

TODAY'S CATHOLIC

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

TODAYSCATHOLIC.org



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God's Mercy Shines Bright in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

All Parishes Will be Open for Prayer, Confession from 6-8 p.m. on March 10 for The Light Is On for You

BY FATHER BRIAN ISENBARGER

God's mercy knows no boundaries. He desperately yearns to forgive. Quite literally, He gave up His only begotten Son on the cross for the forgiveness of every possible sin. And yet, as the season of Lent reminds us, we must turn back to the Lord to receive His mercy.

Several years ago, Pope Francis said, "God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking His mercy." In other words, the only obstacles to the Lord's mercy are the ones we choose to put up.

Unfortunately, according to a 2025 study from the Pew Research Center, we have found plenty of obstacles to the Lord's mercy. In that study, it was found

The Light Is On for You

On Tuesday, March 10, the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend will participate in The Light Is On for You, an evening where all parishes in the diocese will be open for prayer and the Sacrament of Reconciliation between 6-8 p.m. The Light Is On for You is for Catholics who frequent confession, but it is also an opportunity for Catholics who may be reluctant to come to the sacrament, have been away for some time, or find it difficult to get to a regular confession time. Learn more at diocesefwsb.org/light.

that only 23 percent of Catholics in the United States go to confession at least once a year. Put conversely, this means that 77 percent of U.S. Catholics do not follow the precept of the Church to confess serious sins at least

once per year (see the Catechism, No. 1457). Moreover, nearly half of all American Catholics (47 percent) report that they NEVER go to confession.

RECONCILIATION, page 14

Deacons and Wives Engage in Synod Consultation

BY DEACON MEL TARDY

Last October, Bishop Rhoades announced that he would preside over a diocesan synod, the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend's first in 100 years. In two synod sessions this fall – one in South Bend and one in Fort Wayne – delegates selected from all parishes and other groups will gather to prayerfully discern the mission for our diocese today and into the future.

Since October, a parish consultation phase has encouraged each parish to prayerfully gath-

er and discern needs, areas of excellence, and areas needing growth for themselves and the diocese. For some individuals, there are challenges to participating in parish consultations, and so it is necessary for these groups to have their own special consultations – for example, priests and deacons, college students, those in prison, etc.). One such special consultation was held for deacons and their wives on Saturday, February 28, at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish.

DEACONS, page 14



Deacon Mel Tardy

Permanent deacons and their wives gather for a special synod consultation at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Warsaw on Saturday, February 28.

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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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USCCB President, Pope Leo XIV Call for Dialogue Amid Attacks on Iran

BY OSV NEWS

The president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Pope Leo XIV called for deescalation and dialogue in the Middle East following the joint attacks on Iran launched on Saturday, February 28, by the United States and Israel, which killed Iran's long-time supreme leader, 86-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The attacks prompted a wave of strikes by Iran across the region, with deaths and casualties – including the loss of at least four U.S. military personnel – on all sides.

In a March 1 statement, Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the USCCB, warned the “growing conflict risks spiraling into a wider regional war.”

Noting Pope Leo's plea for peace in his March 1 Angelus remarks – with the pope warning of an “irreparable abyss” if the violence continues to spiral – Archbishop Coakley said, “We are faced with the possibility of a tragedy of immense proportions.”

Archbishop Coakley added: “My brother bishops and I unite our voice with our Holy Father and make the heartfelt appeal to all parties involved for diplomacy to regain its proper role.” Quoting the pope's remarks, he added, “We ask for a halt to the spiral of violence, and a return to multilateral diplomatic engagement that seeks to uphold the ‘well-being of peoples, who yearn for peaceful existence founded on justice.’”

The USCCB president stressed that “all nations, international bodies, and partners committed to peace must exert every effort to prevent further escalation.”

Describing the present moment as “critical,” Archbishop Coakley invited “Catholics and all people of goodwill to continue our ardent prayers for peace in the Middle East, for the safety of our troops and the innocent, that leaders may seek dialogue over destruction, and pursue the common good over the tragedy of war.”

His statement contained a link to a June 2025 appeal for prayer and diplomacy by Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on International Justice and Peace, after the U.S. had launched precision strikes on several of Iran's key nuclear facilities.



OSV News photo/Gideon Markowicz, Reuters

An explosion caused by a projectile impact is seen in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Saturday, February 28, after Iran launched missiles into the country following military strikes on Iran by Israel and the United States.

In that statement, Bishop Zaidan, head of the Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles, had urged “multilateral diplomatic engagement for the attainment of a durable peace between Israel and Iran.”

Archbishop Coakley concluded his March 1 statement by imploring “the intercession of our Blessed Mother, Mary, Queen of Peace, to pray for our troubled world and for a lasting peace.”

In his Angelus address held roughly 12 hours after the U.S. and Israel revealed that Khamenei and other leaders in Iran had been killed, Pope Leo issued a fervent appeal for return of diplomacy in “these dramatic hours” in the Middle East and Iran, condemning use of weapons that cause “destruction, pain, and death.”

The pope said he was “following with profound concern” these events and warned of a potential “tragedy of enormous proportions.” He appealed for the warring parties to assume “the moral responsibility of halting the spiral of violence” before it becomes “an irreparable abyss.”

The pope insisted the nations return to diplomacy.

“Stability and peace are not built through mutual threats, nor with weapons that sow destruction, pain, and death, but only through reasonable, authentic, and responsible dialogue,” he said.

The ongoing joint U.S. and Israeli attack on Iran has targeted Tehran and cities across Iran, with Gulf countries caught in the crossfire as Iran launches retaliatory strikes.

“Faced with the possibility of a tragedy of enormous proportions, I address to the parties involved a heartfelt appeal to assume the moral responsibility of halting the spiral of violence before it becomes an irreparable abyss,” he said.

“May diplomacy regain its role and promote the good of the peoples who yearn for peaceful coexistence based on justice,” he added, urging the world to “continue to pray for peace.”

What Pope Leo called a “spiral of violence” continued to unfold on March 1 as mutual attacks escalated hour by hour throughout the Middle East.

Israel and Iran launched fresh attacks on March 1, with the BBC reporting that Iran's state-run Islamic Republic News Agency said Tehran has been hit by 60 attacks in 24 hours, leaving 57 people dead – numbers reportedly provided by the Tehran Province Red Crescent Society.

Israel's military said on X on March 1 that its strikes have killed 40 Iranian commanders, including Abdolrahim Mousavi, the chief of staff of Iran's armed forces. Iranian state television confirmed the death.

Pope Leo, during his Angelus appeal, reminded people that in recent days, “we have also received disturbing news of clashes between Pakistan and Afghanistan.” He raised a “plea for an urgent return to dialogue.”

“Let us pray together that harmony may prevail in all the world's conflicts,” he said, adding, “Only peace, a gift of God, can heal the wounds between peoples.”

In a February 28 statement to OSV News, Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Bashar M. Warda of Erbil, Iraq, said he “witnessed the years of violence, displacement, and bombings that shook Iraq after 2003,” referencing the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq that year in retaliation for the 9/11 terror attacks.

“These are not chapters in a book for us,” Archbishop Warda said. “They are memories we still carry,” Archbishop Warda stressed. “We know what sirens sound like in the middle of the night. We know what it means for a child to fall asleep afraid. We know the silence of empty streets, the fear in a mother's eyes, the pain of families who leave their homes not knowing if they will ever return.”

For that reason, said Archbishop Warda, “When we see tensions rising again in our region, we do not see it as distant news. We feel it in our hearts.

“Every new escalation reopens wounds that have not fully healed,” he explained. “Our people are still recovering, emotionally, economically, spiritually, from the wars of the past.”

“The Middle East does not need another war,” Archbishop Warda said. “Our children deserve stability. Our families deserve peace. Ordinary people have already paid too high a price for conflicts they did not choose.”

He concluded, “From Erbil, a city that once welcomed thousands who fled violence, I appeal for wisdom, restraint, and dialogue.”

Pope Leo XIV Set to Visit Africa, Spain, Monaco in Next Four Months

BY COURTNEY MARES

ROME (OSV News) – Pope Leo XIV will travel to six countries over the next four months, including a 10-day tour of Africa and trips to Monaco and Spain, Vatican officials announced on Wednesday, February 25.

The pope's international travel plans include a day trip to the Catholic principality of Monaco on March 28, a long journey across the African continent from April 13-23, and a weeklong visit to Spain from June 6-12 with expected stops in Madrid, the Canary Islands, and in Barcelona to inaugurate the tallest tower in the Sagrada Familia.

In the first visit to the African continent since the start of his pontificate, Pope Leo will travel to Algeria, Cameroon, Angola, and Equatorial Guinea. The Vatican has highlighted that peace and care for the poor will be central themes of the African journey, which will also bring him in the footsteps of St. Augustine.

The pope's apostolic journey to Africa will begin in Algeria, with stops in the capital Algiers and the northeastern city of Annaba from April 13-15. Pope Leo previously expressed to journalists his desire to visit the country to see the places associated with St. Augustine and to "continue the conversation of dialogue, of building bridges between the Christian world and the Muslim world."

Annaba is home to the Basilica of St. Augustine, built near the ruins of the Basilica Pacis where the theologian died in A.D. 430 as Vandals besieged the city. A statue in the basilica contains a relic of one of Augustine's arm bones.

Algeria is 99 percent Sunni Muslim, and the Catholic Church counts just 8,740 members, about 0.019 percent of the population of more than 45 million people, according to the 2025 edition of the *Anuario Pontificio*, the Vatican's annual yearbook.

From Algeria, the pope will travel to Cameroon from April 15-18, visiting the capital Yaoundé, the northwestern city of Bamenda and Douala, the country's largest city and economic hub. The Bamenda stop brings Pope Leo directly into Cameroon's Anglophone northwest, where a separatist conflict has been ongoing for nearly a decade.

The crisis began in 2017 when the government cracked down



CNS photo/Lola Gomez

Pope Leo XIV arrives in Beirut by plane from Turkey on November 30, 2025, during the first international trip of his papacy.

on strikes by English-speaking teachers and lawyers, triggering an armed insurgency that has since claimed thousands of lives and displaced hundreds of thousands more. Security concerns had cast doubt on whether the papal visit would be feasible.

Christianity is the predominant faith in Cameroon, practiced by more than 60 percent of the population, with more than 7.9 million Catholics in the country, making up 27.9 percent of the population, according to the Vatican's latest statistics.

