

Conversations Along the Synodal Path

Parish Consultations Across the Diocese a Key Part of Historic Synod Process

BY TIM JOHNSON

On Sunday, September 14, the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Bishop Rhoades convoked the first diocesan synod in 100 years during a vespers celebration at St. Matthew Cathedral in South Bend. Through the work of Synod 2026, with the theme “Spreading the Fire of God’s Love,” Bishop Rhoades said the goal “will be to strengthen the vibrancy of the Church in our diocese and to ensure that our parishes, schools, and other communities of faith are truly mission-oriented communities of faith, hope, and charity. The focus is mission.”

Throughout the fall and winter, Catholics across the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend have gathered in parish halls and classrooms to take part in this historic moment for the local Church with the goal of making their parishes mission-oriented communities of faith and service. Through parish consultation sessions held as part of the diocesan synod process, the faithful were invited to share their hopes, concerns, and experiences of the Church in a format designed not



Deacon Mel Tardy

Clockwise from top left, Sister Gianna Marie Weber, Debbie Newbill, Brother Roy Smith, and Yami Maluz share during a special synod consultation for Black Catholics at St. Augustine Parish in South Bend on Saturday, March 7.

for debate but for prayerful listening.

Bishop Rhoades announced the synod as a way to prayerfully discern the needs and opportunities facing the Church in northern Indiana today, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the diocese looks toward the future.

Conversations in the Spirit

Across the diocese, the conversations in the Spirit format encouraged participants to slow down, listen attentively, and reflect prayerfully before responding. The structure, which included moments of silence and shared reflection, helped move

the discussions away from debate and toward discernment.

Pastors and parish leaders who spoke to Today’s Catholic said the goal was not to debate ideas but to allow participants

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Scott Warden

Assistant Superintendent Julie Williams talks with attendees at the diocese’s Diverse Learners Summit for educators on Wednesday, March 11, in Syracuse.

Catholic Schools Aim to Reach All Students at All Learning Levels

BY SCOTT WARDEN

For those who haven’t walked into a school classroom in decades other than to attend a parent-teacher conference or Grandparents’ Day, it might not seem like all that much could possibly change in the world of education. One and one is still two. Sentences still need a subject and a verb. And, generally, when two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking. These

and so many other staples of reading, writing, and arithmetic have been taught successfully since time immemorial.

But it isn’t necessarily what is being taught that has developed over the past few decades but how it’s being taught – or more to the point, how educators today are being intentional about making sure their lessons are delivered in a variety of ways in order

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

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St. Joseph Parish Honors Holy Men of the Congregation of Holy Cross

South Bend Community Welcomes Relics of Blessed Basil Moreau, St. André Bessette

BY LISA KOCHANOWSKI

Relics are pieces of the past that inspire the future. They are the bodies of saints, objects they used during their lifetime or have been touched to their bodies after their death. In the Catholic Church, relics of saints are used in altars, reliquaries for public veneration, and shrines. Recently, St. Joseph Catholic Church in South Bend celebrated the installation of relics of two members of the Congregation of Holy Cross, Blessed Basil Moreau and St. André Bessette.

"Relics help remind us that the saints are real people. But they're not just ordinary people, they're in heaven. The saints are the friends of God who are also our friends," said Theresa Rice, a University of Notre Dame Ph.D. candidate who hosted talks to the school and parish about the relics before their arrival. "Relics are really tangible. We can see them. They help us think about all of these men and women who we can't see anymore but who are still here with us and interceding for us, praying at Mass with us, joining us, and hoping that we join them, too."

St. Joseph Parish has been led by the religious of the Congregation of Holy Cross since the founding of the parish by Father Edward Sorin in 1853. The church has a great devotion to Blessed Basil Moreau, founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, and St. André Bessette, the first saint of the congregation.

"Our parish has a great devotion to our Holy Cross identity, especially in devotion to Moreau and André," Holy Cross Father Peter Puleo, associate pastor of St. Joseph, told Today's Catholic. "Whether through the school, where our teachers are formed in Moreau's model of education and the students learn the



Photos by Lisa Kochanowski

Holy Cross Father Matthew Fase, pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Church in South Bend, above, and the parish community celebrate the installation of relics of Blessed Basil Moreau and St. André Bessette in January, when hundreds gathered to mark the special addition to the church and community. The relics were blessed by Father Fase and Holy Cross Father Peter Puleo, the parish's associate pastor.

'DOOR' virtues of St. André [DOOR stands for "Devotion to St. Joseph, Openness to God's will/serving others, Obedience, and Reliance on prayer"] or in our parish groups like the André ministry for the sick and homebound, these two holy men form our identity and inspire us to live the Christian life.

"We have had statues of Moreau and André in our church for years, and yet we noticed that we did not have any relics of the two men," Father Puleo said. "Therefore, we sought to acquire relics from the Holy Cross Generalate in Rome to further foster our

parish's devotion to them and the way of life they teach."

The relics are permanent additions to the parish that are displayed in reliquaries crafted by parishioner Andy Czarnecki near the statues of Blessed Basil Moreau and St. André Bessette. They are available for viewing and veneration at any time.

"Relics are tangible, sacramental connection to our history, presenting for our veneration the body of our ancestors in faith, who are the ones who have handed on our faith to us."

FATHER PETER PULEO

"Devotion to the saints is important for any Catholic, and relics uniquely foster that devotion," shared Father Puleo. "Relics are a tangible, sacramental connection to our history, presenting for our veneration the body of our ancestors in the faith, who are the ones who have handed on our faith to us. Relics also connect us with other Christians across the world who venerate the same relics; the same body venerated here is honored in Montreal and LeMans, and in Holy Cross apostolates throughout Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe."

"The relics also point us forward to hope in the Resurrection, for it is the very body of the relic, and our body, that is incorporated into the Body

of Christ and which He will raise on the Last Day," Father Puleo continued. "Relics are thus inherently Eucharistic, remembering the past, connecting us across the present, and pointing us toward the future, but colored by a specific saint's life and memory. Therefore, this moment is important to our community because it will allow us to rejoice, remember, and live our Christian faith ever more fully through our devotion to Moreau and André."

At the formal installation in January, hundreds gathered to celebrate the special addition to the church and community. The relics were blessed by Holy Cross Father Matthew Fase, the parish's pastor, and Father Puleo, followed by a procession through the church to the reliquaries.

"I hope that visitors to our parish will be drawn into the veneration of the relics, to express their own devotion to Moreau and André, or to learn more about them if they have not encountered them before," Father Puleo said. "The visual nature of relics presents an invitation to see and experience the faith in a more tangible way, and I hope through these relics that visitors will be able to share our devotion and know the same joy and faith that we do through these men."



Special Olympics Chair Timothy Shriver to Be Given Notre Dame's Laetare Medal

BY LAURETTA BROWN

(OSV News) – The University of Notre Dame is awarding the prestigious Laetare Medal, an honor reserved exclusively for American Catholics, to Timothy Shriver, chairman of Special Olympics.

The university made the announcement on Sunday, March 15, that Shriver will receive the award at Notre Dame's commencement ceremony on May 17.

The Laetare Medal is announced every year on Laetare Sunday, the fourth Sunday in Lent. The first word in the entrance antiphon of the Mass that Sunday is "Laetare," the Latin word for "rejoice," anticipating the celebration of Easter.

The medal has an inscription reading, "Magna est veritas et praevalabit" – Latin for "Truth is mighty, and it shall prevail." The award, conceived in 1883 as an American counterpart to the papal Golden Rose honor, is bestowed annually by the school to a Catholic "whose genius has ennobled the arts and sciences, illustrated the ideals of the Church, and enriched the heritage of humanity."

Shriver has served as chairman of the Special Olympics International board of directors for 30 years, and in that time the organization has grown from 1 million athletes to 6 million athletes in more than 200 countries and territories around the world.

"Drawing on his deep faith, Tim has devoted his life to being a force for good. Whether through his leadership of Special Olympics, his work in education, or his commitment to fostering civil discourse, he is a tireless advocate for human dignity," Holy Cross Father Robert A. Dowd, president of Notre Dame, said in a statement announcing the award. "In awarding him the Laetare Medal, we honor his inspiring witness and his dedication to building bridges in service of a more just and compassionate world."

In his statement thanking the university for the award, Shriver honored his parents, Eunice Kennedy Shriver and Robert Sargent Shriver, and their vision for the organization. His mother founded Special Olympics in 1968, and his father served as



Michael Caterina/University of Notre Dame

It was announced that Timothy Shriver, chairman of Special Olympics, will receive the Laetare Medal from the University of Notre Dame in May.

president and board chair in the 1980s and 1990s.

"My parents never retired. They loved their work. They loved the Special Olympics movement. So, my mom and dad were not looking to hand off the torch; they just wanted someone to help carry it," Shriver said. "Most of all, I think they wanted confidence that whoever was going to lead the movement into the future understood it. And we have tried to maintain that same vision – to see the dignity of every human being and to stay focused on what matters most, which is that every child who comes into this movement deserves to be treated with dignity and hope and justice and joy. Give them a chance, everyone, no exceptions."

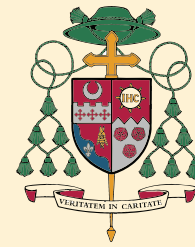
"I look at the work of the last half century of the Special Olympics movement as largely shifting the lens from, 'What's wrong with them?' to 'How much can we accomplish if it's us, not us versus them? If we're all seen as equally gifted, as opposed to some being better than others?' he said. "These were all lessons that were taught to me very early in life, and I'm grateful for them."

Shriver earned a bachelor's degree from Yale University, a master's degree from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and a doctoral degree in education from the University of Connecticut. He

spent 15 years in public education – some in special education – as a teacher and helped pioneer social and emotional learning (SEL) through the New Haven Social Development program. He also co-founded the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) at Yale in 1994 and chairs its board of directors.

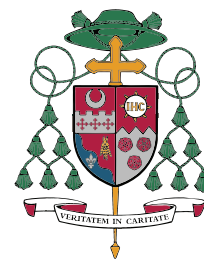
"I know I don't belong in the company of many of the people who have received this medal," Shriver said. "I think it's being given to me as a placeholder for the people who are doing the work every day. It's being given to me so that the athlete who's in a refugee camp in Tanzania running 50 meters this afternoon will somehow know that the world is paying attention, and so that his mom at the finish line will know that her son matters. I'm a good channel for people who deserve it, and I'm grateful to be able to be that channel."

