TODAY'S CATHOLIC

VOLUME 100, NO. 5 | FEBRUARY 1, 2026

100 YEARS OF SERVING THE DIOCESE OF FORT WAYNE-SOUTH BEND

TODAYSCATHOLIC.org

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

'To Be Pro-Life Is Not Optional'

Bishop Rhoades Gives Impassioned Homily Ahead of the March for Life in Indianapolis

Photos by Scott Warden

Students from Indiana University display pro-life signs during the Indiana March for Life in downtown Indianapolis on Thursday, January 22.

BY BISHOP KEVIN C. RHOADES

The following homily was given by Bishop Rhoades on Thursday, January 22, at the Mass for Life at the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis ahead of the annual Indiana March for Life.

I'd like to begin this homily by thanking all of you for coming to this Youth Rally and March for Life from throughout our state of Indiana. Your presence and your witness today are great testaments to the Gospel of Jesus, the Gospel of life. Special thanks to our wonderful Metropolitan Archbishop, Archbishop Thompson, and his staff of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis who worked so hard to prepare today's events, including this beautiful Mass. And thanks to my brother bishops who are able to be here today.

Throughout our nation today, people who believe in the dignity and sanctity of human life from the moment of conception are praying, marching, and gathering for the cause of life. As Catholics of the United States, we celebrate a special Mass today to give thanks to God for the gift of human life. We do so on January 22, the date of the *Roe v. Wade* decision of the

MARCH FOR LIFE, page 8

Bishop Rhoades preaches the homily at the Mass for Life at the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis ahead of the March for Life on Thursday, January 22.

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

Find us on Facebook
facebook.com/todayscatholicFWSB

Follow us on X
@diocesefwsb

Follow us on Instagram
@diocesefwsb

Healing Hands Blessed at Saint Mary's College

Bishop Rhoades Celebrates Mass for School's Chapter of the Catholic Nurses' Association

BY ELYSE MALDONADO

Photos provided by Saint Mary's College

Bishop Rhoades blesses the stethoscopes of nursing students at Saint Mary's College during a Mass for the school's Catholic Nurses' Association on Friday, January 23.

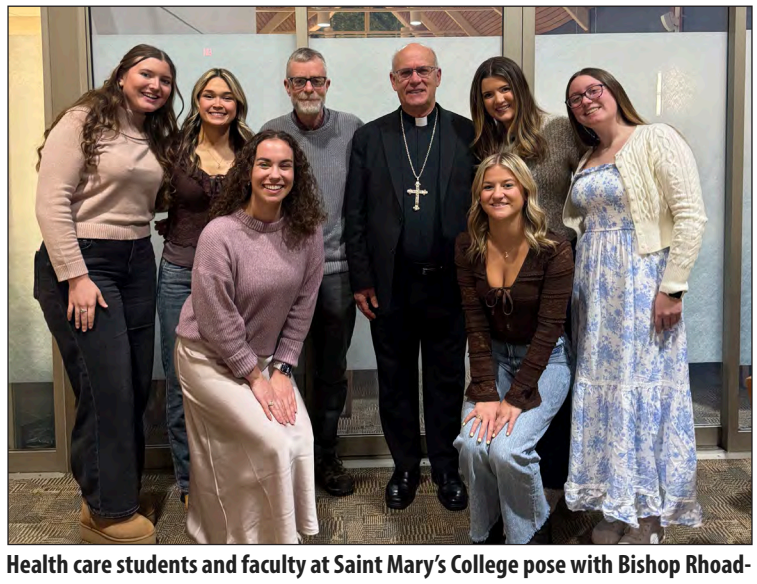
As Bishop Rhoades celebrated Mass in the Holy Spirit Chapel at Saint Mary's College on Friday, January 23, more than 70 nursing and health care students sat in attendance. The third annual Catholic Nurses' Association (CNA) Mass, celebrated this year on the feast of St. Marianne Cope, brought students together from health care programs across campus.

"Vocation" is a word many Saint Mary's students use to describe their pursuit of a nursing degree. United by a shared desire to serve others, CNA is a student-led organization dedicated to fostering a community where members can deepen their faith while preparing for a lifetime of vocational care.

That understanding of health care as a calling was central to Bishop Rhoades' homily, which reflected on the life of St. Marianne Cope, a Catholic sister who cared for St. Damian of Molokai during his final days with leprosy. Despite the personal risk, she willingly offered herself and her community in response to a plea for help.

"Mother Marianne wasn't afraid," Bishop Rhoades said. "She enthusiastically committed herself and the six other sisters to go to Hawaii and care for the lepers."

Bishop Rhoades emphasized that authentic Christian love is not merely an emotion but something lived concretely through sacrifice and service, especially in care for the sick. Nurses, he added, attend not only to physical needs but also to spiritual ones by lifting patients up in prayer and offering hope amid uncertainty.



Health care students and faculty at Saint Mary's College pose with Bishop Rhoades at the reception following Mass.

"St. Marianne Cope brought love and joy to the lepers," Bishop Rhoades said. "Yes, she tended to their nursing needs, but she did other things. She fixed up and cleaned their rooms. She planted trees, shrubs, and flowers. She bought light and hope. Soon there was laughter in the community as she and the sisters brought sports, games, and music into their lives."

CNA's mission is deeply rooted in the health care legacy of the Sisters of the Holy Cross. The sisters began their ministry in health care in 1861, responding to the Indiana governor's request to care for wounded soldiers during the Civil War. By the war's end, approximately half of the community had served as nurses, marking the beginning of an enduring commitment to healing that CNA seeks to honor today.

Molly Gower, vice president for mission at Saint Mary's, said this tradition continues to form students' understanding of health care as a vocation.

"Inspired by the Sisters of the Holy Cross, the college supports students in understanding health care as a vocation of service that honors human dignity," Gower told Today's Catholic. "Through the mentorship of extraordinary faculty and a strong core curriculum, students learn to approach their care for others with seriousness, compassion, and a commitment to the common good."

During the Mass, Bishop Rhoades blessed the students' stethoscopes. The blessing emphasizes the connection between faith and practice, embodying CNA's motto of serving as "God's hands and feet."

"It feels like God's hand on my hands as I go to my patients," said Francesca Munaretto, a senior nursing major and president of CNA. "Our tools are used to help care for and heal other people, and this blessing is a reminder that God is working through me and through those tools."

Munaretto added that the blessing offers comfort amid the pressures of clinicals.

"Clinicals can be stressful sometimes," she said. "Having my stethoscope blessed is a reminder that God is with me."

Munaretto and CNA's officers have worked to create frequent opportunities for nursing students to gather, pray, and build relationships across class years. Recent CNA activities have included rosary making, writing Christmas cards to oncology patients at Saint Joseph Medical Center, and packing baby supplies for local mothers in need.

Audrey Litkowski, a junior nursing major and vice president of CNA, said she chose Saint Mary's specifically for its Catholic approach to nursing education.

"I think it is so important to emphasize that we are able to serve others because He first served us," Litkowski told Today's Catholic. "We can only go out into the world to help and heal because we get our strength from Him."

Bishop Rhoades encouraged students to ask for the intercession of St. Marianne Cope, whose stamina and joy flowed from her prayer life and her devotion to the Holy Eucharist.

"She gave her life and love for God and His beloved children with incredible dedication," he said. "For future nurses, health care workers, and speech-language pathologists, St. Marianne Cope is a wonderful example."

Following the Mass, students, faculty, and Bishop Rhoades gathered for a catered dinner and reception, extending the sense of community fostered by the Mass. For many students, the opportunity to meet and spend time with the shepherd of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend especially meaningful, particularly for those who are not from Indiana or who may not have previously encountered him.

With approximately 150 active members, the Catholic Nurses' Association continues to grow, shaped by tradition and committed to a vocation that unites healing hands with hearts formed by Christ.

CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Pope Leo XIV gives his homily during an evening prayer service at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome on Sunday, January 25, concluding the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Pope Leo Concludes Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

BY CAROL GLATZ

ROME (CNS) – All Christians are called to invite everyone to trust in Christ, who enlightens and consoles, Pope Leo XIV said as he closed the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity on Sunday, January 25, during an ecumenical evening prayer service at Rome's Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls.

"Every authentic encounter with the Lord is, in fact, a transformative moment that grants a new vision and a new direction for the task of building up the Body of Christ," the pope said.

Every year, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity "invites us to renew our commitment to this great mission, bearing in mind that the divisions among us, while they do not prevent the light of Christ from shining, nonetheless make the face which must reflect it to the world less radiant," he said.

As the service began, Orthodox Metropolitan Polykarpos of Italy and Anglican Bishop Anthony Ball, the archbishop of Canterbury's representative to the Holy See, joined Pope Leo in descending the stairs under the main altar to pray before the relics of St. Paul. Several leaders and representatives of numerous churches and Christian communions worldwide attended the prayer service, including Armenian Orthodox Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, the representative of the Armenian Apostolic Church to the Holy See,

The theme for the 2026 celebration of the week was inspired by St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians (4:4), "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling."

"We are one! We already are! Let us recognize it, experience it, and make it visible!" Pope Leo said in his homily.

The synodal journey of the Catholic Church, which is and must be ecumenical, he said, "is a path for growing together in mutual knowledge of our respective synodal structures and traditions."

"As we look toward the 2,000th anniversary of the passion, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus in 2033, let us commit ourselves to further developing ecumenical synodal practices and to sharing with one another who we are, what we do, and what we teach," the pope said.

The mission of all Christians today is "to proclaim Christ and to invite everyone to place their trust in Him," he said. This shared task is to "say humbly and joyfully to the world: 'Look to Christ! Come closer to Him! Welcome His word that enlightens and consoles!'"

Pope Leo underlined the importance of celebrating the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in Iznik, Turkey, in November with representatives of so many Christian traditions.

"Reciting the Nicene Creed together in the very place where it was formulated was a profound and unforgettable testimony to our unity in Christ," he said. "May the Holy Spirit find in us docile minds even today, so that we may proclaim the faith with one voice to the men and women of our time!"

