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Criterion

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January 23, 2026

Vol. LXVI, No. 15



The Finke sisters—Owen, left, Berkley, Sawyer and Harpar—all share the basketball court together for the varsity team of Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School in Indianapolis. (Photo courtesy of Barry Roberts)

Boom baby! Four sisters live the dream of playing high school basketball together

By John Shaughnessy

Jennifer DesJean knew what the huge crowd in the basketball gym wanted. And the more she thought about it, the more excited she became too.

"I'm going to do it," the head coach of the girls' varsity basketball team of Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School in Indianapolis told her assistant coach sitting next to her. "I'm going to do it!"

Seconds later, DesJean made sure that the four Finke sisters—Sawyer, a senior;

Berkley, a junior; Harpar, a sophomore; and Owen, a freshman—were all on the court at the same time in an early-season game.

As the crowd roared and the Cardinal Ritter student section went crazy, the four sisters looked at each other and exchanged smiles and laughs—until the ball was inbounded and their smiles were replaced by serious, "Game on!" expressions.

"Playing with three of your sisters, that's exciting for them," DesJean said

later. "I don't think there's any place in Indiana or the 50 states where this has actually happened. So, it's exciting knowing that—and I don't think they've grasped the concept that they've literally made history."

"It's cool. It makes me feel good that they're enjoying their time together, and their parents get to experience it. I'm so happy that they'll get to look back someday and say, 'I spent one year with all my sisters playing a sport and having a good time.' I love it."

So do the four sisters. Still, for everyone who thinks it's special, the sisters have a different perspective.

'Some good and funny memories'

To them, doing something together is just *so normal*.

When the sisters are asked if they have a sense of how special this season is, Harpar says, "I don't think it's super exciting. But then I step out of my shoes and put myself in other people's

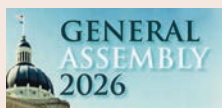
See **SISTERS**, page 2A

Homelessness, housing issues are in the spotlight at the Indiana Statehouse

By Victoria Arthur

The Indiana Statehouse is again the center of debate over how to provide adequate housing for the most vulnerable Hoosiers, including the chronically homeless.

Advocates, including the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC), are tracking two bills that take contrasting approaches to the issue—



from cracking down on street camping in public places to building affordable housing on property owned by religious institutions.

"Legislators are coming from the perspective that it is not charitable to let people live on the street," said Roarke LaCoursiere, associate director of the ICC, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana. "There are people who remain on the streets who refuse services or for whatever reason cannot muster up what it takes to do what others believe is the right thing for them to do. So how can we engage with these people? How can we try to help them better their lives and restore their dignity?"

"That is the goal of these types of bills, but how to meet that goal is something that people strongly disagree about."

Senate Bill 285, which brings back language from a failed attempt last year to prohibit street encampments for the homeless, has passed the first hurdle in this year's General Assembly.



Roarke LaCoursiere

Under the bill, law enforcement officials who first encounter individuals sleeping or camping on public property would issue a warning and offer to connect them with local shelters and other resources. Repeat violations could result in a Class C misdemeanor, which carries a standard fine of \$500 or up to 60 days in jail.

But its author Sen. Cyndi Carrasco (R-Indianapolis) emphasized to lawmakers that the primary intent of the legislation is to offer homeless people viable alternatives to living on the street.

See **HOUSING**, page 11A



The Finke sisters—Owen, left, Harpar, Berkley and Sawyer—have been close ever since their parents decided years ago for them to all share the same bedroom. (Submitted photo)

SISTERS

continued from page 1A

positions—four sisters, all in different grades, playing on the same varsity basketball team.”

Sawyer adds, “You don’t realize how much of an interesting experience it is. Everyone thinks it’s so cool, but we live together, and we’re always together, so it doesn’t feel like it’s anything special. But it is cool *always being together*.”

Consider that the four sisters have all shared the same bedroom for years—an arrangement that is a conscious decision by their parents, Laura and John.

“We decided when they were little that we didn’t want to decide which sisters became close,” Laura says. “So, instead of having two in a room, we put two bunkbeds in one room, and the second room is known as their ‘hangout’ room. Some nights are quiet while others sound like a sleepover. As adults, we know many of these nights will be some they will long for as they grow up.”

“They have no choice but to get along!” John says. “There are normal sibling spats over bathroom space and wearing each other’s clothes, but for the most part they get along.”

The sisters’ smiles confirm that belief. “At night, me and Harpar are hyper, and we’ll turn on random music and make beats and stuff,” Owen says. “That’s some good and funny memories.”

Berkley chimes in, “It’s just so cool we can all share it together,” while Sawyer notes, “One second we could be arguing about something, but then we’ll be laughing about what we just argued about.”

Harpar shares a poignant point, “We all help each other in different ways when someone is frustrated or going through something.”

That support system carries onto the basketball court, but another telling quality often surfaces during the team’s practices—the sisters’ fiery competitiveness with each other.

Someone to lean on

Coach DesJean loves players who compete hard, and her face lights up when she talks about the competitive nature of the Finke sisters.

“We’ll have them play defense against each other in practice,” the coach says with a smile that can best be described as mischievous. “They make things a contest. ‘Let’s go at it.’ They push each other. ‘I’m going to beat you. No, I’m going to beat you.’ It’s a great time.”

Owen acknowledges, “Sometimes there’s some pushing and shoving,” while Sawyer adds, “It can be really competitive because we all want to win when we’re on different teams in practice.”

As much as DesJean enjoys occasionally pitting them against each other, she is far more overjoyed about the force they are together.

“I love having them all on the team. They want to be good, and they bring their teammates along,” the coach says. “And as sisters, they have someone they can lean on about the struggles, the practices, the games. It’s always nice to have a family member who plays the same sport as you. You can count on them for having the same perspective, the same stress, the same highs and lows. I think that helps with their daily lives as well.”

Harpar sees how that connection unfolds when the sisters are all on the court together.

“I definitely think there is more chemistry,” she says. “We know how each other plays because we’ve grown up together, and we know how each other acts and handles certain situations.”

Still, there’s one more quality that stands out most in a conversation with the sisters.

The far-reaching bond of sisterhood

Here’s that quality: The bond of sisterhood that connects them so closely also extends to their teammates, who they regard as sisters, too.

“My teammates are just so great,” Berkley says. “They know how to put a smile on my face and make me laugh. Getting to be with them for two hours



Public Schedule of Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

January 24–29, 2026

January 24 – TBA
Baptism at St. Augustine Church, Lebanon, Ky.

January 25 – 5:30 p.m.
Mass and dinner at St. Paul Catholic Center, Bloomington

January 27 – 1 p.m.
Council of Priests meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center, Indianapolis

January 27 – 5:15 p.m.
Mass and dinner with Secretariat for Evangelizing Catechesis at Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, Indianapolis

January 28 – 10:30 a.m.
Catholic Schools Week Mass at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, Indianapolis

January 28 – 3:30 p.m.
Virtual Chair meeting of Committee and Subcommittee on Evangelization and Catechesis

January 29 – 10 a.m.
Leadership Team meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center

January 29 – 2 p.m.
Virtual National Community of Catechetical Leaders and Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis meeting

January 29 – 5 p.m.
Mass and dinner at Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Indianapolis

after school for practice is just fun, and it makes me happy.”

Owen shares, “The whole varsity team has created such a good bond with everyone. We just connect very well. That’s something I look forward to after school, just being with them and playing basketball with them.”

DesJean relishes that connection among the team, part of the culture she has tried to establish during her three years of leading the program.

“They have a bond,” she says. “Their bond is so much more than sports. They really enjoy each other. And we try to coach them like this is our family. We are one.

“The goals I want are for my girls to know they can achieve anything that they put their mind to. I’ve learned so many life lessons from playing basketball—being self-motivated, disciplined, focused.”

All those life lessons are on the short list that Laura and John Finke want for their children.

“From my perspective, the biggest return on playing a sport is the lifelong lessons you learn,” John says. “That is what pleases me the most about their playing together.”

The parents are also living another dream this season.

‘It’s truly a dream come true’

Besides being mom to the four girls and their brother Toby—a fifth-grade student at St. Monica School in Indianapolis—Laura is a learning support teacher at Cardinal Ritter, where her focus is on other students and not her daughters.

“I honestly forget we are all at school sometimes because I do go into work mode once I’m at school,” says Laura, whose family belongs to St. Monica Parish in Indianapolis. “At times, I’ve run into them during the passing periods, and I think we all do a double take. It’s fun

because it’s authentic. I don’t go looking for them. They need to grow and do high school on their own, so I try very hard to stay out of their way and not be mom at school.”

The sisters do feel their mom’s presence during games.

“Our mom used to be a basketball coach, so you can just hear her telling us what we need to do better,” Berkley says with a smile.

At the same time, Laura couldn’t ask for anything better than watching her girls play together this season.

“To get four girls that love sports as much as I do, it’s truly a dream come true,” she says. “John and I both love playing and watching sports. So watching them from rec soccer days and CYO to varsity sports is just so fun.

“In rec soccer, we would walk from one field to another to watch the girls play, often passing each other to give an update of the other field. Pretty much their whole lives, we’ve had to divide and conquer, sometimes with other family or friends having to fill in for mom and dad. So, to sit and just watch all four play on the same team with John and Toby sitting next to me, it literally feels like my wildest dream come true: one schedule, one game, my whole family in one spot.


“We’ve watched them cheer for each other, high-five each other, pick each other up, but this year, this basketball season takes the cake.”

Her joy momentarily gives way to a touch of wistfulness when she adds, “I know they don’t know how rare this season is, but I know in a good 10-plus years it will hit them.”

For now, the sisters are enjoying the season of a lifetime together. A season when the bonds of sisterhood are timeless.

“It’s fun to all get to play together and support each other,” Berkley says. “We push each other to be better.

“We love it.” †



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

E-mail: criterion@archindy.org

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Staff:

Editor: Mike Krokos


Assistant Editor: John Shaughnessy

Reporter: Sean Gallagher

Reporter: Natalie Hoefler

Graphic Designer / Online Editor: Brandon A. Evans

Executive Assistant: Ann Lewis



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.

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

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



01/23/26

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Grounded in faith, quarterback makes the play of a lifetime for a team of a lifetime

By John Shaughnessy

For fans of the football team of Indiana University, it will be remembered as the play of a lifetime for a team of a lifetime.

The Hoosiers’ quarterback Fernando Mendoza made the memorable play in the fourth quarter of the national championship game against the team from the University of Miami on Jan. 19.

Clinging to a 17-14 lead with nine minutes and 18 seconds left in the game, Indiana faced a fourth down with four yards to go for a first down at Miami’s 12-yard line when Mendoza took the snap.

Twelve yards later, Mendoza dove across the goal line after eluding and bouncing off several Miami players to score the touchdown that was instrumental in Indiana’s eventual 27-21 victory, which earned the university its first national championship in college football.

In an interview with ESPN’s Holly Rowe after the game, Mendoza described his put-everything-out-there approach on that touchdown play.