The university noted in its announcement that "Shriver is the only Laetare Medalist in Notre Dame history whose parents were both recipients as well." His mother received the Laetare medal in 1988 for her work with Special Olympics, and his father was the 1968 Laetare Medalist in recognition of his work in founding the Peace Corps. Timothy Shriver's uncle, President John F. Kennedy, received the medal in 1961.



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

- ◆ **Tuesday, March 24, at 5:15 p.m.** – Mass with Notre Dame Exoneration Justice Clinic and Romero Days Conference, Basilica of the Sacred Heart, Notre Dame
- ◆ **Wednesday, March 25, at 3 p.m.** – Meeting of Our Sunday Visitor Institute Committee, Archbishop Noll Center, Fort Wayne
- ◆ **Thursday, March 26, at 8:30 a.m.** – Meeting of Board of Directors of Our Sunday Visitor, Archbishop Noll Center, Fort Wayne
- ◆ **Saturday, March 28, at 10 a.m.** – Confirmation Mass, St. Joseph Church, Fort Wayne
- ◆ **Sunday, March 29, at 11:30 a.m.** – Palm Sunday Mass, Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Fort Wayne



Priest Assignment

The Most Reverend Kevin C. Rhoades, Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend, has made the following assignments of priests, effective April 14, 2026:

- ◆ **Reverend Mark Gurtner**, to Administrator, St. Aloysius Parish, Yoder, while continuing as Vicar General of the diocese.
- ◆ **Reverend Monsignor Bruce Piechocki**, from Pastor, St. Aloysius Parish, Yoder, to Chaplain, St. Anne Communities Randallia Place, Fort Wayne.

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Saint Mary of the Assumption School in Avilla, Indiana is seeking a qualified, licensed elementary teacher for the 2026–2027 school year. The ideal candidate is faith-filled, committed to strong pedagogy and holistic education, and eager to share their faith with students. Candidates should value collaboration, integrate educational technology, and support the school's longstanding tradition of academic rigor and Franciscan service.

Interested candidates can apply at diocesefwsb.org/careers

For more information about the position, contact Mr. Damian Schmitt 260-897-3481

Bishop Luers' Donations Deepen Solidarity with Mission Schools in Nigeria

BY GEORGIA LIEB

As Catholics, we are called to walk in solidarity, building one another up in the Body of Christ, the Church. Recently, the Bishop Luers High School community had the opportunity to connect with Catholic schools across the globe in Nigeria, providing them with 35 laptop computers.

This came about through a series of events facilitated by Father Theodore Ekwem, founder of the Onyeokike Leadership and Entrepreneurship Initiative. A priest from the Diocese of Ekwulobia in southeast Nigeria, he has served at Bishop Luers as co-chaplain for the past two years while on sabbatical.

Since his ordination to the priesthood, Father Ekwem has worked with young people as an administrator at Bubendorff Memorial Grammar School Adazi and an associate chaplain at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka in Nigeria. Through his years of work as a manager and principal, Father Ekwem saw the need for growth in character formation, creativity, and inspiration among the students he served. Many were choosing to turn to a life of crime based on their lack of resources and support.

In 2022, Father Ekwem received permission from his bishop to begin the Onyeokike Initiative. He chose the name Onyeokike, a word in the Igbo language that means "the Creator," because he wants to encourage students to be creators in their school and community. This nonprofit organization strives to raise quality leaders who will bring about positive change in society and advance youth apostolate programs.

"I was moved to begin this initiative because we can't always keep complaining about the bad things that youths do without creating a platform to help shape them," Father Ekwem said. "I am inspired by Mother Teresa and Pope St. John Paul II because of their love for young people and care for those who are abandoned."

Soon after the initiative's approval, Father Ekwem met Bishop Rhoades for the first time. Bishop Rhoades traveled to Nigeria in 2022 and visited



Provided by the Onyeokike Initiative

Students at Bubendorff Memorial Grammar School in Adazi-Nnukwu, Nigeria, pose with the computers they received from Father Theodore Ekwem and the Bishop Luers community.

Bubendorff Memorial Grammar School, where Father Ekwem served as principal.

Bishop Rhoades met Father Ekwem again while he was in Rome for the Synod of Bishops in 2023. Father Ekwem was finishing up leadership and management studies in Rome. Bishop Rhoades assisted him in procuring housing closer to the university.

In the spring of 2024, Father Ekwem was granted a sabbatical from Cardinal Peter Okpaleke, bishop of Ekwulobia. To thank Bishop Rhoades for his previous generosity, Father Ekwem contacted him and asked if he needed any assistance from a Nigerian priest in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. Bishop Rhoades gladly accepted Father Ekwem's offer, appointing him as co-chaplain at Bishop Luers. Cardinal Okpaleke asked Father Ekwem to observe the pattern and formation of Catholic high schools in the United States during his stay in order to further his efforts once he returns to Nigeria.

Father Ekwem has served in many capacities at Bishop Luers during the past two years, learning and teaching. It was through working closely with school leadership and campus ministry that the idea of laptop donations came about. Last winter, Bishop Luers administration approved the purchase of new laptops for the student body for the 2025-26 academic year. After con-

versations with Father Ekwem about the need for computers in Nigerian schools, Bishop Luers administration decided to donate 35 of the used laptops to the Onyeokike Leadership and Entrepreneurship Initiative to distribute as they saw fit. Father Ekwem said he was very thankful for the donation, saying, "I was so happy about it because I knew its impact would be very much appreciated."

Seth Coffing, principal at Bishop Luers, told Today's Catholic he was happy to provide support.

"We at Bishop Luers High School are very blessed to be in a position to donate laptops to students and staff at three different Nigerian schools," Coffing said. "The smiles and excitement on the students' faces says it all! Serving others is a huge part of who we are at Bishop Luers."

In the fall of 2025, Father Ekwem drove the laptops to his friend in Chicago, whose husband often ships items from the United States to Nigeria through his business. These friends graciously had the computers packaged and shipped to Nigeria and covered the cost as a free-will offering.

Father Ekwem travelled to Nigeria this past January, joining Onyeokike Initiative members to distribute the computers. They gave 15 laptops to St. Dominic Savio Seminary Akpu in the Diocese of Ekwulobia, six to Father Aaron Ekwu Memorial Second-

ary School in Father Ekwem's village of Owerre-Ezukala, and 10 to Bubendorff Memorial Grammar School Adazi in the Diocese of Awka. These schools have a large number of students and only a few computers for the entire school to use. This donation provided students with more computer access. Father Ekwem said, "It was wonderfully received."

Laptops were also given to four individuals, including a literature teacher at Bubendorff Memorial Grammar School, a college nursing student, and two Onyeokike Initiative members.

Bishop Luers has received thank you letters from each of the schools and individuals who received laptops. At Mass a few weeks ago, Father Ekwem read one of the letters so that the entire Bishop Luers faculty, staff, and student body could see the impact that this donation truly had.

Father Augustine Oguine, manager and principal of Bubendorff Memorial Grammar School, wrote: "We are very grateful for the gift. No doubt, the laptops will be of great help to our students in digital technologies classes and learning."

The rector of St. Dominic Savio Seminary, Father Anthony Akabogu, wrote: "Your gifts will go a long way in sustaining our needs, especially in these challenging economic times. We are immensely appreciative of your kind gestures, and we assure you

of our prayers. May God continue to bless you for your support."

Father Ekwem also sent videos back to Bishop Luers High School, showing the Nigerian schools receiving the laptops. In these videos, he presented the laptops to the students and explained where the computers came from.

While Bishop Luers has given donations to Father Ekwem and Nigerian schools, they have also received much from his teachings, support, and counsel. With his infectious laugh and joyful presence, he has impacted the entire school community.

Jan Serrani, pastoral minister at Bishop Luers, said she has experienced Father Ekwem's thoughtful and intentional approach to his work firsthand.

"At a time when there is a lot of upheaval and unrest in Nigeria, he brought his geopolitical experience into the Bishop Luers classroom, creating a series of teachings on Catholic social justice that he presented in theology classes," Serrani said.

Along with these courses, Father Ekwem has celebrated numerous school Masses, assisted with penance services, given talks to faculty and staff about Christian anthropology and Advent reflections, presented in classrooms about Nigerian culture and politics, and much more.

Serrani said she has been touched by Father Ekwem's example, saying: "He has a presence and a warmth about him. He's taught me that the human heart, whether it is here or across the globe, has the same needs. He personifies the meaning of solidarity and is a constant witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I'm just so grateful for his 'yes.'"

Father Ekwem plans to continue facilitating correspondence between Bishop Luers and the Nigerian students in his home diocese. He has decided to schedule video calls between literature students at Bishop Luers and Bubendorff to share their life experiences and learn about different cultures. He is also planning exchange programs in sports.

If you are interested in learning more or supporting the Onyeokike Leadership and Entrepreneurship Initiative, email frtheoekwem@yahoo.com to contact Father Theodore.

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.

A Success That Is Undebatable

Bishop Dwenger Senior Samantha Ondecker Breaks Records on Speech Team

BY MADY SMITH

In 2018, Colin Cahill set the Bishop Dwenger varsity speech team record with 26 wins. According to Mr. Chad Chenowith, the speech team coach, that record seemed untouchable.

And then Samantha Ondecker joined the team.

"My first impression of her in her freshman year was that she was very creative," Chenowith said. "She came in with her own poetry and even wrote a piece her freshman year. As the year progressed, she showed lots of grit, not getting discouraged by rough meets, although she did really well and scored lots of points."

At the time of this writing, Ondecker, a senior, has smashed the varsity wins record, notching 30 victories – and she shows no sign of stopping. Ondecker has won in a number of events, including dramatic interpretation,

poetry reading, program oral interpretation, and original performance. Her achievements include a sixth-place finish at the 2025 Indiana Schools Speech and Debate Association (ISSDA) in original performance along with her performance partner, Cohen Wiwi. That same year, Ondecker took first place in dramatic interpretation and third in original performance at the ISSDA 2025 Section 3 tournament.

This year, Ondecker has won 15 times in three different events. Most impressively, she also qualified for the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA) National Tournament in dramatic interpretation.

But Ondecker adds so much more to the speech and debate team beyond her interpretation skill.

"Some of her best traits are her leadership and her humility," Chenowith said. "She adds so much more to the team beyond points. Her leadership and guidance add so much. She doesn't forget that the event is supposed to be fun, and she doesn't put the competition above that," Chenowith said.