The pope will then travel to Angola from April 18-21, visiting Luanda, Muxima, and Saurimo. Catholicism is the largest religious group in the country, which is home to more than 17.9 million Catholics, according to Vatican statistics, about 49 percent of the population.

Angola, despite its considerable oil wealth, continues to struggle with high poverty rates and deep economic inequality.

The final leg of the African journey brings Pope Leo to Equatorial Guinea from April 21-23, with stops in Malabo, Mongomo, and Bata. About 81.58 percent of the country's 1.37 million population is Catholic, according to the Vatican, making it one of the most Catholic nations in sub-Saharan Africa by percentage and the only Spanish-speaking country on the continent. It will be only the second papal visit in Equatorial Guinea's history; the first was St. John Paul's trip on February 18, 1982.

In total, the apostolic journey to Africa will span 10 days, nearly as long as St. John Paul's 11-day, seven-country African trip in 1985.

Before his African journey, Pope Leo will make a day trip to Monaco, the city-state nestled

along the French Riviera, on March 28. His visit to Monaco, the second-smallest country in the world after Vatican City, will be his first international trip of 2026 and only the second of his pontificate. It will be the first papal visit to Monaco in the modern era.

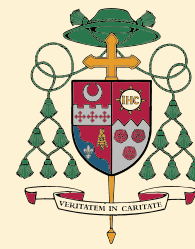
The trip follows an invitation from Prince Albert II, who met with the pope at the Vatican in January and had previously invited Pope Francis to visit. Roman Catholicism is the official state religion of Monaco, where roughly 82 percent of the population is Catholic, according to the Vatican.

Pope Leo's international travel plans also include a weeklong visit to Spain from June 6-12 with expected stops in Madrid, Barcelona, and the Canary Islands.

A highlight of the Barcelona visit will be the inauguration of the newest and tallest tower of the Sagrada Familia. The visit falls during the centenary of the death of Venerable Antoni Gaudí, an architect who was declared venerable last year, one step away from his possible beatification.

The Canary Islands, with expected stops in Tenerife and Gran Canaria, will likely draw attention to the issue of migration. The Atlantic archipelago, situated off the northwest coast of Africa, is one of Europe's main entry points for migrants crossing from Africa, with tens of thousands of arrivals each year. The late Pope Francis had long hoped to visit the islands himself.

In addition to his international travel, the Vatican has previously announced that Pope Leo will make six trips within Italy this year, including visits to the shrine of Our Lady of the Rosary of Pompeii, the tomb of St. Augustine in northern Italy, and the island of Lampedusa on July 4.



PUBLIC SCHEDULE OF
BISHOP KEVIN C. RHOADES

Veritatem In Caritate
(Truth in Charity)

- ◆ **Monday, March 9, at 9 a.m.** – Meeting of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Committee on Doctrine, Washington, D.C.
- ◆ **Monday, March 9, at 1 p.m.** – Meeting of USCCB Committee on Priorities and Plans, Washington, D.C.
- ◆ **Monday, March 9, at 6 p.m.** – Meeting of USCCB Committee on Religious Liberty, St. John Paul II National Shrine, Washington, D.C.
- ◆ **Tuesday and Wednesday, March 10 and 11** – Meetings of USCCB Administrative Committee, Washington, D.C.
- ◆ **Wednesday, March 11** – Joint Meeting of Foundation Board and Governance Board of Catholic Relief Services, Baltimore, Maryland
- ◆ **Saturday, March 14, at 10 a.m.** – Confirmation Mass, Our Lady of Good Hope Church, Fort Wayne
- ◆ **Saturday, March 14, at 6 p.m.** – Catholic Charities St. Patrick Day Gala, Parkview Mirro Center for Research and Innovation, Fort Wayne
- ◆ **Sunday, March 15, at 9:30 a.m.** – Confirmation Mass, St. Dominic Church, Bremen

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New Bill Restricts Social Media Access for Teens as Indiana General Assembly Comes to a Close

BY VICTORIA ARTHUR

Long-sought-after legislation to protect young people from online harm is among the successes for the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) and other advocates at the conclusion of this year's short legislative session.

In the session's final hours on Friday, February 27, lawmakers voted to give Indiana parents greater control over their children's access to social media and their activities online. This followed an emotional plea earlier in the month from the family of Fishers teen Hailey Buzbee, who was found dead in Ohio in January after allegedly leaving home with a 39-year-old man she had been communicating with online for more than a year.

"We have long advocated for providing parents with additional tools to protect their children from the dangers posed by social media and digital technology," said Alexander Mingus, executive director of the ICC, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana. "Youth are particularly vulnerable to harm and exploitation online, and we commend Indiana lawmakers for taking this important step toward their safety and protection."

The new restrictions will require social media providers to verify the age of their users and prohibit anyone from under 16 years old from setting up an account without a parent or guardian's permission. Parents also will be able to set limits on who their children can interact with online.

Other provisions in the legislation – which originated in Senate Bill 199 but ultimately passed as a last-minute addition to House Bill 1408 – include restricting social media companies from using algorithms on children's accounts that can fuel addiction to the online platforms.

As in every legislative session, the ICC advocated for or against bills based on the long and rich history of Catholic social teaching. Among the other measures the ICC supported was Senate Bill 236, which would have paved the way for plaintiffs to sue out-of-state doctors and companies prescribing, manufacturing, and mailing abortion-inducing drugs to patients in Indiana.

"These drugs aren't safe to be mailed across Indiana," Senator

Tyler Johnson (R-Leo) – the bill's author and an emergency room physician – told lawmakers in January. "They're not safe to be given over telehealth (calls). They're not safe to just randomly prescribe through an internet website."

The measure passed the Senate but never received a hearing in the House.

"I think the controversy around this bill was how it would be applied and then enforced," Mingus said. "As other states take this approach and we see what happens in this laboratory of policy, Indiana may be more likely to pass this type of legislation in the coming years. This is something we will continue to follow and work on."

Another measure the ICC had supported was signed into law on Thursday, February 26, by Governor Mike Braun. House Bill 1389, authored by Representative Shane Lindauer (R-Jasper), will prohibit religious discrimination in adoption and foster care services.

"This legislation will prevent scenarios we've seen in other parts of the country of religious-based providers of adoption and foster care services having a conflict with the state solely based on their religious beliefs," Mingus said. "This will also apply to individuals seeking to adopt or foster a child. We were happy to see this bill cross the finish line and head to the governor's desk."

Another success for the ICC was the rejection of a measure to introduce execution by firing squad as an additional means of capital punishment. Currently, only lethal injection is allowed by law to carry out the death penalty in Indiana, although lawmakers backing House Bill 1119 argued that the high cost of the drugs involved, as well as supply issues, have created the need for alternate methods.

Following impassioned debate on the House floor, the bill was defeated in a close vote. Representative Bob Morris (R-Fort Wayne), a Catholic lawmaker who last year introduced legislation to abolish the death penalty altogether, was among those appealing to his colleagues to vote no.

"I'm against every means of capital punishment until this body can debate it," Morris told his fellow House members. "Stand here and tell me the best



Shutterstock

way to execute a life. I'm a pro-life legislator, and I know many of you are as well. Vote this down and let's start the discussion on capital punishment."

In engaging with lawmakers on this bill and similar legislation, the ICC also encouraged a broader discussion about the death penalty, which the Catholic Church opposes in any form.

"We had a lot of good dialogue on the issue of the death penalty in general as we strongly opposed expanding the methods used to carry out capital punishment in Indiana," said Roarke LaCoursiere, associate director of the ICC. "Fortunately, this legislation didn't progress past the first half of session, which was a win for us."

But the 2026 legislative session also held disappointments for the ICC and other advocates.

Senate Bill 76, a sweeping immigration measure that the ICC had opposed, passed the General Assembly on Wednesday, February 25, and was awaiting the governor's signature at press time. The measure aims to tighten the enforcement of federal immigration laws at the local level in Indiana, mandating cooperation with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) by state and local law enforcement, employers, and other entities.

Concerns over the measure had prompted the ICC to submit a letter to lawmakers cautioning against "a one-sided approach to immigration policy that is only focused on enforcement."

The letter noted that Indiana is home to 137,000 unauthorized immigrants, more than 60 percent of whom have lived in the

state at least a decade.

"The Indiana Catholic Conference argues that the humane solution for many of these long-time residents is not deportation but, rather, earned pathways to citizenship," the letter stated. "This is not an endorsement of open borders or illegal entry, but rather, a prudential moral judgment applied to the challenges of today."

The ICC's letter echoed similar statements from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and several of Indiana's bishops over their growing concerns about the country's immigration policies and practices.

Following the General Assembly's passage of Senate Bill 76, Mingus reflected on the "careful balancing" that must be attained between protecting a nation's borders while welcoming the stranger and helping those in need.

"We will continue to share this message that is coming neither from the political right or the left but from the heart of the Church," Mingus said. "We must explore potential solutions that honor our country while honoring the dignity of the human person."

That inherent human dignity, which is at the core of Catholic social teaching, was also the primary factor behind the ICC's stance on a bill involving the chronically homeless.

Senate Bill 285, which was awaiting the governor's signature at press time, prohibits sleeping or camping on public property. Supporters of the measure argued that it would provide a pathway

for law enforcement officers to connect homeless people with shelters and other critical services.

But the ICC had serious concerns about the bill, particularly the provision that would result in a Class C misdemeanor for repeat violations.

"There were a lot of people with good intentions on both sides of this issue," LaCoursiere said. "We will still seek to find better solutions for our brothers and sisters who suffer from chronic homelessness."

In their latest ICC podcast, LaCoursiere and Mingus reflected on the outcomes of this short legislative session while looking ahead.

"We want to continue to be a presence at the Statehouse on behalf of the Church," Mingus said. "My final invitation for everyone is to continue to pray for our lawmakers, who face a lot of difficult decisions and a lot of pressure."

Mingus added that his hope is not only for legislators but for all citizens of Indiana to "continually draw closer to Christ in our daily walk," so that decisions and policies always aspire to the common good.

"That's our ultimate prayer, and we hope you join us in that."

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.

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.

