

Faith Life Shines at Culver Academies

In Pastoral Visit, Bishop Rhoades Tells Students, 'Our Life as Christians Is Truly an Adventure'

BY SCOTT WARDEN

On the morning of Sunday, March 1, early enough that the grass sparkled with dew and the waters of nearby Lake Maxinkuckee were still and silent, a group of students from Culver Academies gathered inside the school's Memorial Chapel. The half-dozen or so girls were dressed in matching navy blazers with the school's crest embroidered on them, while the three or four boys wore uniforms that resembled dress blues worn by those in the military – dark jackets affixed with various patches and medals, striped trousers, and polished black shoes.

Sitting in the front pews of the impressive Tudor-Gothic church that overlooks the lake, the students took rosaries from their pockets and started praying aloud. Meanwhile, the sanctuary in front of them buzzed in preparation, as Deacon Mike Madison, the school's Catholic campus minister, helped directed traffic ahead of the morning's big event: Bishop Rhoades' first pastoral visit to Culver Academies, which serves hundreds of Catholic students.



Scott Warden

Cadets at Culver Academies hold hands during Mass at Memorial Chapel on Sunday, March 1.

A Ministry of Service

Despite hailing from Chicago, Deacon Madison knows Culver well. As a boy, he spent six summers at the academy's seasonal camp. He felt such an affinity for the place that he longed to return, and so in 2004, he and his wife bought a lake house in Culver. She

owned a civil engineering and land survey business, where he served as the vice president for business development. He was ordained to the permanent diaconate for the Archdiocese of Chicago in 2012 and served at his home parish in the northwest suburb of Arlington Heights.

In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and made remote work necessary, Deacon Madison said he felt he had been "called on a mission" to use his diaconal ministry to serve at Culver Academies.

CULVER, page 8

Bishops' Annual CRS Collection 'More Vital Than Ever'

BY OSV NEWS

The U.S. bishops' annual Catholic Relief Services Collection, which helps some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in need in the United States and worldwide, will be held in parishes throughout the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend on the weekend of March 14-15.

The collection benefits six agencies and offices affiliated with the Catholic Church, including CRS, the flagship international relief and development agency for the Catholic Church in the U.S.

"The Church in the Unit-

ed States was built on ministry among immigrants. We help all who are marginalized, including victims of war and disaster overseas. The Catholic Relief Services Collection combines all these kinds of assistance," said Bishop Daniel H. Mueggenborg of Reno, Nevada, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on National Collections.

"Our Lord tells us to love our neighbors – those we know, those we don't, and those we think are very different from us. The Catholic Relief Services Collection is one way that we show that love. Today it is more vital than ever," the bishop said in his March 2

statement.

The collection is also accepting online gifts at igivecatholic.org/story/USCCB-CRS.

Of nearly \$13.5 million distributed from the collection in 2024, nearly \$8 million went to CRS working in places affected by war and natural disaster, according to a USCCB news release.

The CRS Collection has become more critical in light of last year's deep cuts to humanitarian aid by the U.S. federal government that have left a chasm for the Catholic Church and other international aid agencies to fill.

CRS COLLECTION, page 11

Collection This Weekend

The bishops' annual Catholic Relief Services Collection will be held in parishes throughout the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend during Masses on March 14-15. To give online, visit igivecatholic.org/story/USCCB-CRS.



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Former ND Football Coach Lou Holtz Dies

PAGE 2

Priests Focus on Mission Amid Busyness of Lent

PAGE 14

Saint Francis Debuts First Women's Flag Football Team

PAGE 16

TODAY'S
CATHOLIC

(ISSN 0891-1533)
(USPS 403630)

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

PUBLISHER: Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades

Editorial Department

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Scott Warden

PAGE DESIGNER: Chelsea Alt

Business Department

BOOKKEEPING/CIRCULATION:

circulation@diocesefwsb.org

ADVERTISING ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE:

Erika Barron: ebarron@diocesefwsb.org

Website: todayscatholic.org

260-456-2824

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

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

MAIN OFFICE: 915 S. Clinton St., Fort Wayne, IN 46802. Telephone 260-456-2824. Fax: 260-744-1473.

BUREAU OFFICE: 1328 Dagoon Trail, Mishawaka, IN 46544. Telephone 260-456-2824. Fax 260-744-1473.

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

Today's Catholic may be reached at:

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



The
Diocese of
Fort Wayne-South Bend

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

Find us on Facebook
facebook.com/todayscatholicFWSB

Follow us on X
[@diocesefwsb](https://twitter.com/diocesefwsb)

Follow us on Instagram
[@diocesefwsb](https://www.instagram.com/diocesefwsb)

Beloved Notre Dame Coaching Legend Lou Holtz Passes Away at 89

BY ERIC PEAT

Leading up to a college football clash between Notre Dame and heated rival Miami in the late 1980s, a team chaplain for the Hurricanes proclaimed that God doesn't care who wins football games.

Lou Holtz, coach of the Fighting Irish at the time, agreed. "I don't think God cares who wins, either," he replied with a smile. "But His Mother does."

This now-famous quip captured the essence of the legendary coach: an uncanny wit, an unwavering Catholic faith, and an unshakable love for Notre Dame – Our Lady's University. On Wednesday, March 4, Holtz passed away in Orlando, Florida, at the age of 89, surrounded by his family. Forever etched in Irish lore for leading Notre Dame to the 1988 National Championship, Holtz leaves behind not just a decorated football resume but a legacy of shaping young men and inspiring people to live virtuously.

"Notre Dame mourns the loss of Lou Holtz, a legendary football coach, a beloved member of the Notre Dame family, and devoted husband, father, and grandfather," said Notre Dame President Father Robert A. Dowd, CSC. "Among his many accomplishments, we will remember him above all as a teacher, leader, and mentor who brought out the very best in his players, on and off the field, earning their respect and admiration for a lifetime."

Louis Leo Holtz was born on January 6, 1937, in Follansbee, West Virginia, and grew up in East Liverpool, Ohio. He played linebacker at Kent State University before beginning a coaching career that would span over four decades. With head coaching stops at William and Mary, North Carolina State, Arkansas, Minnesota, Notre Dame, and South Carolina, Holtz became the ninth-winningest coach in college football history with a record of 249-132-7. He received national Coach of the Year honors on three occasions and remains the only coach to lead six separate programs to bowl games.

However, Holtz is best remembered for his 11 seasons in South Bend, where he revitalized the Notre Dame football program. From 1986 through



University of Notre Dame

1996, the Fighting Irish won 100 games, reached a program-record nine consecutive bowl games, and were undefeated national champions in 1988 – Notre Dame's last national title to date. As coach of the Irish, Holtz was humble but confident, respectful but fearless, and wise but candid. He established several traditions at Notre Dame that remain in place today, from iconic the "Play Like a Champion Today" sign that players slap on their way to the field, to the removal of names from the football jerseys to emphasize the team dynamic. The mark Holtz left on the program, the university, and especially the young men who played for him cannot be overstated.

"Lou and I shared a very special relationship," Notre Dame head coach Marcus Freeman said in a statement. "He welcomed me to the Notre Dame family immediately, offering me great support throughout our time together. Our relationship meant a lot to me as I admired the values he used to build the foundation of his coaching career: love, trust, and commitment. Lou's impact at Notre Dame has gone well beyond the football team. He and his wife, Beth, are respected across campus for their generous hearts and commitment to carrying out Notre Dame's mission of being a force for good."

"Coach was so much more than a football coach to me," former Irish great Jerome Bettis shared on social media. "He was family. I still remember the day he came to my house to recruit me. He didn't just sit down and

talk to me about football or what I could do on the field. He talked to me as a young man. And he spoke to my mom the way a man should speak to a mother who was trusting someone with her son. He looked her in the eye and promised that I would be taken care of at Notre Dame. That moment meant everything to us, and it's something I've carried with me my entire life."

After retiring from coaching, Holtz spent time as a studio analyst for ESPN, a best-selling author, and a motivational speaker, where he continued inspiring people with the same energy and charisma. He often told crowds, "I follow three rules: Do the right thing, do the best you can, and always show people you care." Holtz preached that "life is 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you respond to it." He challenged people to live exceptional lives, famously stating, "I can't believe that God put us on this earth to be ordinary."

Central to everything Holtz did was his faith. A lifelong Catholic, Holtz served as an altar boy and credited the education he received from the Sisters of Notre Dame with instilling the desire to make God the focus of his life. Holtz was outspoken about his faith and believed following Church teachings "brings meaning and lasting happiness to life." He possessed a deep and profound love for Notre Dame – not just his team, but the university, the students, the fans, and the faith that was alive on campus. "Every single day being there was very special," Holtz

told the National Catholic Register in a 2012 interview, "because there were so many opportunities to encounter and live out the Catholic faith."

The late Bishop John M. D'Arcy of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend once asked Holtz what it meant to be the head football coach at Notre Dame. His answer displayed a life not consumed by his career but anchored by his Catholic faith. "It means if you have an 8 o'clock meeting, you can find a 7 o'clock Mass," Holtz responded. "When you want to go to confession, you just walk across the campus to the basilica. When you are leaving at 10 o'clock at night, the Lady on the dome is smiling down at you."

Holtz reaffirmed his love for Our Lady after coaching his final game at Notre Dame Stadium. After his final home game, when asked by a Fort Wayne News-Sentinel columnist how he'll be remembered, a tearful Holtz said, "I never disgraced the Lady on the dome." Truly, Holtz was a living embodiment of final line of the Alma Mater song, "Notre Dame, Our Mother," performed at the end of each sporting event: "And our hearts forever love thee, Notre Dame!"

Holtz is survived by his four children, Luanne, Lou "Skip" Junior, Kevin, and Elizabeth. His family is finalizing funeral arrangements, including a Mass of Christian Burial at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart on the campus of Notre Dame. Holtz will be laid to rest at Notre Dame's Cedar Grove Cemetery next to his wife, Beth.

Confirmation Schedule for Spring of 2026

Our Lady of Good Hope Church, Fort Wayne Saturday, March 14, 10 a.m.

- Our Lady of Good Hope Parish, Fort Wayne
- Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception Parish, Fort Wayne
- St. Mary Mother of God Parish, Fort Wayne
- St. Peter Parish, Fort Wayne

St. Dominic Church, Bremen Sunday, March 15, 9:30 a.m.

- St. Dominic Parish, Bremen

Holy Family Church, South Bend Saturday, March 21, 10 a.m.

- Holy Family Parish, South Bend
- Sacred Heart Parish, Notre Dame
- St. John the Baptist Parish, South Bend
- St. Augustine Parish, South Bend

Our Lady of Hungary Church, South Bend Sunday, March 22, 6 p.m.

- Our Lady of Hungary Parish, South Bend

St. Joseph Church, Fort Wayne Saturday, March 28, at 10 a.m.

- St. Joseph Parish, Fort Wayne

St. Henry Church, Fort Wayne Sunday, April 5, at 11 a.m.

- St. Henry Parish, Fort Wayne

Immaculate Conception Church, Auburn Wednesday, April 8, 7 p.m.

- Immaculate Conception Parish, Auburn
- St. Joseph Parish, Garrett
- St. Mary of the Assumption Parish, Avilla
- St. Gaspar del Bufalo Parish, Rome City

St. John the Baptist Church, New Haven Friday, April 10, 6:30 p.m.