“We’re always going to put it all on the line. I want to give all the glory and thanks to God,” he said. “The offensive line blocked perfectly, and we executed as a team.”

He continued, “I would die for my team. Whatever they need me to do. They need me to take shots, the front or the back, whatever it is, I’m going to die for my team out there. And I know they’re going to do the same for me. That’s what makes us so close. That’s what makes us national champs and so special.”

Near the end of the interview, he became even more emotional. Tears filled his eyes.

“This victory is so sweet,” Mendoza said. “For everybody, for the entire Hoosier nation, but also this

is super sweet to myself. ... I can’t thank Coach [Curt] Cignetti enough for taking a chance on me.”

He finished the interview by saying, “And give all the glory to God.”

His comments after the game once again showed his dedication to his teammates and his commitment to always giving “all the glory and thanks to God.”

That’s the way he began nearly every post-game interview this season, including when he received the Heisman Trophy as the best player in college football. On that evening in December, Mendoza began his acceptance speech by saying, “First, I want to thank God for giving me an opportunity that once felt a world away.”

That public expression of his gratitude to God also matches his private embrace of his Catholic faith as he regularly attends Mass at St. Paul Catholic Center in Bloomington, on the edge of the IU campus.

Television cameras also captured another defining emotional moment following Mendoza’s diving touchdown, as his father turned in overflowing joy toward Mendoza’s mom, who has endured Multiple Sclerosis for years.

The scene recalled the emotion that poured from Mendoza about his parents during his Heisman speech.

“Mami, this is your trophy as much as it is mine,” he said. “You’ve always been my biggest fan. You’re my light, you’re my why and biggest supporter. Courage, love—those have been my first playbook and the playbook that I carry at my side through my entire life. You tell me toughness doesn’t need to be loud, it can be quiet and strong. It’s choosing hope. It’s believing in yourself when the world doesn’t give you much reason to. Together, you and I are defying what people think is possible. I love you.

“Papi, thank you for grounding me. Thank you for holding me accountable when it was tough. Thank you for reminding me that talent means nothing without discipline, without consistency. ... You personified commitment. You picked all of us up whenever we needed it most.”

Mendoza did the same for the fans of IU’s football team during the national championship game, giving them the play of a lifetime for a team of a lifetime. †

The archdiocese’s official podcast debuts new episodes

Criterion staff report

ArchIndy Vox, the archdiocese’s official podcast, features conversations with archdiocesan leaders and guests on topics shaping Catholic life in central and southern Indiana, offering listeners thoughtful reflection and practical insight rooted in faith.

New episodes of ArchIndy Vox are released on Wednesdays on Spotify at tinyurl.com/archindyvox and air Saturdays at 1:30 p.m. on Relevant Radio in Indianapolis on 89.5 FM WSOM.

Upcoming episodes include:

“Walking Together in Joy and Hope” (Wednesday, Jan. 21)

Guests: Archbishop Charles C. Thompson and Dan Conway

Learn more about the Archdiocese of Indianapolis’ new pastoral plan and how it invites all the faithful to

journey together in mission, encounter and renewed hope.

“Schools of Faith, Communities of Hope”

(Wednesday, Jan. 28)

Guest: Brian Disney, Superintendent of Catholic Schools

During Catholic Schools Week, we discuss and celebrate Catholic education as a ministry that forms the whole person and nurtures faith, belonging and lifelong discipleship.

“Witnessing Faith in the Public Square”

(Wednesday, Feb. 4; airs on Relevant Radio, Feb. 14)

Guest: Alexander Mingus, Executive Director of the Indiana Catholic Conference

Listen in on a pastoral conversation about Catholic social teaching and how it guides faithful engagement in public life, advocating for human dignity and the common good. †

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Editorial

We must continue building on the momentum to protect the unborn

It has been nearly four years since the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* decision returned the issue of abortion from the federal to the state level.

And while we are grateful the justices overturned *Roe v. Wade*—which had legalized abortion on demand across the nation in 1973—we know our work to protect unborn life is far from over.

Indiana is one of several states where a law abolishing most abortions is in effect (it was enacted in August of 2023), but other states sadly continue to offer abortion on demand, including three states that border Indiana.

While the ultimate goal is changing hearts so that abortion is unthinkable, our mission to protect human life does not end there.

“We must continue to support pregnant and parenting mothers in need and offer spiritual and emotional help to all who have participated in abortion,” said Toledo, Ohio, Bishop Daniel E. Thomas, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Committee on Pro-Life Activities, in a statement marking the 53rd anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* and in observance of the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children on Jan. 22.

The annual Indiana March for Life and associated events took place on Jan. 22 in Indianapolis, and coverage of those events will be featured in the Jan. 30 issue of *The Criterion*.

During the past five-plus decades, abortion nationwide has led to the loss of more than 65 million children and immeasurable harm to their parents and family members, Bishop Thomas noted.

But since the overturning of *Roe* in 2022, there have been several other pro-life victories.

“Most recently, at the national level, Congress acted heroically last year in largely defunding Planned Parenthood of federal taxpayer dollars. Meanwhile the administration has reversed several of its predecessor’s pro-abortion policies,” Bishop Thomas said.

“Despite these successes, human life is still gravely threatened by legalized abortion as it continues to be aggressively promoted at the state and federal level. Many challenges remain, including pro-abortion ballot initiatives, the increased use and availability of abortion pills, and the need to protect the Hyde Amendment to keep taxpayer-funded abortion out of national health care bills. ... Our united prayers, sacrifices, and efforts to protect human life and heal the wounds inflicted by abortion remain as important as ever.”

In his first-ever New Year’s address to the diplomatic corps on Jan. 9, Pope Leo XIV told them that abortion “cuts short a growing life and refuses to welcome the gift of life.” He also defended marriage and the family.

The vocation “to love and to life,” the pope said, “manifests itself in an important way in the exclusive and indissoluble union between a woman



Students from Marian University in Indianapolis hold a banner leading the Indiana March for Life up Meridian Street in Indianapolis on Jan. 22, 2025. (Photo by Natalie Hoefer)

and a man,” and “implies a fundamental ethical imperative for enabling families to welcome and fully care for unborn life.”

He added, “Life is a priceless gift that develops within a committed relationship based on mutual self-giving and service.

“In light of this profound vision of life as a gift to be cherished, and of the family as its responsible guardian, we categorically reject any practice that denies or exploits the origin of life and its development.”

The Holy Father told the diplomats that the Holy See “considers it deplorable that public resources are allocated to suppress life, rather than being invested to support mothers and families. The primary objective must remain the protection of every unborn child and the effective and concrete support of every woman so that she is able to welcome life.”

The Archdiocese of Indianapolis offers Walking with Moms in Need, which assists pregnant and parenting mothers. Launched by the USCCB in 2020, the parish-based initiative helps women in crisis pregnancies choose life for their children, assist moms in need, and supports the ministries, organizations and agencies that provide services for these women.

Brie Anne Varick, director of the archdiocesan Office of Human Life and Dignity, said in a 2025 interview that Walking with Moms in Need “... shows that the Church is for the baby in the womb and also for the mom, that we love them both. That we want to help the mom choose life, but we also want to help her and her family after the baby is born. Helping them both has always been the Church’s pro-life mission.”

As we continue building on our pro-life mission, let us embrace these words Bishop Thomas shared:

“May we see the face of Christ in every single person, in every pregnant mother, and every child in the womb. Let us remain steadfast in our commitment to ensure that every human life may be protected in law and welcomed in love, and that abortion may be unthinkable.”

—Mike Krokos

Reflection/Natalie Hoefer

After 100 years, First Saturday Devotion still calls us to pray for Mary’s aching Immaculate Heart

Dec. 10, 2025, marked the 100th anniversary of the Blessed Mother’s request for the Five First Saturdays



Devotion in reparation for blasphemies against her Immaculate Heart.

Mary first mentioned the devotion during an apparition to three shepherd children in Fatima, Portugal, on July 13, 1917, saying

she would share more later.

On Dec. 10, 1925, she appeared with the Christ Child to Lucia dos Santos, one of the shepherd children who would later become a Carmelite sister.

During the apparition, the Blessed Mother outlined the details of the “Five First Saturdays” devotion.

She asked that Catholics go to confession on the first Saturday of five consecutive months (or on the Saturday preceding or following the first Saturday of the month), and to receive Communion, pray five decades of the rosary and reflect for 15 minutes with Mary on one or more mysteries of the rosary—all with the intention of making reparation to her Immaculate Heart.

Mary promised “to assist at the hour of death, with all the graces necessary for the salvation of their souls,” all those who complete the devotion. She also promised salvation for sinners and peace in the world.

The devotion was not a sterile request. Rather, it was made fraught with emotion and a call for compassion.

The Blessed Mother said, “Look, my daughter, at my Heart surrounded with thorns with which ungrateful men at every moment pierce me by their blasphemies and ingratitude.”

The Christ Child also pleaded on Mary’s behalf, saying, “Have pity on the Heart of your Most Holy Mother that is covered with thorns which ungrateful men at every moment nail on her without anyone making an act of reparation to remove them.”

In another apparition to Sister Lucia on May 29, 1930, Christ explained that the five first Saturdays of the devotion are tied to five particular blasphemies: against Mary’s immaculate conception; against her perpetual virginity; against her divine maternity and at the same time refusing to recognize her as the Mother of all; of those who seek to sow in the hearts of children indifference or scorn or even hatred of the Blessed Mother; and of those who desecrate her holy image.

Four years prior, the Child Jesus said to Sister Lucia in an apparition on Feb. 15, 1926: “It is true, my daughter, that many souls begin [the Five First Saturdays devotion], but few finish them, and those who do finish them, do so to receive the graces that are promised. It would please me more if they did five decades [of the rosary] with fervor and with the intention

of making reparation to the Heart of their heavenly Mother, than if they did fifteen decades in a tepid and indifferent manner.”

The call for the practice of the devotion seems to have been reiterated recently. In *My Son Carlo: Carlo Acutis Through the Eyes of His Mother*, written by the saint’s mother Antonia Salzano Acutis, she noted that, “A few days after the death of Sister Lucia in 2005, Carlo dreamed of her. She told him that the practice of the Five First Saturdays of the month could change the destiny of the world.”

Phyllis Burkholder of St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg has a deep love for Mary and the First Saturday Devotion.

In a recent e-mail to me, she described her parish’s monthly First Saturday activities: Confessions are heard from 8-8:30 a.m. while prayers are said in the church—including Fatima prayers, the rosary, the Litany to the Blessed Virgin and a prayer of consecration to Mary—followed by Mass at 8:30 a.m.

She also sent the following suggestions in carrying out the First Saturday devotion:

—“In the Dec. 10, 1925, apparition, the Infant Jesus asked for pity on his Mother’s heart. The more our pity for her grows, the more important this devotion will be in our hearts.”

