens all day, every day, may seem fun to some, but it eventually becomes monotonous. When students are offline and attentive during seminar- and lecture-style classes, they are more excited to learn, and their brains are more physically active.

Moreover, note taking can be difficult on electronic devices. Many students have mentioned that there is much value in having a physical textbook and notes so that they don't need to rely on having a fully charged device with them to find their notes or text readings. Although digital learning is beneficial to students, old-fashioned paper and pens are extremely valuable within the classroom.

Students often have a healthier social life without screens by their sides. It is inevitable that teenagers will be exposed to screens on a day-to-day basis, but as a school community, Marian officials work to limit screen time at school. With a strict cellphone policy, the school's administration and faculty help students to stay away from social media distractions during the school day. Students have mentioned that the culture at Marian is much more controlled and healthier due to the lack of social media and technology at school. Checking Instagram, SnapChat, and text messages can be very distracting for most students, and it takes away from the value that comes from face-to-face relationships at school.

Marian students work together during a recent class.

Photos provided by Marian High School

The administration and faculty at Marian High School intentionally try to limit screen time, opting instead to have students largely use textbooks, paper, and pens and pencils in their classrooms.

As human beings, we naturally desire relationships with one another, which can and should be fulfilled without social media. When students spend too much time on screens, they often end up participating in risky activities, which could end up having negative effects on the student. If students have healthier interactions with others offline, it will help them to focus better during class and be more productive at school overall.

Being a school that fosters its Catholic identity, Marian strives to build a strong faith life in each of its students. In order to create a safe and respectful environment, Marian chooses to limit time on technology not only to protect students against distractions in the classroom and in their social lives but also for keeping them more connected to the Lord. Screens are meant to be used as resources in healthy ways, but they often distract teenagers, and humans in general, from deepening their spiritual lives. Marian's Pastoral Ministries department works to help students live a more faithful life, even with the distractions of technology. Teachers and students have found that because of the absence of cellphones and laptops in classrooms, students are more likely to want to participate in their faith as opposed to focusing on trivial things on social media.

If students have healthier interactions with others offline, it will help them to focus better during class and be more productive at school overall.

Overall, the community at Marian wants to create a healthy environment that incorporates technology when appropriate but doesn't rely solely on technology to educate students. We have multiple traveling Chromebook carts that teachers can request for a day and plenty of readily available desktop computers in the library for students to use before, after, and during study halls.

If schools avoid educating young people about technology, there may be supplemental consequences, such as an ignorance about technology in university settings and difficulty using technology in career environments. However, technology in the classroom is, more often than not, distracting to young, impressionable minds. Due to the growth of artificial intelligence and technology as a whole, it is crucial that students are given the opportunity to explore these resources within a controlled environment. As a community, Marian's faculty, staff, and students want to participate more fully in and out of the classroom and foster stronger relationships with one another; however, this is best accomplished without the interruptions of technology.

McKenna Rousseve is a sophomore at Marian High School.

NEWS BRIEFS

POPE MOURNS 40 KILLED IN SWISS NEW YEAR'S FIRE

OSV News photo/Stephanie Lecocq, Reuters

People mourn outside Le Constellation bar in the upscale ski resort of Crans-Montana in southwestern Switzerland on Thursday, January 1, following a deadly fire and explosion during a New Year's Eve party. Forty people were killed, and 115 others were injured, most of them seriously, after a fire ripped through the bar at the Swiss Alpine resort less than two hours after midnight, police said. The pope mourned those killed and consoled their families in a January 2 telegram signed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's secretary of state, writing, "He wishes to express to the relatives of the victims his compassion and his concern."

Vatican Sees Record Crowds During Jubilee year

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – An estimated 33 million visitors and pilgrims came to the Vatican to celebrate the Jubilee Year of Hope, officials said at a news conference at the Vatican on Monday, January 5. Archbishop Rino Fisichella, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization's section for New Evangelization and chief organizer of the 2025 Holy Year, said the figure is based on estimates from a study by Roma Tre University, online registrations for the Holy Year, and the number of people who passed through the Holy Doors of Rome's major basilicas and attended papal events. By the time the Holy Year ended, he said, at least 33 million took part, which breaks down to more than 90,000 people a day. The period with the most pilgrims in Rome was during the Jubilee of Young People from July 21 to Aug. 10, which registered more than 13 million people. Early estimates had expected that the Jubilee Year would bring 30 million to 35 million visitors to the Vatican. The city saw about 22 million people come to Rome in 2024, Roberto Gualtieri, mayor of Rome, said during the news conference. Based on data collected solely from registered pilgrims, visitors from the United States ranked second only to Italy, accounting for nearly 13 percent of the total number of registered visitors, Archbishop Fisichella said. Pilgrims from more than 185 countries participated in the Jubilee Year.

Columbus Bishop Gives Mass Dispensation Amid Immigration Crackdowns

COLUMBUS, Ohio (OSV News) – Bishop Earl K. Fernandes of Columbus has granted a dispensation from Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation to Catholics without authorization to stay in the United States, as well as those who "reasonably fear" being pursued in the ongoing immigration crackdown across the country. The decree, dated December 23, noted the increase in immigration enforcement activities in the Diocese of Columbus has created "a rise in fear and anxiety" in its immigrant community. The bishop said the decree would be in effect through the Christmas season, ending on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, January 11. The Trump administration's measures in pursuing migrants without legal documents have discouraged the faithful in several U.S. cities from attending Mass or other church activities, or even working, grocery shopping, or attending school. The administration's measures include rescinding long-standing restrictions on arrests at sensitive locations, including houses of worship, schools, and hospitals. The decree follows similar dispensations around the country.

Kentucky, Wisconsin Bishops Issue Statements Affirming Dignity of Migrants

LOUISVILLE, Kentucky (OSV News) – The bishops of Kentucky and Wisconsin have joined similar efforts by bishops in a growing list of states to affirm the human dignity of migrants amid debates over immigration policy. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops voted overwhelmingly on November 12 to issue a rare group statement voicing "our concern here for immigrants" at their annual fall plenary assembly in Baltimore. It came as a growing number of bishops have acknowledged that some of the Trump administration's immigration policies risk presenting the church with both practical challenges in administering pastoral support and charitable endeavors, as well as religious liberty challenges. Marking the feast of the Epiphany, celebrated this year on January 4, the Catholic bishops of Kentucky released their statement "in continuity" with the USCCB statement. They acknowledged the right of nations to "control their borders and to enforce laws meant to protect the population" but said all laws must be enforced in a "just" manner that respects the God-given dignity of each human person. They also expressed concern over "proposals at the state level targeting the ability of immigrants to live and pursue their dreams in Kentucky." In a December 18 statement, Wisconsin's bishops said, "There is no inherent contradiction in upholding human dignity, the common good, and the rule of law."

Israel Bans Dozens of Aid Groups from Gaza

JERUSALEM (OSV News) – Israel has revoked the licenses of 37 international aid organizations operating in Gaza, including Caritas Internationalis and Caritas Jerusalem, ordering them to halt operations by March 1. The Ministry of Diaspora Affairs said the groups failed to meet new security and transparency rules requiring full disclosure of staff, funding, and operations. The regulations were announced last March, with a 10-month compliance deadline that expired on December 31. Israeli officials said the measures are needed to prevent links to terrorism and note the affected groups represent about 15 percent of non-governmental organizations in Gaza. The European Union, United Nations, and 10 foreign ministers have condemned the move, warning it could worsen Gaza's already dire humanitarian crisis after two years of war. Church leaders said Caritas Jerusalem operates under recognized legal agreements with Israel and will continue its humanitarian mission. George Anton, administrative director of Caritas Medical Center in Gaza, told OSV News that Caritas is a Church charity organization whose work in Gaza is "very important and essential in Gaza" and he hopes they will be able to continue their work. Several major NGOs, including Doctors Without Borders and Oxfam, are also affected, though they may continue limited work using local supplies.