Concluding his homily, Pope Leo prayed that "the seeds of the Gospel may continue to bear fruit on this continent in unity, justice, and holiness, for the benefit of peace among the peoples and nations of the whole world.

OSV News photo/Simone Risoluti, Vatican Media

Pope Leo XIV, center, leads an ecumenical evening prayer service at Rome's Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls on Sunday, January 25, as he closed the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

PUBLIC SCHEDULE OF

BISHOP KEVIN C. RHOADES

Veritatem In Caritate

(Truth in Charity)

There are no public events on Bishop Rhoades' schedule this week.

Pope: Let Humans, Not AI, Lead Communication Efforts

BY CAROL GLATZ

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Humanity must not allow technology, especially AI, to obscure, exploit, or suppress human voices, needs, knowledge, talents, creativity, and critical thinking abilities, Pope Leo XIV wrote in his message for the World Day of Communications.

Algorithms designed to maximize engagement on social media can lock people into "bubbles" of easy consensus and rage, weakening people's ability to listen and think critically and increasing polarization, the pope wrote.

"Added to this is a naively uncritical reliance on artificial intelligence as an omniscient 'friend,' a dispenser of all information, an archive of all memory, an 'oracle' of all advice," which can also further erode the ability to understand what things really mean and to think analytically and creatively, he wrote.

> "Giving up the creative process and surrendering our mental capacities and imagination to machines ... means hiding our face and silencing our voice."
>
> **POPE LEO XIV**

The pope's message was released on Saturday, January 24, the feast of St. Francis de Sales, patron saint of journalists. The Vatican and most dioceses will celebrate the World Day of Communications on May 17, the Sunday before Pentecost.

The theme for the Church's 60th celebration of World Day of Communications is "Preserving human voices and faces," which the Dicastery for Communication announced last September.

The theme underlines the pope's focus on the need to respect the human person and each person's God-given uniqueness and diversity.

The challenge, he wrote, "is not technological, but anthropological. Protecting faces and voices ultimately means protecting ourselves."

The main concern is not what "machines" or technology can or will be able to do, Pope Leo wrote, "but what we can and will be able to do, growing in humanity and knowledge, with the wise use of such powerful tools at our service."

The heart of the problem, he wrote, is the human temptation to passively accept the fruits of knowledge without being an integral part of the technological process, without doing the needed research, and without being held accountable and responsible regarding their use.

"Giving up the creative process and surrendering our mental capacities and imagination to machines means burying the talents we have received to grow as people in relation to God and others," he wrote. "It means hiding our face and silencing our voice."

If people replace real human relationships with AI-trained systems, where "everything is made in our image and likeness," he wrote, people can build a "world of mirrors" and be robbed of the opportunity "to encounter others, who are always different from us, and with whom we can and must learn to engage."

And finally, he warned about the danger of having a "handful of companies" be in control of so much data and be able to "subtly influence behavior and even rewrite human history – including the history of the Church – often without us even realizing it."

What needs to be done, he wrote, is "not stop digital innovation but to guide it, to be aware of its ambivalent nature," and to "raise our voices in defense of human beings, so that these tools can truly be integrated as our allies."

Sacred Spaces Project Celebrates Beauty on ND Campus

BY EILEEN BOND

"I would actually credit my time here in undergrad as the first major domino on my pathway to becoming Catholic," Noah Bradon told Today's Catholic, calling his time at the University of Notre Dame "formational." Feeling compelled to convert to Catholicism after graduation, Bradon now serves the university as director of communications and executive director of the McGrath Institute for Church Life.

Recently, Bradon has been hard at work on a new initiative that shares the beauty of the university's campus. He describes the Sacred Spaces of Notre Dame Project as an "invitation and reminder to the Notre Dame community." Bradon told Today's Catholic that the goal of the project is "rekindling wonder, in a sense, for people who might benefit most from an encounter with the sacred."

Wanting to showcase the university's storied campus, Bradon hopes the project will remind others that Notre Dame has been set apart as a place for good – one that is "dedicated to a higher purpose than itself," Bradon said. It should serve as a reminder of what is at the core of Notre Dame's Catholic identity. It is a place where God is ever-present, and Bradon invites the community to come and reflect at some of the 13 "sacred spaces" the project highlights.

Since the project involves a campus pilgrimage designed to exhibit the many sacred spaces that make up the university's campus, Bradon took the time to show Today's Catholic a few of the places on which the project hopes to shine a light.

The walk began outside the Main Building, which serves as the administration building for the university. Better known for its golden dome, the building was rebuilt in 1879 after the original burned down. In 1882, the construction was capped off with a golden statue of Mary that stands 19-feet tall atop the dome, venerating the university's namesake, as Notre Dame is French for "Our Lady."

Directly outside the Main Building is the Sacred Heart of Jesus statue. Arms outstretched, Jesus is symbolizing His openness to all and His love for everyone. "It is a visual reminder of Notre Dame's sacred identity," Bradon explained. When looking at the campus aerially, the sidewalks form the shape of a heart with the statue as the point. This is meant to remind others of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Next, Bradon walked toward the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, which is almost an exact replica of the grotto in France where Mary visited St. Bernadette 18 times in 1858. It even contains a stone from the actual grotto in Lourdes. Dozens of candles flickered while people surrounded the grotto to pray.

"They're sacred not just because someone decided they're sacred but because they're places of devotion," Bradon explained. "That's actually the cool thing about all these spaces: They are all living places of devotion."

The historic Log Chapel was actually the first building on what became Notre Dame's campus. The one standing there today was recreated after the original burned down. This single-room chapel is usually reserved for private events, Bradon explained. It's the same place where his daughter was baptized, so it holds a special place in his heart. He hopes the Sacred Spaces Project will have the same lasting impression on the rest of the Notre Dame community – namely, by "encouraging people to engage with campus in a very different way," hoping they will have their own encounters with the sacred and share their reflections.

The Basilica of the Sacred Heart serves as the primary place of worship on the University's campus, and according to Bradon, it is also where the football team celebrates holy Mass before every home game.

"There are daily Masses, there are daily confessions," Bradon said as he opened the door to the basilica. "It's such a powerful visual representation of what Notre Dame really means to be: a university dedicated to Our Lady." The basilica contains beautiful depictions of scenes from the Bible on its walls and ceiling, and behind the ornate tabernacle lies a relic from the manger of Baby Jesus.

Bradon said he hopes the Sacred Spaces Project helps make the campus "a place that helps cultivate wonder." A multi-phase project, Bradon plans to premiere a short film later this year, which highlights an alumnus who experienced what she says was a powerful intercession at the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes on Notre Dame's campus. These are the sorts of experiences Bradon said he wants to bring to others through the sacred spaces of Notre Dame.

Photos by Eileen Bond

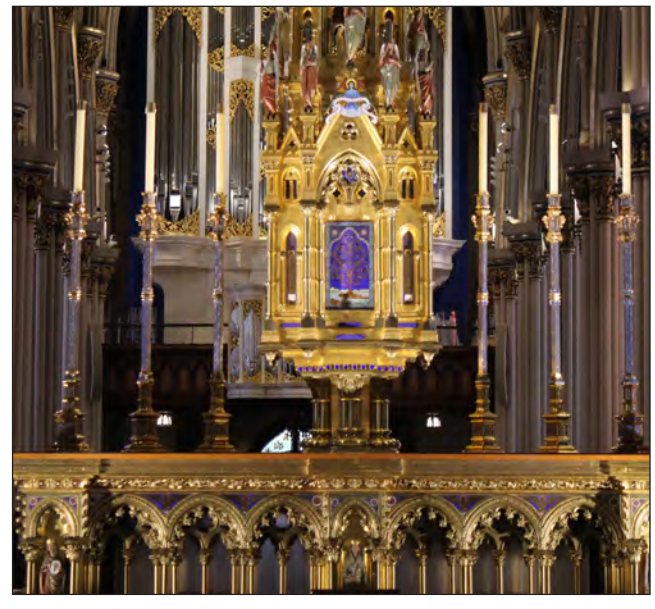
A 19-foot-tall statue of Mary stands atop the Main Building.

In the Sacred Heart of Jesus statue, Christ opens His arms to all.

The Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes is a popular prayer spot on campus.

The Log Chapel was rebuilt after a fire destroyed the original building.

A view of the steeple at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart.



The tabernacle inside the basilica holds the Blessed Sacrament.

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.

Engaging Electives Invigorate Luers Students

From Choir to Theater, Art to Business, Choosing Classes that Interest Them Help Young People Tap into Their Talents

BY LYLA KELTY

Photos provided by Bishop Luers High School

The Bishop Luers Choir sings during a recent all-school Mass.

Though Bishop Luers High School has remained relatively small since its opening in the late 1950s, the school is still constantly improving to better accommodate its students. One way it is better engaging its student body is through the elective courses being offered to help students contribute their individual talents to the school community. Bishop Luers faculty and administration have continued to expand and shift these elective offerings.

Choir has always been a staple at Bishop Luers. The school offers three different levels: freshman, intermediate, and advanced choir. All are popular choices at Luers. As a student body, we see the choir most at Masses. They lead with their charismatic vocals.

Kris Andorfer, the music and show choir director, has worked at Bishop Luers for nine years. He is also a Bishop Luers alum, graduating in 2010. He shares that the choir is important to him because "we have the opportunity to work together as a team, just like a sport."

Along with performing at Masses, the choir performs during the annual Christmas and spring concerts. They perform with Bishop Dwenger at a choir festival every February, and you can hear them at every home football game singing the national anthem. They are also scheduled to sing at an upcoming Komets hockey game.

In class, the choir students work on achieving the highest level of excellence that is possible for students. Senior Elizabeth Stachofsky said: "Choir class is my escape for the day. I love being able to sing with my friends and not stress about any schoolwork. I think everyone should consider choir because it is so fun and a very low maintenance class."

Electives can be a nice relief throughout the school day for students. Bishop Luers strives to update and expand electives to accommodate students' preferences and enjoyment. Andorfer suggests that students "take a chance! Everyone is going to experience challenges and failures in life, and in choir we specifically learn from or failures and learn how to rise to a level we never thought possible!"