'You Can Physically Feel His Presence in the Room'

20-Minute Adoration Retreats Help Marian Students Find Peace During the Busy School Day

BY ALENA KIM

Coming out of eighth grade, there were multiple high schools in the South Bend area that I could have chosen to attend. Ultimately, I decided on Marian High School in Mishawaka, and it has been a great choice for me, as my experience at Marian has revealed a spiritual atmosphere that feels less like a requirement and more like a breath of life into all our students and staff.

Our campus ministry team, led by Mr. Patrick Smith and Mrs. Caitie Cataldo, fosters a sense of community and is a very significant part of our school in ways such as retreats, praying the Rosary weekly with the entire school, making the Sacrament of Confession available, as well as weekly Mass, adoration, Bible study, and so much more. It is not just about rituals; it is about creating a space where students and staff can grow in their personal relationship with God.

Another way our campus ministry team connects our students with Christ is through 20-minute retreats that are held during homeroom period on Wednesdays or Thursdays. Coming from a non-Catholic family, I thought it would be harder for me to live out my faith at Marian because some of our beliefs are not the same, but I soon came to find out it is just as easy as if I was going to a school sponsored by my own religious tradition. I realized this when I went to the



Photos provided by Marian High School

Students at Marian High School in Mishawaka kneel during Eucharistic adoration as part of a "20-minute retreat" during the school day.

last 20-minute retreat.

During my freshman year last year, I did not go to any of these retreats; I was not Catholic, so I thought, what's the point? I soon found out that it was nothing like I had expected. Walking into the retreat made me feel a bit nervous, but as soon as I got there and heard the music, I could instantly feel God's presence within the room. These retreats are mainly comprised of praise and worship music that accompany Eucharistic adoration, and these elements

have really impacted me. I am not sure what it is, but with everyone there and with all the voices combined in praising God, it just really shows you that you are not alone, and you can physically feel His presence in the room.

At the end of the retreat, we gathered into small groups and talked about how these retreats made us feel and what God could be telling us through these retreats. Within my small group, we talked about how nice it is to get away from the stress of

school, friends, drama, and just life in general and just sit with the Lord and rejoice, even if for just 20 minutes. Many people, including myself, said the retreat was very calming. It felt like you could take a moment and breathe without any worry or anything that had been bothering you that day or week.

These retreats provide a moment for students to get away from worldly things and to take a second to be calm and in the presence of the Lord. They give

students a safe place to express their faith without them feeling judged. They also bring students and staff together in a way in which only Christ can do.

For anyone looking for a school that prioritizes mental well-being and spiritual connection alongside academics, Marian offers a unique sanctuary. It is a place where students are brought together in a way only Christ can achieve.

Alena Kim is a sophomore at Marian High School.



NEWS BRIEFS

Archbishop Calls for Healing at Mass with Migrants in Minneapolis

ST. PAUL, Minnesota (OSV News) – Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis preached on the importance of turning from anger to reconciliation and forgiveness during a Votive Mass of Solidarity with Migrants at the University of St. Thomas' Chapel of St. Thomas Aquinas on Friday, February 27. Archbishop Hebda celebrated the Mass with Cardinal Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States; Cardinal Robert W. McElroy of Washington, D.C.; and Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin of Newark, New Jersey, on the morning of the final day of The Way Forward conference that has gathered about 30 bishops for conversations on communication and evangelization in the digital age. The Mass was celebrated, organizers said, in response to the chaotic immigration-related events that have taken place in the archdiocese in recent weeks amid Operation Metro Surge, the federal government's largest ever immigration enforcement effort. "I've been angry when I've felt helpless or unable to find the right words or the way forward to stop the madness unfolding before my eyes," Archbishop Hebda said. Jesus Christ "gave us the ministry of reconciliation," he said. "Jesus wants us to work actively and intentionally for unity, which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding."

U.S. Bishops End Lawsuit Over Refugee Resettlement

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) – The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has ended its lawsuit against the Trump administration over the suspension of a long-running refugee resettlement contract, with monies owed to the USCCB now recovered. Court records show that Judge Trevor N. McFadden of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia signed a January 23 order dismissing the case "without prejudice" – allowing the USCCB the option to bring a subsequent suit on the same grounds. The USCCB had filed a January 22 notice of voluntary dismissal, stating that "no defendant has filed either an answer or a motion for summary judgment in this action." Chieko Noguchi, spokesperson for the USCCB, confirmed to OSV News on Tuesday, February 24, that the conference had recovered what it was owed for its refugee resettlement work with the federal government. As of April 2025, those

POPE: OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE IS MODEL OF 'PERFECT INCULTURATION'



OSV News photo/Lola Gomez

Pope Leo XIV prays before an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe at the conclusion of his Mass for her feast day in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on December 12, 2025. In a February 24 message to the Theological-Pastoral Congress in Mexico City, Pope Leo pointed to Our Lady of Guadalupe as the model of "perfect inculturation" as Mexico prepares for the 500th anniversary of the 1531 apparitions in 2031. She "manifests God's way of approaching his people," he said in the message, adding that Our Lady of Guadalupe, venerated as the patroness of the Americas, is a guide for evangelization today.

funds – still unpaid at the time – amounted to more than \$24 million. The USCCB filed suit in February 2025 after the Trump administration suspended the conference's long-running contract for resettlement under the congressionally established U.S. Refugee Assistance Program.

Mother Cabrini Statue Planned for Chicago Park

CHICAGO (OSV News) – The Chicago Park District announced on Wednesday, February 18, that St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, the first American saint, will be depicted in a planned statue to be put in a public park on Chicago's Near West Side. It will replace a Christopher Columbus statue that was removed during the pandemic. Mother Cabrini received 1,500 of a total 3,900 votes submitted by the public. She was one of eight eligible nominees who were Italians or Americans of Italian descent who were chosen from dozens of proposed

candidates. The statue of the patron saint of immigrants will be erected at Arrigo Park in Chicago's Little Italy, a historically Italian American neighborhood. Mother Cabrini arrived in the U.S. in 1889, providing the poorest of the poor Italian immigrants of New York with food, shelter, education, and health services. By the 1890s, she established services in Chicago, also erecting several hospitals. She expanded those services to all immigrants across the country and around the world. By the time of her death in 1917 at age 67, the naturalized American citizen had established 67 education, health, and social service institutions throughout the world.

Coalition Challenges Key Claim Blocking Immigration from 75 Countries

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) – A Catholic legal network and other opponents of the Trump administration's sus-

pension of immigration from 75 countries are calling into question a key claim the government made in support of that policy. When it announced the policy in January, the State Department said on social media it would pause immigrant visa processing from 75 countries "whose migrants take welfare from the American people at unacceptable rates." A lawsuit, *CLINIC v. Rubio*, was filed on February 2 in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, challenging that policy by a group of American citizens, immigration nonprofits including the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, and other legal organizations. Opponents of the policy disputed the government's claim that immigrants from the 75 countries disproportionately use public benefits. The complaint argues that the government's claim is "unsupported and demonstrably false." The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank

based in Washington, recently published an analysis finding that immigrants consistently have lower welfare participation than native-born Americans for nearly every program across income levels.

New Knights of Columbus Video Series Explores 'Dignity of Work'

NEW HAVEN, Connecticut (OSV News) – A new video series from the Knights of Columbus – the world's largest Catholic fraternal service organization – delves into the dignity of work and its role in men's lives and vocation. "Men, in particular, are struggling to find their mission and meaning in life," Supreme Knight Patrick Kelly told OSV News. "Our 'Into the Breach: The Dignity of Work' video series can help Catholic men understand God's mission for them on Earth, and how work brings them closer to God and builds virtue." Released in February, "Into the Breach: The Dignity of Work" invites men to explore the Catholic vision of work in five 12-15 minute episodes. The episodes – available for free on the Knights' website, kofc.org – feature interviews with Catholic leaders and figures, including Kelly, as well as personal stories of Catholic working men. The videos tackle everything from the nature of work and its relationship with human dignity to the challenges work presents, including workaholicism, the discernment of work-life balance, and the rise of artificial intelligence.

Prolific Writer, Catechist Paul Thigpen Dies at 71

KENNESAW, Georgia (OSV News) – Catholic theologian and prolific writer Thomas "Paul" Thigpen died on Tuesday, February 24, at the age of 71. A resident of Kennesaw, Georgia, he wrote more than 60 books and hundreds of articles on religion and faith. An award-winning journalist, as well as an apologist and catechist, Thigpen wrote for dozens of religious and secular publications, both scholarly and popular. His writing topics ranged widely, with book subjects spanning "A Dictionary of Quotes from the Saints" and "The Biblical Names of Jesus" to "Extraterrestrial Intelligence and the Catholic Faith" and "Saints Who Battled Satan." In a tribute to Thigpen posted February 25 to X, TAN Books CEO Conor Gallagher called him "not only one of the most respected Catholic authors in our industry, but a man who never left a conversation without making you a better person."

St. Mary Mother of God in Fort Wayne Hosts Free Tax Help

BY BETHANY BEEBE

Filing income taxes can be taxing. Because of that, a group of committed volunteers is making St. Mary Mother of God Catholic Church in Fort Wayne one more reason that the parish is an answer to prayers.

Once again this year, those with an annual income less than \$69,000 can seek help filing their taxes at St. Mary through the help of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA), sponsored locally by the Volunteer Center, United Way, and other partners. The Internal Revenue Service calls VITA a “reliable and trusted source for preparing tax returns.” Volunteer tax preparers are trained and tested to standards the IRS says, “meets or exceeds IRS standards.”

Sue Jordan, business manager at St. Mary, told Today's Catholic the program “is very important to St. Mary's. It is reaching out to the community and addressing a need, whether they have had 10 jobs in the last year or one job. It is an easy place to come. It gives them insight into St. Mary's. They remember us. We do outreach to everybody – no matter who they are. They can be homeless and have a job, and they can have their taxes done. Year after year, they can come to us. It is open to the whole diocese and those who are not in the Catholic faith – everybody.”

Locally, at St. Mary, about 40 volunteers, trained through the IRS online program, prepare taxes, said Gretchen Neuhaus, VITA Tax Site Coordinator from the Volunteer Center. She believes the project is a valuable endeavor because it makes the process approachable to everyone.

“I believe this is important,” Neuhaus told Today's Catholic, “because to many people, taxes are scary, and we aim to make this a painless process. Some tax services charge such a high fee that, for many families, it is unaffordable. We eliminate the stress.”