New Orleans Archbishop Apologizes to Abuse Survivors

NEW ORLEANS (OSV News) – Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond of New Orleans has issued a formal apology to abuse survivors in that archdiocese following last month's court approval of a $230 million settlement in the five-year-long bankruptcy case. "With this letter, I express on behalf of the clergy, religious, and laity of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, my predecessors, and myself, profound regret over the tragic and inexcusable harm you have suffered at the hands of your abusers," said Archbishop Aymond in a widely distributed December 26 letter addressed "to all child abuse claimants" in the archdiocese. The seventh amended plan for the archdiocese's Chapter 11 filing – dating to 2020 and prompted by some 500 abuse claims – was approved by Judge Meredith S. Grabill on December 8. The archbishop said the archdiocese "takes responsibility for the abuse you have suffered and pledges to keep children and all vulnerable people safe in our ministry," adding, "It is my fervent hope that as we bring these Chapter 11 proceedings to a close, you will achieve some sense of peace, justice, and healing." The closing hearings of the case in early December included testimony from 23 survivors, with Grabill addressing them through tears ahead of her final ruling. One survivor filed a handwritten letter to Grabill saying her decision "will give children a voice ... who have been silenced for so long," emphasizing the decision to come forward "was very powerful for my own healing and to help move the Catholic Church to a safer environment."

Catholic Governor Signs Law Protecting the Unborn in Puerto Rico

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (OSV News) – On Sunday, December 21, Puerto Rico's Governor Jenniffer González-Colón approved Law 183-2025, which amends the Civil Code of Puerto Rico and recognizes the unborn child or "nasciturus" – a Latin legal term referring to "conceived but not born" – as a natural person from conception. Father Carlos Pérez Toro, pastor of Santa Rosa de Lima Church in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and civil lawyer graduate of Inter American University of Puerto Rico School of Law, explained to OSV News that the law recognizes "that the human being in gestation is a natural person from the first moment of conception." He explained that every pregnant woman in Puerto Rico can now designate her unborn child as an heir, and in tax matters, can now claim a child in her womb as a new dependent when it comes to paying taxes in Puerto Rico.

Photos provided by Bishop Luers High School

Bishop Luers sophomores Alejandro Palma, left, and Ethan Roebel lead the music for Mass at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Fort Wayne. Each learned to play their instruments while attending St. Joseph Catholic School under the tutelage of Ken Jehle, the parish's music director.

Bishop Luers Students Share Musical Talents

BY GEORGIA LIEB

Bishop Luers High School sophomores Alejandro Palma and Ethan Roebel are living witnesses to their school and parish community through their generous service, creativity, and leadership. Both students are active members of the Bishop Luers Knights for Life Club and founding members of the newly established Catholic Relief Services Club. Drawing on their artistic talents, Palma and Roebel recently collaborated to design a holy card for the CRS Club encouraging prayer for the poor and needy around the world. In addition, Palma is a dedicated altar server, faithfully serving at all-school and chapel Masses. Both Palma and Roebel participate in the all-school Mass set-up and tear-down crew each month.

Along with all these acts of service within their school community, they have found ways to serve their parish community through music ministry.

Palma and Roebel, both parishioners at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Fort Wayne, found their inspiration to create liturgical music when they heard the parish's music director, Ken Jehle, play at Mass.

Palma approached Jehle when he was in sixth grade at St. Joseph Catholic School and asked him for guitar lessons. "I always thought it was so cool that he played (guitar) at Mass," Palma said. After taking lessons for a few years from Jehle, Palma began playing at the all-school Mass at St. Joseph each week.

"Alejandro is just a great kid," Jehle said. "He has a really strong prayer life. He stays really close to the Lord and has a fervor for prayer. I've really been impressed by Alejandro's love of the Lord."

Around this time, Roebel, who was one of Palma's eighth grade classmates at St. Joseph School, spoke to Jehle about his interest in learning how to play the pipe organ. "I always liked listening to it at church," Roebel said. As Roebel had never formally played an organ or piano before, he began by practicing on the piano for a few months. He moved to the pipe organ in February of 2024.

Ethan Roebel plays the organ at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Fort Wayne. He was partly inspired to play by his grandfather, who played the organ at local parishes.

Roebel joined Palma at the all-school Masses. Jehle eventually began to integrate them into the St. Joseph weekend Mass schedule. Now, they are advanced enough to lead the music for an entire Mass without Jehle present. They play at one Mass per month.

Jehle told Today's Catholic he is impressed by these two young musicians, saying: "It's not common to see this fervor; they are passionate about church music. That is uncommon in this day and age."

Jehle spoke about the many Masses he covers each week and how he is grateful that Palma and Roebel have assisted him with their talent.

"They just seem to really love doing it," Jehl said. "They love the music, they love the Mass, they love the serving. They are not there for the compliments or the show. They have a great heart posture to offer this up in sincere prayer, and that's beautiful."

Roebel said, "It's a way to take a talent that I was gifted and give it back in worship to God."

While Roebel was inspired by Jehle, he was also inspired by his own grandfather, an organist who has formerly provided sacred music at local parishes including St. Mary Mother of God Catholic Church in Fort Wayne and St. Joseph – Hessen Cassel Catholic Church. His grandfather also used to be the full-time pianist at Von Maur in Fort Wayne.

Now that Roebel has more experience, he gets to choose the songs for Mass. Some of his favorites include "Gather Us In," "Sing of The Lord's Goodness," and the "Mass of Creation" setting.

Along with teaching himself how to play the pipe-organ, Roebel has begun to compose his own liturgical music. While none of his music is officially published, an "Alleluia" that he wrote was recently played at one of the Masses at St. Joseph.

Jehle said Roebel "could grow up to be an incredible organist someday."

2025 Marked a Grim Year for Religious Freedom

From Africa to Asia to Central America, Many Christian Minorities Face Rising Persecution

BY PAULINA GUZIK

OSV News photo/Marvellous Durowaiye, Reuters

Schoolchildren from St. Mary's Catholic School in Papiri, Nigeria, are seen after arriving at the Niger State Government House on December 8, 2025, after being freed from captivity following their abduction by gunmen on November 21. Church officials confirmed that the remaining students were released on December 21, ending a month-long ordeal that began when more than 300 pupils were abducted.

(OSV News) – As we look back at 2025, the plight of persecuted Christians around the world remains dire – and in many places, deeply forgotten. The year has exposed how fragile religious freedom is, even as the faithful strive to survive with courage, hope, and community.

Church leaders such as Regina Lynch, executive director of the pontifical charity Aid to the Church in Need, warn that "there are more cases, there are more countries where religious freedom doesn't exist or … is being eaten away."

Nigeria: Ground Zero for Christian Persecution

As the Jubilee Year of Hope drew to a close, nowhere was the crisis of Christian persecution more visible than in Nigeria, where militant Islamist groups and extremist herding militias continued to ravage Christian villages, abduct clergy and laity, and destroy homes and churches.

In the latest sign of Christian tragedy in the country, Father Emmanuel Ezema was abducted late on December 2 from his residence in St. Peter's Catholic Church in Rumi, in Kaduna State, the Diocese of Zaria said on December 3, according to Reuters.

On November 21, in one of the worst cases of kidnappings in the recent history of Africa's most populous country, more than 300 children, along with their teachers, were taken at gunpoint from St. Mary's Catholic School in Papiri, in central Nigeria. Fifty managed to escape and were reunited with their families, 100 more were released on December 8, and the remaining children were returned to their homes right before Christmas.

In the northeast, particularly dioceses such as Maiduguri, Christians live under constant threat from militants and violent herdsmen. As Bishop John Bogna Bakeni of Maiduguri put it, "Every day is a grace … because we never know what will happen in the next hour."

On October 31, President Donald Trump announced that the U.S. would again designate Nigeria a "country of particular concern" for religious freedom and threatened to suspend nonhumanitarian aid and take "action" if the Nigerian government did not act swiftly to protect Christians from extremist violence. The U.S. carried out a deadly strike in northwestern Nigeria on December 25, with Trump stating the attack targeted Islamic State group terrorists who persecuted Christians in that nation.