—“Think about the pain of her Immaculate Heart completely covered with thorns. Think of the severity of her injuries and the need of reparation for all the offenses that cause her heart pain.”

—“Consider the blasphemies [outlined above]. ... We can defend pictures and statues of Mary ... and protest ‘art’ exhibitions and presentations [that desecrate her image]. We can include reparation for these incidents of blasphemy when meditating while doing this devotion.”

—“Do not injure Our Lady with ingratitude. We should consider the many graces and blessings we have received from her. We turn to her for family problems, health issues, financial difficulties, etc. We often do not consider those who offend her—thereby we should come to her aid.”

—“In the 1925 apparition to Sister Lucia, the Infant Jesus made it clear that the person being injured is not just his Mother, but our Mother. Too many do not consider this tender relationship between our Blessed Mother and us.”

Please consider fulfilling Mary’s request of the Five First Saturdays—and maybe do the devotion every first Saturday out of love and pity for her pained Immaculate Heart.

As a Dec. 6, 2025, *National Catholic Register* article quoted of Marian Father Donald Calloway: “If Our Lady was offended by things happening 100 years ago, imagine how offended she must be today!”

(Natalie Hoefer is a reporter for The Criterion) †

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.

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ARCHBISHOP/ARZOBISPO CHARLES C. THOMPSON



Christ the Cornerstone

Jesus calls us to leave everything and follow him, like the Apostles

[Jesus] saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him (Mt 4:18–22).

The Second Vatican Council stressed the “universal call to holiness” (“*Lumen Gentium*,” chapter 5). Jesus’ invitation to leave everything and follow him is extended to each and every person who seeks to share in his life.

Christ calls every one of us by our names. Although the paths we take may be very different, the Holy Spirit guarantees that we will find Jesus by whatever road we choose.

The paths followed by the holy women and men we venerate as saints can seem very different. Some, like St. Francis Xavier and St. Mother Theodore Guérin, co-patrons of our archdiocese, involved

missionary work in foreign lands. Other saints, like SS. Vincent de Paul and Teresa of Calcutta, cared for the poor and marginalized social outcasts. SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi cast aside all their worldly possessions to embrace lives of radical poverty. SS. Thomas Aquinas and Catherine of Siena dedicated their whole lives to prayerful reflection and teaching.

For the past 2,000 years, women and men have been following Jesus by different paths. They have responded to the universal call to holiness in unique and deeply personal ways. In the process, they have inspired countless others to join them in saying “yes” to the Lord’s call by name.

The vocation (call) that each of us receives from the Lord shapes who we are and how we live the Gospel in our daily lives. Consecrated women and men (religious sisters, brothers and priests) follow Jesus according to the charisms (gifts) of their founders.

For example, the Oldenburg Franciscan Sisters and the Franciscan Friars in our archdiocese live their religious lives in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi. The same is true of the Benedictines at Our Lady of Grace Monastery and Saint Meinrad

Archabbey who follow the *Rule* of St. Benedict. The Sisters of Providence and the Jesuits strive to live as their founders taught them. All are following Jesus—but in the distinctive manner of the holy men and women who founded their particular religious orders.

The majority of Catholics here in central and southern Indiana respond to the universal call to holiness by living the Gospel in the ordinary circumstances of their lives.

The Sunday Eucharist, which is the source and summit of Christian life, is the means by which people are gathered around the table of the Lord to encounter Jesus in Word and Sacrament. Sunday Mass is also the occasion for “going forth” to proclaim the Gospel in both words and actions. Lay Catholics follow Jesus in prayer and worship, in learning about their faith and sharing it with others, in caring for the poor and vulnerable, and in living as generous and responsible stewards of all God’s gifts.

Bishops, priests and deacons are also called to holiness, but in ways that are distinct from other baptized Christians. Whereas everyone shares in the holiness of Christ, those who receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders are asked

to take the place of Christ by being instruments of God’s grace through sacraments (especially Eucharist and reconciliation), constant prayer (Liturgy of the Hours, meditation), preaching the Gospel, offering pastoral care, and serving as spiritual fathers and servants of God’s people, all while striving for personal virtue, self-denial and being a living witness to Christ’s love in their daily lives.

In Sunday’s Gospel (Mt 4:12-23), Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James and his brother John to leave everything and follow him. They responded to the call to holiness without fully understanding what was being asked of them. Their reward would not be immediate, and it would not be in the form of wealth, power or prestige. All would suffer hardship, and their example would inspire many future generations to follow them.

Whether we are clergy, religious or lay people, Jesus asks us to leave everything, to trust in him, and to grow in holiness by surrendering our wills and our lives to him.

May we have the wisdom to say “yes” to Jesus’s call to be holy. May we be courageous women and men who prefer nothing to living the holiness of Christ. †



Cristo, la piedra angular

Como los Apóstoles, Jesús nos llama a dejarlo todo y seguirle

Mientras caminaba junto al lago de Galilea, Jesús vio a dos hermanos: uno era Simón, llamado Pedro, y el otro, Andrés. Estaban echando la red al lago, pues eran pescadores. “Vengan, síganme —dijo Jesús—, y los haré pescadores de hombres”. Al instante dejaron las redes y lo siguieron. Más adelante vio a otros dos hermanos: Santiago y Juan, hijos de Zebedeo, que estaban con su padre en una barca remendando las redes. Jesús los llamó y dejaron enseguida la barca y a su padre para seguirlo. (Mt 4, 18-22).

El Concilio Vaticano II destacó “el llamado universal a la santidad” (*Lumen Gentium*, capítulo 5). La invitación de Jesús a dejarlo todo y seguirle se extiende a todas las personas que desean integrarse a su ejemplo de vida.

Cristo nos llama a cada uno por nuestro nombre y aunque los caminos que tomemos sean muy diferentes, el Espíritu Santo nos garantiza que encontraremos a Jesús independientemente del sendero que elijamos.

Quizá parezca que los caminos que siguieron las mujeres y los hombres santos que veneramos son muy distintos. En algunos casos, como el de san Francisco Javier y la santa Madre Theodore Guérin, copatronos de nuestra Arquidiócesis, su camino los llevó a

realizar trabajo misionero en tierras extranjeras.

Otros santos, como san Vicente de Paúl y santa Teresa de Calcuta, se ocupaban de los pobres y los marginados sociales. San Francisco y santa Clara de Asís abandonaron todas sus posesiones mundanas para entregarse a una vida de pobreza radical. Santo Tomás de Aquino y santa Catalina de Siena dedicaron toda su vida a la reflexión piadosa y a la enseñanza.

Durante los últimos 2,000 años, mujeres y hombres de todo el mundo han seguido a Jesús por caminos diferentes y han respondido a la llamada universal a la santidad de maneras únicas y profundamente personales. En el proceso, han inspirado a innumerables personas a unirse a ellos para decir “sí” al llamado del Señor para ellos.

La vocación (el llamado) que cada uno recibe del Señor moldea quiénes somos y cómo vivimos el Evangelio en nuestra vida cotidiana. Las mujeres y los hombres consagrados (religiosas, religiosos y sacerdotes) siguen a Jesús según los carismas (dones) de los fundadores de sus respectivas órdenes.

Por ejemplo, las Hermanas Franciscanas de Oldenburg y los Frailes Franciscanos de nuestra Arquidiócesis viven su vida religiosa siguiendo a san Francisco de Asís. Lo mismo ocurre

con los benedictinos del monasterio de Nuestra Señora de Gracia y de la archiabadía de san Meinrad, que siguen la *Regla* de san Benito. Las Hermanas de la Providencia y los jesuitas procuran vivir como les enseñaron sus fundadores. Todos siguen a Jesús, pero de la forma que caracteriza a los santos y santas que fundaron sus órdenes religiosas.

La mayoría de los católicos aquí en el centro y sur de Indiana responden al llamado universal a la santidad viviendo el Evangelio en la cotidianidad de sus vidas.

La Eucaristía dominical, fuente y cumbre de la vida cristiana, es la forma de congregar a la gente en torno a la mesa del Señor para encontrarse con Jesús en la Palabra y el sacramento. La misa dominical es también la ocasión para “salir” a proclamar el Evangelio con palabras y acciones. Los católicos laicos siguen a Jesús en la oración y el culto, aprendiendo sobre su fe y compartiéndola con los demás, cuidando de los pobres y vulnerables, y viviendo como administradores generosos y responsables de todos los dones de Dios.

Los obispos, los presbíteros y los diáconos también están llamados a la santidad, pero de manera distinta a los demás cristianos bautizados. Si bien todos participan de la santidad de Cristo, a los que reciben el sacramento

del Orden se les pide que tomen el lugar de Cristo siendo instrumentos de la gracia de Dios a través de los sacramentos (especialmente la Eucaristía y la reconciliación), la oración constante (Liturgia de las Horas, meditación), la predicación del Evangelio, la atención pastoral y el servicio como padres espirituales y servidores del pueblo de Dios, todo ello mientras se esfuerzan por alcanzar la virtud personal, la abnegación y ser testimonio vivo del amor de Cristo en su vida diaria.

En el Evangelio del domingo (Mt 4, 12-23), Jesús llama a Pedro, Andrés, Santiago y su hermano Juan para que lo dejen todo y lo sigan. Respondieron al llamado a la santidad sin comprender plenamente lo que se les pedía. Su recompensa no sería inmediata, ni en forma de riqueza, poder o prestigio. Todos sufrirían penurias, y su ejemplo inspiraría a muchas generaciones futuras a seguirlos.

Ya seamos clérigos, religiosos o laicos, Jesús nos pide que lo dejemos todo, que confiemos en Él y que crezcamos en santidad entregándole nuestra voluntad y nuestra vida.

Que tengamos la sabiduría de decir “sí” al llamado de Jesús a ser santos. Que seamos mujeres y hombres valientes que no prefieren nada por encima de vivir la santidad de Cristo. †

Events Calendar

For a list of events for the next four weeks as reported to The Criterion, log on to www.archindy.org/events.

January 28

St. Nicholas School, 6459 E. St. Nicholas Dr., Sunman. **Open House**, 5:30-7 p.m., free. Information: 812-623-2348, schooloffice@stnicholas-sunman.org.

St. Joan of Arc Parish, 4217 Central Ave., Indianapolis. **Adoption and Foster Care Speaker Panel**, 7 p.m., lower level of parish office, featuring two formerly fostered and adopted speakers who now advocate for Indiana fostered youths, free. Information: 317-283-5508.

Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center, Assembly Hall, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis. **Poverty in Our Community: Complexities, Challenges, Hope**, 5:30-8 p.m.; 5:30-6:30 p.m. visit with members of organizations that directly aid those in need; 6:30 p.m. panel discussion with representatives from Catholic Charities Terre Haute, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul’s Changing Lives Forever Program, St. Mary’s

Early Childhood Center, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the archdiocese’s Catholic Charities Senior Services and Holy Family Shelter; registration preferred, walk-ins welcome, refreshments provided, free. Information, registration: tinyurl.com/povertypanel2026, lsheehan@archindy.org, 317-542-2492.