Apart from choir, Bishop Luers has an excellent performing arts program. Throughout the school day, Luers offers theater arts, theater production, and other advanced theater courses through Purdue University. These courses help students build improvisation skills, creativity, and team building in fun and creative ways.

"What began primarily as performance-based coursework has expanded to include acting, technical theater, directing, design, vocal work, and much more," said Karlene Krouse, the performing arts department chair.

Theater arts and theater production are popular elective choices. Theater Production is a community-based class where students learn to put on a complete play with costumes, stage directions, and all other aspects of producing a show. The students taking Theater Production perform for feeder schools and help younger students get into character by doing their makeup and making their own costumes.

Krouse, who has worked at Bishop Luers for 41 years, said she has loved to watch students discover "their confidence, creativity, and leadership through theater." Past students have been featured in Broadway shows and nominated for Tony Awards, performing in local community theatre and becoming playwrights, theater directors, and educators.

Bishop Luers also offers Piano Lab as an elective, which is a unique experience for the Knights student body. Learning piano helps students grow their musical abilities. Piano Lab and any other theater courses are exciting even for students who aren't interested in the performing arts.

"These classes now support students with different interests and learning styles, whether they're onstage, behind the scenes, developing musical skills or through the dual credit giving students a head start on their college career," Krouse said.

Not only does Luers offer electives in music and theater, but there are also other classes that help students prepare for real-world experiences, including personal finance, leadership development, introduction to business, introduction to accounting, advance accounting, psychology, and sociology. These courses are thoroughly enjoyed by students. Over the years, these courses have been modified to highlight the importance of each subject in fun and educational ways.

Students who won art awards pose with their work. They are, from left, sophomore Victoria Koenig, junior Nazaria Coates, and sophomore Stephanine Martinez.

Lastly, Bishop Luers has a strong art program that recently has seen some students receive impressive rewards. At the 2026 Scholastic Art Awards, junior Nazaria Coates was awarded the Silver Key for poetry and honorable mention for mixed media art. Sophomore Victoria Koenig was awarded a Silver Key for graphic design and honorable mention for painting. Sophomore Stephanine Martinez was awarded a Silver Key for sculpture.

Bishop Luers offers multiple courses in art that encompass many different principles throughout the semester, including intro and advanced 2D art, which showcases students' abilities to create life on paper. In prior years, students have enjoyed creating pop-art self-portraits and collage paintings that reflect their favorite things and hobbies. We also offer intro to 3D art and advanced 3D art. Students in these classes enjoy sculpting different characters and molding with clay and plaster. These art courses offer a variety of projects using different techniques and materials. When visiting Bishop Luers, it is hard to miss the incredible student artwork that line the hallways.

These elective courses help round out a student's day to make it more enjoyable, as it is well known that students work better in classes that pertain to what they are interested in. Electives are so important for students, especially ones that are exploring what they want to do for college. High school students are the future of this world, and it is important to treat them as such. Growing and adapting electives at Bishop Luers has made academic and social life much more enjoyable for students and teachers. This creates a stronger atmosphere and a better day at school! At Bishop Luers, you are sure to find something you enjoy – and good people to share it with.

As Krouse said, "You don't have to be experienced to belong here."

Lyla Kelty is a senior at Bishop Luers High School.

NEWS BRIEFS

MINNESOTA ARCHBISHOP CALLS FOR 'CONVERSION OF HEARTS'

OSV News photo/Tim Evans, Reuters

A young woman becomes emotional at a makeshift memorial in Minneapolis on Sunday, January 25, at the site where Alex Pretti was fatally shot by federal agents trying to detain him on Saturday, January 24. Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis, along with other Church leaders, have called for peace amid growing tensions. In a January 25 statement, Archbishop Hebda asked "all people of goodwill to join me in prayer today for Alex Jeffrey Pretti, for his parents, and for his loved ones." In his homily at an evening Mass for peace on January 25 at the Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul, Archbishop Hebda underscored the need for Christians to make Jesus' "light shine" in the darkness and seek their own conversion of heart.

3 U.S. Bishops Applaud House for Supporting Pregnant Women

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) – Three U.S. bishops who chair committees of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops are applauding two pieces of legislation designed to support pregnant women through an array of resources, including continued access to higher education. "We were grateful to see the U.S. House of Representatives pass the Pregnant Students' Rights Act and the Supporting Pregnant and Parenting Women and Families Act," said Archbishop Shelton J. Fabre of Louisville, Kentucky, Bishop David M. O'Connell of Trenton, New Jersey, and Bishop Daniel E. Thomas of Toledo, Ohio, in a January 23 joint statement. The three prelates respectively chair the USCCB's committees on Domestic Justice and Human Development, Catholic Education, and Pro-Life Activities. The Pregnant Students' Rights Act would require colleges and universities that participate in federal student aid programs to provide both prospective and current students with information on rights and resources for carrying a baby to term while enrolled. The Supporting Pregnant and Parenting Women and Families Act would allow states to use low-income support funds for pregnancy centers that support protecting the life of the mother and her unborn child, and that offer services such as pregnancy testing, prenatal and pregnancy education, counseling, diapers, baby clothes, and other material resources.

To Know God, We Must Welcome Jesus' Humanity, Pope Says

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Pope Leo XIV said that God is revealed through Jesus' humanity, not solely through a "channel of transmission of intellectual truths." It is through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that one can come to know God. Pope Leo continued his series of talks during his weekly general audience on Wednesday, January 21, revisiting Vatican Council II with a speech on Dei Verbum, the Church's teaching on divine revelation. By knowing Jesus, the pope said we can enter into a relationship with God as His adopted children, which was revealed through Jesus' humanity. "In order to know God in Christ, we must welcome His integral humanity: God's truth is not fully revealed where it takes something away from the human, just as the integrity of Jesus' humanity does not diminish the fullness of the divine gift," he said. "It is the integral humanity of Jesus that tells us the truth of the Father." He went on further to say that in becoming man, Jesus "is born, heals, teaches, suffers, dies, rises again, and remains among us. Therefore, to honor the greatness of the Incarnation, it is not enough to consider Jesus as the channel of transmission of intellectual truths." God communicates with us, the pope said, and at the same time, Jesus is the Word of God incarnate. Through this corporal form, the truth of God is revealed.

Pope Evaluating Trump's Invitation to Join Board of Peace

ROME (OSV News) – Vatican officials are weighing whether Pope Leo XIV should accept an invitation from the U.S. President Donald Trump to join his newly announced Board of Peace, a body meant to oversee governance and reconstruction in Gaza. Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin confirmed on Wednesday, January 21, that the Holy See received the invitation and is reviewing it carefully. Speaking to journalists in Rome, Parolin said the decision "requires some time" and stressed that any Vatican involvement would not include financial contributions. The board, unveiled by the White House on January 16, is part of Trump's "Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict" and would oversee the plan's second phase. Membership would typically last three years, though media reports say some countries have been offered permanent seats in exchange for major financial commitments. Norway and France have already declined to participate. Cardinal Parolin noted that the Holy See's unique status calls for special consideration and reiterated the Vatican's call to respect international law and reduce growing tensions between the U.S. and Europe.

Russia Aims to 'Freeze' Ukrainians, Prelate Says

KYIV, Ukraine (OSV News) – Russia's latest missile strikes on Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities deliberately targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure and show clear signs of crimes against humanity, according to Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Speaking as Ukraine entered the 206th week of Russia's full-scale invasion, Major Archbishop Shevchuk said attacks have intensified along the entire front line, with Kyiv emerging as a major epicenter. He noted that 12 missiles struck the capital in a single assault, a scale not seen for months. Major Archbishop Shevchuk said the goal is to destroy Ukraine's energy system and freeze the population during winter, warning that power outages quickly turn apartment buildings into deadly "cold traps." Despite the hardship, he praised civilians for their resilience and faith, saying attacks have only strengthened national unity.

New Partnership Aims to Support Church's Ministry to Migrants, Refugees

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) – On Wednesday, January 21, a group including Catholic organizations announced a new partnership – The Catholic Immigrant Prophetic Action Project – that aims to assist the Catholic Church in the United States in organizing a robust response on behalf of migrants and refugees in the country, including those with legal status who are affected by mass deportation efforts. The project – a partnership between the Hope Border Institute, a group that works to apply the perspective of Catholic social teaching in policy and practice to the U.S.-Mexico border region and the Center for Migration Studies – aims to assist the U.S. Catholic Church in offering a robust response on behalf of migrants and refugees through research, communications, and other support. The project will directly support dioceses and archdioceses to strengthen the Church's response to mass deportations, organizers said. On a call announcing the partnership, Bishop Brendan J. Cahill of Victoria, Texas, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Migration, pointed to the "special pastoral message on immigration," issued by the bishops at their annual fall plenary. He said it "showed the unity of the bishops on the dignity, God-given, of every human person, and our almost unanimous desire to take that public."

White House Ends Federally Funded Research with Fetal Tissue from Elective Abortions

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) – The Trump administration on Thursday, January 22, announced a policy ending the use of fetal tissue from elective abortions in federally funded research. The National Institutes of Health announced that "funds will no longer be used to support research involving human fetal tissue from elective abortions. The policy applies across the NIH Intramural Research Program and all NIH-supported extramural research, including grants, cooperative agreements, other transaction awards, and research and development contracts." "NIH is pushing American biomedical science into the 21st century," NIH Director Jay Bhattacharya said in a statement. He said the decision is "about advancing science by investing in breakthrough technologies more capable of modeling human health and disease" and added that "under President Trump's leadership, taxpayer-funded research must reflect the best science of today and the values of the American people."

Chemical Abortion, Death Penalty Key Life Issues for ICC

BY VICTORIA ARTHUR

OSV News photo/Evelyn Hockstein, Reuters

An illustration shows a paper bag containing the mifepristone and misoprostol pills used for a chemical abortion, follow-up instructions and small warming packs.

As thousands joined the annual March for Life at both the state and national levels, the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) was tracking bills related to the dignity of human life in this year's rapidly moving legislative session.

A bill related to the regulation of chemical abortion as well as two measures aimed at introducing new death penalty methods are of prime concern for the ICC as the 2026 Indiana General Assembly reaches its halfway point.