The Trump administration's move put Nigeria in the spotlight of mainstream media reports; otherwise, the atrocities have been mostly forgotten by global media companies.

"It's difficult to get the secular media to report on these situations," Lynch, executive president of Aid to the Church in Need, told OSV News. "Occasionally the BBC will say something, but it's really a battle to be that voice there."

She said she looks with hope to parliamentarians in the European Union and members of the U.S. Congress – "people who are ready to listen, who do believe that there is persecution of Christians in some of these countries." Lynch said the job of organizations like ACN is to "to move them ... to do something about this."

"What's really a big concern for us today is the growing jihadism in West Africa, in the Sahel region," she said, calling "atrocities" in Nigeria but also Burkina Faso "really, really horrible."

Lynch underlined that in countries like Nigeria, "all people are being attacked, not just Christians but anybody who does not accept this form of jihadism."

> According to the statistics provided by Aid to the Church in Need, the Christian population in Syria has shrunk from roughly 2.1 million in 2011 (before the war) to about 540,000 today.

The latest Intersociety advocacy group report revealed that an average of 32 Christians are killed in Nigeria every day. The report, published in August, indicates that as many as 7,000 Christians were massacred across the country in the first 220 days of 2025.

Amid this horror, faith persists. Surveys show that up to 94 percent of Nigerian Catholics claim to attend Mass weekly or daily.

Catastrophic Violence in Syria, Gaza

Over the past months, Christians in Syria, along with other religious minorities, have faced a sharp increase in targeted violence, insecurity, and displacement. A brutal reminder came on June 22, when a suicide bomber attacked Mar Elias Church, a Greek Orthodox church in the Dweila neighborhood of Damascus, during Divine Liturgy.

At least 20 worshippers were killed and more than 60 injured. The attacker, reportedly linked to Islamic State group, opened fire before detonating his vest. According to witnesses, around 350 people were present inside the church at the time.

But that was not an isolated incident. In the southern district of Sweida, a region with substantial Christian and Druze populations, a wave of sectarian violence erupted in July of 2025. Militias attacked Christian and Druze neighbor-

hoods. In the village of Al-Sura, the Greek Melkite Church of St. Michael was burned down, while 38 Christian homes were also destroyed by fire, leaving many families homeless. As one displaced Christian recalled, "This community has lost everything."

Religious-freedom advocates describe the security situation for Christians and other minorities as "disastrous." According to statistics provided by Aid to the Church in Need, the Christian population in Syria has shrunk from roughly 2.1 million in 2011 (before the war) to about 540,000 today. The sense of vulnerability and fear among survivors and remaining Christians is deep.

Syrian Archbishop Jacques Mourad of Homs warned that the "Church in Syria is dying," lamenting that many believers feel they have no future in their homeland under the new Islamist-led government of Ahmed al-Sharaa.

Still, Church leaders insist on the importance of Christians remaining in their ancestral lands. "These are the living stones. These are the roots. They carry the roots of our faith," Lynch said.

Mentioning Gaza, where a 400-strong flock still shelters in the premises of Holy Family Catholic Parish and St. Porphyrios Orthodox Church, amid difficulties of winter and as a ceasefire was reached in October after two years of constant Israeli bombardment of the enclave, Lynch said: "They manage, but it's not easy. … It's terribly sad."

Bleak Situation in Belarus

While the November 20 release of two priests offers a rare glimmer of hope, for most Christians in Belarus the situation remains bleak, marked by harsh sentences, legal restrictions, and suppression of independent religious life.

The release of Fathers Andrzej Juchniewicz and Henrykh Akalatovich came only after a visit in October by the papal envoy Claudio Gugerotti.

It was described as a "gesture of mercy," interpreted as linked to high-level Vatican intervention. While it was a joy that the outspoken priests supporting freedom in Belarus have been freed, the most prominent group of political prisoners – many of them Catholics – is still behind bars.

Among them is Ales Bialiatski, winner of the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize. His supporters have urged Western Church leaders to take up his cause four years after he was detained and jailed in Belarus on trumped-up charges.

Overall repression remains widespread as Catholics face sweeping legal and administrative restrictions, such as the 2023 religious-freedom law under which all parishes must reregister or risk liquidation; this law curbs missionary activity, religious education, minority-language worship, and monastic life.

Dozens of clergy – Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant – have been arrested on vague charges ranging from "extremist material" or "subversive activity" to treason and espionage. Arrests of political prisoners occurred after the rigged 2020 and 2022 elections and the subsequent crackdown on civil society and dissent.

Prominent lay Catholics are also targeted. Andrzej Poczobut, a journalist and member of Belarus's Polish minority, remains imprisoned since 2021. In December of 2025, the European Parliament awarded him the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, making him a "symbol of the struggle for freedom and democracy" in Belarus.

OSV News/courtesy Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem

Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, speaks with the media after concelebrating Mass at Holy Family Church in Gaza City on December 21, 2025, during his Christmas pastoral visit. He arrived prior to Christmas in a sign of closeness with a community that has endured two years of war.

OSV News photo/Sharafat Ali, Reuters

A woman prays during Christmas Eve Mass at Holy Family Catholic Church in Srinagar, India, on December 24, 2025. Reports indicate that there has been a rise in Hindu fundamentalism in the country under the patronage of governments in different states.

Shrinking Freedom from India to Nicaragua

In 2025, religious oppression in India also took damaging forms. In one high-profile case, two Catholic nuns from Kerala, Sisters Vandana Francis and Preeti Mary, along with an Indigenous youth, were arrested in Chhattisgarh on charges of "human trafficking and forced religious conversion."

Their detention sparked outrage, with religious leaders and civil-society figures calling the charges "unlawful" and demanding their immediate release.

A special court granted them conditional bail in August, but the case remains a stark reminder how legal and administrative tools can be used to harass Christians, stigmatize their humanitarian work, and suppress minority faiths.

In a scathing editorial on August 3, Deepika, a Malayalam daily published by the Catholic bishops in India's Kerala state, slammed the growing Hindu fundamentalism in the country under the patronage of governments in different states, reminding that Hindu fundamentalism had gained a presence in the country and was suppressing the voices of minorities, especially Christians.

Persecution against Christians has steadily increased since 2014 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power, according to the United Christian Forum, based in New Delhi, the nation's capital.

Some of the patterns in persecution have changed dramatically. "It's become, in some countries, more sophisticated," Lynch said, citing India and China and coordinated extremist networks.

On the other side of the world, in Central America, the situation for Christians is also catastrophic – though less visible. In Nicaragua, a systematic crackdown on religious institutions has unfolded under the authoritarian regime of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo.

> "There are more cases, there are more countries where religious freedom doesn't exist or is being eaten away and is less than it was before."
>
> **– REGINA LYNCH**

Over the past several years, more than 200 clergy and religious leaders have been detained, expelled, or forced into exile. Churches and charitable organizations have had their legal status revoked, properties seized, and worship restricted severely.

Although reported attacks in 2025 dropped to just around three dozen compared to 321 in 2023, experts warn that this "decline" masks a deeper reality: the Church has been decimated. Many clergy no longer dare report harassment or violence.

An Alarming Report

A 1,200-page Religious Freedom Report, published by Aid to the Church in Need on October 21, is drawing urgent warnings from Catholic aid officials who say persecution is expanding across continents and deepening in severity.

"There are more cases, there are more countries where religious freedom doesn't exist or is being eaten away and is less than it was before," Lynch said.

She emphasized Aid to the Church in Need is sending humanitarian and logistical help as needed, but "prayer is something that those persecuted communities appreciate most." Traveling the world, Lynch said she's heard "how much it means to the local Christian population to know that there are Christians elsewhere in the world praying for them."

Advocacy is another key issue, Lynch said. "Being a voice for the voiceless is a very important aspect."