- St. John the Baptist Parish, New Haven
- St. Louis Besancon Parish, New Haven

St. Vincent de Paul Church, Fort Wayne Saturday, April 11, 10 a.m.

- St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Fort Wayne

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, Fort Wayne Sunday, April 12, 2 p.m.

- St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, Fort Wayne

St. Joseph-Hessen Cassel Church, Fort Wayne Thursday, April 16, 7 p.m.

- St. Joseph-Hessen Cassel Parish, Fort Wayne
- St. Rose of Lima Parish, Monroeville

Most Precious Blood Church, Fort Wayne Friday, April 17, 7 p.m.

- Most Precious Blood Parish, Fort Wayne
- Queen of Angels Parish, Fort Wayne

St. Mary of the Assumption Church, Decatur Sunday, April 19, 2 p.m.

- St. Mary of the Assumption Parish, Decatur
- St. Joseph Parish, Bluffton

Culver Academies Memorial Chapel, Culver Friday, April 24, 7 p.m.

- St. Mary's of the Lake Parish, Culver

St. Michael Church, Plymouth Saturday, April 25, 10 a.m.

- St. Michael Parish, Plymouth
- St. Patrick Parish, Walkerton

Basilica of the Sacred Heart, Notre Dame Sunday, April 26, 12 p.m.

- Notre Dame students

Holy Spirit Chapel, Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame Sunday, April 26, 7 p.m.

- St. Mary's students

St. Paul of the Cross Church, Columbia City Tuesday, April 28, 7 p.m.

- St. Paul of the Cross Parish, Columbia City
- St. John Bosco Parish, Churubusco
- Immaculate Conception Parish, Ege

St. Therese Church, Fort Wayne Thursday, April 30, 7 p.m.

- St. John the Baptist Parish, Fort Wayne
- St. Therese Parish, Fort Wayne

St. Patrick Church, Ligonier Saturday, May 2, 6:30 p.m.

- St. Patrick Parish, Ligonier

St. Pius X Church, Granger Sunday, May 3, 2 p.m.

- St. Pius X Parish, Granger

St. Vincent de Paul Church, Elkhart Friday, May 8, 7 p.m. and Saturday, May 9, 10 a.m.

- St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Elkhart

St. Thomas the Apostle Church, Elkhart Sunday, May 10, 10:30 a.m.

- St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, Elkhart

Queen of Peace Church, Mishawaka Thursday, May 14, 7 p.m.

- Queen of Peace Parish, Mishawaka
- St. Thérèse, Little Flower Parish, South Bend

St. Adalbert Church, South Bend Sunday, May 17, 5 p.m.

- SS. Casimir and Adalbert Parish, South Bend

Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Warsaw Friday, May 22, 7 p.m.

- Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Warsaw

SS. Peter and Paul Church, Huntington Saturday, May 23, 10 a.m.

- SS. Peter and Paul Parish, Huntington
- St. Mary Parish, Huntington
- St. Joseph Parish, Roanoke
- St. Catherine of Alexandria Parish, Nix Settlement
- St. Bernard Parish, Wabash
- St. Robert Bellarmine Parish, North Manchester

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Fort Wayne

Sunday, May 24, 11:30 a.m.

- Adult Confirmations

St. Matthew Cathedral, South Bend Sunday, May 31, 11 a.m.

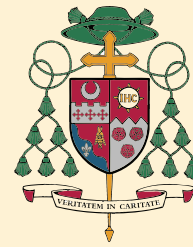
- Adult Confirmations

St. Patrick Church, Fort Wayne Saturday, June 6, 6 p.m.

- St. Patrick Parish, Fort Wayne

St. Anthony of Padua Church, Angola Friday, June 19, 7 p.m.

- St. Anthony of Padua Parish, Angola
- St. Joseph Parish, LaGrange



PUBLIC SCHEDULE OF
BISHOP KEVIN C. RHOADES

Veritatem In Caritate
(Truth in Charity)

- ◆ **Tuesday, March 17, at 11 a.m.** – Mass with the Christ Child Society, St. Thérèse, Little Flower Church, South Bend
- ◆ **Wednesday, March 18, at 3 p.m.** – Pueri Cantores Mass, St. Pius X Church, Granger
- ◆ **Thursday, March 19, at 9:35 a.m.** – Mass and Pastoral Visit, Saint Joseph High School, South Bend
- ◆ **Friday, March 20, at 6:30 p.m.** – Saint Joseph High School Gala, Four Winds Casino, South Bend
- ◆ **Saturday, March 21, at 10 a.m.** – Confirmation Mass, Holy Family Church, South Bend
- ◆ **Sunday, March 22, at 6 p.m.** – Confirmation Mass, Our Lady of Hungary Church, South Bend

FREE
*Self-guided
financial
education*



get started!



**Source[®]
St. Bank**

Member FDIC

Moms, Daughters, Religious Gather for 'Brunch with His Brides'

BY ANDREA KRUMANAKER

On Saturday, February 28, Bishop Rhoades was joined by 36 religious sisters from 11 communities across seven states as well as approximately 300 mothers and daughters from throughout the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend for the second annual "Brunch with His Brides" celebration.

The event began with an 8:30 a.m. Mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, celebrated by Bishop Rhoades. After Mass and a group photo on the Cathedral steps, participants processed to the Grand Wayne Center for brunch. Traffic was temporarily blocked to allow the group to walk together downtown.

The event was organized by Lindsey Arnold and a planning team made up of women from parishes across the diocese. Last year marked the first brunch, which was held at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Fort Wayne. This year, organizers expanded the gathering to welcome more mothers and daughters from across the diocese and to make room for additional religious sisters.

Arnold told Today's Catholic the team felt prompted to widen the scope of the event in order to offer it to more families and to receive more sisters. She said the collaboration among women from different parishes has been a gift in planning the larger celebration.

During his homily, Bishop Rhoades reflected on Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount: "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The bishop said those words summarize the invitation the Church addresses to the faithful during the season of Lent.

Bishop Rhoades said the three pillars of Lent – prayer, fasting, and almsgiving – are meant to renew the faithful in their daily lives, helping them become more Christ-like in their thoughts, words, and actions, and to help them grow more fully into the stature of Christ.

"It is only in Christ that we can attain that perfection," Bishop Rhoades said. "He shows us in His real life what that perfection looks like. It's the perfection of love."

Holiness, he explained, is the perfection of love. It includes

observing the Lord's commandments with one's whole heart and soul. Referencing Psalm 119, he noted the blessing given to those who follow the law of the Lord.

Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it, Bishop Rhoades said. At the same time, Christ calls His followers to more than external conformity to laws and regulations. He calls them to a deeper righteousness and to what Bishop Rhoades described as a radical interiorization of the law.

That interior transformation includes loving one another as Christ has loved and extends even to loving enemies and praying for persecutors. Such commands, he said, surpass those of the Old Testament and reflect the mercy of the Father.

"Jesus is the perfect image of the Father," Bishop Rhoades said, citing St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians and the Gospel of John. "Our Lord shows us what it means to be perfect like our Father in heaven. He shows us how to be fully human the way God made us to be."

Bishop Rhoades emphasized that the call to holiness is universal and rooted in baptism. It began, he said, when Christians received new life in Christ and became adopted children of God.

Living as God's children means adopting the mind of Christ, dying to sin and selfishness, carrying the cross, and loving God and neighbor. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, helps believers in that lifelong process of conversion.

Bishop Rhoades connected that universal call to holiness with the particular vocation of consecrated life. Rooted in baptism, consecrated life consists in the profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty,



Photos by Nathan Proulx

Bishop Rhoades, clergy, religious sisters, and mothers and daughters pose outside of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Fort Wayne following Mass for the "Brunch with His Brides" event on Saturday, February 28.

chastity, and obedience.

Quoting Church teaching, he described consecrated life as a way of following Christ more nearly and pursuing the perfection of charity in service of the Kingdom. He noted the significance of the phrase "perfection of charity," referencing the Church's teaching on the renewal of religious life.

Consecrated virgins and religious, he said, are to be a living icon of the Church's identity as the Bride of Christ. By giving up earthly marriage, they profess a perpetual "yes" to Jesus and dedicate their lives in loving devotion to him.

"I thank you for being a prophetic reminder to all of us of our baptismal call to holiness," Bishop Rhoades told the sisters present.

He concluded by pointing to the Blessed Virgin Mary as the preeminent example of holiness after Christ. She is the most evident example of human perfec-

tion in mirroring the heavenly Father and the Church's greatest model of discipleship, he said.

The brunch event was emceed by Father Brian Isenbarger, pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Garrett, and Father Jake Schneider, parochial vicar at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Fort Wayne. Father Daniel Niezer, pastor of St. Dominic Parish in Bremen and the diocese's promoter of priestly vocations, joined them as well.

Throughout the morning, sisters representing teaching, contemplative, and missionary communities were seated together at the Cathedral before joining families at the Grand Wayne Center for brunch and conversation. Young girls and their mothers had opportunities to meet the sisters and learn about their communities and daily life.

The gathering brought consecrated women and families together in prayer and fellowship, centered on the Eucharist and the shared call to holiness. Organizers said they hope the event continues to grow and encourages openness to religious vocations across the diocese.

The mission of the event, Arnold said, is to create space for young women to witness the joy of religious life and have meaningful encounters that open their heart to the Bridegroom's voice.

A keynote talk was given by Sister Philomena from the Franciscan Sisters of Renewal in East Harlem, New York. After the keynote and brunch, there were breakout sessions on

prayer divided by elementary, middle, and high school led by the religious sisters. There was also an expo where the girls visited with each of the 11 different orders and collected stickers to place on a water bottle that was provided in their bags.

The eleven religious communities represented at Brunch with His Brides were: the Sisters of the Third order of St. Francis from Peoria, Illinois; the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal from East Harlem, New York; the Dominican Sisters, Immaculate Conception Province, from Justice, Illinois; the Franciscan Daughters of Mary from Covington, Kentucky; the Sisters of Children of Mary from Newark, Ohio; the Religious Sisters of Mercy from Alma, Michigan; the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart from Frankfort, Illinois; the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration from Mishawaka; the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary from Indianapolis; the Little Nuns from New Orleans; and the Eucharist Missionaries of Nazareth, an order from Spain that will soon be establishing a convent in Fort Wayne.

"The Lord, in His generosity, drew enough brides to the brunch that each table had at least one religious sister sitting at it," Arnold said.

"The time around the tables offered a great chance for the conversations to go a little deeper, and the moms and daughters were able to make real connections with the sisters."



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.

At Saint Joe High, Hope Means 'Helping Other People Endure'

BY SOPHIA KINTZ

The H.O.P.E. Club (Helping Other People Endure) at Saint Joseph High School is an organization dedicated to serving the less fortunate in the South Bend community. The club is moderated by teachers Jennifer Firestone and Catherine Swick, who also have the assistance of an amazing group of seniors who take leadership roles in overseeing activities as well as their younger peers. The club has been a staple of the community for decades, tracing its roots to the 1980s under Mrs. Susan Lightcap and Ms. Diane Fox.