"Upholding the profound dignity of the human person from conception to natural death is of critical importance to the Catholic Church, and that principle also guides the ICC in our policy work," said Alexander Mingus, executive director of the ICC, the official public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana. "Although we have seen great strides since the overturning of the Roe v. Wade decision, it's clear that there are still a lot of hearts and minds that need to be changed in our culture."

One such example is the ongoing debate over access to abortion in Indiana, particularly as it pertains to chemical abortion, also known as medication abortion. A measure moving through the Statehouse, Senate Bill 236, seeks additional oversight and regulation of abortion practices, including the use of mail-order abortion medications from other states.

In 2022, when the U.S. Supreme Court returned regulation of abortion to the states, Indiana placed significant restrictions on the practice that encompassed both surgical and chemical abortions.

While most abortions are now illegal in the state of Indiana, there are exceptions for fatal fetal anomalies, pregnancies resulting from rape or incest, or to save the life of the mother. Medication abortion, which involves the ingestion of two pills – mifepristone and misoprostol – over a 48-hour period, is not permitted past the 10th week of pregnancy for any reason and is prohibited by mail order from other states.

Yet increasing numbers of women in Indiana are seeking to obtain the combination of abortion pills from out-of-state sources. The author of Senate Bill 236, Senator Tyler Johnson (R-Leo), is an emergency room physician in northeast Indiana who shared his concerns about the safety of medication abortion during a recent hearing on his bill.

Johnson described how he had recently treated a woman in the emergency room suffering from serious complications of the abortion pills and how she said no one had warned her about the potential side effects, which can include severe pain and bleeding.

"These drugs aren't safe to be mailed across Indiana," Johnson said in his testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee on Wednesday, January 21. "They're not safe to be given over telehealth (calls). They're not safe to just randomly prescribe through an internet website. That's the heart of what we're getting to."

Senate Bill 236 also would allow for civil actions to be brought against manufacturers or distributors of abortion medications for what a plaintiff would consider personal injury or wrongful death from the use of the drugs.

In addition, the bill seeks to add oversight for terminated pregnancy reports (TPRs), which are routinely filed with the Indiana Department of Health for every abortion performed in the state. Senate Bill 236 proposes that TPRs, which keep patients' names confidential, also would go to the Office of the Inspector General.

Numerous opponents of the bill who testified before the committee, including some physicians, argued that the measure would have a chilling effect on doctors providing what they consider necessary medical care.

But the bill's co-author, Senator Liz Brown (R-Fort Wayne), maintained the opposite.

"The chilling effect will be on people who are providing abortions illegally and illegally prescribing and/or mailing these abortion pills into this state," Sen. Brown told the committee. "We're a pro-life state. We're always going to be a pro-life state as long as this legislature is the way it is today."

Despite the opposition to Senate Bill 236, the judiciary committee voted 7-4 to pass the measure and send it to the Indiana Senate floor.

In a recent ICC podcast, Mingus said he anticipates additional changes to the bill as the full Senate considers it.

"Conceptually, it's moving in the right direction," Mingus said. "If structured correctly, this bill will help close the gap on the regulation of chemical abortion for the sake of protecting women and pre-born babies."

Mingus and Roarke LaCoursiere, associate director of the ICC, are also carefully monitoring two bills aimed at expanding the methods that Indiana uses to carry out the death penalty.

Senate Bill 11, authored by Senator Mike Young (R-Indianapolis), proposes a firing squad as an alternative to the only current method of capital punishment in Indiana – lethal injection. Young argues that the high cost of the drugs involved, along with their limited shelf life, are complicating factors driving the need for an additional execution method.

The bill would authorize the death penalty to be carried out by firing squad if execution by lethal injection could not occur due to unavailability of the required drug – or if the condemned person requests it instead of lethal injection.

The ICC was among those testifying against the bill in a recent committee hearing. The measure never came up for a vote and has now stalled at the Statehouse.

OSV News photo/Federal Bureau of Prisons

A file photo shows the lethal-injection chamber at the federal correction facility in Terre Haute, Indiana.

But a more expansive death penalty bill is moving through the opposite chamber of the state legislature. House Bill 1119, authored by Representative Jim Lucas (R-Seymour), proposes nitrogen hypoxia – lethal gas – as an additional method of execution for Indiana, along with the firing squad.

The House Courts and Criminal Code Committee passed the bill on an 8-5 vote, sending it to the full House for additional debate.

The ICC strongly objected to the bill during the January 22 committee hearing. In her testimony, LaCoursiere reiterated the Catholic Church's opposition to the death penalty in any form and added that these proposed new methods only underscore the "brutality and savagery" of capital punishment.

Currently, only five states allow firing squad as a legal execution method: Idaho, Utah, Oklahoma, Mississippi, and South Carolina. An equal number permit the gas chamber: Alabama, Arizona, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Wyoming.

Although use of lethal gas is exceedingly rare even in the states that allow it, LaCoursiere pointed to a recent example in Alabama in which eyewitnesses reported a condemned man struggling for 30 minutes in the gas chamber before he was pronounced dead.

"(With nitrogen hypoxia), we would be asking the executioners to administer a method to humans that we do not even use to euthanize animals anymore due to the distress it causes them in the process," LaCoursiere said.

In their recent podcast, she and Mingus urged the Catholic faithful to stay engaged on these bills during this short session of the state legislature, which is set to conclude by the end of February.

"Above all, please pray for us and our state legislators and all those who are advocating for the dignity of human life," Mingus said.

To follow priority legislation of the ICC, visit indianacc.org. This website includes access to ICAN, the Indiana Catholic Action Network, which offers the Church's position on key issues. Those who sign up for ICAN receive alerts on legislation moving forward and ways to contact their elected representatives.

MARCH FOR LIFE, from page 1

U.S. Supreme Court, which legalized abortion throughout our country. Even though, thanks be to God, *Roe v. Wade* was overturned by the Supreme Court in July of 2022, we still gather on this day since we know that we still have much work to do to promote a culture of life in our country and in our state.

To be pro-life is not optional for us as Catholics. When Jesus taught us to love our neighbor and to love one another as He has loved us, He didn't make any exceptions. He even taught us to love our enemies. Love of neighbor does not admit of exceptions! The core of Catholic moral and social teaching is respect for the dignity of every person as a child of God. As Catholics, we are to be united as a community "of life and for life." Not only as a bishop but as a Catholic, I am proud of our Church's consistent and strong commitment to the defense of human life and dignity and the protection of the weak and vulnerable. I am proud of your strong commitment to the cause of life, motivated by your love for God and neighbor. It is a commitment to the dignity of human life in all its phases and conditions, as a gift from God.

In our first reading today, St. John wrote to the early Christians: "For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another, unlike Cain who belonged to the evil one and slaughtered his brother." We're all familiar with the story in the Book of Genesis about Cain killing his brother, Abel, out of envy – the first murder. After Cain murdered his brother, "The Lord asked Cain: 'Where is Abel your brother?'" Do you remember Cain's answer? He lied and said, "I do not know, am I my brother's keeper?" And then God said: "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground." This fratricide happened at the very dawn of history. That evil has continued and spread throughout history. How many attacks on human life have occurred since then and are happening today!

Cain tried to cover up his crime with a lie. Throughout history and today, all kinds of ideologies have tried to justify and disguise atrocious crimes against human beings. Cain refused to accept responsibility for his crime. "Am I my brother's keeper?" he asked. The answer should be "yes, I am." As fellow human beings created in the image and likeness of God, we are to be in solidarity with one another, especially with those who are weakest among us: the unborn, the elderly, the infirm, the disabled, the poor, the hungry, the homeless, migrants, refugees, victims of war and violence, and yes, even those who are on death row. There is a lot of indifference in the world to the plight of those who are vulnerable, whose lives are at risk. Pope Francis called this a "globalization of indifference." Many, perhaps without saying it aloud, cynically repeat what Cain said: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

St. John teaches most emphatically that we are to love one another. He wrote that Cain belonged to the evil one. How delighted Satan is when we are indifferent to the plight of our brothers and sisters in need, especially the little ones in their mothers' wombs. If we belong to Christ, and we do because of our baptism, we cannot be indifferent to our neighbor. We must recognize that we are our brother's keeper! Through everyday works of mercy, we can serve life. We bear witness to Christ every time we do a good deed and help a neighbor in need. St. John asked a rhetorical question in the reading today, a challenge to make our love active. He asked, "If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him?" This is practical Christian life. Our love for one another isn't just a feeling. To be real love, it must be shown by our actions. And so, St. John gives us a very direct exhortation. He writes, "Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth."

Think of the lives of the saints. That's what they did. And that's what the greatest of all the saints, the Queen of All Saints, teaches us. Immediately after conceiving the Son of God in her womb, she went to serve her elderly pregnant cousin, Elizabeth. The Gospel tells us she went in haste to visit her. What a beautiful and joyful encounter that was! And how amazing that the child in Elizabeth's womb, the unborn John the Baptist, leaped for joy at Mary's visitation to his mother, because Mary was carrying in her womb the Savior of the world.

Every one of us, like John the Baptist and like the Lord Jesus Himself, was once a child in our mother's womb. We didn't become human at the moment of our birth or become holy and precious, created in God's image, at some particular stage of development. In His wisdom and love, God transmitted His image to us when we were conceived. And He wants us to respect and protect this gift of life that He has given us. That's why He even gave us the specific commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." And, on the positive side, the great commandment that His Son gave us: "Love one another as I have loved you." It is right here at the altar that we see how much Jesus loves us: He loves us to the end: His body broken for us and His blood poured out for us in His sacrifice on the cross that is made present at every celebration of the Eucharist – truly an amazing mystery.

And Jesus nourishes us with His life-giving body and blood. He gives us the grace and strength to love as He loved, to serve our neighbors in need, and to bear witness to the Gospel of life with courage. May Mary, Our Blessed Mother, accompany us and intercede for us that we may be faithful disciples of her Son!