At the same time, rising secularism in the West is making raising awareness more difficult. "With the secularization that we have in our so-called Western countries today, it's not always easy to … raise the awareness that ... Christians are being killed," Lynch added.

Yet those experiencing persecution firsthand offer a sharp contrast in conviction. One man falsely accused of blasphemy in Pakistan refused to renounce his faith despite torture. Lynch recalled: "He looked at a crucifix on the wall behind me and said: 'But he suffered so much more than I did.'"

DISTLER, from page 1

A major turning point came in 1998, as health care financing changed nationwide.

"With a lot of the changes in health care financing, the sisters sold the hospital because they could no longer operate it and maintain the quality that they wanted," Distler said. "So we took some of the assets and tried to listen to the community and use those assets to make sure the poor had access to health care."

She soon assumed the role of executive director of the newly formed St. Joseph Community Health Foundation, with members of the Poor Handmaids continuing to serve on the board.

"The sisters were always clear," Distler told Today's Catholic: "Nobody should go without health care."

Under Distler's leadership, the foundation's mission expanded beyond traditional grantmaking to include building systems and infrastructure to serve those most likely to fall through the cracks.

"In addition to responding to great needs in the community, about a third of our work has been listening to who isn't being cared for in the system and making sure there are structures supporting the poorest of the poor in the community," she said.

Distler said her early experience inside the hospital helped shape that work.

"That became easier for me because I had those first years really working inside the hospital and understood both sides of it," she said. "I've worked both sides of the coin – fundraising and direct service."

Supporting Women, Children, Families

The needs of women, children, and families have remained central to the foundation's mission throughout Distler's tenure.

"We've always been extremely pro-life, but more pro-family than pro-life," she said.

Distler pointed to sobering realities in the community: "Half of the women giving birth in Allen County are single parents, and about half have needed government support or Medicaid for health care," she said

Two programs stand out as particular sources of pride for Distler: Healthier Moms and Babies and the Prenatal and Infant Care Network.

"I wrote the grant that launched Healthier Moms and Babies, which has gotten a couple thousand women in-home case management," Distler said.

Through the Prenatal and Infant Care Network, the foundation brings together hundreds of professionals and volunteers to support families from pregnancy through early childhood.

"We've got over 300 or 400 individuals in that continuum of care," Distler said.

The foundation has also worked closely with A Mother's Hope and Women's Care Center, helping to launch some of the first gifts and funding for long-term support.

Immigration, Refugee Ministry

A second major pillar of the foundation's work has been immigration and refugee services, particularly in partnership with Catholic Charities.

"We've worked a lot with Catholic Charities because they're a major resettlement agency," Distler said. "They've been a tremendous partner."

Between 2008 and 2012, St. Joseph Community Health Foundation operated a refugee resettlement center serving Burmese refugees.

"We had over 25,000 visits to that center, helping people with food, clothing, and resources," Distler said.

Within the facility, 11 agencies offered coordinated services, including access to government benefits, health education, and legal assistance, often with Burmese-speaking staff.

More recently, the foundation has invested in expanding legal services for immigrants.

"Getting your legal status has always been extraordinarily complicated," Distler said. "It varies based upon what country you were born in and the year you entered into the United States."

A Faith Formed Through Service

Reflecting on her own spiritual journey, Distler said her work has deeply shaped her personal faith.

"I've absolutely been formed by this work," she said. "This has become a life work. How do you not be involved in this?"

She added, "I learned early on that when giving these gifts, I'm the one who receives more than I think anybody else."

Distler also described moments of discernment she attributes to divine providence.

"When difficulties arose, I would say a prayer, and within an hour or two, the phone would ring and the answer would come," she said. Former Bishop John M. D'Arcy, she recalled, referred to those moments as "God consequences."

Papal Affirmation

In 2024, Distler and her husband, Bob, traveled to Rome, where she met Pope Francis during a gathering of Catholic philanthropists.

"It was one of the most amazing experiences of my life," she said. "He took my hands and held my hands and looked you in the eyes and said, 'How can I pray for you?'"

She added: "He was so full of joy. It emanated throughout the room."

During the same trip, Distler attended Mass celebrated by Cardinal Robert Prevost, now Pope Leo XIV. His homily, she said, has stayed with her – and she was delighted when he was elected pope last May.

Looking Ahead

Distler expressed confidence in the foundation's future under its new chief executive director, Matt Smith, who has spent his career serving a wide range of Catholic organizations in northeast Indiana, including the University of Saint Francis, Our Sunday Visitor, and, most recently, Catholic Charities.

"I really believe that Matt is being called to lead it," Distler said.

While stepping away from her executive role, Distler will remain active in service, including serving as a diocesan representative with the Pontifical Mission Societies. She also looks forward to spending more time with her husband and traveling to visit their two daughters – one in San Francisco and one in Virginia.

As she reflects on her years at the St. Joseph Community Health Foundation, Distler returns to an image displayed in the foundation's office: a depiction of Compassionate St. Joseph.

"The role of comforting people on very difficult journeys has been the inspiration of the foundation," Distler said, "and of why one is called to serve the vulnerable."

Legacy of Service

With her 32-year tenure with the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ and the St. Joseph Community Health Foundation concluded, Distler reflected on a vocation marked by generosity, collaboration, and faith-filled service.

"This has been an incredible journey of serving those in poverty," Distler said, "which has taught me the importance of generosity, compassion, and the transforming power of God's love."

Distler expressed gratitude to her family – especially her husband, Bob, and her sister, MB – as well as to the Poor Handmaids, board members, and colleagues who shared in the work.

She noted that since the sale of St. Joseph Medical Center in 1998, the foundation has carried forward the sisters' mission by stewarding a portion of those assets to support vulnerable neighbors across northeast Indiana (see sidebar).

"I never thought I would be here 32 years," Distler said, "but this mission never gets old. It is still exciting to experience the transformational joy of serving your neighbor."

Facebook

Meg Distler, center, poses after receiving the Saint Katharina Kasper Award from the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ in September of 2024.

Facebook

Meg Distler and her husband, Bob, greet Pope Francis during an audience with Catholic philanthropists in November of 2024.

BY THE NUMBERS

During Meg Distler's tenure as executive director, the St. Joseph Community Health Foundation has:

- Distributed nearly $30 million
- Supported 296 local organizations
- Awarded 2,046 grants focused on community health, family stability, and social support.

Distler also highlighted moments when she witnessed "incredible friendships, creativity, and God's hand at work," including efforts to:

- Change local health policies addressing lead poisoning in low-income housing
- Operate a refugee resource center that provided more than 25,000 services to newly arrived Burmese residents
- Help launch critical community infrastructure, including Healthier Moms and Babies, A Mother's Hope, Amani Family Services, GiveHear, Courageous Healing, the Prenatal and Infant Care Network, HEAL, and Double Up IN.

For more information on the St. Joseph Community Health Foundation, visit sjchf.org.

Local Deacon Chants Gospel on Epiphany at St. Peter's

BY TODAY'S CATHOLIC

Deacon Patrick Ernst, a seminarian of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend who is studying at the Pontifical North American College in Rome, was chosen to chant the Gospel reading during Mass on Tuesday, January 6, the feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, at St. Peter's Basilica. The day also marked the closing of the worldwide Jubilee Year of Hope. Deacon Ernst, who was ordained a deacon at St. Peter's in October, chanted the day's Gospel reading from Matthew in Latin, which recounted the story of the Magi who visited the Christ Child in Bethlehem.

Screenshots via Vatican Media/YouTube

VENEZUELA, from page 1

collaboration, stability, and harmony, with special attention to the poorest who suffer due to the difficult economic situation," he said.

On Saturday, January 3, the U.S. carried out what President Donald Trump, writing on his social media platform Truth Social, called "a large-scale strike against Venezuela," capturing Maduro and his wife. A Venezuelan official told The New York Times that preliminary reports indicate at least 40 Venezuelan civilians and military personnel were killed in the attack.

