



The

# Criterion

Serving the Church in Central and Southern Indiana Since 1960



## 'They teach us'

For those with developmental disabilities, SPREAD shares faith, page 9.

CriterionOnline.com

March 21, 2025

Vol. LXV, No. 23 75¢



## Transitional deacons spend time in parishes before priestly ordination as part of new stage in formation

By Sean Gallagher

GREENWOOD—A significant change in the way that seminarians in the archdiocese are formed for priestly life and ministry began last December as two transitional deacons began ministry in parishes for six months prior to

their ordination as priests on June 7 at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis.

Deacon Thomas Day is serving at Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish in Greenwood, while Deacon Isaac Siefker is ministering at Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Beech Grove.

See DEACONS, page 8

Above: Transitional Deacon Isaac Siefker speaks on Jan. 9 to eighth-grade students at Holy Name of Jesus School in Beech Grove. He is serving at Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Beech Grove for six months prior to his priestly ordination scheduled for June 7. (Submitted photo)

## Church continues to walk with refugees despite federal roadblocks

By Victoria Arthur

Catholic Charities offices in Indiana are continuing to serve hundreds of newly arrived legal refugees amid the chaos and confusion triggered by the Trump administration's abrupt halt of funding for a resettlement program the U.S. government had sponsored for decades.

Through an executive order on day one of his second term, President Donald J. Trump paused all federal funding for domestic and international foreign aid. A month later, the administration cancelled the reception and placement contract for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), which had been managed for years through the State Department with local implementation by longstanding partners including Catholic Charities offices nationwide.

"It left all resettlement agencies in the lurch," said Gabrielle Neal, service line director for Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, who has been involved in refugee resettlement efforts for 16 years. "So, we have had to pivot and transition quickly because we felt we had a moral and legal responsibility to continue to serve these clients who are already here. These are individuals who were welcomed by the federal government. They put their trust in our government, and they are legally allowed to be here."

For Catholic Charities in Indianapolis, this year would have marked the 50th anniversary of the agency's involvement in refugee resettlement—even predating

See REFUGEES, page 10



Gabrielle Neal

## An unexpected catch: A fishing story reels in a boatload of hope

(Editor's note: As Pope Francis has announced a Jubilee Year for the Church with the theme, 'Pilgrims of Hope,' The Criterion has invited you, our readers, to share your stories of hope—how embracing hope has helped and guided you in the toughest moments of your life, how others have given you hope for your future, how your faith in God has sustained you and uplifted you. Here is another story in a continuing series.)

By John Shaughnessy

Fish-related stories are like, well, fish—they come in different varieties, creating distinct sensations of taste.

A sensation of wonder still fills the soul from hearing the story of Christ multiplying a meager amount of loaves and fishes to feed thousands of hungry followers.

There's a taste of challenge in the request that Jesus makes to Simon and Andrew as they cast their nets in the sea, telling them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mk 1:17).

See FISHING, page 2

Marty and Mary Miller are all smiles recalling a fishing adventure that brought together youths from different walks of life and gave the couple another source of hope in God. (Submitted photo)



# FISHING

continued from page 1

And in the lives of people who fish today, there's a delicious flavor of humor when they come across this quote about fishing: "Sometimes when the water is quiet, you can almost hear the fish laughing at you."

And whether the story is from the Bible or in a boat or along water today, there's one universal connection among all people who have ever fished:

Hope.

Which leads to a fishing-related story of hope involving Mary and Marty Miller of St. Paul Catholic Center in Bloomington.

## A prayer of hope for the children

"This is a story of hope and holding onto it even when everything seems to be going wrong," Mary begins. "The way I see it, hope is the belief that God in his divine providence will provide."

Yet that belief was tested for Mary when Marty was part of an effort to bring together two groups of children from different walks of life, all in the hope of letting them experience their shared humanity.

That effort unfolded about 20 years ago, Mary says.

"At the time, we were living in Martinsville," she notes. "It was late fall, and Marty was involved with an organization within our community that was putting together a cultural exchange—between Martinsville kids and children from Indianapolis. This took the form of a fishing trip to Bradford Woods [in Morgan County]."

"The planning committee worked very hard to ensure that children from diverse backgrounds and cultures would have a successful and fun experience, both individually and as part of a team. As is our practice, my husband and I prayed beforehand that all would go smoothly."

They prayed some more when rain "came down in heavy, cold sheets" on the Friday before the Saturday get-together.

"That evening, Marty received several calls from workers wondering if the early morning outing would be called off," Mary recalls. "My husband, who hadn't bought the food yet, was beginning to think that might not be a bad idea. But it was decided—rain or not—the event was 'a go.'"

Yet, as Marty got ready to leave their

home to buy food that evening, another challenge came, this one far more concerning than the raging rain.

## 'I was even a little angry with God'

"He was almost out the door when he received a call from his mother, who said she was experiencing chest pains," Mary says. "He dropped everything and rushed her to the emergency room."

The scare fortunately turned out to be a false alarm.

"He got back home around midnight, and we went out and bought the food. That is, everything but the buns," Mary recalls. "There was a mix-up, and we were told the buns would not arrive in the grocery store until the next morning—early, we hoped."

"The rain and wind continued throughout the night. Marty got up early, packed the car with hot dogs, chips, water and tons of hot chocolate. He headed for the grocery and then to Bradford Woods. As he pulled out, my mood was as gloomy as the chilling rain."

A part of her gloom was directed at God.

"I was sure the fishing trip was doomed. 'How unfair,' I thought. I was even a little angry with God. How could he let our prayers go unanswered? After all, our intentions were the best. Huge amounts of time and effort had gone into planning this event. And it was for the kids, for pity's sake!"

That foul feeling stayed with her throughout that Saturday, but she was determined to set it aside when Marty came home that evening.

"I was sure the worst had happened, but I psyched myself up to support him in his exasperation, discouragement and fatigue," she recalls. "I was shocked when he entered the house with a broad smile on his face and a look of great satisfaction."

Mary then recalls the conversation that followed with her husband.

"Well," I said, "you must have done indoor stuff with the kids."

"No," he replied, "they were outside fishing the entire time."

"Then the kids must have brought very good rain gear."

"Nope. In fact, many of them had to use big plastic bags with holes cut out for their arms. They had the most wonderful time!"

Mary asked, "But how can that be?"

Her husband just smiled and said, "Simple, the fish were biting all day."



## Public Schedule of Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

March 22–30, 2025

### March 22 – 4 p.m.

Mass for Knights of Columbus, 4th Degree, Supreme and Indiana Councils at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral followed by dinner at McGowan Hall, both in Indianapolis

### March 24 – noon

Virtual Cross Catholic Outreach Board meeting

### March 25 – 9 a.m.

Mass for students of St. Christopher School, Indianapolis, at St. Christopher Church

### March 25 – 1 p.m.

Council of Priests meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara Catholic Center, Indianapolis

### March 26 – 11:30 a.m.

Strategic Pastoral Planning Initiatives meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara Catholic Center

### March 27 – 10 a.m.

Leadership Team meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara Catholic Center

### March 27 – 3 p.m.

Finance Council meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara Catholic Center

### March 29 – 10 a.m.

Archdiocesan Pastoral Council meeting at St. Bartholomew Parish, Columbus

### March 30 – 9 a.m.

Mass with Vietnamese Community at St. Joseph Church, Indianapolis

### March 30 – 5 p.m.

Priesthood Promises at Blessed Sacrament Chapel of SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, Indianapolis

## 'Hope does not fail'

Mary regards that fishing trip as another story of God's providence—"one of the stories of the great gift of hope in my life."

"Remembering this story always makes me smile," she says. "It was indeed a fast and much desired answer to a prayer. One might say a kind of miracle, a little like the disciples following Christ's directive of casting their nets and pulling up more fish than could be imagined. Like the disciples, we were amazed and grateful. It is lovely to have quick answers to prayer."

At the same time, Mary has lived and prayed long enough to know that prayers aren't always answered quickly or even as people hope. Still, she strives to keep her hope and faith in God, trusting in his plans for her, her husband and their family.

"To be perfectly honest, we have found in our 54 years of marriage that answers often do not come for years, even decades, and perhaps won't come for generations," she says. "We have come

to accept that life never flows evenly, and expectations often fall short. But if we wait patiently and don't give in to darkness, God's caring presence will prevail, often in the quietest of ways.

"This message that was handed down to us is true—'Hope does not fail'—and we try to pass this on the best we can. Over the years, we spent a good deal of time with our small grandchildren. They often stayed overnight, and we usually ended the day with a night prayer. Now that they are older and making their own way, when we say goodbye, we often lovingly add, 'Keep the faith!'"

"That seems to be the best we can give them."

*(If you have a story of hope to share, please send it to John Shaughnessy by e-mail at [jshaughnessy@archindy.org](mailto:jshaughnessy@archindy.org) or by mail in care of The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46202. Please include your parish and a daytime phone number where you can be reached.) †*

## Synodal Church, pastoral leadership are topic of IPI conference on April 25

The archdiocese's Intercultural Pastoral Institute (IPI) is hosting a conference on "The synodal Church and pastoral leadership" at 6 p.m. on April 25 at St. Gabriel the Archangel Church, 6000 W. 34th St., in Indianapolis.

Speakers will include Deacon Tom Hosty, director of the archdiocesan Department of Pastoral Ministries; Felix Navarrete, archdiocesan coordinator of Hispanic Ministry; Andrea Blanco, program manager of the Latino Pastoral Leaders Initiative; and Oscar Castellanos, Bilingual Programs and Hispanic Initiatives manager at Oregon Catholic Press.

A \$20 donation is encouraged. For more information or to register, e-mail Dr. Carmen Hernandez, the coordinator of IPI, at [chernandez@archindy.org](mailto:chernandez@archindy.org). †

## La Iglesia sinodal y el liderazgo pastoral: temas de la conferencia del IPI del 25 de abril

El Instituto de Pastoral Intercultural (IPI) de la Arquidiócesis está organizando una conferencia sobre "La Iglesia sinodal y el liderazgo pastoral," que se llevará a cabo el 25 de abril a las 6 p.m. en la Iglesia de san Gabriel ubicada en 6000 W. 34th St., en Indianapolis.

Entre los ponentes estarán el diácono Tom Hosty, director del Departamento de Ministerios Pastorales de la Arquidiócesis; Félix Navarrete, coordinador del Ministerio Hispano de la Arquidiócesis; Andrea Blanco, directora de programas de la Iniciativa de Líderes Pastorales Latinos; y Óscar Castellanos, director de Programas Bilingües e Iniciativas Hispanas de Oregon Catholic Press.

Se sugiere un donativo de \$20. Para inscribirse, envíe un correo electrónico a la Dra. Carmen Hernández, coordinadora del IPI, a [chernandez@archindy.org](mailto:chernandez@archindy.org). †



### Phone Numbers:

Main office..... 317-236-1570  
Advertising..... 317-236-1585  
Circulation / Subscriptions ... 317-236-1425

Price: \$22.00 per year, 75 cents per copy

### Postmaster:

Send address changes to *The Criterion*, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367

Web site : [www.CriterionOnline.com](http://www.CriterionOnline.com)

E-mail: [criterion@archindy.org](mailto:criterion@archindy.org)

Published weekly except the last week of December, the first week of January and every other week from June to August (*summer schedule*). Mailing address: 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367. Periodical postage paid at Indianapolis, IN. Copyright © 2025 Criterion Press Inc. ISSN 0574-4350.

## NEWS FROM YOU!

Do you have something exciting or newsworthy you want to be considered to be printed in *The Criterion*?

E-mail us:

[criterion@archindy.org](mailto:criterion@archindy.org)

### Staff:

Editor: Mike Krokos  
Assistant Editor: John Shaughnessy  
Reporter: Sean Gallagher  
Reporter: Natalie Hoefer  
Graphic Designer / Online Editor: Brandon A. Evans  
Executive Assistant: Ann Lewis



*The Criterion* (ISSN 0574-4350) is published weekly except the last week of December, the first week of January and every other week from June-Aug.

1400 N. Meridian St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
317-236-1570  
[criterion@archindy.org](mailto:criterion@archindy.org)

Periodical postage paid at Indianapolis, IN.  
Copyright © 2025

Criterion Press Inc.

POSTMASTER:  
Send address changes to:  
Criterion Press Inc.  
1400 N. Meridian St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46202



03/21/25

## Moving?

We'll be there waiting if you give us two weeks' notice!  
Use the form below or at [archindy.org/moving](http://archindy.org/moving).

Name \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

New Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

New Parish \_\_\_\_\_

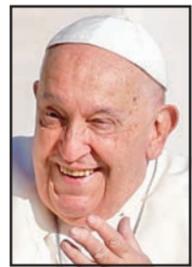
Effective Date \_\_\_\_\_

Note: If you are receiving duplicate copies please send both labels.

*The Criterion* • 1400 N. Meridian St. • Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367

# Improvements mean pope can briefly go without supplemental oxygen

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis has been able to spend brief moments of the day without any supplemental oxygen, which is yet another sign of the gradual improvement in his condition, the Vatican press office said.



Pope Francis

For example, there was no sign of a nasal tube in the photograph the Vatican released on March 16 of the pope concelebrating Mass in his private chapel at Rome's Gemelli

Hospital. (See the photo accompanying the editorial on page 4.) That was because he can be without it for brief periods, the press office told reporters on March 17.

Also, when he is using the nasal tube, he is alternating between high-flow and normal-flow oxygen during the day, while doctors have been reducing the number of hours he uses the noninvasive mechanical ventilation at night, the press office said. The fact that the reductions are possible is a sign that there is slight yet progressive improvement and the respiratory therapy is working.

However, a Vatican source said, his being discharged from the hospital "is not imminent."

In the March 16 photo, Pope Francis' right hand was also noticeably swollen, which was a consequence of his reduced mobility, the press office said. That swelling has already been reduced thanks to physical therapy, which is meant to counter the consequences of limited mobility during a lengthy hospitalization.

The pope continues to follow his usual daily routine of therapy, prayer, rest and a bit of work, it added.

As he continues to be in a stable condition, the doctors have decided not to

release daily medical bulletins. The last official bulletin was released on March 15, and the next more detailed medical update was expected on March 19.

The recitation of the rosary for Pope Francis' health continued in St. Peter's Square on March 17. The faithful gathered in the square were led in prayer by French Cardinal Dominique Mamberti, prefect of the Apostolic Signature, the Holy See's highest court.

For the fifth Sunday in a row, the Holy Father did not come to his window for the recitation of the *Angelus*, but he may have seen some yellow or white balloons fly past his hospital room.

More than 100 children gathered on March 16 in the square in front of Gemelli Hospital to pray the *Angelus*; many were hoping the pope would come to his window to wave while a few of the little ones were more concerned about keeping ahold of their balloons.

"Yesterday at the *Angelus*, Pope Francis invited us to join him in praising the Lord, 'who never abandons us and who, in times of sorrow, places people beside us who reflect a ray of his love,'" Cardinal Mamberti said at the beginning of the prayer service.

"Let us ask the Lord during this time of Lent to purify our hearts so that we may reflect a ray of his love and mercy, especially for those who need it the most," he said.

Although the pope did not come to the window during the recitation of the *Angelus*, he thanked the children in a message the Vatican press office published at noon.

"I know that many children are praying for me; some of them came here today to Gemelli as a sign of closeness," he wrote. "Thank you, dearest children! The pope loves you and is always waiting to meet you."

Pope Francis has been hospitalized



A girl holds up a drawing made for Pope Francis outside of Rome's Gemelli Hospital on March 16. (CNS photo/Justin McLellan)

since Feb. 14 and continues to be treated for double pneumonia and multiple infections. His doctors have said his condition continues to improve gradually.

The pope's *Angelus* message also included a request that people "continue to pray for peace, especially in the countries wounded by war: tormented Ukraine, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Myanmar, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo."

Pope Francis also used the message to affirm his decision, announced the previous day, to launch a three-year program to ensure implementation of the recommendations of the Synod of Bishops on synodality to promote a culture of listening to one another, valuing the gifts of each member of the Church and encouraging all Catholics to take

responsibility for the Church's mission. (See a related article on page 8.)

Commenting on the day's Gospel reading, which recounted the Transfiguration, Pope Francis said that when Jesus took his disciples up the mountain and was transfigured, he showed them "what is hidden behind the gestures he performs in their midst: the light of his infinite love."

Saying that he was writing while "facing a period of trial," the pope said that he joins "with so many brothers and sisters who are sick: fragile, at this time, like me."

