

TODAY'S CATHOLIC

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

TODAYSCATHOLIC.org



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Joe Romie

Bishop Rhoades receives the Book of the Elect during the Rite of Election at St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Fort Wayne.

Diocese to See Record Number Enter the Church at Easter Vigil

BY JILL A. BOUGHTON & ANDREA C. KRUMANAKER

If the numbers in our diocese are any indication, more and more people are knocking on our church doors seeking to become Catholic. A record 787 people took a significant step over two weekends in February on both ends of the diocese. There were 327 unbaptized individuals who participated in the Rite of Election; their journey will include what is known as the period of purification and enlightenment during Lent and will culminate with all the sacraments of initiation during the Easter Vigil on Saturday night, April 4. An additional 460 candidates – either baptized in a different Christian tradition and now seeking full communion with the Catholic Church, or else baptized Catholic but never catechized as children – participated in the Call-

ing to Continuing Conversion and indicated their readiness to complete Christian initiation. During Lent, these candidates will also go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation to prepare for the other sacraments.

Brian MacMichael, director of the diocesan Office of Worship, told Today's Catholic: "The last couple years in the diocese have seen major increases in the numbers of those who are becoming Catholic. 2025 saw an unexpected jump – we had over 150 more than in any of the previous 15 years – and now 2026 has exceeded last year's attendance by well over 100. We heard in 2025 that this trend was echoed nationally and even in-

ternationally."

What's behind the uptick? MacMichael ventured an educated guess.

"Of course, there's no singular reason, as every person's journey is different," MacMichael said. "A pretty common refrain across generations, however, seems to be an appreciation for the clear presentation of the true, the good, and the beautiful that the Catholic Church provides, along with the ability to encounter Jesus in the Mass and in the sacraments, especially the holy Eucharist," explained MacMichael. Many people also mentioned being evangelized by friends.

"This is the most important Lent of your life, the final stage of your preparation for the Easter sacraments."

BISHOP RHOADES

and the beautiful that the Catholic Church provides, along with the ability to encounter Jesus in the Mass and in the sacraments, especially the holy Eucharist," explained MacMichael. Many people also mentioned being evangelized by friends.

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'I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me'

Bishop Rhoades Addresses the Plight of Migrants, Refugees at Holy Cross

BY ELYSE MALDONADO

A large crowd of students, faculty, staff, and community members gathered in St. Joseph's Chapel at Holy Cross College on Wednesday, February 18, for the Spring 2026 Mind and Heart Lecture, a twice-annual event that invites the college community to reflect on timely issues in light of the Catholic intellectual tradition.

Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades, bishop of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana, delivered the lecture, titled "Addressing the Plight of Migrants and Refugees with the Mind and Heart of Christ," offering a theological reflection on one of the most pressing crises of our time. Following Bishop Rhoades' lecture, Louis Albarran, an associate professor of theology at Holy Cross College, served as respondent, sharing his own insights on the topic.

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Provided by Holy Cross College

Bishop Rhoades speaks during the 2026 Mind and Heart Lecture at Holy Cross College on Wednesday, February 18.

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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.
— *Gaudium et Spes*, 78

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'We Are All Called to Be Generous'

At Servus Omnium Lecture, Catholic Charities USA Leader Urges Audience to Serve Others

BY SCOTT WARDEN

Kerry Alys Robinson, president and CEO of Catholic Charities USA, joked with the crowd inside the North Auditorium at the University of Saint Francis that she “jumped at the opportunity” to speak at the 2026 Servus Omnium Lecture. “You see, as a rule, I never turn down an invitation to visit northern Indiana in the middle of February.”

While there was certainly a briskness to the late winter weather in Fort Wayne on the morning of February 17, those who had risen before the sun to attend the annual Fat Tuesday breakfast and lecture were warmed by Robinson's inspiring speech, as she wove together personal anecdotes and moving accounts of others who share her passion toward service.

Founded in 2013 by Dr. Lance Richey, president of the University of Saint Francis, and Matt Smith, CEO of the St. Joseph Community Health Foundation, the Servus Omnium Lecture aims to bring Catholic leaders and businesspeople together for a morning of food, fellowship, and mission. Robinson acknowledged the important purpose of the event, saying she was eager to accept the invitation to speak “because of the spirit of service behind this annual lecture series.”

And few can better to speak to the charitable mission of the Church than Robinson, who previously served as a global ambassador of Leadership Roundtable, an organization formed in 2005 in the wake of the Church's sex abuse crisis. She was also the executive director of the foundation responsible for giving out the Opus Prize, an annual million-dollar international humanitarian award that honors people of any faith whose lives are dedicated to the alleviation of human suffering. Before that, she was the director of development at St. Thomas More Catholic Chapel and Center at Yale University, where she helped to raise \$75 million to advance the mission of the Catholic ministry on campus.

Through her fundraising work at Yale, Robinson told the audience, she learned an important lesson that she has carried with her throughout her



Provided by the University of Saint Francis

Kerry Alys Robinson, right, speaks at the Servus Omnium Lecture at the University of Saint Francis on Tuesday, February 17.

career: “Generosity is humankind's birthright,” she said. “We are all called to be generous and to be catalysts to inspire generosity in others. A common misconception is that generosity is only for the very wealthy. Believing that lets the rest of us off the hook – and denies ourselves a full, rewarding life. Central to Christianity is the conviction that one finds life by first giving it away.”

To illustrate that point, she shared a story about St. Teresa of Calcutta caring for the poorest of the poor in India. Mother Teresa was helping at a food distribution center, where once a week, local families were allowed to come to have a single bucket filled with grains of rice. A novice of Mother Teresa's order, the Missionaries of Charity, was shadowing the saint when an elderly woman stepped to the front of the line with two buckets – one for her family and other belonging to her neighbor, who was unable to come because of illness. When Mother Teresa filled just one of the woman's buckets, the woman left the line and poured half of her rice into her neighbor's bucket. Surprised, the novice questioned Mother Teresa as to why she didn't fill both buckets, as there were two families in need.

“Mother Teresa stopped what she was doing and admonished the novice, [saying]: ‘These are among the poorest and most destitute people you will ever

meet. Never take away the right of another person to be generous.’”

In 2023, Robinson became the just the second layperson – and second woman – to lead Catholic Charities USA in the organization's 115-year history. Catholic Charities USA is a national body that helps support the more than 160 independent local Catholic Charities agencies across the country, including Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

Because Catholic Charities USA acts as an umbrella organization to the local boots-on-the-ground agencies across the country, Robinson admitted that “some people are unsure about what, exactly, Catholic Charities does.” That's because the “the life-changing ministries of Catholic Charities are varied and vast,” she said. “Every day, in every corner of the United States, Catholic Charities agencies provide comfort, hope, and relief to people in need, regardless of their faith or background. A common misperception is that Catholic Charities exists to serve Catholics in need. In fact, we serve all people of all backgrounds. People of all faiths or no faith. As the famous saying goes, ‘We don't serve people in need because they are Catholic. We serve people in need because we are Catholic.’”

Richey, president of the University of Saint Francis, told Today's Catholic that the Servus Omnium Lecture Series

“is designed to offer a message that can strengthen and inspire listeners to think of their professional lives the same way, and by doing so make manifest the love and goodness of God in our world.”

He added that Robinson's “deep love for the Church and unwavering commitment to extend its ministry of healing and hope to the world, especially through her work as president and CEO of Catholic Charities USA, embodies what we want in a Servus Omnium speaker. ... Dr. Robinson demonstrates that not only should we not leave our Catholic faith at the workplace door, but in fact we should lead with it in all that we do. That is what true discipleship looks like!”

To close her speech, Robinson gave a call to action to those in attendance: “Identify the causes you care the most about and try to make a difference. Find your own moral heroes and heroines and strive to emulate them. Be a person of hope. Be a beneficial presence in the world. When you cultivate the discipline of being other-centered, you begin to take genuine delight in the good fortune of others. And when you take genuine delight in the good fortunes of others, you will never be without a reason to celebrate.”

Scott Warden is editor-in-chief of Today's Catholic. Email him at editor@diocesefwsb.org.

Father Bill Sullivan, Retired Priest of Diocese, Passes Away at Age 79

BY ERIC PEAT

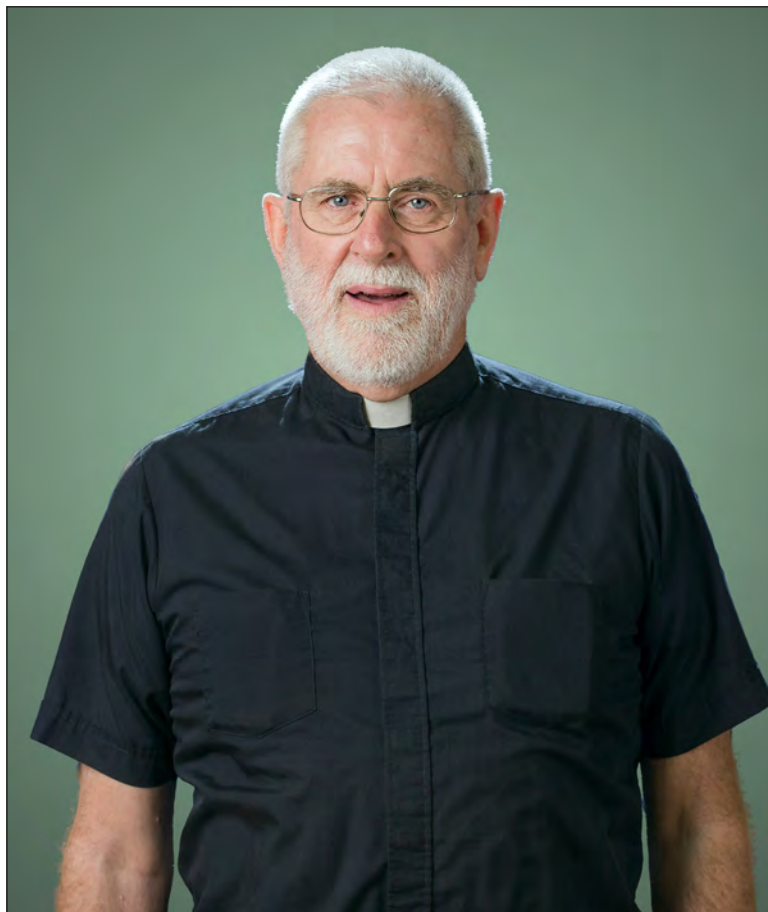
On Thursday, February 19, the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend lost a beloved shepherd, brother, uncle, and friend.

Father Bill Sullivan, a retired priest of the diocese who celebrated his 50th jubilee in 2022, passed away peacefully at Stillwater Hospice in Fort Wayne with his family at his side. He was 79.