Throughout the year, H.O.P.E. members participate in food drives, fundraisers, and many other small but impactful service opportunities. During the fall, they held a bake sale at the Saint Joseph High School football game on Friday, October 3. Members baked items such as muffins, cookies, cupcakes, and brownies, which were sold for \$2 each. The bake sale raised \$500 that donated those in need this past holiday season.

The club's next and largest event every year is the annual Thanksgiving food drive, which has been held at Saint Joe for 45 years. Notre Dame women's basketball coach Muffet McGraw kicked off the campaign with a talk about the importance of the cause. Saint Joe students made donation pledges, and



Photos provided by Saint Joseph High School

the money gathered was used to make boxes full of food for a Thanksgiving meal, which were distributed on November 24 to those who could not afford a holiday meal on their own.

Large acts of service like the ones shown by the H.O.P.E. club truly reflect the values of Saint Joe High School. "Serve with Joy" is a pillar the school follows that is commonly emphasized and practiced by staff and students. This service helps not only those in need but also helps in uniting the students to one another as a community.

"It's a great way for us to come together as a community of Saint Joseph High School to help South Bend," said Alex Choinacky, a senior leader of

the club. The willingness of the H.O.P.E. members to help out of love and care for the less fortunate exemplifies the school's motto of serving with joy.

This year's campaign was one of the most successful in school history. The total amount raised was more than \$33,000 and served 300 families. The club also is using additional funds to support local food pantries and one of our local parishes for clothing needs. This spring, the club will be volunteering at the Northern Food Bank and visiting the Cardinal Nursing home as they continue to help others in need.

Sophia Kintz is a sophomore at Saint Joseph High School.



Vatican Synod Study Group Proposes Creation of Commission for New Technologies

ROME (OSV News) – A study group from the 2023-24 Synod of Bishops on synodality has recommended the creation of a new “Pontifical Commission for Digital Culture and New Technologies” in the first of 15 synod study group reports expected in the coming weeks. The Vatican published the first two final reports from its synod study groups on Tuesday, March 3. The first report contains recommendations on navigating the Church’s presence in digital spaces. The second report focuses on guidelines for the formation of future priests and includes a call for more women to play a role in aiding the formation of seminarians for the priesthood. The report also lists 26 real-world examples of “best practices” from seminaries around the world. Among those highlighted: a program in eight U.S. dioceses focused on healing wounds caused by the excessive use of technology and family breakdown, centered on an eight-day silent retreat and a small-group chastity program; and a Nigerian seminary that requires seminarians to perform all maintenance work and cleaning of their seminary building to “experience the dignity of human labor.”

Pope Tells Youth: Jesus Is Close By, So Just Open Your Eyes

ROME (CNS) – Every Catholic parish needs to show that Jesus, who promises a just, true, and full life, is always near, Pope Leo XIV said. “I encourage you to ensure that parish activities are a sign of a Church that, like a mother, takes care of her children, without condemning them but rather welcoming them, listening to them, and supporting them in the face of danger,” he told parishioners at the Church of St. Mary of the Presentation in Rome in his homily on Sunday, March 8. “As a good and caring Shepherd, the Lord always waits for us and accompanies us, wherever we live and however we are. He mercifully heals our wounds and gives Himself as a gift to us, enabling us in turn to become a gift for our brothers and sisters,” he said. Before celebrating Mass, the pope met with families and young people outside. “Jesus is coming to your home, in your heart, in your life. We have to be ready to open that door to find Jesus, who is waiting for us,” he said. “Jesus is close to us. Let’s open our eyes!” he said, indi-

NEWS BRIEFS

POPE URGES PEACE, WARNS ABOUT WIDER CONFLICT IN MIDDLE EAST



OSV News photo/Mohammad Yassine, Reuters

People inspect the damage in the Lebanese town of Nabi Chit on Saturday, March 7, where the Israeli military carried out an airborne operation that dropped troops overnight. Pope Leo XIV has urged an end to the escalating war involving Iran, warning that the conflict could destabilize more of the Middle East. Speaking after the Angelus prayer on Sunday, March 8, the pope said recent developments have caused “deep dismay,” as violence spreads and fears grow that other countries, including Lebanon, could be drawn into the fighting. The pope called on Catholics to pray “that the roar of bombs may cease” and dialogue may begin. “I make a heartfelt appeal to all the parties involved to assume the moral responsibility of halting the spiral of violence before it becomes an irreparable abyss,” the pope warned.

cating the Lord can be found in those who suffer or seek help. “He asks us to bring them what we have received.”

‘Catholic Saints of America’ Celebrates America’s 250th birthday

CHAMPION, Wisconsin (OSV News) – Drawing inspiration from St. Carlo Acutis, a national shrine in Wisconsin is inviting Catholics to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the United States this summer by joining in prayer and learning about the holy men and women of America. Scheduled for July 1-9, “Catholic Saints of America” will feature a special novena, an exhibit honoring Americans who are saints or on the path to sainthood, and an opportunity to venerate their relics. The event will be held at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion near Green

Bay, Wisconsin, the site of the only Church-approved Marian apparition site in the United States. The shrine is in the process of inviting promoters of all U.S. causes to participate. So far, the promoters of more than 35 causes have confirmed they will collaborate in some way.

Christians ‘Most Persecuted Religious Community in the World,’ Vatican Tells U.N.

GENEVA (OSV News) – The Vatican’s representative to the United Nations in Geneva warned that Christians remain the most persecuted religious group worldwide and called for stronger protections for religious freedom. Speaking at a March 3 event during the U.N. Human Rights Council’s 61st session, Archbishop Ettore Balestrero said nearly 400 million Christians face persecution or violence – roughly 1 in 7 believers glob-

ally. He noted that almost 5,000 Christians were killed for their faith in 2025, about 13 each day. The event, organized in cooperation with the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians, brought diplomats, experts, and civil society leaders together to highlight growing threats to Christians and broader religious freedom concerns. Archbishop Balestrero said governments have a “fundamental responsibility” to defend religious liberty and hold perpetrators accountable. He warned that persecution can also take subtle forms, including social marginalization or legal pressures against believers. “These are not superficial acts,” he said. “They are serious violations of the rights of Christians.” The archbishop added that religious freedom must be recognized not as a privilege granted by states but as a basic human right.

Chaldean Catholic Bishop in California Jailed for Alleged Financial Crimes

SAN DIEGO (OSV News) – Bishop Emanuel Shaleta of the Chaldean Catholic Diocese of St. Peter the Apostle in San Diego has been arrested and jailed on several financial charges. The 69-year-old bishop, who is facing accusations of embezzlement, money laundering, and inappropriate personal relationships, had submitted his resignation to the Vatican in January, and according to The Pillar was expected to travel to Rome. He was “contacted and detained” on Thursday, March 5, at the San Diego International Airport while “attempting to leave the country,” according to a statement issued that same day by the San Diego County Sheriff’s Office. Bishop Shaleta was being held in San Diego’s central jail on \$125,000 bail, with court approval required for payment and release. The Chaldean Catholic Patriarchate issued a statement saying it had cooperated with Vatican’s “thorough investigations” in pursuit of “a just and impartial decision” on the situation, which “has prompted a range of responses. It added, “All perspectives are being taken seriously and require careful review, proper documentation, and time so that the truth may be fully and fairly discerned.”

Sudanese Bishops Express Distress at the Massacre of 178 in South Sudan

JUBA, South Sudan (OSV News) – Catholic bishops in Sudan and South Sudan are condemning a deadly attack that left nearly 178 people dead in northern South Sudan on Monday, March 2. Local officials say unidentified armed youths – allegedly linked to the Sudan People’s Liberation Army in Opposition – carried out the assault in the Ruweng Administrative Area. Authorities report at least 90 civilians, including women, children, and the elderly, were killed, along with 79 soldiers. Many survivors fled to a nearby U.N. peacekeeping base for safety. Bishop Christian Carlassare of Bentiu told OSV News that gunfire could be heard near the Parish of Mary Help of Christians in his diocese. In messages to OSV News, he pleaded for dialogue over violence, saying the land has already suffered too much conflict. In a joint statement, bishops led by Cardinal Stephen Ameyu Martin Mulla of Juba condemned the killings as “heinous and senseless,” warning that cycles of revenge are tearing communities apart. South Sudan, the world’s youngest nation, gained independence in 2011 but has struggled with recurring violence since a devastating civil war erupted in 2013.

Pope Leo XIV Names New Apostolic Nuncio to U.S.

Italian Archbishop Gabriele Caccia Succeeds Cardinal Christophe Pierre as Vatican Ambassador

BY COURTNEY MARES

ROME (OSV News) – Pope Leo XIV has named Archbishop Gabriele Caccia as the Vatican's ambassador to the United States, selecting a seasoned diplomat to serve as a crucial liaison between Rome and the pope's home country.

Vatican officials announced the appointment of the new apostolic nuncio on Saturday, March 7, naming Archbishop Caccia, 68, to succeed Cardinal Christophe Pierre, who turned 80 in January and had served in the post since 2016.

A nuncio is a Vatican diplomatic representative with the rank of ambassador. He acts as both the Holy See's ambassador to the government and its representative to the Catholic Church in the host country, maintaining ties between local bishops and Rome.

Archbishop Caccia, a native of Milan, already has significant experience in the United States, having served as the permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in New York since 2020.

As papal nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Caccia will play a key role in the selection process for U.S. bishop appointments and will serve as a point of contact between the bishops and clergy in the United States and the pope, in addition to carrying out the diplomatic tasks of a foreign ambassador serving in the United States.

Like his predecessor, Archbishop Caccia will serve as the pope's key contact with President Donald Trump's administration at a time when the administration's immigration policies have been increasingly met by resistance by the U.S. bishops.

Archbishop Caccia in a March 7 statement said he was "honored and deeply humbled by the decision of the Holy Father to appoint me as apostolic nuncio to the country and the Church where he himself was born and raised."

"I receive this mission with both joy and a sense of trepidation, conscious of the great trust placed in me and of my own limitations, yet confident in His Holiness's prayerful sup-

port and guidance," the archbishop said.

During his years of service at the United Nations in New York, Archbishop Caccia said, he has experienced "warmth and openness" from the local Church, the government, and the people of the United States. "I trust that their generosity and collaboration will assist me in carrying out this new mission at the service of communion and peace."

Archbishop Caccia invoked "the blessings of Almighty God" on all, "especially in this year that marks the 250th anniversary of the birth of the United States of America."

The president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, welcomed the appointment on behalf of his brother bishops.

"I wish to extend our warmest welcome and our prayerful support to him as he carries out his responsibilities across the United States, and we look forward to working with him," the archbishop said in a statement.

Archbishop Coakley also expressed his "sincere and prayerful appreciation" to Cardinal Pierre, noting his "many opportunities to work with Cardinal Pierre over the years, particularly over the last four months through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops," since the Oklahoma prelate's election in November as USCCB president.

"Thank you, Your Eminence, for your tireless service to the Church in the United States, and on behalf of my brother bishops, I offer our heartfelt prayers and best wishes in your retirement," Archbishop Coakley said.

Archbishop Caccia is a career Vatican diplomat trained at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy in Rome. He holds a doctorate in sacred theology and a licentiate in canon law from the Pontifical Gregorian University.

His previous diplomatic posts include serving as apostolic nuncio to the Philippines and Lebanon, and earlier as an attaché in Tanzania. He also worked as assessor for general affairs in the Secretariat of State under Pope St. John Paul II in Rome.