"Our bodies are weak," he wrote, "but even like this, nothing can prevent us from loving, praying, giving ourselves, being for each other, in faith, shining signs of hope." †

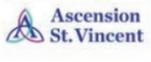


JOIN US for the

## LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR 5K

St. Vincent de Paul Indianapolis

presented by




**Saturday, April 26, 2025**  
White River State Park

- Register for the 5K or 1 Mile Fun Run/Walk
- Donate to help our neighbors in need
- Beer (21+)/Root Beer Garden (all ages)
- Trophies for racers and best "love" individual and group outfits



To learn more and register, please visit [svdpindy.org/neighbor](http://svdpindy.org/neighbor)

## For today, tomorrow, and forever



Join the Saint Meinrad Benedictine community in its prayer, work, and theological formation through a lasting gift of perpetual support. Contact Brian Doyle at [plannedgiving@saintmeinrad.edu](mailto:plannedgiving@saintmeinrad.edu) or 812-357-6501 to learn how your impactful generosity will bring the peace and love of Christ to current and future generations.




**Saint Meinrad Archabbey, Seminary & School of Theology**  
200 Hill Drive, St. Meinrad, IN 47577  
[www.saintmeinrad.edu](http://www.saintmeinrad.edu)



CRS RICE BOWL  
50 YEARS  
CRSRICEBOWL.ORG

FOR LENT FOR LIFE

PARA LA CUARESMA POR LA VIDA



# The Criterion

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson, *Publisher*  
Mike Krokos, *Editor*

Sally Krause, *Associate Publisher*

## Editorial



Pope Francis is seen in the chapel of his suite of rooms at Rome's Gemelli Hospital on March 16. The Vatican press office said the 88-year-old pope concelebrated Mass that morning. (CNS photo/Vatican Press Office)

## Lent helps us to renew ourselves spiritually and live holy lives

Pope Francis has offered us a powerful reflection on how we should observe this sacred time of Lent.

The Holy Father said:

"[This] is a time to act, and in Lent, to act also means to pause. To pause in prayer, in order to receive the word of God, to pause like the Samaritan in the presence of a wounded brother or sister. Love of God and love of neighbor are one love. ... For this reason, prayer, almsgiving and fasting are not three unrelated acts, but a single movement of openness and self-emptying. ... Then the atrophied and isolated heart will revive. Slow down, then, and pause! The contemplative dimension of life that Lent helps us to rediscover will release new energies."

Too often, we forget to pause, to listen, and to learn what God is calling us to be and do. Lent gives us a chance to be contemplative for a change and, like the Blessed Virgin Mary, to "ponder" in our hearts the mysterious ways that God is working in our life.

Lent invites us to contemplate our own mortality and to ask ourselves what the reality—and inevitability—of our death means. This should not be a morbid exercise. After all, the heart of the Christian message is that sin has been conquered, and death has been overcome through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Only in light of this fundamental truth—that Christ has been victorious in the face of death—can we renew ourselves spiritually and live holy lives.

Recently, Pope Francis offered some reflections on things that can become obstacles in our efforts to grow spiritually.

The Holy Father said:

"Every day the Lord visits us, speaks to us, reveals himself in unexpected ways and, at the end of life and time, he will come. He himself exhorts us to stay awake, to be vigilant, to persevere in waiting. Indeed, the worst thing that can happen to us is to let 'our spirit doze off,' to let the heart fall asleep, to anesthetize the soul, to lock hope away in the dark corners of disappointment and resignation."

To hear the Lord when he speaks to us, we have to be alert—not distracted by the busyness of life and not so soundly asleep that we miss the Lord when he comes.

In his reflections, Pope Francis identifies two obstacles to being awake spiritually. The first obstacle is "neglect of the interior life." This happens when we lose a sense of enthusiasm and allow weariness and negative experiences to turn us into angry and embittered people.

When this occurs, there is no life left in us. No enthusiasm or vitality remains in our spiritual life. To overcome this obstacle (neglect of the interior life), we must create opportunities for prayer, reflection and the proper nourishment of our spiritual lives. We must allow God to renew us spiritually.

The second obstacle noted by Pope Francis is "adapting to a worldly lifestyle, which ends up taking the place of the Gospel." Too many of the values promoted by our secular culture, especially consumerism, eroticism, materialism, racism—and all of the other "ism's" that are so prevalent today—make it very difficult to live as Jesus taught.

To overcome this obstacle, we must re-examine how we live as Catholics committed to following our Lord and walking in his footsteps. Lent gives us an opportunity to nourish our interior lives and to renew our commitment to living the Gospel.

The disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving should be an integral part of daily Christian living year-round. However, we are invited to pay special attention to them during this penitential time in order to ready ourselves for participation in the paschal mystery during Holy Week and Easter.

Lent is a time for repentance, renewal and revitalization. This is the time when the whole Church pauses and reflects on the importance of spiritual vitality. This is the time when we are encouraged to ask: How can we reignite the light of Christ? Has our "light" gone out? Or become dim? If so, the disciplines of Lent provide us with simple, but effective ways to rejuvenate our spirits and to prepare for the joy of Easter.

As we continue this holy season of Lent, let's allow God to renew us spiritually and resist the temptation to settle for ways of living that are unworthy of missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.

—Daniel Conway

Be Our Guest/Sr. Constance Veit, L.S.P.

## Pandemic, elders' wisdom remind us to get ready for the goal of heaven

Five years ago this month, life as we knew it came to a standstill.

COVID-19 cast a pall over the entire world, forcing us to face our radical vulnerability and our powerlessness in the face of death.



About a week after we had gone into lockdown, the COVID virus invaded the first of our Little Sisters of the Poor homes in the U.S.

I was asked to go and help the sisters cope with this tragic situation. "Was I sure I was willing to go? ... Would I like some time to think about it?" my provincial superior asked.

Despite a certain fear of the unknown, I didn't hesitate. I felt it was an honor to serve in this way, even if it might cost me my life!

Several residents passed away during my first few days in this home; 13 had died by Easter. At the same time, I received news of the first COVID-related deaths back home in Washington. I felt that I was surrounded by death, but I was not afraid.

I have been caring for the elderly since I was 15 years old.

Through the years, many residents have told me, without the slightest hint of depression, that they were looking forward to death. Some have spoken of their longing to see God; others of how much they were looking forward to being reunited with their deceased loved ones.

A few told me they feared God had forgotten about them—why else had he left them on Earth for so long?

The seniors I have known, cared for and loved through these many years have taught me important lessons about living and dying. They have expressed their belief that death represents a passage to a better place.

As the pandemic stretched on from weeks to months, and then years, I have often thought of all these elders, drawing consolation from the countless faces that pass through my memory.

Now, as we look back at the pandemic, we are confronted with death in a new way as we watch Pope Francis struggle through a period of serious illness.

As I write this, he seems to be

improving—thanks be to God—and while I pray that God will return him to full health so that he may continue his ministry, I am also confident that whenever God does call Pope Francis to himself, he will be prepared.

In a Sunday blessing written during his hospitalization, the pope wrote, "I feel in my heart the 'blessing' that is hidden within frailty, because it is precisely in these moments that we learn even more to trust in the Lord; at the same time, I thank God for giving me the opportunity to share in body and spirit the condition of so many sick and suffering people."

In a series of talks on old age given in 2022, Pope Francis spoke confidently about death.

"Our existence on Earth is the time of the initiation into life: it is life, but one that leads you toward a fuller life, the initiation of the fuller one; a life which finds fulfillment only in God," he wrote.

"Dear brothers and sisters," he continued, "old age is the phase in life best suited to spreading the joyful news that life is the initiation to a definitive fulfillment. The elderly are a promise, a witness of promise. And the best is yet to come."

"When Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God, he describes it as a wedding feast; as a party with friends; as the work that makes the house perfect," he continued. "It is the surprise that makes the harvest richer than the sowing. ... Our whole life appears like a seed that will have to be buried so that its flower and its fruit can be born. ... Not without labor pains, not without pain, but it will be born [Jn 16:21-23]. And the life of the risen body will be a hundred and a thousand times more alive than we have tasted it on this Earth [Mk 10:28-31]. ... The hand of the Lord is always there carrying us forward and beyond the door there is the party."

In this jubilee year celebrating the virtue of Christian hope, may the words and example of Pope Francis in the midst of suffering encourage us to reflect on the reality of death, strengthening our assurance that the best is yet to come, because heaven is the goal.

(*Little Sisters of the Poor Sister Constance Veit is director of communications for the Little Sisters of the Poor in the United States and an occupational therapist.*) †

*As the pandemic stretched on from weeks to months, and then years, I have often thought of all these elders, drawing consolation from the countless faces that pass through my memory.*

## Letters Policy

Letters from readers are published in *The Criterion* as part of the newspaper's commitment to "the responsible exchange of freely-held and expressed opinion among the People of God" (*Communio et Progressio*, 116).

Letters from readers are welcome and every effort will be made to include letters from as many people and representing as many viewpoints as possible. Letters should be informed, relevant, well-expressed and temperate in tone. They must reflect a basic sense of courtesy and respect.

The editors reserve the right to select the letters that will be published and to edit letters from readers as necessary

based on space limitations, pastoral sensitivity and content (including spelling and grammar). In order to encourage opinions from a variety of readers, frequent writers will ordinarily be limited to one letter every three months. Concise letters (usually less than 300 words) are more likely to be printed.

Letters must be signed, but, for serious reasons, names may be withheld.

Send letters to "Letters to the Editor," *The Criterion*, 1400 N. Meridian Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367. Readers with access to e-mail may send letters to [criterion@archindy.org](mailto:criterion@archindy.org). †

ARCHBISHOP/ARZOBISPO CHARLES C. THOMPSON



# Christ the Cornerstone

## As sinners, let us repent and be renewed during Lent

The Gospel reading for the Third Sunday of Lent (Lk 13:1-9) speaks of our need for repentance. The selection begins with a bit of gossip—even slander. “Some people told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices” (Lk 13:1). Who are these people? And what do they hope to accomplish by telling Jesus what these scandalous Galileans have done?

We can tell by our Lord’s reaction that he wants no part of this kind of “trash talk,” gossip that denigrates a group of people just for the sake of feeling superior to them. “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans?” Jesus replies. “By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!” (Lk 13:2-3)

By looking down on others, and by gossiping about them, we act like we ourselves are sinless. We fail to acknowledge that we are sinners also, and we abuse our sisters and brothers by treating them as if they are somehow less than we are in the eyes of God. This is the kind of hypocrisy that always makes Jesus angry. Why?

Because he knows exactly who we are, and he will not tolerate people who puff themselves up with pride and pretend they are better than everyone else.

In his autobiography *Hope*, Pope Francis speaks to this very human condition. He writes:

*I am a sinner. This is the fairest definition. And it is not just an expression, a dialectical contrivance, a literary genre, a theatrical pose. ...*

*We are all sinners. If I were to tell myself that I am not, then I would be the most corrupt person. In our prayer to Mary, we say that she is mother of “us sinners,” and so it is. But not of corrupt people. For people who are corrupt sell their mothers, they sell their membership to their family or to their people. They make a choice that is self-serving. I’d say satanical: They lock the door from the inside. They lock the door and double-lock it.*

The difference between sinners and corrupt people is that sinners can repent and be converted. In the language of this Sunday’s Gospel, they can repent and once again begin to “bear fruit” (Lk 13:9).

Corrupt people refuse to acknowledge their sinfulness. They

act as if they are they are not to blame for the negative consequences of their actions. “The inability to feel personal blame is a serious and widespread sickness,” Pope Francis says. But even great sinners can be saved if they have the humility to admit their wrongs and let God’s grace enter into their lives.

In the Responsorial Psalm for the Third Sunday of Lent (Ps 103), we will sing:

*The Lord pardons all your iniquities, heals all your ills. He redeems your life from destruction, crowns you with kindness and compassion.*

*Merciful and gracious is the Lord, slow to anger and abounding in kindness.*

*For as the heavens are high above the Earth, so surpassing is his kindness toward those who fear him.*

Jesus Christ is gracious and merciful. He knows that we are all sinners. He doesn’t make comparisons or engage in gossip. He is slow to anger and overflowing with kindness. He invites everyone—no matter who we are or what we have done—to turn to him and ask for forgiveness.

In the second part of Sunday’s Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the

fig tree. He describes a man who owned an orchard with a fig tree that for the past three years has born no fruit. Understandably, the man wants to cut it down, but the gardener begs for mercy for the fig tree. He promises to cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it in the hopes that it will once again bear fruit.

Second chances are always available to us, but they require hard work and “a firm purpose of amendment.” We have to want to change, and we have to be willing to do whatever is required to turn our lives around and make things right.

“I have a dogmatic certainty,” Pope Francis says. “God is in the life of every person. ... Even if a person’s life has been a disaster, if that person has been wracked by vices, by drugs, by whatever else, God is in that life.”

During this Lenten season, let’s see ourselves not as better than anyone else, but as fellow sinners who are eager to repent and be renewed—physically, emotionally and spiritually. Let us work to cultivate and fertilize the soil we are grounded in so that we can once again bear much fruit. †



# Cristo, la piedra angular

## Como pecadores, arrepintámonos y renovémonos durante la Cuaresma

La lectura del Evangelio del tercer domingo de Cuaresma (Lc 13:1-9) habla de nuestra necesidad de arrepentimiento. El pasaje comienza relatando sobre algunas habladurías, incluso calumnias, que rondaban. “Había allí algunos que contaron a Jesús acerca de los galileos cuya sangre Pilato había mezclado con la de sus sacrificios” (Lc 13:1). ¿Quiénes son estas personas? ¿Y qué esperan conseguir al contarle a Jesús lo que han hecho estos escandalosos galileos?

Por la reacción de nuestro Señor, sabemos que no quiere saber nada de ese tipo de “habladurías,” de chismes que denigran a un grupo de personas solamente para sentirse superior a ellas. “Él les respondió: “¿Piensan que estos galileos eran más pecadores que todos los demás galileos, porque sufrieron esto? Les digo que no; al contrario, si ustedes no se arrepienten, todos perecerán igualmente” (Lc 13:2-3).

Al menospreciar a los demás y hablar de ellos, actuamos como si estuviéramos libres de pecado; no reconocemos que también somos pecadores y abusamos de nuestros hermanos y hermanas al tratarlos como si fueran menos que nosotros a los ojos de Dios. Este es el tipo

de hipocresía que siempre enoja a Jesús. ¿Por qué? Porque él sabe exactamente quiénes somos, y no tolerará a las personas que se inflan de orgullo y pretenden ser mejores que los demás.

En su autobiografía *Esperanza*, el papa Francisco habla de esta condición tan humana. Escribe:

*Soy pecador. Esa es la definición más justa. Y no es solo una expresión, un artificio dialéctico, un género literario, una pose teatral. [...]*

*Todos somos pecadores; si me dijera a mí mismo que no lo soy, entonces sería la persona más corrupta. En nuestra oración a María, decimos que es madre de “nosotros los pecadores,” y así es. Pero no de corruptos. Los corruptos venden a su madre, venden su lugar en su familia o en su pueblo. Toman decisiones que les beneficia a ellos mismos. Diría que es hasta satánico: cierran la puerta por dentro, cierran la puerta con doble llave.*

La diferencia entre los pecadores y los corruptos es que los pecadores pueden arrepentirse y convertirse. En el lenguaje del Evangelio de este domingo, pueden arrepentirse y empezar de nuevo a “dar fruto” (Lk 13:9).

Los corruptos se niegan a

reconocer su pecaminosidad y actúan como si no tuvieran la culpa de las consecuencias negativas de sus actos. “La incapacidad de sentir la culpa personal es una enfermedad grave y muy extendida,” dice el papa Francisco. Pero incluso los grandes pecadores pueden salvarse si tienen la humildad de admitir sus errores y dejan que la gracia de Dios entre en sus vidas.

En el salmo responsorial del cuarto domingo de Pascua (Sal 103), rezamos:

*Él es el que perdona todas tus iniquidades, El que sana todas tus enfermedades; El que rescata de la fosa tu vida, El que te corona de bondad y compasión; Compasivo y clemente es el Señor; Lento para la ira y grande en misericordia.*

*Porque como están de altos los cielos sobre la tierra, Así es de grande Su misericordia para los que le temen.*

Jesucristo es compasivo y clemente; sabe que todos somos pecadores pero no hace comparaciones ni se dedica a las habladurías. Es lento para la ira y desborda bondad. Nos invita a todos—sin importar quiénes somos o qué hemos hecho—a acudir a Él y pedirle perdón.