As the senior speech captain, Ondecker has certain responsibilities. She is the first person who underclassmen will come to for advice and will often coach teammates on their pieces. Ondecker is also responsible for receiving the team sweepstakes award at the end of every speech meet.

"Sam is a great leader to everyone on the team," said Kingston Schenkel, a speech team member. "She's always there for everybody and always checking in and making sure everyone's OK. She always puts a smile on everyone's face."

Ondecker has been a member of the speech team since her freshman year, where she won a meet in the novice competition and another at the varsity level. In the four years that followed, Ondecker has put in the time and effort to improve to the place she is now.

"I can definitely see the progress from freshman year," Ondecker said. "Freshman year, I was still timid, and getting up in front of a classroom full of people was terrifying to me. Now, it's second nature. I have come to love it. I'm excited to go to speech meets. You get that rush, and it's the best feeling, especially when you're up on stage and you can appreciate the hours that you put into this."

Ondecker is a valuable part of the Bishop Dwenger speech team not only because of her skill, but also because of who she is. Without her, the team would not be the same.

"Some of her best traits are her leadership and her humility. She adds so much more to the team beyond points. Her leadership and guidance add so much."

CHAD CHENOWITH



Photos provided by Bishop Dwenger High School



Top: Samantha Ondecker poses with a plaque distinguishing her as a National Speech and Debate Tournament qualifier. Above: Ondecker, left, poses with teammates from the Bishop Dwenger High School speech team.

NEWS BRIEFS

Pope Leo Points to St. Joseph as a Model of 'Being Present'

ROME (OSV News) – One week before the Church celebrated the feast of St. Joseph, Pope Leo XIV urged Christians to learn from the saint's example of faithful presence and responsibility. Speaking in the Clementine Hall at the Apostolic Palace ahead of Joseph's March 19 feast day, the pope said the foster father of Jesus shows how authentic welcome requires care for others. "This is exactly what St. Joseph did in caring for the family entrusted to him by the Lord," he said. "In him we recognize that welcoming is not only presence but also guardianship. Guardianship means being attentive to others, respecting their choices, and caring for them." Drawing on the Gospel of Luke and Psalm 121, the pope said Joseph teaches that presence requires responsibility. "Joseph shows us that presence and guardianship are inseparable dimensions."

Catholics 'Stand in Solidarity' with Jewish Community after Michigan Synagogue Attack

WEST BLOOMFIELD, Michigan (OSV News) – Detroit Archbishop Edward J. Weisenburger called for prayers and said Catholics in southeast Michigan "stand in solidarity" with their Jewish brothers and sisters. He made the comments hours after a terrorist gunman attacked a synagogue in West Bloomfield Township. Law enforcement said a man rammed a truck into Temple Israel and opened fire on Thursday, March 12. The gunman died. No staff or children at the synagogue and its attached school were hurt. A security guard was being treated for injuries and was expected to recover, law enforcement said. "On behalf of the Catholic community of southeastern Michigan, I want to express my profound sorrow over today's violent attack at Temple Israel," Archbishop Weisenburger said in a statement. "We stand in solidarity with our Jewish brothers and sisters, holding in prayer all those affected by this act of violence, especially those who are wounded, grieving, or shaken, including the congregation, first responders, and the greater community."

Vatican Releases Synod Report on Women's Role in Church Leadership

ROME (OSV News) – The Vatican has released the final report of a Synod of Bishops on synodality study group examining women's participation in the Church, call-

POPE LEO CALLS FOR CEASEFIRE IN MIDDLE EAST



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Leo XIV greets a child holding the flag of Malta during a parish visit to the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome on Sunday, March 15. In his homily for Laetare Sunday, Pope Leo said believing problems and differences can be resolved with war is absurd, and he chastised those who use God's name in their dark and deadly pursuits. "God cannot be enlisted by darkness," he said. "Rather, He always comes to bring light, hope, and peace to humanity, and it is peace that must be sought by those who call upon him." Before his parish visit, after praying the Angelus with pilgrims in St. Peter's Square, Pope Leo called for an immediate ceasefire in the Middle East. "On behalf of the Christians of the Middle East, and of all women and men of goodwill, I appeal to those responsible for this conflict: cease fire!" Pope Leo said. "May paths of dialogue be reopened! Violence can never lead to the justice, stability, and peace for which the people are waiting."

ing for expanded leadership roles for women that do not involve ordained ministry. The 75-page report, published on Tuesday, March 10, in English and Italian, encourages what it calls a broader "charismatic path" for women in Church life. "Alongside the sacramental path and distinct from it, there is also a charismatic path that can be fruitfully pursued to open new spaces of participation for the lay faithful, particularly for women," the document states. It adds that "today laywomen have the right to affirm their participation in the mission of the Church ... on the basis of the charisms given by God." The report urges theologians and canon lawyers to explore "new forms

of exercising authority grounded in the Sacrament of Baptism and distinct from those deriving from holy orders, so that adequate canonical forms may be found to make effective the participation of women in roles of leadership within the Church." It does not address the question of a female diaconate. The document highlights biblical models such as the Virgin Mary and St. Mary Magdalene and recent Vatican appointments of women to leadership roles.

Detroit Archbishop Offers Pastoral Message on Clergy Abuse

DETROIT (OSV News) – In a new pastoral message released on Wednesday, March 11, De-

troit Archbishop Edward J. Weisenburger expressed "heartfelt sorrow for the evil of abuse" and detailed new policies for fingerprinting, victim assistance, education, and monitoring. The message, titled "Rebuilding Trust: A Pastoral Message on Abuse, Reform, and Hope," was released ahead of his first anniversary as Detroit's chief shepherd. Archbishop Weisenburger acknowledged the pain caused by the sins of clergy sexual abuse, and he said while the Church has made important strides, "We must commit ourselves to ongoing accountability, transparency, and the unwavering protection of those entrusted to our care – especially God's

beloved little ones." The archdiocese will expand its reserves dedicated to providing funding for the psychiatric and psychological care of victims. In April of 2025, Archbishop Weisenburger named an episcopal vicar for clergy discipline who, with his team, has conducted "a comprehensive and unprecedented review" of all of the Archdiocese of Detroit's files, processes, and protocols.

Pope Leo to Receive Liberty Medal for Promoting Religious Liberty, Human Dignity

PHILADELPHIA (OSV News) – As the United States marks its 250th anniversary, Pope Leo XIV will be honored in the nation's former capital of Philadelphia (1790-1800) for his efforts to promote religious liberty as well as freedom of expression and conscience. The National Constitution Center will bestow its Liberty Medal on Pope Leo on July 3 during a public ceremony outside its location at Independence Mall in Philadelphia, part of Independence National Historical Park, home to several sites of historical significance in the nation's founding. The medal honors both individuals and organizations "who strive to secure the blessings of liberty to people around the globe," said the center in its release. The pope is set to deliver live acceptance remarks from the Vatican, which will be livestreamed to in-person attendees and online at the center's website.

Omaha Police Arrest Son Suspected of Murdering His Father, a Catholic Deacon

OMAHA, Nebraska (OSV News) – A Catholic deacon in Omaha, Nebraska, has been murdered, with his adult son now in custody as the suspected killer. Deacon John Zak, who served at St. Peter Catholic Church in Omaha, was found dead in his home late March 11. The deacon's son, 36-year-old Martin Zak, was arrested the following day on suspicion of criminal homicide, felony flight to evade arrest, and felony theft of at least \$5,000. The arrest took place after law enforcement attempted to stop Zak's vehicle. He is currently being held in the Douglas County jail on \$1 million bond, the Douglas County Attorney's Office told OSV News. Father John Broheimer, pastor at St. Peter, released a statement posted to the parish website, describing the deacon's death as "a great shock to his family and to our parish."

America Celebrates 250 Years of Religious Liberty

BY KIMBERLEY HEATHERINGTON

(OSV News) – As the United States indulges in a star-spangled celebration of its 250th birthday, a cornerstone of historical significance that stands out is religious freedom, and unlike for many other nations, it is a unique founding principle of this nation.

“From the beginning, we’ve had this quarrel – that’s why I call it the Founders Quarrel – which is, on the one hand, there was agreement that we should have religious liberty. But what that actually meant ... was what?” Linda Przybyszewski, associate professor of history at the University of Notre Dame, told OSV News.

“They argued about it,” she said of the Founding Fathers, “because so many of them believed that some form of belief in God was necessary to teaching people virtue and morality – since we need virtue and morality in order to be a self-governing republic. The question then became, ‘Who’s going to teach the religion?’ ... And I don’t think that has ever gone away.”

During the colonial period of the early 1700s, most colonists – about 85 percent of some 500,000 – lived in colonies with an official state church, typically the Congregational (Calvinist) or Anglican Church.

“This disparate group of people argued very strongly for religious liberty,” Przybyszewski said, “which is why we have in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that Congress shall make no law regarding the establishment of religion or imposing on the free exercise of religion.”

Michael Breidenbach, dean of the Honors College and associate professor of history at Ave Maria University in Florida, agreed.

“Religious experience for colonial Americans was very varied. There were some colonists who came specifically because they were fleeing religious persecution. There were others who were forced to come to America, in the case of enslaved people and indentured servants,” he shared.

“There were others who were trying to find a better life than what they had in Europe. And most of them were, I would say, a Christian in some description, although there are notable and



Father Liam McDonald, pastor of St. Therese of Lisieux Church in Montauk, New York, holds a monstrance containing the Blessed Sacrament as he leads a Eucharistic procession in Montauk in observance of Religious Freedom Day in 2022.

OSV News photo/CNS file, Gregory A. Shemitz

important exceptions with Jews and Muslims and, of course, those who did not profess the faith – Gnostics or atheists,” said Breidenbach.

He noted that most frequently arguments for religious toleration involved a fair degree of self-interest, meaning those who wished it for themselves were not necessarily committed pluralists.

“Religious toleration,” Breidenbach said, “is a kind of grant from the civil authority that allows for religious nonconformity because that does better for civil peace – and a kind of recognition that conforming people to a religion they do not believe in makes them hypocrites, makes them not true believers, and otherwise creates a lot of dissension in a political community.”

The Maryland Toleration Act of 1649, written by Cecil Calvert (1605-75), son of George Calvert (1580-1632), the Catholic founder of the colony of Maryland (later home of the first U.S. diocese), is typically identified as the first American law specifically referring to “the free exercise” of religion.