The oldest of James and Eileen Sullivan's five children, Father Sullivan was born into a devout Irish Catholic family on May 14, 1946, in Worcester, Massachusetts. Though he was raised in Presque Isle, Maine, his family moved to Fort Wayne when he was in eighth grade and joined St. John the Baptist Parish. Father Sullivan graduated from Bishop Luers High School in 1964 and remained a loyal supporter of the Knights throughout his life. He was inspired by the Franciscans who taught there to become a religious brother, to which his mother famously replied, "Why be half a priest?" That was all he needed to hear to pursue the priesthood.

Father Sullivan attended St. Gregory and Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio, and was ordained a Catholic priest on May 20, 1972. He always considered himself blessed to have spent his diaconate being mentored by Monsignor Edward Hession and to have served alongside Monsignor William Lester at his first parish assignment, St. Jude in Fort Wayne. It was while at St. Jude that Father Sullivan began his lifelong dedication to hospital ministry. His priesthood was characterized by a heartfelt devotion to serving the poor, the sick, the disabled, and the elderly.

For four years, Father Sullivan taught and acted as chaplain at Bishop Luers' crosstown rival, Bishop Dwenger, during which his family jokingly "disowned" him. He then made stops at St. Joseph Parish in Fort Wayne, St. Monica Parish in Mishawaka, St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Elkhart, and St. John the Baptist Parish in New Haven. Father Sullivan retired in 2021, one year shy of 50 years in active ministry, but he found great joy filling in at various parishes across the diocese in retirement.



Father Bill Sullivan

Over the years, Father Sullivan reached countless hearts through his deeply personal, gently challenging, and often humorous homilies. He loved administering the sacraments – especially reconciliation, which he affectionately called "a hug from God" – and was a champion of Catholic education, serving as a board member at both Bishop Luers and Marian High School. Father Sullivan also loved sports and spent 15 years as the moderator of Catholic Youth Organization athletics. If you didn't run into him on the sidelines of a Bishop Luers football game or in the stands at a Notre Dame basketball game, he was likely attending spring training for his beloved Boston Red Sox.

Anyone who knew Father Sullivan knew how much he cherished his family. He is survived by his siblings, Eileen (Myron) Brodmerkel, James Sullivan, and Joan (Daniel) Bourbonnais. He was "Uncle Billy" to his nieces and nephews, Patrick Rawlins, Bridget (Jason) Jacoby, Colin (Mara) Brodmerkel, Caitlin (Alex) Krouse, Brendan Rawlins, Deirdre (Brian) Goshert, and Neil Rawlins. He adored his great-nieces and great-nephews, William, Eddie, Cecilia, Ella, Emmett, James, Luca, Mary, and Markus. He was preceded in death by his parents,

his sister and brother-in-law, Mary and Glen Rawlins, and his niece, Alana Bourbonnais.

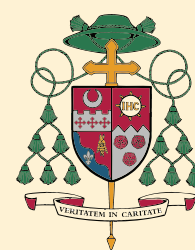
Eileen Brodmerkel fondly recalls growing up with her big brother, Billy.

"He was always a good kid, and I was the one who made people ask, 'Are you sure you're Bill's sister?'" Brodmerkel laughed. "In our school, we picked potatoes. [With] his first paycheck – this is the honest-to-God truth – he bought a manger for my mom, which we still have." Brodmerkel said he was a great big brother who watched out for his siblings, drove them around, and let them hang out with his friends. After being ordained, Father Sullivan celebrated every sacrament with his extended family, from baptisms to first reconciliations to weddings.

"It is very tough to lose my big brother," Brodmerkel told Today's Catholic. "People are sometimes horrified that we don't call him Father Bill. When Billy's with us, he's Billy. He's our family. And he's Uncle Billy to my grandchildren and great nieces and nephews."

One of his nieces, Deirdre Goshert, lovingly remembers Uncle Billy's regular visits, when he would spoil the family with plates of cookies, baked pies, or other assorted treats.

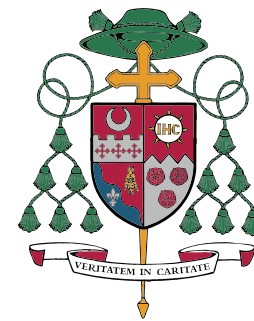
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PUBLIC SCHEDULE OF
BISHOP KEVIN C. RHOADES

Veritatem In Caritate
(Truth in Charity)

- ◆ **Tuesday, March 3, at 10:30 a.m.** – Lenten Day of Recollection, St. Martin de Porres Church, Syracuse
- ◆ **Tuesday, March 3, at 5:45 p.m.** – Meeting of Diocesan Review Board, Sacred Heart Rectory, Warsaw
- ◆ **Wednesday, March 4, at 11 a.m.** – Talk with Notre Dame student seminar, University of Notre Dame
- ◆ **Thursday, March 5, at 10:30 a.m.** – Presbyteral Council Meeting, Sacred Heart Rectory, Warsaw
- ◆ **Thursday, March 5, at 1 p.m.** – Priest Personnel Board Meeting, Sacred Heart Rectory, Warsaw
- ◆ **Saturday, March 7, at 9:15 a.m.** – Mass and Meeting of Diocesan Pastoral Council, St. Martin de Porres Church, Syracuse
- ◆ **Saturday, March 7, at 6 p.m.** – Saints Alive!, Bishop Dwenger High School, Fort Wayne



Priest Assignment

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

- ◆ **Reverend Terry Fisher**, to Administrator, St. Mary of the Annunciation Parish, Bristol, effective February 18, 2026.

Deacon Assignments

The Most Reverend Kevin C. Rhoades, Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend, has made the following assignments of deacons, effective February 17, 2026:

- ◆ **Deacon Maximo Ortega**, from diaconal ministry at St. Therese Parish, Fort Wayne, to part-time diaconal ministry at St. Robert Bellarmine Parish, North Manchester, while continuing ministry in the Diocesan Tribunal.
- ◆ **Deacon Paul Stoyell-Mullholland**, to diaconal ministry at St. Thérèse, Little Flower Parish, South Bend.

ICC Looks to Pope Leo for Policy Guidance on the Poor

BY VICTORIA ARTHUR

In the 2026 legislative season and beyond, the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) has a new lens through which it can evaluate public policies that affect the poor: the first major document issued by Pope Leo XIV.

The American-born pope calls for prioritizing those in most need in the recently released *Dilexi Te* ("I Have Loved You"), the first apostolic exhortation of his pontificate. Begun by Pope Francis before his death, the document proclaims that "the poor are not a sociological category but the very flesh of Christ," deserving of the utmost compassion and care.

For the ICC, which for nearly 60 years has been drawing on 2,000 years of Catholic social teaching in carrying out its work, *Dilexi Te* offers additional clarity and immediacy.

"This document provides us a wonderful framework with which we can view legislation as it relates to caring for the poor," said Alexander Mingus, executive director of the ICC, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana. "There's a beauty in the way the document goes through the history of the Church's love for the poor, identifying for us Catholics that love for the most vulnerable among us is a perennial commitment."

Signed by Pope Leo XIV on October 4, the feast of St. Francis, *Dilexi Te* has already been a source of guidance for the ICC during this year's short legislative session, which is now concluding. Mingus noted especially the pope's emphasis on the Church's

long-standing "preferential option for the poor," which demands that the needs of those in poverty take priority in economic and political decisions.

"There's a deeper way that the Church and through this document Pope Leo is reminding us of this preferential option for the poor," Mingus said. "When we make decisions, the poor must come first. It really turns our decision-making process in the modern day on its head, because the poor are not often thought of first. But that's the kind of framework we want to carry into our work at the Indiana Catholic Conference as we're evaluating public policy."

A prime example in this year's legislative session is Senate Bill 197, an affordability measure that sought to curb debt collectors from garnishing the wages of those struggling to make ends meet. Its author, Senator Greg Walker (R-Columbus), said the bill was about "preserving enough of a person's paycheck so they can pay the rent and buy food."

"This is about stability and hope," Walker told members of the Senate Insurance and Financial Institutions Committee when presenting the bill in January.

Mingus testified in favor of the measure, mentioning the recently concluded Jubilee Year of Hope in his remarks.

"We're at the tail end of a long-standing tradition in Christian history, called a jubilee year," he told lawmakers at the committee hearing. "Part of that, if you know the Old Testament, is forgiving debt. So, I want to emphasize that as you're considering



Wikimedia Commons

Several bills relating to the treatment of the poor are being considered during the current legislative session at the Indiana Statehouse.

this bill and (various) mechanisms that you carry forward the spirit of the jubilee year."

The ICC was joined by numerous allies in supporting Senate Bill 197, including the Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute. While the bill passed the Senate, it never received a hearing in the House.

Another measure involving the most vulnerable in Indiana is Senate Bill 285, which is the most recent legislative attempt at prohibiting homeless encampments across the state.

Under the bill, law enforcement officials first encountering individuals sleeping or camping on public property would issue a warning and offer to connect them with local shelters and other resources. Repeat violations could result in a Class C misdemeanor, which carries a standard fine of \$500 or up to 60 days in jail.

Opponents say that the measure would criminalize homelessness. But those backing the bill argue that the primary intent is to link the chronically homeless with essential services that could lead them to healthier and more stable lives.

After taking a mostly neutral stance, the ICC recently issued an action alert opposing Senate Bill 285, urging people to contact their lawmakers to vote "no" on the measure.

"We had seen some minor improvements to the bill, and we know there were some good intentions behind it," Mingus said. "But ultimately, we came to the belief that this bill would do

more harm than good."

Senate Bill 285 passed out of that chamber in late January and at press time was awaiting further action in the House.

The ICC also has concerns about elements of a more wide-ranging measure, Senate Bill 1, which is a key priority for Republicans in this legislative session. The bill aims to reduce waste, fraud, and abuse within the state's Medicaid program as well as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), more commonly known as food stamps.

"What's especially relevant for our work at the ICC in light of Pope Leo's recent document is how we think about the poor in relation to the use of public funds and public programs," Mingus said.

Among other provisions, Senate Bill 1 mandates rigorous verification of immigration status for all Medicaid and SNAP applicants. In addition, applicants who fail to verify their legal residence may face immediate referral to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Pope Leo XIV has criticized the immigration policies of President Donald Trump and called for the humane treatment of migrants. He has expressed particularly deep concern over the treatment of longtime residents of the United States who are undocumented and the separation of families in deportation actions.

In *Dilexi Te*, the pope summed up centuries of Catholic social teaching on the need to welcome and respect migrants.

"The Church, like a mother, accompanies those who are walking," he wrote. "Where the world sees threats, she sees children; where walls are built, she builds bridges."

"She knows that her proclamation of the Gospel is credible only when it is translated into gestures of closeness and welcome. And she knows that in every rejected migrant, it is Christ Himself who knocks at the door of the community."

Mingus said the ICC recognizes the state's need to ensure that its Medicaid and SNAP programs are functional and adequately funded. However, he said he believes Senate Bill 1 goes too far.

"In some areas, the bill is more stringent than that which is required by federal law," he said. "And in many ways, it does not think of the poor first."