Those who are seeking help simply drop off the necessary documents (see sidebar) and return a week or so later to sign the relevant papers and complete the process.

“A tax return doesn't take too long to actually prepare,” Neuhaus said. “But our process involves an interview with the



Bethany Beebe

Heliana Montero, left, and Gretchen Neuhaus work on a tax return at St. Mary Mother of God Catholic Church as part of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, which helps those earning \$69,000 annually or less complete their yearly income tax returns.

taxpayer, the actual preparation, the quality review, then the review with the taxpayer. We tell the taxpayer that they will for sure be done within a week of drop off. Most times we contact them within 2-3 days to let them know their return is complete and ready for them to come back to review and sign their documents.”

Those completed documents are done at the hands of folks ranging from college students to retired bankers, lawyers, and a retired IRS agent.

“I know that this will help other people. I was one of those people here, and I want to pay it forward.”

HELIANA MONTERO

One volunteer, Heliana Montero, who holds an MBA in international business, works in e-commerce, has a family, and still makes the time to spend time on Wednesdays doing taxes.

“I know that this will help other people,” Montero said. “I was one of those people coming here, and I want to pay it forward. I like numbers; I do my own taxes, and I have my own business. I feel confident to help other people do their taxes.”

Another volunteer, Ruth Dewit, was the executive director of the Volunteer Lawyer Program of Northeast Indiana and promised that when she retired she would become a VITA volunteer. She knew about the program because “our organizations partnered on quite a few projects,” she said. In her first tax season, she told Today's Catholic that she loves working with the other volunteers and leadership at the Fort Wayne office. “These folks are fantastic,” she said, noting great communication and information sharing, especially when she has questions on the process.

One of those sources of information on the process is reviewer Marcia Johnson, who has been with VITA since 2012. A career math teacher, Johnson said, “I've always liked fixing things,” and that her portion of the process, the review, “makes them more accurate.”

In the past, tax preparers met

What to Bring With You

Social Security or ITIN Cards

Bring information for you, your spouse, and any dependents you are claiming.

Valid Picture ID

If married and filing jointly both spouses must be present and both must bring a picture ID.

Tax Forms

This includes W-2 forms, Unemployment form (1099 G) and 1099 forms for ALL jobs held in 2025.



Do not come until you have all required documents for the 2025 tax year

Scan the QR code for a complete list of what to bring.

directly with tax filers. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the current drop-off system, but the change in the process only benefitted all involved.

“COVID really helped us evolve into a bigger success,” Neuhaus said. She estimates that 75 percent more returns are completed with the added efficiency of having clients drop off their documents and return to pick them up, as people no longer have to wait in line for hours. “I would never want to go back,” Neuhaus said.

When those completed files go back to their recipient, they

also come with informal advice on how to make one's financial future brighter.

“We educate people on how to fill out their employment forms, how to get banked, and how to do budgeting,” Neuhaus said, adding that the information shared on how to set up a bank account, for example, can make it possible for a taxpayer to receive returns more quickly.

Those interested in filing at St. Mary's can visit as walk-ins on Mondays from 1 to 6:30 p.m., Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 1 to 5:30 p.m., and Saturdays from 9 to noon until April 8.

MARY:

The Perfect Lenten Companion



Wikimedia Commons

BY ROBERT FASTIGGI

(OSV News) – As we're firmly entrenched now in Lent, the season directs us to recall our own baptism and prepare for the celebration of the paschal mystery of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. It is a time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and it helps us grow closer to Jesus.

In celebrating Lent and in every season of the liturgical year, it is good to recall the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that the "Church honors with special love the Blessed Mary, Mother of God, who is joined by an inseparable bond to the saving work of her Son."

"In her," the council fathers wrote, "the Church holds up and admires the most excellent fruit

of the redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image that which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, No. 103).

Mary is the perfect companion for Lent, and Lent is a perfect time to deepen our love, knowledge, and veneration of the Mother of God. Lent is also a season of conversion, and here, too, we receive great help from Mary, who, as the Mother of Mercy, points us to her divine Son, Jesus Christ, who came into the world to reconcile sinners to Himself (cf. Lk 5:31-32).

In his general audience on Ash Wednesday in 2014, Pope Francis highlighted the special protection and help of the Blessed Virgin for the journey of Lent: "On this journey, we want to invoke with special trust

the protection and help of the Virgin Mary: May she, who was the first to believe in Christ, accompany us in our days of intense prayer and penance, so that we might come to celebrate, purified and renewed in spirit, the great paschal mystery of her Son."

These words of Pope Francis help us to appreciate one reason why Mary is the perfect companion for Lent: She is the model of the perfect disciple because she entrusted herself completely to God.

At the Annunciation, Mary tells the angel: "I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). In 1974, Pope St. Paul VI taught that Mary is "worthy of imitation because she was the first and the most perfect of Christ's disciples" (*Marialis*

Cultus, No. 35).

In his Angelus address for the second Sunday of Lent in 2006, Pope Benedict XVI highlighted Mary as the model of believers who listen attentively to God: "The Virgin Mary herself, among all human creatures the closest to God, still had to walk day after day in a pilgrimage of faith, constantly guarding and meditating on in her heart the word that God addressed to her through holy Scripture and through the events of the life of her Son, in whom she recognized and welcomed the Lord's mysterious voice. And so, this is the gift and duty for each one of us during the season of Lent: to listen to Christ, like Mary. To listen to Him in His word, contained in sacred Scripture. To listen to Him in the events of our lives, seeking to decipher in them the messages of providence."

At the Wedding Feast of Cana, Mary told the servers, "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). In a similar way, Mary directs us all to be faithful to Christ, her divine Son. If we wish to draw closer to Christ during Lent, there is no better way than by entrusting ourselves to Mary, our spiritual mother.

As our spiritual Mother, Mary not only leads us to Christ, but she also protects and guides us from sin. Lent is a perfect time to renew our devotion to Mary as our spiritual mother who cares for us in the midst of challenges and difficulties.

One of the oldest known

"In her, the Church holds up and admires the most excellent fruit of the redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image that which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be."

SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM

prayers to Mary is known as the *Sub Tuum Praesidium* ("Under Thy Protection"), which goes back to the third or fourth century. One translation of it reads: "We fly to Thy protection, O Holy Mother of God; Do not despise our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O Glorious and Blessed Virgin. Amen."

Because Lent is a time to turn away from sin, it is also an ideal time to recognize the gift that Our Lord Himself gave us, giving us His own mother as our mother while He was dying on the cross (Jn 19:25-27). Pope St. John Paul II recognized that Jesus gave Mary as mother not only to the beloved disciple but to all of the faithful.

Mary's spiritual motherhood is the basis for the "Marian dimension" of the life of each of the disciples of Christ. John Paul II wrote in 1987: "The Marian dimension of the life of a disciple of Christ is expressed in



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a special way precisely through this filial entrusting to the Mother of Christ, which began with the testament of the Redeemer on Golgotha. Entrusting himself to Mary in a filial manner, the Christian, like the Apostle John, 'welcomes' the Mother of Christ 'into his own home' and brings her into everything that makes up his inner life" (*Redemptoris Mater*, No. 45).

Lent is a time to deepen our prayer life, and Mary provides the best example of prayer in her canticle, known as the Magnificat (cf. Lk 1:46-55). This canticle expresses the attitudes of praise, gratitude, and humility that are at the heart of all authentic prayer to God. St. Paul VI speaks of Mary as "the virgin in prayer" who "praises the Lord unceasingly and intercedes for the salvation of the world" (*Marialis Cultus*, No. 18). As our spiritual mother, Mary not only teaches us how to pray, but she prays for us "now and at the hour of our death."

In the Gospel of Luke, Simeon told Mary that her heart would be pierced so that "the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed" (Lk 2:35). This prophecy was fulfilled during Christ's passion when Mary stood beneath the cross witnessing her Son's crucifixion (cf. Jn 19:25-27). Vatican II tells us that Mary "faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, grieving exceedingly with her only begotten Son, uniting herself with a maternal heart with His sacrifice, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth" (*Lumen Gentium*, No. 58).

Lent, along with the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows on September 15, is also a special time for venerating Mary as our sorrowful mother. This is done in the Stations of the



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"Mary faithfully persevered her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood ... uniting herself with a maternal heart with His sacrifice."

LUMEN GENTIUM

Cross, which often includes the singing of parts of the medieval hymn *Stabat Mater*, whose most memorable verses are: "At the cross her station keeping, Stood the mournful Mother weeping, Close to Jesus to the last. Through her heart, His sorrow sharing, All His bitter anguish bearing, Now at length the sword had pass'd. Oh, how sad and sore distress'd. Was that mother highly blest, Of the sole-begotten One!"

Because Lent points to Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil, Mary as Our Lady

of Sorrows assumes particular importance. But even under the cross, Mary remains a teacher and a model. She shows how all of the faithful, like her, can unite their sufferings to the passion of Christ for the redemption of the world.

Mary's "unique contribution to the Gospel of suffering" (described by St. John Paul II in *Salvifici Doloris*) shows us that suffering is not meaningless. Lent is a special time to remember the sorrows of Mary and to join ourselves to her in offering her divine Son "in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world" (Chaplet of Divine Mercy).

There is no better companion for the journey of Lent than Mary. As she leads us closer to Jesus, she will serve – as we pray in the *Salve Regina* – "our life, our sweetness, and our hope."

Robert Fastiggi, Ph.D., is a professor of systematic theology at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit. He is former president of the Mariological Society of America.

Walk Alongside the Sorrowful Mother

While the Stations of the Cross are well known, there is the parallel pious exercise known as the *Via Matris* or "way of Mary."

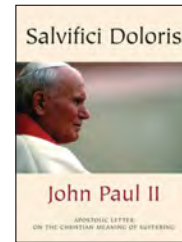
This devotion centers on the seven sorrows (or dolours) of Mary, which have a sure scriptural foundation: 1. The prophecy of Simeon (Lk 2:34–35); 2. The flight into Egypt (Mt 2:13); 3. The loss of Jesus in the Temple (Lk 2:43–45); 4. The meeting of Jesus and Mary on the way to Calvary (Lk 23:27); 5. The crucifixion of Jesus (Jn 19:25); 6. The descent of Jesus from the cross (Mt 27: 57–59); and 7. The burial of Jesus (Jn 19: 40–42).

The Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy, issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 2002, states that the *Via Matris* harmonizes well "with certain themes that are proper to the Lenten season." It also notes that the *Via Matris* provides "stages on the journey of faith and sorrow on which the Virgin Mary has preceded the Church, and in which the Church journeys until the end of time."

Five Books to Read This Lent

BY OSV NEWS

The season of Lent is an ideal time to grow in the spiritual life. Here are five great reads to help you on your way.



Salvifici Doloris by Pope St. John Paul II

Written in the wake of his assassination attempt and published as an apostolic letter in 1984, *Salvifici Doloris* is a treatise on the redemptive value of suffering, one of the hidden gems of St. John Paul II's bibliography. It explains that all suffering finds its meaning and is transformed by Jesus Christ, sheds light on the centrality of the cross in the Christian's life, and ties together

themes of suffering from Scripture to present a robust spirituality on suffering. With Lent's focus on purification and the need to cling to Christ crucified, this letter is most fitting for the season.



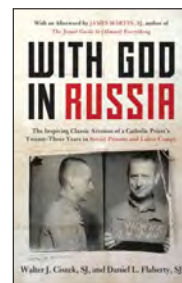
"Finding God in Suffering"

by Father Christopher M. Mahar

Drawing richly from the teachings on suffering by Pope St. John Paul II, "Finding God in Suffering" (Pauline Books & Media US, 2023) tackles the age-old questions related to the topic, such as: What does suffering mean? Why does God allow it? How can it have a purpose? With Lent's focus on Christ's passion and death, this book can help others come to see their own connection

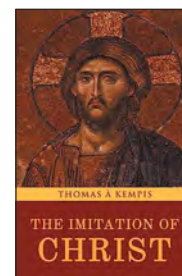
to the Suffering Christ.

Drawing from decades of experience in pastoral counseling, author Father Christopher Mahar articulates the Church's teachings very clearly and with great empathy and hope. Each chapter is accompanied by reflection questions and prayer prompts, making the book a perfect tool to engage mind, heart, and strength in the midst of suffering.



"With God in Russia" by Father Walter Ciszek, SJ

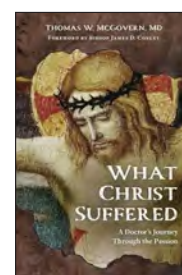
An inspiring and challenging memoir of the American Jesuit priest's imprisonment in a Soviet gulag, falsely accused of espionage and subversion. Much of Father Ciszek's suffering was endured in hard labor camps in Siberia. While there, he embraced the horror of his situation as a means to carry on his priestly work, even celebrating the sacraments secretly. But, moreover, the brutality he faced recounted in "With God in Russia" (Ignatius Press, 1997) was a proving ground for great virtue and holiness. Given the importance placed on interior renewal and holiness imposed by the significance of Lent, this book has much to ponder.



"The Imitation of Christ" by Thomas à Kempis

"The Imitation of Christ" (Noll Library, OSV, 2018) is a handbook for spiritual life. The 15th-century text is divided into four books: "Helpful Counsels of the Spiritual Life," "Directives for the Interior Life," "On Interior Consolation," and "On the Blessed Sacrament." It was written at a time when many recognized the need for reform in the Church by holier living of its members. It focuses on the interior life and withdrawal from the

world. It places emphasis on the devotion to the Eucharist as a key element of spiritual life. It can be a sure daily companion during Lenten prayer time.



"What Christ Suffered: A Doctor's Journey Through the Passion" Revised and Expanded, By Thomas W. McGovern, MD

What Christ suffered during His passion – for you – is a powerful source of reflection and meditation. While we know Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem around A.D. 33, the details have been confused and obscured over the past two millennia. In this revised and expanded edition of "What Christ Suffered" (OSV, 2025), Dr. Thomas

W. McGovern, a dermatologist whose practice is based in Fort Wayne, provides the most accurate, up-to-date understanding of the sufferings of Jesus Christ, using ancient Greek and Latin literature about crucifixion, discoveries of ancient images, archaeology, medical reenactment studies, and medical case reports. In addition, drawing on the teachings of Pope St. John Paul II in *Salvifici Doloris*, this book offers practical ways to respond to suffering, both our own and that of others.

Bishop Rhoades 'Grateful' as Pro-Abortion Professor Declines Notre Dame Appointment

BY GINA CHRISTIAN

(OSV News) – Bishop Rhoades welcomed news that a pro-abortion professor at the University of Notre Dame has withdrawn from an appointment to direct one of the university institutes, following weeks of outcry from students, staff, and many U.S. Catholic bishops over her prominent advocacy for abortion.

"I am very grateful to all the members of the Notre Dame community and beyond who, out of love for Notre Dame, expressed their opposition to the appointment," Bishop Rhoades said in a February 26 statement. Bishop Rhoades noted his opposition to the appointment was "because the appointment of persons to leadership positions at a Catholic university is an act of institutional witness, a mission-governance issue."

"This is not an issue about academic freedom or scholarly engagement," he said. "Academic freedom protects inquiry. It does not require institutional self-contradiction."

Earlier that day, Dean Mary Gallagher of Notre Dame's Keough School of Global Affairs announced in an email that Susan Ostermann, associate professor in the Keough School, had "decided not to move forward" as director of its Liu Institute for Asia and Asian Studies.

Ostermann, who specializes in the study of regulatory compliance, comparative politics and environmental regulation, with a focus on South Asia, will remain a member of the Keough School's faculty.

Gallagher said she was "grateful" for Ostermann's "willingness to serve and for the thoughtfulness with which she approached this decision" to decline the directorship.

Ostermann's appointment, announced January 8, was set to take effect July 1 and quickly drew fire from Notre Dame faculty and staff due to her robust public advocacy for legal abortion. She had also worked as a consultant for the Population Council, an international research and policy firm that works to advance "sexual and reproductive health, rights and choices" as a key aim.

Two days prior to Ostermann's withdrawal, Bishop Rhoades



OSV News photo/James Whitaker

Student leaders and others from groups across campus take part in the "March on the Dome" at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend on Friday, February 27, in response to the appointment of pro-abortion professor Susan Ostermann to one of its institutes. Ostermann "decided not to move forward" as director of the school's Liu Institute for Asia and Asian Studies, said Keough School of Global Affairs Dean Mary Gallagher in a February 26 email.

joined some 50 students, faculty, and staff gathered at the university's Marian grotto to "pray together for the cause of life and respect for all human life" (See Page 11).

In his February 26 statement, Bishop Rhoades acknowledged a Notre Dame spokesperson's public statement that the university maintains an "unwavering" commitment to "upholding the inherent dignity of the human person and the sanctity of life at every stage."

"Clearly Notre Dame is reaffirming its fidelity to a core truth of Catholic social teaching that is central to the Church's commitment to integral human development," he said. Bishop Rhoades added that many of Notre Dame's classes, activities, and programs reaffirm "its fidelity to a core truth of Catholic social teaching central to the Church's commitment to integral human development."

But he emphasized, "That mission commitment is compromised when a Catholic university appoints leaders or bestows honors on those who act or speak against fundamental teachings of the Church."

Bishop Rhoades, who is also secretary of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, had originally issued a statement February 11 expressing "dismay" and "strong opposition" to the university's decision to appoint Ostermann as an institute director, which he said was "causing scandal to the faithful of our diocese and beyond."

Ostermann's "extensive public advocacy of abortion rights and her disparaging and inflammatory remarks about those who uphold the dignity of human life from the moment of conception to natural death go against a core principle of justice that is central to Notre Dame's Catholic identity and mission," he said.

Notre Dame sophomore Luke Woodyard, one of the organizers of the February 24 prayer gathering, told OSV News the Ostermann appointment was "the straw that broke the camel's back."

In a statement, Notre Dame officials explained that Ostermann was chosen to head the Liu Institute "for her expertise in Asian studies" and that "she respects the university's position on the sanctity of life." It maintained

that as an incoming director, Ostermann understood "her role is to support the diverse research of the Institute's scholars and students, not advance a personal political agenda."

In a statement included with Gallagher's February 26 email announcing her withdrawal, Ostermann said her "only goal" in accepting the Liu directorship "was to serve as a steward for the institute's world-class faculty, students, and staff." Ostermann said she had not applied for the position but was "truly honored to take on" the role.

"At present, the focus on my appointment risks overshadowing the vital work the institute performs, which it should be allowed to pursue without undue distraction," Ostermann said. "At the same time, it has become clear that there is work to do at Notre Dame to build a community where a variety of voices can flourish. Both academic inquiry and the full realization of human dignity demand this of us."

The controversy over Ostermann's appointment highlighted the role of Catholic universities in the life of the Church, as delineated in St. John Paul II's 1990

apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, for which the USCCB approved a particular application in 1999.

In their particular application, the U.S. bishops said they "want to maintain, preserve, and guarantee the Catholic identity of Catholic higher education" as a shared responsibility with "sponsoring religious communities, boards of trustees, university administration, faculty, staff, and students."

Noting that "academic freedom is an essential component of a Catholic university," the particular application also stresses the university – especially its trustees, administration, and faculty – "should take practical steps to implement its mission statement in order to foster and strengthen its Catholic nature and character."

Holy Cross Father Wilson Miscamble, emeritus professor of history at Notre Dame, told OSV News he was "deeply pleased" by Ostermann's decision to decline the Liu appointment but added, "I recognize there is much work to do to uphold Notre Dame's Catholic mission and identity."

Students Pray for Life with Bishop Rhoades at Notre Dame Grotto

BY GRETCHEN R. CROWE

(OSV News) – On Tuesday, February 24 – two days before it was announced that a pro-abortion professor at the University of Notre Dame had withdrawn from being appointed to lead the school's Liu Institute for Asia and Asian Studies – Bishop Rhoades joined dozens of students to pray for life at the university's Marian grotto.

"I'm so proud of you; I'm so proud of all of you," Bishop Rhoades said on the evening of Tuesday, February 24, to the approximately 50 students, faculty, and staff gathered at the grotto. "The power of prayer – that's why we're here at Our Lady's grotto, so we'll pray together for the cause of life and respect for all human life. We pray for the University of Notre Dame, and we ask for the powerful intercession of our Blessed Mother as she looks over this campus."