En la segunda parte del Evangelio del domingo, Jesús cuenta la parábola

de la higuera. Describe a un hombre que poseía un huerto con una higuera que desde hacía tres años no daba fruto. Comprensiblemente, el hombre quiere cortarla, pero el jardinero pide clemencia para la higuera. Promete cultivar la tierra a su alrededor y fertilizarla con la esperanza de que vuelva a dar fruto.

Siempre tenemos la posibilidad de recibir una segunda oportunidad, pero requiere mucho trabajo y «un firme propósito de enmienda». Tenemos que querer cambiar y estar dispuestos a hacer lo que sea necesario para dar un giro a nuestras vidas y enderezar nuestros caminos.

“Tengo una certeza dogmática”—dice el papa Francisco—: “Dios está en la vida de cada persona. [...] Incluso aunque su vida haya sido un desastre, si esa persona ha sido sacudida por los vicios, por las drogas, por cualquier otra cosa, Dios está en esa vida.”

Durante este tiempo de Cuaresma, no nos veamos como mejores que los demás, sino como pecadores deseosos de arrepentirnos y renovarnos física, emocional y espiritualmente. Trabajemos para cultivar y abonar la tierra a la que estamos conectados para que podamos volver a dar mucho fruto. †

# Events Calendar

For a list of events for the next four weeks as reported to The Criterion, log on to [www.archindy.org/events](http://www.archindy.org/events).

## March 27

Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology, St. Bede Theater, 200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad. **Cyprian Davis Lecture**, 7 p.m. CT, Diocese of Baton Rouge, La., vocations director and author Father Josh Johnson presenting “Making Disciples of All Nations,” free. Information: 812-357-6501.

## March 27, April 3, 10

St. Mary Parish, 629 Clay St., North Vernon. **Soup Supper and Lenten Study**, 6-8 p.m., Father Jerry Byrd presenting on Pope Benedict XVI’s apostolic exhortation “The Sacrament of Charity” about the Eucharist, free. Information: 812-346-3604, [parishsecretary@stmarysnv.com](mailto:parishsecretary@stmarysnv.com).

## March 27, 28, 29

St. Ann Parish, 6350 S. Mooresville Road, Indianapolis. **Parish Mission: Hope and the Healing Sacraments**, Thurs. and Fri. 6-7:30 p.m., Sat. 3 p.m. confessions, 4 p.m. Mass with presentation following, executive director for the archdiocesan Secretariat for Evangelizing Catechesis Ken Ogorek and archdiocesan coordinator of Hispanic Ministry Felix Navarrete presenting, in English and Spanish, free. Information: 317-821-2909, [admin@stannindy.org](mailto:admin@stannindy.org).

## March 28-30

Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, 1 Sisters of Providence, St. Mary-of-the-Woods. **Come and See Retreat**, 4 p.m. Fri.-2 p.m. Sun., for single Catholic women ages 18-42 wanting to explore religious life, free, meals and housing provided. Information, registration: 361-500-9505, [jluna@swsmw.org](mailto:jluna@swsmw.org), [sister4sofprovidence.org](http://sister4sofprovidence.org).

## March 29

White Violet Center for Eco-Justice, 1 Sisters of Providence, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. **Alpaca Encounter: From Farm to Fiber Art**, 1-3 p.m., alpaca herd visit and presentations on alpaca wool harvesting, preparation and arts, \$25, register by March 27. Information: [Events.SistersofProvidence.org](http://Events.SistersofProvidence.org), 812-535-2932, [wvc@spsmw.org](mailto:wvc@spsmw.org).

## April 2

MCL Cafeteria, 5520 Castleton Corner Lane, Indianapolis. **Solo Seniors**, 5:30-8:30 p.m., Catholic, educational, charitable and social singles—separated, widowed or divorced—age 50 and older, new members welcome, also call about regular Friday night dinner events. Information: 317-796-8605.

## Virtual Series: Learn About Our Benedictine Vows—Obedience, via Zoom

7 p.m., second of three sessions (April 30), hosted by Sisters of St. Benedict of Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, Ind. (Evansville Diocese), free, registration required. Information, registration: 812-367-1411, ext. 2830, [vocation@thedome.org](mailto:vocation@thedome.org).

## April 4

Women’s Care Center, 4901 W. 86th St., Indianapolis. **First Friday Mass**, 5 p.m., optional tour of center to follow. Information: 317-829-6800, [womenscarecenter.org](http://womenscarecenter.org).

Our Lady of the Greenwood Church, 335 S. Meridian St., Greenwood. **First Friday bilingual celebration of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus**, Mass 6 p.m. followed by adoration until 9 p.m., sacrament of reconciliation available. Information: 317-750-7309, [msross1@hotmail.com](mailto:msross1@hotmail.com).

St. John Paul II Church, 2253 St. Joe Road W., Sellersburg. **First Friday Devotion**, 11:40 a.m., litany, consecration to the Sacred Heart, Divine Mercy Chaplet followed by noon Mass. Information: 812-246-2512.

## April 4-6

Cincinnati, Ohio. **Retrouvaille**

**Retreat**, for those in a struggling marriage, location disclosed upon registering. Information, registration: 513-258-8622, [CincinnatiRetrouvaille@gmail.com](mailto:CincinnatiRetrouvaille@gmail.com), [helpourmarriage.org](http://helpourmarriage.org).

## April 5

St. John Paul II Church, 2253 St. Joe Road W., Sellersburg. **First Saturday Devotion**, 8 a.m., rosary, litany, consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, confession 8-8:30 a.m. followed by 8:30 a.m. Mass. Information: 812-246-2512.

St. Matthew the Apostle Church, 4100 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. **Children’s Rosary**, 9 a.m., children of all ages invited to pray rosary every first Saturday, donuts and fellowship to follow, free. Information: [julie3reyes@gmail.com](mailto:julie3reyes@gmail.com).

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, 10655 Haverstick Road, Carmel, Ind. (Lafayette Diocese). **Gabriel Project Benefit Concert**, 6 p.m. classical music concert by Musica Viate followed by reception, \$20 suggested donation, proceeds benefit Gabriel Project of Indianapolis, all welcome to worship at Mass at 4:30 p.m. before concert. Information, registration: [goangels.org/benefit-concert](http://goangels.org/benefit-concert).

## April 5, 6, 26

**St. Malachy Parish, 9833 E. County Road 750 N** Brownsburg. **One in Christ marriage preparation**, Saturdays 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Sunday 9:45 a.m.-4 p.m., \$99 for online prework session, \$300 for seminar, NFP classes additional fee, scholarships and gift certificates available. Information, registration: 317-600-5629, [Info@OICmarriage.org](mailto:Info@OICmarriage.org), [oicmarriage.org](http://oicmarriage.org).

## April 7

**Virtual Prayer with the Sisters of Providence**, 7-7:45 p.m., for single women ages 18-42, prayer and sharing on topic of shame. Information, registration: [events.sistersofprovidence.org](http://events.sistersofprovidence.org), 361-500-9505, [jluna@spsmw.org](mailto:jluna@spsmw.org).

## April 8

Church of the Immaculate Conception, 1 Sisters of Providence, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, St. Mary-of-the-Woods. **Taizé Prayer at the Woods**, 7-8 p.m., silent and spoken prayers, simple music, silence, virtual option available. Information: [Taize.SistersofProvidence.org](http://Taize.SistersofProvidence.org), 812-535-2952.

## April 8, 16, 22, 29

St. Monica Parish, 6131 N. Michigan Road, Indianapolis. **“Know Your Fertility” Class**

in Spanish, 7-9 p.m., series of four sessions, \$75. Information, registration: [ccorona@archindy.org](mailto:ccorona@archindy.org), 317-800-9306.

## April 10

The Galt House, 140 N. Fourth St., Louisville, Ky. **St. Elizabeth Catholic Charities Giving Hope-Changing Lives Gala**, doors open 5:30 p.m., dinner 7 p.m., client testimonials, live auction items from \$2,400-\$8,500 value, register by March 21. Information, registration: 812-949-7305, [info@stcharities.org](mailto:info@stcharities.org). Separate online auction starts March 26 at [bidpal.net/stegala2025](http://bidpal.net/stegala2025).

## April 13

Marian University, Norman Center Room 222, 3200 Cold Spring Road, Indianapolis. **People of Peace OFS Monthly Meeting**, 12:30-3 p.m., explore Franciscan spirituality with lay Franciscans, free. Information: Information: 317-432-0909, [jodymdalton@aol.com](mailto:jodymdalton@aol.com).

## April 14

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. **Leave the Light On**, 9 a.m.-7 p.m., sacrament of reconciliation, no appointment needed. Information: 317-545-7681, [lcoons@archindy.org](mailto:lcoons@archindy.org). †

## Retreats and Programs

For a complete list of retreats as reported to The Criterion, log on to [www.archindy.org/retreats](http://www.archindy.org/retreats).

## April 4-6

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. **Living a More Deliberate and Conscious**

**Christian Life: Lenten Weekend Retreat**, 6 p.m. Fri.-noon Sun., Father James Farrell and Mary Schaffner presenting, \$225,

includes single room, meals. Registration: [archindy.org/fatima-events](http://archindy.org/fatima-events), 317-545-7681, [lcoons@archindy.org](mailto:lcoons@archindy.org).

## April 10, May 8

**Virtual guided meditation series via Zoom**, 7-7:45 p.m., every second Thursday of the month through May, offered by Providence Spirituality & Conference Center, free, registration required. Information, registration: [events.SistersofProvidence.org](http://events.SistersofProvidence.org), 812-535-2952, [provctr@spsmw.org](mailto:provctr@spsmw.org).

## April 11-13

Saint Meinrad Archabbey Guesthouse, 200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad. **The Passion(s) of the Christ**, Benedictine Archabbot Kurt Stasiak presenting, \$350 single, \$550 double. Registration: 812-357-6611, [saintmeinrad.org/retreats](http://saintmeinrad.org/retreats).

## April 15, 16, 17

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. **Holy Week Days of Silence**, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., \$45 per day, includes room, continental breakfast, lunch and use of common areas and grounds, overnight stays

available for additional \$32 per night, dinner additional \$11 per meal. Registration: [archindy.org/fatima-events](http://archindy.org/fatima-events), 317-545-7681, [lcoons@archindy.org](mailto:lcoons@archindy.org).

## April 16-20

Saint Meinrad Archabbey Guesthouse, 200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad. **Holy Week: A Time to Ponder and Rejoice**, Benedictine Father Simon Herrmann presenting, \$625 single, \$1,000 double. Registration: 812-357-6611, [saintmeinrad.org/retreats](http://saintmeinrad.org/retreats).

## April 17-20

Mother of the Redeemer Retreat Center, 8220 W. State Road 48, Bloomington. **Easter Triduum Retreat**, 4 p.m. Holy Thursday-10 a.m. Easter Sunday Mass, facilitated by Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, \$241 for single room, \$277 for double room, \$313 for triple room, includes meals on Friday and Saturday plus breakfast Sunday,

commuters \$36 includes lunch and dinner on Friday and Saturday. Information, registration: 812-825-4642, ext. 1, [motheroftheredeemer.com](http://motheroftheredeemer.com).

## April 25-27

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. **Worldwide Marriage Encounter**, 8 p.m. Fri.-4 p.m. Sun., includes three meals Sat., two meals Sun., and Sunday Mass, \$75 application fee to reserve space plus freewill offering to cover cost of retreat. Information, registration: [wwme.org/apply](http://wwme.org/apply), 317-863-5680.

## April 28-May 2

Saint Meinrad Archabbey Guesthouse, 200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad. **Priest Retreat: Faith Stories from the Gospel of John**, Benedictine Father Eugene Hensell presenting, \$625 single, \$1,250 double. Registration: 812-357-6611, [saintmeinrad.org/retreats](http://saintmeinrad.org/retreats). †

## April 7-8 gathering at Marian to highlight USCCB document on youths, young adults

Marian University, 3200 Cold Spring Road, in Indianapolis, is hosting a two-day regional formation event on April 7-8 highlighting “Listen, Teach, Send,” a new national pastoral framework for ministries with youths and young adults in the Church adopted by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) last June. The gathering is being co-hosted by the Archdiocese of Indianapolis and the USCCB.

“Listen, Teach, Send” will unpack the USCCB document and focus on its guide for families and pastoral ministers in the accompaniment and evangelization of youth and young adults in their journey to and with Jesus Christ.

The methodology for it is rooted in the Gospel story of the road to

Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35) and invites pastoral leaders and families, in their engagement with young people, to imitate Jesus who listens attentively, teaches from the heart and sends disciples into the world.

The two-day event will be from 4-9 p.m. on April 7 and 8 a.m.-5 p.m. on April 8.

Indianapolis Archbishop Charles C. Thompson will celebrate a welcoming Mass for all attending at 4:30 p.m. on April 7 at Marian University.

Costs, including meals, is \$30 for a single day or \$60 for both days. Register by April 1. For more information or to register, visit [tinyurl.com/listenteachsend25](http://tinyurl.com/listenteachsend25). †

## Archdiocesan Creation Care Ministry accepting parish grant applications through May 2

Does your parish have an idea to make its campus more sustainable? The archdiocesan Creation Care Ministry is accepting applications from parishes for two grants, with a submission deadline of May 2.

The Outdoor Sacred Space Grant is for outdoor sacred space projects such as pollinator gardens, wildlife habitats, rain gardens, tree plantings, community gardens and grottos. The grant amount is \$250, and multiple

recipients will be selected.

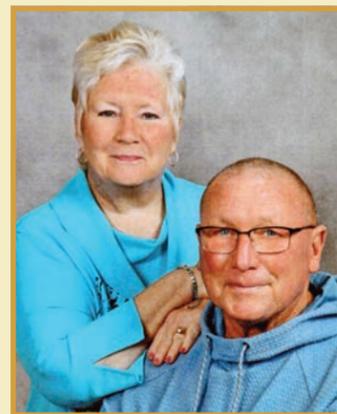
The Recycling and Waste Reduction Grant is for recycling and waste reduction projects, including the purchase of new equipment, reusable materials, signage and more. The grant amount of \$1,000 will awarded to a single recipient.

To apply, send a project description and budget with approval from your parish pastor, principal or parish council representative to [mail@ourcommonhome.org](mailto:ourcommonhome.org). †

## Wedding Anniversaries

**GREGORY AND PEGGY (BROWNLEE) SCHAUB**, members of St. Jude Parish in Indianapolis, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on March 22. The couple was married in St. Philip Neri Church in Indianapolis on March 22, 1975. They have two children: Patrick and Paul Schaub.

The couple also has 10 grandchildren. †



Announcements for couples celebrating 50, 55, 60, 65, 70 or more years of marriage are accepted. Go to [cutt.ly/anniversaries](http://cutt.ly/anniversaries) or call 317-236-1585.



# The Face of Mercy

By Daniel Conway



## Artists give renewed hope and meaning to those who have lost their way

During the 2025 Jubilee Year, several days have been designated as “Jubilee Days.” These are intended to welcome and celebrate different groups of people and various ministries in the Church.

The Jubilee of Artists and the World of Culture was held on Feb. 16-18. Individual artists and groups of artists were invited to reflect on the “way of beauty,” the *via pulchritudinis*, to encounter Jesus Christ, “the image [icon] of the invisible God” (Col 1:15) and the sure foundation of Christian hope, the one who reveals God’s love to all people. Artists of every race, language and culture were given a graced opportunity to discover or rediscover their vocations to express forms of beauty that can renew the world with the gift of hope.

The Gospel reading for Mass on Feb. 16 was St. Luke’s version of the Beatitudes (Lk 6:17, 20-26). According to Pope Francis, Jesus’ words “blessed are you” overturn our worldly mentality and invite us to look at reality with new eyes, with God’s gaze, “so we can see beyond appearances and recognize beauty even amidst frailty and suffering.” This new way of seeing the world is essential to the

appreciation of works of beauty.

The second part of St. Luke’s Beatitudes contains what the pope calls “harsh and admonishing words.” These are the “woes” that follow the Lord’s words of blessing: “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep” (Lk 6:24-25). The contrast between “blessed are you” and “woe to you” is stark.

Pope Francis issues a prophetic message to artists and representatives of the world of culture. “You are called to be witnesses to the revolutionary vision of the Beatitudes,” the pope says. “Your mission is not only to create beauty, but to reveal the truth, goodness and beauty hidden within the folds of history, to give voice to the voiceless, to transform pain into hope.”

The connection between beauty, on the one hand, and truth and goodness, on the other, is what genuine hope is all about.