To underscore the spirit of the issue, Mingus points to the words of Pope Leo XIV in the following excerpt from *Dilexi Te*.

"I am convinced that the preferential choice for the poor is a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society, if we can only set ourselves free of our self-centeredness and open our ears to their cry."

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.

Entering

A Day of Prayer and Healing
for Women Who Have
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Canaan

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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.

The Heart and Soul of Mrs. Mercylynn Green

Bishop Luers' Christ the Teacher Award Winner Radiates Faith, Joy

BY AVA HARDY

In just three years, Mrs. Mercylynn Green (formerly Ms. Mercylynn Mbuguah) has become a vital thread in the fabric of Bishop Luers High School. While she is still affectionally known as to many in the hallway as "Mrs. Mercy," she is stepping into a new chapter of her life both personally and professionally.

Mrs. Mercy teaches everything from the precision of geometry to the foundations of religion. Her unique ability to switch gears between two vastly different subjects all while maintaining her outstanding character has made her a stand-out mentor for students across multiple grade levels. Whether she is helping an upperclassman navigate their faith or conversing with students at the end of class, Mrs. Mercy's classroom has become a place where academic rigor meets genuine heart.

Her dedication to her students was recently recognized when she was named the Christ the Teacher Award recipient for Bishop Luers. For Mrs. Mercy, the honor was both humbling and validating, serving as a milestone in a career path that wasn't always so certain.

"Receiving the award was truly a privilege and a gift," she noted. "I initially wanted to become a doctor; however, I felt the Lord calling me to teach. This award is a testament of how God is working in my life as I continue to live out my ministry of teaching," she added, emphasizing that her work in the classroom is an extension of her faith.

While the award is a recognition of her achievements, the true evidence of her success is seen daily throughout the meaningful connections she has built within our school walls.

That sense of connection is what drew her to our school in the first place. When asked why she chose to teach here specifically, she pointed to the unique welcoming atmosphere of the community that seemed to radiate as soon as she stepped



Photos provided by Bishop Luers High School

on campus. Explaining that she originally wanted to be closer to home, that desire led to the opportunity of applying for a religion teacher position at Bishop Luers. Once hired, she realized that there was much more in store for her than just a shorter commute.

"I instantly fell in love with the community," she said. "I remember when I first interviewed for this position, I had a quick interaction with the theology department, and I felt a strong connection. Immediately, I knew this was the right choice. Now, they're like a second family to me," she said.

This feeling of belonging isn't just something Mrs. Mercy keeps for herself; it's a virtue she actively builds for everyone she greets in the hallways or steps through her door by intentionally treating her classroom as a home filled with love rather than a workplace. Ultimately, she fosters this by ensuring that no student feels like another anonymous name on an attendance sheet but rather a valued and supported member of her close-knit circle.

Even on the toughest days of grading complicated math work or discussing complex theology, Mrs. Mercy finds joy in the classroom. When asked about

her favorite part of teaching at Bishop Luers, she gave a simple answer. "Honestly, I just love interacting with the students. Every day there is a story, making sure that I always leave work with a couple good laughs," she said jokingly.

This joy is clearly a two-way street, as the impact Mrs. Mercy has on the school is felt by everyone from the faculty lounge to the back row of her geometry class. Andrea Isch, who serves as the chair of the school's theology department, described Mrs. Mercy as pure joy.

"Her energy just radiates," Isch said. "She fills me with joy, along with the students at Luers. Everything about her is always so positive. She truly uplifts every-

one she encounters."

This sentiment is echoed across the hall by Deb Brough, chair of the math department at Bishop Luers.

"There is so much I could say about Mrs. Mercy" Brough began. "Joy would be the ultimate word that comes to mind when I think of her. She can instantly brighten up any room she walks in simply with a smile," Brough said, adding that Mrs. Mercy is "by far one of the most selfless people I've met."

Mrs. Mercy's students frequently point to how her faith easily flows into the classroom.

Freshman Presley Meta and Ryan VanHorn share how Mrs. Mercy has grown their faith.

"I would say Mrs. Mercy's

"Joy would be the ultimate word that comes to mind when I think of her. She can instantly brighten up any room when she walks in simply with a smile."

DEB BROUGH

faith inspires me," Meta said. "She's very in touch with her spirituality, and it makes me want to deepen my faith by seeing how she lives out hers."

VanHorn said he feels that the way Mrs. Mercy teaches motivates him to dig further into Scripture. "Mrs. Mercy teaches Scripture in a way that helps me be able to understand it more. She's so passionate about her teaching that it encourages you to want to learn instead of it seeming like a chore."

For those who might be considering joining the Catholic Church, Mrs. Mercy offers a warm and open invitation.

"I would tell anyone curious about the faith that it's a journey worth taking," she shared. "Allow yourself to bring questions, doubts, and wonders, because God's fullness of truth is in the Catholic Church. Be open to receiving what God has to offer, because if you listen, it will truly change your life."

After three years of exploring the nuances of faith, Mrs. Mercy has proven to be a cornerstone of our school. Her commitment to her Bishop Luers family recently took on an even deeper meaning, as Bishop Luers students and staff joined her in celebrating her beautiful wedding, which took place in early February.

As she begins this exciting new chapter of her own life, she continues to remind us all that the best kind of learning and the best kind of life happens when you are surrounded by a community of love and faith.

Ava Hardy is a senior at Bishop Luers High School.



NEWS BRIEFS

At Lenten Retreat, Bishop Warns of Gospel's Use 'As a Weapon in Culture Wars'

VATICAN CITY (OSV News) – In his first reflection at the Lenten retreat with Pope Leo XIV and the Roman Curia on Sunday, February 22, and Monday, February 23, Norwegian Trappist Bishop Erik Varden urged Vatican officials to embrace Lent as a season of authentic Christian witness, not culture war combat. Preaching the Roman Curia's annual retreat February 22–27 in the Pauline Chapel, Bishop Varden warned against using the Gospel as a weapon. "Every manipulation of Christian words and symbols for other purposes must be vigorously challenged," he said, adding that errors are best corrected through teaching and example – not indignation. Chosen by Pope Leo to lead the reflections, Bishop Varden focused on the theme, "Illuminated by a Hidden Glory." He described Lent as a time stripped of excess, calling Christians to embody the peace "which the world cannot give." That peace, he said, is not ease but the foundation of a transformed society.

Pope Renews 'Heartfelt Appeal' for Ceasefire' in Russia-Ukraine War

VATICAN CITY (OSV News) – Pope Leo XIV has renewed his "heartfelt appeal" for an "immediate ceasefire" in Russia's war against Ukraine and again urged dialogue "be strengthened to pave the way toward peace." "Peace cannot be postponed," the pope said at the end of the Angelus on Sunday, February 22, in St. Peter's Square. "It is an urgent necessity that must find a home in our hearts and be translated into responsible decisions. ... Let the weapons fall silent, let the bombings cease." The pope's repeated appeal for peace came two days ahead of the fourth anniversary of Russia launching its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Initiated in 2014, Russia's war against Ukraine was accelerated by the invasion on February 24, 2022. "Four years have passed since the beginning of the war against Ukraine," Pope Leo said. "My heartfelt thoughts remain focused on the tragic situation unfolding before the eyes of the whole world." He called all to unite in prayer "for the embattled people of Ukraine." Since February of 2022, more than 14,500 civilians – including 745 children – have been confirmed killed, with tens of thousands more injured.

St. Francis' Relics Open to Public for First Extended Veneration in 800 years

ASSISI, Italy (OSV News) – For the first time in 800 years, the

VATICAN UNVEILS NEW STATIONS OF THE CROSS AT ST. PETER'S



OSV News photo/Courtney Mares

A woman prays before the fourth Station of the Cross, painted by a young Swiss artist who won the Vatican's international art competition, in St. Peter's Basilica. The new Stations of the Cross series by Manuel Andreas Dürr, a 36-year-old artist and father of three, was inaugurated on Friday, February 20. The 14 stations, which were prayed in St. Peter's for the first time on the first Friday of Lent, will be displayed temporarily until Easter as part of the many initiatives to mark the 400th anniversary of the basilica's consecration.

mortal remains of St. Francis of Assisi are on extended public display. The monthlong veneration, drawing some 370,000 registered pilgrims to the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, marks the 800th anniversary of the saint's death in 1226 and runs through March 22. Pilgrims from around the world lined up on Sunday, February 22, for the first day of public veneration to pray before the bones of "the Little Poor Man of Assisi. Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime called the exposition "an event of extraordinary grace," adding, "this body, fragile and poor, reminds us that the Gospel is also lived with the body, with real choices, with daily gestures." Franciscan Brother Jimmy Zammit said, "If our heart becomes more Franciscan, we become makers of peace," urging Catholics worldwide to live the saint's legacy.

Pope Leo Tells Priests Not to Use AI to Write Homilies or Seek Likes on TikTok

VATICAN CITY (OSV News) – Pope Leo XIV has urged priests to not to use artificial intelli-

gence to write their homilies or to seek "likes" on social media platforms like TikTok. In a question-and-answer session with clergy from the Diocese of Rome, the pope said priests should resist "the temptation to prepare homilies with artificial intelligence." "Like all the muscles in the body, if we do not use them, if we do not move them, they die. The brain needs to be used, so our intelligence must also be exercised a little so as not to lose this capacity," Pope Leo said in the closed-door meeting, according to a report by Vatican News on Friday, February 20. "To give a true homily is to share faith," and artificial intelligence "will never be able to share faith," the pope added.

Cardinal Dolan: Vance 'Apologized' for Comments About U.S. Bishops and Immigration

NEW YORK (OSV News) – Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan said U.S. Vice President JD Vance "apologized" for "out of line" comments he made against the nation's Catholic bishops over immigra-

tion. The cardinal, who recently retired as archbishop of New York and is now the co-chief of police chaplains in that city, recalled an undated conversation he had with Vance and spoke about it in a February 19 interview with Mark Irons of EWTN News. During the 32-minute interview, Irons asked Cardinal Dolan how he would "grade" Vance. While describing Vance as "a very good guy," Cardinal Dolan said he had directly addressed him about Vance's public accusations that the nation's bishops helped migrants for financial gain. "When he suggested that bishops in the United States were pro-immigrant because we were making money, which was not only untrue, it was scurrilous – and he apologized," said Cardinal Dolan. "He says, 'That was out of line, and that's not true.'"

Removal of Slavery Display 'Robs Us' of History, Healing, Say Black Catholic Leaders

PHILADELPHIA (OSV News) – The Trump administration's

effort to remove a slavery exhibit at a national historic site in Philadelphia distorts history while eroding racial justice and healing, several Black Catholic leaders told OSV News. And although the display was reinstalled on Thursday, February 19, under a federal judge's order – a move the administration has appealed – more work needs to be done overall in countering the sin of racism, they said. "We cannot erase our history; it will crop up to bite us when we least expect," said M. Shawn Copeland, professor emerita of systematic theology at Boston College and author of "Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience." Catholic scholar, author, and speaker Gloria Purvis told OSV News the display's removal was "a larger part ... of erasing the Black experience as well as Black accomplishments from American history." Father Reginald Norman, president of the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators and pastor of St. Mark Parish in Stratford, Connecticut, described the display removal as "very oppressive." He said people "are panicking" because they think Black history is gone forever, but "it will never be gone as long as we remember it." The priest added, "We will march on, and we'll do the work" of healing racial injustice.