It mandated religious tolerance for Trinitarian Christians, stating, “No person or persons shall from henceforth be any ways troubled, molested, or discountenanced for or in respect of his or her religion nor in the free exercise thereof.”

Ironically, it was repealed in

1654 when William Claiborne, who was stridently anti-Catholic, took control of the colonial government. A new law was passed barring Catholics from openly practicing their religion.

The “Great Awakening” of the 1740s – an evangelical revival of Christianity that swept the colonies, ushering in both religious and political change – further fueled debates.

“By the time we get to American Independence,” said

Breidenbach, “what changes is that we see a shift in the discourse to the natural rights of someone to freely exercise one’s religion – public worship – according to the dictates of their conscience. And that’s a different commitment, because the government can’t abridge those rights,” he added. “They can maybe limit them under certain conditions, but they are natural rights, and so that’s a much more firm protection.”

Catholics, Breidenbach noted, were at the forefront of the commitment for the natural rights of religious liberty.

Archbishop John Carroll

of Baltimore (1735-1815), the first Catholic bishop in the U.S., wrote publicly on the subject; his brother, Daniel Carroll (1730-96), was a framer of the U.S. Constitution, and their second cousin, Charles Carroll (1737-1832), was the only Catholic to sign the Declaration of Independence.

Still, non-Protestants often faced exclusion and outright persecution.

In the 17th century, Massachusetts hanged people for being Quakers. When the Declaration of Independence was signed, nine of the 13 colonies prohibited Catholics and Jews from holding office; in 1838, the governor of Missouri issued Executive Order 44, calling for the “extermination” of the Mormons;

and during the 1830s, Protestant mobs burned convents and sacked churches during anti-Catholic riots.

“A lot of American Protestants didn’t even think the Catholic Church was producing people who were going to make good citizens,” Przybyszewski said. “The Protestant view of Catholics was that this

was a backward, superstitious, not really Christian church, which their faith had rejected centuries earlier.”

Even the first Catholic U.S. president, John F. Kennedy, had to convince Protestant-majority America he would not answer to the pope: “I am not the Catholic candidate for president,” Kennedy stressed. “I am the Democratic Party’s candidate for president who happens also to be a Catholic. I do not speak for my Church on public matters, and the Church does not speak for me.”

Since May of 2020, at least 410 anti-Catholic episodes have occurred throughout the country, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops notes.

“Incidents,” the USCCB states, “include arson, statues beheaded, limbs cut, smashed, and painted, gravestones defaced with swastikas and anti-Catholic language and American flags next to them burned, and other destruction and vandalism.”

The USCCB itemizes an annual list of religious freedom concerns; the latest edition was released in mid-February.

For 2026, those identified as “critical” are “political and anti-religious violence; unjust terms and conditions on federal grants, and unreliability of government; access to sacraments for ICE detainees and immigration enforcement at houses of worship; school choice and the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit; repeal of provisions that prevent religious organizations from participating in government programs; and further repudiation of gender ideology.”

While present questions of religious liberty may seem discouraging, Breidenbach nonetheless sees a lesson in the revolutionary history the nation is celebrating.

“Catholics in colonial America were presumed dangerous until proven loyal. And to go from being suspected subjects of a king to trusted patriots in a new republic is a remarkable transformation,” he emphasized.

“It’s something that still needs to be retold; it needs to be revitalized,” said Breidenbach. “Because when we think about questions of religious liberty today, we need to firmly say that whatever you think about a particular religion, one has to acknowledge that Catholics were founders and framers of this country.”

“From the beginning we’ve had this quarrel ... which is, on the one hand, there was agreement that we should have religious liberty. But what that actually meant ... was what?”

LINDA PRZYBYSZEWSKI

SYNOD, from page 1

to hear experiences and viewpoints they might not normally encounter.

In many parishes, the consultation sessions were preceded by a Holy Hour of Eucharistic adoration to prepare participants spiritually for the conversations that would follow. During these times of prayer, parishioners were invited to reflect on the five focus areas of the synod – evangelization, catechesis, spiritual and liturgical life, outreach, and vocations – and ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit before gathering for the discussions. Parish leaders said the time of prayer helped create a reflective atmosphere and reminded participants that the synod process is rooted first in listening to God.

In some parishes, organizers even assigned table numbers as participants arrived. The approach helped ensure that spouses or close friends did not automatically sit together and allowed parishioners with different perspectives to share the same table.

In parish after parish, participants expressed gratitude simply for the opportunity to speak openly about their faith and the life of the Church.

Using a method known as conversations in the Spirit, participants reflected in silence, spoke one at a time, and listened carefully to one another as they sought to discern how the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church in the diocese today.

The consultation phase represents the first step in a broader synod process called by Bishop Rhoades. Insights gathered from parishioners will help shape

discussions that will follow at the diocesan level.

According to Stacey Noem, moderator of the diocesan synod, the effort marks a significant moment in the life of the local Church. The Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend has not held a synod in a century. The last synod, held under Bishop John F. Noll in 1926, was a canonical synod primarily focused on clergy and Church governance.

“This synod is different,” Noem explained. “It begins by listening to the People of God.”

Rather than focusing first on canonical legislation, the current synod begins with consultation across parish communities, inviting Catholics to reflect prayerfully on the life and mission of the Church.

“The goal is to listen carefully to what the Holy Spirit is saying through the People of God,” Noem said.

While each parish organized its consultation in its own way, many experienced a similar response: parishioners grateful for the opportunity to speak openly about their faith and the future of their Church.

St. John the Evangelist Parish, Goshen

At St. John the Evangelist Parish in Goshen, the synod consultation took on a distinct dimension as parish leaders worked to ensure participation from both the English- and Spanish-speaking members of the parish.

Father Brian Florin, pastor of the parish, entrusted much of the practical organization of the consultation to lay leaders. Amanda Woodiel, pastoral associate of mission integration at St. John, coordinated the English-language consultation, while parish volun-



Deacon Mel Tardy
Women gather at St. Augustine Parish during a special synod consultation for Black Catholics on Saturday, March 7.

teer Rosa Alba helped organize the Spanish-speaking participation.

Woodiel said one of the first challenges was helping parishioners understand what the synod process was about.

“People were confused about what a synod even was at first,” Woodiel said. “We were trying to keep it simple so people understood what they were walking into.”

Parish leaders used multiple ways to communicate the invitation, including announcements at Mass, bulletin inserts, social media posts, and conversations with ministry leaders. Woodiel said repetition was important.

“People have to see something three, four, or five times before they even pay attention,” she said.

Because St. John the Evangelist serves a large bilingual community, coordination between language groups was essential. Alba

said personal invitations proved especially effective in encouraging participation among Spanish-speaking parishioners.

“Just the personal invitation,” Alba said. “I think that’s what helped the most.”

Alba also shared information through WhatsApp groups commonly used within the Hispanic community.

“We use it mostly for bigger groups,” she said. “It’s something a lot of our Hispanic community uses to communicate.”

The parish held separate consultation sessions for the English- and Spanish-speaking communities to ensure that participants could comfortably share their experiences and reflections. About 40 parishioners attended the English-language session, while roughly 70 participated in the Spanish-language consultation.

To encourage listening and dialogue, participants were assigned table numbers when they arrived rather than choosing where to sit.

“The goal was to make sure people didn’t just sit with the same friends or family members,” Woodiel said. “It helped bring different perspectives together.”

The conversations followed the conversations in the Spirit format, which includes moments of silence, structured sharing, and careful listening. Alba said the format helped ensure that everyone had an opportunity to speak.

“You always have that one person who loves to talk and the one who stays quiet,” she said. “In this case, everyone had a turn.”

As the sessions progressed, participants became more comfortable with the slower pace of reflection and listening.

“You could literally feel the Holy Spirit working,” Alba said. “People were communicating, laughing, and it was just a great feeling.”

Woodiel said many participants left the sessions grateful for the opportunity to share their perspectives.

“Father Brian called it a ‘mini conversion,’” she said.

Several common themes emerged during the consultations. Participants frequently spoke about the importance of unity within the parish and the need for continued evangelization. One concern voiced by many participants, Alba said, involved young people who drift away from parish life after receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation.

“Kids finish confirmation and we don’t see them again,” she said. “People asked how we can help them stay connected to the Church.”

Participants also expressed appreciation for the parish’s strong sacramental life and the availability of bilingual Masses and ministries.

Before the consultation sessions began, the parish held a bilingual Holy Hour that drew about 150 people. During the time of prayer, Father Florin invited parishioners to reflect on the synod themes in both English and Spanish.

Woodiel said the evening helped set a prayerful tone for the conversations that followed.

“It really felt like one parish praying together,” she said.

Listening Across the Diocese

While each parish approached the consultation process in its own way, many experienced similar reactions from participants.

Parish leaders reported that Catholics were initially curious – and sometimes uncertain – about what the synod sessions would involve. Yet once the conversations began, many found the experience both meaningful and hopeful.

Across the diocese, the conversations in the Spirit format encouraged participants to slow down, listen attentively and reflect prayerfully before responding.

Several themes surfaced repeatedly in the consultations, including the desire for greater unity within parish communities, renewed efforts in evangelization, and concern for helping young people remain engaged after receiving the sacraments.

Parish leaders also noted that the process itself often strengthened relationships among parishioners who might not normally interact.

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Priests from across the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, along with synod facilitators, gather in Plymouth on Wednesday, October 15, 2025, for a special synod consultation.

In many cases, participants left the sessions with a deeper appreciation for the faith experiences of others in their parish and a renewed sense of shared mission.

St. Bernard Parish, Wabash

At St. Bernard Catholic Church in Wabash, Father Jay Horning, pastor of the parish, said the synod consultation brought together a diverse group of parishioners eager to reflect on the life of their parish and the Church.

About 10 percent of the parish participated in the consultation phase, gathering in small groups to share their experiences and listen to one another.

Father Horning said the variety of participants helped enrich the conversations, bringing together parishioners from different ministries and backgrounds. "We had a good mix of people from across the parish," he said.

Participants were intentionally seated at different tables rather than sitting with friends or family members. The goal, Father Horning explained, was to encourage parishioners to listen to perspectives they might not normally hear.

"That helped people hear different viewpoints and experiences within the parish," he said.

The consultation session was held at a church across the street from St. Bernard, a practical arrangement that also highlighted one of the parish's needs. Some parishioners noted during the discussions that the parish would benefit from having a parish hall that could accommodate gatherings of this type.