Cardinal Pierre, who spent nearly five decades in Vatican diplomatic service, earned widespread respect among U.S.

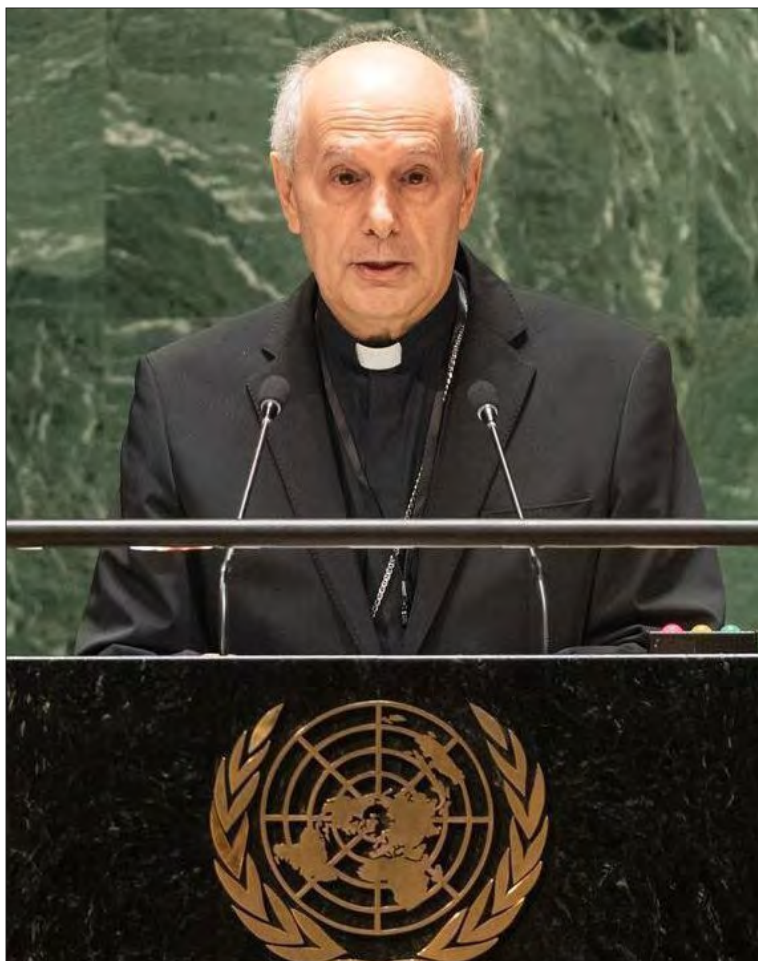
bishops for identifying episcopal candidates who embodied Pope Francis' priorities while avoiding polarization. He was elevated to the College of Cardinals in 2023 and is expected to divide his retirement between his native France and Rome.

The United States and the Holy See have maintained formal diplomatic relations since 1984, when President Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II established full ties. However, the relationship dates back to the founding of the United States, when Benjamin Franklin conveyed a message from George Washington to Pope Pius VI in 1788, affirming that the new republic's commitment to religious

liberty meant no government role in appointing bishops.

The U.S. maintained consular relations with the Papal States from 1797 and diplomatic relations from 1848 to 1867, though not at the ambassadorial level. Congress banned funding for Vatican relations in 1867, a move partly driven by anti-Catholic sentiment. For more than a century afterward, contact relied on personal envoys, including during World War II, until Reagan and John Paul II restored formal ties.

The current Rome-based U.S. ambassador to the Holy See is Ambassador Brian Burch, who presented his credentials to Pope Leo XIV in September.



OSV News photo/Rick Bajornas, courtesy United Nations

Archbishop Gabriele G. Caccia, the Holy See's permanent observer to the United Nations, is pictured in a 2023 photo addressing the General Assembly at U.N. headquarters in New York City. Pope Leo XIV named Archbishop Caccia as the new papal nuncio to the United States on Saturday, March 7. He succeeds Cardinal Christophe Pierre, who turned 80 in January and had served in the post since 2016.

FW STATUE RESTORATIONS
AND Custom Grotto Creation

Contact: Bob Panza
Email: panzab06@gmail.com
Facebook: FW Statue Restoration

A 9-Day Pilgrimage with Fr. Jay Horning

I R E L A N D
IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ST. PATRICK

September 7-15, 2026

ST. CHARLES
Catholic Pilgrimages

Contact for more info: Mary Hilger 260-438-8356
Register at stcharlespilgrimages.com/horning

Join us in welcoming two providers to our team!

Dr. Julie Funrock, DO

Cassie Herber, FNP-C

Dr. Julie A. Funrock, DO Nicholas M. Lesch, PA-C Cassandra E. Kaiser, PA-C
Dr. Emily M. Krach, DO Cassandree A. Herber, FNP-C Dr. Andrew J. Mullally, MD

CREDO
FAMILY MEDICINE

(260) 4- FAMILY • credofamilymedicine.com • Fort Wayne, IN

CULVER, from page 1

"But when's the right time? Well, COVID said, what are you waiting for?" he told Today's Catholic.

Because Culver didn't have a full-time ministry position available for him at the time, he began as a volunteer, spending Mondays, Tuesday, Thursdays, and Fridays working in Chicago and Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday ministering to the students at Culver.

"I look back and I'm not really sure how I did it," Deacon Madison said. "But it put into motion some things that would come later."

He got to know the students, he said, and they got to know him – partly because his uniform stood out on campus. Most deacons don't regularly wear the roman collar – "I certainly didn't," Deacon Madison said – but, he added, "We're a uniform school, so I wear a uniform." That visibility made a difference as he began his ministry. "It didn't matter whether you were Catholic or not, people know who Deacon Mike is. So, when it came time to interview for the job, I was already doing it."

'I Used to Be These Kids'

Father Stephen Felicichia was no stranger to academy life before Bishop Rhoades appointed him as pastor of St. Mary of the Lake Parish in Culver in 2023. After graduating from Bishop Luers High School in 2004, Felicichia was accepted at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He gradu-



Photos by Scott Warden

Cadets hold the Indiana and United States flags aloft as they practice marching near Memorial Chapel on the campus of Culver Academies in Culver on Sunday, March 1.

ated in 2008 as a second lieutenant, U.S. Army Field Artillery, and was stationed at Fort Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska. He served two tours in Afghanistan and completed his five years of service, attaining the rank of captain.

"I understand these kids. I used to be these kids," Father Felicichia told Today's Catholic. "They're younger than I was when I went to an academy, but the drive is still there all the same, the kind of trials and challenges that you would expect in such a challenging setting. And so, I know what they're suf-

fering, I know what their successes are, I know what their joys are, I know what they want. That allows me, I think, to communicate and bond with them more efficiently now. Obviously, they'd be the real judges of that, but I am really trying to use my experience for their benefit."

As pastor of St. Mary, Father Felicichia plays a key role in the sacramental life of the Catholic students at Culver Academies, where he celebrates Mass on Sunday mornings at Memorial Chapel and hears confessions afterward. He also strives to spend time on campus outside of Mass, getting to know the students on a personal level.

"He'll come here and have lunch with students," Deacon Madison said. "When everybody sees him come in, they all migrate to him. He's been over to bless rooms. He'll hear confession when students need it outside of his usual time on Sundays. He's been really available. It's important to him because of his West Point experience, and I think he sees that here in the young cadets."

Father Felicichia isn't just ministering to students on campus; he's trying to incorporate them into parish life at St. Mary of the Lake, which is located less than a mile from the school. After all, he said, the parish itself exists because of Culver Academies. In the late 1940s, the commandant of the cadets reached out to Bishop John Francis Noll, bishop of the Diocese of Fort Wayne, and asked him to send a priest to Culver to minister to the school's Catholic cadets. He sent Father Joseph Lenk, and a parish was established in 1949.

"The church was built, and

at the Rite of Election.

"I was so happy to see you at St. Pius X Church in Granger," he said, adding, "you were off to the right of the transept, and I'm praying for all of you."

Bishop Rhoades preached to the Culver Academies community on the first reading and the Gospel reading for the Second Sunday of Lent. The first reading, from the Book of Genesis, recalled when God called Abram (before his name was changed to Abraham) to leave his homeland for "a land that I will show you," where God promised to "make of you a great nation, and I will bless you. ... All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you."

Bishop Rhoades noted that when God called Abram, "He was living a comfortable life with his wife, Sarah. ... And he believed in the word of the Lord, and he got up from his comfortable situation, left his homeland, and went into the land which became the land of Israel, which has brought so many blessings, because it was in that land that Jesus, the Son of God, became man. ... The whole history of the Jewish people, beginning with Abraham, was leading up to that great moment. It's the history of salvation, when God sent His Son as our Savior."

We should all model Abram's willingness to discern the will of God and act, regardless of our own comfort, Bishop Rhoades said.

"Think about how, in our lives, sometimes we can get very comfortable, and God may be calling us to something more," Bishop Rhoades said. "But sometimes

the cadets would actually march down to the parish every Sunday," Father Felicichia said. "So, from the origin of the parish, the cadets were invited to be a part of parish life, and we're trying to keep that bond strong and include them in all we do. And it's growing. We're trying to make ourselves more of a unified family."

'A Great Adventure'

With a majority of the pews inside Memorial Chapel full for his visit, Bishop Rhoades gave a nod to 12 Culver cadets either being baptized or to be received into full communion in the Church whom he had seen the previous weekend



Deacon Mike Madison reads the Gospel during Mass at Memorial Chapel at Culver Academies on Sunday, March 1.



Father Stephen Felicichia distributes Communion during Mass on Sunday, March 1.

we're turning in on ourselves, and we're just thinking about our own comfort. But you know what? If we live our lives just being self-centered and really not listening to the Lord's call, our lives are going to be pretty boring. God is calling us, like he called Abraham, to an adventure. Our faith, our life as Christians, is truly an adventure."

"Think about your own lives," Bishop Rhoades continued. "It was an adventure probably to come here to Culver Academy. You were probably pretty comfortable back home. You had to leave your family. You had to leave your friends. Most of you probably didn't know anybody here. And yet, you came. I hope it's been a good experience. I hope that it's helping you to grow. You're making new friends. You're learning new things."

Bishop Rhoades noted that he experienced a similar adventure as he discerned his call to the priesthood, leaving college to attend St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia, which, he said, "was a lot like Culver Academy. ... There was so much discipline. It was like the West Point of seminaries. ... But yet, you know what happened? It was a great experience."

Bishop Rhoades told those attending Mass that after two years at St. Charles, his bishop sent him to study at the Pontifical North American College in Rome – another grand adventure.

"It was an amazing experience," Bishop Rhoades said. "It was a great adventure. And when I was there, I went to the Holy

Land and other places throughout the world. So sometimes, this is in God's plan, God's providence. Yeah, it would have been more comfortable to stay home. I wouldn't have had to learn a new language, but sacrifice led to many blessings."

Bishop Rhoades transitioned to speaking about the Gospel reading, which recounted the transfiguration of Jesus. The physical journey for Peter, James, and John to follow Christ up the mountain wasn't an easy one, nor was the experience of the transfiguration itself, and afterward, when Christ told them that he would suffer and die.