Gathered in the cold near a replica

of the French grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, a popular place for prayer on campus, Bishop Rhoades and students prayed the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary as the sun set in the late February sky. Some students stood holding rosaries, some knelt in prayer.

Bishop Rhoades said it was "a blessing" to pray with students at the grotto.

"I am grateful for Notre Dame's pro-life witness reflected in the students and faculty who work to foster a culture of life through their organizations, programs, and daily example," he said. "I entrust the Notre Dame community and its leaders to the intercession of Our Lady of Lourdes. I invite all the faithful to join in prayer – perhaps by lighting a candle at the Grotto – asking our Blessed Mother to intercede for Notre Dame and its proclamation and service of the Gospel of her Son, the Gospel of life."



Photos by Peter Ringenberg

Bishop Rhoades prays the Rosary with students at the University of Notre Dame at the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes on Tuesday, February 24.



In the Footsteps of St. Oscar Romero in El Salvador



GUEST COMMENTARY

ELY SEGURA

When I heard that an upcoming mission trip for the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers was going to be to El Salvador, I didn't hesitate to sign up immediately. I was eager to learn more about the work of St. Oscar Romero, especially because the testimony of his priesthood had moved me to tears, just as the testimonies of St. Damien on the island of Molokai and Blessed Stanley Rother in Guatemala had done.

That trip in 2023 coincided with the commemoration of the 43rd anniversary of St. Romero's martyrdom. Like John the Baptist or an authentic "alter Christus," knowing his death was imminent, he did not cease in the fulfillment of the mission entrusted to him: to advocate for justice, until his last breath, on behalf of the least fortunate among his people.

This was my first visit to El Salvador. Meeting its people



OSV News photo/courtesy Ely Segura

A file photo shows a portrait of St. Oscar Romero at the Metropolitan Cathedral in San Salvador, El Salvador, where he is buried. Archbishop Romero was assassinated while celebrating Mass in San Salvador in 1980.

and getting an overview of the situation left me with mixed feelings. On the one hand, in our encounters with Salvadorans, I perceived the scars of their historical, political, and social wounds, but it was also clear that recent political and social wounds continue to di-

vide them. On the other hand, I witnessed their overwhelming kindness and generosity, which moved me deeply.

In downtown San Salvador, construction was underway on the National Library, and a few blocks from that site, in the cathedral, preparations were

being made for the feast day – and martyrdom anniversary – of St. Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdamez, the archbishop of San Salvador from 1977-80, who was canonized on October 14, 2018, by Pope Francis.

That morning, March 24, 2023, in the cathedral was

memorable for me. Hundreds of faithful, young and old, attended the holy Eucharist: religious, laypeople, supporters of St. Romero, members of the media, and dozens of groups of pilgrims who also gathered around the saint's crypt to pay tribute to him with songs and prayers. It was truly gratifying to hear the youth groups sharing what St. Romero means to them.

I was struck by the fact that St. Romero was not only a figure who gained international recognition but that he was truly a prophet in his own land, loved by everyone there, Christian or not. Even the international airport in San Salvador bears his name, and several of its walls pay tribute to him.

During my mission trip, we had the opportunity to learn about the lives of other martyrs in El Salvador, but since my focus was on St. Romero, I want to highlight three lessons I learned from that visit to Central America.

First, the pressing need to touch the wounds of the afflicted. St. Romero is credited

SEGURA, page 13

This Lent, Be Reminded of the Wellspring of Mercy Offered by God



THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MONSIGNOR OWEN F. CAMPION

The source of the first biblical reading for this Lenten weekend's liturgies is the Book of Exodus, one of the five books of the Bible regarded as the basis of God's revelation to the Chosen People. The initial theological concepts and regulations about behavior are seen as being rooted in the original teachings of Moses.

Together, these five books constitute the Torah, then and still the cornerstone of Judaism. Another name is the Pentateuch, this term coming from the Greek word for five.

As the title implies, the Book of Exodus is concerned with the experiences of the Hebrews as they fled Egypt and moved toward the land God had promised them. It was a very difficult trip. Even today, a journey across the Sinai Peninsula by land is

bleak. It is not surprising that the Hebrews wondered if they had swapped the witch for the devil as they wandered across Sinai. In frustration, bewilderment, and misery, they grumbled about Moses, who led the way.

Water was a precious commodity in this arid environment. Understandably, the people feared thirst. Moses, enlightened by God, told them to look for water in an improbable place. It was the side of a rock. As directed, the people struck the rock, and water flowed.

St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans supplies the second reading. As is so typical of Paul's writing, this passage celebrates Jesus as the only source of life, and of bonding with God, and it proclaims salvation in Christ as the gift coming from the willing sacrifice of the Lord on Calvary.

For its last reading this weekend, the Church presents a section of St. John's Gospel. It is the story of the Lord's meeting with the Samaritan woman beside a well in Samaria. The reading is heavy with lessons for us.

First, the site is Samaria. For the Jews of the Lord's time, Samaria represented many bad things. The woman is a Samaritan, and Samaritans were of Hebrew heritage, but they had acquiesced when foreigners invaded the land, compromising with paganism, and even inter-marrying with pagan foreigners. Inter-marriage added insult to injury, because by such unions Samaritans defiled the Hebrew heritage.

Faithful Jews looked upon Samaritans with contempt.

Also, at the time of Jesus, no adult unmarried man ever engaged a strange woman in conversation, let alone a Samaritan.

The message is that Jesus set all these considerations aside. He bore the mercy of God, and this mercy was meant for everyone, all conventions aside.

Furthermore, by outreach to this Samaritan woman, the Lord asserts that every person possesses a dignity – indeed, a right to eternal life.

More than Jacob of old, Jesus promises a gift of water greatly

more satisfying than any that could be drawn from a well.

Finally, the Lord predicts that a new order is coming. It will be neither centralized in Jerusalem nor on the mountaintops where the Samaritans customarily worshipped.

Reflection

A historic fixture in any Catholic church is a bowl, or vessel, placed at the church's door, filled with water that has been blessed by a priest. It represents the water used in Christian baptism.

Catholics enter the church. They touch the water in the bowl with their fingertips, and then, their fingers wet with the holy water, they bless themselves with the Sign of the Cross.

This gesture hopefully reminds the person of his or her own baptism when a bond with Christ was established. He received them in the Church. They promised, perhaps through their godparents if they were infants, to follow Christ all their days.

Lent is the time to decide whether or not these promises have been fulfilled. Are they still the blueprint of life? It is time for recommitment to them.

READINGS

Sunday: Exodus 17:3-7; Psalms 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9; Romans 5:1-2, 5-8; John 4:5-42

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

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

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

Thursday: Jeremiah 7:23-28; Psalms 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9; Luke 11:14-23

Friday: Hosea 14:2-10; Psalms 81:6c-8a, 8bc-9, 10-11ab, 14, 17; Mark 12:28-34

Saturday: Hosea 6:1-6; Psalms 51:3-4, 18-19, 20-21ab; Luke 18:9-14

Second by Second, Turning Toward the Sun



TWENTY SOMETHING

CHRISTINA CAPECCHI

The older I get, the more I appreciate the math of meteorology. Something has shifted in me, and now I'm all ears when my retired neighbor rattles off numbers from his rain gauge.

What appeals to me, I think, is the precision. We can measure forces of nature – rainfall, snowfall, temperature – and in our uncertain world, we can know them for certain. We can pinpoint them to our backyard, exactly where and exactly when we experienced them.

It offers a rare kind of certainty – the confirmation of a shared experience. “Yes, I was there, I witnessed that, too.” Weather gives us something to rally around, something we can agree on. The rain really did fall. The temperature really did drop. In a world where so much feels subject to debate, these measurements let us say together: “This happened.”

Of all the weather stats, the most hopeful one is happening now: our steady march toward summer. This movement is measured in seconds.

It begins on December 21, the winter solstice, when the sun sets here in St. Paul, Minnesota, at 4:33 p.m. One day later, we northerners gain four seconds of daylight. The second

day after the solstice, we gain nine seconds. The third day, 14. The fourth day, 19. The fifth day, 24.

Shall I continue with these riveting numbers?

They are drenched in optimism.

Good work is underway in you and in me. God is moving in us right now - second by second, step by step. Even when we can't feel it ... We are becoming more fully ourselves, made in God's image.

All that incremental progress adds up. Tiny gains that stack up to big ones. By the time March arrives, we've gained nearly two and a half hours of daylight. And the biggest change of all here happens this month.

March does the most work to carry us to summer, the heaviest lifting, when our hemisphere turns toward the sun at its quickest pace. We see our biggest gains in St. Paul in mid-March, when a single day adds 3 minutes and 9 seconds of daylight. From that first daily increase of just 4 seconds, it's a marked jump.

It makes for a busy month. Over the duration of March in St. Paul – just 31 days – we gain

one hour, 34 minutes, and 17 seconds of daylight. We hold at that peak for about two weeks before the pace eases in April and May, even as the days keep lengthening. Once we reach the summer solstice, in total we've added 6 hours, 55 minutes, and 2 seconds of daylight since winter solstice.

This fact of nature instills such confidence. Our swing to the sun is guaranteed. No matter how badly we mess up, it's a sure thing, a promise of progress made each day.

So, too, is God's grace, working in us daily, transforming us in barely perceptible increments – four-second gains that add up to seven hours. St. Paul pledges this with the same kind of certainty. “I am confident of this,” he writes in Philippians 1:6, “that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Good work is underway in you and in me. God is moving in us right now – second by second, step by step. Even when we can't feel it, even if it is still dark, even though we fail, we are turning toward the Son. We are becoming more fully ourselves, made in God's image. And this work will be brought to completion. God will see us through.

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

duty (cf. 1 Cor 9:16). Woe to all Christians if we do not do so!

Thanks to the broadcasts of his homilies on the diocesan radio station, today we can marvel at a prophet of our times, who was not afraid to denounce the abuses of his country's military, the abuse of authority by its leaders, and the unequal distribution of wealth.

St. Romero never ceased to awaken the conscience of his compatriots, urging them to peacefully unite for just causes and claim the rights that belonged to them. His messages were always direct, without beating around the bush or using euphemisms. The day before his death, he openly begged the national guard to cease their harassment and persecution, appealing to the commandment not to kill.

Finally, each of us is called give our lives! It may not be to the extreme, like Jesus who gave His on the cross, or at the point of a bullet, like St. Romero, but wear it out in unconditional dedication, taking up a cause to alleviate the pain of those who are suffering.