February 6

JW Marriott, White River Ballroom, 10 S. West St., Indianapolis. **Legacy Gala**, 5:30 p.m., fundraiser for archdiocesan Catholic Charities, Catholic schools and Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary, Legacy Gala honoree Patricia Etling, \$150 ages 40 and older, \$75 ages 18-39, table sponsorships available. Information, registration: archindy.org/legacygala, 317-236-1411.

February 7

Mount Saint Francis Center for Spirituality, 101 Saint Anthony Dr., Mt. St. Francis. **Pre-Cana Retreat**, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m.,

includes materials, continental breakfast, lunch, \$125 per couple, register by Jan. 29. Information, registration: catalystcatholic.org/precana, michelle@catalystcatholic.org, 812-923-8355, ext. 201.

Sisters of Providence, 1 Sisters of Providence, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, St. Mary-of-the-Woods. **Teen Volunteering Opportunity**, 9 a.m.-2 p.m., ages 12-18, visit with elder sisters and help them with activities such as Bingo, exercise, baking and more. Information, registration: teenvolunteer.sistersofprovidence.org, jluna@spsmw.org, 361-500-9505.

February 12

St. Mary Parish, 1331 E. Hunter Robbins Way, Greensburg. **Miracles of the Eucharist Exhibit**, 6-8:30 p.m., created by St. Carlo Acutis, presentation by International Marian Catechist coordinator and national coordinator for the Real Presence Association Patrick Brueggen, freewill donations accepted.

Information: 812-663-8427, ext. 204, anavarra@stmarysgreensburg.com.

February 15, 16

St. Mary Parish, 1331 E. Hunter Robbins Way, Greensburg. **Miracles of the Eucharist Exhibit**, 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m., exhibition on the Eucharistic Miracles of the World created by St. Carlo Acutis, freewill offerings accepted. Information: 812-663-8427, ext. 204, anavarra@stmarysgreensburg.com.

February 16, March 16 Virtual Sister Thea Bowman Black Catholic Women’s Prayer Group, 7 p.m., meets online monthly on third Monday, sponsored by archdiocesan Black Catholic Ministry, all women welcome. Meeting: tinyurl.com/SrTheaPrayerGrp. Information: iowhosomaddox@archindy.org, 317-261-3381.

February 28

Pike Performing Arts Center, 6701 Zionsville Road, Indianapolis. **Holy Fire Youth Retreat**, 9 a.m.-5:30 p.m., for

students in grades 6-8; \$74.50 with lunch or \$64.50 without lunch; register by Feb. 8, sponsored by archdiocesan Office of Youth Ministry. Information, registration: archindyym.com/holy-fire, 317-456-7076, rgilman@archindy.org.

St. Joan of Arc Church, 4217 Central Ave., Indianapolis. **Healing Service**, 7 p.m., sponsored by Encounter School of Ministry, free, no registration required. Information: indianapolis@encounterschool.org, 317-795-4912.

March 13-15

Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center, 5440 Moeller Ave, Norwood, Ohio. **Worldwide Marriage Encounter**, \$75 non-refundable fee. Registration: www.wwme.org. Information: Andy and Melanie Reinersman, 859-653-8464.

March 14-15

Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis. **Pre-Cana Retreat**, 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

each day, includes materials, light breakfast, box lunch and snacks, \$200 per couple, register by March 4. Information, registration: ccorona@archindy.org, 317-800-9306, tinyurl.com/ccprecana3-26.

April 24-26

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. **Worldwide Marriage Encounter in Spanish**, \$75 non-refundable application fee. Registration: www.wwme.org. Information: Ken and Ann Butt, 317-863-5680.

July 28-August 2

Mount Saint Francis Center for Spirituality, 101 St. Anthony Dr., Mt. St. Francis. **Maximize Retreat on Theology of the Body and the Holy Spirit**, presented by Family Renewal Project; single occupancy \$800 per person through April 30, \$900 after; double occupancy \$750 per person through April 30, \$850 after. Information, registration: tinyurl.com/MaximizeRetreat2026. †

Retreats and Programs

For a complete list of retreats as reported to The Criterion, log on to www.archindy.org/retreats.

February 13-15

Saint Meinrad Archabbey Guesthouse, 200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad. **Seasons of Us: Renewing Marriage Through Every Stage of Life**, married couples retreat, Josh and Angie Greulich presenting, \$550 double. Registration: 812-357-6611, saintmeinrad.org/retreats.

February 18

Saint Meinrad Archabbey Guesthouse, 200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad. **Ash Wednesday and The Contemplative Life**,

9 a.m.-3 p.m. CT, Jane Feliz Rush presenting, includes lunch, \$75. Registration: 812-357-6611, saintmeinrad.org/retreats.

February 19, March 18

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. **Day of Silence**, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., \$55, includes room, lunch, Mass and use of common areas and grounds, overnight stay available for additional \$42, dinner additional \$14.40.

Registration: fm.retreatportal.com/events, 317-545-7681, lcoons@archindy.org.

February 20, Mach 27

Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22143 Main St., Oldenburg. **A Day of Quiet Renewal**, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., \$20, \$80 with spiritual direction. Information, registration: 812-933-6437, oldenburgfranciscancenter.org.

February 20-22

Mother of the Redeemer

Retreat Center, 8220 W. State Road 48, Bloomington. **Strong Marriage, Strong Parenting**, 6 p.m. Fri.-10 a.m. Sun., EWTN personality and clinical psychologist Dr. Ray Guarendi presenting, \$290 for single, \$480 double, \$670 triple, \$860 quadruple, commuter \$90, includes four meals and room for two nights, commuters \$50.70 includes lunch and dinner on Sat. Information, registration: 812-825-4642, ext. 1, motheroftheredeemer.com.

February 21

Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22143 Main St., Oldenburg. **Modern Day Saints**, 9:30-11:30 a.m., artist Gracie Morbitzer presenting, \$30. Information,

registration: 812-933-6437, oldenburgfranciscancenter.org.

February 24-26

Saint Meinrad Archabbey Guesthouse, 200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad. **Women of the Bible**, Benedictine Brother Zachary Wilberding presenting, \$350 single, \$550 double. Registration: 812-357-6611, saintmeinrad.org/retreats.

February 24, March 3, 10, 17

Saint Meinrad Archabbey Guesthouse, 200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad. **Blessed Are You**, 10 a.m.-11 a.m. CT, four-week workshop, Benedictine Father Kolbe Wolniakowski presenting, includes all four sessions, \$75. Registration: 812-357-6611, saintmeinrad.org/retreats.

March 27-29

Saint Meinrad Archabbey Guesthouse, 200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad. **Pilgrims of Hope**, Benedictine Father Adrian Burke presenting, \$350 single, \$550 double. Registration: 812-357-6611, saintmeinrad.org/retreats.

March 31, April 1, 2

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. **Holy Week Days of Silence**, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., \$55 per day, includes room, lunch, Mass and use of common areas and grounds, overnight stay available for additional \$42, dinner additional \$14.40. Registration: fm.retreatportal.com/events, 317-545-7681, lcoons@archindy.org. †

Married couples retreat will be held on Feb. 13-15 at Saint Meinrad Archabbey guest house in St. Meinrad

“Seasons of Us: Renewing Marriage Through Every Stage of Life” weekend retreat for married Catholic couples will be held at Saint Meinrad Archabbey Guest House and Retreat Center, 200 Hill Drive, in St. Meinrad, from 9 a.m. CT on Feb. 13 through 1 p.m. CT on Feb. 15.

Josh and Angie Greulich, a married couple of 14 years raising two teens, will lead this down-to-earth, spiritually rich and deeply encouraging retreat meant for couples who are seeking a spark in the midst of busyness or space to rediscover one another in retirement. The retreat invites couples of all stages to step away from the noise and

rediscover the heart of their vocation.

Through the wisdom of Scripture, the inspiring witness of married saints, shared personal experiences and the timeless guidance of the four cardinal virtues—prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance—couples will reflect, reconnect and rekindle the purpose and joy of their shared calling.

The cost is \$550, which includes meals and a private room for the couple.

For more information or to register, go to tinyurl.com/seasonsfeb26, call 812-357-6611 or e-mail guestservices@saintmeinrad.edu. †

Celebrate romance at dinner dance at Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish on Feb. 7

A Celebrate Romance Dinner and Dance will be held at Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish, 335 S. Meridian St., Greenwood, from 6-10 p.m. on Feb. 7.

All married couples are invited for an evening catered by South Side of Chicago, a photo booth, a dance

lesson, dancing and more. Wristbands for access to a cash bar will also be available the night of the event.

Tickets are \$60 per couple through Jan. 26 and \$75 after that date. They can be purchased at tinyurl.com/CelebrateMarriage2026. †

Soup Bowl Benefit for Terre Haute Catholic Charities Foodbank is set for Feb. 7

A Soup Bowl Benefit for Terre Haute Catholic Charities Foodbank will take place at Maryland Community Church, 4700 S. Highway 46, in Terre Haute, from 3-5 p.m. on Feb. 7.

Throughout the event’s 16-year history, the goal of the Soup Bowl Benefit remains the same: to raise awareness on the issues of hunger and food insecurity in our communities.

Guests select a hand-crafted bowl to sample soups from local chefs—

and the bowl is theirs to keep!

Tickets are \$30 (plus \$1.20 online purchase fee). Every ticket purchased can provide as many as 120 meals to the agency’s neighbors in need.

Tickets are limited, so folks are encouraged to purchase them in advance—or to make a donation for Terre Haute Catholic Charities Foodbank—at secure.qgiv.com/for/2026soupbowlbenefit or by calling 812-232-1447. †

Wedding Anniversaries

NORMAN AND JUDY (HAY) HERZOG, members of St. Michael Parish in Cannelton, celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary on Jan. 21.

The couple was married in St. Michael Church in Cannelton on Jan. 21, 1961.

They have four children: Mindy Paulet, Christopher, John-Paul and Norman Herzog.

The couple also has 11 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. †



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



(Photo by John Shaughnessy)

A garden reveals God’s creation and the fruits of a Catholic education

By John Shaughnessy

In the middle of winter, it may seem unusual to share the story of a garden and the woman who helps to bring it to life for children.

But this is the story of a garden at an archdiocesan school, a garden that overflows year-round—even when snow is on the ground—with the bountiful gifts that can blossom from a Catholic education.

Consider that the garden provides about 600 pounds of fresh produce every year, supplying tomatoes, squash, green beans and cucumbers for people in need—a gift that also teaches the school children to look out for others in kindness and empathy.

Consider also that while the children roam among the trees, the flower beds, the giant sunflowers and the chickens, they are also learning lessons about science, technology, engineering and math—the so-called STEM foundations of learning.

Now consider one more truth, the most important one: Everything in this garden and everything that is taught here is rooted in the belief that God provides so much abundance for us in life, and that we are called to take care of his creation and each other.