Photos by Scott Warden

Students carry the "Indiana March for Life" banner down Meridian Street in downtown Indianapolis near the city's Soldiers and Sailors Monument on Thursday, January 22. An estimated 1,500 people joined the state's annual March for Life. Students from several area high schools, including Bishop Luers, Bishop Dwenger, and the Chesterton Academy from Fort Wayne, as well as Saint Joseph from South Bend and Marian from Mishawaka participated in the march.

Students from Bishop Dwenger High School in Fort Wayne kneel in prayer during the Mass for Life at the Indiana Convention Center on Thursday, January 22.

Bishop Rhoades gives Communion to a student during the Mass for Life at the Indiana Convention Center ahead of the annual March for Life on Thursday, January 22.

Students from Bishop Luers High School in Fort Wayne hold hands in prayer during the Mass for Life at the Indiana Convention Center on Thursday, January 22.

Bishop Rhoades laughs with priests ahead of the Mass for Life.

Students from Saint Joseph High School in South Bend pose with their pro-life signs at the Indiana March for Life.

Bishop Luers students pose with Father Paolo Degasperi, the school's chaplain.

Students from Bishop Luers hold a flag representing the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend at the annual March for Life in downtown Indianapolis.

Students from Marian High School in Mishawaka pose near the Indiana Statehouse following the March for Life in Indianapolis.

Pro-Lifers Brave Cold to March in South Bend

BY TODAY'S CATHOLIC

Despite a schedule that was adjusted because of the freezing outdoor temperatures, dozens of pro-life supporters rallied at the March for Life South Bend on Friday, January 23. Co-sponsored by Right to Life Michiana and the St. Joseph Valley Chapter of the Knights of Columbus, the event included an indoor rally at the Knights' hall on Washington Street, a short march (to account for the weather), and a stuff-a-truck event to gather donations for local pregnancy resource centers.

Photos provided by Right to Life Michiana

Pro-life supporters carry banners while walking in the snow along Niles Avenue during the March for Life South Bend on Friday, January 23.

Volunteers pose for a photo during the stuff-a-truck event in South Bend on Friday, January 23. The event gathered donations of diapers, baby wipes, and other necessities for local pregnancy resource centers.

Dozens gather at the Knights of Columbus hall in South Bend before the city's March for Life.

Thousands Rally at National March for Life in D.C.

BY PETER JESSERER SMITH

OSV News photo/Mihoko Owada

A woman prays during the National Prayer Vigil for Life Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., on Thursday, January 22, the evening before the annual the March for Life.

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) – Tens of thousands of pro-life advocates descended on the March for Life demonstrating their strong motivation to give witness to the importance of protecting the right to life for the unborn. This year's march stressed the theme "Life is a Gift," but the event also showed visible cracks emerging in the movement's political vision and frustration with the Trump administration.

For Catholics attending the march from all corners of the United States, the motivations were as strong as ever.

Hallie Millerbernd, a senior nursing student at the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota, told OSV News this is her third March for Life. The multi-bus pilgrimage from there takes 60 nonstop hours, making it a real test of endurance.

She said the sight of "thousands of people of all ages carrying signs with different colored hats, singing songs, and chanting" inspired her. "It also showed me that there was hope for change and that there was a large movement against abortion."

Ruby Galatolo, who came to Washington from the Diocese of Orlando, Florida, said she has tried to come every year since her first march in 2010. The experience was a turning point in her life, seeing "so many young people here so happy and hopeful."

Gatalolo said she "never imagined that I would see the day when Roe v. Wade would be overturned," referring to the Supreme Court's 2022 Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization decision that returned the issue of abortion to lawmakers.

"Of course, there is still a long way to go," she said, adding that she continues to hope that ultimately abortion would become a thing of the past.

The Catholic Church was also strongly represented in January 22-23 vigil events held around the 53rd March for Life, with thousands attending the National Prayer Vigil for Life held at the national basilica in Washington, the Life Fest event put on by the Knights of Columbus and Sisters of Life in nearby Oxon Hill, Maryland, and the Life is VERY Good event hosted by the Diocese of Arlington at the Eagle-Bank Arena in Fairfax, Virginia.

In his homily at the National Prayer Vigil for Life's closing Mass on January 23, Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley, who, with the exception of the COVID limitations in 2021, has been to every March for Life since the first one in 1974, exhorted participants to "look for opportunities to be apostles of life building a civilization of love and ethic of care."

"We're here today to proclaim life is a gift. It's a precious gift from a loving God," said Cardinal O'Malley, archbishop emeritus of Boston. "Together we can protect and nurture that gift of life ... The antidote to abortion is love – love manifest in community, compassion, and solidarity."

Sister of Life Faustina Maria Pia told OSV News that she hoped the young people at Life Fest, which featured musical performances, Eucharistic adoration, a Eucharistic procession, Mass, confession, and testimonies – would realize the gift of their own life.

"Today is a day that we really want to make a strong impact on our nation, to witness to this beautiful sanctity of human life," she said of the event. "There's no more powerful way than to pray."

At the March for Life rally itself, March for Life president Jennie Bradley Lichter reminded the crowd that what has "saved so many lives and moved countless hearts" on the abortion issue over the years is the marchers' "unfailing hope," their "love for the littlest ones and for moms who need a hand," their joy, and "the sheer number of you who are here year after year."

But this year's March event showed that amid the cultural unity, there was political fraying within the pro-life movement itself.

Lichter herself introduced Vice President JD Vance, who spoke in person at the rally, while President Donald Trump gave a video message reminding attendees of his role in helping overturn Roe v. Wade – "the greatest victory in its history" – and thanking "every single one of you who's out on this winter day, a beautiful day – but it's winter, nevertheless – to stand up for the unborn."

However, while Lichter praised the administration's pro-life policies, it was Vance who brought up "the elephant in the room," which he called "a fear" that "not enough progress has been made."

Various pro-life advocates and groups had begun to raise criticism of the second Trump administration, following a string of pro-life disappointments, such as Trump's recent comments to House Republicans telling them to be "flexible" on the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits public funding of elective abortions, in negotiations on health care subsidies.

Vance touted the administration's past accomplishments, citing actions including expanded conscience protection for health care workers, and "policies that make family life possible," such as "Trump accounts," government-backed savings accounts for newborns under the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act."

Vance's speech was generally well received by the crowd, but some attendees chanted "Ban the abortion pill." Several national pro-life groups have called on the Trump-Vance administration to roll back the Biden administration's actions on mifepristone, a pill commonly but not exclusively used for early abortion, to the regulations in place during the previous Trump-Pence administration. But the administration has not delivered on this, while approving a new generic form of the pill.

OSV News photo/Leslie E. Kossoff

Pro-life advocates hold signs during the 53rd annual March for Life in Washington, D.C., on Friday, January 23. One man holds a sign displaying the image of Holy Cross Brother Columba O'Neill, the "Miracle Man of Notre Dame."

Vance, however, argued that the pro-life movement was better off today than it was 10 years ago, when Trump was first elected, and there would be disagreements within the movement about how best to achieve their goals.

But, in the hours following Vance's speech, Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, an organization that works to elect pro-life candidates to office, issued a statement rebuking his assertion by pointing out the comparison "reveals a harsh reality."

"The clearest measure of whether the pro-life movement is winning or losing is the number of abortions occurring each year," said Marjorie Dannenfelser, the group's president. "According to the latest statistics, there are at least 1.1 million abortions occurring in America annually post-Roe. This compares to 874,000 abortions in 2016 – a 30 percent increase."

"Because of the indispensable role President Trump played in the overturning of Roe, we have the opportunity to save lives and serve women," she said. "But it is because of the inaction of the Trump-Vance administration on abortion drugs that this opportunity isn't being realized – and abortions are going up, not down."

Shortly before the final prayer and sending off the thousands gathered to march and advocate for life, Lichter said she had a message from an early alumnus of the March for Life who could not be with them due to an overseas work commitment: Pope Leo XIV.

She read the pope's letter to the march's participants, imparting his papal blessing, and assuring them "of my spiritual closeness as you gather for this eloquent public witness to affirm that the protection of the right to life constitutes the indispensable foundation of every other human right."

After the final prayer, marchers – armed with a variety of signs with pro-life slogans – exited the rally space on the National Mall to walk through Washington's streets to the steps of the Supreme Court building.

A Celebration of Christ Our Light

HUMOR IN THE MIX

KEN HALLENIUS

Every year on February 2, we celebrate the feast of the Presentation of the Lord. We read about this event in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 2, recounting how Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the Temple to offer two turtledoves to God in accordance with the Jewish law, 40 days after Christ's birth.

In the Gospel account, we meet the elderly prophet Simeon, who had been told by God that he would not die before he had seen the long-awaaited Messiah of Israel that was to come. Upon seeing Jesus, Simeon blessed the child and prayed, "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel."

Simeon's words are prayed as part of the Liturgy of the Hours every night at Compline, the final hour of prayer before we go to sleep. As we recite his words as our own, we offer the work of our day in thanksgiving to God and acknowledge that Jesus is the light of our lives.

This feast is also known as Candlemas, highlighting Simeon's prophecy that Jesus is "a light for revelation." For many years, the tradition on this feast has been for families to bring their candles to the church to be blessed. Some of these blessed candles are used in a distinctive Catholic devotion on the feast of St. Blaise on February 3, commemorating the fourth century bishop and former physician who is credited with the miracle of healing a child who was choking on a fishbone. In the blessing, as the priest holds two crossed candles near each supplicant's throat, he prays, "Through the intercession of St. Blaise, bishop and martyr, may God deliver you from every disease of the throat and from every other illness." As a podcaster who relies on my voice to make a living, I take great consolation in receiving the saint's intercession each year on his feast.

Candles play a prominent role in our Catholic sacramental life. Perhaps the most important is the Paschal candle, which we inscribe with the sign of the cross, the alpha and the omega, and the year, and bless at the very beginning of the Easter Vigil. This impressively tall candle is lit from a fire prepared outside and is then carried in procession into the darkened church as we sing, "Christ our Light. Thanks be to God!" Each member of the congregation will then light their own smaller candle from the Paschal candle, the one flame passing from person to person until the entire building is brilliantly lit.

