

## Community Spirit Helps St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School Thrive



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

**Bishop Rhoades  
 Makes Pastoral  
 Visit to Bishop  
 Dwenger**

PAGES 8-9

**The Church's  
 Efforts to Stop  
 Child Abuse**

PAGE 2

**2 Priests  
 Ordained for  
 Congregation  
 of Holy Cross**

PAGE 4



Bethany Beebe

**Bishop Rhoades poses with students in the pre-kindergarten classroom at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School during his pastoral visit on Thursday, April 9. In preparation for his visit, mitres matching one worn by Bishop Rhoades were prepared for each student in the class to wear.**

BY BETHANY BEEBE

Pope St. John Paul II, paraphrasing St. Augustine, famously said, “We are an Easter people, and Alleluia is our song.”

Bishop Rhoades shared in that Easter joy as he celebrated Mass on the fifth day of the Octave of Easter during a pastoral visit to

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School on Thursday, April 9.

Pointing to the painted image on the wall behind the altar that recounts the crucifixion of Jesus, Bishop Rhoades reminded those present that death was not the end of the story.

“On Sunday,” he said, “we celebrated the resurrection of Our

Lord, the great event of Easter. The Church celebrates Our Lord’s resurrection not only on Easter Sunday but for eight days, which we call the Octave of Easter. During these eight days, at every Mass, we hear about appearances of the risen Jesus.”

During Christ’s visits to the disciples and others, and as a re-

curing theme in His ministry, He wanted to share peace with those who saw Him after Easter — and with us today, Bishop Rhoades said.

“Do you know what the first thing he said to them was?” Bishop Rhoades asked the students at

**ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON, page 10**

## Catholic Educators Honored for Forming Faith Amid Modern Challenges

BY TIM JOHNSON

Twenty-three Catholic educators from the Fort Wayne region of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend were honored on Tuesday, April 7, at the annual You Can Lend a Hand luncheon at the Grand Wayne Center in Fort Wayne, a celebration not only of teaching excellence but of a deeper mission: forming students in faith in an increasingly complex

world. Quality Dining hosts the luncheons.

The event, now in its 44th year, brings together educators, administrators, pastors and supporters of Catholic schools while also raising funds to support school needs across the diocese. Participating schools sold You Can Lend a Hand coupons to Quality Dining Inc. restaurants to financially support

**EDUCATORS, page 16**



Tim Johnson

**Students from St. John the Baptist School in New Haven perform songs from “Beauty and the Beast” during the You Can Lend a Hand Lunch in Fort Wayne.**

TODAY'S  
CATHOLIC

(ISSN 0891-1533)  
(USPS 403630)

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

**Publisher**

Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades

**Secretary for Communications**

Emily Mentock

**Editorial Department**

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Scott Warden

PAGE DESIGNER: Chelsea Alt

**Business Department**

BOOKKEEPING/CIRCULATION:

circulation@diocesefwsb.org

ADVERTISING ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE:

Erika Barron: ebarron@diocesefwsb.org

Website: [todayscatholic.org](http://todayscatholic.org)

260-456-2824

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

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

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

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

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

**Today's Catholic may be reached at:**

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



The  
Diocese of  
Fort Wayne-South Bend

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

**Find us on Facebook**  
[facebook.com/todayscatholicFWSB](https://facebook.com/todayscatholicFWSB)

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

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

# Establishing the Vanguard in Child Protection: The Catholic Church Today

BY TODAY'S CATHOLIC

The tragedy that is child abuse has been a part of human existence longer than anyone wants to think. It inflicts the deepest of wounds, including the severing of a young person's faith in God, in adults and in the institutions that exist to protect them. Child abuse, including sexual abuse, occurs worldwide, across generations and cultures and has made itself present even in Christ's church.

Jesuit Father Hans Zollner consults on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons to the Diocese of Rome and the Dicastery for Clergy and has been on the front lines of safeguarding children in more than 80 countries. Last May, Father Zollner reminded a room full of diocesan Safe Environment and victim assistance coordinators that keeping children safe is more than the obligation of Church clergy, lay staff and volunteers: It is part and parcel of the Gospel.

The global Church is a leader today in safeguarding the youngest followers of Christ, he noted, although "we don't do well dealing with the past."

The path toward both acknowledging past harm and improving child protection began in 2002, when a vision of the Catholic Church became to eradicate child sexual abuse by clergy and religious from all its institutions and ensure that the Church's evangelizing focus is accompanied by the promise of personal safety for children and vulnerable adults. The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young Adults, which was approved and implemented that year, put forward as its premise that no form of child abuse should be perpetrated, encouraged, accepted or overlooked by anyone carrying out the Church's mission.

The charter set forth essential norms for diocesan policies dealing with allegations of sexual abuse of minors by priests or deacons. It has undergone several revisions since its inception almost 25 years ago, but the guiding principle has stayed the same: to acknowledge past mistakes and affirm a "deep commitment to sustain and strengthen a safe environment within the Church for children and youth," as well as promote



Scott Warden

healing and reconciliation among victim-survivors.

At the diocesan level, that has taken the form of a robust and strict Safe Environment policy. Last year, that policy saw 16,941 children receive Safe Environment training, 13,991 adults receive training in child protection and more than 12,000 parish and school and diocesan employees and lay volunteers submit to background checks meant to prevent those with child abuse and other criminal charges from interacting with minors in the Catholic environment.

In the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend's Office of Human Resources, Brandy Scrogam is the diocesan Safe Environment coordinator. She is responsible for the implementation of Safe Environment policies, collaborates on an annual diocesan audit and conducts parish and school Safe Environment audits. She is in regular communication with other Safe Environment coordinators across the country to ensure that the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend is implementing best practices with its Safe Environment program. Babette Zielinski, the database coordinator, works closely with parish Safe Environment coordinators to maintain the accuracy of the database and conducts parish and school audits.

"Our pastors are so supportive in implementing our diocesan policies and the safeguards we have in place for the protection of our children and young people," Scrogam said.

Safe Environment begins at the parish and school level, and

each parish and school have a Safe Environment coordinator. According to Zielinski, "The Safe Environment coordinators work diligently to ensure that every employee and volunteer who encounters our children and young people have completed all Safe Environment requirements."

Compared to the days in which this safeguarding focus was not in place, and due to the intense diligence with which the Safe Environment program has been implemented within the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, far fewer survivors of child sexual abuse by representatives of the Church are coming forward today. However, the Church's responsibility to accompany and support victim-survivors means that the diocese continues to offer the assistance of Victim Assistance Coordinator Jodi Marlin, because "every instance of abuse perpetrated by clergy or religious is egregious," Marlin said. "Anyone who has been harmed deserves credibility, compassion and justice as they try to reconcile what happened to them with the existence of a loving God and a Savior who gave His life for them," Marlin added. Different resources are available to help victim-survivors navigate an adulthood colored by past abuse.

Today, more instances of child abuse and child sexual abuse and exploitation involve lay parish or school staff than members of the clergy. Also prevalent is abuse perpetrated by school classmates or friends of young people, even those who attend Catholic

schools. Policies in place at both the school and diocesan level aim to make the expectations of students clear – as well as the repercussions for crossing ethical boundaries. While those landscapes and the Church's response to them evolve, no instance of sexual abuse of a young person goes unaddressed.

While Marlin is available for situations of abuse involving children and clergy, Mary Glowaski, assistant to Bishop Rhoades in pastoral care, mediates in situations of abuse and misconduct involving schools, adults and lay ministers of the diocese. Her pastoral work is focused on walking with those involved anytime harm has been caused, in any way, in the Church.

"Bishop Rhoades takes very seriously any report of abuse or misconduct by any representative of the Church and has a steadfast commitment to transparency and to the protection of the young and vulnerable," Glowaski said. "He is dedicated to admitting the past and helping victims heal and be reconciled."

Glowaski said she is grateful for the commitment of Bishop Rhoades, Scrogam, Marlin and all of the Safe Environment team to creating a safe and caring environment for everyone in the Church. The Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend is unique, she said, "in having a team that works together and complements each other in this way and is so committed to fulfilling every facet of security and protection. This collaboration serves the whole Church."

# Pope Decries Horror, Inhumanity of War at Prayer Vigil for Peace



CNS photo/Vatican Media

**Pope Leo XIV watches as the faithful, wearing clothing representing nations in the Americas, light a lamp below a statue of Our Lady Queen of Peace in St. Peter's Basilica on Saturday, April 11, during a prayer vigil and the recitation of the Rosary for peace.**

BY CAROL GLATZ

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Warning against an increasingly unpredictable and aggressive “delusion of omnipotence” threatening the globe, Pope Leo XIV called on world leaders and individuals to empty their hearts and minds of hatred and violence and to start serving life.

“Enough of the idolatry of self and money! Enough of the display of power! Enough of war! True strength is shown in serving life,” Pope Leo said during a special evening prayer vigil for peace in St. Peter's Basilica on Saturday, April 11.

“Those who pray are aware of their own limitations; they do not kill or threaten with death,” he said. “Instead, death enslaves those who have turned their backs on the living God, turning themselves and their own power into a mute, blind and deaf idol, to which they sacrifice every value, demanding that the whole world bend its knee.”

“Let us listen to the voices of children,” who write to him all the time, recounting “all the horror and inhumanity of actions that some adults boast of with pride,” he said.