All these truths sprout to life in the garden at Christ the King School in Indianapolis, a place where joy, curiosity and wonder combine to form a wonderful bouquet of appreciation for nature, which is exactly what the Garden Lady—a parent volunteer also known as Jackie Chandler—strives to create for children.

Just understand that when Chandler starts to talk about the garden and the children, her enthusiasm, like one of those giant sunflowers, can’t be contained.

“Their sparked interest is so exciting for me and brings me so much joy in return,” she notes about the children. “My favorite thing is teaching these kids to be resourceful. We talk about water conservation, and reusing, repurposing and recycling items. We model caring for God’s Earth and all living things.

“We estimate in silly ways how tall a tree is, and we dig for worms. Seeing wonder through the students’ eyes is illuminating. Seeing the light come on inside of them about things they can do at home—or even on their own even though they are 5 to 10 years old—is miraculous.

“I am filled most with joy when I see the students in

awe with soil testing, or with the stories I hear about students going home from garden class and making their own bug hotel in their backyard. And, *oooh!*, the excitement when they find a worm and run over to show me, knowing that earthworms are my *favorite!*”

Her joy and her smile are ever-present in the garden now. Yet the reality is that when she first came here, it was a soul-searching time for her, a time when her spirits and the spirits of our entire country felt as lifeless as a garden during a Midwestern winter.

“I found peace and purpose”

Back then, Chandler worked as a full-time nurse practitioner at an Indianapolis hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I need to let you know what brought me to gardening in the first place, as this has led me into volunteering as the Garden Lady,” she begins. “I started really getting into gardening just before the COVID pandemic hit. During a time of uncertainty and isolation, while working overtime caring for hospital employees during the pandemic, I found peace and purpose watching my little seedlings in my garage grow.

“At times, I had trouble connecting with my family, too, during that time, and being outside with my hands in the dirt gave me a sense of calm and connection that I didn’t even know I needed.”

That need stayed with her as she and her husband Mike searched for a school for their son Walter as he entered kindergarten. At the time, Christ the King School had started a garden under the direction of then-principal Ed Seib. Seeing the garden, the couple knew they had



Jackie Chandler, the “Garden Lady,” helps children, including Marty Funk and Emelia Marshall, understand that everything that happens in the garden at Christ the King School in Indianapolis is rooted in the belief that God provides so much abundance for us in life. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

found their school home for Walter *and* a place of renewal for her.

“I really appreciated the school garden, equipped with real, live chickens and giant sunflowers,” Chandler recalls. “Around that time in my personal life, I went through my own ‘dark night of the soul.’

“We were a couple of years since the COVID-19 pandemic started, and I think the trauma and secondary trauma of caring for health care employees hit me once the hustle and bustle of being in survival mode faded. I had time off from work for my own healing. And that same comfort I initially felt watching those seedlings grow in my garage was renewed, as I felt comfort and strength in caring for our school garden. It became a source of healing and hope for me.”

The garden also soon became a calling to help the

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GARDEN

continued from page 1B

students grow, and a way for her to serve God and help share his gifts of creation.

‘Caring for God’s great Earth’

“Over time, my love for the garden grew into a love for what it brings to our community, and it made me ponder what more it can provide for our kids as a place to learn, explore and see God’s hand in creation,” she says. She met with Seib to share her plan for expanding the garden to 18 raised beds, one garden bed for each class at the school. She recruited her friend and fellow Christ the King mother, Annie Feeney, to help. “Together, we spearheaded this adventure,” Chandler says. “Once transformed, we were excited to have the kids out in the space. I proposed classes with planned-out lesson plans, including STEM-based activities, to our current principal, Kortney Wenclewicz, and she approved. Not only that, the sign-up spots filled quickly



Even in the snow and cold of winter, there are lessons to be learned in the garden area and in the chicken coop at Christ the King School in Indianapolis. (Submitted photo)



Students keep a journal of the results of their experiments in the garden at Christ the King School in Indianapolis. (Submitted photo)

with kindergarten through fourth-grade classes. “I was honored—and still am—that they let the kids come learn with me in the garden. That first year, I figured the worst-case scenario was that the kids are outside in fresh air and playing in the dirt. Well, it turned out much greater than that. To see the kids learning about plants, trees, soil, being resourceful and caring for God’s great Earth has been such a joy to watch.” The children share the same joy. “In garden class, we get to plant our garden bed,” says Gemma Karpinski, a third-grade student. “The garden is so beautiful, and it’s so nice to have the plants and the birds. And it’s fun when we go on scavenger hunts as a group.” Evan Mennel, a fellow third-grader, adds, “We get to do a lot of fun activities. We have books, and whatever we learn, we write about it.” Both students also appreciate the opportunity to share the garden’s harvest with others. “We get to pick tomatoes and cucumbers, and they go to the food pantry,” Evan says. “And the chickens lay eggs, and some go to the food pantry, too.” When principal Wenclewicz views the garden, she sees it as a reflection of the difference that parent volunteers make *and* an opportunity for students to gain a close-up understanding of the world God has created.

“It has been a hands-on learning experience for our students to understand the importance of God’s creation,” she says. “The students and volunteers have been an integral part in building new raised beds, planting vegetables, weeding, and providing the grown produce to the local food pantry. Christ the King is very blessed to have this ecosystem on our campus to learn more about the world around us.” Wenclewicz also shares this thought about Chandler. “We rely on her expertise to continue to grow our garden and learn more about the animals, organisms and produce that live within this environment,” she says. “She is truly a remarkable addition to our school community.”

Seeing the world with wonder

Those thoughts touch Chandler, but the Garden Lady is quick to sow praise in all directions. Besides making sure that Annie Feeney is acknowledged for all she does, she mentions the dad who built the chicken coop, the parents who provide the soil and the vegetable shoots, and the parents who volunteer in the garden classes when they can. She sees all the efforts as an extension of the Catholic faith. “The garden’s official name is the St. Isidore and St. Maria Garden,” Chandler notes. “They share the values and virtues of commitment to family, love for the land, service to the poor and a deep spirituality. Thinking [about] and doing for others gets us out of our own heads, worries and concerns. “In classroom moments, we have taken a brief moment of pause and quiet to hear God’s greatest creation—birds chirping, wind blowing.”



Children show some of the produce that is grown in the garden at Christ the King School in Indianapolis, produce that is shared with people in need. (Submitted photo)

The Garden Lady has especially felt the breath of God in her life. “Though I have only been on God’s great Earth for 36 years, I have been given many second chances at life,” she says. “At times, I am quite surprised and feel very blessed to still be here. Feeling like I am on borrowed time drives my values and goals in life. This ‘Garden Lady’ chapter has been a beautiful adventure in my journey. I learn so much from the kids, and they remind me how to see the world with wonder.” That wonder has led her to make a dramatic change in her life. She has left her hospital nursing job—“my dream job”—to become a part-time nurse at Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis, a change that allows her to devote even more time to the garden and the children. “My rebellious teenage self—who was actually just riddled with fear—would *never* believe I would be working at a Catholic high school, or that I have become a member of a Catholic church and community. I am so grateful that my family and I are part of the caring and welcoming community at Christ the King. “It is important for me to continue to cultivate this community that I have always longed for, and this continues to take root in the garden. Gardening and playing in the dirt have been very therapeutic for me—the outdoors is where I connect most personally with God. And maybe just one of those kids in garden class needs to play in the dirt, feel the sun on their cheeks or hear birds chirping that day in garden class. “Maybe they won’t be able to put words to that need or understand how it helps them, but I hope to teach connection with the Earth, others, creatures, trees, flowers and God in the garden. And hopefully in turn, the students will later pass this on to others.” It’s the humble prayer of the Garden Lady, a prayer rooted in the abundant goodness of God. †

Catholic Schools: Drawing new maps of hope

By Brian Disney
Superintendent of Catholic schools in the archdiocese

Happy Catholic Schools Week! We are blessed to have 69 Catholic schools serving more than 23,000 students throughout the archdiocese. As we honor the gift of Catholic education, we renew our mission focused on the whole person, the power of community and the promise of hope in every student’s journey.



Brian Disney

Pope Leo XIV provided a vision for Catholic schools in his apostolic letter “Drawing New Maps of Hope” on Oct. 27, 2025, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the

conciliar declaration “*Gravissimum educationis*” (“Declaration on Catholic Education”). In the letter, he reminds us that education “is one of the highest expressions of Christian charity.” Catholic education does more than teach academic content. It also prioritizes the learning of virtues. At our Catholic schools, students discover the meaning of life, recognize their inalienable dignity, discern their vocations and apply their responsibility toward others. Catholic schools put the person at the center of our endeavors. By focusing on a student’s inherent dignity, Catholic schools embrace “the entire person: spiritual, intellectual, emotional, social, physical.” In forming the whole person, our schools avoid fragmentation and integrate the Catholic faith into all aspects of the student experience. Pope Leo also emphasizes that technological progress, including

artificial intelligence (AI), is part of God’s plan, but its use must be guided by careful discernment. “Let us educate in a judicious use of technology and of AI, placing the person before the algorithm and harmonizing technical, emotional, social, spiritual and ecological intelligence.” Pope Leo stresses, “Christian education is a collective endeavor: no one educates alone. The educational community is a ‘we’ where teachers, students, families, administrative and service staff, pastors and civil society converge to generate life.” With this emphasis on collaborative formation, our schools echo the vibrant, shared mission of the Gospel. Catholic school educators recognize that parents are the first teachers and support them in that effort. Not only are parents and teachers actively engaged in Catholic education, but so is the entire parish community.

Catholic education “is an act of hope and a passion that is renewed because it manifests the promise we see in the future of humanity,” Pope Leo notes. We see the immeasurable value of each student and assist them with growing in the universal call to holiness. Pope Leo reminds us, “Young people ask for depth; they need spaces for silence, discernment, and dialogue with their conscience and with God.” Through this contemplation, students understand they are sons and daughters of God, and they build trust in our divided world filled with conflicts and fear. This hope empowers them to engage their whole persons in transforming the world into the kingdom of God. As we celebrate Catholic Schools Week, we are inspired by Pope Leo to draw new maps of hope as we help young people grow in God’s grace and goodness. †



The love and faith of others help guide a student to share the same with her peers

By John Shaughnessy

To understand the impact that Mary Claire McCarthy tries to have on other people’s lives, you have to know the essential belief about God she has learned to embrace:

He often makes his presence known through the people he puts in our lives.

That reality frequently happens in the most heartbreaking and challenging times that people face, like the one that overwhelmed Mary Claire when she was in the third grade.

“My dad passed away in a car accident when I was in third grade,” says Mary Claire, now a senior at Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis. “It was really hard for my family because it was so sudden.”

A child then, she saw how that devastating tragedy tested and strained some people’s relationship with God. She also felt the impact it had on her in other ways.

“For a while, it was harder for me to trust God because I had a lot of anxiety about what if someone else dies. Anytime my mom left the house, I was really stressed, thinking she’d get in a car accident or something like that.