In the great sung prayer called the Exsultet that follows, we are taught that the Paschal candle represents the pillar of fire that led the Israelites out of slavery to sin in Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. The prayer celebrates that in the middle of the night on the first Easter, Jesus Christ rose from the dead to burst forth from the darkness of the tomb, and that when He returns in glory, there will be no need for sun nor moon, for Jesus shall be the light of the world.

Later during the Easter Vigil, the Paschal candle is dunked into the baptismal font as the

HALLENIUS, page 13

A Survival Love Story

TWENTY SOMETHING

CHRISTINA CAPECCHI

Zach Zarembinski was 18 when he suffered a massive brain bleed during a high-school football game, was rushed to Regions Hospital in St. Paul, Minnesota, and placed in a coma. Nine days later, 16-year-old Isabelle Richard arrived at the adjacent children's hospital on the same campus after a near-fatal car crash left her in a coma.

This year they will be married.

Somehow God wove their survival stories into one beautiful love story. Zach and Isabelle, both devout Christians, will be celebrating their romance this Valentine's Day at their favorite Italian restaurant as they continue to plan their September wedding.

"God orchestrated this in His perfect timing," says Isabelle, now 23, a Hy-Vee employee from Lakeville, Minnesota. "It's crazy what God can do!"

Looking back, the couple can trace the many ways God nudged them together. Zach learned about Isabelle when her mom came to the news conference announcing his release from the hospital. After nine days in a coma, his discharge gave her hope.

Their moms connected on Facebook. When Isabelle's mother shared the news that, after two and a half months, her daughter was finally out of a coma, Zach felt compelled to leave an encouraging comment online – and to come meet her in her hospital room. A photo was snapped of the two teens – Isabelle in her hospital bed, Zach crouching behind her, both smiling brightly. It was February of 2019.

In the months that followed, neither faced an easy road to recovery. Both leaned on their faith. Zach's spiritual life had been cultivated by many Catholic influences. He was in his fifth year at Hill-Murray School in Maplewood, Minnesota, a respected Catholic school where a Benedictine nun served as chaplain of his football team.

Benedictine Sister Linda Soler was "a steady presence for Zach," praying for him often and striking up regular conversations when he visited her office in campus ministry.

CAPECCHI, page 13

Christ Has Come; Now, We Must Live Out the Gospel

THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MONSIGNOR OWEN F. CAMPION

The first biblical reading this weekend is from Zephaniah. These details are known about this prophet: He was the son of Cushi and a descendant of Hezekiah, presumably King Hezekiah, who reigned as king of Judah, the southern Hebrew kingdom centered on Jerusalem, from 715-687 B.C.

Royal ancestry is important. If indeed Zephaniah descended from a king, he may more easily have had access to the royal court and, consequently, more familiarity with the politics of his day.

Whatever the exact timeframe in which this prophecy was written, the plight of the Hebrews, both those in the kingdom of Judah and those in the northern kingdom of Israel, was uncertain. The two kingdoms were insignificant and weak. They were easy prey for their mightier neighbors, and as history unfolded, powerful neighbors repeatedly overran them.

The prophets, Zephaniah included, saw the peril facing the Chosen People not so much because of policies for conquest of hostile neighboring powers but rather as a consequence of the people's sin.

Sin was the root of all problems. If the Chosen People would remain faithful, God's protection would prevail.

St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians furnishes the next reading this weekend. The reading presents to us a paradox. The weak will be exalted. The mighty will be laid low. This paradox is deep and profound, teaching us a fundamental fact of life, but it runs utterly counter to the human presumption of reality. So, we cannot judge our lives, or the world, by earthly, human standards, but only by Jesus.

For its last reading, the Church offers us the Gospel of St. Matthew and its presentation of the Beatitudes.

(Among the Synoptic Gospels, Luke also has a version of the Beatitudes, only slightly differing from that given in Matthew. Mark does not include the Beatitudes.)

These verses are reminiscent of the Psalms. This fact seats them very much in the history of God's people, and in the people's experiences. It places them in the historical fact of Revelation.

Always strong in the Old Testament was the hope that one day God would lead His people into life in a wonderful kingdom, where God would reign, and in which peace, love, and justice would prevail.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus is the one and only guide to this kingdom, the only access.

We cannot allow ourselves to be misled or follow anyone else. Jesus is the Holy One who commands even the evil spirits.

Reflection

The readings for this weekend, culminating in the Beatitudes, both celebrate the revelation of God to us, bringing us genuine wisdom about life, and challenge us to be strong and active witnesses to Jesus and to the truth of the Gospel.

Zephaniah builds the case that living without regard for God reaps the whirlwind. Paul adds another lesson. The judgments of the world are unsure if not altogether false – inevitably. If we follow the world's assessment of things, we at best dance on the edge of the cliff.

The Beatitudes reveal to us the joy and perfection of life with God, and they summon us to do our part in redemption. This summons applies to us personally and collectively. We must accept the Lord, the Son of God, the Redeemer, born of Mary at Christmas, seen as God at the Epiphany, the Savior manifested at the Baptism of the Lord.

Then, beyond ourselves, we are called upon the live the Gospel in our lives, in all that we do.

Now as we look for the coming of Lent, the Church gently guides us to question ourselves. We have learned of Jesus. Now, how do we respond?

READINGS

Sunday: Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13; Psalms 146:6-7, 8-9a, 9bc-10; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Matthew 5:1-12a

Monday: Malachi 3:1-4; Psalms 24:7-10; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40 (or Luke 2:22-32)

Tuesday: 2 Samuel 18:9-10, 14, 24-25a, 30 – 19:3; Psalms 86:1-6; Mark 5:21-43

Wednesday: 2 Samuel 24:2, 9-17; Psalms 32:1-2, 5-7; Mark 6:1-6

Thursday: 1 Kings 2:1-4, 10-12; First Chronicles 29:10-12; Mark 6:7-13

Friday: Sirach 47:2-11; Psalms 18:31, 47, 50-51; Mark 6:14-29

Saturday: 1 Kings 3:4-13; Psalms 119:9-14; Mark 6:30-34

Getting Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable

FAITH AT HOME

LAURA KELLY FANUCCI

Picture your favorite place to sit. A cozy recliner near the TV, a reading spot on your couch, or your usual chair at the kitchen table. Remember how your body sinks into that space without a second thought. After a long day, there's nothing better than settling in where we feel most at home.

Now picture the place where you usually sit at Mass. You might have a regular pew, a certain side of the church you love, or the same exact seat every Sunday. Why do you pick this spot?

Maybe that's where your family or friends have always sat. Maybe you like the view or the acoustics: You can see and hear well here. Or maybe you're simply a creature of habit!

There's nothing wrong with having a favorite place. In a chaotic, ever-changing world, our nervous systems sigh with relief at routines. We need the expected. Even Jesus liked to recline at table with his friends.

But in this in-between stretch of Ordinary Time, between the high feast of Christmas and the solemn preparation of Lent, we find ourselves in a new place as we settle into the new year. What will 2026 hold, the good and the bad? Who might we become by year's end?

At home, at church, in our communities, and in the wider world, we can find ourselves seeking what is comfortable. We like this kind of food, that style of worship, this grocery store, or that politician. We feel at home in our particular camp.

Yet Christ came both to comfort (with God's mercy) and challenge (with God's justice). His call to discipleship is always prophetic, asking each of us to leave behind the nets of our comfort zones and venture into the deep.

As a parent of children ranging from kindergarten to high school, I find myself thinking often about the home as a place of comfort – but also challenge. I want our family home to be a space of safety, solace, and love for our kids, but I also know it must be a source of difficult lessons: how to forgive, how to change. and how to do the right thing even when it's hard.

In 1902, humor columnist Finley Dunne coined a famous phrase about the duty of journalism, writing that the role of the newspaper is to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." Catholics sometimes say the same about the mission of the Church, too. We need only look to the Gospels to see how Jesus comforted the suffering and spoke out strongly against the wealthy and powerful who did not care for the poor and vulnerable.

Where we stand (or sit) determines our view – of our home, church, and society. If we stand with the least among us as Christ did, we will see things very differently than if we side with the powerful, the popular, or the strong.

What if we took one step out of our comfort zone in 2026?

It might be a small change, like sitting in a different pew to meet new parishioners in our community and see our physical church home from a new perspective. It might be a big change, like deciding to volunteer as a family with a local food pantry to get to know our neighbors in need and serve them with our time and energy. Or we might devote this short season of Ordinary Time to deeper prayer, asking God to lead us further in faith even when it gets uncomfortable.

When we know we have safe spaces where we can return – like our family home, our favorite chair, or our regular parish pew – we can strike out in good faith and courage to do whatever challenging work that God calls us to do.

I pray this for my children when they leave the house each day, that God might go with them and lead them home safely. I pray the same for each of us, that we will always remember there is nowhere we can go, even the farthest leap from our comfort zone, where God has not already gone before us.

Laura Kelly Fanucci is an author, speaker, and founder of Mothering Spirit, an online gathering place on parenting and spirituality.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for February 1, 2026

Matthew 5:1-12a

Following is a word search based on the Gospel reading for the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A: Teaching on the mountain. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

MOUNTAIN	DISCIPLES	BLESSED
HEAVEN	MOURN	COMFORTED
MEEK	HUNGER	THIRST
MERCIFUL	SEE GOD	PEACEMAKERS
CHILDREN	OF GOD	PERSECUTED
UTTER	EVIL	REJOICE
BE GLAD	REWARD	GREAT

EIGHT POINTS

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

CAPECCHI, page 14

Meanwhile, Rebecca Fandrich, a theology teacher, opened his eyes to the power of the Holy Spirit. "I learned how to live with a deeper understanding of the world beyond the five senses," Zach said.

He worked to lose weight, become a runner, and advance his career. Isabelle relearned how to walk, talk, and drive – all while completing high school. Five and a half years after the two had first met in Isabelle's hospital room, she received the final all-clear from her neurosurgeon. When her mom, Esther, shared the news on Facebook, Zach left another encouraging comment. Esther responded and suggested the two families go out for dinner.

"I'm so proud of you," Zach remembers telling her. At the same time, he was thinking: "Wow, she's pretty! Let me get her phone number!"