Mexican Bishops Urge Prudence, Prayer as Violence Erupts

MEXICO CITY (OSV News) – Mexico's bishops are urging calm and caution after a deadly military operation sparked violence across several states. In a February 22 message, the Mexican bishops' conference called on the faithful to follow safety protocols, avoid unnecessary travel, and shelter at home when needed. The statement, signed by conference president Bishop Ramón Castro Castro of Cuernavaca and Auxiliary Bishop Héctor M. Pérez Villareal of Mexico City, invited Catholics to respond with prudence and prayer. The appeal followed the killing of cartel leader Nemesio Rubén Oseguera Cervantes, head of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel. According to the Associated Press, a shootout left four dead, including Oseguera. The bishops asked for intensified prayer, invoking Our Lady of Guadalupe, and calling Catholics to be "sowers of reconciliation and fraternity." Invoking the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the bishops prayed that Mary would "cover us with her mantle, protect our families, and help us build paths of justice, peace, and hope."

'Remember You Are Dust, And to Dust You Shall Return'



Scott Warden

Members of the faithful line up for Communion during Ash Wednesday Mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Fort Wayne.



St. Thérèse, Little Flower via Facebook

Father Julius Okojie, pastor of St. Thérèse, Little Flower, and members of the parish distribute ashes outside of Martin's grocery store in South Bend on Ash Wednesday, February 18.



Scott Warden

Father Francis Chukwuma, rector of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Fort Wayne, places ashes on the forehead of a man during Ash Wednesday Mass.



Scott Warden

Worshippers pray the Our Father during Ash Wednesday Mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Fort Wayne on Wednesday, February 18.

SULLIVAN, from page 3

"He was here for birthdays, Christmas, to stop by just to see the kids in their Halloween costumes, and he always had magic tricks he did for the kids," said Goshert, who named her oldest son William after her Uncle Billy. "He never missed a Sunday meal or a holiday get-together."

Goshert also appreciated his encouragement at sporting events. "He came to not only my children's games but to cheer on kids who were members of St. John's and Luers," she said. "He'd be standing right at the gate at Luers when you walked in; he was always there for those big games and came to support them whenever he could."

Caitlin Krouse, another niece, experienced this support when she ran cross country at Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame while Father Sullivan was pastor in Mishawaka and Elkhart.

"It was really nice having him nearby – he would regularly swing by at Saint Mary's to check in or take me to dinner or to a Notre Dame basketball game,"

said Krouse, recalling how he would show her how to maximize at the all-you-can-eat dining halls at Notre Dame. "That was special time for me to have him close."

However, the gloves came off when Father Sullivan was competing in family games.

"He was the only one so competitive that he wouldn't let any of us kids win," Krouse said, referencing his merciless basketball antics while playing HORSE with his nieces and nephews. "He wouldn't care – he would do behind-the-back layups, and we'd all get out. He'd celebrate the glory of winning a basketball game against 8-year-olds. We thought he was so funny."

All humor aside, Krouse said she will always treasure the faith he modeled to the end.

"Watching my uncle go through his final days, his faith through all of that was truly inspiring," she said. "I am trying myself to think how I can carry that in my own life, because I don't want to lose that memory of his final days and how that faith was something you could feel in

the room; you could see the presence of how at peace he was. ... He was always a humble, incredibly generous, faith-filled man, and that was the cherry on top."

Father Sullivan is remembered similarly at each of his former parishes. Corinne DeLucenay's family came to St. Thomas in Elkhart when her mother was hired as director of religious education in 1999.

"How incredibly blessed I am to have known and been known by Father Bill," DeLucenay said. "Being a parish staff kid meant long days at church, but it was never a burden. Instead, it shaped me." She treasures memories of Father Sullivan buying her Lindt chocolates for the first time and always keeping the candy jar full in her mom's office. "Those small gestures meant more than he probably ever knew."

To DeLucenay, Father Sullivan wasn't just pastor – he was family, friend, and spiritual father who was "steady, generous, and present" through difficult times. "Through his care, I first began to understand the Lord's

providence ... to have such a great witness of the Father's love and compassion. His influence and example helped lead me into ministry and a life of service, and for that I will be forever grateful."

Dave Steffen, a parishioner at St. John the Baptist, went to high school with Father Sullivan and remembers him as captain of the Bishop Luers basketball team his senior year. Their friendship was renewed years later when Father Sullivan returned to celebrate Mass at St. John the Baptist, which he did quite often in his retirement.

"If there is one thing I really remember about him, after he retired, he still would come and do Mass for the kids during the week at all-school Masses, and he would give great sermons," Steffen said. "He was a very wonderful priest, and people always loved him wherever he was."

Visitation was held at St. John the Baptist Church in Fort Wayne on Tuesday, February 24, along with a Rosary and vigil service. Mass was celebrated at

St. John the Baptist on Wednesday, February 25, with visitation held one hour before and burial following at the Catholic Cemetery in Fort Wayne. Memorial contributions may be made to Bishop Luers High School, St. John the Baptist (Fort Wayne), the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Diocesan Seminarian Fund, or masses.

During what ended up being his final public homily, as he celebrated the solemnity of Mary Mother of God on January 1, Father Sullivan preached on memories of running home to his mother for comfort. He shared that he will run straight to his mom when he gets to heaven. Just a few weeks later, amid declining health, Father Sullivan told his family that he saw his parents in a dream, young and beautiful, welcoming him into heaven. So, when his hospice nurse was preparing to transfer him to a different building, Father Sullivan said he knew where he wanted to go. He simply looked up at the sky and said, "Home."

Welcome home, Uncle Billy.

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Bishops' Religious Liberty Report Addresses 'Critical Concerns'

BY KATE SCANLON

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) – Areas of critical concern for religious liberty in the United States include political and anti-religious violence, “unjust terms and conditions on federal grants, and unreliability of government,” access to sacraments for people detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and immigration enforcement operations at houses of worship, according to a new report by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

On Tuesday, February 17, the USCCB Committee for Religious Liberty issued its “Annual Report on the State of Religious Liberty,” which highlights the legislative actions, executive actions, and U.S. Supreme Court cases the U.S. bishops are closely watching.

“While there were positive developments for religious liberty in the past year, there have been worrying developments as well,” Archbishop Alexander K. Sample of Portland, Oregon, chair of the Committee for Religious Liberty, said in his introduction of the report. Archbishop Sample succeeded Bishop Rhoades as chairman of the committee.

The other areas of critical concern the report identified were school choice and the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit, the repeal of provisions that prevent religious organizations from participating in government programs, and “further repudiation of gender ideology.”

Of the areas the report identifies, Archbishop Sample said, “Perhaps most concerning is the ongoing rise in political violence. The polarization the bishops have long lamented seems to be breaking out into serious attacks. Antisemitic sentiment and rhetoric in mainstream institutions appears to be increasing.”

Antisemitic incidents have seen a sharp uptick in recent years, according to the Anti-Defamation League, which tracks antisemitic attacks. That group said in a 2025 report that it recorded 9,354 antisemitic incidents across the U.S. the previous year, which marked a 344 percent increase over the



OSV News file photo/Bradley Birkholz

group's findings from the previous five years.

The report said that Catholic churches also saw instances of violence and vandalism – most notably the August 27 mass shooting at Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis during a school Mass. The report noted that an investigation “discerned no coherent motive” from the shooter, who expressed “a mix of antisemitic, anti-Trump, racist, and anti-Catholic ideas, along with a strong desire to kill children.”

It also pointed to the October 5 arrest of a man armed with explosive devices from the front steps of the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington, D.C., shortly before the church's annual Red Mass, which marks the opening of the Supreme Court's term.

Examples of political violence included the assassination of conservative activist Charlie Kirk and a firebombing attack on the home of Pennsylvania's Democratic Governor Joshua Shapiro during Passover that authorities called an attempted murder.

“Too much of our national life is marked by enmity and strife,” Archbishop Sample said.

The report also noted areas of tension between the Trump administration's immigration enforcement and religious liberty, such as loosened restrictions on ICE agents from making arrests at what are seen as sensitive locations, including houses of worship, schools, and hospitals, as well as ensuring those in ICE custody have access to the sacraments.

“Furthermore, the admin-

istration's aggressive approach to immigration enforcement has led to fears about going to church, driving down Mass attendance, and leading some bishops to dispense the faithful from their Sunday obligation,” Archbishop Sample said.

The report said that five bishops “have taken the extraordinary step of dispensing Catholics from their Sunday obligation if they fear that going to Mass puts them at risk of being detained.”

However, Archbishop Sample said, “there were positive developments for religious liberty, too,” citing the Religious Liberty Commission created by President Donald Trump, “which several of my brother bishops serve as either members or advisers.”

The report also praised steps taken by the Trump administration “to combat gender ideology, which has corroded religious liberty in recent years,” and Trump's directive to “repeal regulatory provisions that are unlawful in light of recent decisions of the United States Supreme Court, including *Carson v. Makin*.”

Archbishop Sample noted, “all of these developments are taking place as Americans prepare to celebrate two hundred fifty years as an independent nation.”

“It is a fitting time to reflect on the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence, and how those ideals have shaped the unique culture that has grown over the past two-and-a-half centuries,” he said. “For Catholics, it is an opportunity to reflect on how the Church has enriched American life.”

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USCCB Chairman Speaks Out on Mass Detention Centers

BY GINA CHRISTIAN

(OSV News) – A Texas bishop and head of the U.S. Catholic bishops' migration committee is sounding the alarm over the Trump administration's plans to acquire massive warehouses all over the country, each capable of interning thousands of people, in the name of its sweeping crackdown on immigration.

"The thought of holding thousands of families in massive warehouses should challenge the conscience of every American," said Bishop Brendan J. Cahill of Victoria, Texas, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration, in a February 20 statement released by the USCCB. "Whatever their immigration status, these are human beings created in the image and likeness of God, and this is a moral inflection point for our country."

The New York Times, citing internal Department of Homeland Security documents it had obtained, reported on Wednesday, February 18, that the administration is seeking to purchase some 20 warehouses for the detentions, with the goal of 92,600 total beds. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, called it a "necessary downstream requirement" for the planned tempo of its enforcement and arrest operations in 2026 after a "surge hiring effort" that added 12,000 officers.

All of the new facilities are set to open by November 30, 2026, "ensuring the timely expansion of detention capacity," ICE officials said.