The vigil, which drew thousands of people inside and outside the basilica, featured the recitation of the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary. Before each mystery was recited, women wearing traditional dress from countries representing the different continents of the world lit small lamps from a flame

from the Lamp of Peace from Assisi that was placed below a statue of Our Lady Queen of Peace.

Prayer can move mountains, Pope Leo said in his remarks in Italian. “War divides; hope unites. Arrogance tramples upon others; love lifts up. Idolatry blinds us; the living God enlightens.”

With the help of prayer and God, people can help “break the demonic cycle of evil” and be at the service of the Kingdom of God, where there is “no sword, no drone, no vengeance, no trivialization of evil, no unjust profit, but only dignity, understanding and forgiveness,” Pope Leo said.

“It is here that we find a bulwark against that delusion of omnipotence that surrounds us and is becoming increasingly unpredictable and aggressive,” he added.

Speaking to the world's leaders, the pope said, “Stop! It is time for peace! Sit at the table of dialogue and mediation, not at the table where rearmament is planned, and deadly actions are decided!”

However, all the world's people also have a duty to reject the violence in their own hearts and minds and help build a kingdom of peace each and every day in one's own home, school and community, he said.

“Let us believe once again in love, moderation and good politics,” he said, urging people to learn more and “get personally involved” in being part of “the mosaic of peace!”

“Dear brothers and sisters, let us return home having made a commitment to pray without

ceasing and without growing weary, a commitment to a profound conversion of heart,” the pope said.

In Washington, D.C., Cardinal Robert W. McElroy, the archbishop of Washington, decried the U.S. conflict with Iran as “an immoral war” during a vigil Mass for peace at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle on April 11, as he urged people to pray for peace and advocate with their government leaders and representatives for an end to that war.

“Pope Leo has made it totally clear that the only pathway which Catholic teaching allows at this moment is the permanent cessation of hostilities and vigorous steps to build up the conditions for a lasting peace,” the cardinal said in his homily.

In his homily at the vigil Mass for peace, Cardinal McElroy said, “We desperately ask our God, the Prince of Peace, to open the minds and hearts of all those in positions of power to look beyond their own interests and to see in its fullness the well-being of all those ensnared in this bitter and needless conflict.”

Concluding his homily, Cardinal McElroy issued an impassioned plea for an end to the war against Iran, saying, “At that critical juncture, as disciples of Jesus Christ called to be peacemakers in the world, we must answer vocally and in unison: No. Not in our name. Not at this moment. Not with our country.”

OSV News contributed to this report.



PUBLIC SCHEDULE OF  
BISHOP KEVIN C. RHOADES

*Veritatem In Caritate*  
(Truth in Charity)

- ◆ **Monday, April 20, at 5:30 p.m.** – Meeting of Board of Directors of Catholic Cemetery Association, Divine Mercy Funeral Home, Fort Wayne
- ◆ **Tuesday, April 21, at 8:30 a.m.** – Mass and Pastoral Visit, St. Joseph School, Garrett
- ◆ **Wednesday, April 22, at 10:30 a.m.** – Presbyterate Meeting, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Warsaw
- ◆ **Wednesday, April 22, at 7:30 p.m.** – Mass, Chapel of the Holy Spirit, Our Lady of the Road, South Bend
- ◆ **Thursday, April 23, at 8 a.m.** – Mass and Pastoral Visit, Corpus Christi School, South Bend
- ◆ **Friday, April 24, at 11:30 a.m.** – “You Can Lend A Hand” Luncheon, Century Center, South Bend
- ◆ **Friday, April 24, at 7 p.m.** – Confirmation Mass, Culver Academies Memorial Chapel, Culver
- ◆ **Saturday, April 25, at 10 a.m.** – Confirmation Mass, St. Michael Church, Plymouth
- ◆ **Saturday, April 25, at 7 p.m.** – Luers Knight, Bishop Luers High School, Fort Wayne
- ◆ **Sunday, April 26, at noon** – Confirmation Mass with Rite of Full Communion, Basilica of the Sacred Heart, University of Notre Dame
- ◆ **Sunday, April 26, at 7 p.m.** – Confirmation Mass, Holy Spirit Chapel, Le Mans Hall, Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame



## Priest Assignment

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

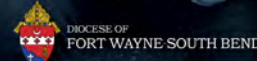
- ◆ **Reverend Bonaventure Nwosu**, to Administrator, St. Patrick Parish, Arcola, while continuing as a judge of the diocesan tribunal.

*The Protection of Children  
is Everyone's Responsibility.*



**Take one step to learn how to protect children and youth in our communities.**

Find resources at  
[diocesefwsb.org/prevent-child-abuse](https://diocesefwsb.org/prevent-child-abuse)



# Two Priests Ordained with Congregation of Holy Cross

BY LISA KOCHANOWSKI

It was an afternoon of joy, reverence and celebration on Saturday, April 11, at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart on the campus of the University of Notre Dame. Bishop Patrick M. Neary, C.S.C., of the Diocese of St. Cloud, Minnesota, conferred the Order of the Presbyter through the ancient Christian sign of the laying on of hands and the prayer of the Church to Father Thomas James "T.J." Groden, C.S.C., and Father Christopher Nicholas Mulholland, C.S.C.

"T.J. and Chris are generous and compassionate men whose lives already reflect the heart of Christ in service to others," said Holy Cross Provincial Superior Father William M. Lies. "In these somewhat uncertain times, their witness gives us hope. We are grateful to welcome them into the brotherhood of the Congregation of Holy Cross and confident that their faith, humility and zeal will help make God known, loved and served wherever they are sent."

At the beginning of the ordination Mass, Bishop Neary said: "This is a beautiful day, not only in nature but especially in this holy place, this basilica. Today our joy is increased because we are here to ordain two of our brothers in Holy Cross to the priesthood, and you have come from near and far to be here today."

He continued, saying, "We pray in a special way that they can be filled with the joy of Christ, come to His Sacred Heart, and through their witness and through their preaching, and through their teaching, and through their administering the sacraments of the Church, they can draw many more people to the light and love of Christ and to His Sacred Heart."

## Affirmation Presentation

In the Congregation of Holy Cross, the provincial superior — Father Lies, in this case — presents the men to the ordaining bishop and also invites each man to have a layperson present on their behalf.

University of Notre Dame student Peter Verges, a member of Baumer Hall, where Father Groden served as rector, shared a testimony on behalf of the men of the dormitory.

"Deacon T.J., since his arrival in the fall, has embodied a

Christlike concern for others," Verges said. "From meals in his room to intentional conversations ... his presence and his laugh are both very powerful. Through these ways and more, including the hours he dedicates to the administration of Baumer, ensuring the best possible experience for us, Deacon T.J. places others above himself. Baumer residents described T.J. as selfless, a welcoming force of encouragement and love, and a father figure," shared Verges. "In his preaching, Deacon T.J. has led our community to see the living God in our lives. He routinely reminds us that God can do marvels."

Olivia Kraft, a parishioner of St. Ignatius Martyr Catholic Church in Austin, Texas, presented on behalf of Father Mulholland.

"Deacon Chris both teaches and lives the word in his everyday life," Kraft said. "We've definitely put him to work in just about every ministry of our church that fits into his schedule — and a few that don't. Through these ministries, he had told me he has seen people at every stage and phase of their life. He's seen the joy and the grief that comes with every part of life, and what makes him so special and so set apart by God is the incredible grace he navigates it with. He always has boundless energy and a smile to offer anyone. His homilies always feel kind of like God told him my business, and I'm always sitting there being like, how did he know?"

## Newly Ordained

Father Groden, from Glenview, Illinois, is the youngest of three children of the late Louis and the late Susan Groden. His home parish is Our Lady of Perpetual Help, located in the Archdiocese of Chicago. While at the University of Notre Dame, he earned a bachelor of business administration and undergraduate degrees in finance and medieval studies, as well as master's degrees in education and divinity.

While in formation, he served as assistant rector in Dillon Hall at Notre Dame; served at Our Lady of the Road in South Bend; supported Notre Dame's Campus Ministry Short Course (OCIA) program; provided chaplaincy care at Elkhart General Hospital in Elkhart; and led youth ministry at St. Joseph Parish in South Bend. His sum-



Photos by Lisa Kochanowski

The men of Baumer Hall at the University of Notre Dame pose for a group photo with their rector, newly ordained Holy Cross Father T.J. Groden, following the ordination Mass at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in South Bend on Saturday, April 11.



Holy Cross Father Christopher Mulholland, right, hugs Holy Cross Father John Dougherty after being vested by him. Father Dougherty is pastor of St. Ignatius Martyr Church in Austin, Texas, where Father Mulholland served this past year.

mer placements included parish ministry in Jalchatra, Bangladesh; Spanish language study in Puebla, Mexico; an internship with University Relations at the University of Portland; service at My Brother's Keeper in Easton, Massachusetts; and pastoral ministry at Christ the King Parish in South Bend. Following his final vows, he has served as rector of Baumer Hall.

"As a priest, I hope to be a faithful steward of God's mysteries and a generous and zealous worker in the Lord's vineyard," Father Groden said. "In the words of Father Jacques Dujarié, the founder of the Brothers of St. Joseph, 'I am a priest to be the consolation of the widow, the father of the orphan, the support of the poor, and the friend of those who suffer.' In Holy Cross,

we stand with Our Lady of Sorrows at the foot of the cross and help those entrusted to our care to bear the crosses of their lives."