He did – and their courtship soon began. The twenty-somethings discovered their shared Christian values and the remarkable way they complemented each other. In part, that balance traced back to their brain injuries: Zach's on the left, Isabelle's on the right.

"She's the creative thinker, and I handle the nuts and bolts," said Zach, now 25, who lives in Apple Valley, Minnesota, and works at a Verizon store.

Strong where the other is weak. With God at the center, they move forward as one.

They're planning a September wedding in Red Wing, Minnesota, with their pastor from ZOE Church in Burnsville, which is associated with the Assemblies of God.

Reflecting on their journey to the altar still fills them with awe.

"God was looking out for us the whole time," said Isabelle.

"God is faithful," added Zach. "All those painful moments made me stronger and led me to Isabelle."

When people hear they story, many remark that it sounds like a Hallmark movie.

Zach has the perfect reply: "God writes better stories than Hallmark!"

Christine Capecchi is a freelance writer from Grey Cloud Island, Minnesota.

HALLENIUS, from page 12

water is blessed, the priest calling down the Holy Spirit as the water becomes the source of life for those about to be baptized. After their baptism, each neophyte is presented with their own candle, newly lit from the Paschal candle along with the words, "Receive the light of Christ." The priest then solemnly charges each to "keep the flame of faith alive in your heart." One of my friends who became Catholic as an adult has the beautiful practice of lighting his candle each year on the anniversary of his baptism while offering prayers of thanksgiving for the gift of faith that he received.

Alongside the Paschal candle that is lit throughout the Easter season and at solemn celebrations such as baptisms, ordinations, and funerals, in every church you will also see another candle permanently burning near the tabernacle to symbolize that Jesus is present in the Blessed Sacrament. I find this little glowing red light to be a great consolation when walking into unfamiliar churches during my various travels, reminding me that Christ is always present and waiting no matter how far from home I may be.

Many churches and chapels also feature a rack of votive candles, often placed near the statue of a saint or a holy icon. Many of the faithful will light one of these candles as they offer and beg prayers of intercession, the candle symbolizing their particular intention. The Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes on the campus of the University of Notre Dame where I work is well-known for its racks upon racks of candles lit by students, visitors, and pilgrims – and not just for another win on the football field or as a last-ditch effort in their exams. It is incredibly inspiring to walk by the grotto on a dark winter evening and see the hundreds of candles flickering brightly as the snow falls and the wind howls beneath the loving gaze of the statue of Our Lady.

In the Northern Hemisphere, the days are steadily growing longer, and the darkness is receding. It is in these darkest days that we can recall, as John wrote in his Gospel, "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Christ, be our light!

Ken Hallenius and his wife, Julie, are parishioners at St. Joseph Catholic Church in South Bend.

Luers Holds Homecoming for Basketball Legend

Knights Retire Jersey of Deshaun Thomas, former Mr. Basketball and 2-Time State Champion Who Played Professionally Overseas

BY ERIC PEAT

Photos by Eric Peat

Bishop Luers graduate Deshaun Thomas lifts his No. 1 jersey in the air as the Knights faithful cheer during a "homecoming" on Friday, January 17.

After a standout prep career, a decorated collegiate run, and a dozen years playing internationally at the professional level, Deshaun Thomas' basketball journey has come full circle and ended where it all began – at Bishop Luers High School in Fort Wayne.

The 2010 graduate who recently announced his retirement from basketball was honored with a special celebration at Bishop Luers on Saturday, January 17. The event, titled "Once a Knight, Always #1," featured a public meet and greet followed by a jersey retirement ceremony before the Knights tipped off their varsity boys basketball game against Blackhawk Christian. This commemorative evening offered fans, students, and local community members the chance to celebrate Thomas' legacy as one of the most accomplished athletes in Bishop Luers history.

"It's something special," Thomas said of the celebration to Today's Catholic and other local media. "It lets you know that [with] the hard work I put in, anything is possible. As long as you stay faithful, as long as you stay locked in and believe in God, anything is possible in your career. I think this is something special – something I'm going to cherish for the rest of my life."

While Bishop Luers principal and head boys basketball coach Seth Coffing called the honor "long overdue," he admitted it had not been possible previously due to Thomas playing overseas each winter.

"It's really cool for us to be able to honor him here tonight," Coffing said. "This is actually his first time being back at a game at Luers since he played here, and I think he really appreciates us doing this for him. It's the least we can do for the type of career, the type of joy that he brought to people here at Bishop Luers while he played here."

Thomas' four years with the Knights were indeed a joyful time for Luers fans. In addition to receiving All-Conference and All-Area honors each season, Thomas led Bishop Luers to back-to-back Class 2A State Championships in 2008 and 2009 – the only two state titles in program history. As a senior in 2010, Thomas was named a McDonald's All-American and received the coveted title of Indiana Mr. Basketball as the best prep player in the state. Thomas finished his high school career with 3,018 points, the third most in the history of Indiana high school basketball. Needless to say, Thomas said Bishop Luers will always hold a special place in his heart.

"It's very emotional, because this is where it started," reflected Thomas. "Luers gave me a chance. They took me in – tall kid, 6'7", 6'8", however you want to say the height – took me in and saw something special. I learned a lot here at Luers. I didn't just become a great basketball player; I became a man. I became a great father, just because of my experience here at Luers."

Thomas spoke to the boys basketball team prior to the game, challenging each player to have something to fight for. He encouraged them to take the court each night as he did while at Luers – to play with passion, be yourself, play as hard as you can, and enjoy the game. Coffing said the example that Thomas has set for his players to follow is invaluable.

"Everybody knows him because he scored so many points, but ultimately, Bishop Luers people see him because he's a winner," Coffing stressed. "His true tradition here is the state championships, how he went about his business here and winning so many games. … But really, the way he carries himself and the way he carried himself here at Luers, by all accounts, too, is very impressive, and that's something I want my guys to see."

Following graduation, Thomas excelled as a versatile scoring forward at Ohio State University, helping to lead the Buckeyes to the Final Four in 2012 and earning Third Team All-America honors in 2013. He parlayed this collegiate success into a professional career, spending more than a decade in different European leagues and playing in countries such as France, Spain, Italy, Israel, Japan, Germany, and Greece. Thomas claimed experiencing so many different cultures "makes you appreciate a lot of things more when you see the people over there and how they live, how they enjoy life."

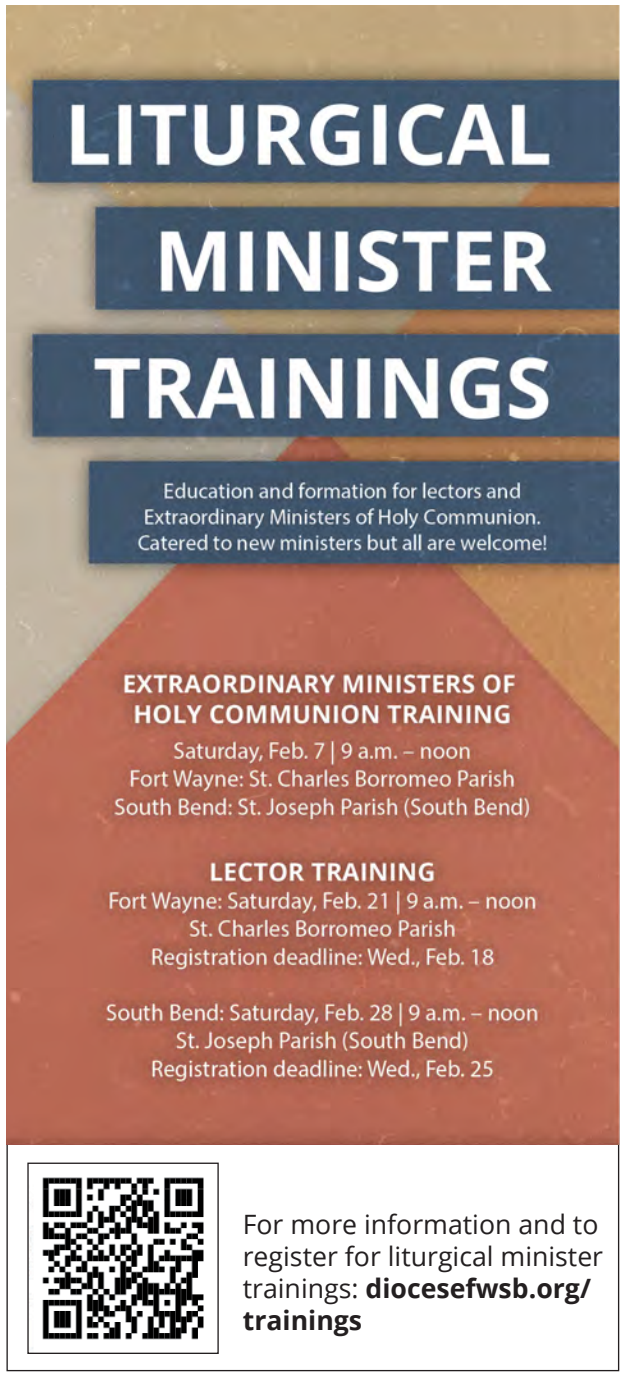
Thomas poses with his family following his jersey retirement ceremony at Bishop Luers on January 17.

Although now retired, Thomas plans to keep busy running a couple businesses and training kids. He is dedicated to educating today's youth both on and off the court and finding ways to give back to the community that helped shape him. Thomas will also get to spend more time with his family, and despite all the honors he earned over the years, Thomas said teaching his three boys how to be men and to care about people is what he is most proud of. It's an outlook that's only possible because of his faith – a faith that has carried him through the highs and lows of his career and remains with him today.

"Oh man, it helped me a lot," Thomas said of his faith. "I give props to my father, my grandma. I grew up around the church. I grew up every day in Bible studies and learning the faith and what God had in store for me and the gifts that He gave me. So, it's been very, very strong for me in my career, especially when things were tough, especially in college and even in the pros. You've got to understand: I'm in Europe for almost 10 months and at home for a month and a half. So, it gets tough leaving the family and doing all those great things. But when I stay prayed up and believe in God's work and His plans, everything's going to be fine."