So far, at least eight facilities – located in Georgia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Texas – have



"Whatever their immigration status, these are human beings created in the image and likeness of God, and this is a moral inflection point for our country."

BISHOP BRENDAN J. CAHILL

already been acquired by the Trump administration.

The statement released by the USCCB drew particular attention to eight "mega centers" that would be each "capable of detaining 7,000 to 10,000 people."

Warehouses are also being considered in Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah.

A majority of the people targeted by ICE for mass detention and eventual deportation are expected to be Catholics in six out of 10 cases, according to a 2025 joint Catholic-Evangelical report published by the USCCB and World Relief. It also found Christians make up 80 percent of those at risk of President Donald Trump's mass deportation effort. The report also found nearly 1 in 5 Catholics (18 percent) in the U.S. are either vulnerable to deportation or live with someone who is.

The estimated cost for the ICE's "new detention center model" will be \$38.3 billion, to be funded by congressional allocations under the Trump administration's "One Big Beautiful Bill Act."

But the USCCB preface to Bishop Cahill's statement noted, "Aside from the internment camps used to incarcerate Japanese Americans in the 1940s, such facilities have no precedent

in American history."

During World War II, the federal government at the order of President Franklin D. Roosevelt incarcerated more than 125,000 Japanese Americans to remotely located camps throughout the nation, claiming they posed a security threat following the Empire of Japan's 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor.

Some 70,000 of those interned were U.S. citizens, with 1,600 of the people imprisoned dying during their incarceration. Internment also economically ruined families who lost property and businesses as a result.

In his statement, Bishop Cahill described the Trump administration's ICE detention facility expansion plans as "deeply troubling."

"The federal government does not have a positive track record when it comes to detaining large numbers of people, especially families, and the proposed scale of these facilities is difficult to comprehend," he said.

A number of immigration advocates have deplored conditions at ICE detention centers, citing unsanitary conditions, lack of basic care, and instances of violence and death, as well as denial of pastoral visits and access to legal counsel.

Last year, 32 people died while in ICE detention – the largest number in over two decades, according to a January 4 report by The Guardian. As of January, six people have died in ICE custody.

As of February 7, 68,289 persons were in ICE detention, with 73.6 percent of detainees having no criminal conviction, according to Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse.

Bishop Cahill said that "the private prison industry is who stands to gain the most from this supercharging of immigration detention."

He pointed to the USCCB's

special pastoral message on immigration, issued during the conference's annual fall meeting in 2025.

"Last November, my brother bishops and I unequivocally opposed the indiscriminate mass deportation of people and raised concerns about existing conditions in detention centers," he said. "We specifically highlighted a lack of access to pastoral care for detainees. On many occasions, we have also opposed the expansion of family detention, recognizing its harmful impacts on children in particular."

Catholic social teaching on immigration seeks to balance three interrelated principles: the right of persons to migrate

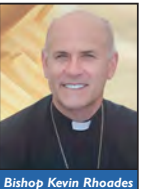
in order to sustain themselves and their families; the right of a country to regulate its borders and immigration; and a nation's duty to conduct that regulation with justice and mercy.

The Church's teaching, the bishops' special message noted, "rests on the foundational concern for the human person, as created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27)."

Bishop Cahill implored the Trump administration and Congress "to lead with right reason, abandon this misuse of taxpayer funds, and to instead pursue a more just approach to immigration enforcement that truly respects human dignity, the sanctity of families, and religious liberty."

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OSV News photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

Auxiliary Bishop Manuel A. Cruz of the Archdiocese of Newark, New Jersey, speaks during a prayer vigil outside Delaney Hall, a migrant detention center in Newark, on October 22, 2025.

RITE OF ELECTION, from page 1

Because of these numbers, the Rite of Election and Calling to Continuing Conversion were moved from our two diocesan cathedrals to a larger church on each end of the diocese – St. Charles Borromeo in Fort Wayne on Sunday, February 15, and St. Pius X in Granger on Sunday, February 22. Bishop Rhoades told those at St. Pius X it would have been standing-room-only at either cathedral and gave thanks that “so many of you are listening to God’s call.”

The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults, abbreviated OCIA, is the process through which adults and older children prepare to enter the Catholic Church. Formation includes months or even years of instruction, participation in parish life, prayer, and discernment. The Rite of Election and Calling to Continuing Conversion serve as a hinge moment in that journey, shifting the focus from general formation to immediate preparation to celebrate the sacraments of initiation.

The rites drew godparents, sponsors, OCIA team members, and family or other parishioners from across the diocese. The tone was both solemn and celebratory. Those preparing to enter the Church were called individually



Derby Photography

Members of the faithful look on during Mass in which the Rite of Election and the Calling to Conversion were held at St. Pius X Church in Granger on Sunday, January 22.

by name, with their godparents or sponsors testifying collectively to their readiness and commitment. Bishop Rhoades signed the Books of the Elect, in which the catechumens (the unbaptized) had previously inscribed their names at the Rite of Sending in their own parishes. This signified their transition from being catechumens to being chosen as the elect, ready to be baptized

this Easter.

In his homily at both locations, Bishop Rhoades placed the rites within the wider context of the Lenten season, 40 days of prayer, penance, and charitable works. He stressed that while Lent is observed by the entire Church, it carries particular weight for those preparing to receive the sacraments of initiation at Easter.

“First of all, dear catechumens, this is the most important Lent of your life, the final stage of your preparation for the Easter sacraments: baptism, confirmation, and the holy Eucharist.” He emphasized that the Church sees these sacraments as real encounters with grace and transformation. “Baptism is not a mere formality, and it’s not like joining a club. Through baptism,

you will receive the blessings that flow from the dying and rising of Jesus, including the forgiveness of sins. You will be unified with the crucified and risen Jesus. You will undergo a death to the bondage of sin and receive new life and freedom by the gift of God’s grace.”

During Lent, the elect will participate in special Lenten rites known as scrutinies, which focus on spiritual healing, self-examination, and strengthening against sin. For the elect, after Baptism, Confirmation will be conferred by the pastor so that, together with First Communion, all three sacraments are celebrated during the Easter Vigil liturgy.

Many baptized, non-Catholic candidates for full communion also enter the Church during the Easter Vigil at the parish, making a special profession of faith in the Catholic Church and all it teaches, before being confirmed and receiving the Eucharist for the first time. In his homily during the rites in Fort Wayne and South Bend, Bishop Rhoades addressed the candidates for full communion, saying: “You are already sharers in Christ’s death and resurrection and have received the gift of his new life in baptism. But you are preparing this Lent to enter into full communion with the Church instituted by Jesus and governed

by the successor of St. Peter.”

Bishop Rhoades reflected on the central role of the Eucharist for Catholics, calling it “the source and summit of the Christian life,” “the sacrament of Christ’s love unto the end,” and “the Church’s greatest treasure.” He invited those preparing for initiation “to contemplate the amazing mystery of the Eucharist during this Lenten season.”

In addition, every year, large numbers of adults who were baptized Catholic as infants but never catechized or prepared to receive the other sacraments of initiation, are prepared to join in renewing their baptismal promises – many receive their first Communion at Easter, and Bishop Rhoades will confirm them later during the Easter season.

Included among these uncatechized Catholics is Stacy Romero of St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Elkhart. Although her parents and older siblings received the sacraments of initiation and made sure she was baptized at St. Thomas in Elkhart, one parent became alienated by someone within the Church, and after that, the family stayed away. Romero went to Mass only when her paternal grandmother took her. She had her first child baptized 30 years ago but didn’t continue his formation because of his disabilities.

“I always felt like I was missing something,” Romero told Today’s Catholic. She remembers being jealous when her best friend began attending a parochial school, but she didn’t pursue reconnecting with the Church until she was hired as business manager at St. Vincent de Paul on April 7, 2025. “I believe God gave me that job to help me go through with this.” She has grown closer to Jesus through the OCIA process but admits it’s been a struggle because of an illness and an auto accident.

One thing that has helped a great deal is time spent in adoration. “I never even knew what that was,” Romero admitted, but it’s given her a way to be close to Jesus in the Eucharist even before she is able to receive Communion. “It’s been a struggle at times but a joy most of the time. I can feel the difference in every aspect of my life.”

Fernando Galarza is another nominal Catholic who had been on a “dark path,” but “I needed something else in my life,” he said. His fiancée, Carey Brooks, was formerly active in a Baptist church but has been increasingly drawn to becoming Catholic. She is a candidate for full com-

munion at St. Joseph Church in Mishawaka.

For Gavin and Danna Guajardo from Our Lady of Hungary Parish in South Bend, Danna is the one whose background is Catholic. She attended Our Lady of Hungary during middle school, but she received no sacraments; her mother wanted her to decide for herself what she wanted. After a rebellious phase, Danna wanted to get in touch with Jesus, so she accompanied her mother-in-law to a Pentecostal church but really wished their family could be Catholic. So, she was surprised when Gavin said, “OK, let’s be Catholic.” Gavin had grown up in San Antonio but identified as an agnostic. However, his two best friends in the Army were a committed Baptist and a Catholic; the three of them spent much of their time discussing theology, and eventually the Catholic member of the group convinced both of his buddies to convert to the faith. Besides completing their initiation, the Guajardo family is also looking forward to the baptism of their two young daughters this Easter season.

Tegegn Drake, a high school sophomore, will have a shorter period of preparation than most of the other elect. On March 19, the feast of St. Joseph, Bishop Rhoades will visit Saint Joseph High School in South Bend to baptize him and confirm him and several candidates for full communion. For these students and their sponsors, OCIA has taken place during their one-hour flex period, with reading assignments as homework.

The only one of four siblings to attend Catholic schools (Holy Cross Grade School and Saint Joe High), Tegegn said, “I grew close to the faith, and I’ve known I wanted to be a part of the Catholic Church since eighth grade.”

Bishop Rhoades encouraged candidates to use Lent as a time of renewal and ongoing conversion, supported by prayer, Scripture, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. And he urged all present to take Lent seriously as a time for spiritual renewal because “we all need continual conversion and repentance.” The traditional Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, he said, “are meant to help us as we journey toward Easter so that we may draw more abundantly from the mystery of redemption the new life in Christ we received in baptism.” He encouraged everyone “to renew the grace and commitments of our baptism and accept Our Lord’s invitation to follow Him decisively and consistently.”



Photos by Joe Romie

Catechists holding Books of the Elect line up during Mass at St. Charles Borromeo Church in Fort Wayne on Sunday, February 15.



Bishop Rhoades signs a Book of the Elect during the Rite of Election as Father Nathan Maskal and a catechist look on at St. Charles Borromeo Church in Fort Wayne on Sunday, February 15.

On Flesh and Fish



HUMORIN THE MIX

KEN HALLENIUS

When I was growing up in Seattle, my family would usually go out to eat at a local seafood restaurant chain on the Fridays of Lent, and it always appeared to me that every booth was filled with another family from St. Philomena Parish. I'm pretty sure that the six weeks of Lent were the high point of the restaurant's balance sheet each year, and I know for certain that I ate well more than the surgeon general's recommended daily allowance of tartar sauce over those 40 days. It never occurred to me to wonder exactly why we Catholics abstained from meat on Fridays, because I genuinely looked forward to a basket of fish and chips.