As the Holy Father says:

*We live in a time of complex financial and social crises, but ours is above all a*

*spiritual crisis, a crisis of meaning. Let us ask ourselves questions about time and about purpose. Are we pilgrims or wanderers? Does our journey have a destination, or are we directionless? Artists have the task of helping humanity not to lose its way and to keep a hopeful outlook.*

The spiritual crisis of our time frequently causes people to lose hope and to feel lonely, lost and afraid. Pope Francis believes that artists can give renewed hope and meaning to people who have lost their way. “Be aware, however,” the pope says, “that hope is not easy, superficial or abstract. No! True hope is interwoven within the drama of human existence.”

Pope Francis sees hope as dynamic, not passive. “Hope is not a convenient refuge, but a fire that burns and irradiates light, like the word of God. That is why authentic art always expresses an encounter with mystery, with the beauty that surpasses us, with the pain that challenges us, with the truth that calls us.”

The encounter with mystery that takes place when we experience authentic art stirs something in the mind and

heart. Art inspires us, moves us and transforms us. As Pope Francis says, artists are “guardians of the Beatitudes” who can both preserve and expose the revolutionary worldview of Christ.

“We live in a time when new walls are being erected,” the pope says, “when differences become a pretext for division rather than an opportunity for mutual enrichment.” Artists, who are men and women of the world of culture, “are called to build bridges, to create spaces for encounter and dialogue, to enlighten minds and warm hearts.”

To those who ask, “What is the use of art in our wounded world? Are there not more urgent, more practical, more pressing things to do?” Pope Francis replies: “Art is not a luxury, but something that the spirit needs. It is not a flight from reality, but a charge, a call to action, an appeal and a cry.”

True beauty teaches us that there is infinitely more to life than what is pragmatic.

*(Daniel Conway is a member of The Criterion’s editorial committee.) †*

“Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person reveals the mercy of God.”

—Pope Francis, “*Misericordiae Vultus*” (“The Face of Mercy”)

“Jesús de Nazaret con su palabra, con sus gestos y con toda su persona revela la misericordia de Dios.”

—Papa Francisco, “*Misericordiae Vultus*” (“El rostro de la misericordia”)

**El rostro de la misericordia/Daniel Conway**

## Los artistas devuelve la esperanza y el sentido a quienes han perdido el rumbo

Durante el Año Jubilar 2025, se han designado varios días de “jubileo” con los que se pretende acoger y celebrar a distintos grupos de personas y diversos ministerios de la Iglesia.

El Jubileo de los Artistas y del Mundo de la Cultura se celebró del 16 al 18 de febrero. Se invitó a artistas individuales y a grupos de artistas a reflexionar sobre el “camino de la belleza,” la *via pulchritudinis*, para encontrarse con Jesucristo, “la imagen del Dios invisible” (Col 1:15) y fundamento seguro de la esperanza cristiana, el que revela el amor de Dios a todos los hombres. Artistas de todas las razas, lenguas y culturas tuvieron la oportunidad de descubrir o redescubrir su vocación de expresar formas de belleza capaces de renovar el mundo con el don de la esperanza.

La lectura del Evangelio del 16 de febrero fue la versión de san Lucas de las Bienaventuranzas (Lc 6:17, 20-26). Según el papa Francisco, las palabras de Jesús “felices ustedes” invierten nuestra mentalidad mundana y nos invitan a mirar la realidad con nuevos ojos, con la mirada de Dios, “que ve más allá de las apariencias y reconoce la belleza, aun en la fragilidad y en el sufrimiento.” Esta nueva forma de ver el mundo es esencial

para apreciar las obras de belleza.

La segunda parte de las Bienaventuranzas de san Lucas contiene lo que el Papa llama “palabras duras y de advertencia.” Estos son los “¡ay!” que siguen a las palabras de bendición del Señor: “¡Ay de ustedes, los ricos, porque ya tienen consuelo! ¡Ay de ustedes, los que ahora están satisfechos, porque tendrán hambre! ¡Ay de ustedes, los que ahora ríen, porque conocerán la aflicción y las lágrimas!” (Lc 6:24-25). El contraste entre “felices ustedes” y “ay de ustedes” es muy marcado.

El papa Francisco lanza un mensaje profético a los artistas y representantes del mundo de la cultura. “[Ustedes] están llamados a ser testigos de la visión revolucionaria de las Bienaventuranzas,” afirma el Papa. “Su misión no sólo es crear belleza, sino revelar la verdad, la bondad y la belleza escondidas en los pliegues de la historia, de dar voz a quien no tiene voz, de transformar el dolor en esperanza.”

La conexión entre la belleza, por un lado, y la verdad y la bondad, por otro, es en lo que consiste la auténtica esperanza.

Tal como nuestro Santo Padre lo plantea:

*Vivimos un tiempo de crisis compleja,*

*que es económica y social y, ante todo, es crisis del alma, crisis de significado. Nos planteamos cuestiones sobre el tiempo y la orientación. ¿Somos peregrinos o errantes? ¿Caminamos con una meta o estamos dispersos deambulando? El artista es aquel o aquella que tiene la tarea de ayudar a la humanidad a no perder la dirección, a no extraviar el horizonte de la esperanza.*

La crisis espiritual de nuestro tiempo hace que a menudo las personas pierdan la esperanza y se sientan solas, perdidas y asustadas. El papa Francisco considera que los artistas pueden dar esperanza y sentido renovados a quienes han perdido el rumbo. “Pero, atención— señala el Papa—“no una esperanza fácil, superficial, desencarnada. ¡No! ¡No! La verdadera esperanza se entrelaza con el drama de la existencia humana.”

El Santo Padre ve la esperanza como algo dinámico, no pasivo. “No es un refugio cómodo, sino un fuego que arde e ilumina, como la Palabra de Dios. Por eso el arte auténtico es siempre un encuentro con el misterio, con la belleza que nos supera, con el dolor que nos interroga, con la verdad que nos llama.”

El encuentro con el misterio que se produce cuando experimentamos el arte

auténtico despierta algo en la mente y el corazón. El arte nos inspira, nos conmueve y nos transforma. Como dice el papa Francisco, los artistas son “custodios de las Bienaventuranzas” que pueden tanto preservar como exponer la visión revolucionaria del mundo de Cristo.

“Vivimos en una época en la que se levantan nuevos muros, en la que las diferencias se vuelven un pretexto para la división más que una ocasión de enriquecimiento mutuo.” Los artistas, que son hombres y mujeres del mundo de la cultura, “están llamados a construir puentes, a crear espacios de encuentro y de diálogo, a iluminar las mentes y a encender los corazones.”

A los que se preguntan: “Pero, ¿para qué sirve el arte en un mundo herido? ¿No hay quizá cosas más urgentes, más concretas, más necesarias?” El papa Francisco responde: “El arte no es un lujo, sino una necesidad del espíritu. No es huida, sino responsabilidad, invitación a la acción, llamada, grito.”

La verdadera belleza nos enseña que la vida es infinitamente más que lo pragmático.

*(Daniel Conway es integrante del comité editorial de The Criterion.) †*

# DEACONS

continued from page 1

The change came about through the continued implementation of the latest edition of the *Program for Priestly Formation* (PPF), developed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops with guidance from the Vatican.

The implementation began a few years ago with new programs for forming seminarians beginning priestly formation.

Now dioceses and seminaries are starting to apply changes to the last phase of priestly formation, which the new edition of the PPF calls the “vocational synthesis stage.”

Transitional Deacon Liam Hosty, who will also be ordained a priest on June 7, is not ministering in an archdiocesan parish in the months leading up to the ordination liturgy. That is because the seminary in which he is enrolled, Mount St. Mary’s Seminary and School of Theology in Cincinnati, has not yet implemented this part of the new edition of the PPF.

In interviews with *The Criterion*, Deacons Day and Siefker, the pastors of the parishes where they are serving and archdiocesan director of seminarians Father Eric Augenstein reflected on how this new stage in priestly formation is affecting how men are being prepared for life and ministry as priests in central and southern Indiana.

## ‘Helping them to prepare for life as a priest’

Father Augenstein said that the two purposes of the vocational synthesis stage are for the deacons “to gain experience in pastoral ministry” and “to be integrated into the life of the archdiocese and the presbyterate.”

He also explained that “the bulk of the vocational synthesis stage happens at the parish and the pastor is the primary formator and supervisor.”

“My role is to recommend to the archbishop good pastors and parishes for the deacons to be assigned to,” added Father Augenstein, who also serves as pastor of Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ Parish in Indianapolis.

He meets with the deacons several times during the stage to help them grow in their knowledge of ministries in the archdiocese and people who help lead them.

“We’re not just putting them in a parish,” he said. “We’re also helping them to prepare for life as a priest and what that will look like specifically here in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.”

Deacon Day and Deacon Siefker were familiar with their respective parishes before arriving last December because they had served in ministry there the previous summer.

“I’m really glad that where I’m at now is where I was at during the previous summer,” said Deacon Day of his starting ministry at Our Lady of the Greenwood. “The summer was a great time to begin in. This is a big parish and a busy parish. So, I’m glad that I kind of had a foot in the door from the summer experience.”

Archdiocesan seminarians regularly serve in parishes during the summer. The transitional deacons noted, though, that there’s a difference in starting in ministry in a parish in December.

“I’m here while school is in session,” said Deacon Siefker of his current ministry at Holy Name. “The parish is busier now than when I was here in the summer. I was here for Christmas liturgies. I’ll be here for Holy Week liturgies. It’s a bigger deal. I feel more immersed into the life of the parish.”

“That’s different from the summer,” said Father Todd Goodson, Our Lady of the Greenwood’s pastor. “Some

parishes effectively shut down all of July. So, it’s a better time to be engaged in parish life.”

While Father Robert Robeson, Holy Name’s pastor, supervises Deacon Siefker’s ministry in the Beech Grove faith community, he sees the parishioners contributing as much to Deacon Siefker’s formation as himself, noting that they have been “enveloping him and helping him to learn what it’s like to be a part of the parish environment.”

“I see that really as my role,” Father Robeson said, “to facilitate that learning experience with the parish, helping him to learn how to stand in his authority and his identity as a soon-to-be priest.”

While Deacon Siefker has benefited from his interaction with Holy Name parishioners, Father Robeson noted that the parish benefits from seeing his growth in ministry.

“They really have seen this transformation and a growth in confidence,” Father Robeson said. “It’s a great benefit for me and the parish to be able to see that.”

## ‘Feeling the grace of the sacrament’

Both transitional deacons have ministered in parishes in the past as seminarians. Deacon Siefker, though, “definitely” noticed a change in parish ministry after being ordained a deacon.

“I’m feeling the grace of the sacrament, so to speak,” he said. “There’s more confidence, more boldness. I feel more zealous about it, honestly.”

Part of that feeling, he noted, is because he knows that, now that he is ordained, he’s gone beyond the continuing discernment that marked his earlier priestly formation.

Deacon Siefker likened that earlier formation to “trying on a pair of shoes.”

“Now it’s like, ‘Yep. I’ve put the shoes on, the laces are tied, and we are running,’” he said with a laugh.

Both deacons can proclaim the Gospel and preach at Mass and preside over baptisms and graveside committal services, responsibilities they could not do prior to their diaconal ordination on Oct. 26 at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad where they were previously enrolled.

Father Goodson noted the fact that Deacon Day has already been ordained makes the kind of supervision he gives to him different from what he would do with a seminarian earlier in his formation.

“I feel a little bit less like I’m helping form him and more like we’re partnering together as he moves into ministry,” Father Goodson said. “He loves to preach and is a good preacher. So, that’s helpful for me. And it’s a fresh voice for the parish.”

“This isn’t a matter of a mentor teaching a student who might not be here in a few months,” added Deacon Day. “You’re joining a band of brothers.”

He experienced that brotherhood in Our Lady of the Greenwood’s rectory, living with Father Goodson and the parish’s parochial vicar, Father José Neri.

“It’s sort of a locus for other priests in the [Indianapolis]



Father Todd Goodson, left, and transitional Deacon Thomas Day pose on Feb. 19 at Our Lady of the Greenwood Church in Greenwood. Deacon Day is serving for six months in Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish prior to his priestly ordination on June 7. Father Goodson, pastor of Our Lady of the Greenwood, is supervising Deacon Day’s ministry in the parish. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

South Deanery,” Deacon Day said. “Just last Sunday, we had five or six priests here just to have dinner, kick back and catch up with what everyone’s doing.”

## ‘Taking off one of the training wheels’

The vocational synthesis stage is a time for transitional deacons to grow in that brotherhood with archdiocesan priests.

“Fraternity in a diocesan priestly setting is something that you have to be intentional about,” said Father Goodson. “It’s hard to do. There are a lot of demands on you as a priest in a parish. So, you can very easily become isolated if you’re not really intentional about calling brother priests to come over for dinner, checking in, making sure we’re praying the [Liturgy of the Hours] together.”

“I’ve certainly learned in my time as a priest that, if I want the brotherhood in the priesthood, it will happen kind of automatically in a seminary setting because you’re all there together. But you really have to be intentional about it in a diocesan setting.”

Father Augenstein noted that going quickly from the community life of a seminary to a more isolated life found in a parish rectory “can be a very jarring transition” for newly ordained priests. The vocational synthesis stage was in part designed to make that transition smoother.

“By the time they are ordained priests and begin priestly ministry, they will have already grown comfortable to the routines of life in a parish,” Father Augenstein said.

While Deacon Siefker has experienced the “loss of the support” he had when he lived at Saint Meinrad, he added that his time at Holy Name and the continued formation he is receiving there has been a good transition.

“It’s an intermediate amount of formation,” Deacon Siefker said. “Before, it was all around you and you were immersed in it. You really had no other choice than to do formation. Now, you’re definitely a lot more independent than when you’re in the seminary. Still, there’s some oversight and some required things in regard to formation to attend to.”

“It’s like taking off one of the training wheels. Eventually, I’ll take off both of them.”

(For more information on a vocation to the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, go to [HearGodsCall.com](http://HearGodsCall.com).) †



Fr. Eric Augenstein



Fr. Robert Robeson

# Pope Francis approves next phase of synod, setting path to 2028 assembly

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis has approved the next phase of the Synod of Bishops on synodality, launching a three-year implementation process that will culminate in an ecclesial assembly at the Vatican in October 2028.

In a letter published on March 15, Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the synod, announced that the synod’s new phase will focus on applying its conclusions at all levels of the Church, with dioceses, bishops’ conferences and religious communities working to integrate synodality into daily Church life before the meeting at the Vatican in 2028.

“For now, therefore, a new synod will not be convened; instead, the focus will be on consolidating the path taken so far,” he wrote in the letter addressed to all bishops, eparchs and the presidents of national and regional bishops’ conferences.

Cardinal Grech told bishops that Pope

Francis approved the three-year plan on March 11 at Rome’s Gemelli Hospital where he has been treated since Feb. 14.

The final document of the synod on synodality, approved by Pope Francis in October 2024, emphasized synodality as essential to the Church’s mission and called for greater lay participation, mandatory pastoral councils and continued study on women in ministry and seminary formation.

During the next three years, dioceses, bishops’ conferences and religious communities will work to integrate synodal principles into Church life with the guidance of a Vatican-issued document scheduled to be published in May.

Evaluation assemblies at diocesan, national and continental levels from 2027 to early 2028 will assess progress before a final ecclesial assembly at the Vatican in October 2028, where Church leaders will

reflect on the synodal journey and discern future steps, the cardinal said.

According to the apostolic constitution “*Universi Dominici Gregis*,” which governs procedures when the papacy is vacant, a council or Synod of Bishops is immediately suspended when a pope dies or resigns. All meetings, decisions and promulgations must cease until a new pope explicitly orders their continuation, or they are considered null.

In the letter, Cardinal Grech noted that implementation phase of the synod “provides the framework” for implementing the results of the 10 Vatican-appointed study groups which, since March 2024, have been examining key issues raised during the first session of the synodal assembly in 2023, such as the role of women in the Church, seminary formation and Church governance.

The study groups were scheduled to present their findings to the pope before June 2025; however, they can also offer an “interim report” then as they continue their work, Cardinal Grech said.

The cardinal added that a key component of the implementation process will be the strengthening of synodal teams, composed of clergy, religious and laypeople, who will work alongside bishops to accompany “the ordinary synodal life of local churches.”

In an interview with Vatican News accompanying the letter’s publication on March 15, Cardinal Grech said that this phase of the synodal process is not about adding bureaucratic tasks, but about “helping the churches to walk in a synodal style.” He explained that the Church must continue “a path of accompaniment and evaluation” rather than treating the synod as a one-time event. †

# For those with developmental disabilities, SPREAD shares faith, 'but they teach us'

By Natalie Hoefler

When Juanita Swallers recalls her son, Nicholas, receiving his first Communion several years ago, the memory makes her eyes misty.