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.



For more information and to register for liturgical minister trainings: **diocesefwsb.org/trainings**

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3
Theology on Tap – Fort Wayne
6 – 9 p.m.
FORT WAYNE – This winter, young adults from across Fort Wayne are invited to gather at Classic Cafe, 4832 Hillegas Rd., for Theology on Tap: Hope Does Not Disappoint, a four-week series centered on the theme of Hope. Drawing from Romans 5:3–5, the series will explore how suffering leads to endurance, builds character, and ultimately how our hope rests in Christ's mercy.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5
Theology on Tap – Mishawaka
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.
MISHAWAKA – 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 like Dignity of the Persons, Mental Health, Moral Theology, and much more! Welcomed for young adults in their 20s and 30s, single or marries, to share in food, fellowship, and faith!

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7
Art Exhibition
6– 10 p.m.
FORT WAYNE – Looking for religious-themed artists to share and display their work at St. Therese, 2222 Lower Huntington Rd. Artists are invited to sell their own pieces! Enjoy a relaxed evening that makes a perfect date night, complete with appetizers, beer and wine flights. To reserve your space or learn more, please call 260-747-9139.

Veteran Vatican Journalist John Allen Dies at 61

BY JUNO AROCHO ESTEVES

(OSV News) – John Allen, the editor-in-chief of Crux whose decades-long career in journalism defined him as one of the authoritative voices on the Vatican and the Catholic Church, has died at the age of 61.

Allen passed away in Rome on Thursday, January 22, after battling cancer since 2022. He is survived by his wife, Elise Ann Allen, Crux's senior Vatican correspondent.

In February of 2025, Allen updated readers on his cancer diagnosis and asked them to keep him in their prayers.

"Never in my life have I believed more in the power of intercessory prayer than I do right now," he said.

Several months later, in a second update, he chronicled his treatment for stomach cancer and noted that "without the tireless daily support of my wife, Elise Allen, I'm sure I probably would have imploded."

Born in Hays, Kansas, in 1965, Allen taught journalism and supervised the student-run newspaper at Notre Dame High School in Sherman Oaks, California.

After teaching journalism, Allen joined the National Catholic Reporter in 1997 and subsequently established its Rome bureau in 2000. After establishing himself in Rome, Allen gained prominence in 2000 with the publication of his first major biography of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.

Allen left NCR in 2014 and joined the Boston Globe, where he launched Crux. Two years later, after the Boston Globe ended its sponsorship of Crux, Allen relaunched the news site independently, becoming its president and editor-in-chief.

Allen continued to appear on CNN as a Vatican analyst throughout the papacies of Pope Benedict and Pope Francis, and in 2025, he served as a CBS News contributor during the election of Pope Leo XIV.

Throughout his career, he was a highly sought-after public speaker, speaking at conferences and events around the globe. He wrote 11 books on the Vatican and the Catholic Church.

For his accomplishments and expertise, he garnered attention and praise, with the London Tablet calling him "the most authoritative writer on Vatican affairs in the English language."

Virginia Bishop Releases Pastoral Letter on Mental Health

BY GINA CHRISTIAN

(OSV News) – A U.S. bishop is highlighting the nation's growing mental health crisis while pointing to the "divine medicine" offered by Christ through the work of the Church.

On Monday, January 19, Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of Arlington, Virginia, released "The Divine Physician and a Christian Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing," a pastoral letter surveying the state of mental health in the United States and offering both "encouragement and guidance" in addressing mental health challenges "in light of the teachings of Christ and the Gospel."

Bishop Burbidge said the letter was prompted by his "increasing pastoral concern" over "the emergence of a broad crisis concerning mental health that is negatively impacting Americans, and especially young people, in terms of their spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing."

He described "the scale and scope of this crisis" as "staggering," citing data from the National Alliance on Mental Illness indicating that one in five American adults experience mental health challenges each year.

The pastoral letter, available on the Diocese of Arlington's website (arlingtondiocese.org), also announced the creation of a diocesan mental health council to provide resources for "those experiencing significant mental health challenges as well as their loved ones."

Central to the bishop's pastoral letter was an understanding of the human person as a divinely created being redeemed by Christ.

Bishop Burbidge situated the issue of mental health within the broader context of God's eternal plan for humanity and the "negative effects of our separation" from God, which "so obviously frustrate our natural desires for health, wellbeing, and lasting happiness."

"Even before the advent of Christ, and before our definitive knowledge of God's goodness and the possibility of heavenly peace, humanity knew that all was not well," he said. "We knew that we needed a Savior."

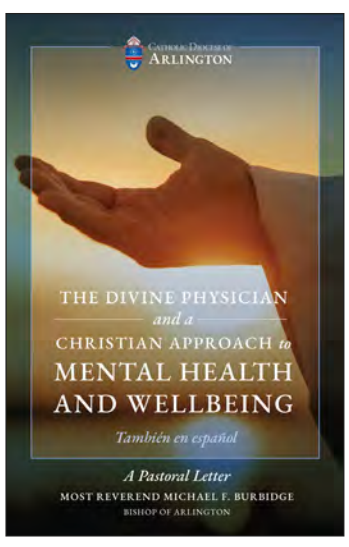
The numerous healings Christ performed in His earthly ministry, "revealing His authority over ailments affecting mind, body, and soul," point to His intention to ultimately redeem humanity fully from the effects of sin and death, said Bishop Burbidge.

The bishop stressed that "the Church follows Our Lord in emphasizing the primacy of spiritual healing, the importance of faith in God, and fidelity to His commands as the key for everlasting salvation."

He said that "faith and trust in God are shown to be the keys to everlasting health and wellbeing for humanity," while emphasizing that "we must be careful in recognizing that not all who ask for healing are healed, either in the way they want or in the timeframe for which they may hope."

In his letter, Bishop Burbidge explored the issue of mental health with respect to several considerations: the ongoing stigma many feel in seeking help; the mystery of human suffering, which can be redemptive when united with that of Christ; and the social realities that have led to increased loneliness and disconnection.

He particularly mourned "the breakdown of the family," a decline in which "many of the challenges we experience today have their roots." Bishop Burbidge said that the erosion of the family structure – in which children "first discover their inherent dignity" – has been "accelerated over the past century by the progressive disintegration of sacramental marriage as a cultural and social norm."



> May we pray with humility and trust, seeking whenever necessary the assistance of professional experts who are Christ's instruments for our healing.
>
> **BISHOP MICHAEL F. BURBIDGE**

OSV News photo/Mihoko Owada, Catholic Standard

Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of Arlington, Virginia, delivers the homily during the opening Mass of the National Prayer Vigil for Life in 2024. On January 19, Bishop Burbidge released a pastoral letter entitled, "The Divine Physician and a Christian Approach to Mental Health." You can read the letter at arlingtondiocese.org.

The Church has been entrusted with a mission to bring Christ's healing to all of these wounds, said Bishop Burbidge.

Christians "have a particular responsibility to address the stigmas that prevent people from seeking help and to remove barriers that keep so many stuck in patterns of isolation and misery," he said.

Less than half of Americans experiencing mental health issues seek treatment, with those who do often waiting years to enter into counseling, he noted.

At the same time, Bishop Burbidge cautioned against equating the world's view of human identity, health, and happiness with that of the divine.

"The difference between Catholic and secular views of happiness and mental health is the difference between a 'freedom for' versus a 'freedom from' mentality," he explained.

The secular "freedom from" mentality seeks to eliminate anxiety and distress, he said, while the Christian understanding "goes deeper," and "encourages us to recognize freedom as a gift meant for our holistic flourishing."

"The Christian approach guides us to consider what God asks of us in our lives," said Bishop Burbidge.

He also distinguished between suffering and despair.

"As Catholics, we understand that suffering, whether physical or mental, is an invitation to draw near to Christ at the foot of the cross," said Bishop Burbidge. "We can find purpose and meaning in suffering if we first recognize that everyone suffers to different degrees and that peace is possible when suffering is offered to God with confidence and earnest prayer."

In contrast, despair "lacks that other-focused quality" and leads to isolation and self-focus while obscuring "any larger meaning and purpose," he said.

"God may allow suffering in our lives, but He forbids despair," said Bishop Burbidge. "Any person experiencing recurrent or unrelenting despair should seek assistance and support."

He urged the faithful to be "willing to connect with others," since "we are made for community and find purpose when given the chance to cultivate authentic relationships with others and practice virtues like compassion."

In addition, he said, "due to the structure of our society, we must be more intentional than ever about our daily priorities, especially including our prioritization of relationship with friends and family."

The bishop observed that "all things that are devotional and holy" also benefit the human psyche, "including the Sacrament of Reconciliation on a regular basis."

He called for Christian counseling that is "rightly anchored in a Christian theological anthropology," and that "restores and equips us for our daily pilgrimage."

"Counseling involves sharing our mind and heart with another in the hope of being restored to health and wellbeing in body, mind, and soul," said Bishop Burbidge, adding that "a counselor with a Christian theological anthropology – that is, the understanding of our origin and ultimate destiny in God – is better equipped to help us overcome the obstacles that prevent us from being fully able to follow God's call in our lives."

Counseling is intended "neither to eliminate all hardships nor to establish a perpetual dependency on therapy," he said, but "should help us accept and embrace challenges in our lives with the confidence that comes from a preeminent relationship with God and the healing offered through relationship with His Son, the Divine Physician."

Quoting Isaiah 43:1, Bishop Burbidge invited the faithful to "reflect without ceasing on God's promise that 'You are mine.'"

"May we pray with humility and trust, seeking whenever necessary the assistance of professional experts who are Christ's instruments for our healing. May we actively engage with the sacramental life of the Church and support one another in our parish communities," he said. "And may we find consolation and peace in the frequent reception of the Eucharist and the adoration of the one who promises to save us, forever and always."

Struggling with Mental Health?

You are not alone. Contact Catholic Charities of Fort Wayne-South Bend at 260-422-5625 for mental health resources or someone to talk to. For severe cases, dial 988 (the suicide and crisis lifeline) for immediate assistance.