One of my high school teachers once told us that when he was a teenager, he and his friends would cruise the town on Friday nights, waiting for the clock to strike midnight so they could gorge themselves on hamburgers. That's when I put it together

that this distinctive penitential practice on Fridays has been part of Catholic tradition since time immemorial, with varying degrees of observance based on local custom. In the years following the Second Vatican Council, the bishops of the United States decided that Friday abstinence from meat is binding on American Catholics during the season of Lent, while another penitential practice may be substituted on Fridays during the rest of the year.

But why do we abstain specifically from meat as a penance? The simple answer is that since Jesus sacrificed his own flesh in the Crucifixion, we give up flesh meats in His honor. Flesh meats are traditionally understood as that of mammals and poultry, such as beef, pork, lamb, chicken, and turkey. Fish (and other cold-blooded water animals) have never been considered flesh meats under the law and thus are not prohibited. A secondary reason is that flesh meats throughout history have usually been more expensive than fish and thus were rarely eaten, typically as part of a joyful celebration. This also explains why if a solemnity falls on a Friday of Lent (like the Annunciation or

St. Joseph's feast day), we may eat meat at the feast.

Our mindful acts of penance on Fridays, whether by abstaining from meat or another act of sacrifice, are tangible reminders of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on that first Good Friday, the day that He suffered and died upon the cross for our sins. My choosing to give up a good thing like a hamburger is an insignificant sacrifice in comparison to the death of the Lord Jesus. But when I consciously make the decision to forego my natural desire for a hamburger, my choice is a small act of thanksgiving to the God who gives all good things, most especially the gift of Himself.

Penance, prayer, and almsgiving are the hallmarks of the Lenten season, and indeed the whole Christian life. Jesus told his disciples that whoever wishes to follow Him "must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Mt 16: 24). We deny ourselves when we mindfully practice penitential fasting and abstinence. We pray as He taught when we offer an Our Father. And we perform almsgiving by visiting the imprisoned, healing the sick, and feeding

HALLENIUS, page 13

Stepping Up to Lent



CALLED TO HOLINESS

JAYMIE STUART WOLFE

The thing about Mardi Gras in New Orleans is the scale of what happens here.

A few weekends ago, I went to eight parades. I saw 277 floats from four different artistic design and construction companies, carrying nearly 10,000 riders, throwing tens of thousands of trinkets to the crowds, flanked by dozens of marching bands and other costumed groups who dance, roller-skate, or ride bicycles, motorcycles, and even motorized recliners (I kid you not!) down the nearly 5-mile route.

Now add police, EMTs, power workers, media, and street cleaners to the mix – and crowds north of a couple hundred thousand. It's practically impossible to imagine if you've never seen it for yourself. And that wasn't even the weekend before Mardi Gras!

The amount of time, effort, money, and creativity required to put together a parade that lasts only three or four hours is

brehtaking. Even more amazing is the fact that Mardi Gras is produced voluntarily by private citizens, organizations, and clubs. There is no overarching steering committee coordinating everything that goes on here, nor are there any corporate or government sponsors footing the bill. Each one of the almost 60 parades is a unique and extravagant gift between neighbors in this vibrant community. And that's why more than a million visitors come to see it.

There are a lot of life lessons to be learned from what happens here, but chief among them is this: The most wonderful things in the world don't just happen on their own.

Everything we love, cherish, and enjoy – the best and most meaningful experiences we remember all our lives – require people who are willing to spend their resources, share their talents, and work their tails off to make them happen.

That principle applies to everything, whether we're talking about preparing a delicious meal, celebrating a birthday, decorating for Christmas, updating a

WOLFE, page 13

Only in Rejecting Sin Can We Shimmer in God's Sanctifying Light



THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MONSIGNOR OWEN F. CAMPION

The Book of Genesis is the source of this weekend's first biblical reading. As its name implies, Genesis reveals the divine origin of life and the divine plan in the forming of the Hebrew race.

First and foremost, Genesis is a splendidly vivid revelation of God's majesty and power, but also of the dignity of humanity and purpose of life. It is a great pity that this marvelous book has been so tortured and misconstrued by well-meaning but uninformed readers over the years. The core message of Genesis is not about the details of how creation occurred.

This weekend's reading is about Abraham. Considered by scholars to have been an actual person and not a myth, Abraham is regarded as the father of the Jewish people.

The reading makes several points. God is active in human affairs, and God communicates with humans, and they with God.

Abraham has strong faith. God rewards this faith by pledging that Abraham's descendants, until the end of time, will be God's special people. It is not a dignity conferred without obligation. Descendants of Abraham must be loyal to God and, by their lives of faith, reveal God to the world.

For its second reading, this weekend's liturgy presents a passage from the Second Epistle to Timothy.

Timothy was a disciple of Paul. The Church venerates Timothy as a great saint, very important in the formation of Christianity. According to the New Testament, Timothy was the son of a pagan father and a devout Jewish mother. He was Paul's secretary at one point and once was imprisoned with Paul, although eventually released. Tradition is that Timothy was the first bishop of Ephesus, then a major city, its present ruins are

on the Mediterranean coast of modern Turkey.

This reading encourages Timothy to be strong in his Christian belief despite difficulties and obstacles.

St. Matthew's Gospel furnishes the last reading. It is the story of the Transfiguration, ablaze with symbols of God with which any Jew instantly would have recognized, as these images appear throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

In these Scriptures, brilliant light, mountaintops, clouds, and pure white all symbolized God. Finally, surrounding Jesus were Moses and Elijah, the great heroes of the Hebrew religious tradition.

This scene completely contrasts with that of Calvary. Instead of shimmering clothes, Jesus is crucified after being stripped of his garments. Instead of glowing clouds and brilliant light, gloom and darkness surround the cross.

Reflection

Lent is little more than one week along, and already the Church is encouraging us, reinforcing our faith, just as Jesus

strengthened the faith of the apostles who stood trembling and in dismay before the divine sight manifested on the mountain.

The message is clear. Jesus is God, active and present among us.

To be saved, we must believe, and in our belief, we must commit our very lives to Christ. So, Abraham is critically a part of this weekend's lesson as an example.

Nowhere in these readings is any account of the Crucifixion, no reference to Calvary. Nevertheless, the event of the Lord's death on the cross is essential to understanding fully this weekend's message.

Calvary represents the world. It was for a moment, seemingly, the triumph of earthly power and human sin over good. Certainly, the enemies of Jesus saw the crucifixion as their victory. Jesus died, but then came the wonder of Easter.

Every human being can be tricked into assuming that earthly things, or earthly satisfaction, will bring them reward. Instead of reward, sinning brings death. All around it is gloom and darkness.

So, the Church counsels, have faith, see beyond the gloom,

be smart, rejoice in the light of Jesus. Remember the Transfiguration, and remember Abraham, our model of absolute faith. Remember the Lord, our only hope.

READINGS

Sunday: Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalms 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22; 2 Timothy 1:8b-10; Matthew 17:1-9

Monday: Daniel 9:4b-10; Psalms 79:8, 9, 11, 13; Luke 6:36-38

Tuesday: Isaiah 1:10, 16-20; Psalms 50:8-9, 16bc-17, 21, 23; Matthew 23:1-12

Wednesday: Jeremiah 18:18-20; Psalms 31:5-6, 14, 15-16; Matthew 20:17-28

Thursday: Jeremiah 17:5-10; Psalms 1:1-2, 3-4, 6; Luke 16:19-31

Friday: Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28; Psalms 105:16-17, 18-19, 20-21; Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

Saturday: Micah 7:14-15, 18-20; Psalms 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Lenten Lessons from Pope Leo



PAPAL WORDS

MICHAEL R. HEINLEIN

Pope Leo XIV's first Lenten message is a great gift for those looking for a road map to the season.

Reading the communication – his first such as pontiff – reminded me of the importance of taking on the real work necessary for deeper union with Christ for the life of the world.

It was a reminder, too, of the annual challenge of the season to take up the Church's invitation "to place the mystery of God back in the center of our lives, in order to find renewal in our faith and keep our hearts from being consumed by the anxieties and distractions of daily life."

Lent isn't supposed to be effortless. And it's supposed to have a positive effect. Obscuring these realities can be easy today. When taking on the penances of Lent, Pope Leo directs us to keep our eyes on the goal of conversion, of embracing the afforded "opportunity to heed the voice of the Lord and renew our commitment to following Christ."

In drafting his short yet substantive Lenten message, it would appear that Pope Leo understands the fractured focus and fragmented existence so many of us experience in today's culture.

We live in a world with so much noise, with so many competing voices and forces all vying

for our attention and resources. With the resounding gongs and clanging symbols all around us, it's easy to become counted among them ourselves.

Nearing the end of what's been a long winter for many, including those of us in our home, I started thinking about how the need for listening advocated by Pope Leo in his Lenten message comes, providentially, after a season of being cooped up at home for a long wintry stretch.

As a homeschooling family, sometimes too much of one another can present challenges in practicing virtue. As soon as I read Pope Leo's message for Lent, I knew I had to share some of it with our children. Any family should consider doing the same.

I was drawn to Leo's interest in fostering listening. How often does the simple absence of listening to one another lead to struggles and divisions? Too often. Scrolling through social media or listening to the news drives home the point.

Closer to home, just after I read Leo's Lenten lessons, the toddler and his at-times overly motherly older sister were feuding over a still-popular Christmas toy – Lord, have mercy – before breakfast.

"The willingness to listen is the first way we demonstrate our desire to enter into relationship with someone," Pope Leo observes.

I thought of this as the kids were descending into a battle of words and wills. Describing God as "one who seeks to involve us," I thought, why not involve the

kids in trying to live Leo's Lenten call?

God "even today ... shares with us what is in His heart," Leo explains. What could be better than helping children this Lent begin to do the same? Leo draws to our attention "listening to the word in the liturgy" since it "teaches us to listen to the truth of reality."

He continues: "In the midst of the many voices present in our personal lives and in society, Sacred Scripture helps us to recognize and respond to the cry of those who are anguished and suffering. In order to foster this inner openness to listening, we must allow God to teach us how to listen as He does."

To take this on with kids this Lent seems like a worthy challenge, and one that will hopefully assist them in seeing the positive effects of undertaking greater virtue. As Pope Leo explains, Lent's call to conversion "refers not only to one's conscience but also to the quality of our relationships and dialogue. It means allowing ourselves to be challenged by reality and recognizing what truly guides our desires."

These undertakings are necessary for any of us who endeavor to let Christ dwell in us more fully. Going about living so more fruitfully in our family this Lent undoubtedly won't be easy. But that's not what Lent is supposed to be.