"I teared up when he was in front of me, getting ready to receive," she says. "It just meant a lot to me. I was born and raised Catholic. And so, it just felt like I was able to pass on the faith to him. Or at least try to."

"Or at least try to"—because Nicholas was born with Down syndrome. He has developmental delays and is non-verbal.

Juanita and her husband Kenny, who worship with their family at Holy Spirit Parish in Indianapolis, were able to pass on their faith to Nicholas through the archdiocese's Special Religious Education and Discipleship (SPREAD) program for those with developmental disabilities.

Offering adapted sacramental preparation is vital for fully embracing these individuals and their families in the faith.

But SPREAD, offered through individual parishes or groups of parishes in central and southern Indiana, does so much more.

By nurturing the faith lives of its members through specialized approaches at regular meetings and annual events, the program develops models of discipleship that impact the lives of others.

"They're natural disciples. They really, really are," says Jenny Bryans, archdiocesan disabilities ministries coordinator. "They have no qualms or reserve about letting everyone know how much they love Jesus and how important Jesus is in their life. I think they teach us how to be disciples rather than us teaching them."

## An 'adapted and multi-sensory' method

Intentional inclusion of those with developmental disabilities was a long time coming in the Church.

It finally arrived in 1978 when the bishops of the United States issued a pastoral statement on addressing the needs of these individuals and their families, from physical access to catechesis and more.

The SPRED (Special Religious Development) program, developed in Chicago, was created to meet those catechetical needs. It was introduced in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis in the 1990s.

"Our groups are no longer exclusively following the SPRED Chicago program, so we recently changed our name to Special Religious Education and Discipleship to best represent the added focus of the groups," says Bryans.

Ten groups are currently active in several parishes or combined parishes

in Columbus, Indianapolis, Oldenburg and Seymour, with a new group in the process of forming in New Albany.

Each group meets once or twice a month between September and May.

"There's a specific structure to the meetings, and it also has lessons and a curriculum," says Bryans, who trains SPREAD catechists in the archdiocese.

She describes methods used to develop members' faith during the meetings as "adapted and multi-sensory."

"For instance, at prayer time you might pass around a cross they could hold," Bryans explains. "That would be a cue to them that it's time to pray.

"Or if they're non-verbal or unable to read, then you use a lot more pictorial type of material so you can communicate with them, and they can express themselves with pictures."

The format and approach create a comfortable environment for the participants, says Christine Riche, executive director of ministries at St. Mark the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis. Her brother Michael Riche, who has Down syndrome, is a longtime SPREAD member.

The catechists "talk about Scripture, about God in a way that caters to the mentality of our adult groups," she says. "They help them process some ideas or some thoughts on how to have a better relationship with God and just different ways of how they can improve on it if they feel like they want to.

"And [Michael] can be with his peers and just know that it's OK. He can say whatever he wants. He doesn't have to worry about it being a wrong answer or a wrong idea or a wrong thought."

## 'Loved, accepted and celebrated'

Bryans coordinates four annual events bringing together all of the SPREAD groups—a dinner and dance in March, a Disabilities Awareness Mass in April, an overnight summer retreat in July and an Advent gathering in December.

Joy abounds at these events.

"They're eager to sign up to be greeters, readers and altar servers at the Mass," which is celebrated by Archbishop Charles C. Thompson at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis, says Bryans. "And they love visiting with the archbishop at the breakfast afterward."

The July retreat, held at a Catholic retreat center, combines faith, fellowship and fun. It's a favorite of longtime SPREAD member Amy Korzekwa of St. Pius X Parish in Indianapolis.

"It's pretty spiritual, and it's really relaxing," says Korzekwa, who is on the autism spectrum. "We learn the rosary. We do Bible study, and we do other stuff, too."

Like simple service projects, having the opportunity to go to confession and closing with Mass. And there's also time



Nicholas Swallers, left, and his father Kenny Swallers, both of Holy Spirit Parish in Indianapolis, pray before the meal at the 25th annual Special Religious Education and Discipleship (SPREAD) dinner and dance on March 8 at St. Pius X School in Indianapolis. (Photos by Natalie Hoefler)

for games, crafts and cutting loose with karaoke.

"I really like being there with my friends," says Korzekwa. "Everybody feels really comfortable. We just always have a good time."

The social aspect of these events is important for the participants' sense of community, says Bryans. The dinner and dance is a good example.

"They really do look forward to this event, because this is a social event with friends that they have bonded with through the years," she says. "And this is especially wonderful for those whose group doesn't meet anymore for various reasons. This might be the only opportunity for them to see those friends all year. They can be themselves and know that they are loved, accepted and celebrated."

## 'When it comes to love—they get it'

That gift of acceptance is felt by the families of SPREAD members as well.

"It makes each of these individuals and their families feel a part of the community," says Paula Korzekwa, Amy's mother and fellow St. Pius X parishioner. "That's so important. I think so many times in the past, you know, children like that were just left behind, and now they're welcomed freely."

The SPREAD program encourages

members to share their gifts in their parish. Amy, who Paula says "loves to be with people," serves as an usher at St. Pius X.

"Amy knows everyone at church," says Paula. "She calls church her 'happy place.'"

Parishes that involve members with disabilities gain more than volunteers—they learn lessons on joy and love.

"I sing in the choir up front at Holy Spirit," says Swallers. "One day at Mass, Nicholas just walked up and started conducting us! The priests loved it, and he has been doing it ever since.

"Everyone has been so encouraging. Our music director, Christian [Kuphal], is so amazing with Nicholas. Nicholas will bring a CD and ask him to play a song after Mass. And Christian will flip through his iPad to find the sheet music and play it for him. It's just so beautiful."

Bryans recalls one pastor sharing about lessons learned from a SPREAD member during altar server training.

"He was worried about how to adapt to her needs," she says. "But he said she really helped the other [servers] because she wanted to know exactly how to do everything and she asked questions. She was actually leading him and leading the others in how to learn better."

Riche sees members of the SPREAD community less as learners and more as teachers of the core component of Christianity.

"I find it funny that we call them 'special needs,'" she says. "But we're the 'special needs.' We could learn so much from them, especially when it comes to the heart, when it comes to love—they get it."

*(The annual Disabilities Ministry Mass will be celebrated by Archbishop Charles C. Thompson at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, 1347 N. Meridian St., in Indianapolis, at 10 a.m. on April 27. The archdiocesan SPREAD ministry is in need of volunteers to help at events and in other ways. Those interested in helping SPREAD or with the archdiocesan Disabilities Ministries and those with questions about these ministries can contact Jenny Bryans at 317-236-1448 or [jbryans@archindy.org](mailto:jbryans@archindy.org).) †*



Members of the Special Religious Education and Discipleship (SPREAD) community dance to the song "YMCA" at the 25th annual SPREAD dinner and dance on March 8 in the gym of St. Pius X School in Indianapolis on March 8.

# REFUGEES

continued from page 1

the Refugee Act of 1980, signed into law by President Jimmy Carter. That policy established a permanent and systematic procedure for admitting refugees to the United States and created the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement—all of which now hang in the balance.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), one of 10 organizations the federal government has historically partnered with in refugee resettlement, filed a lawsuit on Feb. 18 challenging what it called “the government’s unlawful suspension of funding for its refugee admissions program.”

“For decades, the USCCB has partnered with the U.S. government and locally based Catholic partners to help nearly a million individuals find safety and build their lives in the United States,” the bishops stated in a press release. “The unilateral and unexplained decision of the government to suspend this program will have devastating impacts on refugees, making it harder for them to establish themselves in their new home.”

The USCCB statement also noted that the refugees in the program “have undergone special screening and vetting procedures by the U.S. government and are fleeing hardship and persecution in their home countries to resettle in the United States.”

“We are urging the government to uphold its legal and moral obligations to refugees,” the statement continued, “and to restore the necessary funding to ensure that faith-based and community organizations can continue this vital work that reflects our nation’s values of compassion, justice and hospitality.”

But a week after the legal challenge, the Trump administration cancelled its contracts with the USCCB pertaining to refugee resettlement. This action had an immediate effect on Catholic Charities

offices nationwide, which for decades had been the recipients of those federal funds via the USCCB to perform the local work of resettling refugees.

In Indiana, Catholic Charities staff members in both the Archdiocese of Indianapolis and the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend are carrying on this work to the best of their ability despite the current challenges, which have forced cuts in their personnel.

Neal said that Catholic Charities Indianapolis has turned to other funding streams to provide basic case management for the refugee resettlement program—a program that she says has had a remarkable record of success.

The core of the now de-funded federal initiative is an intensive 90-day program in which partner agencies like Catholic Charities help newly arrived refugees acclimate to life in the United States and quickly become independent.

“The services we provide are comprehensive, and it is mind-blowing how self-sufficient somebody can become who may not have a grasp of the culture or the language but then turn around and even in a year’s time open their own business,” Neal said. “It’s truly inspiring what these humans can do.”

Dan Florin, chief executive officer of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, points to the number of staff members and volunteers involved in refugee resettlement who are former refugees themselves. They want to give back, he said, because of their immense gratitude for the hospitality and help they received from day one of their arrival.

“We literally pick them up at the airport, and we are their lifeline for those first 90 days,” Florin said. “We find them safe, clean, affordable housing, and we provide all their basic needs in those first three months. It’s an extremely intensive program that depends fully on our staff and volunteers.”

His Catholic Charities staff has now

been cut by 20% because of the recent developments at the federal level.

Between Fort Wayne and South Bend, Florin said that his Catholic Charities office is currently supporting nearly 1,000 active refugee clients—about 100 of whom arrived before the federal cuts.

Like Neal, Florin points to the decades-long track record and success rate of the resettlement program.

“By day 90, you’re in housing, the kids are in school, everyone is in English as a second language [classes], and you’re well on your path to economic self-sufficiency,” he said. “It requires a complete wraparound of services and love and compassion around those people.”

Florin said that his office is still trying to come to terms with the dramatic changes of the past two months.

“We were all shocked at the abruptness with which the [reception and placement] contract was terminated,” he said. “We’d expected a reduction in the numbers of new arrivals, because that’s what happened during Trump’s first administration. We were prepared for that. But we were not prepared for a complete shutdown of new arrivals.”

Florin has spoken extensively with the press in South Bend and Fort Wayne in recent weeks, emphasizing the longstanding partnership that the federal government has had with Catholic Charities and other agencies and the positive outcomes that have resulted.

“I want people to know that people who come to America through the U.S. refugee admission program are typically coming from refugee camps,” he said. “They’ve been screened multiple times from a health standpoint and a security standpoint. This program has been around since 1980 when Congress set it up, and when you objectively look at its success measures, with people achieving economic self-sufficiency and thriving in their communities, the data support this program. “These are people coming to America

through a legal pathway toward permanent residency and then citizenship,” he continued. “They’re under the care of an accredited refugee resettlement agency like ours, accountable to make sure they stay on track. And we steward them.”

In their latest podcast, leaders of the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) focus on the federal cuts to the refugee program and foreign aid, emphasizing that solidarity with the vulnerable and love of neighbor are at the core of Catholic social teaching.

“We hear a lot in our national narrative now about this tension between the interests of Americans versus the interests of the rest of the world,” said Alexander Mingus, executive director of the ICC, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana. “What does the Church say about this? I can’t find anything that says that a nation has a responsibility only to its own people. What I find is a conversation about solidarity.”

For Neal at Catholic Charities of Indianapolis, which has served more than 20,000 refugees in the last five decades, the local mission is clear despite the uncertainties at the national level.

“We have a moral obligation to serve the most vulnerable,” she said. “It’s taking time to figure out this newness. But what I’ve been trying to keep in mind these last weeks is that I have to be like the very people this program serves. Not one of them ever gave up hope.”

“I can’t be fearful. I just have to keep walking and stay on the right road.”

To follow priority issues and legislation of the ICC, visit [www.indianacc.org](http://www.indianacc.org).

(Victoria Arthur, a member of St. Therese of the Infant Jesus [Little Flower] Parish in Indianapolis, is a correspondent for The Criterion.) †



Alexander Mingus

## LOVE YOUR extraordinary LIFE



Healthcare that understands the value of a life well lived is more than medicine. It’s a partnership, a promise, that each day will be met with compassion and each challenge with dignity.

In every routine checkup, every hospital stay and every interaction – we see the extraordinary in you.

[FranciscanHealth.org](http://FranciscanHealth.org)



# Franciscan HEALTH

# SIMPLY CATHOLIC

## Lent can be a pathway to lead believers to God-given happiness

By Bill Dodds

(OSV News)—“Smear on some ashes, come on get happy,  
 “Gonna chase all those sins away.  
 “Shout hallelujah, put on your sackcloth,  
 “We’re heading for that Easter Day!”  
 Everybody sing!  
 Or not.  
 Either way, maybe it’s time to lighten up as you  
 “Lenten up.”

But—sorry to dash your hopes here—that doesn’t mean skipping the “hard stuff.” You know. The going without. The doing more. The saying “no” to self and “yes” to what God’s calling you to do (or worse, challenging you to do).

It means the “hard stuff” can be a source of happiness. It can be the foundation of a new-found joy.

“Can be” the foundation. That’s the catch, isn’t it? Most likely, you have never spent the 40 days of Lent humming some variation of “tra-la-la-la.” You didn’t lightly skip and dance from Ash Wednesday through Holy Saturday. In fact, you may have grunted “ugh-ugh-ugh” and slogged day after day through all those days. And nights.

So how can “Dies Irae” and “Zip-a-dee-doo-dah” not just be compatible but actually mesh? How can “Day of wrath, O day of mourning” be in sync with “Zip-a-dee-doo-dah, zip-a-dee-ay. My, oh my, what a wonderful day”?

Short theological answer: “God’s ways are not our ways.”

To which the common response is: “You’ve got that right.”

But, seriously, how are you supposed to have a “happy” Lent, a liturgical season that, to quote the glossary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “is the primary penitential season in the Church’s liturgical year, reflecting the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert in fasting and prayer”?

“Whoo-hoo! It’s time to fast and pray”? Yes, fast, pray, give alms and ...

No, not host a Lenten bash. But, yes, come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of what Jesus did for each of us because Lent (and Advent) are times, the catechism says, that are “particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises” (#1438).

The point is learning how to see. We’re like the blind man that Jesus had to work on twice. You know the story of his two-stage miracle:

“When they arrived at Bethsaida, they brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. Putting spittle on his eyes he laid his hands on him and asked, ‘Do you see anything?’ Looking up he replied, ‘I see people looking like trees and walking.’ Then he laid hands on his eyes a second time and he saw clearly; his sight was restored and he could see everything distinctly” (Mk 8:22-25).



Volunteer Maeve Clare smiles on July 17, 2024, as she assists a student working on a project during vacation Bible school at St. Mary Church in East Islip, N.Y. Lent can give believers a deep sense of happiness through coming to see their lives more through the eyes of God. (OSV News photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)

“The point,” the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* explains, “is that the man’s return to sight is gradual, at first not completely perfect.”

In a similar way, our view of Lent can be less than clear. We understand what we’re supposed to do for Lent, but what Lent can do for us may be a little fuzzy.

Can do to us—heart, mind and soul.

And as that comes into better focus, as our own “blind spots” grow smaller, happiness and joy become more apparent.

Keeping this all in mind, you may begin to notice:

1. You can be God’s little helper. Yes, on the seventh day of creation he rested, but he invites you to help him co-create—you.

He has the plans all drawn up. He’s done all the heavy lifting, and he knows what’s needed now to finish the project. Out of his infinite love for you, he leaves some of the work and some of the options (free will!) up to you.

Lent isn’t just a time for repairing what you’ve failed to maintain. It can be a time for refurbishing, revising and revitalizing. For getting started on “You 2.0.”

The praying, fasting, abstaining, almsgiving and private, personal sacrifices can help you better see not

just who you are, but who you can be. And it can give you the courage to more seriously and confidently move forward toward that.

Maybe make a few small adjustments this year. Or maybe a big one. Further explore the possibility of a priestly or religious vocation, of changing from this job to that job, of going back to school, of retiring, of—who knows? It’s more likely you’ll be more open to it if you take advantage of Lent.

And won’t that be a happy (and perhaps a little frightening) discovery? Won’t that bring a sense of relief and excitement? Won’t you want to shout “hallelujah”? (At least once Lent is over and Easter arrives.)

2. You can finally conquer that small, pesky, stubborn, sinful habit of yours. Well, maybe not conquer, but at least tame. Remember: “Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pt 5:8).