Tertullian affirmed that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church. May the blood of St. Romero germinate in each of us during this Lent the desire to fearlessly assume our identity as Church, for, in the end, the consequence will never be death but eternal life.

Ely Segura is a laywoman and creator of the Teófilo project, an initiative for the faith formation of Hispanic adults in the United States (proyectoteofilo.com).

SEGURA, from page 12

with the phrase, “There are many things that can only be seen through eyes that have cried.” He knew this better than anyone because he not only welcomed the tears of the direct victims of violence and social inequality but also shed tears for them and with them.

In his final years, he turned the Archdiocese of San Salvador into a place of welcome and listening for those who suffer, people from all walks of life who confided their fears to him and who offered him bonds of trust and friendship.

Second, preaching the Gospel, in all its implications, is an obligation. For, as St. Paul said in his First Letter to the Corinthians, preaching the Gospel is not a cause for pride; it is a

SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for March 8, 2026

John 4:5-42

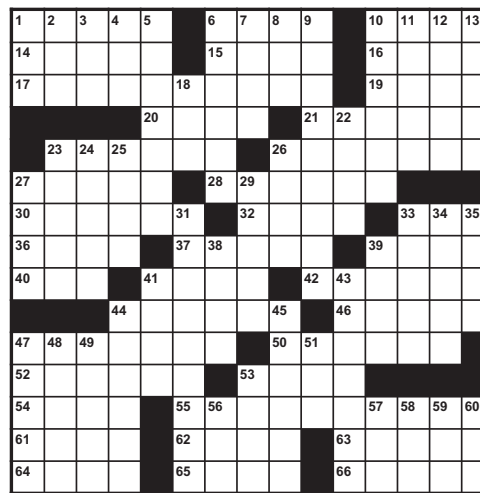
Following is a word search based on the Gospel reading for the third Sunday of Lent, Cycle A: A Samaritan woman meets Jesus. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

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|----------|---------------|-----------|
| JOSEPH | WELL | TIRED |
| JOURNEY | NOON | SAMARITAN |
| OF GOD | LIVING | WATER |
| FLOCKS | THIRSTY AGAIN | SPRING |
| ETERNAL | PROPHET | MOUNTAIN |
| NOW HERE | TRUTH | MESSIAH |
| TWO DAYS | BELIEVE | SAVIOR |

BELIEVING WOMAN

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

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- 54 Second letter of the Greek alphabet
 55 Obstacle to a sacrament
 61 Level
 62 Angelus time
 63 Reuben or Gad, for example
 64 “___ in peace”
 65 “___ grip!”
 66 From that time
- DOWN**
- 1 OT historical book
 2 Med. Christian empire
 3 Writer Fleming
 4 Parisian season
 5 Catholic tennis great Roger
 6 Holy
 7 Latin or Byzantine, for example
 8 Movie about Capote
 9 Serving at Mass
 10 Crib for Baby Jesus

ACROSS

- 1 Dismas, the Good ___
 6 Span. lass
 10 Filth
 14 Take to the soapbox
 15 Something you shouldn't put on
 16 Ancient Egyptian life-giving force (var.)
 17 Canticle of Zachariah
 19 Like many an art piece
 20 Patrick's place
 21 “My sentiments exactly”
 23 “The ___ Queene”
 26 Climbs
 27 Multitude
 28 On the right side
 30 Holy ___
 32 Inter ___
 33 Strike
 36 Type of gun
 37 This Jesuit has a crater on the moon named for him
 39 Fog
 40 Number of foolish and wise virgins in the Gospel
 41 Recline in a relaxed manner
 42 Twisted
 44 Films
 46 Standard of perfection
 47 Ornamental shoulder piece
 50 According to Proverbs, a gracious woman gets this
 52 Pertaining to the mind
 53 “...___ to anger, abounding in mercy, steadfast love.” (Ps 103:8)
- 11 Course reversal
 12 Yielded
 13 Prayer spot?
 18 Roman crowd?
 22 Suffix (zool.)
 23 Specialty
 24 Catholic actress of “Our Miss Brooks” fame
 25 First place
 26 Wheel shaft
 27 Communion wafer
 29 One of the faces in Ezekiel's vision
 31 Scooping
 33 Company newbie
 34 Religion of the Muslims
 35 Internet good-bye
 38 Landed
 39 “...begotten, not ___.”
 41 “Damn Yankees” vamp
 43 Idiots
 44 Sci-fi staple
 45 Catholic actress/singer Gomez
 47 It was touched to Isaiah's mouth
 48 Some people have a pet one
 49 Pays to play
 51 Turf
 53 Puff's buddy
 56 Stooze name
 57 High-tech hosp. test
 58 Aachen article
 59 US TV station
 60 Golfer's aid

Answer key on page 15

DEACONS, from page 1

According to Stacey Noem, moderator of the diocesan synod, a special synod consultation for deacons and their wives was important for understanding what parish life looks like.

"We're hearing from the parishes themselves" in the parish consultation phase, Noem said. "This is an essential opportunity to get that insight from a perspective that's unique to those serving in the capacity of deacons and their spouses."

After Eucharistic adoration, deacons and wives were assigned



Stacey Noem, moderator of the diocesan synod, speaks during a special consultation for deacons and their wives on Saturday, February 28.

to one of several tables, each with a notetaker and facilitator. Spouses were intentionally separated.

"It was good that we were not sitting with our spouses!" said Tracy Penzler. "It really created an opportunity to not necessarily say the same things and to have a little bit of a diverse conversation. It was wonderful being mixed with deacons who have been deacons for a long time and newer deacons and their wives ... to hear about what's happening in other parishes from a unique lens ... in a broad spectrum."

Father Matthew Coonan, the diocese's vicar for clergy, told participants: "Listen to the Holy Spirit already at work here. Don't interrupt. ... Don't make comments. ... Actively receive what others have said because in the very next round you need to name something you heard from someone else, not your own thoughts."

Deacon Jose Ruvalcaba praised the effectiveness of "this synod to be able to listen to each other and to see the needs. Sometimes we're just following what's been done, we're not really adjusting to the specific needs of the people. This is a great opportunity so that we can see how we're working and maybe to know what we need to change in our communities and in our own needs."

Even with some focus on the concerns of deacons and their wives, all stayed mindful of the needs of those in the pews.



Deacon Mel Tardy

Deacons and deacon wives hold a discussion during the synod consultation at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Warsaw.

"A lot of our brothers and sisters are suffering right now," said Deacon Juan Sandoval, "but this synod helps us so we can go back to help them. ... We're helping right now, but we want to help more. We want to see that our communities grow and help those brothers and sisters that are passing through a bad time right now."

After the consultation, Tracy Penzler said, "It was a wonderful opportunity to speak about what we're seeing and experiencing in our parishes ... [and] to hear what other deacons and wives are talking about."

Deacon Sandoval added: "It was a pleasure to see all our brother deacons and wives. It was really joyful. We learned a lot



Father Matthew Coonan, vicar for clergy for the diocese, speaks during the special consultation for deacons and their wives.

in the synod because we talked about the needs of everyone in our Church."

Deacon James Summers said he hoped "that Voices will be heard, that people in the pews will get the sense that this is their

opportunity to let Bishop know what they truly need if they've been hesitant to do so."

Deacon Mel Tardy serves as the administrator of St. Augustine Parish in South Bend.

RECONCILIATION, from page 1

As a priest, this is one of the most disheartening statistics I have ever come across. Within our Church here in the United States, nearly half of our people NEVER receive the mercy of God within the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In other words, half of our Church consistently refuses to accept the very gift that Jesus yearns to give.

While I would love to imagine that the majority of our Church in this country is living free from serious sin, I highly doubt that to be the case. From my perspective, I think there are several other reasons why some folks refuse to receive the saving mercy of the Lord in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Fear: This is probably one of the biggest obstacles that comes up. Maybe it's been a long time, and someone is afraid the priest will be upset. Maybe there's a certain sin that has caused shame and is difficult to confess. Maybe there is a fear of not

remembering the act of contrition. I can tell you with great certainty that each and every one of these reasons comes from the enemy and not from the Lord. For me, one of the happiest moments in my priesthood comes when someone returns to the sacrament for the first time in a long time. I literally rejoice to welcome home those who have been away. Jesus tells us the same – just read the 15th chapter of Luke's Gospel if you need more evidence.

Pride: This is the silent killer. It sounds like this: "I'm a good person; I don't need confession." It may also sound like, "I just tell God I'm sorry; He knows my heart. I don't need to confess my sins to a priest." In response, I would highlight two passages from Scripture. The first is Luke 18:9-14. There we find the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee was self-righteous and refused to receive God's mercy. He was not justified by God. The tax collector, on the other hand, after acknowledging his sinfulness, was

Five Tips for Inviting a Friend to Confession

- 1. Pray:** Pray for the individual. Pray that God's grace may work through your invitation. Pray with confidence that God is listening and will act in His time.
- 2. Setting matters:** Extend the invitation when the individual is not stressed, not feeling rushed, and is in a position to consider the invitation.
- 3. Make it easy:** Could you provide a ride? And, even easier, invite your friend to any parish in the diocese on March 10 between 6-8 p.m. as part of The Light Is On for You.
- 4. Just do it:** God's grace is far more powerful than our fears and hesitations.
- 5. Explain the sacrament:** Last, if it has been a while since your friend has received God's forgiveness through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, he or she will likely have questions. Visit diocesefwsb.org/light for information regarding what the sacrament is and how to go to confession.

sent home justified by the Lord. Only God's mercy can justify, not our own self-assessment. The other passage to mention is John 20:19-23. This is the scene on the evening of the first Easter Sunday. The very first thing the resurrected Jesus does here is to give the apostles the power to forgive sins. Put another way, the resurrected Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation through the apostolic ministry.

In short, to refuse the sacrament is to refuse the merits of Christ's death and resurrection in favor of a paschal mystery of our own creation.

Ignorance: Perhaps it's the case that folks simply do not understand the power of one good confession. A good confession is both restorative and preventative. It could also be the difference in a life of eternal happiness with God or a life of eternal separa-

tion from Him. On one level, it restores us to right relationship with God, ourselves, the Church, and the rest of creation. On another level, it strengthens us for the Christian life to resist future temptation. In this way, even if we are not struggling with serious sin, confession is a great way to continue to be strengthened in the Christian life. However, if we are guilty of grave sin, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the only ordinary means of reconciliation with God and the Church (see the Catechism, No. 1497).