“I had opportunities to connect with God, but it took me a while to get there. I really saw a change in my relationship when I was going into high school. I just learned more about how much God loves me. I opened my eyes to all the things that God has given me, and how much better my life is with him in it. I started to see the ways that God has put people into my life along the way.”

She mentions “the great example” of her mom, Stacey, saying, “I trust her, and I can talk to her. I don’t know what I’d do without her.”

She also glows when she talks about her aunt, Moira McCarthy, the youngest sister of her dad, Kevin.

“She reminds me a lot of my dad as a person, which is really comforting for me. She’s also a good mentor for me. She’s the one who got me to start praying the Surrender novena. That definitely helps with my anxiety—to let go and let Jesus take the wheel helps a lot.”

She also smiles when she talks about her grandparents, especially her grandfather, Kevin McCarthy.

“He has taught me the most about my faith. From day one, he’s always done his best to encourage me to pray and go to church and all that.”

And there’s also the influence of the family for which she has served as a nanny since her freshman year.

“Now they’re like a second family to me. And the dad has even told me that he’d be happy to act as a father figure for me if that’s what I want or need. He also knows he could never replace my dad. He just wants to be there for me if I want someone. And that’s been really helpful.”

All those influences—passed down through the generations—have led her to want to be there for others, to help her fellow high school students draw closer to Christ too.

‘Just finding ways to let God bring peace’

Mary Claire has pursued that hope as a peer minister during her years at Bishop Chatard.

“We’re like spiritual mentors for younger students,” says Mary Claire, who previously attended St. Luke the Evangelist School in Indianapolis and is a member of that parish. “Part of that is I’ve led freshman, sophomore and



Mary Claire McCarthy smiles in her interactions with visitors to Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis, the place where the senior has grown as a person, including in her relationship with God. (Submitted photo)

junior retreats. I like it because it helps me connect them to God. And at the same time, I’m connecting to God.”

She views her involvement as a combination of giving back and living her faith.

“I feel as a peer minister, it holds me accountable. I know if I’m teaching other people to grow closer to God or helping people to do that, I need to be strong in my faith, too. I can’t be skipping Mass or not praying. I need to have a relationship with God if I’m going to try to teach other people to do that as well.”

She put those thoughts into practice again this past fall as she helped lead a retreat for juniors. During that retreat, she shared her own faith journey, including her struggles with the death of her dad—and the love and faith of the people who have been there for her ever since.

“During the junior retreat, there was a lot of really deep conversations. We also had small groups. We just had a lot of spiritual breakthroughs with people. I also gave a talk. Talking about my journey and the struggles I’ve faced and also the times I’ve seen God in that. And how I found God at my lowest points and how God has shown me everything I have at my highest points.”

She now describes her relationship with God as “the best it’s ever been.”

“I’m just prioritizing God and trying my best to influence other people around me. I take my little sister to church on Sundays. I pray about every little thing. I used to think if you prayed over things that are really small or silly, you’re just wasting God’s time. But now I’m like, he doesn’t care, he just wants you to talk to him and trust him.

“Like if I’m going to bed at night, I’ll say a prayer so I don’t oversleep in the morning. That kind of thing. Just finding ways to let God bring peace.”

‘I felt like I made a difference’

She sees the difference that her 13 years of Catholic education have made in her faith journey, her life.

“It’s taught me a lot, and I’m really thankful for it. I don’t know if I’d be as strong in my faith if I didn’t have the experience I’ve had. Especially coming to high school where I was taught about the personal connection you can form with God.”

Her smile grows even wider as she talks about one of her latest efforts to lead younger students closer to God.

Looking for an opportunity to connect again with the members of the small group she led at the junior retreat, Mary Claire proposed a few options, but there were too many conflicts. She nervously offered one more possibility, saying, “Hear me out. We could all just go to Mass.”

“They were actually excited,” she recalls. “I talked to them on the retreat about the importance of going to Sunday Mass, and how I understand that when you’re in high school, it can be hard to go. Because a lot of them struggle about how hard it is to go to Sunday Mass.

“I just decided I need to take them to Mass. I’ll plan it and take them. The best way to encourage someone to do something is to do it with them.”

It’s a lesson she has learned from the people who love her, including her dad who she knows is still with her.

After Mass together, the youths shared brunch at a restaurant.

“It felt like I made a difference, like I actually had a little bit of an impact on them, and that I had done something right,” Mary Claire says, beaming. “I did something. I tried.” †

Catholic education must form the whole person—intellect, heart and spirit

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our 2026 theme for Catholic Schools Week, “Catholic Schools: United in Faith and Community,” makes clear that formation and education involve



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

more than a solitary endeavor. Human beings are communal by nature. Faith is more effectively celebrated and enriched within the context of community rather than in isolation from one another. The community of believers is more than a mere collection of individuals. It is for this reason that documents of the Second Vatican Council referred to the Church as the Body of Christ and Pilgrim People of God.

In his recent Oct. 27, 2025, Apostolic Letter, “*Drawing New Maps of Hope*,” commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Conciliar Declaration, “*Gravissimum educationis*,” Pope Leo XIV writes, “Christian education is a collective endeavor: no one educates alone. The educational community is a ‘we’ where teachers, students, families, administrative and

service staff, pastors and civil society converge to generate life” (#3).

The Holy Father emphasized that Catholic education must form the whole person (intellect, heart, spirit) within communities, integrating faith into all subjects and serving the common good. He also expressed concern about addressing modern challenges of technology, especially within the context of Catholic social teaching. The collective effort of education, he noted, is a true “act of hope.”

Hope is one of the three theological virtues, along with faith and charity, upon which all other virtues are hinged. Having just completed the Jubilee Year of Hope, we are reminded of how essential hope is for individuals, families and all forms of community to grow and prosper. Given the various ideologies and exaggerated individualism that underlie the ever-increasing polarization of practically every aspect of society, Catholic education is poised to provide a path to hope made available by authentic respect for both faith and reason.

Thus, our Catholic Schools Week theme aptly acknowledges how necessary the unity of faith and community are for Catholic schools to thrive in forming hearts and educating minds. Ultimately, the

salvation of souls and development of good citizens is all about being Christ-centered. Permeating all aspects of the educational experience—the subjects, activities, clubs, athletics, social and nutritional concerns—is the true purpose of Catholic identity; namely, to witness to the good news of Jesus Christ, our hope and salvation. This is why our Catholic schools exist. This is the reason for all the sacrifice and resources made by so many individuals, families, parishes and religious communities.

There is no better time than Catholic Schools Week to thank our pastors, administrators, staff, faculty, benefactors, volunteers, families and especially students, for being incredible witnesses to Catholic education throughout central and southern Indiana. The Archdiocese of Indianapolis is truly blessed with such wonderful ambassadors of Catholic identity both within and outside our schools.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Charles C. Thompson

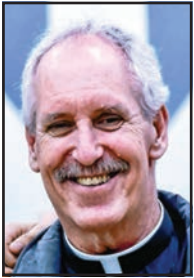
Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Priests find life in passing on the faith in Catholic schools across the archdiocese

By Sean Gallagher

After leading St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bloomington for nearly 15 years, Father Thomas Kovatch knows well where to go for a pick-me-up.

“If I’m having a bad day, all I have to do is walk into the school and visit the kids,” he said. “They lift me up like there’s no tomorrow. They are constantly joy-filled and excited to see me. They’re very uplifting. To go there and spend time in the school is one of my favorite things to do.”



Father Thomas Kovatch

Dozens of priests across central and southern Indiana who serve in elementary and high schools in the archdiocese could echo Father Kovatch’s sentiments.

But the benefits go both ways. The presence of priests in Catholic schools in the archdiocese enhances the formation and education of the more than 23,000 students enrolled in them.

In addition to Father Kovatch, two other priests who serve in schools in the archdiocese spoke with *The Criterion* about their experience of ministry in Catholic education.

As pastor of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Richmond, Father Sengole Thomas Gnanaraj ministers in the faith community’s St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School and Seton Catholic Jr./Sr. High School.

Father Rick Nagel is pastor of Prince of Peace Parish in Madison and serves at its Pope John XXIII School and Father Michael Shawe Memorial Jr./Sr. High School.

Serving ‘the young Church’

Father Nagel began ministry at Prince of Peace Parish last July. He said that many strands in his life going back decades prepared him for leading a parish that has both an elementary school and high school.

He comes from a family of nine and has 34 nieces and nephews and 40 great-nieces and great-nephews. Before becoming an archdiocesan seminarian, he was a

high school teacher for six years and then served as the state director for the Future Farmers of America.

“I’ve been around kids my whole life,” Father Nagel said. “So, it’s kind of natural for me.”

And for the last 16 years, he’s ministered to many young adult Catholics at St. John the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis and as chaplain of what is now Indiana University Indianapolis and Purdue University in Indianapolis.

“I absolutely love anything to do with faith formation and especially to do with the young Church,” Father Nagel said. “That’s a big part of my heart in the many years of my priesthood. It’s such a joy. It gives me life. It lifts me up.”

And he wants to return the favor for the students at Prince of Peace’s schools. He celebrates three school Masses each week, teaches theology classes at Shawe and visits classrooms when teachers ask him to come by, which he says happens regularly.

“Any requests that they have of me to come into the classroom to do something or an event, I’m there,” Father Nagel said. “I really try to be open and present to that.”

Last fall, Father Nagel also trained 62 students from the

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Father Rick Nagel, pastor of Prince of Peace Parish in Madison, teaches fourth-grade students at the faith community’s Pope John XXIII School how to be an altar server on Sept. 17, 2025, in St. Patrick Chapel, which is adjacent to the school. (Submitted photo)

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school.holyspirit-indy.org




Little Flower
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CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

third through the 12th grade to be altar servers.

“It’s really beautiful,” he said. “We’ve had at least three families I know of that have come back to the Church through these kids being involved in serving.”

Father Nagel is grateful for all the life and joy he’s experienced in just one semester at Pope John XXIII and Shawe.

“I feel super blessed as a priest to be here,” he said. “God’s led me here. It’s so full of life, goodness and opportunities to help grow the faith within families within the life of the schools and broadly through the parish life.”

‘A ministry of being available’

Like other priests who lead parishes with schools, Father Kovatch makes sure to be present during the day when classes are in session at St. Charles.

He interacts a lot with students when preaching during the weekly school Mass.

“I ask them questions about the readings and various things,” Father Kovatch said. “They get excited. They’ll answer the questions. They’re really smart.”

But he knows the importance of spending time with the school community outside of regular hours, too.

“I go to their ball games,” Father Kovatch said. “There are a lot of Saturdays where I’m at the gym the whole day because there are games after games after games.”

While being the person ultimately responsible for the administration of his parish’s school, Father Kovatch sees his service as more focused on simply being present.

“It’s a ministry of being available,” he said. “A priest needs to be available to the school, to the kids and to the staff, just as I need to be available to my parishioners. It all comes out of the same mentality that your life is not your own. It’s given away.”