Father Mulholland, from Atchison, Kansas, is the second of six children of Edward and Valerie Mulholland. His home parish is St. Benedict, located in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas. Studies at the University of Notre Dame earned him a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering and an M.Div. degree.

During formation, he assisted with religious education at St. Mark Parish in Niles, Michigan; volunteered with Catholic Charities and the Marian House in Colorado Springs, Colorado, with a winter placement at St. Ignatius Martyr Parish in Austin, Texas; served in youth

ministry at St. Adalbert Parish in South Bend, where he assisted with the Spanish language Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA); provided pastoral care through Campus Ministry at the University of Notre Dame; and served as the assistant director of Old College, the Congregation's undergraduate seminary. Following final vows, he has served at St. Ignatius Martyr Parish.

"I tell the couples I have been preparing for marriage, 'This is a big year for both of us!' ... I can only pray that the graces packed into this weekend will remain with me so I can continue to examine them one by one for years to come," Father Mulholland said. "As a priest, I hope to go where Christ sends me and to let His life grow in me. 'Let them see you, Lord' is what I pray."

# 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.

# Dwenger Senior Wears His Faith on His Sleeve

## As a Designer, Max Stefanek Evangelizes Through His Own Clothing Line

BY ELLA ALVARADO

Bishop Dwenger senior Max Stefanek has found a unique and creative way to share his Catholic faith. Stefanek designs clothing that encourages students to talk more openly about their faith and what it means to them.

"I love spreading my faith, and clothing is an easy way to start conversations about Christ," he explained.

Stefanek's favorite design is the T-shirt that says, "Jesus Wept — John 11:35" — the shortest verse in the Bible — which carries a powerful reminder of Jesus' humanity and compassion.

His journey into faith-based content creation began two years ago, and he began making clothes, he said, about a year later.

Support for his brand, Set a Fire ([setafire.net](http://setafire.net)), quickly spread among classmates. His best friend, senior Eddie Miller, owns one of Max's shirts. "It says 'Trust God' with a cross on the back," Miller said.

But for him, Stefanek models something more important than just his clothing.

"He is a great influence, and I know he's super close to God, and it helps me get closer with God because he is one of my best friends," Miller said.

Miller said he helps Stefanek by taking photos for the brand's social media pages.

"I know Max through football, and he has great leadership," said sophomore Joey Ley, who said he owns one of Stefanek's "Jesus Wept" T-shirts.

Amy Stefanek, Max's mom and the administrative assistant for Bishop Dwenger's guidance department, has watched her son's passion develop from the beginning.

She said she admires "his faith, his love of God and his way of promoting it to others."

Her favorite piece he has made is a black "Christ Is King" sweatshirt, a design that has become one of the brand's most recognizable items.



Photos provided by Max Stefanek, Bishop Dwenger High School

Outside of his clothing line, Stefanek plays baseball and football for the Saints. His strong work ethic shows on and off the field, as he balances sports, school, and his brand with determination.

Stefanek's football and baseball coach, Jason Garrett, sees the same consistency in him on the field that others see in his clothing.

"Max lives his faith by example," Garrett said, stating that Stefanek's attitude and work ethic stand out during practices and games.

Garrett's favorite design from Stefanek's brand is the "Jesus Won" T-shirt, a piece Stefanek helped him create for the 2026 youth baseball camp.

"He is our catcher, and he exemplifies what it means to be a team player. He plays hard at every game," Garrett added.

To him, Stefanek's dedication to sports and his commitment to his faith come from the same place: a desire to do

things with purpose.

Next year, Stefanek said he plans to attend Indiana University in Bloomington, where he hopes to continue growing academically and creatively.

Looking ahead, Max dreams of expanding his brand and building a larger online presence.

"In my future, I would love to continue to sell clothes with my brand and continue to make content on YouTube and TikTok," Stefanek said. "Being a content creator would definitely be my dream job. I love doing this stuff, and doing it as a job would be amazing," he added.

What began as a simple act of faith has become something much bigger — a spark that inspires others, encourages conversations and reflects the power of sharing what you believe.

*Ella Alvarado is a freshman at Bishop Dwenger High School.*



## Pope Leo, USCCB President Respond to Trump's Social Media Attack

ABOARD THE PAPAL FLIGHT TO ALGIERS (OSV News) — Pope Leo XIV said on Monday, April 13, he has “no fear” of President Donald Trump’s administration and responded to criticism by emphasizing peace, telling journalists his message is “the message of the Gospel: Blessed are the peacemakers.” Speaking aboard the papal plane from Rome to Algiers, the pope said he saw Trump’s social media posts criticizing him as “weak on crime” and “terrible for foreign policy.” Pope Leo said during the flight, “I have no fear neither of the Trump administration nor speaking out loudly of the message of the Gospel, which is what I believe I am here to do, what the Church is here to do. We are not politicians,” Pope Leo added, stressing, “I don’t want to get into debate with him.” The pope reiterated his opposition to war, saying, “Too many people are suffering in the world today.” Trump, meanwhile, said he did not want “a Pope who thinks it’s OK for Iran to have a Nuclear Weapon.” Archbishop Paul S. Coakley, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said he was “disheartened” by Trump’s remarks, adding, “Pope Leo is not his rival.”

## Vatican: Report that Pentagon Officials Lectured Ambassador ‘Completely Untrue’

ROME (OSV News) — The Holy See Press Office issued a statement on Friday, April 10, disputing a report by The Free Press several days earlier that the Vatican’s top diplomat in the U.S. was brought to the Pentagon in January for a “bitter lecture” about comments from Pope Leo XIV that some senior U.S. defense officials perceived as criticism of the Trump administration. “The narrative offered by some media outlets about this meeting is completely untrue,” the Vatican press office statement said. It said that Cardinal Christophe Pierre, the former papal ambassador to the U.S. who retired in March after reaching 80, “confirmed” that his January 22 meeting with Eldridge Colby, U.S. undersecretary of war for policy, at the Pentagon “was part of the papal representative’s regular mission and provided the opportunity for an exchange of views on matters of mutual interest.” A day before the Holy See Press Office’s statement, both the U.S. War Department, a moniker for the Department of Defense, and Vatican Embassy in Washington issued their own written statements to OSV News disputing The Free

# NEWS BRIEFS

## POPE LEO ARRIVES IN ALGERIA TO BEGIN 11-DAY AFRICAN JOURNEY



OSV News photo/Simone Risoluti, Vatican Media

Pope Leo XIV is greeted by an Algerian girl with flowers upon arrival at Houari Boumediene International Airport in Dar El Beida district in Algiers, Algeria, on Monday, April 13, to begin his apostolic journey to Algeria, Angola, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. Pope Leo is the first pope to make an apostolic visit to the nation as he began an 11-day, four-country trip across Africa. Speaking to journalists on the flight to Algiers, Pope Leo revealed that his trip to Africa was “meant to be the first trip of the pontificate. ... Last year, in May, I said, ‘On my first trip, I would like to travel to Africa.’” The visit marks a historic moment in a country that is overwhelmingly Muslim, with a small Catholic community of fewer than 9,000 faithful. The 70-year-old pope will travel more than 11,000 miles across four nations, delivering speeches in French, English, Portuguese and Spanish, and focusing on dialogue and peace.

Press’s characterization of the meeting and emphasizing their gratitude to have the opportunity to meet and dialogue about areas of mutual concern.

## Olympic, Paralympic Athletes Meet Pope Leo

ROME (OSV News) — Pope Leo XIV met Olympic and Paralympic athletes from the 2026 Milan Cortina Winter Olympics on Thursday, April 9, praising sport as a path to humility, resilience and peace. Italian figure skater Daniel Grassl called the encounter a “dream,” saying his Catholic faith made meeting the pope especially meaningful. He highlighted Pope Leo’s message: in loss, never lose yourself; in victory, remain humble. Addressing roughly 300 athletes, the pope said no one wins alone and described sport as “language” of sacrifice, discipline and new beginnings. Pope Leo also urged athletes to promote peace, recalling the Olympic truce and call-

ing sport a space for encounter in a divided world. “I wanted to recall, on the occasion of these Games, the value of the Olympic truce. With your presence, you have made visible this possibility of peace as a prophecy that is by no means rhetorical: breaking the logic of violence to promote that of encounter,” the pope said.

## Planned Parenthood Shows Abortions, Taxpayer Funding Rise

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) — Planned Parenthood’s new 2024-25 annual report showed an increase in abortions from the previous year’s report, while also showing an increase in government funding. At the same time, it showed a decrease in cancer screenings and prevention services. The organization’s latest annual report reflects its fiscal year as of June 30, 2025, just a few days before President Donald Trump signed the One Big Beautiful Bill Act into law on July 4. That legislation also included a provision eliminating funds to health pro-

viders who also perform abortions — but just for one year. The report showed Planned Parenthood, the nation’s largest abortion provider, performed 434,450 abortions, an increase of more than 32,200, or 8 percent, from the previous year’s report. Planned Parenthood reported \$832 million in “Government Health Services Reimbursements and Grants,” an increase of about \$39.8 million from the previous year’s report. Meanwhile, Planned Parenthood reported 389,449 total cancer screening and prevention services — such as pap tests and HPV vaccinations — a decrease from 426,268 the previous year. Tessa Cox, senior research associate at the Charlotte Lozier Institute, the research arm of Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, said in a statement that women deserve better alternatives to Planned Parenthood. “Yet again, abortions performed by Planned Parenthood hit a record high, demonstrating that abortion remains a top priority for the organization,” she said.