Can fasting and praying really help you knock Satan for a loop? You know who’s the top model, the prime example, of that strategy, don’t you? Of course, it’s Jesus. He was tempted after his 40 days in the desert. (See Mt 4:1-11.) And you know how that ended: “Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him” (Mt 4:11).

How could that not be a zip-a-dee-doo-dah day for you? Devil leaves, angels come. Now those are reasons to be happy!

3. You can enjoy a daily sense of accomplishment during the 40 days of Lent. Each day, with each prayer said or each latte skipped, is a victory—brick after brick in the road that can lead you forward in wisdom and grace.

In sports or physical training terms, your “personal record” or “personal best” gets better every day. Throughout the day.

And then—bonus!—that string of repeated good actions becomes a deeply ingrained habit, a virtue. Praying is more a part of your life. Or fasting is. Or saying “no” to self is. Or using your talents to help others is.

Like the athlete who runs a certain number of miles every day misses that exercise when circumstance interferes, you’re aware when those good actions, when that virtue, starts to slip.

You want—you rely on—daily faith, hope and love. On kindness, patience, temperance and so many others.

Then, after discovering the joy of penance, prayer and virtue, you want every day—throughout the year, throughout your life—to be a little bit “Lent,” so every day can be a whole lot “Easter.”

A little bit tougher. A whole lot happier.

(Bill Dodds is the author of *On Your Pilgrimage Called Grief: A Guide for Widows and Widowers.*) †



A crucifix and Bible are pictured on purple cloth during Lent at Jesus the Good Shepherd Church in Dunkirk, Md., on April 7, 2022. The spiritual practices of Lent can lead believers to a greater sense of joy and happiness. (OSV News photo/Bob Roller)

## Journey of the Heart/Jennifer Burger

## Seeds planted during Lent remind us new life will come at Easter

It has been a few weeks since I received ashes, and I still feel like they are on my forehead!

Perhaps it is something about how they were applied, or the gritty feel of the ashes when making the sign of the cross or moving a strand of hair from my face that day.



But whatever the reason, I'm grateful for what has remained in my senses as it reminds me that I have personally accepted and desire to take on the life of penance, participating in our Lord's passion and suffering in way that draws me closer to him during these 40 days.

It is my "yes" to die with him so I may rise with him on Easter morning. I have a stake in this, and these ashes are my "stake in the ground" that mark the spot where something has been planted. We cannot see all that is taking place beneath the surface, but we must trust and avail ourselves to this preparation.

As I consider what might be taking place in my own heart, I am aware that, although far from empty, something feels unfinished. This is part of the Lenten journey.

It is the inner work within the landscape of our hearts that is being cultivated as we are removing the stones of resistance and the weeds of sin. Through our Lenten promises and practices, we turn things over, exposing and offering to God so that our hearts can be made fertile for change and new life in Christ.

The seeds of God's love in Jesus Christ are already planted within us. The same darkness in which these seeds will germinate can also tempt us to hide in the shadow of our sinful nature. The shame or pain that we hold in this darkness can hinder growth and destroy our ability to receive grace—the grace to repent, to be healed, to be open, to receive consolation and blessing. We need this light to overcome any darkness within so that this new life may take root and grow in us.

The words prayed over us when we received our ashes—"Remember you are dust and to dust you shall

return" or "Repent and believe in the Gospel"—are not only sobering reminders, but good "instruction" of our role in the work of God during this penitential season.

Growing in awareness and dying to self magnify both my nothingness, my true poverty and my sinful nature as well as God's omnipotence, source of all things and redemption through Jesus Christ. This is the hidden work of God, the working of the soil of the rough edges of my heart that, come Easter morning, will sprout new life.

My ashes have long been washed away and I don't know for how long I will feel their presence, but I have decided that I will touch my fingers to my forehead and make a sign of the cross, as reminder and indication that here Christ has been planted in the depths of my heart—where he lives, dies and is resurrected in me.

(Jennifer Burger is program manager at Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House in Indianapolis and a member of St. Simon the Apostle Parish in Indianapolis. She is also a spiritual director.) †

## That All May Be One/Fr. Rick Ginther

## A common date for Easter in the East and West? Yes, may it be so

"The Catholic Church is open to accepting the date [for Easter] that everyone wants: a date of unity."

Pope Francis said this during an ecumenical prayer service on Jan. 25 at Rome's



Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls at the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

In several earlier remarks during his pontificate, he has shared this sentiment. His remarks reaffirm the position officially taken by St. Pope Paul VI in the 1960s—if Eastern Christians agree on a way to determine a common date for Easter, the Catholic Church will accept it.

In this Jubilee Year of Hope, the date of Easter coincidentally is the same for East and West, on April 20. But this is not by design or agreement.

A common date of Easter would end the scandal of our division over the annual celebration of the center of our faith.

Christians and former Christians are taken aback by this "division." People of other faiths point to this divide as a clear reason to question the truth of what we believe. That is a scandal.

As has been the custom since the Council of Nicaea in the year 325, the date for Easter was calculated with a simple formula: the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox.

And this works—if all are using the same calendar!

The current solar calendar system used by most of the world was created by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 with the assistance of astronomers at that time. The solar Julian calendar, created by Julius Caesar in 49 B.C., was 11 days off.

With Pope Gregory's adjustment, Oct. 4 was followed by Oct. 15 in 1582.

But not all Christians agreed to use the Gregorian calendar to date their religious feasts. A number of Eastern Orthodox continued to use the Julian calendar.

The current controversy of varied calendars is not new to the Church. In the first three centuries, a controversy arose across the Christian world.

Some demanded that the date of Easter remain in line with the Jewish feast of Passover (14-15 Nisan, as prescribed in Mosaic law). Such Christians were—and are yet today—known as *Quatrodecimans* ("fourteenth" day adherents). For them, Easter falls on whatever day of the week 14-15 Nisan occurs.

Others, including Pope Victor (190 A.D.), insisted that Easter be celebrated on the Lord's day (Sunday), the day of the resurrection.

The Council of Nicaea, whose 1,700th anniversary is this year, ultimately declared that Easter would be celebrated on Sunday. It made normative the basic calculation formula noted earlier.

And that would have been the end of it—until the Julian calendar was reformed.

At the end of the 20th century, a revision of the formula was proposed. It was a joint effort by the World Council of Churches and representatives of the Eastern Churches in Aleppo, Syria, in March 1997. The revision was based on the current formula but not tied to Julian or Gregorian calendars.

Three principles were stated.

First, honor the basic wisdom of Nicaea's formula.

Second, calculate the astronomical data (spring equinox and the full moon) based on today's most accurate astronomical science.

Third, use as the basis for reckoning the meridian of Jerusalem, the place of Christ's death and resurrection.

This proposal was received by many, including the Roman Catholic Church, as an excellent reformulation for unity.

Sadly, this proposal has yet to find universal acceptance. The politics of tradition remain stronger for some in the East than the drive toward unity.

Perhaps this year's coincidental common date and the anniversary of the Council of Nicaea will spur the Church to step toward unity with a common date of Easter.

Please, God, may it be so!

*The current controversy of varied calendars is not new to the Church. In the first three centuries, a controversy arose across the Christian world.*

(Father Rick Ginther is director of the archdiocesan Office of Ecumenism and Interreligious Affairs. He is also the pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Indianapolis.) †

## Evangelization Outreach/Deacon Jim Wood

## Funeral, jubilee year highlight message that hope only comes from Jesus

I recently presided at a funeral service for a man I did not know, nor did I know his family. As a permanent deacon for the archdiocese, I am also called to preside at funerals outside of Mass and graveside services.



In a brief homily I gave that afternoon, I spoke about a journey of hope. I said to the man's family and friends that we are all on a journey of hope to see God face to face. This life we live here is a journey of hope and expectation, a life of service to one another, and a life of worship of the one true God.

I explained that, as Catholics, we believe death is not the end of the story. We believe in what Jesus taught us, that he desires all to be saved and to be with him in paradise. Heaven is the eternal reward we strive for, but it is not a guarantee. We must live a life here in love and service to one another and follow God's commandments.

The Gospel reading for the funeral was John 14:1-6, where Jesus speaks of preparing a dwelling place for us. He says he is the way, the truth and the life. The journey we take in this life must be one pointed to Christ, a life hopeful in God's promise of eternal life for all who have fallen asleep in the love of Jesus.

In 2025, the Catholic Church is taking part on another journey—a holy year to mark a jubilee, whose theme is "Pilgrims of Hope." In recent centuries, every 25 years a

jubilee year is proclaimed for the Church throughout our world. They are special times for a more intense focus on conversion from sin to new life in Jesus Christ, for

*Our faith teaches us a pilgrim is a traveler in this life walking toward communion with Christ, and as the Catechism of the Catholic Church notes: "Pilgrimages evoke our earthly journey toward heaven and are traditionally very special occasions for renewal in prayer" (#2691).*

enhanced priority of encountering Jesus in the sacraments and for reflecting on a jubilee theme.

Our faith teaches us a pilgrim is a traveler in this

life walking toward communion with Christ, and as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes: "Pilgrimages evoke our earthly journey toward heaven and are traditionally very special occasions for renewal in prayer" (#2691).

Pope Francis, speaking about the recently begun jubilee year, offered "a wish for hope, which is a theological virtue, together with faith and charity," praying that "the new year bring us peace, fellowship and gratitude."

We all long for hope in peace, hope in fellowship and hope in gratitude. And while at times we can lose hope—or all hope is indeed lost—we must not forget the hope we have in Jesus, who is our hope on this side of heaven. He is our hope when journeys are weighed down by the effects of our sins. Jesus is our hope when the pilgrimage of life is marred by the seeming lack of faith we see in our world.

This year is indeed a jubilee of hope. Let's continue to pray for hope in our lives, the true hope that comes only from Christ Jesus.

As I told the family and friends during that recent funeral who had lost their loved one, it is OK to grieve for our loved ones who have passed, but to remember to hope in the resurrection of the dead, where they will see their loved one again in paradise.

(Deacon Jim Wood is the catechetical resources coordinator within the archdiocesan Secretariat for Evangelizing Catechesis. He can be reached at [jwood@archindy.org](mailto:jwood@archindy.org).) †

Third Sunday of Lent/Msgr. Owen F. Campion

# The Sunday Readings

Sunday, March 23, 2025

- Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15
- 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12
- Luke 13:1-9

The Book of Exodus, the source of the first reading for Mass this weekend, recalls the encounter between God and Moses at the burning bush. Moses is reported as tending his father-in-law's flock. The bush, although on fire, did not burn.



Then God spoke, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The message was simple. God is always with his people and aware of their plight. He was always merciful and continues to be, sending leaders such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to bring hope, relief and guidance.

Moses in his turn was God's instrument of this relief, sent to lead the people out of Egypt.

Unable to look upon God's face, knowing his own limitations, Moses removed his sandals to show respect even for the ground upon which he met God.

Finally, God revealed the divine name to Moses, a supreme revelation. In Hebrew tradition, names contained the very being of the person. To know a person's name was to touch the person's identity. Imparting the divine name reveals the tightness of the bond, and depth of God, in God's relationship with people.

St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians provides the second reading. Corinth's Christian community challenged Paul. Corinth was an utter pit of immorality. Christians were vulnerable before many temptations.

Paul insisted that Christians had to follow the Gospels despite the difficulties. He warned the Corinthians, encouraged them, scolded them, implored them, taught them and sought to inspire them.

He referred to the history of God's people, giving it as proof that, without God's guidance, without the nourishment provided by God, people die. Earthly resources could never protect or sustain them. Paul insists that God alone is the source of true life.

St. Luke's Gospel furnishes the last

reading, giving one of the rare glimpses of Pontius Pilate in the Gospels outside the passion narratives themselves. It hardly is complimentary to him. Pilate, who so casually sentenced Jesus to an agonizing death, was ruthless and unmerciful in many cases. He also had no regard for the God of Israel or for the religion of the people who worshipped the God of Israel.

(An ancient tradition is that he was recalled to Rome because of his brutality, a brutality too vicious even by the heartless standards of Roman imperial governance.)

Jesus said that the victims of Pilate's cruelty did not deserve what they received. Jesus referred to an accidental disaster, when 18 people were killed by a falling tower in Siloam. He noted that they, too, were innocent. The Lord made this basic point. All those to whom Jesus referred in the end died, innocent or not. None could control evil decisions by evil people, nor the mishaps of nature or invented things.

Manner of death, however, is unimportant. All people die.

Jesus tells the people to reform, giving the parable of the barren fig tree. The owner wants to uproot the tree, but his vinedresser pleads for enough time to nourish the tree in the hope that it will bear fruit. In the end, though, the tree must bear fruit.

## Reflection

We continue to move through Lent. The Church in these readings is frank, telling us that abandoning God reaps a whirlwind of calamity, drawing into its wake even the innocent. Remember the victims of Pilate's disregard for his subjects.

All humans will die under some circumstances. Physicians call death "the inevitable." Even so, it doesn't necessarily mean eternal death. The Church provides Lent to help us to live with God, now and in the next life. If we stumble, God forgives and is ready to strengthen us.

Remember the fig tree. God is patient, but one day will be everyone's last on Earth. What happens next is up to us. †

## Daily Readings

### Monday, March 24

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

### Tuesday, March 25

The Annunciation of the Lord  
Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10  
Psalm 40:7-11  
Hebrews 10:4-10  
Luke 1:26-38

### Wednesday, March 26

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

### Thursday, March 27

Jeremiah 7:23-28  
Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9  
Luke 11:14-23

### Friday, March 28

Hosea 14:2-10  
Psalm 81:6c-11b, 14, 17  
Mark 12:28-34

### Saturday, March 29

Hosea 6:1-6  
Psalm 51:3-4, 18-21b  
Luke 18:9-14

### Sunday, March 30

Fourth Sunday of Lent  
Joshua 5:9a, 10-12  
Psalm 34:2-7  
2 Corinthians 5:17-21  
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

## Question Corner/Jenna Marie Cooper

### Infidelity can be a 'symptom' of causes of a marriage to be declared invalid

**Q**I know the Church investigates divorces and grants a "decree of nullity" if there is sufficient evidence of some foundational issue with the marriage, such as deception, unwillingness to have children or emotional problems.



But what about cases where there was an affair or adultery and where the cheating spouse admits it? Would this involve annulment too, or would or could the Church grant a divorce? (Indiana)

**A**The quick way that I usually like to explain this is that while infidelity in and of itself is not a cause of marital nullity, it can be a "symptom" of one of these causes.

As you correctly note, a declaration or decree of nullity—sometimes popularly but inaccurately called an "annulment"—can be issued by a Catholic marriage tribunal in situations where an apparent marriage was found to never have been valid and binding in the first place.

While in the big picture truly null marriages (that is, as opposed to valid marriages that failed) are relatively rare, there are many reasons why a union may have been invalid. These reasons are called "grounds." Grounds can range from the more dramatic, like kidnapping (see canon 1089 of the Code of Canon Law) or marrying under threats of violence (canon 1103); to the more common and mundane, like certain kinds of psychological issues (see canon 1095).

Typically, when adultery is a relevant factor, the ground that is usually proposed is, in canonical terms, called "partial simulation *contra bonum fidei* [against the good of fidelity]." This corresponds to canon 1101, 2, which states: "If, however, either or both of the parties should by a positive act of will exclude marriage itself or any essential element of marriage

or any essential property, such party contracts invalidly."

Marital fidelity is, of course, an "essential element of marriage," and so "excluding it by a positive act of the will" would render a marriage null. In practical terms, this means that a person would have to have entered into the apparent union with a well-formed and distinct intention to cheat on their spouse or to at least have it in their mind at the time of the wedding that acts of infidelity were something they would be unequivocally open to.

Proving partial simulation before a marriage tribunal can be tricky, since it's naturally difficult to demonstrate someone's interior state of mind in a fully objective way. The actual fact of having committed adultery is an important piece of the puzzle, but in order to prove simulation there must also be evidence that the alleged simulator had a motive both for reserving to themselves the possibility of infidelity and for entering into what they on at least some level understood to be a "sham" marriage in the first place.

This is very different from a scenario where a person married with the presumptive usual intentions of remaining faithful to their spouse, and committing adultery only years afterward when his or her feelings had changed. This lack of fidelity "after the fact," despite being gravely sinful, would not retroactively render the marriage bond invalid.

It should be noted, however, that the Church's law does acknowledge infidelity as a legitimate reason, under certain conditions, for spouses to separate even while their marriage bond still remains (canon 1152).

Less often, infidelity can also be pertinent to the question of a marriage's potential nullity if such acts were compulsive and part of a serious and diagnosable psychiatric disorder. Canon 1095, 3 tells us that those who "because of causes of a psychological nature, are unable to assume the essential obligations of marriage" are incapable of entering into marriage validly.