Giving himself to St. Charles Borromeo Parish and its school since coming to Bloomington in 2011 has allowed Father Kovatch to accompany students as they’ve grown from children to adults.

“I’ve had weddings of kids who were in the fourth grade when I came here,” he said. “I just baptized the child of one of those [couples] last weekend. And they come to Mass every weekend.”

Nurturing a ‘friendship with Christ’

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Richmond uses



Father Sengole Thomas Gnanaraj, pastor of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Richmond, poses with first-grade students at the faith community’s elementary school. (Submitted photo)

all three of its campuses for its schools. Students in pre-kindergarten through the second grade go to classes on the St. Mary campus. Third through sixth graders are at the Holy Family campus. And Seton Catholic Jr./Sr. High School is on the St. Andrew campus.

Father Gnanaraj says that keeps him “on wheels every day.”

But he wouldn’t have it any other way.

“I love it 100%,” he said.

Father Gnanaraj especially likes preaching during the Masses he celebrates weekly on each of the three campuses.

“I consider that my teaching time,” he said. “To the little ones, you have to talk like a 100% entertainer to get their attention. Intermediate is another style. They are just in that cusp of understanding things in a better way.”

In preaching to the high school students, Father Gnanaraj wants to stretch their hearts and minds.

The Indian priest who has served in the archdiocese since 2011 has done graduate studies on the theology of

St. Thomas Aquinas and wants to pass on the wisdom of this great doctor of the Church to the Seton students.

“I make sure that I kind of translate at least some of the major teachings of Aquinas into their own language,” Father Gnanaraj said. “I talk about virtues. I talk about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the sacraments. I spend a lot of time talking about some of those basic building blocks that they should get a good grip on.”

All of his preaching and interaction with students in classrooms, high school retreats and other settings is geared toward helping them nurture a lifelong friendship with Christ.

“My goal is to help our young people to see Jesus our Lord, to see Christ as early as possible and begin to develop a relationship with him,” Father Gnanaraj said. “That is my goal.”

“If the students graduate from Seton with a pretty good understanding of what it means to have faith and what it means to have friendship with Christ, the success story begins right there.” †



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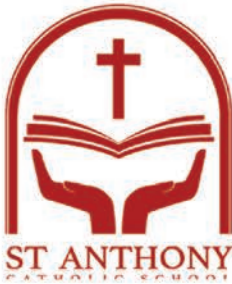
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Teacher crosses a bridge in life and finds a closer bond with Christ and her students

(This story is an edited version of the one that first appeared in The Criterion on April 4, 2025.)

By John Shaughnessy

FLOYD COUNTY—Driving from her home in southern Indiana to her work in Kentucky, Maggie Banet had the growing feeling that she needed to make a dramatic change in her life.

For years, she had been teaching at a public school that was ranked first academically in Kentucky, a school where she loved the students, their supportive families and her caring colleagues. It was a dream job in the eyes of many, but something was missing for Banet.

As she crossed the bridge spanning the two states, a short Bible verse often jumped into her thoughts, a verse from Colossians 3:23 that she summed up in this way, “Work for the Lord and not for men.”

“I wanted to please my principal and the administration,” she recalls. “The pressure from the top down to stay at the number one spot was extremely difficult. I would repeat that verse to myself to remember that, ultimately, I need to please God first.”

Amid those thoughts, she heard from a friend—a secretary at St. Mary-of-the-Knobs School in Floyd County—that there was an opening for a teacher.

“It was literally divine providence,” says Banet about that moment seven years ago. “I feel like the Lord just picked me up out of my toughest year of teaching. He opened the door at St. Mary’s. I came to interview, and they offered me the job. I literally cried tears of joy.”

Banet had another moment of joy when the fifth-grade teacher was chosen as the recipient of the 2025 Saint Theodora Excellence in Education Award, the highest honor given to an educator in the archdiocese.

‘We’re going to sing to the Lord because we love him’

The atmosphere that Banet strives to create for her students is one of joy, discovery and faith.

The emphasis on faith is especially evident, from the Christian songs that sometimes serve as background music during religion and even math classes, to the

various Bible verses that are printed on colorful pieces of paper and displayed prominently around the room.

“Be still and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10).

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13).

“I cannot think of a more boring way to start teaching, especially during religion class, than to say, ‘OK, open your book to page seven,’ ” Banet says. “When you’re talking about God and how absolutely amazing he is, I just can’t bring myself to open a textbook.

“Sometimes we’ll start with a song or end with a song and the kids’ faces just light up. ‘Hey, we’re going to sing to the Lord because we love him.’ The goal is for them to have a relationship with Jesus.”

While she’s laser-focused on helping her students move closer to Jesus, Banet continues to strive to bring out the best in them academically.

“Maggie isn’t just enthusiastic, she is also effective,” says Tracy Jansen, principal of St. Mary-of-the-Knobs School. “Her students respond to the energy she brings daily. Her students consistently score in the top 15% of ILEARN math scores [administered by the Indiana Department of Education]. After assessments are administered, she eagerly analyzes the data and fills in learning gaps, ever focused on student learning and growth.”

Her high energy approach shows in the fact that she doesn’t have a chair for herself in her classroom. And instead of a desk, she has a large, rolling cart with shelves, where she keeps her computer and phone.

“I just walk around the room and put myself close to the kids that are struggling. I’m looking over their shoulder, figuring out who’s got it and who needs help.”

She also knows where to turn when she needs help.

‘I’m forever grateful’

“I have an ongoing conversation with God throughout the day. Just a quick ‘thank you.’ A quick ‘help me,’ ” she says. “And I truly feel he talks back.”

She also encourages her students to understand the importance of seeking God’s words and wisdom in their lives. She has them memorize one Scripture verse a week.

“I hope I give them a taste of how God can use



Maggie Banet is the recipient of the 2025 Saint Theodora Excellence in Education Award, the highest honor given to an educator in the archdiocese. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

Scripture in your life. You pull that verse from your memory bank when you’re feeling frightened or when you’re feeling discouraged or when you’re feeling joyful. If they know how to make that connection, I hope they will do that more as they get older.”

Receiving the Saint Theodora award thrilled Banet, yet not nearly as much as what she gets to do as a Catholic school educator.

“The Bible says to go and make disciples of all nations. If I’m going to share my faith like the Lord tells me to, what better way to do it—‘here’s a group of children, mold them, teach them,’ ” she says. “It’s such a gift to be given the opportunity to share my faith in such an easy, enjoyable manner.”

That gift ties into a Scripture verse that has become crucial to her. It’s a verse she’s had her students memorize, all in her hope that they will rely upon it throughout their lives: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Prv 3:5).

“I don’t know how people make it through life without faith,” she says. “It is just the driving force behind everything I do. In the end, all that matters is my faith and did I share it. When I have my ups and downs in life, I always remember that Jesus is the constant.

“He’s the one doing the work. He’s the one changing hearts. I’m just the tool he’s chosen to use. And for that, I’m forever grateful.” †

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Two archdiocesan schools receive first-ever recognition for excellence

(This story first appeared in The Criterion on Nov. 7, 2025.)

By John Shaughnessy

After learning the great news, the students and staff of Immaculate Heart of Mary School in Indianapolis cheered.

The community of St. Mary School in North Vernon was also thrilled to receive their exciting recognition.

Both archdiocesan schools were among the 11 public and private schools to be the first-ever recipients of the Indiana Blue Ribbon Schools designation, celebrating their “exceptional academic achievement and commitment to student success.”

In announcing the Blue Ribbon Schools on Oct. 28, 2025, Indiana Gov. Mike Braun said, “Through the unwavering collaboration of teachers, school leaders, parents and entire communities, Indiana students are achieving strong results. This inaugural cohort of Indiana Blue Ribbon Schools are a model for others across our state and nation of what is possible when we put students first.”

Brian Disney, superintendent of Catholic schools in the archdiocese, also praised St. Mary and Immaculate Heart of Mary schools for continuing the long tradition of archdiocesan schools being recognized for excellence.

“We are excited that Immaculate Heart of Mary and St. Mary schools are being recognized for their strong cultures and academic excellence,” Disney noted. “They are two examples of the outstanding Catholic schools throughout the archdiocese. Our Catholic schools are built on the foundation of Jesus Christ and strive to develop the full potential of every student in mind, body and spirit.”

Since 1982, archdiocesan schools have received 43 Blue Ribbon School designations from the U.S. Department of Education. And the principals of both Immaculate Heart of Mary and St. Mary schools were privately informed in the summer of 2025 that their schools had also earned that national honor, and it would be announced in September.

Instead, the U.S. Department of Education discontinued the Blue Ribbon program in September of 2025, placing the

future of such recognition in the hands of the individual states. And the Indiana Department of Education embraced the program as its own.

The 11 schools were celebrated during the Educational Excellence Awards gala in Indianapolis on Nov. 21, 2025.

“Receiving the Blue Ribbon is a really nice public recognition of the good work I get to see our teachers and our students do every day. And how involved our parent volunteer base is,” said Chris Kolakovich, principal of Immaculate Heart of Mary School.

The principal first shared the news with teachers.

“They cheered. I told them that this validates their commitment to excellence, their commitment to collaborating and supporting each other, and their working together to provide the best experience for the students. They were super excited.”

So were the students when Kolakovich shared the news with them in an announcement.

“The students were cheering. Some of them congratulated me. I said, ‘The congratulations belong to you as well. This award belongs to all of us.’ They have a part in it for the good work they do, in working hard every day for their teachers.”

St. Mary principal Meredith Inman offered similar praise for the staff, students and parents who comprise their school community.

“This was so special to be recognized,” she said. “We know we are a great school. We know our students are awesome and our staff is awesome. We know that our



Students at Immaculate Heart of Mary School in Indianapolis celebrate the school's selection as one of the schools to receive a first-ever Indiana Blue Ribbon School designation. (Photo courtesy of Alex Rodman)

parents and families are awesome.

“There’s just a feeling you get when you walk through our doors. It’s a family environment, and every parent knows the staff members here are willing to go above and beyond to help every student meet their fullest potential and to succeed. Everybody wants the best for the students and the families.”

That approach marks Catholic schools across the archdiocese. Kolakovich and Inman know that approach will continue at their schools.

“We have a really outstanding and high-achieving school, and I get to see it on a daily basis,” Kolakovich said.

Inman noted, “This place has been standing for over 100 years because of people who love St. Mary’s and love our parish and our school. There are very deep family roots and traditions here, and lots of generations have been through the halls of this school. It’s a very well-loved and respected school.” †

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RONCALLI.ORG

Principal of the Year Kent Clady has a ‘genuine desire to serve others’

By Natalie Hoefer

Kent Clady views his approach and accomplishments as principal of Our Lady of the Greenwood School (OLG) in Greenwood as nothing special.

“I just do what I do because it needs to be done,” he told *The Criterion*.