The setting also reinforced another theme that surfaced during the conversations – the importance of maintaining strong

relationships with other Christian communities in the area.

Father Horning said participants spoke about the value of continuing ecumenical outreach and cooperation with neighboring churches.

The structured format of the conversations in the Spirit method helped participants slow down and listen more carefully than in typical parish discussions.

"People were grateful for the opportunity to be heard," Horning said.

Participants also discussed strengthening faith formation, encouraging greater participation in parish life, and continuing efforts to share the Gospel in the wider community.

Father Horning said many parishioners appreciated the opportunity to reflect together on how the parish can continue to grow in faith.

"It helped people realize that everyone has a voice in the life of the Church," he said.

St. Charles Borromeo Parish, Fort Wayne

At St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church in Fort Wayne, the synod consultation also drew strong participation from parishioners eager to reflect on the life of the Church.

Monsignor Tom Shoemaker, pastor of the parish, said the consultation day gave parishioners a meaningful opportunity to share their perspectives and listen to others within the parish community.

"It was a positive experience for the parish," Father Shoemaker said.

Like many other parishes, St. Charles Borromeo used the synod's structured format to guide conversations and encour-

age thoughtful reflection. Participants gathered in small groups to share their experiences of parish life, listen to one another, and reflect prayerfully before responding.

Father Shoemaker said the process helped create an atmosphere where parishioners felt comfortable speaking openly about their faith and their hopes for the Church.

"It gave people an opportunity to express what was on their hearts," he said.

Participants discussed ways to strengthen parish unity, support families, and deepen faith formation within the parish.

For Father Shoemaker, the consultation also offered valuable insight into the experiences and concerns of parishioners.

"It helped us hear directly from people about what they value in their parish and where they see opportunities for growth," he said.

The conversations, he noted, reinforced the importance of listening as the Church seeks to discern how best to carry out its mission in the years ahead.



Members of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in New Haven gather for their parish's synod consultation on Sunday, March 1.

St. Gaspar del Bufalo Parish, Rome City

At St. Gaspar del Bufalo Catholic Church in Rome City, parish leaders placed special emphasis on preparing facilitators who would guide the synod conversations.

Because the parish church is currently undergoing renovations, the consultation session was held at the nearby Our Lady of the Americas Shrine, where parishioners gathered in a conference room for the discussions.

Mary Krouse, who helped coordinate the consultation, said training the leaders was an important part of the process.

Before the consultation session was held, parish leaders hosted a dinner for the facilitators and note-takers who would guide the discussions. The gathering served both as a time of fellowship and an opportunity to walk through the synod format together.

"We wanted them to understand the structure and feel comfortable guiding the conversation," Krouse said.

During the training, participants reviewed the conversations in the Spirit format and discussed how to encourage respectful listening and reflection during the consultations. Krouse said the preparation helped facilitators create an atmosphere that was both welcoming and prayerful when the parish gathered for its consultation session.

Participants later met in small groups to reflect on the synod themes and share their experiences of parish life.

Rather than debating ideas, parishioners were encouraged to listen carefully to one another and reflect on how the Holy Spirit might be guiding the Church.

Krouse said the process helped participants recognize the importance of unity within the parish and the shared responsibility of continuing to evangelize and strengthen the

life of the Church.

Like at other parishes, the consultation at St. Gaspar highlighted a desire among parishioners to strengthen connections within the parish community and continue sharing the faith with others.

What Happens Next

While the parish consultation phase has concluded, the synod process continues. According to Stacey Noem, the insights gathered from parishes across the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend will now be compiled and prayerfully reviewed, including special consultations with groups that fall outside of a parish context, including priests, deacons and their wives, people who are incarcerated, people who are in nursing homes, the unhoused population within the diocese, college students, and Black Catholics.

Each parish and each group included in a special consultation has submitted – or will soon submit – summaries of the conversations that took place during the consultation sessions. Those reports will be studied by the diocesan synod team as they prepare the next phase of the synod process.

To assist with the work, a team of graduate students from the University of Notre Dame has been helping organize and synthesize the parish consultation summaries. Their efforts will help identify common themes emerging from the conversations taking place across the diocese.

Noem said the consultation phase is meant to ensure that the voices of the faithful help inform the discernment that will take place at the diocesan level.

Once delegates from each parish are chosen and trained, they will gather for two synod sessions in the fall – the first on October 31 and November 1 in South Bend and the second in Fort Wayne on November 20-21 – to continue to discuss how the diocese and its institutions can improve upon its mission to spread the fire of God's love.

For many participants, the consultation sessions were already a meaningful experience. Parishioners who gathered around tables across the diocese discovered that the synod process is not simply about discussion but about listening – to one another and to the Holy Spirit.

As the diocesan synod continues, the reflections shared in parish halls and meeting rooms will help guide the Church in northern Indiana as it seeks to discern the path forward together.

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Meditating on the Way of the Cross Is Not Only for Lent

BY D.D. EMMONS

(OSV News) – The Way of the Cross is one of the most personal, meditative, and graphic of any Catholic devotion. We spiritually join Jesus on the via dolorosa (“sorrowful way”) leading to the place of the skull, suffering with Him as He struggles to carry the cross on that first Good Friday.

The crack of the Roman’s whip, the jeers of the mob, the sobs of his followers, fill our ears. We see Him fall, see the executioner strip His clothes, nail Him to the cross, and raise Him to die. After witnessing His torture and pain, all that He willingly endured for our salvation, we pledge never again to cause Him such agony.

“I love you my beloved Jesus; I love you more than myself; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from

you again. Grant that I may love you always; and do with me what you will.” Those words of St. Alphonsus Liguori echo in our hearts, calling us to follow our Master, to walk, to pray the Way of the Cross again and again.

Widely called “the Stations” and popular during Lent, this beautiful devotion is not limited by a season or single day like Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, or Good Friday.

The 14 stations are not removed from the church walls at the end of Lent or Easter; they remain as a constant reminder of His total sacrifice, a sacrifice from which we never distance ourselves.

Frequently and piously walking with Him, contemplating His suffering, and sharing our crosses, especially when we feel abandoned or in despair, gives us courage and

hope. Throughout the year, especially on Friday afternoons, we often find Catholics humbly praying the stations. This perfect prayer conforms us to the one crucified. Isaiah wrote, “The Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all” (53:6).

A beautiful Catholic book from 1908 titled “From Our Church, Her Children, and Institutions” suggests graces that the Stations of the Cross bring: “You feel no devotion to the passion of Christ? Make the stations. You feel no contrition for your sins? Make the stations. You are getting lukewarm and sluggish? Make the stations. You cannot pray or meditate? Make the stations. You have no relish for mortification? Make the stations.”

The Church offers us a plenary indulgence when we walk the Way of the Cross. We can make this walk alone or, in crowded conditions, remain in our pew while someone else publicly leads the devotion.

A cross at each station is required, and most churches include a picture or tableaux to assist our meditation. It is necessary to be in a state of grace, have the intention of gaining the indulgence, and performing the devotion

“I love you my beloved Jesus, I love you more than myself; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again.”

ST. ALPHONSUS

while moving between, pausing, and meditating on Our Lord’s passion and death at each station.

Additionally, one must go to confession, be free from all sin including venial sin, receive holy Communion, and pray for the intentions of the pope – all on or near the day of the devotion.

Catholics unable to participate in walking the Way of the Cross may receive an indulgence if they spend a minimum of 30 minutes praying and meditating on Christ’s passion.

According to legend, the

first person after Jesus to visit the sites of Christ's passion was the Blessed Mother. Of course, others wanted to go to those holy places, but the Romans were still occupying Jerusalem and persecuting anyone who was a follower of Jesus.

For centuries, access to the holy sites was limited because non-Christians were frequently in control of the city. Even if security was not an issue, many living outside Palestine couldn't make a long, arduous journey to get to the Holy Land.

During the 11th century, the crusaders returned Jerusalem back to the Christians, and churches, shrines, and other memorials began to appear reflecting the route Christ took to Calvary. Whether or not this route was exactly where Jesus was forced to carry His cross is uncertain, as the city was destroyed in 70 A.D.

By the Middle Ages, pilgrims mostly were doing a walking tour of the holy sites that often started on Calvary and went back to Pilate's home, where Christ's sentencing took place. Around 1458, an Englishman named William Wey is alleged to have walked his pilgrimage to Calvary beginning at Pilate's residence and offered prayers and meditations at the different shrines and memorials along the way. He dubbed the stops as halting places or stations, thus the name, Stations of the Cross.

Christians who couldn't visit Jerusalem began locally to erect replicas of the holy sites based on information from people who had been to the city, such as the crusaders. Initially, there was no continuity or standardization among these structures; some included as many as 37 stops, others as few as seven. Finally, in 1731, Pope Clement

XII established the number of stations as 14.

In 1991, Pope St. John Paul II introduced a version of this devotion based entirely on the Scriptures. All 14 stations and the accompanying meditations can be found in the Bible. The Scriptural Stations are an alternative to the traditional Way of the Cross.

No discussion of the Way of the Cross is complete without some comment on the *Stabat Mater* (Latin for "the standing mother"), the hymn traditionally sung in between each of the stations.

When singing the mournful verses, we experience the heartbreak of Mary as she watches her Son go to His death. There are at least 60 translations of this hymn. A 13th-century Franciscan named Jocopone da Toddy often is credited with writing this song.



CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz
Parishioners participate in a reenactment of the Stations of the Cross at St. John of God Church in Central Islip, New York, on Good Friday in 2022.

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What We're Becoming: AI and the Future of Human Dignity



TRUTH AND LIGHT

LEONARD J. DELORENZO

There's a Substack I've been reading lately called *Meta-trends*, run by Peter Diamandis and his team. They're tracking AI's exponential growth with the breathless optimism tech futurists are known for. They're asking fascinating questions – questions about whether AI agents might deserve legal personhood, whether these systems could organize for labor rights, how we might achieve post-scarcity abundance by 2035.

The articles are smart. The questions are urgent. But I keep noticing what's missing.

Nobody's asking what we're becoming in the process.

Diamandis writes about four great revolutions: the Scientific Revolution gave us the ability to understand nature's laws; the Industrial Revolution mechanized production; the Digital Revolution connected the world; now we're enter-

ing Revolution Four – the AI Revolution – which promises to solve everything from disease to poverty. The opportunities are real.