If a person truly cannot remain faithful despite his or her desire to do so, this means that the person was incapable of marrying due to a fundamental incapacity to assume a core duty of the vocation of marriage. But here too, the infidelity itself would be only a sign that the actual invalidating problem—namely, the psychological disorder—was present.

(Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News. Send your questions to [CatholicQA@osv.com](mailto:CatholicQA@osv.com).) †

## My Journey to God

### Starting Over in Lent

By Sandra Marek Behringer

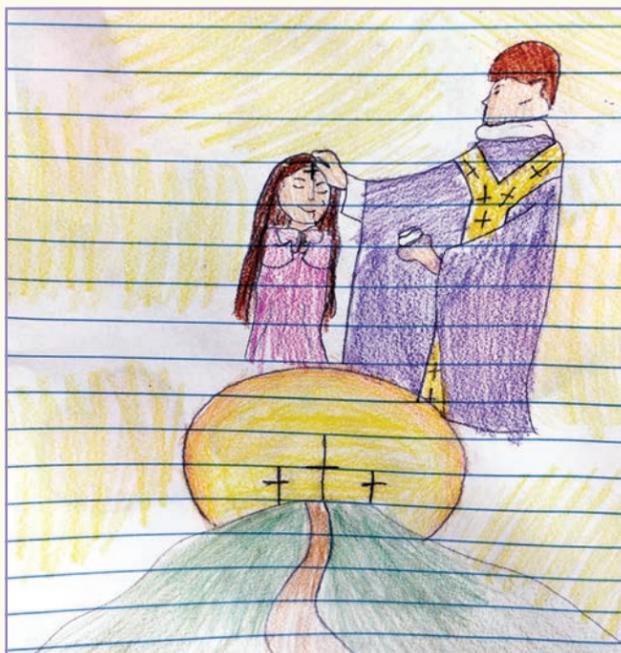
Awakened  
In the dark of morning  
I realize  
the journey continues.

I am walking  
an acceptable road  
in an acceptable time.

The very air is light,  
heady with the power  
of many souls freed of burdens  
singing praise, giving thanks,  
breaking heavy chains of habit  
shaking off selfishness.

Taking a deep breath,  
I start over.

(Sandra Marek Behringer is a member of St. Luke the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis. Photo: When third-grade students of St. Michael School in Brookville were asked to draw a picture of what Ash Wednesday—March 5 this year—meant to them, Paige Scott, 8, created this image. She is the daughter of Erika Scott and Jason Bruns.) (Submitted image)



# Rest in peace

Please submit in writing to our office by 10 a.m. Thursday before the week of publication; be sure to state date of death. Obituaries of archdiocesan priests serving our archdiocese are listed elsewhere in *The Criterion*. Order priests and religious sisters and brothers are included here, unless they are natives of the archdiocese or have other connections to it; those are separate obituaries on this page.

**BRAMBLE, Robert**, 88, Mary, Queen of Peace, Danville, March 7. Husband of Pansy Bramble. Father of Carol Blair, Barbara Frazee, Linda Gowan and Mary Wetterer. Grandfather of seven. Great-grandfather of eight.

**CLARK, Michael E.**, 62, Holy Family, Oldenburg, Feb. 10. Brother of Cathy Cleveland, Susan Hanley, Mary Jo, Jim and Paul Clark. Uncle of several.

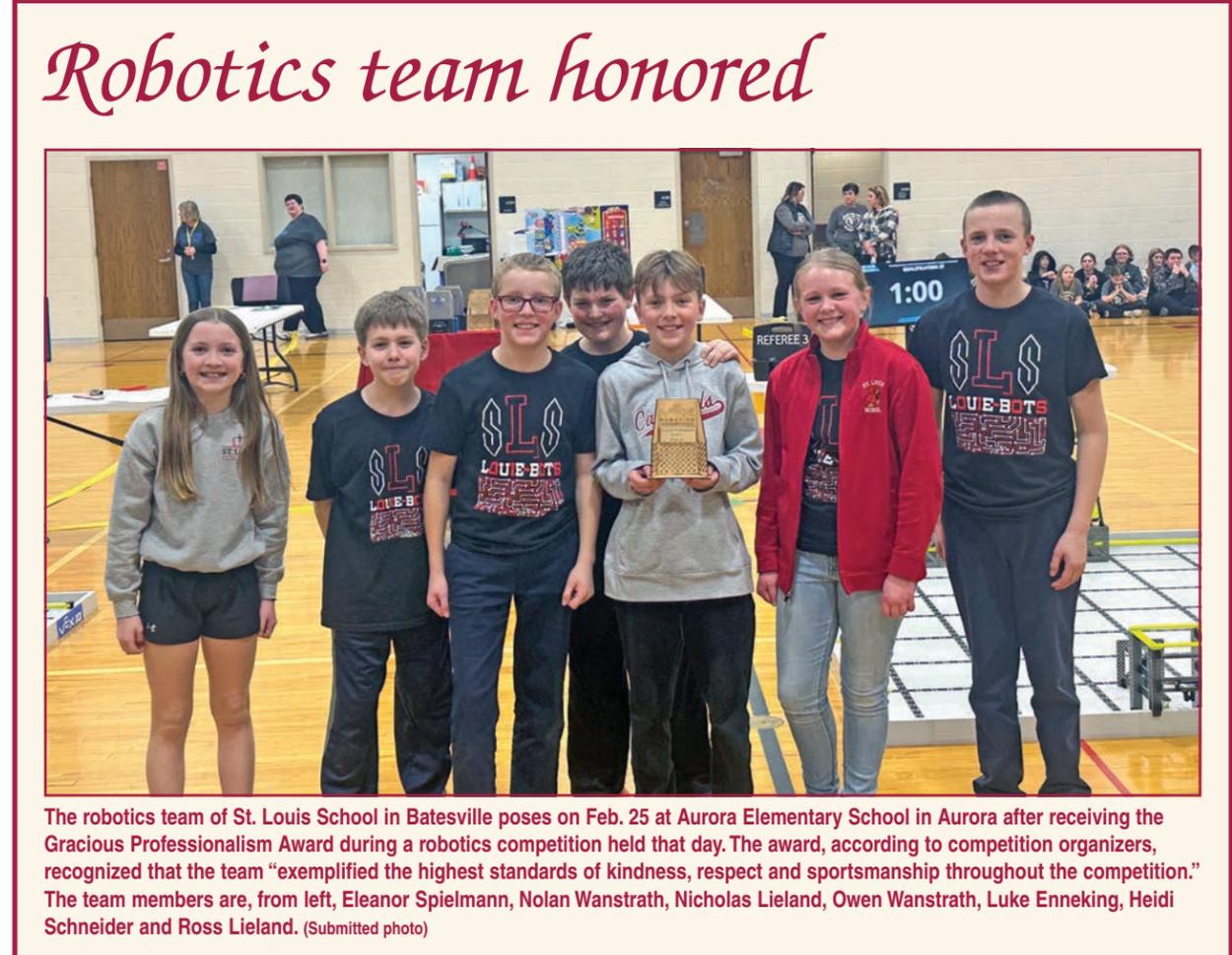
**DOERFLINGER, Dennis**, 89, St. Mary, Greensburg, March 6. Husband of Carol Doerflinger. Father of Sonya Doerflinger, Barbara Fagan and Ann Hathaway. Stepfather of Barbara Jacobs. Grandfather of eight. Great-grandfather of two.

**GAYNOR, Mary V.**, 86, All Saints, Dearborn County, March 7. Wife of Bob Gaynor. Father of Beth Emsweller, Jim and Robin Gaynor. Sister of Mary, Theresa, Joe, Larry, Louis, Michael and Paul. Grandmother of three.

**HECKLER, Doris T.**, 97, St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Aurora, March 3. Mother of Ann Fetzer, Amy, Paula, David, Luke, Mark and Michael Heckler. Sister of Sister of Charity Ann Lehman. Grandmother of 10. Great-grandmother of four.

**JACOBI, Margaret**, 91, St. Michael, Bradford, Feb. 28. Wife of Melvin Jacobi. Mother of Jane Lopnow, Elizabeth Magee, Laura Miller, Todd and Tony Jacobi. Sister of Ginny Garbrough, Amy Schneider, Ida Stilger and Rick Pflanz. Grandmother of 10. Great-grandmother of 15.

**JUAREZ-ESPINOZA, Leslie**



The robotics team of St. Louis School in Batesville poses on Feb. 25 at Aurora Elementary School in Aurora after receiving the Gracious Professionalism Award during a robotics competition held that day. The award, according to competition organizers, recognized that the team “exemplified the highest standards of kindness, respect and sportsmanship throughout the competition.” The team members are, from left, Eleanor Spielmann, Nolan Wanstrath, Nicholas Lieland, Owen Wanstrath, Luke Enneking, Heidi Schneider and Ross Lieland. (Submitted photo)

**D.**, 22, St. Mary, New Albany, Feb. 22. Mother of Alicia Mae Juarez-Espinoza. Daughter of Tomas Espinoza-Acre and

Judith Osiris Juarez. Sister of Jacobo and Tomas Espinoza.

**KNUE, Michael E.**, 74, St. Lawrence, Lawrenceburg, March 5. Husband of Connie Knue. Father of Melinda Scott, Greg and James Knue. Brother of Millicent Prostick and Melinda Thompson. Grandfather of eight. Great-grandfather of four.

**KRAUS, James R.**, 86, All Saints, Dearborn County, March 1. Father of Rita Hummel, Barbie Whiteford and Bill Kraus. Brother of Maryjane Henning, Sandra Wagner, Carole Weldishofer, Denny, Junior, Leon, Mark, Tim and Wally Kraus. Grandfather of eight. Great-grandfather of two.

**KUNKEL, Irvin J.**, 87, St. Louis, Batesville, Feb. 24. Father of Michelle Bushelman, Tammy Housel, Douglas and Steven Kunkel. Grandfather of seven. Great-grandfather of two.

**LUKOWITZ, Jerry**, 85, SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi, Greenwood, Feb. 24. Husband of Marie Lukowitz. Father of Janet Eckerle, Jeanne Schwartz and Steven Lukowitz. Grandfather of four. Great-grandfather of five.

**MAKOWSKY, Carolyn (Popp)**, 89, St. John Paul II, Sellersburg, March 2. Mother of Sarah Hart, Mindy Howe, Jane White, David and Martin Makowsky. Sister of Patty Millman. Grandmother of eight. Great-grandmother of 14.

**MCGRANAHAN, Sean E.**, 51, St. Lawrence, Lawrenceburg, March 7. Husband of Roberta McGranahan. Father of Gwenivere McGranahan. Son of Clayton and Joan McGranahan.

**OZERUS, Leonne**, 65, St. John Paul II, Sellersburg, Feb. 23. Mother of Macien and Wislet Mulatre. Stepmother of Modelene and Willy Mulatre.

**PFLUM, Richard**, 90, St. Gabriel, Connersville, March 6. Husband of Joanne Pflum. Father of Richard and Ronald Pflum. Brother of Diane Jones, Marilyn Miles, Carolyn Nutty, David and Phillip Pflum. Grandfather of five. Great-grandfather of six.

**QUINTER, Janet**, 94, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Richmond, March 4. Mother of Terri and David Quinter. Sister of Paula Kish and George Toschlog. Grandmother of one.

**STRUEWING, Lisa A.**, 65, Holy Family, Oldenburg, Feb. 28. Wife of John Struewing. Mother of Sandy Cameron, Kara Richard, Christopher Moenter and Jared Struewing. Grandmother of three.

**WHELAN, Carol M.**, 88, St. Mary, New Albany, Feb. 18. Mother of Laura Whitus. †

## Franciscan Sister Lynne Matteson served in Catholic schools in Oldenburg, Indianapolis

Franciscan Sister Lynne Matteson died on March 6 at the motherhouse of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis in Oldenburg. She was 81.

The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on March 11 at the Motherhouse Chapel in Oldenburg. Burial followed at the sisters' cemetery.

Sister Lynne was born on May 29, 1943, in Syracuse, N.Y., her family eventually settling near Cincinnati. Raised as a Presbyterian, she was received into the full communion of the Church as a teenager.

Sister Lynne earned a bachelor's degree in education at the University of Cincinnati in Cincinnati, and a master's degree in education at Indiana University in Bloomington. She spent many years working as a teacher and counselor in Cincinnati and Indianapolis.

As a single adult, Sister Lynne adopted a 9-year-old daughter. After her daughter

married, she joined the Sisters of St. Francis in Oldenburg on Sept. 26, 1987, and professed final vows on Oct. 30, 1993.

During her 37 years as a member of the Sisters of St. Francis, Sister Lynne ministered in Catholic education in Indiana and at the motherhouse.

In the archdiocese, she served at the Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception in Oldenburg from 1988-90, at Cathedral High School as a teacher and secretary from 1990-2013 and in communications and the sewing room at the motherhouse beginning in 2013. As her health declined, Sister Lynne dedicated herself to prayer and presence in her community.

She is survived by her daughter Verna Cook and two grandchildren.

Memorial gifts may be sent to the Sisters of St. Francis, P.O. Box 100, Oldenburg, IN 47036-0100. †

## Pro-life groups praise move to drop suit against Idaho abortion law

WASHINGTON (OSV News)—Pro-life groups praised the Trump administration's recent move to drop a Biden administration lawsuit against an Idaho law over what the government previously argued was a conflict between

Idaho's abortion restrictions and federal law governing emergency health care.

Supporters of abortion restrictions passed by Idaho argued it made appropriate exceptions for emergency circumstances, while opponents argued the law runs afoul of federal requirements to provide stabilizing care to pregnant women experiencing adverse effects in emergency rooms.

The Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act, or EMTALA, obligates doctors and hospitals to attempt to stabilize both mother and unborn child in an emergency. The Biden administration previously sought to use the 1986 emergency health care law to require hospitals to perform emergency abortions in states that have restricted abortion following the June 2022 Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which overturned the high court's previous abortion precedent.

But in March 5 court filings, the Justice Department moved to dismiss that suit.

Idaho Attorney General Raúl Labrador, a Republican, said on March 7 he was “pleased” by the dismissal of “the previous administration’s attack on Idaho’s Defense of Life Act.”

“I have been fighting against the Biden administration’s twisted interpretation of federal statutes to keep individual states from enacting pro-life laws for the last two years, and this dismissal is a welcome relief,” he said.

In a March 5 statement, Katie Daniel, director of legal affairs and policy counsel for Susan B. Anthony (SBA) Pro-Life America, argued, “Idaho’s Defense of Life Act protecting babies and their mothers throughout pregnancy was upheld by the state Supreme Court in 2023.

“There is no conflict between Idaho’s law and federal

law, which never mentions abortion but specifically mentions several times that the ‘unborn child’ is also a patient any time a pregnant woman comes to the emergency room,” Daniel said. “Idaho’s law protects more than 1,500 babies a year, and like every pro-life law in the country, nothing in it stops pregnant women from receiving emergency medical care. This care is absolutely legal.”

Mini Timmaraju, president and CEO of Reproductive Freedom for All, formerly NARAL Pro-Choice America, argued in a March 4 statement, “By withdrawing this case, [President] Donald Trump and his DOJ have decided to let women die.”

Daniel added SBA List is encouraging “every pro-life state to adopt ‘Med Ed’ policies to make it crystal clear how doctors can use their medical judgment and comply with the law.”

Dr. Ingrid Skop, a board-certified OB-GYN who has practiced in Texas and is a senior fellow and director of medical affairs at the Charlotte Lozier Institute, said in a statement, “The administration’s change in stance is welcome news for both of my patients—a pregnant woman and her unborn child—whose lives are both prioritized by EMTALA.”