But, Bishop Rhoades said, "I think having this glimpse of the transfigured Jesus gave them extra strength." Jesus transfigured on the mountain, showing "the radiance of his glory," Bishop Rhoades added. "That's our destination. That's what God has prepared for all of us."

The Transfiguration, Bishop Rhoades said, "is teaching us something very important about the goal of our life. As Christians, we're called to take up our cross and follow Jesus. That is the greatest adventure of my life, and I hope it is the greatest adventure of your life. It's the most beautiful adventure, because it gives meaning and purpose to our lives, and it satisfies the deepest hungers of our human hearts."

He concluded by saying that "the Lord gives us the Holy Spirit to help us in our journey. Lent is a time we purify and cleanse so that we can grow as Jesus' disciples on our journey to heaven. ... I hope that your Lenten journey will draw you ever closer to Jesus and that your life's journey will be a truly great adventure, knowing where the finish line is."

Following Mass, Bishop Rhoades ate brunch with student leaders, met with faculty and staff, and held a Q&A with students back in Memorial Chapel.

"I was impressed by the school and especially by the students, who were warm and welcoming," Bishop Rhoades told *Today's Catholic*. "They're from a variety of backgrounds and different parts of the world, but it was clear they all really want to grow in their faith as Catholics. It was a wonderful experience."

Leading Future Leaders

Father Felicichia and Deacon Madison both said it is a privilege to help guide the students at Culver Academies as they embark on their young faith journeys. The clergy said they continue to encounter



Bishop Rhoades talks with students over brunch during his pastoral visit to Culver Academies on Sunday, March 1.

young people who are dedicated to growing closer to Christ and His Church and eager to walk with their peers who are curious about the faith.

"The sharing that goes on with these students – that curiosity, that wanting to understand, particularly about Christ and about the Catholic Church – is special and unique," said Deacon Madison, who works alongside not only the Catholic students on campus but with those of all faith traditions. He added that because the students at Culver live and study together, they are eager to understand the depths of one another's faith lives. "How do we come back to understanding the real presence of the Eucharist? How do we understand the value of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the lives of the saints and guardian angels? They haven't been taught that in many cases at all. So, they come here and they're really feeding each other."

There are boundaries to Deacon Madison's job, including respecting each student's faith tradition. For example, he can't reach out directly to students and encourage them to convert to Catholicism. "But the students can," he said. "And the power of invitation is important. Once they express an interest, we can talk; I can meet with them."

He said much of the work he does is simply a "ministry of presence."

"One of the things that helps my position is that I don't give them a rank, I don't give them a grade, I don't tell them whether they made the team, and I don't hand out discipline," Deacon Madison said. "There aren't too many people on campus that are



Students pray the Rosary before Bishop Rhoades celebrated Mass at Culver Academies in Culver on Sunday, March 1.

as safe as me to talk to, and that's been a blessing to me."

Deacon Madison added that working with the students at Culver has been a highlight of his diaconal ministry.

"I wasn't ready to retire," he said. "I knew that being arounds kids this age could either kill me or they could keep me young, and that's what they're doing. I'm supposed to be feeding them; they're feeding me."

Father Felicichia said Culver Academies "is a fantastic place to practice your faith life, because it is very well supported by the institution itself, which is a beautiful thing to see," he said. "The children here really practice their faith, and we're making more and more converts. The cadets who practice are inviting their friends to come to Mass ... and they do come. ... Conversions are being made by the aid of these students who are not only just Catholic in name, but they're actually living it very,

very well."

This intentionality and discipline in all aspects of the students' lives doesn't surprise Father Felicichia.

"These are driven young people who are ready to do great things and to learn and to grow," he said.

"You're talking about future potential leaders of the world, and it's a joy to see them as human beings and to let them know they're seen. It keeps me young in a lot of ways. But I see the joy and the vibrancy of what a place like this is, which I live through myself. Daily, it reminds me of the good that is constantly being refined and harnessed and treasured and protected, and that's one of the joys of my priesthood. I thank God every day that I can be a chaplain and minister to these kids and cadets."

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



St. Joseph: A Humble Model for All Fathers

BY JOHN CAVADINI

(OSV News) – One of St. Joseph's most devoted followers, St. Peter Julian Eymard, recommends we use the March 19 feast of St. Joseph as an opportunity to seal a devotion to him, saying, "I consecrate myself to you, good St. Joseph, as my spiritual father; I choose you to rule my soul and to teach me the interior life, the life hidden away with Jesus, Mary, and yourself."

St. Peter Julian is following the recommendation of a faithful devotee of St. Joseph, St. Teresa of Avila, who says, "If a person cannot find anyone to teach him how to pray, let him take this glorious saint for his guide, and he will not lose his way."

But what could this possibly mean? No teaching of St. Joseph is recorded. He is silent in Scripture.

The journey to find the answer to that question has been a personal one. After years of overlooking him, I discovered St. Joseph later in life by, ironically, noticing he was not being noticed. In our church, there are side altars to the Blessed Virgin, to the Sacred Heart, and to St. Joseph. After Mass one Sunday, I noticed that while the first two always had many votive lights burning, there were usually far fewer before St. Joseph.

The inequity of this struck me. After all, St. Joseph was head of the Holy Family! True, his wife is the Mother of God, and his son is God Incarnate – but still, I thought, he was the dad, responsible for his wife and her child, whom he had welcomed as his own, securing their safety, earning their livelihood. He seemed to deserve more respect. I'm a dad, too – was this all projection out of a moment of self-pity? Whatever the reason, I went to light a candle at his altar so there would at least be one more. Thus, almost accidentally, began my devotion to "this glorious saint."

About A.D. 112, the martyr Ignatius of Antioch wrote: "Mary's virginity was hidden from the prince of this world; so was her giving birth; and so was the death of the Lord. All these three secrets, to be revealed at the appropriate time, were brought to pass in the deep silence of God."

Origen of Alexandria, in



Wikimedia Commons

the next century, commented on this passage from Ignatius, explaining that it was primarily the presence of Joseph that preserved these three secrets until Jesus' "hour" had come.

Although the Annunciation was only to Mary, it was to Mary as betrothed to Joseph.

Now we are ready to see the true depths of the mystery of St. Joseph, who, Scripture says, is "just." He is not an unthinking stage prop just taking up space to make things look normal. He was betrothed to Mary, and, perhaps against his better judgment but in obedience to a vision that tells him the babe in Mary's womb is conceived by the Holy Spirit, he took Mary into his home as his wife, giving up his own chance at natural paternity to be the father of a child about whose very existence he was not even consulted.

In other words, the economy of the virginal conception and birth of Jesus, and even his death, are "hidden" in the loving generosity of St. Joseph – hidden from the prince of this world by the only thing he can't see – self-giving love – because he doesn't believe in it.

The generous obedience of St. Joseph to the vision of God is astonishing. No one asked him how he felt about his wife's being consulted on an intimate matter affecting their whole married life, or about raising

someone else's child and giving up his own natural paternity for good. But his sacrifice in generous obedience to the will of God became a home in this world for Jesus, his legal son, and Mary, his wife, both treasures of divine initiative.

This act submerges Joseph in the profound "silence of God," as Ignatius calls it. St. Paul says in Colossians, "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3). There is something intrinsically "hidden" about the Christian life, and we see the form of this revealed in St. Joseph. His life, by its very structure, cannot provide an accounting of itself without undoing itself.

Joseph has no one to tell his story to, and he exercises a prudential silence about himself. St. Peter Julian writes: "St. Joseph stands out as one of the great men of silence. He observed ... the silence of fidelity in keeping strictly secret the divine mystery of which he was the confidant. Nothing could make him break this secret of God."

A mosaic of St. Joseph, commissioned by Pope St. John XXIII and placed over the side altar in St. Peter's Basilica where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, uniquely depicts the warmth and beauty of this saint. In the picture, Joseph is outside, holding the child Jesus in his right arm. Jesus looks

about 2 years old. This gives Joseph's figure a look of immense strength, because he manages to hold such a big, active child in one arm with no trouble.

In his left hand, he holds his identifying iconic sign, the staff blooming with the lilies of purity. He holds it a little stiffly, as though a neighbor had chanced upon him and asked him to pose for a picture with his son, insisting Joseph hold the staff, too. He is in the middle

of taking care of his 2-year-old and someone has asked him to pose. But he tolerantly obliges, picks up the baby, and looks at the "camera." His face is calm but hardly grave; rather, even though posing for an annoying family picture, his face seems to take it in stride and seems to radiate happiness.

It's a face familiar to any dad.

Here is the hiddenness of St. Joseph, who accepts the utterly common lot of a dad holding his child, without fanfare, though he is holding the Word Incarnate and could claim glory and fame. Jesus does not pay any attention to the imaginary photographer but rather seems wholly delighted with His dad,

for what on St. Joseph's side is the continuous immolation of self-gift is on Jesus' side the brilliant radiance, comfort, and charity of paternal love, that cloak of invisibility that gives even the Word of God a genuine childhood and keeps Him hidden from the Prince of Darkness until it is time for Him to confront him alone, armed only with the love He had learned, in part, from His earthly dad.

It is as though He was learning, in a truly human way, from His true and legal human father, St. Joseph, the dimensions of the generosity of the Eternal One He will later call His Father in a wholly unique way. After all, just like the eternal Father, Joseph "loves the Son and has given everything over to Him" (Jn 3:35).

Here is St. Teresa again: "I took for my patron and lord the glorious St. Joseph, and recommended myself earnestly to him. ... I cannot call to mind that I have ever asked him at any time for anything which he has not granted."

I believe that I can say the same thing, though in some cases I have had to grow up a little in order to see it. But isn't that the job of a dad, to help his kids grow up by seeing beyond their childish concerns, even as those concerns are warmly received and not dismissed as merely childish?

Devotion to St. Joseph has shown me why he has so few, comparatively

speaking, candles at his altar. It is because he wills it. He has always willed his family to shine beyond himself, deflecting attention from himself to them. Devotion to St. Joseph means that, as the genuine mystery of his person is revealed to us little by little, we grow up to accept the form of the Christian life as, in baptism, a hidden one, a death to the noise of the world and a life in the silence of God that is nothing other than his eternal love.

Thank you, St. Joseph!

John Cavadini is director of the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame.

His sacrifice in the generous obedience to the will of God became a home in this world for Jesus, his legal son, and Mary, his wife, both treasured of divine initiative.

Indiana Court Blocks State's Abortion Restrictions

BY KATE SCANLON

(OSV News) – An Indiana court blocked the state's near-total abortion ban on Thursday, March 5, in response to a class-action lawsuit claiming the ban violated religious freedom protections.

In 2022, the American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana filed a class-action lawsuit claiming that Indiana's Senate Enrolled Act 1, which prohibits most abortions in the state, violates Indiana's Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The lawsuit was filed on behalf of an organization called Hoosier Jews for Choice and five women who claimed they held sincere religious beliefs that they must be able to obtain an abortion under circumstances prohibited by the law, the ACLU of Indiana said at the time.

In a 17-page ruling, Marion County Judge Christina R. Kline-

man blocked the law from being enforced against the plaintiffs as well as any Indiana resident who objects to the ban on religious grounds.

"The court finds that there is significant public interest in ensuring the religious freedom of all citizens and the state's position that religious freedom is somehow less important than other exceptions in the abortion law puts the court in an untenable position and finds a permanent injunction the only proper relief," Klineman wrote.

Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita appealed the ruling, and a spokesperson in his office said in a statement, "As we have with every challenge against our pro-life law, we'll continue fighting to protect the lives of the unborn."

Stevie Pactor, senior staff attorney at the ACLU of Indiana, argued in a March 5 statement that the ruling is "a recognition that

religious freedom protects people of many faiths and beliefs, not just those favored by the state."

"For more than three years, our clients have challenged a law that forces them to choose between their faith and their autonomy," Pactor said. "This decision makes it clear that Indiana cannot enforce its abortion ban in ways that violate their religious freedom."

While some proponents of expanding abortion access have argued that religious freedom claims could be a legal avenue to circumvent or even block abortion bans, abortion opponents criticized the litigation strategy.

Alexander Mingus, executive director of the Indiana Catholic Conference, said in a March 7 statement, "Indiana's religious freedom laws were passed for the purpose of protecting religious practice, not to protect the ending of a human life. Religions that preach violence are not protected

by religious freedom claims," Mingus said. "While the court's decision is disappointing, the Catholic Church in Indiana remains committed to upholding the dignity of all life and concretely supporting women with difficult pregnancies."

In a March 6 statement, Mike Fichter, Indiana Right to Life president and chief executive officer, argued, "For the court to rule that taking the life of an unborn child is an exercise of religious freedom is deeply distressing – and a perversion of the law's intent."

"Indiana's Religious Freedom Restoration Act was never intended to equate taking the life of an unborn child with religious expression in our state," Fichter said. "While this current injunction is limited to the plaintiffs in the case only, if it withstands challenge, it will be exploited so anyone claiming a spiritual belief, even if personal and non-theistic,

can justify taking a child's life."

Senator Jim Banks of Indiana wrote on X the ruling was "outrageous" and argued the judge should be impeached.

"Indiana's abortion law serves the purpose of protecting unborn life and should be upheld," he said.

Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, which works to elect pro-life candidates to public office, argued on X, "We're confident this absurd ruling will not stand."

Indiana's law permits abortion up to 10 weeks gestation only in instances of rape or incest and up to 20 weeks gestation only in cases of lethal fetal anomalies, or when the mother's life is in danger from specific medical issues. The law also requires that abortions take place at a hospital or a hospital-owned surgery center.

The Catholic Church teaches that all human life is sacred from conception to natural death, and as such, opposes direct abortion.

CRS COLLECTION, from page 1

In July of 2025, the U.S. Agency for International Development effectively ceased to exist, with 85 percent of its programs cut as a result of the cost-cutting efforts of President Donald Trump's Department of Government Efficiency. Academic demographers have estimated the sudden loss of funding to groups carrying out humanitarian aid led to as many as 300,000 people dying within six months.

The Lancet, a peer-reviewed British medical journal published since 1823, estimated USAID assistance has saved more than 91 million lives, including that of 30 million children, over the past two decades. But it forecast that if USAID-funding levels were not restored, "a staggering number of avoidable deaths could occur by 2030": 14.1 million people, with over 4.5 million being children younger than 5.

The other recipients of the CRS Collection are:

- The Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc., or CLINIC, which provides training and support to a network of more than 400 Catholic and community-based immigration law providers in 49 states.

- The USCCB Secretariat of Migration, formerly the Department of Migration and Refugee Services, which assists dioceses in carrying out their ministries to newcomers, publishes educational resources, and promotes

policies "that affirm the life and dignity of immigrants and refugees."

- Two initiatives of the USCCB Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church: pastoral ministries to migrant workers, travelers, and seafarers through its Subcommittee on the Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees, and Travelers, and its Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Island Affairs, which helps the Church address the unique pastoral needs across many boundaries of language and tradition.

- The USCCB Secretariat of Justice and Peace, which engages in advocacy on behalf of the poor around the world and works with policymakers and government officials to end violent international conflicts through its international justice and peace program. Created in early August 2024, the secretariat serves a number of USCCB committees, including the Committee on International Justice and Peace.

- Holy Father's Relief Fund, which helps Pope Leo XIV rush aid to areas of the world in crisis.

Bishop Mueggenborg said, "Together, these agencies help victims of war and natural disaster, support sustainable economic development overseas, advocate for international peace and human rights, help refugees and immigrants in the United States to obtain legal support, offer pastoral support to a wide variety of people who migrate for work, and build cross-cultural understanding."

REVEAL
Christ's
LOVE

SUPPORT THE CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES COLLECTION

United States
Conference of
Catholic Bishops

Copyright © 2025, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. All rights reserved. Photo: Nripendra Khatri/CRS.

Is Our Nation Losing Its Soul?



AMID THE FRAY

GREG ERLANDSON

U.S. bishops are speaking up about the treatment of immigrants and the deportation strategy and tactics of the current administration, and their messaging has grown increasingly urgent and concerned.

What they are seeing is not just a political clash that has pitted American against American. They are seeing something much more profound and troubling.

"The political crisis of our time is, at its root, a spiritual crisis," said Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore in his February 9 pastoral letter, "In Charity and Truth: Toward a Renewed Political Culture." "While the symptoms appear in our discourse, our institutions, and our communities, the deeper fracture lies within the human heart," he writes.

Detroit Archbishop Edward J. Weisenburger wrote in a February 1 column: "As a proud American, I have always lived by

the belief that we are a nation of guiding values, a nation of noble virtues, a nation established on the rule of law and respectful of human rights. I find myself asking if our nation is losing its very soul."

In Los Angeles, Archbishop

Jose H. Gomez said that we as a nation are "in a moment when it seems like many have lost faith in America's promise and her founders' vision. And it is sad that this is happening this year, when we are celebrating our nation's 250th anniversary. This should be a time for

renewal, not a time of retreat," he said in a February 4 homily.

The immediate crisis has been the mass deportation of undocumented immigrants, as well as the assault on Americans who are demonstrating their opposition to these deportation policies. Two American citizens have been killed and many more have been injured or arrested.

The U.S. bishops have been remarkably consistent for years on the immigration crisis. They do not deny that a country has a right to protect its borders. At the same time, the Gospel imperative is to help the refugee and to extend aid to those in need.

In Pope Leo XIV's recent apostolic exhortation *Dilexi Te*, he sums up this imperative by quoting Pope Francis: "Our (Catholic) response to the challenges posed by contemporary migration can be summed up in four verbs: welcome, protect, promote,

and integrate."

For the bishops, our nation's enforcement of immigration laws can start with limiting deportations to those guilty of serious offenses. That was the stated goal of the deportation campaign, but it has clearly extended far beyond

"It shows no national interest to deport undocumented men and women who are contributing to the good of our society, it only leaves children without their parents."

ARCHBISHOP JOSE H. GOMEZ

ERLANDSON, page 13

Lent Is Not Punishment; It Is Invitation



FEELING IT

EFFIE CALDAROLA

At Mass on Ash Wednesday, the holy Communion line was down to its last person. Suddenly, a young woman hurried down the aisle just as the priest was turning back to the altar.

Obviously, a latecomer. And then she briefly spoke to the priest. I couldn't hear her words, but it was clear she was asking to receive ashes after Mass, having not arrived when they were distributed.

Ashes are very important to many Catholics. They're a great witness, both for us and for those that see them on us.

Ashes are sacramentals, which the Catechism of the Catholic Church says are "sacred signs instituted by the Church" to prepare us to receive the fruit of the sacraments. They serve as remind-

ers of our faith. I love sacramentals – candles, rosaries, and what my husband laughingly says is my tendency to bring holy water home from every shrine we visit. Thank you, Our Lady of Knock.

But I've never understood why often more Catholics show up for ashes than attend the deeply moving and important liturgies of Holy Thursday and Good Friday. Sacramentals are not the sacraments. The Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith, and if we have the choice between receiving the Eucharist or receiving ashes, well, that's no choice at all.

Sometimes I wonder, now that Lent is moving along, if we feel a bit disappointed in our Lent. Maybe on Ash Wednesday we're determined to "do" Lent well, and as the days progress, we lose heart in our efforts.

Were our ashes the big impetus for action, and by Holy

CALDAROLA, page 13

We Must Stay Humble and Recognize Our Need for God



THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MONSIGNOR OWEN F. CAMPION

Drawing from the first word, in Latin, in the entrance antiphon for this weekend's liturgy, this Sunday long has been called *Laetare Sunday*. *Laetare* means "to rejoice." The Church rejoices that even amid the drabness and penance of Lent, the glory of Christ shines forth, as the Lord rose in brilliant light after being crucified.

The first reading for this weekend is from the First Book of Samuel. An ancient prophet, and therefore God's representative and spokesman, Samuel selected the young David to be king of Israel. To signify this appointment, Samuel anointed David with oil.

Anointings have always marked persons for special jobs or to strengthen them in particular circumstances. All Catholics are anointed when

they are baptized or confirmed. Priests and bishops are anointed. Faithful people in bad health are anointed to strengthen them and reinforce their spiritual constitution should they be near death. Kings were anointed.

David was, and still is, special in the Hebrew mind. He was the great king who united and empowered the nation, but he was much more than a successful political leader. His ultimate duty was in tightening the bond between God and His people. The bond was in the people's genuine acknowledgment of God, and their lives of obedience to God's law confirmed this bond.

The Epistle to the Ephesians provides the second reading. This reading is an admonition to the Christian people of Ephesus, one of the major seaports, commercial centers, and pagan shrines of the Roman Empire in the first century.

Drawing heavily upon the imagery of light and darkness, the reading links light with righteousness and darkness with sin, calling upon the

Christian Ephesians to live in the light.

St. John's Gospel furnishes the last reading. Central to the story is the Lord's meeting with a man blind since birth. The Lord gives the man sight. To understand this entire story, it is necessary to realize how Jews at the time of Jesus looked upon physical difficulties.

Unaware of the scientific explanations for blindness and other problems that people of this age have come to see as obvious, the ancient Jews believed such terrible handicaps came as a result of sin. After all, Original Sin ushered death itself into the world. In this thinking, sin also upset the good order of nature, hence disease.

Thus, the question came: Was this man's blindness the result of his own sin or a sin of his parents?

Searching for an answer, the Pharisees question the man. The Pharisees are shown as obstinate and smug. By contrast, the blind man is humble and sincere. He has faith in God and in Jesus.

An added element, surely of special interest to the early generations of Christians who suffered persecution, was that the Pharisees expelled the man from their synagogue. The righteous often suffer from the ill will of others.

Reflection

The Gospel story recalls a miracle. It also is a study in contrasts. On the one side is the man born blind whom Jesus healed. The other side is that of the Pharisees, so self-satisfied and so confident in their own knowledge and in their own high estimates of their piety.

We must apply these contrasts to ourselves. We may not be very evil, or even pompous and boastful as were the Pharisees. Still, we must admit our limitations. Our exaggerated judgments of ourselves trick us repeatedly.

All this keeps us in the dark. Lent is the time to face facts. We must recognize our need for God. We must turn to God. He is the light of day, breaking on the horizon after a dark night.

Always, God will receive us, love us, forgive us, and give us sight. The light of God awaits us. Rejoice!