But when Diamandis describes these earlier revolutions, he focuses entirely on what they solved. There's not a word about what they cost us.

Take the Scientific Revolution. It gave us the experimental method and transformed our understanding of the natural world. Wonderful. But it also developed in us the social tendency to reduce everything to secular processes, to eliminate mystery, to turn the world into a storehouse of data points. We learned to see nature as mechanism, and eventually we learned to see ourselves the same way.

The Industrial Revolution brought incredible productivity gains, yes. But it also brought the transformation of work into impersonal function-performance. Time became monetized through "Taylorism" and time-motion studies. Work became something you did to people rather than with them.

And the Digital Revolution? We're barely two decades in and already we can see the costs.

We're more "connected" than ever while being profoundly lonely. We've closed physical distance while becoming alienated from place, neighbor, and home. We have unlimited information while our attention collapses.

If we approach "the AI Revolution" with only an eye to potential benefits, we'll blindly accept the deleterious consequences to human life and society. We'll automate ourselves into irrelevance without meaning to. We'll outsource our humanity one convenience at a time.

Which brings me back to those questions about AI personhood and rights. Those are intriguing questions. But they're downstream from more fundamental ones we're not asking: What does it mean to be human in an age when machines can think? What are the essential rights of a human person when we're building systems that might claim similar rights? What responsibilities can't be delegated to an algorithm? What work shouldn't be automated, not because machines can't do it but because we need to do it for the sake of our own

humanity? What frictions and inefficiencies are actually necessary for true human living?

These aren't just philosophical puzzles. They're urgent questions about human formation. Every technological revolution has formed us whether we meant it to or not. The printing press didn't just make books cheaper – it changed how we think. The smartphone didn't just connect us – it rewired our brains. AI won't just solve problems – it can reshape what we think it means to be a person.

And if we don't reckon with that now – if we don't develop a focused and refreshed understanding of human dignity in our present age – the power of this next revolution might leave us far more estranged from our humanity than any before it. More estranged from each other. From our work. From our callings. From God.

The Catholic tradition has wisdom here. We've always insisted that human beings aren't just really smart animals or really complicated machines. We're made in the image of God. We have an inherent dignity that can't be earned

or lost, can't be optimized or automated. We're called to work that makes us more fully human, not less. To relationships that are ends in themselves, not means to other ends. To worship of the One who made us, not the things we make.

Those truths don't change just because our tools get exponentially more powerful. They become more important.

So yes, we can entertain questions about "AI rights" and abundance economics. But first, let's talk about human personhood. About what we owe one another. About what we dare not lose in the rush toward what's next.

This short article can't accomplish this critical work (nor could I accomplish it myself, on my own). I am merely pointing out the need and the urgency of putting this work front and center, with absolute seriousness. The need to freshly understand the meaning of our humanity is as important – if not more important – than ever.

Leonard J. DeLorenzo is a professor of the practice in the McGrath Institute for Church Life and concurrent professor in the department of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Like Lazarus, Christ Will Raise Us if We Devoutly Follow Him



THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MONSIGNOR OWEN F. CAMPION

The Book of Ezekiel provides the first reading for this weekend. Even a quick reading of the history of ancient Israel shows that there were precious few periods of prosperity and calm. Indeed, only the reigns of David and Solomon might properly be considered as truly good times.

Some of the times were more trying than others. Certainly, generations endured miserable times in Babylon, confined in wretchedness, taunted and abused as a minority. Understandably, these Jewish exiles yearned for the day when they could return to their homeland.

Ezekiel built upon this theme of hope and expectation. As all the prophets did, he saw a release from Babylonian bondage not as an accident or

a happy turn of events. He saw it as a result of God's mercy and of fidelity to God. Thus, in this reading, the Lord speaks, promising to breathe new life into the defeated, dejected people.

St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans furnishes the second reading. Rome was the center for everything in the first-century Mediterranean world, the political, economic, and cultural heart of the empire. Rome's inhabitants came from everywhere, bringing with them a great variety of customs and beliefs.

Paul wrote to the Christian Romans, among whom eventually he would die as a martyr. Many of them would be martyred.

This reading stresses two spiritual realities. The Christian is linked with God in Christ. So, the Christian possesses the very life of the Holy Spirit, a life that will never die.

For its third reading, the Church presents the Gospel of John. Jesus went to Bethany, then a separate community but now a part of greater Jerusalem, sum-

moned by Martha and Mary who were anxious about their brother, Lazarus, the Lord's friend.

When Jesus at last arrived, Lazarus was dead. In fact, he had been dead for several days. Putrefaction had begun. Responding to the sisters' faith, the Lord restores Lazarus to life.

Several important themes occur in the passage. First, of course, is the active, life-giving love of Jesus. In the mystery of the Incarnation, Jesus feels and expresses human love. Second, the faith of Martha and Mary is unqualified.

The evangelist sees a parallel between the resurrection of Jesus and the restoration of earthly life to Lazarus. In each account, mourning women are essential parts of the story. A stone closes the tomb. The body is dressed, and a cloth, customary in Jewish burials of the time, covers the face. Finally, in each story, faith and human limitation have important roles.

Reflection

Next week, on Palm Sunday, the Church will invite us to

learn and to worship in the most intense liturgical days of its year. Calling us to Christ, and with ancient drama and the most compelling symbolism, it will proclaim Jesus as Savior and as risen Lord.

This weekend, the Church prepares us for this experience, giving us the beautiful and wondrous story of Lazarus.

Echoing the Lord's own resurrection, today's message is clear. If we are united with Jesus, as Lazarus and his sisters were united, then in God's power we will have everlasting life.

Eternal life will occur only if we seek Jesus, and if we seek Jesus with the faith uncompromisingly displayed by Martha. Only Jesus can give us life.

The other readings reinforce this theme. For everyone, life can be taxing. Death awaits all. Ezekiel assures us that God will give us true life. It will be the life of holiness, the life that never ends.

St. Paul insisted that this divine life, and peace in the present, abides only in Jesus.

So, as Lent anticipates its culmination, the Church calls us to Jesus, the Lord of life.

READINGS

Sunday: Ezekiel 37:12-14; Psalms 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8; Romans 8:8-11; John 11:1-45

Monday: Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 (or 13:41c-62); Psalms 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6; John 8:1-11

Tuesday: Numbers 21:4-9; Psalms 102:2-3, 16-18, 19-21; John 8:21-30

Wednesday: Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10; Psalms 40:7-8a, 8b-9, 10, 11; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38

Thursday: Genesis 17:3-9; Psalms 105:4-5, 6-7, 8-9; John 8:51-59

Friday: Jeremiah 20:10-13; Psalms 18:2-3a, 3bc-4, 5-6, 7; John 10:31-42

Saturday: Ezekiel 37:21-28; Jeremiah 31:10, 11-12, 13; John 11:45-56

Baptism Isn't Merely a Symbolic Gesture



INTO THE TRUTH

FATHER MARK HELLINGER

On this Fifth Sunday of Lent, because we are in year A, the whole Church will hear the Gospel reading of Lazarus being raised from the dead by Jesus. This Gospel is also read in other years as part of the rituals for catechumens known as the scrutinies. What a fitting context to think about what will take place in the lives of our catechumens this Easter, and for those who have been baptized, what took place at our baptism.

In the preface of the Mass, which corresponds to the Gospel, we will pray: "For as true man He wept for Lazarus His friend and as eternal God raised him from the tomb, just as, taking pity on the human race, He leads us by sacred mysteries to new life."

Baptism, which is necessary for salvation as Christ Himself teaches. John 3 says: "Jesus answered: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit' And Mark 16:16 says, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.") Baptism is the ritual, or in the words of the preface, the sacred mystery, by which Christ raises us to new life. As Paul draws out in the second reading for this Sunday's Mass, prior to baptism, we are not belonging to Christ – which is another way to say we are not alive yet in the fullest sense.

Baptism has three principal effects, and each one of them

draws out a way in which we are "reborn" because of the Grace of Christ working through the sacrament. The first effect is the forgiveness of Original Sin and all personal sin. In forgiving Original Sin and any personal sin we may have committed before baptism, we are truly made of the Spirit – the original disobedience of the Fall is wiped away from us, and we are restored (and re-created) for a relationship with God. That relationship is shaped by the fact we are remade and adopted as sons and daughters in the Son.

The second effect is one of deep importance: We are made members of the Body of Christ, which is the Church. This effect has lasting impact in our lives. After baptism, we are inseparably bound to the lives of other Christians, precisely because our life is grafted into Christ's. By baptism we share in the Resurrection, precisely because we are organically united – as though one – to the resurrected body of Jesus Christ. We also are subject to the laws of the body, which is the Church's law. Thus, being baptized as a Catholic makes us part of the body – both mystical and visible. It is for this reason that we have obligations imposed on us, such as being married under the authority of Church and certain fasting days. It is because our lives are truly linked together that these rules matter for our spiritual health.

It is also because of this effect that we enjoy the exchange of graces known as the Communion of Saints. We can live a life of intercession and relationship with all those reborn in Christ precisely because our baptism has a real effect. When St. Paul uses the analogy of a physical body to describe the Church, he is not far from reality itself. In fact, Jesus' own image of the vine and branches provides a vivid

and compelling image for us to reflect on for how intertwined our lives are – first with Christ and then with all those reborn in Christ – because of baptism.

The third effect of baptism is that divine life is given to us – we are made capable of becoming unite to God. In this way, we see that baptism so remakes us that we have the capacity for union with God here and now – to be perfected in the life of heaven. Thus, in baptism, God the Father truly becomes our Father. We are truly made a part of God's family and coheirs of grace. Thus, Paul can say again in the second reading that the "Spirit of God dwells in you."

These three effects taken together also put a great emphasis on why we as Catholics baptize infants. As St. John Chrysostom said: "You see how many are the benefits of baptism, and some think its heavenly grace consists only in the remission of sins, but we have enumerated 10 honors [it bestows]! For this reason, we baptize even infants, though they are not defiled by [personal] sins, so that there may be given to them holiness, righteousness, adoption, inheritance, brotherhood with Christ, and that they may be His [Christ's] members"

Christianity is not a mental head game or some process of the mind by which we relate to God – it is an embodied existence of union with God which remakes us and draws us up to a greater life. In sin, we were dead, but in the grace of baptism we have been raised from the dead. As we pray for those who will receive this marvelous gift soon, we do well to prepare to renew our own baptismal promises at Easter and so allow God's grace to grow in us.