“This coercive effort by the prior administration to subvert existing laws to promote abortion was never necessary, as EMTALA has never been confusing for me or my obstetric peers,” Skop said. “Every state pro-life law already permitted physicians to intervene immediately in a pregnancy emergency to protect a woman’s life. Although I do not perform elective abortions, I have always been able to provide quality care in obstetric emergencies, seeking to preserve the lives of both mother and child.” †

### Online Lay Ministry Formation

The Archdiocese of Indianapolis has partnered with the University of Notre Dame and Catholic Distance University (CDU) to offer not-for-credit online theology classes:

- Earn certificate in Lay Ministry
- Complete 12 courses online with ND STEP program
- CDU offers classes on Catechism of the Catholic Church
- 20% discount for all employees, volunteers, and parishioners

For more information, please log on to [www.archindy.org/layministry](http://www.archindy.org/layministry)



### REPORT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT NOW

If you are a victim of sexual misconduct by a person ministering on behalf of the Church, or if you know of anyone who has been a victim of such misconduct, please contact the archdiocesan victim assistance coordinator. There are two ways to make a report:

- 1 Ethics Point**  
Confidential, Online Reporting  
[www.archdioceseofindianapolis.ethicspoint.com](http://www.archdioceseofindianapolis.ethicspoint.com) or 888-393-6810
- 2 Victim Assistance Coordinator**, Archdiocese of Indianapolis  
P.O. Box 1410, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1410  
**317-236-1548 or 800-382-9836, ext. 1548**  
[victimassistance@archindy.org](mailto:victimassistance@archindy.org)

# A CELEBRATION OF ST. PATRICK

On the warm, sun-kissed day of March 14, thousands of people lined the streets of downtown Indianapolis for a parade celebrating the life of St. Patrick and the joy of being Irish. As the chaplain of the Indianapolis divisions of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians, Father Joseph Moriarty, pastor of St. Luke the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis, greets people with a wave and a smile along the parade route. Christ the King School was among a number of Catholic grade schools and high schools in the Indianapolis area that had students participating in the celebration of St. Patrick, whose feast day is on March 17. (Photos by John Shaughnessy)



## Biannual grants awarded to parishes, schools and archdiocesan agencies

### Criterion staff report

During the fall/winter portion of fiscal year 2024-25, \$462,100 was awarded in grant monies to parishes, schools and agencies in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

The grants, awarded twice a year, are made available through the St. Francis Xavier Home Mission Endowment Fund, the Growth and Expansion Endowment Fund, the Queen and Divine Mercy Fund and the James P. Scott Endowment Fund. These grants were made possible through the generosity of archdiocesan parishioners, who set up the endowments.

The grant process is jointly administered by the archdiocesan Finance Office and the Office of Stewardship and Development.

Grant applications are due to the archdiocese for the two grant allocation periods on April 30 and on Oct. 31 each year.

The award period for spring/summer 2025 is open, with applications due no later than April 30.

The 2024 fall/winter grants awarded for fiscal year 2024-25 are as follows:

- Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ School, Indianapolis; Growth and Expansion Fund; \$11,000 for IT expansion in classrooms.
- Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish, Indianapolis; Home Mission Fund; \$25,000 for church roof repairs.
- St. Ann Church, Indianapolis; Home

Mission Fund; \$4,814 for communication system.

—SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi Parish, Greenwood; James P. Scott Fund; \$20,000 for church bell tower repair.

—St. Lawrence Church, Indianapolis; Home Mission Fund; \$25,000 for church masonry repair.

—St. Mark the Evangelist Parish, Indianapolis; Growth and Expansion Fund; \$9,000 for radio equipment.

—St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, Indianapolis; James P. Scott Fund; \$25,000 for rectory repairs.

—St. Vincent de Paul Church, Bedford; James P. Scott Fund; \$13,760 for asbestos abatement.

—St. Anthony of Padua Church, Clarksville; Home Mission Fund; \$25,000 for roofing project and handicap ramp.

—Sacred Heart Church, Clinton; Growth and Expansion Fund; \$55,000 to renovate storage building for offices and meeting space.

—St. Augustine Church, Jeffersonville; James P. Scott Fund; \$12,250 for church flooring project.

—Prince of Peace Parish, Madison; James P. Scott Fund; \$10,000 for security camera system.

—St. Mary Church, North Vernon; James P. Scott Fund; \$32,500 for new organ.

—St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, Richmond; James P. Scott Fund; \$10,000 for rectory window replacement.

—St. Nicholas School, Sunman; Growth

and Expansion and James P. Scott funds; \$15,000 for modular classroom rental.

—St. Pius V Parish, Troy; Home Mission Fund; \$35,000 for AC replacement.

—St. Mary's Early Childhood Center, Indianapolis; Growth and Expansion Fund; \$10,000 for set-up of new classroom location.

—Terre Haute Catholic Charities Foodbank, Terre Haute; James P. Scott Fund; \$30,000 for back-up generator.

—Seton Catholic High School, Richmond; Home Mission Fund; \$40,000 for school gym AC replacement.

—St. Mark the Evangelist Parish, Indianapolis; Queen and Divine Mercy Fund; \$4,664 for spiritual garden project.

—St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish, Aurora; Queen and Divine Mercy Fund; \$2,070 for Blessed Virgin statue.

—St. Malachy School, Brownsburg; Queen and Divine Mercy Fund; \$2,500

for Marian consecration costs.

—St. Martin of Tours Parish, Martinsville; Queen and Divine Mercy Fund; \$5,000 for cemetery crucifix statue.

—St. Agnes Parish, Nashville; Queen and Divine Mercy Fund; \$1,192 for grotto roof replacement.

—St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, Richmond; Queen and Divine Mercy Fund; \$14,000 for Mary grotto project.

—Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary, Indianapolis; Queen and Divine Mercy Fund; \$22,000 for Marian grotto project.

—St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross Parish, Bright; Queen and Divine Mercy Fund; \$2,350 for Marian statue.

(For information on how to apply for the grants, go to [www.archindy.org/finance/grant](http://www.archindy.org/finance/grant) or contact Stacy Harris in the Finance Office at [sharris@archindy.org](mailto:sharris@archindy.org) or by phone at 317-236-1535.) †

### Employment

#### Assistant Director of Communications

The Archdiocese of Indianapolis is seeking an Assistant Director of Communications for its central office. The assistant director reports to the director of communications and will be responsible for implementing the communication strategy for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, aligning with the mission of evangelizing catechesis and the new Archdiocesan pastoral plan. This role oversees internal and external communications as well as the execution of marketing initiatives. The ideal candidate will also develop and manage content creation across all platforms, ensuring adherence to brand standards. Additionally, this position leads media relations, supports crisis communication efforts, and is prepared to step in for the Director of Communication when needed.

Qualifications include: active practicing Catholic in full communion with the Church; minimum of bachelor's degree, master's degree preferred in communications, public relations, mass media, marketing, journalism or related field; 8 or more years practical work experience; comfortable with various forms of electronic communications; demonstrated experience with community relations and issues management; knowledge and awareness of issues of importance in the Catholic Church; exceptional oral, written and interpersonal communication skills; knowledge of maintaining brand standards across an organization. For a complete list of requirements, go to: [tinyurl.com/archindyasstdircomm25](http://tinyurl.com/archindyasstdircomm25).

To apply, please email a resume, cover letter, and list of references to Andrea Wunnenberg, Director of Human Resources, at [awunnenberg@archindy.org](mailto:awunnenberg@archindy.org). Applications will be accepted until March 27th with an anticipated start in April/May of 2025.

## Classified Directory

### Hauling and Tree Removal Services

**Fred & Sons'**  
Hauling & Tree Removal Service  
FredAndSons.com  
317-626-5973  
Call today for prompt service!

- Tree Removal, Topping & Trimming
- Shrub Trimming & Removal
- Light Hauling
- Construction Clean-up
- Junk Removal
- Brush Pile Cleaning
- Garage/Basement/Attic Cleanout
- Gutter Cleaning
- Mini Barn / Shed / Fence / Deck Demolition & Removal
- Appliance / E-Waste Removal
- Stump Grinding

### For Sale

**CALVARY CEMETERY**, 435 W. Troy, Indianapolis, four plots in Garden of Trinity, section 23 graves 1-4, monument privileged, \$2,500 a piece or \$9,000 for all four. Call 317-847-5128.

**Call 317-236-1585**  
**TO ADVERTISE IN**  
**The Criterion**

# Biographer: In 12 years since his election, Pope Francis demonstrates papacy is a mission, not a job

(OSV News)—As Pope Francis celebrated the 12th anniversary of his election in the hospital, the papal biographer told OSV News that the pontiff has “given a very significant witness these last few years ... which in many ways is comparable to the witness that John Paul II gave ... demonstrating or communicating that the papacy is for life, that it’s a mission, not a job.”

Austen Ivereigh, papal biographer and author of *The Great Reformer and Wounded Shepherd*, said that Pope Francis, hospitalized in the Gemelli Hospital since Feb. 14 has shown in the last years that “he’s willing to be pope in a wheelchair, frail, sometimes unable to read his speeches because of his bronchitis.”

While “we’re at the moment facing a situation of enormous uncertainty in respect of his long-term prognosis,” and “we also don’t know what his short-term prognosis is,” he continued, the pope gives the world a lesson “of docility and humble acceptance” and “an important example of the centrality of mission and vocation.”

Ivereigh recently wrote *First Belong to God: On Retreat with Pope Francis*—a homage to the pope and his spirituality, the author said.

“The purpose of the book was to provide a workable instrument for ordinary people in parishes and religious communities who could enter into the spiritual dynamic of the pontificate and the path of conversion to which the pontificate is calling us through an eight-day [program of] spiritual exercises, which in practice can be given over eight weeks.”

The book is based in part on the collection of talks Jesuit Father Jorge Mario Bergoglio gave between the 1970s and early 1990s.

“What you see is somebody who is actually profoundly shaped by the [Ignatian] spiritual exercises and who at the heart of the exercises is putting Christ at the center. And when you put Christ at the center of your life, and you choose to reorganize your life around the Christ priorities rather than your own, then it’s profoundly transformative,” Ivereigh said.

“In fact, I think his whole pontificate has been about putting Christ at the center of the Church, and the reforms and the changes ... flow from that choice.”

Ivereigh said that in the hospital, Pope Francis hasn’t lost his sense of humor, which also teaches us a lot about the pope.

When Italian Prime Minister Giorgia



Pope Francis, assisted by an aide, rises from his wheelchair to take his seat in the Paul VI Audience Hall for his weekly general audience at the Vatican on Feb. 12. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

Meloni visited the pontiff on Feb. 19, Ivereigh said, the pope supposedly told her: “There are people praying for me to go to paradise. But the Lord of the vineyard seems to prefer me to stay put.”

Ivereigh said that “even though it was funny, I actually said to a lot of people: That is basically his view. That is essentially his view of his life, of the pontificate. ... He has this freedom, this serenity,” which “is the result of that choice that he’s made,” to put Christ in the center.

Referring to critics of the Holy Father, Ivereigh said that “the idea that a pope should do things and say things that are acceptable to all Catholics is, of course, absurd. Every pope has been opposed,” he said, adding that it’s part of “the loneliness of the papacy.”

“A pope who doesn’t offend and scandalize some Catholics is not putting Christ at the center, because, of course, Christ does exactly that. ... The Christian choice is a scandalous choice because it’s unworldly. And I think so much of the criticism of Francis is understandable, but it’s also ignorant because it starts from a framework—theologians call it a hermeneutic—a way of seeing which is essentially worldly.”

He said that with documents dubbed controversial such as “*Amoris Laetitia*,” a post-synodal apostolic exhortation published in 2016, “there’s a sort of worldly assumption that what Francis was setting out to do was to liberalize Catholic doctrine on marriage. But he wasn’t ever trying to do that.”

“There was never, ever a moment where Francis sought to liberalize either the doctrine or the law on either of those things,” Ivereigh emphasized. “What he was trying to do, or what he felt was necessary for the Church to look at [was] how the doctrine and the law are applied in the circumstances of today’s world in such a way that we hold in tension, truth and mercy, which is ... a Christ-like choice.”

Controversies surrounding the document concerned the part where the pope said that in certain conditions and in certain circumstances, some divorced and remarried people may receive the Eucharist.

More recent controversy regarded the December 2023 document “*Fiducia Supplicans*” (“Supplicating Trust”)—subtitled “On the pastoral meaning of blessings”—which stated that Catholic priests could bless a same-sex or other unmarried couple. However, it cannot be a formal liturgical blessing, nor give the impression that the Church is blessing the union as if it were a marriage.

Ivereigh said that “it didn’t change Catholic doctrine on marriage at all,” and that “there’s nothing doctrinally liberal about it. What it said very simply and clearly was that even though the Church cannot bless, that is to say, approve” blessing same-sex or other irregular relationships, “it can bless the people in them if they are seeking God’s grace.”

Both “*Amoris Laetitia*” and “*Fiducia Supplicans*”—“in a very Christ like way”—Ivereigh said—“understand that there are people in difficult, irregular, problematic situations who might be trying very hard within limited circumstances to do the right thing.”

“And the Church, I think, in both of those documents,” he continued, “is being pastoral, is allowing the Church to walk with those people, reassure them that God loves them, and that you know they are not closed off from God’s grace, while at the same time obviously calling them to grow, which is the path we’re all called to.”



Pope Francis smiles as he greets people after celebrating Mass at the Church of St. Anne within the Vatican on March 17, 2013. The pope wants the church to be holy and joyful. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

Asked what kind of Church that Pope Francis shaped in the last 12 years, Ivereigh said that the answer lies in “*Dilexit Nos*,” his latest encyclical, released in October 2024, on the human and divine love of the heart of Jesus, which is “a kind of hermeneutic key to the whole papacy, because of the idea that we need to recover the heart as the place from which to view and to act.”

Pope Francis “has talked a lot about God’s style” in the last 12 years, Ivereigh said. “The Church needs to embody God’s style, and God’s style is the heart of the Good Shepherd that looks and walks with and accompanies her. It’s the way Jesus interacts with people ... walks with them, creates space for them, asks them questions. There’s a graciousness. ... That’s God’s style. And the Church needs to embrace that style.”

The pope’s biographer said that “the singular greatest achievement of the pope has been to foster that style and that culture within the Church” that encourages pastoral attitude “in respect of people in difficult situations.”

Also to be highlighted in Francis’ legacy, he added, are the reform of the curia and putting spotlight on synodality “where the community is constantly gathering to discuss, dialogue, discern and decide together with the Holy Spirit as the protagonist,” but where “the bishop or whoever the authority is, still takes the decision.”

“There’s no challenge to the authority structure, but the whole people of God, the baptized, are involved in the decision-making processes.”

Ivereigh underscored that in today’s turbulent world, “it’s a profound witness that the Church is called to give now, in this time, in this world, where we have the fragmentation of politics, where we have the breakdown of civil society, where differences are used as weapons and it becomes a power struggle.”

“One wins, the other loses. In that context, the Church is called ... to recover what is actually its own culture.”

“Changing structures and changing people are the easy part,” the papal biographer said. “The hardest thing to change in any organization is the culture. And I think that’s what he’s done,” he stressed.

Asked whether we’ll see a different kind of papacy now that the Holy Father may not be physically capable to be as present as before in official duties, Ivereigh said: “I think for him, the papacy

is full on. It’s a total commitment. It’s a total service. It’s a mission that he’s been given by God. He knows that he can carry that out in a number of different ways, and that you can have ... an extrovert pope who’s out there constantly meeting people.”

But as happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, “he was essentially locked away for a year, so the papacy isn’t dependent on any of these particular models,” Ivereigh said.

“On the other hand, I think he would not want a papacy in which he would be unable, essentially, to have regular contact with people. I think for him, it would make the proclamation of the Gospel very hard. And in those circumstances, I think he would consider resigning.”

While “it’s OK that the pope is ill,” Ivereigh said something that may cause Pope Francis to consider resignation is that if in a long-term prognosis “he’s somebody who’s going to need a lot of nursing care, regular risk of hospitalization in which the risk is that the health then becomes the focus point, I think he would hate that, actually,” Ivereigh pointed out.

“I honestly don’t know,” he said, on the question of possible papal resignation. “It’s very hard to talk about this question in the abstract, because it really does depend on that long-term prognosis.”

Asked what particularly stayed with him from the many personal conversations he had with Pope Francis is “that he thinks that this is a time for a Holy Saturday spirituality,” where faced with the transformations in society and in the Church, “we look ahead with hope but with no triumphalism. ... I just thought that that was a brilliant summary, in a way, of him and his pontificate, that the one thing that you’ve never had with Francis is triumphalism. ... He sees triumphalism as a real temptation, particularly for the Church, ... as kind of spiritual worldliness.”

Rather than “putting your faith in sort of particular programs of renewal or evangelization,” Ivereigh said, Pope Francis thinks the “spirituality we need is much more one of patient opening to what the spirit is trying to teach us at this time ... as the option to discern and reform rather than to lament and condemn.”

“He’s the Church’s spiritual director, leading us on a kind of a retreat, a journey of conversion,” Ivereigh concluded. “And he’s there with us, sitting with us, walking with us, accompanying us, pointing out the obstacles, the temptations, the resistances, and helping to guide us through to the horizon beyond.”

“And I think that’s his great achievement as a man, as a Jesuit, as a Church leader and, of course, as a pope.” †