The pair were transported to New York that same evening. They, along with Maduro's son and several other Venezuelan officials not currently in U.S. custody, are set to face federal charges of narcoterrorism, conspiracy to import cocaine, and weapons offenses, according to a superseding indictment unsealed after Maduro and his wife were seized.

The U.S. mission, named "Absolute Resolve," follows months of deadly strikes on alleged drug-smuggling boats in the region and in the Pacific. Some 115 have been killed in 35 such attacks since September.

During a January 3 press conference from his Mar-a-Lago resort, Trump, flanked by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, and Air Force General Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said "not a single American service member was killed and not a single piece of American equipment was lost," although the U.S. "had many helicopters, many planes, many, many people involved in that fight."

Trump also declared at the press conference the U.S. will "run the country (Venezuela) until such time as we can do a safe, proper, and judicious transition." Trump also made clear a second military operation was possible to force Venezuela to comply, emphasizing, "We're not afraid of boots on the ground."

Reactions from around the world have been mixed, with many, particularly Venezuelans in the diaspora, hailing Maduro's capture, while others expressed concerns that the U.S. attack violated international law.

A spokesperson said in a January 3 statement that U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres was "deeply alarmed by the recent escalation in Venezuela," worrying the developments "constitute a dangerous precedent" of disrespect for the rules of international law. The statement called on "all actors in Venezuela to engage in inclusive dialogue, in full respect of human rights and the rule of law."

The bishops of Venezuela issued a brief "message of accompaniment and closeness with the People of God" via Instagram and X that did not comment directly on the capture of the Venezuelan president and his wife but instead urged the faithful to pray "for the unity of our people."

"In light of the events that our country is experiencing today, let us ask God to grant all Venezuelans serenity, wisdom, and strength," the bishops said. "We express our solidarity with those who were wounded and the families of those who died."

Less than an hour later, the bishops issued a second brief statement calling on the people of Venezuela "to live more intensely in hope and fervent prayer for peace in our hearts and in society, rejecting any type of violence."

"May our hands open for encounter and mutual aid, and may the decisions that are taken always be made for the well-being of our people," the bishops wrote.

The statement was shared by other Latin American bishops' conferences, including the bishops of Argentina and Mexico.

The Mexican bishops' conference said it was "united in prayer with the bishops of Venezuela to ask God for serenity, wisdom, and strength for the Venezuelan people."

In a brief comment to SIR, the news agency of the Italian bishops' conference, Archbishop Jesús González de Zárate of Valencia, Venezuela, president of the country's bishops conference, said he had been "awake since 2 a.m. to follow what was happening" and that he was accompanying "our people with prayer."

While Venezuelans are still in shock, Archbishop Zarate said, "the facts are still in development to properly assess" the situation and emphasized his "trust in God and the values of our people."

Bishop Juan Carlos Bravo Salazar of Petare, a diocese located east of the Venezuelan capital of Caracas, issued a statement on January 3 on the diocese's Instagram account acknowledging that the people of Venezuela "are living through moments of confusion, uncertainty, and pain, in which we do not see clearly what is happening."

"Our strength and hope are in the Lord of life and peace," Bishop Bravo said, urging the need "to maintain serenity, peace, and above all a climate of prayer."

He also urged caution, asking people to "take shelter and not go out."

"For the good of our people, do not make calls to (take to) the streets, nor disseminate unverified and unconfirmed information, nor from sources that are not reliable or official. Let us stay in communication among ourselves, between pastoral zones, and with our closest collaborators," he said.

Kneeling in the Pigpen: True Connection in the Age of Efficiency

TRUTH AND LIGHT

LEONARD J. DELORENZO

We live in an age that prizes efficiency above almost everything else. Tap your phone and a car arrives. Click a button and groceries appear. Swipe right and ... well, that's supposed to be connection, isn't it? Except it's not. What we've gained in convenience we're losing in something harder to quantify: actual human closeness.

Josef Pieper saw this coming. Writing decades before smartphones existed, the German Catholic philosopher understood that love – real love – can't be engineered for maximum efficiency.

"What is really sought – human closeness, overcoming of loneliness, union with another personal being," he wrote, "all that can be had only in real love. But at this point we see a further segment of the vicious circle. For love – above all, eros – is by nature something that cannot be fitted smoothly and easily, without problems, into the functional context of utilitarian plans."

In other words, love made to serve other ends ceases to be love at all. The moment we try to make relationships efficient, productive, useful – the moment we optimize them – we kill the very thing we're after.

This is uncomfortable news in a modern culture that tends to treat everything as a problem to be solved. But love doesn't work that way. Neither does friendship. Neither does the slow, messy work of actually knowing another person. Real connection requires what we're increasingly unwilling to give: time. Embodied presence. Inefficiency. The awkwardness of sitting with someone who's struggling instead of sending a text. The risk of being misunderstood or rejected.

> When you know your own fragility, when you've faced your own capacity for failure, you can't maintain the posture of the perpetually scandalize.

It's easier than ever to pull away from people with minimal consequence: ghost someone, block, unfollow. We've built technologies that make disconnection frictionless.

Which means forgiveness and reconciliation have become more radical, more essential to our humanity than ever. When you can walk away from any relationship at the first sign of difficulty, choosing to stay and work through conflict becomes revolutionary.

This is where St. Claude La Colombière speaks to our moment with unexpected power. He wrote: "Really humble people are never scandalized: They know their own weakness too well; they know that they themselves are so close to the edge of the precipice and they are so afraid of falling over that they are not at all astonished to see others do so. ... We have no reason to despise anyone. A humble man sees his own faults. It is a sign of little virtue to notice the imperfections of others. A person may be imperfect today who in a little while, recognizing this, may rise to great sanctity."

This should perhaps be written across the top of every screen and scroll across every social media site. What have our digital platforms become if not engines of scandalization? We've created spaces where noticing and broadcasting the imperfections of others has become not just entertainment but social currency. The algorithm rewards outrage. The architecture encourages judgment.

Wikimedia Commons

Real humility – the kind St. Claude describes – makes that impossible. When you know your own fragility, when you've faced your own capacity for failure, you can't maintain the posture of the perpetually scandalized. You remember that you, too, are close to the edge. You extend to others the grace you desperately need for yourself. And that creates the possibility for actual relationship instead of performance.

There's an image that captures this better than words can. Albrecht Dürer's engraving "The Prodigal Son Among the Swine" (c. 1496) shows the wayward son at his lowest point – kneeling in prayer amid the pigs, surrounded by ruins. But here's what strikes me: The one who prays in the midst of his sin already sees beyond his sins, even if he

DELORENZO, page 13

We Are Sinners, and Only in Christ Can We Be Cleansed

THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MONSIGNOR OWEN F. CAMPION

As winter begins each year, the Church presents three great feasts to celebrate our salvation in Jesus but also to teach us the meaning of salvation in Jesus. Christmas was the first of these feasts. Then came the Epiphany of the Lord. This weekend is the third, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

Each of these feasts, through its Liturgy of the Word, introduces us to a vital dimension in the identity of Jesus and to important considerations for Christians as they seek to follow the Lord.

Supplying the first reading for this weekend is the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah writes about a loyal servant of God, a servant who is steadfast in his faithfulness despite enduring the hostilities of others around him and the unhappy twists of his fortune. This servant is therefore the most perfect servant. Regardless of the injustices surrounding him, and the temptation to forsake God, the servant never falters.

This reading is among four quite similar passages in Isaiah, called the "Songs of the Suffering Servant." They form a major part not only of Scripture but also of the liturgy, as they are used in Holy Week when the faithful concentrate of the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary.

The second reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, reveals what life was in the first generation of Christianity. It verifies that the structure of the Church then essentially was as it is today.

Peter is central. He appears before Cornelius, whose name indicates Roman origins, and Peter preaches in the very name of Christ, discharging his responsibility as an apostle, a responsibility given him by the Lord.