Father Mark Hellinger is pastor of St. Jude Catholic Church in South Bend.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for March 22, 2026

John 11:1-45

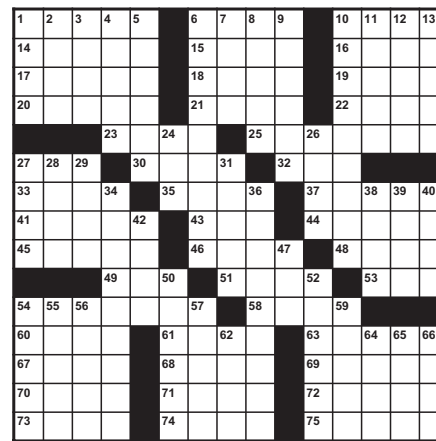
Following is a word search based on the Gospel reading for the Fifth Sunday in Lent, Cycle A: The illness of Lazarus. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

SISTERS	IS ILL	HEARD
ILLNESS	JESUS	MARTHA
LAZARUS	DISCIPLES	JUDEA
LORD	BEEN HERE	NOT HAVE DIED
YOU ASK	WILL RISE	LAST DAY
NEVER DIE	BELIEVE	JEW
STONE	LOUD VOICE	LET HIM GO

PROMISE

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

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- 63 Greek title for Jesus
 - 67 Drilling grp.
 - 68 Pertaining to Mars
 - 69 Nighttime annoyance, perhaps
 - 70 Tropical tree
 - 71 Nicholas or Peter
 - 72 Aquatic mammal
 - 73 Drove
 - 74 Polishes off
 - 75 Snare
- DOWN**
- 1 Leader of the Church
 - 2 Among
 - 3 "___ Irae"
 - 4 Speak
 - 5 Sanctuary
 - 6 Belittling
 - 7 The yoke of Jesus

ACROSS

- 1 Diocese in northern Italy
- 6 Son of Adam
- 10 Height (comb.)
- 14 Leaves out
- 15 Zhivago's love
- 16 Insult
- 17 Reverence
- 18 Egyptian goddess of fertility
- 19 Dupes
- 20 Ford flop
- 21 School rooms
- 22 Circular sandwich
- 23 Ancestress of Jesus
- 25 Make less taut
- 27 High trains
- 30 Gospel with the most chapters (abbr.)
- 32 Father of Hophni and Phinehas
- 33 Grant temporary use of
- 35 Number for the last Leo
- 37 The Diocese of Portland is here
- 41 St. ___ Bertrand
- 43 Asian country, for short
- 44 Simple seat
- 45 Anguish
- 46 Grating
- 48 Female sheep
- 49 "...my ___ overflows" (Ps 23:5)
- 51 Ancient Egyptian life-giving force (var.)
- 53 In the manner of
- 54 City in central Israel
- 58 Vinegar (comb.)
- 60 Opposite or absence of good
- 61 Season during which the Sorrowful Mysteries are used

- 8 Cuts
- 9 Bother
- 10 "Do not be haughty, but ___ with the lowly" (Rom 12:16)
- 11 Catholic author, Mary Higgins ___
- 12 Monetary unit of India
- 13 Actor Welles
- 24 Matthew collected this before he met Jesus
- 26 Charity
- 27 Scat queen
- 28 Jaworski of Watergate fame
- 29 Cozy
- 31 Symbol on the papal flag
- 34 Kind of Carmelite
- 36 Apers
- 38 The Diocese of Des Moines is here
- 39 French Christmas
- 40 Actress Lancaster
- 42 Alphabet string
- 47 Christmas month (abbr.)
- 50 Roman governor who condemned Jesus
- 52 Diocese in British Columbia
- 54 Father of Abram
- 55 Call forth
- 56 Unit of capacity
- 57 Vice follower
- 59 Scout's rider
- 62 Trim
- 64 Kind of guy
- 65 Minerals
- 66 Withered

Answers on page 15.



SAINT OF THE WEEK BASIL THE YOUNGER

As a young man born in the ninth century, Basil began living as a hermit near Constantinople, now Istanbul, Turkey. Courtiers of the Byzantine emperor, alarmed at his appearance and fearful of his influence, had him arrested and questioned as a spy. Basil would say only that he was a pilgrim and stranger on earth, but he denounced their immoral lifestyles. According to his hagiography, he survived their cruel tortures, including being left unharmed after he was thrown to a lion, and he was saved from a drowning by two dolphins. These miracles won him freedom. Thereafter, many of the faithful came to his hermitage for healing, prophecies, and instruction. Basil reportedly lived to the age of 110.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, from page 1

to meet the needs of each individual student in the classroom.

"I think that as we grow as a society, we're supposed to get wiser," said Amanda Arnold, who was hired last summer to serve as the diverse learners director for the Catholic Schools Office of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. "When we were kids, you sat in a classroom and, most of the time, the teacher taught one way, and you either understood or you didn't."

Thankfully, Arnold told Today's Catholic, "the idea of education overall has changed to say, hey, not everybody's going to learn orally, not everybody's going to learn visually, and it is the responsibility of the diocese, the school, and the teacher to say, because there are 30 students in this classroom, I might need three or four different ways to teach this in order to help these kids be the best that they can be."

It was with this purpose in mind that led Arnold and others in the Catholic Schools Office to hold the diocese's Diverse Learners Summit on Wednesday, March 11, in Syracuse. At least one representative was present from each of the diocese's 43 Catholic schools, with 135 people in total attending the one-day workshop, including educators from the neighboring Diocese of Lafayette and Lakewood Park Christian, a nondenominational private school located in Auburn.

"Every year, as we plan these summits, we kind of look at what the needs are when we meet with principals and visit schools," Arnold said. "This year, we thought it would be helpful to lean into what's known as MTSS or multi-tiered system of support. This focuses on helping every child in a classroom, from those who are high achievers to students who might need a little more instruction or simply a different way of looking at the material. So, the goal of the Diverse Learners Summit is to help teachers and principals meet those needs within the structure of their schools, which can be very different based on size and resources."

'Living Our Catholic Mission'

Before joining the Catholic Schools Office, Arnold spent 17 years as a special education teacher, including 15 years at diocesan schools, most recently at St. Vincent de Paul School in Fort Wayne. Julie Williams, an assistant superintendent with the diocese, said Arnold was the perfect fit when they were looking to fill the new position of diverse learners director.



Photos by Scott Warden

Amanda Arnold speaks during the Catholic Schools Office's Diverse Learners Summit on Wednesday, March 11, in Syracuse.

"She's so passionate about reaching all students," Williams told Today's Catholic. "It's just who she is, and she has such a gift. ... She has changed so many schools in just the short time that she's been in this role."

In the summit's opening session, Arnold explained the benefits of implementing a multi-tiered system of support for students as well as strategies for doing so, offering tips on how to make necessary changes even with a small staff, tweaking classroom schedules in order to make the best use of available instructional time, and ensuring lessons are engaging to stop bad behavior before it starts.

One of the final slides in Arnold's opening presentation stated, in bold: "Supporting every learner isn't just good teaching, it is living our Catholic mission."

"Catholic means 'universal,' and we need to be able to offer the best education possible to the most number of families who desire it," Arnold said. "And to be able to give this opportunity to all families does change some dynamics – whether it's cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic diversity, or different learning abilities. So, classrooms that were once a little more uniform are now looking more universal, and that's beautiful, but it does raise some challenges. And it's great to open our doors and our hearts to everyone, but in order to actually respect the human dignity of every child, every student, we actually have to service them the way they need. ... That's our duty."

Mike Obergfell, principal at St. Jude School in Fort Wayne, attended the meeting with three of his school's teachers. He told Today's Catholic that "any tools or best practices that we can use to help our diverse populations is a good thing, so it's always good for us to come and know that other schools in the diocese are doing the same thing. ... We do have a

staff that's doing a good job with meeting the needs of our students, and we're blessed in that way, but we can always do better."

Derek Boone, principal of Huntington Catholic School, concurred, telling Today's Catholic that the support given by Arnold and the diocese to intentionally reach all learners has made an impact with his school's teachers and students.

"This is especially helpful for smaller schools like ours due to the limited staffing or resources we have on hand," Boone said. "We've seen an immediate impact in our school simply based on support from Mrs. Arnold, benefiting at least 3-5 students and their teachers immediately."

Diocesan Lending Library

A portion of the Diverse Learners Summit was dedicated to introducing the teachers and administrators to a new initiative being rolled out by the Catholic Schools Office and spearheaded by Arnold and Williams. Laid out on half a dozen or so folding tables were a wide variety of resources the two have compiled for the diocese's new Diverse Learners Lending Library.

The collection includes instructional programs, intervention materials, assistive tools, and class-

room supports that teachers are encouraged to explore and borrow to strengthen instruction and support student success. Schools are encouraged to review the available resources, test tools that might benefit their students, and evaluate programs before making expensive purchasing decisions.

Williams told Today's Catholic that the idea for a lending library came about after a generous donor came to Bishop Rhoades seeking to make an impact on Catholic education across the diocese. Williams said she and Arnold put a plan together for the library, which was then pitched to Bishop Rhoades, who gave them a green light to get started.

"Bishop Rhoades has been amazing; he's been so supportive," Williams said. "In the three years since I've been here, being able to offer a Catholic education to students of all abilities has been one of the things that he has really pushed for, because he's so passionate about it."

Arnold also credited Bishop Rhoades and his support for the project, saying: "Not only did he think that all students deserve to attend a Catholic school but that all deserve to be educated. That's huge, and not everybody thinks that way, and he has been so pivotal in that mission."

The goal of the lending library, Arnold said, is to give schools access to resources they might not otherwise have.

"If students at a particular school are having academic struggles, we can give teachers there another intervention tool or a program that is research-based and data-driven that they might not have known about or have immediate financial access to," Arnold said.

The lending library focuses on resources to help students in three key areas – reading and math, certainly, but also religion.

"We have a beautiful opportunity to take students with more

significant cognitive needs and make sure they have full access to the sacraments – and it's not just receiving the sacraments; it's being able to actually participate to the best of their ability in the sacraments," Arnold said. "There are beautiful, amazing, adaptive kits that can help with reconciliation when we have a child who's nonverbal, or maybe they are verbal but they have language impairment, or maybe they speak a different language. There are picture cards that a child or an adult could give to a priest that then can prompt the priest to communicate with them. That's just one example."