READINGS

Sunday: 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13; Psalms 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

Monday: Isaiah 65:17-21; Psalms 30:2, 4-5, 6, 11-12a, 13b; John 4:43-54

Tuesday: Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; Psalms 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9; John 5:1-16

Wednesday: Isaiah 49:8-15; Psalms 145:8-9, 13cd-14, 17-18; John 5:17-30

Thursday: 2 Samuel 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16; Psalms 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29; Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22; Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24 or Luke 2:41-51a

Friday: Wisdom 2:1a, 12-22; Psalms 34:17-18, 19-20, 21, 23; John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Saturday: Jeremiah 11:18-20; Psalms 7:2-3, 9bc-10, 11-12; John 7:40-53

How Our Bodies Cooperate in God's Plan for Salvation



**SIGN,
WONDER,
SOWER, SEED**

MOLLY JO ROSE

Often as spiritual people, we put all our focus on our souls, that immortal part of ourselves that longs for union with God. We are right to lead with the unseen, intangible soul, as it is the core of our being where God breathed life into us. But often, this focus is at the expense of our poor bodies, the workhorses that do so much. We push our bodies to exertion – or worse, we sit still and allow our bodies to atrophy, forgetting that movement is a gift and that our bodies are tools meant to celebrate life and serve others. Simply put, our bodies don't get the credit and treatment they deserve.

Not only does the body not get credit for its participation in our salvation, we often blame it for our weaknesses. We act as though the spirit and the body are in conflict rather than mystically unified in our humanity. In "He Leadeth Me," a book about his 23 years spent in Siberian prisons and labor camps, Father Walter J. Ciszek devotes a whole chapter to the body.

"There is a strain in Christian asceticism that tends to despise the body," he writes, "that looks upon it as the corruptible part of man and the source of corruption." Father Ciszek goes on to say, "It is always the poor old body that gets the worst of it, as if the mind and the will never had any sinful thoughts or inclinations, as if sin did not consist

precisely in setting one's will (not the body) against God's will."

It is Lent, a time when our bodies are given less food, fewer treats, deprived of many things that nourish it and keep it well all so that our souls can be nourished through this season of sacrifice. The body is so reliable. It bears the weight of this season gracefully – its only revolt some stomach grumbling and an occasional headache from lack of sugar or caffeine. These mortifications, however small, have a long and undeniable history as a rich spiritual practice that has led many saints to heaven, but I wonder if this Lent we can't also consider ways to honor our much-abused body as full participants in our salvation.

It is our body that inhales the metallic ting of cold air deep into our lungs, that folds into a kneeling position before the altar, that joyfully sways to music, that grows warm with good food, and that revels in the bright smell of our children when they rush in from playing outside. Even as I enter fully into this Lenten season, I want to recognize what my body does on a daily basis that allows me to participate in the small windows to heaven all around me.

While there are times when I might benefit from throwing my body into a thorn bush like St. Benedict to avoid sinful thoughts, most of my body's work is beautiful and good. My body holds my animated daughter during Mass and turns her face toward the altar to remind her to focus on what is happening. My body walks alongside friends who are grieving and who need to feel the warmth of

While Lent is undeniably a time of sacrifice, let it also be a time when we celebrate that God chose our bodies to house our souls, and as a house, it deserves credit for the work it does.

someone next to them. And it is my body that I ask to be Christ's light throughout the week after receiving Him in Communion.

"Truly, man is a creature composed of body and soul," Father Ciszek writes, "and we work out our salvation in this vale of tears through the medium of flesh." Even as we purgare our bodies this Lent, as we deny ourselves snacks and candy and whatever other offering we have chosen as sacrifice, let it also be a time that reflects that Christ chose a human form, and He loved it and found it good. While Lent is undeniably a time of sacrifice, let it also be a time when we celebrate that God chose our bodies to house our souls, and as a house, it deserves credit for the work it does. This Lent, let us understand that the body is not a separate, sinful entity but rather a divinely designed one worthy of rejoicing in as it gives us access to all the good things in this life and helps us gain entrance to the next.

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

ERLANDSON, from page 12

that to include those who are not criminals, who have raised families and contributed to local communities for decades. Those threatened include the people who care for our children and our elderly. They work our fields and labor in construction, all the while dreaming of a better life for themselves and their children.

As Archbishop Gomez put it: "It serves no national interest to deport undocumented men and women who are contributing to the good of our society; it only leaves children without their parents. Surely, we can find an-

other way to hold these men and women accountable for breaking our laws."

The real challenge, one that the bishops have consistently warned about for decades, is to address immigration reform, Archbishop Gomez said. "The root cause of the current crisis is the country's broken immigration system," he said. "Our leaders have done little in nearly 40 years to try to reform our immigration laws. Even today, with our cities in turmoil, no one in Washington is talking seriously about this."

The bishops have shown great courage in challenging this

status quo of mass deportations. Recognizing the values of this country as a beacon of liberty and recognizing the teachings of the Gospel regarding the human dignity of each person and our responsibility toward those in need, the bishops have seized a teaching moment.

The pushback they have received in some quarters suggests that those who most need to hear their message are members of their own flock.

Greg Erlandson is an award-winning Catholic publisher, editor, and journalist whose column appears monthly at OSV News.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for March 15, 2026

John 9:1-41

Following is a word search based on the Gospel reading for the Fourth Sunday of Lent, Cycle A: Jesus, clay and a blind man. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

BLIND	BIRTH	SPAT
GROUND	MADE CLAY	GO WASH
SILOAM	WASHED	NEIGHBORS
BEGGAR	SIT AND BEG	PHARISEES
DIVISION	ANSWERED	BORN
TEACH US	BELIEVE	SON OF MAN
WHO IS HE	SEEN HIM	WORSHIPED

EYES OPENED

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

© 2026 TRI-C-A Publications; tri-c-a-publications.com

CALDAROLA, from page 12

Week we think we didn't live up to our expectations?

Hopefully that's not the case, but if it is, we should never get discouraged. As a kid, I thought God was a stern taskmaster and Lent was somehow a punishment for my sins. As I grew in faith and understanding, I saw the God that Jesus showed us – the God who is love, the God who is the prodigal's father, always waiting with open arms, the God who doesn't impose suffering but suffers with us.

Lent is not punishment, it's invitation: invitation to growth, to conversion, to Christ. The door remains open.

Discouraged with your Lent? Then begin again. And forget the trap I sometimes fall into – thinking of Lent as New Year's resolutions on steroids, things I'll "do," sometimes with a nod toward my own goals – maybe losing a couple of pounds would be nice?

Sure, if giving up chocolate helps you remember Lent, then go for it. Pray, give alms, fast. But all those things should be with a focus on Christ.

I remember the words of Pope Benedict XVI, who said: "Christian faith is ... above all a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is an encounter with the Son of God that gives new energy to the whole of our existence."

And when we are discouraged by our sinfulness? Julian of Norwich, the 14th-century English mystic, said, "First the fall, and then the recovery from the fall, and both are the mercy of God."

But how can a fall be the mercy of God? As Franciscan Father Richard Rohr explains it, it's in falling down that we learn almost everything that matters spiritually. Our sin and failure offer us, if we let them, insight and potential for growth.

So, you've fallen? That's the acknowledgement of Lent. We're all sinners. But the biggest gift of Lent is God's overwhelming and enduring love for us. So welcome to the rest of Lent, which beckons with many graces.

Effie Caldarola is a wife, mom, and grandmother who received her master's degree in pastoral studies from Seattle University.

Local Priests Focus on Pastoral Mission, Spiritual Growth Amid Busyness of Lent

BY CHRISTIAN TOWALSKI

Every day during the liturgical season of Lent, Father Jake Schneider, parochial vicar at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Fort Wayne, hears confessions from members of his parish. These Lenten confessions, however, are different, he said. Parishioners from all over the area, some of whom might not regularly engage in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, gather together to celebrate the Lenten tradition.

"At St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, we have the custom of hearing confessions after daily Mass," Father Schneider told *Today's Catholic*. "In some seasons, there aren't penitents lining up for confession, but in Lent, it is not uncommon to hear an hour of confessions after daily Masses."

And yet, despite the increased physical, mental, and spiritual workload he experiences during this time, Father Schneider said he's happy to help his parishioners experience Lent more fully.

"During the Lenten season, every Christian is focusing their time to search for God and make Him present in their daily activities," Father Schneider said. "This greater spiritual awareness from the laity results in a higher necessity for priests to minister to their needs."

Other priests from the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend described Lent as one of the busiest times of year – both for their parishes and the Church as a whole.

"A lot more time is taken up by sacramental ministry both at my parish and assisting at other parishes with reconciliation services," said Father David Smith, pastor at Christ the King Parish in South Bend. "There also tend to be larger events going on during this time, such as our annual soup supper and fish fry."

"Good planning certainly helps a lot, but also I remind myself that this is a time that is busy in the best possible way – in serving my calling and duties



OSV News photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

to the People of God as a priest in the sacraments," Father Smith added.

Both Father Smith and Father Schneider admit that the Lenten season can be draining, especially if unexpected challenges arise at inopportune times, such as a sudden spring illness among friends or parishioners. Nevertheless, they are dedicated to their vocation and prepared to meet the demands of their busy schedules.

"If the faithful are searching for God, then as priests, we want

to make available those extra moments to shape their encounter with the Lord," Father Schneider concluded.

Monsignor Tom Shoemaker, pastor at St. Charles Borromeo in Fort Wayne, expressed a similar focus on the Sacrament

of Reconciliation. He said the increased workload is an opportunity to help both himself and his parishioners align themselves with the Lord.

"Lent is the season of repentance. For priests, this means hearing confessions – lots of confessions. Our normal schedule at St. Charles includes six hours a week of confession times. As we approach Holy



"If the faithful are searching for God, then as priests, we want to make available those extra moments to shape their encounter with the Lord."

FATHER JAKE SCHNEIDER

Week, we will add many extra hours," Father Shoemaker said.

"As I am looking at my calendar today, I have commitments to help in 17 Lenten services outside of our usual parish times," he added.

During the Lent, the faithful are called to repent from sin and prepare for Easter by devoting themselves to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving – the three pillars of Lent.

It is a particularly special time for priests. Father Schneider noted that in addition to the increased focus on reconcilia-

tion and the Lenten pillars, it is also a time when many priests reflect on their own spiritual journeys and how they can more fully realize their vocation.

"A priest is intentional how he will pray, even with extra time, and [may] accompany it with a spiritual book," Father Schneider said. "Sometimes, a priest will try to habituate particular devotions he wishes to incorporate into his life."

Father Ryan Pietrocarlo, a Holy Cross priest serving the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend as pastor of SS. Casimir and Adalbert Parish in South Bend, told *Today's Catholic*

that during Lent he spends more time with the Mass readings. "Praying with these readings helps me renew my own priestly commitment and continue growing in holiness," he said.

Father Shoemaker reflected on how the Sacrament of Reconciliation helps to ground his work as a priest while serving the spiritual

needs of his parish. "I think that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is key for the priest himself during Lent. We need to be cleansed of our sin and fortified in this sacrament before offering it to others," he said.

Father Schneider agreed, saying: "I begin Lent with confession, to renew my commitment to the Lord and receive his mercy. Also with a clean slate, as I undertake penances, I can see what parts of myself I still struggle to have healed by the Lord."