The reading is revealing since it shows that Peter offered salvation not just to Jews, whose heritage Peter shared, but also to pagans, indeed even to the brutal Romans whose military conquest and occupation of the Holy Land had resulted in so much misery, death, and despair among Jews.

Peter's preaching leads to one conclusion: Salvation is in Jesus alone. Jesus came as God's representative. In God's love, Jesus went about "doing good works" and healing the sick.

St. Matthew's Gospel offers the last reading, revealing not only the event of the story of the Lord's baptism in the River Jordan by John the Baptist but the import of the event for us and for all believers.

Ritual washings, or baptisms, were popular in certain Jewish circles in the first century. So, homes had ceremonial bathtubs. Archeologists who excavated the ruins of Masada, the great Jewish fortress high on a mountaintop overlooking the Dead Sea, discovered such baths there.

Being baptized, or bathing in these special pools, symbolized the yearning of a person to be rid of sin. It was as if sin stained not just the soul but also the body.

John the Baptist salutes Jesus as God's anointed. Then, marvelously, miraculously, God appears and identifies Jesus as the Son of God. God could be seen and heard. To clarify the message even more, God speaks, and gestures, in ancient Old Testament words and symbols that no Jew would have misunderstood.

Reflection

This feast of the Baptism of the Lord reveals the Lord's identity to us. He is the Son of God, with all the force and mystery contained in this reality.

He is the Savior, rescuing us from eternal death by assuming our sins and by making amends to God for our sinfulness. He is the mediator, uniting us with God.

The Church makes the words of Peter to Cornelius its own, calling us to the Lord as our Savior.

We are sinners, the Church bluntly – but honestly – tells us. We need Jesus to reconcile us with God. He is our hope and our life.

READINGS

Sunday: Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Psalms 29:1-2, 3-4, 9-10; Acts 10:34-38; Matthew 3:13-17

Monday: 1 Samuel 1:1-8; Psalms 116:12-13, 14-16, 18-19; Mark 1:14-20

Tuesday: 1 Samuel 1:9-20; 1 Samuel 2:1, 4-5, 6-7, 8abcd; Mark 1:21-28

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

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

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

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

The Holy Purpose of Conflict

SIGN, WONDER, SOWER, SEED

MOLLY JO ROSE

I have a family member who doesn't obey the laws of the jungle, specifically the law that counsels never to corner an animal. In conflict with her, word by word, squaring of shoulder by shifting of foot, she slowly edges me both physically and mentally into a corner. It is suffocating. Yet even in this moment of gasping-for-air discomfort, I admire her ability to enter so easily into conflict, to move so freely in its grip, because conflict is an unavoidable part of our time on earth. We would do well to get as comfortable with it as we can.

Conflict and disagreement are not the same thing. Disagreements can be resolved or at least better understood through conversation. Conflict is an escalation of disagreement when our emotions become entangled in ways that are difficult to unravel. It is this thorny place that terrifies me. The fear of heated argumentation is one of the limiting side effects of having grown up in a largely conflict-free home. When my mom had complaints, my dad would glance up from his newspaper and respond, "Whatever you say, my dear." While there was something frustratingly reductive in his words, there was also an immediate surrender of his will, a regular practice of abandoning his side of the argument that prevented unnecessary tension in their marriage. This has served me well in my own marriage, but I have very few models for how to manage when whatever you say will not suffice.

Like most people, I want everyone to like me and agree with me all the time. In confession, I told my priest about a conflict I was having with someone. I looked everywhere but at him when I admitted, "I'm talking about them in uncharitable ways." And then with no small amount of hurt in my voice, I continued, "And they're talking about me. I can love them, but I don't want to be anywhere near them." Father leaned forward, exhaled, and shook his head. I assumed he was disappointed in my behavior, but his disapproval had more to do with my expectations than my behavior, which admittedly still needed some work.

"The expectation to agree 100 percent always is unrealistic on this earth," he said. He went on to say that everyone seems to think we are all supposed to get along all time, but this is not possible. "Getting along," he continued, "is possible even when we disagree, but it requires the effort of both parties, and we personally have no direct agency on how the other party will interact with us."

On a visit to St. Vincent Monastery in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, I watched an interaction between a monk and one of his brothers. From across the basilica, I witnessed their exchange, amiable enough at first, but their faces as they parted made me laugh as the distaste for each other and the bad flavor of conflict was so evident. Clearly, even in a place so devoted to God, conflict was present. I asked Brother Bosco, whose face was still unsettled from the exchange, how the monks handled the realities of conflict in community life.

"I was told once that the monastery is a lot like a rock tumbler," he said. "We all enter the rock tumbler with various impurities. It is only when we are in the rock tumbler, when we hit against one another, that our impurities are broken off." Bosco scanned the crowd of his robed brothers, his fellow rocks, as he continued. "The idea is once we are taken out of the tumbler at our death, we are all smoothed out and ready to meet Jesus."

I was thinking of all these things – my family member who engages so readily in confrontation, my confessor's assertion that disagreement is unavoidable, and Brother Bosco's understanding of how conflict functions in community life – as I sat in the middle of a heated discussion recently. The conversation toggled back and forth between disagreement and conflict, the salve of understanding often competing with the hurts of those moments when emotions ran high. The feeling of suffocation, of trying to keep my head above the water, was overpowering. I didn't know how to navigate it, and I wished I had something to protect myself from the discomfort of it.

But perhaps it's not supposed to be comfortable. Maybe instead it's looking across a basilica of holy men and recognizing that even a monastery is a place of brokenness where we are not yet ready to meet Christ.

I don't have to like it, but I can accept the promise in the great discomfort of being cornered. I can accept that the collision with others will grind me down, my protruding flaws crumbling away bit by painful bit. I'm not sure knowing this will make conflict more comfortable, but there is solace in knowing it has a larger purpose. And I can choose to step out of the corners when the polishing becomes a bit too intense. It doesn't have to happen all at once.

Molly Jo Rose is a writer 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.

DeLORENZO, from page 12

believes he can see nothing else. Dignity, which is reborn in the redeemed sinner, is here in its embryonic stage.

That's the moment Dürer chose to depict. Not the celebration of the son's return. Not the father's embrace. But the instant when someone broken by his own choices turns toward home. Prayer amid the wreckage. The first stirring of hope in the heart of the lost. The prodigal hasn't cleaned himself up yet. He's still in the pigpen. But he's already being transformed.

This is what human connection requires in our age: the willingness to kneel in the pigpen with each other. To stay present in the mess. To pray together when nothing is fixed yet. We can't optimize our way to this. We can't hack intimacy or engineer belonging. We can only do the slow work of showing up, choosing reconciliation over convenience, presence over productivity, the risk of real love over the safety of managed relationships.

The father in the parable was watching for his son. Watching requires time. Waiting requires patience. Welcome requires generosity. None of these fit into our utilitarian plans. But they're the only way home.