## Bishop Cozzens in NCEA Keynote: Educators Must Help Heal the Human Heart

MINNEAPOLIS (OSV News) — The heart “is the place where our deepest longings live, our deepest hopes live, and also our deepest fears,” Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minnesota, said on Tuesday, April 7, in a keynote opening the National Catholic Educational Association convention. But too many people have wounded hearts, and it is the job of Catholic educators to help heal them, he said. NCEA 2026 marked the first time in 17 years the conference was held in Minneapolis and drew 3,800 Catholic and religious educators from around the country to the convention center April 7-9 to exchange ideas and research related to education. Artificial intelligence can’t help heal the human heart, and neither can technology, popular culture or politics Bishop Cozzens said. He outlined three practical steps to teach young people that might lead to the healing of their hearts: to understand that hearts are broken; to open young people to the truth that love can heal their hearts; and to teach that “when their hearts are healed, they’ll find joy in making a gift of themselves.”

## U.S. Bishop Express ‘Grave Concern’ Over ICE Treatment of Pregnant Women

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) — Two U.S. bishops have advised the new head of the Department of Homeland Security of their “grave concern” over the treatment of pregnant women in immigration detention. “There are increasing numbers of alarming reports of pregnant mothers not getting the medical care they need ... tragically resulting in miscarriage in some cases, as well as reports of nursing mothers being separated from their babies when detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement,” wrote Bishop Daniel E. Thomas of Toledo, Ohio, and Bishop Brendan J. Cahill of Victoria, Texas, in an April 13 letter addressed to DHS Secretary Markwayne Mullin. The two prelates, who respectively chair the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities and Committee on Migration, urged ICE “to abide consistently” by an existing directive to avoid arresting and detaining pregnant women aside from “exceptional circumstances,” such as national security or imminent threat of harm. “No matter one’s immigration status, there is no overarching justification for separating nursing infants from their mothers or endangering the health and safety of pregnant women or their preborn babies,” they said.



# Pastoral Visit Highlights Faith, Leadership at Dwenger

BY TIM JOHNSON

Students at Bishop Dwenger High School in Fort Wayne gathered as a school community for Mass and a day of encounter during a pastoral visit from Bishop Rhoades, an experience that highlighted the role of Catholic education in forming young people in faith, leadership and service.

Originally scheduled earlier in the winter, the visit was postponed due to a snow day and rescheduled during the Easter season — a fitting time, Bishop Rhoades noted, to reflect on the meaning of Christ's resurrection and its impact on daily life.

"It's great to be with you during this octave of Easter," Bishop Rhoades told students during his visit on Friday, April 10. "We continue to celebrate the glorious resurrection of Our Lord and the new life we have received through Him."

The all-school Mass, celebrated in the gym, brought together students, faculty, staff and friends in a shared moment of prayer that reflected the school's Catholic identity.

## Forming 'Citizens of Two Worlds'

Principal Jason Schiffli said the bishop's visit affirms a mission that is lived out daily at Bishop Dwenger.

"We want to form students as citizens of two worlds," Schiffli said — prepared for success in this life while also growing in faith with the ultimate goal of sainthood. That formation,

## BISHOP DWENGER HIGH SCHOOL

Address: 300 E. Washington Center Rd., Fort Wayne  
Phone number: 260-496-4700  
Website: bishopdwenger.com  
Principal: Jason Schiffli  
Founded: 1963  
Number of students: 925  
Nickname: Saints

he explained, is rooted in the school's four pillars: academics, spirituality, service and activity.

"It's not just something we talk about," Schiffli said. "It's something we practice. Just like an athlete exercises to grow stronger, we want our students to exercise their faith and their virtues so they grow stronger spiritually."

Faith is visible throughout the school day — from prayer in classrooms to time spent in the chapel, where students and teachers alike regularly pause for reflection.

"You'll see classes go down to the chapel — not just theology classes but math, science, English — just to begin with prayer," Schiffli said. "That's heartwarming to see."

## Students Taking Ownership of Their Faith

Beyond structured opportunities, Schiffli said many students are taking initiative in living out their faith in ways that go beyond expectations.

"We're seeing students take



Photos provided by Bishop Dwenger High School

Bishop Rhoades participates in a class discussion during his pastoral visit to Bishop Dwenger High School on Friday, April 10.



Tim Johnson

Students sing in the choir during an all-school Mass at Bishop Dwenger.



Bishop Dwenger students give and receive Communion during Mass on Friday, April 10.



Bishop Rhoades preaches to students during Mass at Bishop Dwenger High School.

BISHOP DWENGER, page 9



Tim Johnson

Members of Bishop Dwenger's football team, which had recently received their state championship rings, talk with Bishop Rhoades during his pastoral visit to the school on Friday, April 10.

**BISHOP DWENGER, from page 8**

ownership," he said. "They're starting clubs, organizing opportunities for prayer, inviting others to be part of it. It's very genuine."

One example is a student-led praise and worship group that meets weekly in the chapel.

"They came to us and asked to start it," Schiffli said. "Now you'll see 40 or 50 students there in the morning, leading music, praying together. It's something they wanted — it's grassroots."

That desire for authenticity, he said, is shaping the spiritual culture of the school.

"They want something real," Schiffli said. "They want the fullness of the Catholic faith — and they're seeking it out."

**Faith at a Critical Stage**

For the school's chaplains, the high school years represent an important moment of decision in a student's faith life.

"I think what many students are wrestling with is whether the faith they've been given is something they will take as their own," said Father Bobby Krisch, one of the school's chaplains. "They're asking, 'Is this something I believe? Is this something I'm going to carry forward?'"

Father Caleb Kruse, who also serves as a chaplain at Bishop Dwenger, said students approach that question in different ways but often share a common desire.

"They have a real desire for something greater — for truth, for love, for what the Gospel offers," he said. "Some are very on fire, some are curious, but that desire is there."

Both chaplains emphasized the importance of presence — meeting students where they are in daily life.

"It's about showing up," Father Krisch said. "Being at their games, in the hallways, offering the sacraments — letting them know you care. That opens the door for deeper conversations."

**Sacramental Life at Bishop Dwenger**

One of the most visible signs of faith at Bishop Dwenger, the chaplains said, is students' participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

"The confession lines are strong," Father Kruse said. "Students are humble and bold about going — and even asking for confession when it's not a scheduled time."

That desire for the sacraments reflects a deeper encounter with Christ.

"There are students who can say, 'I've encountered Jesus, and I'm trying to follow Him,'" Father Kruse said. "That's where we really see faith come alive."

Bishop Dwenger has also been a strong source of priestly vocations for the diocese in recent years, with several alumni currently in seminary or ordained to the priesthood. Among them is Father Kruse, a graduate of the school.

Students also participate actively in the life of the Church — serving at Mass, attending daily liturgies and engaging in parish youth groups and retreats.

**A Day of Encounter**

Following Mass, Bishop

Rhoades visited classrooms, shared lunch with student council members and met with theology teachers.

In his homily at Mass, Bishop Rhoades reflected on the mystery of the Resurrection and its central importance to Christian life.

"If Christ has not been raised, our faith is in vain," he said, echoing St. Paul. "But because He has conquered death, we can live in hope."

At the conclusion of Mass, the bishop thanked the faculty and staff for their witness.

"It's because of you that Bishop Dwenger has such a strong reputation of excellence," Bishop Rhoades said. "Especially your commitment to the Catholic identity of the school."

**Hope for the Future**

For both the principal and chaplains, the visit served as a reminder of the strength of the school community — and the promise found in its students.

"These are really good students," Father Krisch said. "They have a strong foundation of faith, and they're taking it seriously. That gives me a lot of hope."

He added that students are not only the future of the Church but already an active part of it.

"They are the Church," he said. "Just a younger part of it."

As students returned to their classrooms following the bishop's visit, that sense of purpose remained clear — a faith that is growing, personal and increasingly lived out in action.

Join us in welcoming two providers to our team!

Dr. Julie Funfrock, DO  
Cassie Herber, FNP-C

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

**CREDO**  
FAMILY MEDICINE

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

**FREE**  
*Self-guided financial education*

get started!

**Source St. Bank**  
Member FDIC

READ THE LATEST LOCAL CATHOLIC NEWS ONLINE AT  
**TODAYSCATHOLIC.ORG**



Photos by Bethany Beebe

Bishop Rhoades joins students on the floor and talks with them about saints during his April 9 pastoral visit to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School in Fort Wayne.

### ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON SCHOOL

Address: 10650 Aboite Center Rd., Fort Wayne  
Phone number: 260-432-4001  
Website: seascsfw.org  
Principal: Lois Widner  
Enrollment: 580  
Founded: 2015  
Nickname: Pioneers

#### ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON, from page 1

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School. “Peace be with you,’ because they were so agitated and so worried and so sad ... and Jesus wanted to give them peace. Peace be with you.”

Immediately making relevant to his modern audience how the invitation to peace is relevant, Bishop Rhoades asked how the disciples responded before an-

swering the question himself.

“Well, we hear in the Gospel they were startled,” he said. “Imagine someone you love had died, and they appeared. You’d be startled, right? You’d be shocked.”

Bishop Rhoades asked the students how the people who encountered Jesus might know He was really alive and not a ghost. Responding to a student who raised her hand with the answer, he drew the students in by repeating her response.