Wherever you find yourself on the Lenten journey, the Lord Jesus yearns to show you His merciful heart in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Whether it has been a few years, a decade, 50 years, or longer, the Lord wants to show you the light of his love. That light will be on for YOU in every parish of our diocese on Tuesday, March 10, from 6-8 p.m.

Father Brian Isenberger is pastor at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Garrett.

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.

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- 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.

SATURDAY, MARCH 7 Diocese Synod Special Consultation for Black Catholics

9:30 a.m. – 12 p.m.
SOUTH BEND – All are welcome at this special consultation at St. Augustine Church, 1501 W. Washington St. Black Catholics, their immediate family members, and those who minister to Blacks in Catholic settings are especially invited to ensure all voices in the diocese are heard. Special consultations offer a prayerful opening, discernment, and consultation adapted to the particular needs of the group. The voices and prayerful discernment of Black Catholics and their loved ones matters deeply to us all as the Body of Christ. Brunch is included.

SUNDAY, MARCH 8 Corazón Puro Monthly Meeting

FORT WAYNE AND GOSHEN – Join us for our March monthly meeting on the topic "True Intimacy." Come for an afternoon of Mass, confession, adoration, and fellowship as we grow together in authentic love and holiness. In Goshen: Sunday, March 8, at 2:45 pm at St. John the Evangelist (109 W. Monroe St.), or in Fort Wayne: Sunday, March 8, at 1:30 pm at St. Henry Catholic Church (2929 E. Paulding Rd.). All are welcome — invite a friend and join us!

THURSDAY, MARCH 12 World Youth Day Sneak Peek Zoom Meeting 7 – 8 p.m.

ZOOM MEETING – Discover more about World Youth Day 2027 in Seoul! Join Verso Ministries and the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend on Zoom for a preview session to meet the team, walk through the itinerary, and ask questions about this exciting trip. Register online at tinyurl.com/4jawmw85.

THURSDAY, MARCH 12 RETURN Mass and Stations of the Cross 7 – 8:30 p.m.

SOUTH BEND – Please join us at Christ the King Catholic Church, 52473 State Road 933, for a special Mass and Stations of the Cross to pray for the return of adult children (or other loved ones). After Mass, around 7:40 p.m., we will pray the Stations of the Cross with reflections written particularly for this same intention. All are welcome for Mass and/or stations. No registration necessary, but please let us know that you are coming! To register, please visit ablazemission.org/return.

SATURDAY, MARCH 14 St. Patrick Day Celebration 12 – 4 p.m.

SOUTH BEND – Stop by St. Hedwig Memorial Hall, 300 Scott St., for the St. Patrick's Day celebration. Irish food, music and dancers are featured, with chicken or corned beef meals available for \$20.

REST IN PEACE

Mishawaka

Peter Leveque, 76, Queen of Peace

Mary Moser, 91, Queen of Peace

Florence Chapman, 93, St. Joseph

Michael DeBroka, 85, St. Joseph

Thomas DeClark, 83, St. Joseph

Tom Lyvers, 72, St. Joseph

Joan Richard, 88, St. Joseph

Barbara Sommer, 83, St. Joseph

Rosemary Sterzik, 98, St. Joseph

Richard Swiental, 67, St. Joseph

Patricia Van Lue, 100, St. Joseph

New Haven

Sandra Hale, 67, St. John the Baptist

Plymouth

Barbara Danielson, 89, St. Michael

Rex Hummel, 72, St. Michael

Julian Keiser, 90, St. Michael

Shirley Shook, 83, St. Michael

Linda Verhaeghe, 80, St. Michael

South Bend

David J. Hume III, 82, St. John the Baptist

Walkerton

Sharon LaPara, 78, St. Patrick

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Rekindle the Fire Encourages Men to Seek Faith, Fraternity

BY KEN HALLENIUS

“Faith and Fraternity” was the theme of the 2026 Rekindle the Fire men’s conference, which drew more than 550 men from across the diocese and as far away as North Carolina to the Century Center in South Bend on Saturday, February 21. Keynote speakers Robert Rogers, Father Larry Richards, and Dom Quaglia each delivered inspiring talks, and Bishop Rhoades took questions from the audience before celebrating Mass to conclude the day, encouraging men to “Rekindle the fire. Spread the fire of God’s love. That’s our mission.”

Father Jay Horning, pastor of St. Bernard Parish in Wabash, served as the event’s master of ceremonies, as he introduced the speakers and sponsors throughout the day and kept the conference moving. He introduced the theme by asking, “Will you be my brother today? Will you be my brother tomorrow?”

The conference began with the enthronement of the Gospels at center stage, which several presenters referenced in their talks as they encouraged the men to read Scripture daily. “No Bible, no breakfast. No Bible, no bed,” chanted Robert Rogers, quoting an oft-repeated phrase of his fellow speaker Father Larry Richards.

Rogers, a member of St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Fort Wayne, spoke and sang movingly about entrusting one’s life to God through the greatest adversities. He drew the audience in with his deft storytelling about his personal faith journey, meeting and falling in love with his wife, the difficult pregnancies they experienced, and the joy they shared as they added a daughter to their family through international adoption. Within months of his daughter’s arrival, a tragic car accident killed his entire family and spared him alone. Rather than collapsing in on himself due to the grief, Rogers embraced God’s call to be a “brave and mighty man of God” and to live a life filled with no regrets.

Rogers shared a number of lessons that he had learned through the tragedy, drawing parallels with the suffering of Job. He spoke of the importance of coming to know God personally and intimately through prayer, daily Scripture reading,



Photos by Scott Warden

More than 500 men gather at the Century Center in South Bend for Rekindle the Fire on Saturday, February 21.

and fasting. He encouraged men to cherish their families with intentionality, to be fully present to their children and grandchildren without allowing the distraction of devices or screens, and to bless and pray for their families daily. He encouraged his rapt audience to serve others sacrificially, beginning with one’s spouse. He advocated praying as a couple, taking monthly date nights, and showering each other with notes of love and encouragement.

Following Rogers, Father Richards brought his engaging and bombastic style to the stage, where he delivered a message of “tough love” to those in attendance. He frankly told the men that “masculinity is so messed up today it’s ridiculous.” He said that when he signs books for men at conferences such as Rekindle the Fire, he writes their name and adds, “Be a saint!” When he hands the book back, he tells them, “or go to hell. There’s no other choice.”

Addressing the widespread addiction to pornography among American men, Father Richards suggested: “I think the problem is that most men don’t know Jesus Christ. You’ve got to get to know Jesus, the perfect man, if you’re going to become a man yourself. You have to do as Jesus did; you have to think as Jesus thinks.”

Reading Scripture regularly, even the parts that seem to be “boring,” are how men can come to know Jesus. “What does the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew teach us? He had a rapist, a murder, an adulterer,

and a whore in his family. Jesus entered into the messy stuff of the universe!”

The afternoon session featured Dom Quaglia Jr., returning to Rekindle the Fire for the first time since 2018. In his talk, he encouraged attendees to reflect on three phrases of Jesus in the Gospels: “follow me,” “remain in my love,” and “love one another.”

“We all have to make a decision” about following God, Quaglia said. “Decision” means ‘to cut away.’ Michelangelo said about carving his statue of David that he just had to cut away everything in the block of marble that wasn’t David. Becoming a man of God is letting God chip away everything that isn’t needed, to reveal the beauty that is in us.”

As in past years, Bishop Rhoades joined the conference to take questions from the men in the audience. He led off his

remarks by explaining that at the fall assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops late last year, he proposed to his brother bishops to consecrate the United States to the Sacred Heart of Jesus this coming June in honor of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The bishops’ conference wholeheartedly agreed, he said. Bishop Rhoades also remarked that the particular painting of the Sacred Heart on display at the conference has held a special place in his own heart since his seminary studies in Rome, where he would often pray in front of the original painting in the Church of the Gesù.

Bishop Rhoades expressed his joy at beginning the diocesan process of inquiry into the sanctity of Holy Cross Brother Columba O’Neill, known as the “Miracle Man of Notre Dame,” who himself had a deep devotion to the Sacred Heart. He was

a cobbler who was renowned for his personal holiness, and he handed out thousands of badges displaying the Sacred Heart to those who asked for his prayers. “So, it’s all amazing to me – providential, it seems. I encourage your own personal devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.”

In response to a question about the recent uptick in people entering the Catholic Church, Bishop Rhoades gave credit to the explosion in lay-led Catholic apostolates, especially those focused on evangelization, and to the recently concluded Jubilee Year of Hope.

“There’s a lot of hopelessness out there,” Bishop Rhoades said. “Every person has this inner longing for communion with others and communion with God. Well, we have the answer; it’s Christ. And that’s the message that the world needs. This is an evangelizing moment for us, to help those who are really struggling. We have the bread of life. That thirst in people’s souls, we have the living water, which is the Holy Spirit.”

In his homily at the conference’s concluding Mass, Bishop Rhoades echoed themes addressed by each of the day’s speakers, urging the men to daily prayer, Scripture reading, and the Sacrament of Penance.

“When we trust in God and live our lives alongside Jesus, we can resist the seductions of the devil and reject his temptations,” Bishop Rhoades said. “And we have weapons to do so: prayer, especially listening to the word of God; we have fasting and almsgiving; we have the nourishment of the Holy Eucharist; and, when we fall, we have the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation so that we can get up and continue on the path of salvation.”

John Coriden, a parishioner at St. Joseph Catholic Church in South Bend, told Today’s Catholic he has attended the Rekindle the Fire conference six times and views it as his annual retreat.

“Father Larry Richards was so good,” Coriden said. “He has so much experience being a pastor, being on the radio, and he was very enthusiastic. His message was simple: be a saint. Ask God, ‘What do you want me to do today?’ and then listen. Bishop Rhoades advised us to read the Bible daily and to listen to God. That went hand-in-hand with what Father Richards told us. Learning to listen to God is what caught my eye and ear. It’s so critical. Learn to listen.”



Father Larry Richards, a well-known author, speaker, and radio host, encourages men to live and sacrifice for their families like Christ did for each of us.