Leonard J. DeLorenzo is a professor of the practice in the McGrath Institute for Church Life and concurrent professor in the department of theology at the University of Notre Dame. You can find his writing at leonardjdelorenzo.com. He wrote this for OSV News.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for January 11, 2026

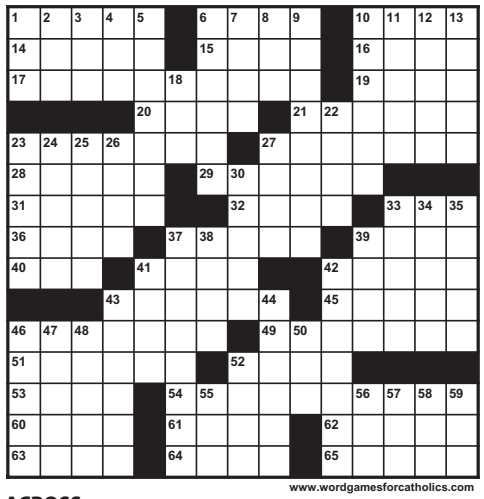
Matthew 3:13-17

Following is a word search based on the Gospel reading for the feast of Baptism of the Lord, Cycle A: Jesus and John at the Jordan. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

JESUS	GALILEE	THE JORDAN
JOHN	PREVENT	I NEED
BAPTIZED	FITTING	FULFILL
WATER	BEHOLD	HEAVENS
OPENED	HE SAW	THE SPIRIT
DESCENDING	ON HIM	A VOICE
SAYING	THIS IS	BELOVED

AT THE JORDAN

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



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ACROSS

1 Sixteenth century Council
6 Alphabet string
10 Headwear
14 Aquatic mammal
15 Certain something
16 Island converted in the 5th century
17 Teachings listed in the Sermon on the Mount
19 Large crucifix
20 Canonical hour
21 Number of tribes of Israel
23 Like Zechariah and Elizabeth
27 Louder
28 Utterly stupid person
29 Every 365 days
31 Beastly
32 Remain
33 Collection of miscellaneous data
36 Double curve
37 Laud
39 Having wings
40 Matter of law
41 "What'll ___?"
42 Judah, for example
43 Playful
45 Target
46 Brand of facial tissue
49 Pleasing
51 "Bring Flowers of the ___"
52 Novena number
53 Culture medium
54 The bishops, collectively
60 Festive occasion
61 "…the ___ he has sent away empty" (Lk 1:53)
62 Municipal pope?
63 Stepped
64 Suffix (zool.)
65 Jesus' description of the Pharisees in Matthew 23

DOWN

1 OT historical book
2 AAA suggestion
3 Airport letters
4 Tool of trade for Peter and Andrew
5 God in three Persons
6 Holy Thursday that begins the Triduum
7 Unclothed
8 Smelter input
9 Describes certain letters from the bishops
10 False teaching
11 Garlic-flavored mayonnaise
12 Valuable collection
13 Passover meal
18 Polish place
22 Crafty
23 The Friars ___
24 Saw
25 Ascends
26 Routine
27 Western pact
30 Politician Kefauver
33 You may be out on one
34 David married his widow
35 Mountain ridge
37 And so forth
38 ___ 360
39 Opera highlight
41 Charged particles
42 Like fast food, sometimes
43 Taunted
44 Elijah's successor
46 Velveeta maker
47 Pilsner
48 Muse of lyric poetry
50 End of Time?
52 Diocese on the French Riviera
55 Photo
56 "Ora ___ nobis"
57 Defensive weapon (abbr.)
58 Label
59 Abstract being

Answers can be found on page 15.

Tips to Strengthen Your Domestic Church in 2026

BY GREGORY POPCAK

(OSV News) – Did you know that your home is holy? It might not feel like it sometimes, but similar to the way God transforms common bread and wine into His precious body and blood, God uses sacramental grace to transform your messy family life into a "domestic church." This is a truly sacred place where you are meant to encounter God's grace in the everyday stuff of everyday life, learn how to care for one another with the love that flows from God's heart, and bring the world to Christ through your witness.

But what does it really mean to be a domestic church?

A domestic church is a household of persons who are, first, united to one another and God through the sacramental life of the Church and, second, committed to living out the Christian vision of love in their relationships with one another and the world. Let's break that down.

A household of persons who are united to God and one another through the sacramental life of the Church means that it is grace that makes a household a domestic church.

Of course, just living under the same roof doesn't make a domestic church happen any more than standing around in a physical church makes Mass happen. In both cases, the people who are gathered together need to be intentional about what they are doing. That's why, besides sharing a sacramental connection, a domestic church must also be committed to living out the Christian vision of love in their relationships with one another and the world.

The world offers a lot of different ideas about what love means. At its core, being a Christian disciple means living a life that promotes a uniquely Christian vision of love. For Christians, loving someone means, first, working to be in intimate communion – as the Trinity is revealed to us as the perfect communion of life and love – and, second, giving everything we have to help one another become everything God created us to be – like Jesus did.

The mission of every domestic church is to build grace-filled, loving, intimate households rooted in the commitment to work for one another's ultimate good.

Out of the different types of domestic churches that exist, households rooted in marriage rightfully enjoy a special pride of place, but not because they represent some kind of human ideal. They deserve special respect because they share a stronger sacramental connection and, as "icons of the Trinity," they are better equipped to witness to Trinitarian love.

That doesn't mean other households are lesser domestic churches, or that married households are automatically ideal. It just means there are different kinds of domestic churches – all of which share some sacramental connection, but each of which witnesses to Christian love in the manner that's most appropriate to its specific reason for being.

One reason people can be confused by the term "domestic church" is that, when we go to church, we usually celebrate a liturgy – namely, the Liturgy of the Eucharist. But families don't celebrate liturgy at home, do we? Actually, yes, we do! We celebrate the liturgy of domestic church life. Theologians tell us that Christian family life is liturgical. The liturgy of domestic church life is the liturgy over which we, the common priesthood (a vocation we received at baptism), preside.

Liturgy is an act of worship that God uses to heal the damage sin does to our relationships with him and others. The Liturgy of the Eucharist, over which the ministerial priesthood presides, facilitates communion with God and makes communion with others possible. The liturgy of domestic church life, presided over by the common priesthood, enables families to bring Christ home so that He can help us overcome the selfish and sinful ways we tend to treat one another and learn to care for others with God's love instead.

Similar to the way the Liturgy of the Eucharist is made up of different building blocks – that is, rites – we can say that the liturgy of domestic church life is made up of three parts: the "rite" of Christian relationships, the "rite" of family rituals, and the "rite" of reaching out. Each of these so-called rites involves certain practices that help families exercise their baptismal mission to be priests, prophets, and royals, respectively.

So, how do we live all that? Considering each of the three rites we've explained, think how you might implement the following traits that can strengthen your domestic church.

Rite of Christian Relationships

The rite of Christian relationships helps families live the priestly mission of baptism. When we work to overcome the selfish, sinful ways we treat one another; imitate Christ's sacrificial, incarnate love; and consecrate the things we do all day to Christ, it is then that family life becomes a "little way of holiness."

Here are some concrete practices:

• **Prioritize family time.** Because we can only form godly children if we spend meaningful time together every day, don't let outside activities compete with efforts to create a close-knit, family team.

• **Be extravagantly affectionate. Christ's love is generous and incarnate.** As a Christian household, imitate Christ by being generously and appropriately affectionate, affirming, and supportive of one another.

• Pope St. John Paul II said that Christian relationships are characterized by "mutual self-giving." **Work hard to respond to one another's needs promptly, generously, consistently, and cheerfully.**

• **Practice discipleship discipline in the home**. As St. John Bosco taught, reject harsh punishments and focus on teaching, supporting, and encouraging godly behavior through "reason, religion, and loving kindness."

Rite of Family Rituals

The rite of family rituals equips families to live the prophetic mission of baptism. When families work, play, talk, and pray together every day, they witness to the ways Christians relate to work, leisure, others, and faith.

• **Work rituals**. Each day, instead of dividing and conquering, make time to do at least some household chores together. Don't think of chores as just "things that have to get done." They are opportunities to learn to be a team and take good care of one another.

• **Play rituals**. Every day make a point to play together, enjoy one another's company, and model healthy ways to celebrate your life together.

• **Talk rituals**. Several times a week have meaningful conversations (not lectures) about faith, values, how God is showing up, and how to take better care of one another.

• **Prayer rituals**. Pray together as a family throughout each day. Relate to Jesus as another member of the family. Regularly praise Him and ask for His help.

Rite of Reaching Out

The rite of reaching out equips families to live the royal mission of baptism. We reign with Christ by serving with Him.

• **Take good care of others in the home**. Authentic Christian service begins with caring generously for the people under our roof.

• **Think about others even when at home**. As a family, donate gently used items, look for ways to help neighbors, and make your home a place where others can enjoy godly fun and fellowship. Regularly engage in charitable service together as a family.