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

menu, which is quite praiseworthy (as well as a good business decision in a city filled with Catholics). But the ad for this particular restaurant struck a discordant note when it invited patrons to "indulge in our exclusive Lenten friendly tasting menu."

The word "indulge" gave me pause. In my mind, if I abstain from meat only to gorge myself on lobster and scallops, I may be following the letter of the law, but I'm entirely missing its penitential spirit.

Many parishes and Knights of Columbus councils offer fish fry dinners on Lenten Fridays. In South Bend alone you can go to a different parish fish fry every week throughout the season and still not hit them all. My childhood parish hosted weekly soup suppers during Lent, where families would

gather together in the parish hall to share a simple meal in common, with monetary proceeds from the evening being donated to the Catholic Relief Services Rice Bowl program. These and similar Lenten offerings are opportunities to deepen our practice of the faith as we break bread together, continuing the communion that flows from the Eucharist.

As we continue this holy season of Lent, let us rededicate ourselves to the daily practice of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, looking forward to the coming Easter Triduum and to the day when we shall all be gathered with the saints and angels to rejoice at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb!

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

SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for March 1, 2026

Matthew 17:1-9

Following is a word search based on the Gospel for the Second Sunday of Lent, Cycle A: The Transfiguration of Jesus to Peter, James and John. Words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

PETER	JAMES	JOHN
MOUNTAIN	BEFORE THEM	LIKE THE SUN
WHITE	LIGHT	ELIJAH
LORD	IS GOOD	IF YOU WISH
THREE	A VOICE	BELOVED
PLEASED	LISTEN	HEARD
AFRAID	ALONE	RAISED

HIGH MOUNTAIN

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M J O B D D I A R F A X
O A M E R D E S A E L P
U M V L O H M L W I O J
N E U O L O E D K A N I
T S G V I H H E J O E F
A S L E S C T H R E E Y
I B L D T H E A R D D O
N R A D E W R L L R E U
N H O S N H O L I L S W
I H U Y B I F G G J I I
G N O R E T E P H I A S
D F G J O E B K T L R H
    
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HALLENIUS, from page 12

the poor. Through these acts of mercy for our brothers and sisters, we imitate the Lord who took flesh to visit His people imprisoned in sin, healed the blind and the lame, and fed the multitudes – first with five loaves and two fishes, and at every Mass with His very body and blood in the gift of the Eucharist.

But sacrifice might not always feel like a sacrifice. To wit: Did you know that the Filet-O-Fish sandwich was the first non-burger item added to the McDonald's menu, specifically so that Catholics would have a fast-food option on a Friday? I was reminded of this when I saw a recent social media post from a local restaurant known for fine dining. They were announcing a special Lenten

gratitude means handing it all on – stepping up to give others what they themselves received, and even things they did not receive but wish they had.

And that's what I think Lent is for. This penitential season gives us a chance to consider whether we're people who show up and watch or people who do what it takes to make things happen. It gives us an opportunity to consider how we might move from consumers to creators, from spectators to participants, from beneficiaries to benefactors.

The streets of New Orleans fill with crowds of people ready to watch a Mardi Gras parade only because an enormous number of other people have taken it upon themselves to produce the spectacle they come out for. Without them, there would be nothing to see. The culture that animates this city would quickly become a thing of the past.

If everyday Catholics continue to sit back and wait for someone else to step up to the plate, to bear the burden, to spend themselves for the sake of others, I worry about what will remain in a generation or two. The truth is we ought to stop waiting for Father, Deacon, Sister, and the parish "church lady" to do everything for us. It's time for us to step up and do everything for one another.

Jaymie Stewart Wolfe is a Catholic convert, freelance writer and editor, musician, speaker, pet-aholic, wife, and mom of eight grown children, living life in New Orleans.

WOLFE, from page 12

bathroom, planting flowers, or planning a vacation. It also applies to the Church.

Beautiful liturgies don't happen by accident or luck. Neither does parish hospitality, adult formation, catechesis, adoration, or access to the sacraments. Somebody has to book the Lenten mission speaker and sing in the choir. Somebody has to make sure there's enough coffee and get to the hall early to wipe down the tables and set up the urn. Somebody has to teach fourth grade religious ed, repose the Most Blessed Sacrament, lead the Bible study, the Rosary, or the book club.

In most parishes, the same handful of people do everything. That is not how the Church is supposed to work. Maybe that's why it sometimes doesn't. For every aspect of parish life we have – or wish we did – somebody must be willing to step up and do what's necessary. The problem is that for too many Catholics that "somebody" is always somebody else.

When we're kids, good things simply appear like magic and out of thin air. There's always a turkey dinner on Thanksgiving, presents from Santa under the tree, and jellybeans hidden around the house in pastel plastic eggs. Part of growing up is realizing that someone else has been orchestrating the special events in our lives all along. Grown-ups know that genuine

HOLY CROSS, from page 1

"The topic I have been asked to speak about concerns one of the greatest challenges our world faces today: the migrant and refugee crisis. It is a crisis of immense proportions," Bishop Rhoades began.

Drawing on the most recent United Nations data, he underscored the staggering scope of global displacement.

"This past June, the most recent reporting period, the U.N. reported that there are 117.3 million displaced people in the world, of whom 42.5 million are refugees; 67.8 million are displaced within their own countries; and 8.42 million are asylum seekers."

Bishop Rhoades clarified distinctions among refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons, noting that while all are migrants in a broad sense, "not all migrants are refugees and asylum seekers. They are all people on the move, but there are key differences according to international law."

"Refugees are people forced to flee their own country and seek safety in another country," Bishop Rhoades explained. "There are various reasons they are forced to flee: to escape war, conflict, violence, persecution, or serious public disorder." Many, he added, flee out of "a well-founded fear of harm."

Even as he presented these statistics, Bishop Rhoades cautioned against focusing solely on numbers.

"These are real people," he said. "Over 40 percent of refugees today are children under the age of 18. Over 60 percent of refugees are in family units."

Bishop Rhoades described the trauma many endure, including dangerous journeys, overcrowded refugee camps, lack of clean water and adequate shelter, and years of uncertainty. "As Christians, we must never treat the suffering of others as if it does not concern us," he said.

"We must look at this issue first and foremost from the perspective of God's revelation transmitted to us in Scripture and Tradition, and not from the perspective of one's political party or narrow ideologies," Bishop Rhoades added.

Migration, he reminded the audience, is a major theme in Scripture. He pointed to the Exodus, when Moses led the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt, and to God's command in Exodus: "You shall not oppress an alien; you know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt."

He also cited Leviticus: "You shall treat the stranger who resides with you no differently than the



Elyse Maldonado

Bishop Rhoades speaks with students after giving the Mind and Heart Lecture at Holy Cross College in South Bend on Wednesday, February 18.

natives born among you. Have the same love for him as for yourself."

In the New Testament, he highlighted the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt, described by Pope Pius XII in *Exsul Familia* as "the archetype of every refugee family."

Bishop Rhoades invoked the story of Cain and Abel from Genesis, recalling Cain's response to God after murdering his brother: "Am I my brother's keeper?" The bishop suggested that this question continues to resonate in modern debates about migrants.

"Perhaps the most direct instruction for us comes from the words of Jesus in the parable of the Last Judgment: 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me,'" he said. "In welcoming the immigrant ... we are welcoming Jesus."

He added, "There is no doubt from the teaching of Scripture that we have a Christian responsibility to 'welcome the stranger among us.'"

Shifting to Catholic social teaching, Bishop Rhoades explained the principle of the "universal destination of goods," which teaches that the goods of the earth are intended for all.

"We are stewards of the goods of the earth, not absolute masters," he said, "and are morally obliged to ensure that our goods benefit those in need, including migrants and refugees."

He also highlighted the Church's preferential option for the poor.

"As disciples of Jesus, we cannot be indifferent to the poor, to migrants and refugees, or to anyone living in misery," he said. "Human misery elicited the compassion of Christ and needs to elicit our compassion."

The second half of the lecture focused on what Bishop Rhoades called a "fundamental and natural right that is too often overlooked": the right not to migrate.

"The Church teaches that people have a right to find safety, eco-

nomie opportunity, and dignity in their own homeland," he said.

The bishop discussed the work of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), on whose board he has served. CRS operates in more than 100 countries, providing emergency relief and development so families can remain in their homelands.

However, he noted, severe cuts to USAID funding last year eliminated nearly 50 percent of the CRS budget, forcing staff layoffs and reducing many life-saving programs.

"This has jeopardized food security, health services, and other humanitarian help for millions of poor people," he said. Despite these challenges, he encouraged the audience to support CRS through increased private giving, particularly during Lent.

Turning to the right to migrate, the bishop affirmed that when a person's life and dignity are threatened, "one has the right to migrate elsewhere where they can live humanly."

"We have a moral responsibility to recognize, uphold, and defend this right," including the right of asylum, Bishop Rhoades said. At the same time, he acknowledged that "the right to migrate is not an absolute right."

"The Church recognizes the right of nations to control entry of migrants and to protect their borders," he said, citing the Catechism, which teaches that prosperous nations are obliged, "to the extent they are able," to welcome the foreigner in search of security and livelihood.

He stressed the importance of safe and legal pathways, family reunification, and a humane asylum process. "There are approximately 3.4 to 3.5 million asylum cases awaiting a hearing or final decision in the United States," he said, calling the backlog "a terrible one."

Responding to Bishop Rhoades' remarks and broadening the conversation, Albarran addressed

what he described as a growing breach between Church doctrine and Christian living.

"It would be good to focus on the break between doctrine and Christian living," he said, noting that partisanship often widens the divide on issues such as migration. "The concerns of today apply to all of us, regardless of political affiliation. Apparently, we would rather settle for partisan identities than consider the Church's doctrine."

Albarran emphasized the need to realign with Church teaching in order to heal the division caused by partisanship. He suggested that renewal begins with embodied practices of solidarity. Social and cultural responses, including traditional practices such as the works of mercy, can help bridge the gap and prepare Catholics to receive challenging teachings more fully.

"By engaging in face-to-face practices that demand solidarity and respect for the dignity of the person," he said, "Catholics can form the habits necessary to receive challenging doctrine."

He pointed to Bishop Rhoades' longstanding commitment to Catholic Charities and local outreach efforts as concrete examples of a "social strategy" grounded in the works of mercy.

Bishop Rhoades' address and Albarran's response reflected the college's own commitment to its mission. Dianne Barlas, the vice president for mission and ministry and acting provost, described the lecture's theme as both timely and mission-driven.

"We invited Bishop Rhoades to speak to our students on the plight of migrants and refugees to engage in a conversation that demonstrates the use of the Gospel and Catholic social teaching to respond to the needs of some of the most vulnerable in our communities," Barlas told *Today's Catholic*.

She described the Mind and Heart Lecture series as an initiative "to bring experts both domestic and international to our campus" and to invite dialogue between Catholic intellectual tradition and contemporary issues.