While the items in the lending library have just begun being shared with schools across the diocese, Arnold said she's had a chance over the past few weeks to visit with schools and show them some of the resources that are available.

"One of the most exciting things has been when a school that might be struggling with something asks me to come in, and I'll bring some things from the library," Arnold said. "I've had teachers and principals literally in tears because now they have something that they didn't know existed. They use it, and they can actually see how it can change a child's life."

Serving the Needs of All Families

At the Diverse Learners Summit, Williams said one thing she would stress to educators is that making sure all levels of learners are being reached doesn't happen overnight.

"But throughout that change process, we are here to help and support schools the entire way," Williams said. "We know this is what is best, and we know this is what our mission is, according to our faith. We're here to help you get there."

Arnold said the goal of the summit, and the lending library, and her job as diverse learners director is that "families are able to attend their parish school and have the needs of their kids met – academically, behaviorally, socially, emotionally – through their parish school," Arnold said. "There might be circumstances that prevent them from attending their parish school, but we want to make sure that it isn't because of a need or a disability or a health concern. ... That's my vision: that every Catholic school can meet the needs of the people who knock on our doors."

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



Educators browse the diocese's new Diverse Learners Lending Library during a workshop in Syracuse on Wednesday, March 11.

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.

THURSDAY, MARCH 19
The Splendor of a Marian Church
4:30 – 5:30 p.m.
 NOTRE DAME – As the Church approaches the feast of the Annunciation, we invite you to join us at Eck Visitors Center, 100 Eck Center, for a lecture on the Splendor of a Marian Church. This presentation invites renewed consideration of the Mariological foundations of ecclesial renewal for the life and mission of the Church today. Open to the public.

FRIDAY/SATURDAY, MARCH 20-21
School of Prophetic Ministry
 SOUTH BEND – Experience two powerful days of activation-based learning at St. Thérèse, Little Flower, 54191 Ironwood Road, in a safe and relational environment grounded in teaching faithful to the Church. Our hope is that you would experience a great acceleration in your ministry and walk away with years worth of tools and ideas for equipping in the prophetic gifts and building a prophetic culture in the Church. Learn more at tinyurl.com/2kpt36ws.

FRIDAY, MARCH 20
St. Bavo Parish Original Jonah Fish Fry
4 – 7 p.m.
 MISHAWAKA – St. Bavo Parish, 524 W. 8th St., will be hosting an Original Jonah Fish Fry in the school gym. Indoor dining includes all-you-can-eat fish, coleslaw, applesauce, rolls, and dessert for \$15 per person. Drive-thru carryout box dinners are \$12 each. Pay at the door; cash or checks accepted.

St. Joseph Bluffton Fish Fry
4 – 7 p.m.
 BLUFFTON – Held at St. Joseph, 1300 N. Main St. Drive-thru only fish fry featuring Dan's Fish, potato salad, green beans, and dessert.

St. Joseph Catholic School Lenten Fish Fry
4 – 7:30 p.m.
 GARRETT – Knights of Columbus #1790 hosts a fish dinner every Friday during Lent at St. Joseph Catholic School, 300 W. Houston St. Fish, baked potato, green beans, and water for \$12. Drive-thru, carry out or dine in.

St. Therese K of C Drive-Thru Fish Fry
4:30 – 6:30 p.m.
 FORT WAYNE – The fish fry proceeds benefit the Save Our School Campaign at St. Therese Parish Hall, 2304 Lower Huntington Rd. Meal includes six pieces for to-go orders, potato wedges or mac and cheese, coleslaw or apple sauce, and tarter sauce. The cost is \$14 for adults and \$7 for kids 12 and younger.

St. Joseph of Roanoke Fish Fry
4:30 – 7 p.m.
 ROANOKE – Located at the American Legion, 1122 North Main St., there will be fried fish, baked potato or french fries, applesauce or coleslaw, and cookies. Adults are \$15; children 12 and younger are \$7.

St. Paul Chapel Fish Fry
5 – 7 p.m.
 FREMONT – Join us at 8780 E. 700 N. for an all-you-can-eat fish dinner. Carryout and dine-in options are available. Open to the public.

SATURDAY, MARCH 21
St. Therese School Round Up, Pre-K – Eighth Grade
10 a.m. – 2p.m.
 HUNTINGTON – St. Therese Round Up, 2222 Lower Huntington Rd, is for all grades. We will be doing a scavenger hunt, activities for kids, and parents can come talk to the teachers and tour our school.

St. Felix Mass for the Sick
12:30 – 2 p.m.
 HUNTINGTON – Mass for the Sick and Troubled is held the third Saturday of each month at St. Felix Catholic Center, 1280 Hitzfield St. The Rosary begins at 12:30 p.m., and Mass is at 1 p.m. Father Solanus Casey holds special significance for St. Felix and the Fort Wayne-South Bend diocese because he lived for a time at St. Felix Friary. His example continues to shape the spiritual identity of the diocese. Father Solanus Casey instructed the other friars to provide food, famously saying, "They are hungry; get them some soup and sandwiches." Before the Mass for the Sick and Troubled, soup will be served prior to the Rosary.

REST IN PEACE

Fort Wayne
 Sally Tinkel, 83, St. Vincent de Paul

Goshen
 Donald C. Gouker Jr., 76, St. John the Evangelist

Granger
 Michael Campbell, 80, St. Pius X
 Roy Moore, 94, St. Pius X

Mishawaka
 Audrey DiTella, 91, Queen of Peace
 Barbara Slabaugh, 80, St. Monica

New Haven
 Joan M. Huber, 88, St. John the Baptist

Send obituaries to obituaries@diocesefwsb.org.



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

www.wordgamesforcatholics.com

"Dear friends, Christ is God's answer to our human hunger, because his Body is the bread of eternal life: Take this and eat of it, all of you! Jesus' invitation reflects our daily experience: in order to remain alive, we need to nourish ourselves with life, drawing it from plants and animals."
POPE LEO XIV

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

Fish Fry 

Come and enjoy another St. Pat's fish fry!

DRIVE-THRU ONLY
FRIDAY, MARCH 27
4 – 7 P.M.

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Catholic Charities Hosts Second Annual Sláinte to St. Patrick

BY SCOTT WARDEN

On Saturday, March 14, the staff of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend hosted its second annual fundraising gala, Sláinte to St. Patrick, at the Parkview Mirro Center in Fort Wayne.

Dan Florin CEO of Catholic Charities, welcomed more than 300 supporters to an evening of “good friends, good cheer, and an even greater mission.” Florin joked that he was encouraged to open with an Irish joke about fundraising given the event’s St. Patrick’s Day theme, “but it turns out they were all about chasing pots of gold. Honestly, that feels about right for tonight,” he joked.

“But in truth, in truth, our mission at Catholic Charities is not to chase pots of gold at the end of a rainbow. Rather, our mission is to serve all those in need, as Christ calls us to do. And that calling, it’s worth more than all the treasure in Ireland.”

In his short opening remarks, Florin highlighted a couple of initiatives Catholic Charities has organized to give back to those in need in the community, including the Thrive Life Skills program, which, Florin said, “is built around one simple but powerful idea: that the human person has God-given capacity to change and to flourish. “Over the course of 10 weeks, Thrive participants receive practical tools and hands-on guidance to move beyond immediate challenges and build

a foundation for lasting stability. They learn about a growth mindset, emotional resiliency, and financial literacy. They set goals. They practice budgeting. They strengthen their communication skills. They learn about values and develop habits that support long-term growth.”

Florin also highlighted the increase in mental-health counseling support Catholic Charities has provided to the community through diocesan parishes and local Catholic schools.

“I wish I could tell you this happens because we found the four-leaf clover,” Florin said. “Of course, it’s not that simple. The truth is it happens when good people of faith, like you, invest in hope for our neighbors. Right now in our community, someone is praying for a lifeline to stability and healing. Someone is hoping not just to survive but to thrive. And you are the answer to that prayer.”

Along with raising money through silent auctions, live auctions, and other initiatives, Florin and Bishop Rhoades helped give two awards to worthy recipients.

The St. Louise de Marillac Award for Outstanding Service to Catholic Charities honors volunteers whose generosity of spirit inspires others, transforming local communities through love, hope, and service. The award was presented to the retired senior volunteers in the four counties of DeKalb, Steuben, Noble, and LaGrange. Last year alone, these volunteers gave 22,292 hours of service back to the community.



Father Jay Horning, pastor of St. Bernard Parish in Wabash, throws gold coins during a live auction at the second annual Sláinte celebration for Catholic Charities on Saturday, March 14, at the Parkview Mirro Center in Fort Wayne.

Photos by Scott Warden

Mother Teresa Award for Philanthropic Support, which honors an extraordinary donor or foundation whose generosity has profoundly advanced the mission of Catholic Charities in serving all those in need, was awarded to the Foellinger Foundation.

“Time and time again, the Foellinger Foundation has risen to the call – not only for Catholic Charities but for missions and ministries across Allen County,” Bishop Rhoades said. “When there is a need, they respond. When organizations seek to grow their impact, they invest thoughtfully and strategically. Their philanthropy is not only generous, it is transformational.”

In his short remarks, Bishop

Rhoades told the Sláinte crowd that seeing so many people come to support the work of Catholic Charities “is really a joy for me because I’m so proud of Catholic Charities in our diocese. I wish more people knew about the wonderful services and what we are doing as the Catholic Church in northeast Indiana. And events like this help to spread the message. So, I encourage all of you to share the news of what the Church is doing through Catholic Charities to serve the needy and the vulnerable among us. I’m very grateful to all of you who come here tonight.”

Bishop Rhoades noted that “our love for God is inseparable

from our love for our neighbor. Catholic Charities is one of the most visible ways that our diocese lives out that command. ... This is not simply social work; this is the Church’s mission in action. It is Catholic social teaching lived concretely, not just in theory but in practice, in reality, affirming the dignity of the human person, the importance of solidarity, and our responsibility to care for the poor and the vulnerable.”

To learn more about the work of Catholic Charities, or to donate, visit ccfwsb.org.

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



Bishop Rhoades congratulates Catholic Charities volunteers who were given the St. Louise de Marillac Award for Outstanding Service to Catholic Charities during the Sláinte fundraising event on Saturday, March 14, in Fort Wayne.



Father Andrew Budzinski, who dressed up as a leprechaun to raise money for Catholic Charities during last year's Sláinte event, passes his shillelagh to Father Jay Horning, who served as emcee on Saturday, March 14.