• **Implement kind and thoughtful attitudes and use good manners in and outside the home**. As a family, be conscious of leaving people happier than you found them.

Every family has strengths and areas for growth. Incorporating this vision and these practices will help strengthen your domestic church in the new year.

Dr. Gregory Popcak is the founder and executive director of the Pastoral Solutions Institute, an organization dedicated to helping Catholics find faith-filled solutions to tough marriage, family, and personal problems.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

WHAT'S HAPPENING? highlights upcoming events from around the diocese. Discover more Catholic events or share your own at todayscatholic.org/event. To feature your event and gain more exposure, call us at (260) 399-1449 to learn about space options.

Youth/Young Adult Minister Coffee Meetings
Monday, January 12 (Fort Wayne)
10 – 11:30 a.m.
Crescendo Café at the Pearl
258 W. Main St.
Wednesday, January 14 (South Bend)
1 – 2:30 p.m.
Chicory Cafe, 105 E. Jefferson Blvd.

Come together with youth and young adult ministers from across our diocese, including full-time, part-time, and volunteer leaders, as we gather to discuss ministry trends, upcoming events, and ways to better support our youth and their families.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15
Theology on Tap
6:30 –8:30 p.m.
SOUTH BEND – Come join us at The Public House, 330 Ironworks Ave., as we explore the pressing current topics channeled through the wisdom of the Doctors of the Church. Topics include dignity of the persons, mental health, moral theology, and much more!

SATURDAY, JANUARY 17
Most Precious Blood School Trivia Night
6 –9 p.m.
FORT WAYNE – Most Precious Blood will be holding a Trivia Night at 1529 Barthold St. Doors to the gym open at 6 p.m., with trivia starting at 7 p.m. Tables are $100 and seat up to 10 people. Adult beverages will be available for purchase, with drinks provided by Tower Tavern. This is a 21-and-over event. To register, please call Angela Gernhardt in the school office at 424-4832 or email office2@preciousblood.org.

MONDAY, JANUARY 19
Eighth-Grade Girls Convent Field Trip
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
MISHAWAKA – The Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration would like to extend an invitation for the eighth-grade girls who are homeschooled or who attend public schools to come to the Motherhouse in Mishawaka, Indiana. Our goal is to give your students a glimpse into religious life as they continue to grow in faith and understanding of God's will in their lives. Go to bit.ly/ssfpafieldtrip to register and for more information. Each parish/family is responsible for transportation and lunch. Note: Catholic schools who wish to register are asked to register as a school through a separate form.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7
EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER TRAININGS
9 a.m. – 12 p.m.
South Bend: St. Joseph Parish (226 N. Hill St.)
Fort Wayne: St. Charles Borromeo Parish (4916 Trier Rd.)

New and current extraordinary ministers of holy Communion are invited to attend a free training organized by the diocesan Office of Worship. Advanced registration is required. For details and to register, please visit diocesefwsb.org/trainings.

LECTOR TRAININGS
New and current lectors are invited to attend a free training organized by the diocesan Office of Worship. Advanced registration is required. For details and to register, please visit diocesefwsb.org/trainings

Fort Wayne: Saturday, February 21
9 a.m. – 12 p.m.
Our Lady of Good Hope Parish (7215 St. Joe Rd.)
Registration deadline: Wednesday, February 18

South Bend: Saturday February 28
9 a.m. – 12 p.m.
Holy Cross Parish (1050 Wilber St.)
Registration deadline: Wednesday, February 25

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

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REST IN PEACE

Fort Wayne
Ola Irby, 82, St. Peter

Huntington
William F. Christman, 98, SS. Peter and Paul

Mishawaka
Sharon Marie Dewey, 83, St. Bavo

Ray E. Staples Sr., 84, St. Bavo

New Haven
Gerald Bendele, 83, St. John the Baptist

Patricia "Patti" Coyne, 82, St. Louis

Marilyn Smith, 97, St. Louis

Pierceton
Aurelio "Art" De La Cruz, 82, St. Francis Xavier

South Bend
Charles P. Fricano, 84, Christ the King

Rosemary Toepp, 95, Christ the King

Wabash
Joann Rauh, 94, St. Bernard

Send obituaries to obituaries@diocesefwsb.org.

Sister Joan Fisher of the Poor Handmaids Dies at Age 95

BY TODAY'S CATHOLIC

Sister Joan Kathleen Fisher (formerly Sister Colette) of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ entered the final stage of her life's journey on earth and passed away at Catherine's Cottage in Donaldson on Saturday, December 27, at the age of 95.

Her parents, Ellis Fisher and Catherine (Irle), welcomed two daughters, Joan Kathleen and Rosemary, to their family. She is survived her niece, Kymm Ivy, and her nephews, Robert Haber and Michael Haber.

Sister Joan was born on July 9, 1930, in Fort Wayne. She was inspired by her early educators, members of the Poor Handmaids, and knew she wanted to be a sister, so she entered the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ community in Donaldson on November 21, 1948, and professed her first vows on June 25, 1951.

Sister Joan's life theme was to "celebrate the journey," and indeed she celebrated her life's journey in many varied ways. Following her profession, she completed education at Alverno College (B.A.) in Milwaukee, St. Francis College (M.S.) in Fort Wayne, and obtained various certifications for Montessori teacher and parish ministry. She ministered as an elementary teacher at St. Joseph School in Mishawaka; St. Mary School in Trenton, Illinois; Angel Guardian Orphanage in Chicago; and Our Lady of Perpetual Help School in Hammond. She served as a Montessori teacher at St. Mary Parish in Fort Wayne, and it was in that last ministry she witnessed a close look at poverty experienced by inner city children. This opportunity opened a new journey to minister with the poor and marginalized as she learned that was where God was leading her heart and energy.

She was a staunch advocate for those most in need and instrumental in founding the Daystar Program in Cairo, Illinois, in 1978. The Daystar program brought hope to the poor, the elderly, and the disadvantaged, and it still continues today. In 1997, Sister Joan Fisher saw that the Gary area needed a center to reach out to women and children experiencing homelessness. Along with Sister Peg Spindler, CSA, Sister Joan opened Sojourner Truth House in Gary to provide a safe and welcoming place for clients. Today, the Sojourner Truth House ministry is thriving and is a village of hope that empowers women and children.

Sister Joan was also director of the Poor Handmaid Associate Community from 1986-92, sparking a wonderful beginning of a spiritual family of St. Katharina Kasper.

In 2002, Sister Joan moved to the Poor Handmaid motherhouse to minister to her mother who then lived at Catherine Kasper Nursing Home. In 2006, Sister Joan was asked to become a member of the Catherine's Cottage Supportive Community with other Poor Handmaid Sisters. Sister Joan's "yes" to a new door in her life's journey was a blessing to all members of the Cottage Community as she shared a beautiful smile, compassion, and her youthful spirit.

During her time at the Cottage, Sister Joan continued outreach to the poor as she sewed clothes bags (lots of them!) and delivered them to the Women's Care Center in Plymouth.

Sister Joan lived a life of joyful service, and in her autobiography, she wrote: "My life with its ups and downs is in fact a life centered in God whom I am getting to see … and rejoice and sing and love Him with all my heart as He loves me."

Visitation for Sister Joan will be held on Monday, January 12, at the Catherine Kasper Convent Chapel in Donaldson at 4:30 p.m. A wake service will follow beginning at 7 p.m. The chapel will also play host to a Mass of Christian Burial on Tuesday, January 13, at 10:30 a.m. with visitation to be held half an hour beforehand. The Mass will be livestreamed at poorhandmaids.org/live. Memorial contributions may be made at poorhandmaids.org.


WEEK OF PRAYER FOR
CHRISTIAN UNITY
ECUMENICAL
PRAYER
SERVICE
WITH BISHOP RHOADES
SUNDAY, JANUARY 18 | 5 P.M.
ST. JUDE | FORT WAYNE
DIOCESE OF
FORT WAYNE-SOUTH BEND