“They could see the wounds of Jesus! A ghost doesn’t have this,” Bishop Rhoades said. “As if that wasn’t enough, He said, ‘Touch my body; it is real! I am not a ghost!’ And then they were filled with joy!”

The day’s Gospel reading from Luke said, “While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed, He asked them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave Him a piece of baked fish; He took it and ate it in front of them.”

Bishop Rhoades said Jesus ate not because He was hungry but because it proved the reality of His physical existence, albeit different because it is a risen body that will never again feel pain, hunger, or thirst.

Bishop Rhoades also said those who live for Christ in this life will someday have risen bodies, as “Jesus promised that we will rise again like He did, so that means we will have bodies like that someday. ... And our bodies will be perfect; they will never suffer anymore. ... So that is our great hope.”

While the hope described during the Mass by Bishop Rhoades is eternal, those involved with the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School share a great deal of hope for the future, too, in the positive culture embodied in the school community.

“I think the primary reason we are successful is ... the commitment of both parents and staff ... to their faith and to their children/students,” said Father Terry Coonan, pastor of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. “They give time, talent, treasure to the cause of Catholic education, and it bears fruit. Our school helps create a tight-knit community that can be a haven for the parish community, helping families to feel more deeply connected with the parish. The parish supports the school in making it so much easier to practice our faith than a stand-alone school.”

Parents who spoke to Today’s Catholic said the interactions of the priests are hard to miss.

“In addition to celebrating school Mass twice a week, they are often seen giving fist bumps and

ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON, page 11



Father Terry Coonan, pastor of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, and Father Jake Schneider, associate pastor, smile during Bishop Rhoades’ homily at the all-school Mass.



During his pastoral visit to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School on Thursday, April 9, Bishop Rhoades talks to middle school students in the school’s cafeteria.



Bishop Rhoades models the mitre from which those worn by the pre-K students was fashioned.

**ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON, from page 10**

high fives in the halls, skateboarding through the parking lot at recess, popping into sporting events and waving goodbye to the vehicles at dismissal," said Sarah Adams, school parent. "These everyday interactions make a lasting impression on our children and are truly beautiful to witness."

Parent involvement and support is a clear driver of the life of the school.

"Our staff, families and priests make St. E's what it is," said Chris Schuler, assistant principal.

"There is a true collaborative spirit within this campus. Everyone is so very willing to go above and beyond to help with whatever is needed. We have amazing priests who set aside time weekly to meet and talk with our students. Parents are willing to help with so many things around the school. Our teachers are so very

dedicated and talented and see teaching as a vocation and not just a job."

That collaborative nature of the school community was echoed by several who spoke to Today's Catholic.

"Faith is woven into every part of daily life at SEAS," Adams said. "From prayer and liturgy to the way students treat one another, it is clear that faith is not just taught but lived. Students are given many opportunities to grow in their relationship with God and to put their faith into action through service, kindness, and community involvement. Throughout the year, fundraisers support local Catholic organizations and charities. Many grade levels participate in community service projects within our community. Actively practicing the Catholic faith, both in and out of school, is part of the culture at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic School."

Teaching children that service is part of a lived faith begins early. Karen Tippmann's kindergarten class, for example, is preparing notes of encouragement for other students at the school taking the ILEARN tests. Parents shared candy, and the students are attaching it to notes created for their older peers.

Kate Spong, a second-grade teacher, seconded the notion of positive culture.

"The parents are our partners," she said. "I appreciate how I work with the parents, not around them. When that partnership works, your teaching becomes part of a bigger family mission."

The mission to form strong Christian students appears to be embodied in a group of students who care.

"I appreciate the eagerness of my students," Spong said. "They always are ready to lend a helping hand and let Jesus' light shine through them."

# DEO GRATIAS

THE CONGREGATION OF HOLY CROSS  
*celebrates the recent Ordination to the Priesthood of*

REV. THOMAS "T.J." GRODEN, C.S.C.  
& REV. CHRISTOPHER MULHOLLAND, C.S.C.



"I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you."

John 17:20-21

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN A LIFE OF SERVICE TO OTHERS  
AS A PRIEST OR BROTHER OF HOLY CROSS, VISIT [CSCVOCATIONS.ORG](http://CSCVOCATIONS.ORG)



[cscvocations.org](http://cscvocations.org)  
@cscvocations

ONCE YOU'VE READ  
**TODAY'S CATHOLIC**  
ENHANCE YOUR SPIRITUAL  
LIFE WITH ITEMS FROM

*Good Shepherd*  
BOOKS • GIFTS

**Print subscribers receive 30% OFF**  
**one regular-priced item**  
**\*20% on books, CDs & DVDs\***

Must present this original PRINT coupon at time of purchase

**Digital subscribers receive 20% off**  
**one regular-priced item**

Must show your digital copy of coupon at time of purchase.

Hours: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. M-F and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sat.  
LIMIT: one coupon per visit. Some restrictions apply.

EXPIRES 4/30/2026

[todayscatholic.org/subscribe](http://todayscatholic.org/subscribe)

[goodshepherdbookstore.org](http://goodshepherdbookstore.org)  
915 S. Clinton St., Fort Wayne | Free parking in the garage

# To Know Scripture Is to Know Christ



## INTO THE TRUTH

FATHER MARK HELLINGER

The wonderful Emmaus story, which is the Gospel reading for the Third Sunday of Easter in Year A, reminds us of a few essential points of faith. Of course, hearing this read at Sunday Mass on the Third Sunday might throw our internal timeline off a bit, as this encounter, Luke makes clear, happens on Easter Sunday itself. That is quite an important point, since Jesus breaks bread with them — meaning that the life of the Church in the light of the Resurrection has never gone a day without the gift of the Eucharist. Indeed, much ink has and should be spilled on the powerful realization of what it means that Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

But there is another aspect that sticks out, most especially in light of our cultural context and the need for evangelical renewal in our age. Luke tells us, “Then beginning with Moses

and all the prophets, He interpreted to them what referred to Him in all the Scriptures.” And later, he goes on: “Then they said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while He spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?’” This points to two worthwhile reflections. First, the importance of knowing the story of Scripture. Second, the proclamation of the Living Word as the basis of evangelization.

To the first point, it is a well-known trope — but likely not as true as people think — that Catholics do not “know the Scripture” as well as other Christians. There are, however, two different ways (at least) of “knowing” the Scripture. One is chapter-verse citation; the second is knowing the story. The Letter to the Hebrews provides, I propose, a good model for showing what is essential. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews often cites Scripture but sticks to the story over the exact citation (much like, “Somewhere it says ...”). In Jesus’ own example on the road to Emmaus, we see the indispensable way in which we must know Scripture — namely, by the story. We need to know the narrative of God’s works in

the world as well or better than we know our own family history, precisely because it is our real family history. Thus, in light of Easter, we do well to be renewed in our resolve to know Scripture better — but especially to know the narrative story.

To the second point, the way in which the disciples’ hearts were burning as

Jesus proclaimed Himself to them is a model of evangelization for us. Its starting point, of course, is knowing the story of the word, but there

is also a certain sacramentality the word of God has when proclaimed (above all in the liturgy). As Pope Benedict XVI noted in *Verbum Domini*: “The sacramental character of revelation points in turn to the history of salvation, to the way that word of God enters time and space, and speaks to men and women, who are called to accept His gift in faith. The sacramentality of the word can thus be understood by analogy with the real presence of Christ under the appearances of

the consecrated bread and wine. By approaching the altar and partaking in the Eucharistic banquet, we truly share in the body and blood of Christ. The proclamation of God’s word at the celebration entails an acknowledgment that Christ himself is present, that He speaks to us, and that He wishes to be heard. St. Jerome

speaks of the way we ought to approach both the Eucharist and the word of God: “We are reading the sacred Scriptures. For me, the Gospel is the Body of Christ; for me,

Our task from the Gospel is twofold: to know intimately the word of God and to be transformed by it — learning our story, the story of salvation.

the holy Scriptures are His teaching. And when He says, “Whoever does not eat my flesh and drink my blood” (Jn 6:53), even though these words can also be understood of the [Eucharistic] Mystery, Christ’s body and blood are really the word of Scripture, God’s teaching. When we approach the [Eucharistic] Mystery, if a crumb falls to the ground, we are troubled. Yet when we are listening to the word of God, and God’s word and Christ’s flesh and blood are being poured into

our ears yet we pay no heed, what great peril should we not feel?” Christ, truly present under the species of bread and wine, is analogously present in the word proclaimed in the liturgy. A deeper understanding of the sacramentality of God’s word can thus lead us to a more unified understanding of the mystery of revelation, which takes place through ‘deeds and words intimately connected’; an appreciation of this can only benefit the spiritual life of the faithful and the Church’s pastoral activity” (No. 56).

Thus, our task from the Gospel is twofold: to know intimately the word of God and to be transformed by it — learning our story, the story of salvation — and then proclaiming that story with the confidence of knowing that if we truly share the living word, Christ is present and active to move the hearts of those who hear it. We must ourselves be good hearers of the word first, however, so that we never proclaim ourselves but only the truly active and living Word Himself, Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.

**Father Mark Hellinger** is pastor of St. Jude and Sacred Heart of Jesus parishes in South Bend.

# Just as the Apostles Needed Christ’s Wisdom and Guidance, So Do We



## THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MONSIGNOR OWEN F. CAMPION

Again, as is usual for weekends of the Easter season, the Acts of the Apostles provides the first reading for the Liturgy of the Word.