"We hold that education is an act of hope," Barlas said. "The speakers we invite and the topics we choose for the Mind and Heart Lecture urge our students to think deeply about the meaning of life, the presence and action of God all around them, and the virtuous life whereby faith, hope, and love are

ordered to the coming of the Kingdom of God, as witnessed by right relationships between persons, communities, and creation."

For students in attendance, Bishop Rhoades' words resonated on a personal level. Many students stayed to talk to him after his lecture.

Manuel Mendoza Marquez, a junior at Holy Cross, explained that several of his friends come from countries marked by violence and instability.

"They've seen a lot," he said. "It makes you think about their well-being. You want them somewhere safe, somewhere they can find a home and find peace."

Junior Mataya Watson reflected on Bishop Rhoades' discussion of balancing compassion with responsibility for the common good.

"I thought it was interesting how he connected care for migrants with concern for the general public welfare," Watson told *Today's Catholic*. "He emphasized being open and recognizing human dignity while also acknowledging the importance of the common good and the well-being of the country."

For many, Bishop Rhoades' presence on campus was itself formative.

"I think the college cares a lot about our education holistically, not just as scholars but as disciples and citizens of the world," Watson said. "It makes us ask: How are we walking as future leaders? Are we informed as Catholics first? I think having the bishop here shows that commitment."

Before the lecture, Bishop Rhoades joined students, faculty, and staff for a simple soup supper on campus, a fitting observance for Ash Wednesday. Students were able to ask Bishop Rhoades questions and engage him directly on the complexities of immigration, Catholic social teaching, and the realities facing the Church.

Throughout the lecture, Bishop Rhoades returned to the principle of solidarity, quoting Pope St. John Paul II, who described solidarity not as "a feeling of vague compassion" but as "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good."

"That includes our migrant brothers and sisters," Bishop Rhoades said. "To be indifferent to them," he concluded, "is to be indifferent to Jesus."



Watch the Lecture

Scan the QR code to view a video of Bishop Rhoades' lecture on "Addressing the Plight of Migrants and Refugees with the Mind and Heart of Christ."

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.

TUESDAY, MARCH 3

Fort Wayne-South Bend World Apostolate of Fatima Lenten Mission

5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

FORT WAYNE – The WAF Blue Army Fort Wayne/South Bend Division is hosting a Lenten Mission at St. Therese Catholic Church, 2304 Lower Huntington Rd., featuring speaker Father Edward Brodsky, FSSP. The evening includes Holy Mass celebrated by Father Glenn Kohrman, followed by a Q&A and final blessing. Free-will donations are accepted.

FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF AREA FISH FRIES, VISIT TODAYSCATHOLIC.ORG/EVENT

SATURDAY, MARCH 7

South Bend Lector Trainings

9 a.m. – 12 p.m.

SOUTH BEND – New and current lectors are invited to attend a free training offered by the diocesan Office of Worship. Sessions will be held at Holy Cross Parish, 1050 Wilber St., on Saturday, March 7, from 9 a.m. to noon (note the change from the original February 28 date; register by March 4). Advanced registration is required. For details and to sign up, visit diocesefwsb.org/trainings.

SATURDAY, MARCH 7

St. Aloysius 5th Annual Ladies Night

7 – 9 p.m.

YODER – Join us for a night of BUNCO fun! HASA is hosting the 5th Annual Ladies Night at St. Aloysius, 14623 Bluffton Rd., in the Parish Activity Center. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. and Bunco begins at 7 p.m. Don't know how to play? We will teach you! Admission cost is \$10.

ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH ARCOLA
12305 Arcola Rd., Fort Wayne

Fish Fry

DINE IN OR DRIVE-THRU
FRIDAY, MARCH 13
4 – 7 P.M.



Adult \$16, Child (6-12) \$8, Children 5 and under free

- All-you-can-eat fish, homemade potato salad, coleslaw, apple sauce, and dessert.
- Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for kids,
- Coffee, water, and lemonade
- Silent auction in parish hall.
- Drive-thru - \$16 dinner, \$20 all fish, \$5 pint of potato salad.

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REST IN PEACE

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Margaret A. Hruby, 97, St. Mary of the Annunciation

Elkhart

Deborah Ann Belleville, 66, St. Vincent de Paul
Louis Gerencer, 94, St. Thomas the Apostle

Fort Wayne

Steve Biesiada, 75, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
Kent Hagenbush, 70, St. Joseph-Hessen Cassel
Cecile Charais, 67, St. Therese
Leslie Ann Harber, 54, St. Therese
Howard Fischer, 83, St. Vincent de Paul

Granger

Sylvester "Sal" Gerschoffer, 96, St. Pius X
Ronald Giordano, 73, St. Pius X
Allen Rogers, 80, St. Pius X

Thomas Santilli, 67, St. Pius X

Helen Zagrvejewski, 83, St. Pius X

Huntington

Kenneth M. Stoffel, 89, SS. Peter and Paul

Monroeville

Paul E. Cagnet, 75, St. Rose of Lima

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CRS Rice Bowl Even More Critical After USAID Cuts

BY KIMBERLEY
HEATHERINGTON

(OSV News) – “Are you leaving, too?”

The question, said Abena Amedormey, country representative for Catholic Relief Services in the west African nation of Ghana, came to CRS workers as they visited communities they serve after a January 2025 freeze on all U.S. foreign aid, ordered by the Trump administration.

By July of 2025, the U.S. Agency for International Development – established in 1961 and which in 2024 provided \$187 million in humanitarian funding to Ghana – effectively ceased to exist, with 85 percent of its programs cut. The result was that many in-country aid organizations also ceased operations.

But not CRS.

They're surviving, yet the deep slashes to USAID funding have now made their annual Rice Bowl collection more essential than ever.

A familiar Lenten program of Catholic Relief Services, which is the official relief and development agency of the Catholic Church in the U.S., CRS Rice Bowl offers faith communities in every diocese throughout the United States the opportunity to put their faith into action.

Since 1975, the titular rice bowl – a brightly colored, cardboard almsgiving box that's a familiar annual Lenten sight in parishes nationwide – has invited Catholics to pray, fast, and give in solidarity with the world's poor.

“We're very much known across Ghana,” Amedormey told OSV News. “People know that we bring relief and we work with the most vulnerable people, where nobody wants to go. It's the remotest parts of the country – the most hard to reach areas, the most vulnerable people – that we work with.”

Present in the country from 1958 onwards – just one year after Ghana gained independence from Great Britain – Catholic Relief Services Ghana works to tackle poverty with a holistic approach, operating projects to improve child and maternal health, increase access to clean water and sanitation, scale up farm production, and enhance community level savings and lending.

“We strongly believe in sustainability because we don't want to come in, support you, and then we're gone,” Amedormey said. “It's like the saying, ‘Teach a man to fish’ – we don't want to provide



Adriana, 14, of Timor-Leste, is pictured in a July 5, 2024, collecting water for her family. Catholic Relief Services supported nutrition and health initiatives for adolescent girls and young women across 21 communities in Timor-Leste.

OSV News photo/Benny Manser, Catholic Relief Services

fish and leave. We want them to go out to fish.”

But with the shuttering of USAID, that mission is threatened.

“The (Ghanian) government suffered a huge shortfall of financing in the health sector,” Amedormey said, “and this was also in education, where there were school-feeding programs and teacher-training programs.”

Those additional disruptions struck the work of other nongovernmental organizations.

“A lot of organizations had to close shop overnight, had to lay off people, had to stop programming. These layoffs affected health care workers, agriculture extension officers, social workers, and administrative staff,” Amedormey said. “And so names and faces that were known in a lot of communities as bringing support overnight had to pack up and leave.”

Farmers lost subsidized fertilizer, improved seeds, and training, which had all aimed to increase their crop yields.

Specialized teacher training was suspended, and children who looked forward to school meals could no longer be sure they'd have them.

All of it, said Amedormey, “had a huge impact.”

Yet she remains committedly optimistic.

“One of the things that CRS has been faithful to is trying as much as possible to fill the gaps,” she said.

The Lancet, a peer-reviewed British medical journal published since 1823, estimated USAID assistance has saved more

than 91 million lives over the past two decades, including that of 30 million children.

The journal's July 2025 prediction, however, was grim.

“Our estimates show that, unless the abrupt funding cuts announced and implemented in the first half of 2025 are reversed, a staggering number of avoidable deaths could occur by 2030,” the Lancet forecast. The study noted that almost 14.1 million people could die by that year, with more than 4.5 million deaths being children younger than 5.

“The big thing that has changed is our ability to deliver aid to the people that we are called to serve around the world,” said Beth Knobbe, CRS adviser on church mobilization. “It's been limited in certain ways, given the dramatic cuts to U.S. humanitarian aid. Those cuts are just absolutely devastating to the people that CRS serves.”

According to the Global Report on Food Crises 2025, published by the Food Security Information Network in support of the Global Network against Food Crises, “In 2024, more than 295 million people across 53 countries and territories experienced acute levels of hunger – an increase of 13.7 million from 2023.”

“It's even more important than ever that Catholics take seriously that call to live Lent,” Knobbe said. “CRS Rice Bowl gives people a chance to truly grow in solidarity with our global neighbors through their prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. ... And that almsgiving is so critical,” she added, “be-

cause the needs are so great – both at home and around the world.”

Some 11,000 Catholic parishes and schools are participating in the Rice Bowl Program this Lent, Knobbe said.

In Honduras, where CRS has been since 1959 and programs primarily focus on agriculture, education, emergencies, and clean water, the challenges are also multiplying, and with it, the critical assistance from this year's Rice Bowl collection.

“It's a huge loss,” Haydee Diaz, CRS country manager for Honduras, told OSV News of the USAID cuts. “Because the government here doesn't really have the resources to do the kind of improvements that tend to really change a school system over time

and lead to a better-educated population. More jobs, people are better off. They're able to stay and not be so desperate to migrate.”

The cutting of U.S. aid in combination with increased U.S. immigration restrictions is, it seems, an ironic paradox.

“As Americans, we say that we want people to stay home and not migrate to the U.S.,” observed Diaz. “But we've cut the programs that give people a chance to really stay in their communities and thrive there.”

In chain-like fashion, that also impacts other outcomes.

“Nobody wins when children don't get an education, and the country stays poor and doesn't have the ability to draw jobs or investments from other countries, because they don't have a well-educated workforce,” Diaz said.

“It doesn't benefit the U.S. to have neighbors to the South that are poor, where people feel like they don't have a future,” Diaz added. “And that's what USAID programs used to do. USAID used to really give people that hope that they could make it here – that they had some support, and that they could thrive.”

Nonetheless – like Amedormey in Ghana – she hasn't dimmed her outlook, particularly with the CRS Rice Bowl collection ongoing.

“It's been very inspiring to see the generosity of individuals in the middle of such a dark, difficult time, where so much international aid has been cut and international aid programs have really been dismantled,” Diaz said. “It's been wonderful to see how individuals have stepped up and really started to contribute.”

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