During this busy – and sometimes stressful – time, priests find ways to relax and center themselves to ensure they are at their best for their parishioners. One way to do that, they said, is to lean on their fellow priests.

"As a member of the Congregation of Holy Cross, we are blessed to have a retreat property in LaPorte, Indiana. I try to spend my days off there, when possible, especially for rest and

prayer," Father Pietrocarlo said.

Father Schneider also described the friendships he has with his fellow priests as an outlet that helps him navigate his own challenges and recharge his spiritual battery.

"My relaxation during the Lenten

season is spent with my brother priests," Father Schneider said. "The Lenten desert is lonely to walk alone, and I would much rather have another journeying with me; only they understand what I go through," he said.

Amid this busy time, all four priests expressed great joy and hope for the future. Father

Pietrocarlo said this year will see an increased number of people preparing to enter the Church.

"It is a beautiful time to be a priest," he said. "There is something deeply moving about accompanying the People of God during this

sacred season. It is a rich and grace-filled time of renewal for everyone."



MONSIGNOR TOM SHOEMAKER



FATHER RYAN PIETROCARLO



FATHER DAVID SMITH

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.

SATURDAY, MARCH 14
St. Patrick's Day Celebration
12 – 4 p.m.
 SOUTH BEND – Join us in celebrating St. Patrick's Day at St. Hedwig Memorial Hall, 300 Scott St. Enjoy Irish dancing music, Irish meals and more!

SUNDAY, MARCH 15
Central Catholic High School Alumni Open House
1 – 3 p.m.
 FORT WAYNE – CCHS Alumni are invited to CCHS Alumni Association office, 4618 E. State Blvd., Suite 100, reminisce with many yearbooks, team pictures, other memorabilia to view. Visit with other Alumni. Refreshments available. Please join us!

MARCH 16– 19
Year of St. Francis Lenten Mission
7:30 – 8:30 p.m.
 FORT WAYNE – A Lenten Mission Series honoring the Year of St. Francis will take place March 16, 18, and 19 will be in Achatz Auditorium, 2701 Spring St., with a March 17 Eucharistic holy hour and Confession in the Oratory of St. Francis.

Redemptorist Brother Daniel Korn, a Fort Wayne Native, Dies at Age 79

BY TODAY'S CATHOLIC

The Redemptorist Order is seeking prayers for the repose of the soul of Brother Daniel Korn, C.Ss.R., who died at the age of 79 on February 28 while recovering from a surgical procedure in St. Louis. A beloved mentor and spiritual director to generations of Redemptorists, Brother Dan will be remembered for sharing his deep devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help worldwide, fulfilling the Redemptorist mandate to “make her known” through presentations, retreats, books, and videos based upon the Eastern traditions of Marian iconography and prayer.

Glen and Alyce (Thieme) Korn welcomed their only child, Daniel Glen, on January 11, 1947, in Fort Wayne. Although he was born into a staunch Lutheran family, Dan often accompanied his mother



to the weekly Sorrowful Mother Novena at St. Hyacinth Church, the neighborhood Polish parish. His mother became friendly with the School Sisters of Notre Dame and enrolled Dan at the parish school. The family converted to the Catholic faith, and Dan was baptized at the age of 10. He always gave credit to the Mother of God for bringing his family into the Catholic Church and then leading him to religious life as a Redemptorist brother.

After he graduated from school, he enrolled at Villa Majella, the Religious Brothers School in Pine City, Minnesota. He made his first profession of vows

on August 2, 1966, and perpetual vows on August 2, 1970.

Along with various assignments at parishes and retreat houses throughout the Midwest, Brother Dan served at Liguori Publications, including as coordinator of word and mission as well as a contributing editor. He authored many articles and pamphlets on Redemptorist spirituality and the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, notably “Embracing the Icon of Love,” which was published in 2015.

Brother Dan became an internationally celebrated iconologist through his deep devotion to the Mother of God after years of private reading, prayer, and contemplation. He led spiritual novenas and presented seminars, missions, and retreats focused on the iconography contained in the image of Our Mother of Perpetual Help throughout the world. He shared his

REST IN PEACE

Bristol
 Mary Ellen Doyle, 85, St. Mary of the Annunciation

Fort Wayne
 Henry “Hank” Nauts, 94, St. Patrick Arcola
 Michael H. Durnell, 82, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
 David Lehman, 68, St. Vincent de Paul

Mishawaka
 Elizabeth “Betty” DeWinter, 78, St. Joseph

South Bend
 Patricia Louise Battles, 91, St. Jude
 Dorothy “Dottie” VanParis, 97, St. Jude

Send obituaries to
obituaries@diocesefwsb.org

knowledge on radio and television programs and served as the spiritual director of the Denver Province's popular website devoted to Our Mother of Perpetual Help, maryprayforus.org, and the Facebook page devoted to Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

Brother Dan provided commentary for the EWTN broadcast of the Mass celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Redemptorists receiving the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help and the mandate to “make her known” in 2016 at St. Alphonsus “Rock” Church. He began to write icons and continued to spread devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help for the remainder of his life. His devotion lives on through the countless people his ministry introduced to the spirituality of the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

SERVICE DIRECTORY

With a variety of options for web and print advertising, let us help you reach YOUR demographic.
CALL 260-399-1449



LINDA RILEY
 Senior Loan Officer
 NMLS: 234665

C: 574.551.9330
O: 574.268.9033
F: 574.268.2955

310 Enterprise Drive
 Warsaw, IN 46580

lirley@ruoff.com
ruoff.com/lindariley



USB UNION SAVINGS BANK

David Egts

Low Closing Costs & Great Rates
“MORTGAGE CLOSING COST CRUSHER”

260-418-6191
 CERTIFIED RESIDENTIAL MORTGAGE PROFESSIONAL
 NMLS 229839



SHAWNEE
 Construction & Engineering

COMMERCIAL • INDUSTRIAL
 7701 Opportunity Drive, Fort Wayne 46825
489-1234



PLUMBING
HEATING
AIR CONDITIONING
ELECTRICAL

www.borcheltheating.com | 260-485-3412
 6332 Maplecrest Rd., Fort Wayne, IN 46835

PNC Bank Building

LEONARD J. Andorfer & Co., LLP
 CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS

110 W. Berry Street, STE 2202
 Fort Wayne 46802
(260) 423-9405
 Fax: (260) 422-9206

- Tax Planning and Preparation
- Corporations, Individuals and Partnerships
- Estates and Trusts
- Auditing Services

Visit us at www.ljandorfer.com

Saint Francis Fields State's First Women's Flag Team

BY ERIC PEAT

Being a part of history isn't enough for TJ Williams. The University of Saint Francis women's flag football head coach wants to make a statement in the program's inaugural campaign.

"We have the right team to go do what we want to do here over the next few years," Williams told *Today's Catholic*. "I told the team it's going to take some time to do what we want to do, but we think we can definitely turn heads like we want to. We're right where we need to be right now in terms of the growth process."

When the Cougars kicked off their spring 2026 season in February, they officially became the first collegiate-level women's flag football team in Indiana to take the field. No other college or university in the state offers women's flag football as a scholarship sport, a distinction that isn't lost on Saint Francis' trailblazing ladies.

"It's really special," said freshman Nami Singer, a receiver and linebacker from Marana, Arizona. "I felt like as soon as we walked on campus, everyone was like super curious and excited, and they were all like, 'Oh my gosh, you guys are the flag football team?' I definitely felt like everyone was supportive and wanting to get to know what we wanted to do."

Women's flag football is a 7-on-7 sport that is played on a 40-yard by 80-yard field, smaller than a standard football field. Williams knows the sport intimately, having spent the last seven years as head flag football coach at Traction Athletic

Performance in Fort Wayne. He has twice led teams to NFL Flag/National Flag Football championships and was tabbed as the Mojo NFL Flag National Coach of the Year in 2022. After being hired by Saint Francis in December of 2024, Williams has spent the past 14 months building his roster from the ground up.

"Putting a team together, I knew exactly what I was looking for – it was just going to the right areas and obtaining those individuals," said Williams, who filled seven of his 21 roster spots with Indiana natives and four with graduates of Fort Wayne area high schools. "It's just a blessing how things have worked out when I go to certain areas, and I don't think to be looking for certain people, but they pop up. It's been fun. The girls have been really immersed in the process and doing all the right things to prepare for the season."

There's no denying the rise of women's flag football as one of the fastest growing sports in America, from youth level to high school to college and beyond. More than 30 NAIA schools have established women's flag football programs as of 2025, while more than 60 schools across all NCAA divisions offered the sport at either the varsity or club level, with many more announced. In April, the NCAA will host the first ever women's flag football Division I National Championship, and the sport will also debut at the 2028 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles. While Williams admitted Indiana has been behind the curve in embracing the sport, he's ready to help change that.

"Collectively – not just the



Provided by the University of Saint Francis

university, but our team – I think we're very grateful for the opportunity to set the tone for flag in Indiana, as it continues to grow from the high school side but now collegiately," Williams said. "We can really get it going."

The Cougars played their first game in program history on Saturday, February 21, against Siena Heights University, an NAIA school in Adrian, Michigan. The game was hosted by the Indianapolis Colts at the Indiana Farm Bureau Football Center in Indianapolis, providing players with an unforgettable venue for their collegiate debuts.

"I don't think I've ever played at a facility that big and professional, so it felt really cool," Singer said. "It felt legit. I know we had seen Sienna before in the scrimmages, so we were familiar with their team, but it was different playing against them in a real game."

Freshman quarterback Jianna Reyes was the offensive sparkplug in the season opener, passing for 165 yards and two touchdowns while rushing for 44 yards and another score. Wilma Gardner and Madison Myers-Rebidas each caught a touchdown pass for the Cougars. Ava Cousins led the defensive effort with 10 flag pulls, with Haylee Weatherspoon and Nina Kamma-Hill grabbing one interception apiece. Even though Saint Francis lost 24-18 in double overtime, the Cougars gained valuable insights from the experience.

"I learned that we work well as a team when we put forth the



Eric Peat

Saint Francis Flag Football Home Schedule

All games will be played at Bishop D'Arcy Stadium at the University of Saint Francis in Fort Wayne as part of the inaugural Cougar Classic. Visit saintfranciscougars.com/sports/wffb for more information.

- Graceland – Friday, March 20, 3:15 p.m.
- Southwestern – Friday, March 20, 6:15 p.m.
- Midland – Saturday, March 21, 12:15 p.m.
- Campbellsville – Saturday, March 21, 3:15 p.m.

effort, but we do have to communicate better with each other," reflected Gardner, a freshman from Indianapolis who plays multiple positions.

"When we lock that down, we'll be ready for everything in the future," Gardner said.

Women's flag football season runs through May, with road trips to Florida, Kentucky, and Michigan dotting the Saint Francis schedule. Cougar fans can catch their team in action on home turf on March 20-21 when Saint Francis welcomes five visit-

ing teams for the Cougar Classic at Bishop D'Arcy Stadium. Before that, Williams and company traveled to Tampa, Florida, to participate in the IFFA Next Level Showdown from March 5-7. Novelty aside, Gardner is preparing for the challenges that await with the same confident mindset as her coach.

"We're really excited, but we're definitely going down there to prove a point," Gardner said. "Of course, we're a first-year team, but we're ready to take on any team."



Eric Peat