This reading recalls an event like several others in Acts. Peter preached in the name of all the 11 surviving apostles. His remarks, or at least those recorded in this passage, were brief and crisp.

The term used by biblical scholars is that Peter’s message was kerygmatic, drawing from kerygma, the Greek word for “message.” It means that Peter’s words contained the basic information about Jesus and about God’s plan of salvation.

Despite the small number of Christians at the time, and despite the facts that the Jewish culture and the effects of Roman

domination were overwhelming, the apostles still were determined to speak aloud about Jesus.

Their determination revealed their trust and faith in Jesus, as Savior and as Son of God. The world desperately needed Jesus. Only Jesus could fill what the world needed — and still needs today. Remembering last weekend’s first reading that described both the early Christian community’s love for the Lord and its outreach to the troubled and needy, this reading shows that the first followers of Christ saw informing others about the Redeemer as a loving service.

Note also, here as elsewhere in Acts, even though the other apostles were present, Peter, and Peter alone, spoke in their behalf.

The First Epistle of Peter supplies the next reading. Scholars debate the authorship of this epistle. Was Peter the author? Or was someone writing in Peter’s name the author, or was the author presenting ideas that had come from Peter?

In any case, the reading shows how totally committed to Jesus the early Christians were, and how aware they were that salvation had come through the Lord’s death and resurrection.

The last reading, from Luke’s Gospel, is the powerful and lovely story of the risen Lord’s walk to Emmaus with two disciples. The Emmaus narrative appears only in Luke. It is one of the most renowned and beloved pieces in the New Testament.

Important in its message is the fact that, regardless of their devotion to Jesus, the disciples still do not understand everything. They are limited human beings, bewildered by the events of the Lord’s death and resurrection. They need Jesus to help them understand the deep meaning and purpose of all they had seen.

Second, Jesus meets this need. He teaches them. Third, Jesus is with them. Finally, as they celebrate the meal, with its Eucharistic overtones, Jesus is the central figure presiding as they “break the bread.” After hearing the Lord’s explanation of events

and encountering Jesus, they join in a holy meal. The connection with the Eucharist is too strong to overlook.

### Reflection

Beginning with the Scripture readings for Easter itself, and continuing this weekend, the Church expresses to us forcefully and clearly its unflinching belief that after crucifixion and death the Lord Jesus rose to new life.

With equal vigor, and equally strong faith, it also insists to us that Jesus did not rise and then disappear. Instead, the Lord was with the apostles, showing to Thomas the wounds and blessing those who believe. He was alive, present, and still teaching during the trip to Emmaus. The Eucharist at Emmaus was the culmination on the two disciples’ time with Jesus.

The use of the technique of kerygma gives us the basic facts of the Lord’s identity and mission. The experience of the apostles shows us that they literally knew the Risen Christ. We turn to them to know Jesus ourselves.

Knowing Jesus is more than possessing data. It confronts us with the obligation to follow Jesus if we know Jesus.

By our discipleship, we extend Christ to those whom we meet.

### READINGS

**Sunday:** Acts 2:14, 22-33; Psalms 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11; 1 Peter 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-35

**Monday:** Acts 6:8-15; Psalms 119:23-24, 26-27, 29-30; John 6:22-29

**Tuesday:** Acts 7:51-8:1a; Psalms 31:3cd-4, 6 and 7b and 8a, 17 and 21ab; John 6:30-35

**Wednesday:** Acts 8:1b-8; Psalms 66:1-3a, 4-5, 6-7a; John 6:35-40

**Thursday:** Acts 8:26-40; Psalms 66:8-9, 16-17, 20; John 6:44-51

**Friday:** Acts 9:1-20; Psalms 117:1bc, 2; John 6:52-59

**Saturday:** 1 Peter 5:5b-14; Psalms 89:2-3, 6-7, 16-17; Mark 16:15-20

# New Short Film Highlights 'Mary, Icon of the Church'



INTO THE TRUTH

LEONARD J. DeLORENZO

On a snow-covered winter day in 1842, Father Edward Sorin stood before a frozen lake in northern Indiana and did something audacious. He consecrated the land, the institution he was about to found and every soul who would ever study or work there to the Blessed Virgin Mary — and he did this not as an afterthought or pious decoration but as the founding act itself.

That consecration wasn't merely symbolic, something to be noted in the university's founding documents and then quietly set aside. It was — and remains — constitutive of what the University of Notre Dame is.

Which is why the McGrath Institute for Church Life has just released "Mary, Icon of the Church," a new short film exploring what it means for a university to be consecrated to Our Lady and what that consecration reveals about the inseparability of Marian devotion from authentic Christian worship.

Here's what we sometimes forget: Mary isn't an optional add-on to Christianity. She's not a Catholic peculiarity that other Christians can safely ignore. Devotion to Mary is intrinsic to Christian worship because she shows us what it looks like to receive God.

Think about the Annunciation. The angel came with a message that defied every category of human understanding — a virgin would conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the child born of her would be the Son of the Most High, the one in whom God's promises to David would find their fulfillment.

This is the hinge upon which all of salvation history turned, the moment when eternity broke into time and the Word prepared to take flesh. And Mary, confronted with this utterly world-shattering proposition, said yes — not because she understood the mechanics of what God was asking but because she trusted the One asking it of her.

Her fiat was the supreme act of freedom, the moment when a human being aligned her will so completely with God's that she became the very means by

which the Incarnation occurred. As the Second Vatican Council's Lumen Gentium puts it, quoting St. Irenaeus, by her obedience she "became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race."

That's the pattern. That's what the Church is supposed to look like: receiving the Word of God, pondering it, letting it take flesh in us. Mary is the icon of the Church because she's the first and most perfect instance of what every Christian is called to be — a bearer of Christ to the world.

In his founding letter, Father Sorin wrote, "A special consecration was made to the Blessed Mother of Jesus, not only of the land that was to be called by her very name, but also of the institution that was to be founded there ... I presented to the Blessed Virgin all those generous souls whom heaven should be pleased to call around me on this spot, or who should come after me."

Notice what he's doing. He's entrusting the entire educational enterprise to the one who knows what it means to receive truth and let it transform you. Because that's what education is supposed to be — not just

the transfer of information but the formation of persons who can receive reality as gift and respond with their whole lives.

There's a temptation at research universities to treat scholarship and devotion as separate domains. The intellectual life happens in one place, the spiritual life in another. Notre Dame was founded to resist that split. Its animating conviction is that the pursuit of truth and the life of faith don't merely coexist, they belong together.

Mary stands as the supreme model of this integration. In her pondering heart — treasuring, weighing, receiving — we see what it looks like to encounter truth not as information to be processed but as mystery to be inhabited. She held the Word of God with both rigor and wonder, both in her mind and her

## WATCH THE FILM

To view the new short film, "Mary, Icon of the Church," released by the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame, scan the QR code.



heart. That's what Catholic education at its best aims to form: people who can do the same.

This matters because we live in a time when the intellectual and the spiritual are assumed to be in tension. That assumption produces universities that train really smart people who have no idea what they're for. It produces churches that are devotionally rich but intellectually shallow. It produces a culture that's lost the ability to see the world as charged with meaning.

Father Sorin understood that a university consecrated to Mary would be different. It would refuse the false choice between rigor and reverence. It would insist that the various lines of Catholic thought intersect with all forms of human knowledge. It would form students whose learning becomes

service to justice and whose lives build a society that is, in the university's own words, "at once more human and more divine."

That society — more human and more divine — is precisely the horizon Marian devotion opens. Because Mary shows us what humanity

looks like when it's fully receptive to God. She's the proof that saying yes to the Almighty doesn't diminish us; it completes us.

Watch the film. Let it remind you of what Sorin knew: that every act of learning, every pursuit of truth, every effort to serve the Church happens under Mary's mantle. We've all been presented to her. The question is whether we'll receive the gift.

**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. You can find his writing at [leonardjdelorenzo.com](http://leonardjdelorenzo.com).

## SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for April 19, 2026

Luke 24:13-35

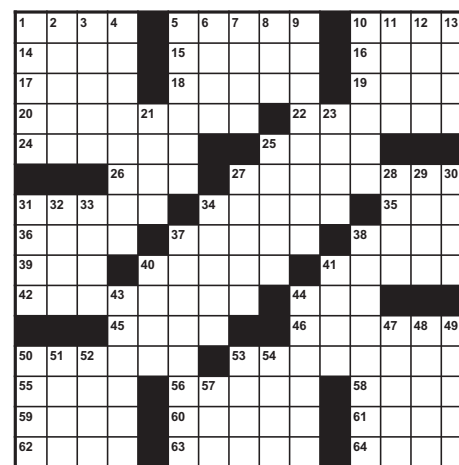
Following is a word search based on the Gospel reading for the Third Sunday of Easter, Cycle A: The trip to Emmaus. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

VILLAGE	SEVEN MILES	EMMAUS
JESUS	RECOGNIZING	CLEOPAS
VISITOR	PROPHET	CHIEF PRIESTS
ISRAEL	A VISION	ALIVE
SUFFER	ENTER	GLORY
MOSES	TABLE	BREAD
BROKE IT	HEARTS	BREAKING

## EMMAUS VILLAGE

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

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



### ACROSS

- 1 The \_\_\_ Sheep
- 5 Clay pigeon sport
- 10 NT book
- 14 Copier
- 15 Major religion in India
- 16 Den
- 17 Make weary
- 18 Happen again
- 19 Patron saint of Canada
- 20 Intrusive
- 22 Henpecked
- 24 Catholic actor Liam
- 25 Beige
- 26 One, to Pierre
- 27 "... from the Father and the Son"
- 31 Forty \_\_\_
- 34 Wife of Abraham
- 35 Jesus said birds of the air don't do this
- 36 Otherwise
- 37 Youngest son
- 38 Goin' okay, for Pierre
- 39 "Ready, \_\_\_, fire"
- 40 Commandment that directs us to keep holy the Lord's Day
- 41 Sticky
- 42 Teaching
- 44 Chairman with a "Little Red Book"
- 45 Wither
- 46 In 2 Kings, he cured Naaman of leprosy
- 50 Portion of time
- 53 Stopped
- 55 "\_\_\_ your pardon"

### DOWN

- 1 Language of the Church
- 2 Express a belief
- 3 Assist at Mass
- 4 "For where your \_\_\_ is, there will your heart be also." (Mt 6:21)
- 5 Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.
- 6 Capital of the Ukraine
- 7 Differ ending
- 8 School's end

- 9 Renegade
- 10 Frogs or locust
- 11 Suspend
- 12 Queue
- 13 TV horse, of course
- 21 Joseph and Benjamin, to Jacob
- 23 Diocese or bishop starter
- 25 Made a mistake
- 27 \_\_\_ Pio
- 28 He gave up his birthright to his brother
- 29 Symbol of the Holy Spirit
- 30 Begin to convince
- 31 Goliath lost his
- 32 Potpourri
- 33 Amer. military branch
- 34 Holy one
- 37 Parturition
- 38 Place for nuns
- 40 Musical group
- 41 Very strong wind
- 43 '60s skinny model
- 44 Earns
- 47 Catholic comedian Carrell
- 48 Sr. Prejean
- 49 Make \_\_\_ in
- 50 Middle Eastern bread
- 51 Black
- 52 Tear apart
- 53 Attention getter
- 54 "... this life was the light of the human \_\_\_" (Jn 1:4)
- 57 Pie-mode link

Answers on page 15.

# Congregation of Holy Cross Lives Out Missionary Revival

BY BROTHER PAUL  
BEDNARCZYK, C.S.C.

(Vatican News) — “Where in the world is the greatest need for religious today?”

The Congregation of Holy Cross asked that question of Cardinal Luis Tagle, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization. After consulting with his staff, the cardinal responded: “Papua New Guinea.” That question and response led the Congregation on a two-year journey that culminated in March of the 2025 Jubilee Year with the founding of its first new foreign mission in several decades: the Holy Family Mission in the Diocese of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea.

During that two-year span, Pope Francis himself visited Papua New Guinea from September 6-9, 2024, as part of a wider apostolic trip to Asia and Oceania. During that trip, the Holy Father was once again putting into practice the missionary call that he had made to the Church time and time again: “go out to the peripheries.” In that same spirit, like Pope Francis, the Congregation of Holy Cross was coming out of itself to venture as pilgrims in hope to the peripheries in Papua New Guinea.

## Parishes Coming Alive

Although the Congregation's seven pioneering missionaries are now marking one year in Bougainville, they have been in their parish communities for only around nine months, following their orientation and



Traditional dancers and drummers lead the entrance procession at Mass during Pope Francis' 2024 visit to Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

CNS photo/Lola Gomez

immersion program with the diocese. The fruits, however, are already evident. Life is springing up throughout the parish as they walk with God's people in hope. Once half-full churches are now filled or overflowing on Sundays. Chapels that sat mostly dormant during the week now hear music and prayers throughout the week — that is, Masses, Eucharistic adoration, and Rosaries.

Through renewed catechesis and evangelization focused on Jesus, more people have been coming forward to receive the sacraments, including baptism, reconciliation and matrimony.

Lay leaders are coming forward to engage in new ministries and outreach programs. Teachers and students at the parish schools are beginning the year with a new sense of purpose and energy. All of this can be seen as a fulfillment of the Congregation's Constitutions, which state, “wherever through its superiors the Congregation sends us we go as educators in the faith to those whose lot we share, supporting men and women of grace and goodwill everywhere in their efforts to form communities of the coming kingdom.”

## An Extraordinary Year of Mission

Yet that renewed fire and missionary zeal has not been confined to the borders of Bougainville. To coincide with the founding of the new mission, the Congregation declared an extraordinary Year of Mission, with the theme “Hope Beyond Borders.” It was an echoing of Pope Francis' call during the 2025 Jubilee Year to journey in hope to the peripheries of our world. The goal was that the year would inspire all Holy Cross jurisdictions, ministries and apostolates, not only to reflect on how they were currently carrying out their mission but also to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in discerning new pathways forward in mission. It has worked. The fire is spreading through the winds of the Holy Spirit.

## Growing Missionary Zeal

Within just a year, both the Holy Family Mission and the Year of Mission have captured the imagination of the Congregation, reenergizing its members and reawakening its missionary charism to make God known, loved and served. The Congregation's younger members now express a greater openness and desire to minister in a country other than their own. Even some of the older members in their senior years have caught the missionary spirit. They have said if they were only 20 or 30 years younger, they would have gladly volunteered and followed in the footsteps of Jesus to be part of the Congregation beginning a new mission in a foreign land.

The new mission in Papua New Guinea has also inspired provinces within the Congregation to explore new mission opportunities abroad. This is especially true of the provinces in Africa and Asia, who cherish the generations of missionaries who brought the Gospel to them, and now, in gratitude, desire to carry that same Gospel to others. For example, the Province of East Africa, answering the call of a local bishop, is currently finalizing plans to send three priests for parish ministry in Ireland. The Holy Cross Brothers in Ghana are in dialogue with bishops for mission prospects in neighboring Burkina Faso. The Congregation's Asian Provinc-

es have set up committees to explore new ministerial opportunities either in the peripheries of their own geographical areas or in other countries abroad in conversation with those local churches.

## Zeal to Make God Known, Loved and Served

Blessed Basil Moreau, founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, is certainly pleased. Within years of founding his religious family of priests, brothers and sisters in France in the early 19th century, he was sending them around the world in mission in response to the needs expressed by the Church. For Blessed Basil Moreau, zeal was “that flame of burning desire to make God known, loved and served, and thus save souls.” He knew the world and Church of his age needed that zeal from the disciples of Jesus, just as the world and the Church of today need it from Jesus' disciples in this age.

Asking the question of where one is needed, and listening to the Church's response, very well might lead one to the place least expected, across borders of every sort. And yet, what will be found along the way is a hope beyond borders.

Brother Paul Bednarczyk, C.S.C., is superior general of the Congregation of Holy Cross. He wrote this for Vatican News ([vaticannews.va/en](http://vaticannews.va/en)).

## SCHOOL PRINCIPAL OPENING

ST. MARY OF THE ASSUMPTION SCHOOL  
Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend



*Lead with faith.  
Inspire with purpose.*

St. Mary of the Assumption School is seeking a **faith-filled principal** to begin in the 2026–2027 school year. Serving 154 students (preschool through grade 8) from 11 parishes, our school is known for its strong Catholic identity, close-knit community, and commitment to forming disciples of Christ.

Learn more and apply at  
[diocesefwsb.org/school-careers](http://diocesefwsb.org/school-careers)

# 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](http://todayscatholic.org/event). To feature your event and gain more exposure, call us at (260) 399-1449 to learn about space options.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 18**

**Bishop Dwenger High School Performing Arts Cabaret Dinner and Show Event**

4 – 6 p.m.

FORT WAYNE – Bishop Dwenger's Performing Arts presents its annual fundraising cabaret dinner event and show on Saturday, April 18, at Bishop Dwenger High School, 1300 E. Washington Center Rd. There will be performances by current and future Bishop Dwenger students as well as a catered dinner, wine and whiskey pull and more! Tickets are \$30 for adults and \$18 for children.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 18**

**Abide With Me: A Concert of Sacred Music**

6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

FORT WAYNE – The Ecce Young Adult Choir presents "Abide With Me: A Concert of Sacred Music" at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, 4500 Fairfield Ave. This concert is free and open to the public; no tickets or reservations are required. A free dinner will be provided at 5:30 p.m. in the Parish Activity Center, open to all concert attendees.

**TUESDAY, APRIL 21**

**St. Aloysius Open House Grades Pre-K to 8**

6 – 7 p.m.

YODER – The doors are open at St. Aloysius School, 14607 Bluffton Rd., to all who want to explore the possibility of a

Catholic education for your beloved young ones in grades pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. As we continue to educate and form scholars and saints through Christ, we are committed to having our students learn what virtue is and living out a virtuous life. Tour our school and talk to current families and staff about how amazing St. Aloysius School is.

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22**

**Every Family Needs an Estate Plan**

4:30 – 5:30 p.m.

FORT WAYNE – Provide for your loved ones and gain peace of mind at our upcoming estate planning workshop at the University of Saint Francis, 2702 Spring St., Room 117. Learn how to protect your children and assets, choose between a will and a trust, ensure your medical and financial wishes are honored, create a lasting impact for the causes you love, and so much more!

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22, 9:30 – 11 a.m.**

**and THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 6:30 – 8 p.m.**

**Christ Child Society of South Bend Information Coffee**

MISHAWAKA – Learn about the Christ Child Society, tour the Clothing Center and discover the benefits of membership and volunteering at Town at Country Shopping Center, 2366 Miracle Lane.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 25**

**Rosary Rally**

12 – 12:30 p.m.

FORT WAYNE – Please join us for a Rosary Rally at noon outside Planned Parenthood, 2930 Lake Ave. We will unite and invoke the protection of Our Lady of Fatima for our country and pray for stronger pro-life laws to end the atrocity of abortion in the United States. Let us work for a time when abortion will be unthinkable in our country. The rally lasts about 30 minutes and includes recitation of the Rosary, a litany, and a few other prayers.

## REST IN PEACE

**Auburn**

Darla Drew, 69, Immaculate Conception

Louise Todd, 87, Immaculate Conception

**Bristol**

Phil Stillson, 76, St. Mary of the Annunciation

**Fort Wayne**

Nicholas Reith, 87, St. Vincent de Paul

**Huntington**

Mae (Stephan) Leedy, 100, SS. Peter and Paul

**South Bend**

Mary Ellen Golabowski, 71, Christ the King

Ralph Szymanski, 84, Christ the King

Susanne Muchison, 83, Holy Cross

Ward Underwood, 80, St. Jude

Claudia DeLeon, 91, St. Jude

Send obituaries to [obituaries@diocesefwsb.org](mailto:obituaries@diocesefwsb.org).



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

[www.wordgamesforcatholics.com](http://www.wordgamesforcatholics.com)

tailored gift planning | endowments | donor advised funds

*May the risen Lord fill you with peace and joy this Easter season!*

Your friends at the  
**Catholic Community Foundation**  
of Northeast Indiana

260-399-1436 | [www.ccfnei.org](http://www.ccfnei.org)

**37<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL**  
**ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH**  
12305 Arcola Rd., Arcola, Indiana

**BLESSING OF THE BIKES**

**APRIL 25, 2026**

**1:00 pm**

All proceeds benefit the St. Pat's Youth Group  
**FREE ADMISSION | ALL BIKES WELCOME**  
*Event held rain or shine*

**50/50 Drawing**  
**Event T-shirts**  
**Food & Beverages**

Questions? Call Jerry Gordon  
260-213-0029 or email  
[jerrygordon65@yahoo.com](mailto:jerrygordon65@yahoo.com)



## SAINT OF THE WEEK

### St. Anselm

**Feast Day: April 21**

This scholarly Italian youth wanted to become a monk, but his father's disapproval pushed him to a secular life that he later described as dissipated. After his mother died, he moved to France to continue studies with her family. In 1060, he joined the Benedictines at Bec in Normandy, and in 1078 was elected abbot, which increasingly involved him in civil and Church affairs in France and England. In 1093, he became archbishop of Canterbury, a post held until his death. During his tenure, Canterbury became England's primate see, but Anselm was twice exiled over conflicts with English monarchs. He penned a systematic study of Christian beliefs and many letters to his beloved monks. He is a Doctor of the Church.



Tim Johnson

Bishop Rhoades, front row center, and Superintendent David Maugel, far left in the back row, pose with winners of the Christ the Teacher Awards at the You Can Lend a Hand Lunch in Fort Wayne on Tuesday, April 7.

### EDUCATORS, from page 1

Catholic education. A similar luncheon will be held on April 24 in South Bend, reflecting the diocesan-wide effort of Quality Dining Inc., to support Catholic schools in both regions.

This year's gathering highlighted the vocation of Catholic educators as witnesses to Christ in the classroom — a role many speakers said is more important than ever in today's culture.

"We need Catholic schools more than ever," said Bishop Rhoades, who addressed attendees during the luncheon. He emphasized that Catholic schools are rooted in forming the whole person — body, mind and spirit — and helping students encounter Christ, the ultimate teacher.

Drawing on the Gospel account of Mary Magdalene recognizing the Risen Christ, Bishop Rhoades reflected on Jesus as 'Rabbi,' or teacher, noting that Catholic educators share in that mission in a unique and profound way.

"The vocation of our Catholic school educators ... is truly extraordinary," Bishop Rhoades said, pointing to their role in forming students not only academically but spiritually, helping them grow in faith, virtue and character.

Throughout the program, speakers emphasized that Catholic educators serve as examples for students in a world often lacking positive role models.

"They see people that offer them encouragement ... you are offering them light in a time of darkness," said Chuck Freeby, who served as the event's master of ceremonies.

That mission, educators said, comes with real challenges.

"For 50 minutes in the classroom, I'm fighting maybe six hours of social media a night," said Parker Noll, a theology teacher at Bishop Dwenger High School who was chosen as one of 22 Christ the Teacher Award recipients. "What they're watching ... isn't always in tune with the Catholic faith."

Noll said Catholic educators are working to present the Faith in a way that is both authentic and engaging for students growing up in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

"We live in a world where being faith-filled ... isn't always seen as popular," he said, adding that helping students encounter Christ in a personal way remains central to his work.

Despite those challenges, educators described their work as deeply rewarding and rooted in a sense of calling.

"The ability to bring Christ to all individuals ... I can wear my cross and share Christ with all," said Starr Harless, a Christ the Teacher Award recipient and junior high teacher at St. Rose of Lima School in Monroeville, and one of two recipients of the Catholic Community Foundation of Northeast Indiana Teachers Award.

Also receiving that honor was Elizabeth Schuler of St. Bernard School in Wabash, recognized for her commitment to academic excellence and faith formation in the classroom.

Others pointed to the lasting impact Catholic education has across generations.

"It is my family. It is my life," said Nikki Thompson of St. Aloysius School in Yoder, also a Christ the Teacher Award recipient. She noted that five generations of her family have been educated at the

school. She added that helping students remain rooted in their faith beyond the classroom remains "a big challenge."

Still, educators said their mission is grounded in something deeper than the challenges they face.

"To be that light to a child who needs it ... there's nothing better than that," Noll said.

The luncheon celebrated recipients of the Christ the Teacher Award, presented annually to outstanding educators from schools across the diocese and one Catholic school from Niles, Michigan. The award reflects the central role of Christ as teacher and recognizes those who model that example by serving students in their classrooms each day.

Zachary Coyle, principal of St. Vincent de Paul School in Fort Wayne, was recognized with the St. Mother Theodore Guerin Administrator Award for his leadership and dedication to Catholic education.

In addition to honoring educators, the program highlighted student involvement and the broader Catholic school community. Bishop Luers High School students served as table hosts, while the Borromeo Bells of St. Charles Borromeo School in Fort Wayne welcomed guests with handbell music upon arrival.

During the luncheon, students from St. John the Baptist School in New Haven performed selections from their upcoming production of "Beauty and the Beast," adding a joyful and creative element to the celebration.

Several additional awards were presented recognizing leadership, service and support of Catholic education.

### 2026 Christ the Teacher Award Winners

**Kelsey Spoltman**, Most Precious Blood, Fort Wayne  
**Natalie Guisinger**, St. Therese, Fort Wayne  
**Autumn Hulting**, Our Lady of Good Hope, Fort Wayne  
**Jessica Nifong**, Queen of Angeles, Fort Wayne  
**Amber Wilson**, St. Charles Borromeo, Fort Wayne  
**Alyssa Rost**, St. John the Baptist, Fort Wayne  
**Michelle Stroncsek**, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Fort Wayne  
**Lorna Pioquinto-Staller**, St. Joseph, Fort Wayne  
**Meagan Mocek**, St. Jude, Fort Wayne  
**Laura Geraghty**, St. Vincent de Paul, Fort Wayne  
**Nichole Thompson**, St. Aloysius, Yoder  
**Justin Pranger**, St. John the Baptist, New Haven  
**Kassie Ripple**, St. Joseph-Hessen Cassel, Fort Wayne  
**Starr Harless**, St. Rose of Lima, Monroeville  
**Danielle Strack**, St. Louis Academy, New Haven  
**Ashley Wetzel**, St. Mary of the Assumption, Avilla  
**Chelsea Rigler**, St. Joseph, Garrett  
**Amanda Sutter**, St. Joseph, Decatur  
**Reagan Wood**, Huntington Catholic, Huntington  
**Elizabeth Schuler**, St. Bernard, Wabash  
**Parker Noll**, Bishop Dwenger, Fort Wayne  
**Mercylynn Green**, Bishop Luers, Fort Wayne

Rebecca McDaniel, an eighth-grade student at St. Joseph-Hessen Cassel School, was named the winner of this year's Quality Dining poster contest, selected from more than 250 entries submitted across the diocese.

Chuck McNulty received the Monsignor J. William Lester Award, honoring his long-standing support of Catholic schools and his commitment to helping students succeed through scholarships and community investment.

The Catholic Community Foundation also presented its annual Teachers Award, recognizing educators who exemplify both faith and excellence in the classroom.

Since its founding in 1982, the You Can Lend a Hand program has raised more than \$12 million to support Catholic schools in northern Indiana, providing resources that help schools continue their mission of forming students in faith and knowledge.

For those gathered, the luncheon served as both a celebration and a reminder — that Catholic education is not simply a profession but a vocation rooted in sharing the Gospel.

As Bishop Rhoades told the educators, their work ultimately reflects the mission of Christ himself — to teach, to form and to lead others to the truth.