Kent Clady

But his fellow archdiocesan Catholic principals view him differently.

“Mr. Clady leads with both humility and conviction,” observed Amy Wilson, principal of St. Roch School in Indianapolis. “Kent’s approachable demeanor, tireless work ethic and genuine care for all those he encounters have earned him immense respect

from colleagues and profound love from his school community.”

She wrote her comments in a letter nominating Clady for the archdiocese’s Principal of the Year Award.

Wilson’s peer at Holy Name of Jesus School in Beech Grove agreed.

“I can think of no one more deserving of this recognition,” wrote Amy Wright, the school’s principal. “Kent exemplifies the qualities we hope to see in every Catholic school leader—faith-filled, compassionate, visionary and deeply devoted to the mission of Catholic education.”

These and glowing comments from other Catholic school leaders in central and southern Indiana led to Clady’s selection by the archdiocesan Office of Catholic Schools as Principal of the Year.

Praying together ‘is the greatest gift’

Clady began his academic career 39 years ago. He taught for 13 years then worked as a principal for three years, with both roles at public schools.

“I’m a convert to the faith,” said Clady. “So, when [he and his wife] were raising our three boys, it became evident that we wanted them to go to Catholic schools.”

Then something became more evident to him.

“I decided I always wanted to provide for students in school what I wanted my own kids to have, and now my own grandkids,” said Clady, whose granddaughter attends fourth grade at OLG. “I decided I wouldn’t want families to send their kids to a school I wouldn’t want to send my own kids to.”

So, 23 years ago, he was hired as principal of OLG. There, he has been able to do what he could not do in the public schools—pray and worship at Mass.

Clady starts each day with his own personal devotion time. “Then every morning, we have morning prayer at 8:05, ... and we have three Masses a week” for different grade groupings, he said. “That’s important to me to experience that with them.

“I feel it’s important for me to be an example for prayer and faith. ... The greatest gift we can have is to pray together.”

“Under Kent’s leadership, Our Lady of the Greenwood Catholic School has flourished spiritually and academically,” Wright wrote in her letter of recommendation.

During Clady’s time as principal, OLG received national recognition as a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence in 2010.

He attributes the accolades to his “amazing staff.”

“One of the things that says the most about our school as a whole is the high retention rate of our staff,” said Clady.

He noted that six personnel are OLG graduates, and several other members are graduates of Roncalli High School, which Indianapolis South

Deanery elementary schools—including OLG—feed into.

“One teacher spent her whole 40-year career here,” said Clady. “That says a lot when the staff is so invested and teachers and families stick around.”

‘He puts everyone else first’

In an interview with *The Criterion*, Wright recalled Clady being assigned as her mentor when she became principal of Holy Name School seven years ago.

“He always brought everything back to how we treat people,” she said. “Conversations [with him] are always rooted in love and our faith and the reason we’re here every day—academics are important, but the love and relationships you have with the people in your building are the most important thing. ... That’s why he does what he does—those conversations that help people grow in their faith. That’s his true passion.”

Wright admires Clady’s “servant leadership.”

“Everything he says and does just oozes that love and compassion he has for the students and teachers in his building.”

That compassion includes finding the best solution for his students—even if that means finding another school that better suits a particular child’s needs.

“On numerous occasions, he has reached out to me regarding students needing a new beginning—young people he recognized as having untapped potential,” wrote the St. Roch principal.

“Each student he has referred to us has thrived, a testament to his deep understanding of children and his unwavering belief in their capacity for growth and renewal.”

‘One of my greatest accomplishments’

Clady recently announced that he will retire at the end of this school year.

Reflecting on his career at OLG, he is struck by some “amazing transitions.”

When he became principal 23 years ago, the school served children from both Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish and SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi Parish, also in Greenwood.

See CLADY, page 16B



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Archbishop shares a special prayer with seniors— and a perspective to remember

By John Shaughnessy

Sometimes a different perspective opens our eyes to the gifts we have in life and the other people who share them.

As one of 19 seniors at Seton Catholic High School in Richmond, Makayla Minor had that awakening moment before the annual Mass that Archbishop Charles C. Thompson celebrates for the Catholic high school seniors from across the archdiocese.

As St. Malachy Church in Brownsburg filled up with more than 1,000 students from 11 different high schools on Dec. 10, 2025, Makayla marveled at the scene.

“I think it’s so powerful,” said Makayla, 18, a member of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Richmond.

“We’re such a small school, and our graduating class is so small, so being in a church with all these people, it’s definitely very awesome and very amazing.

“Honestly, just looking around here, I’m surprised that so many people in this state also have the same faith.”

During his homily, Archbishop Thompson strived to give the Catholic high school seniors from Clarksville, Indianapolis, Madison, Oldenburg and Richmond a different perspective, too—one that opens their eyes to the gifts they have that the world needs *and* the gifts they are in the eyes of God.

At the beginning of his homily, the archbishop shared a simple prayer of 11 words that he hoped the seniors would take to heart—the Surrender Prayer that notes, “O Jesus, I surrender myself to you, take care of everything.”

That prayer became a constant through his homily as the archbishop involved the seniors after telling them he would shout the “O Jesus” part, followed by the young men roaring “I surrender myself to you,” and the young women belting out, “Take care of everything.”

Amid the repeated calls for connectedness in offering that prayer together, the archbishop shared several key points with the seniors of Bishop Chatard, Brebeuf Jesuit, Cardinal Ritter, Cathedral, Father Michael Shawe Memorial, Father Thomas Scecina Memorial, Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Providence, Providence Cristo Rey, Roncalli and Seton Catholic.

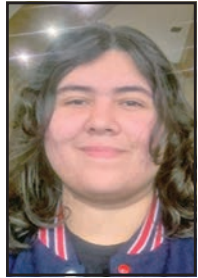
—**Be a force for peace and unity**

“We have to cultivate our culture because if we don’t cultivate the culture, the culture cultivates us,” Archbishop Thompson told the seniors. “It cultivates and affects the way we think. We have to be aware of that. Pope Leo talks a lot about peace and unity. How do we get there? We get there by us cultivating the culture.”

—**Recognize the unique connection you and Pope Leo XIV have**

“You have something that no other generation in our country has experienced: A pope that speaks your language,” the archbishop noted. “Other popes have spoken English, but this is his first language. That’s something unique. A pope that speaks your language firsthand and knows your culture.”

Archbishop Thompson also shared an insight with the



Makayla Minor

seniors that showed their importance to Pope Leo.

For the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis in November 2025, Pope Leo was initially asked to share 15 minutes in conversation with the youths who attended the event. Instead, the pope committed to 45 minutes, which actually extended to nearly an hour during the event.

“Time doesn’t mean as much to him as you mean to him,” the archbishop said.

—**Write your story—don’t let AI do it**

“One thing the pope talks a lot about is AI [artificial intelligence],” Archbishop Thompson said. “He’s concerned at how AI is having a cultural effect on us. And how it can have a devastating effect, if we’re not careful. AI can do some great things, but AI can’t heal. AI can’t discern. AI doesn’t have the human ability to think and act.

“One of the things I thought was very powerful, he said, ‘We can’t let AI write our narrative.’ AI shouldn’t be writing our personal stories. We have to claim our own identity. And our identity is created in the image of God. Our identity is God-given. We don’t create our identity. We discern it, and we receive it, and we embrace it. We have to make sure we use AI for our benefit and not let AI control us.”

—**Be thankful**

“You did a lot of work, of course. But you got here with a lot of people,” the archbishop reminded the seniors. “Parents, grandparents, teachers in grade school and high school, administrators, counselors, all the different people who walked with you.”

—**Remember the one constant you have in life**

“Some of your classmates, after you graduate, you’ll never see,” the archbishop said. “You’ll go on to make other friends. Some will come and go. The one constant in our lives is Jesus Christ. He’s with us wherever we go. But we also have to cultivate a relationship with God.

“It’s not enough to know about Jesus. The demons in the Scriptures knew about Jesus. The Scripture people who hated Jesus knew about Jesus. We have to have a personal encounter with him. If we want true peace, if we want true meaning, if we want a true sense of belonging, it begins first in a relationship with him.”

—**‘Don’t forget your souls’**

“As you look forward to your goals, don’t take for granted the journey, the encounters along the way,” Archbishop Thompson told the seniors. “The late Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that our goal as Christians is not to possess the truth but to allow the truth to possess us. He reminds us that truth is a person, Jesus Christ.

“Wherever you go, cultivate that relationship—with prayer, with Scripture, through sacrament, through service to the Gospel. Don’t forget your souls. Don’t forget what ultimately matters. Our souls were made for eternal life.”

—**‘It was such a beautiful experience’**

The opportunity to share the Mass with seniors across the archdiocese left its impact on Jamison Williams, one of 36 seniors from Father Michael Shawe Memorial Jr./Sr. High School in Madison.



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson shares a moment of joy with students from Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School in Indianapolis following the Mass he celebrated for high school seniors from across the archdiocese on Dec. 10, 2025, at St. Malachy Church in Brownsburg. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

“It’s uplifting to see that there are other people from these schools who have the same faith and the same experience as us,” said Jamison, a member of Prince of Peace Parish in Madison. “It’s very powerful.”

Cardinal Ritter senior Ashley Escamilla had the same reaction.

“It was such a beautiful experience,” said Ashley, a member of St. Gabriel the Archangel Parish in Indianapolis. “As Catholic schools, we usually don’t have much time to be united all as one. But being able to have Mass here today was truly special. You got to see all the other seniors who are going to be graduating.”

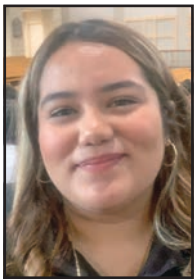
She had similar praise for Archbishop Thompson’s homily.

“I truly loved his message. His reminder to us all that we can’t let AI write our narrative was truly amazing. In the end, that is the truth. We are made in the image and likeness of God, and God has already written our story for us.

“Archbishop Thompson also reminded us that with Jesus we are able to do everything. So yes, we have goals in life, but we should always be thankful and grateful for all the people who come within our path and that make our story amazing.” †



Jamison Williams



Ashley Escamilla



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Special needs programs at Roncalli build ‘Christian men and women with character’

By Natalie Hoefer

When Elle Howe started as a freshman at Roncalli High School in the fall of 2022, she was quiet, shy and very anxious.

“I was so nervous, I said to my mom, ‘What if I just drop out of high school?’ And she said, ‘I don’t think we’re going to do that,’” says Elle, now a senior at the archdiocese’s Indianapolis South Deanery high school.

Michelle Roberts recalls the timid person Elle was back then.



Michelle Roberts

“But now she is just full of confidence,” says Roncalli’s director of special services.

That change came about through Elle’s efforts and her four-year participation in the school’s STARS program that Roberts oversees.

“It’s a resource program for those with a range of learning challenges, from learning disabilities to autism to ADHD [attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder],” Roberts explains.

She also spearheads Roncalli’s Life Academy for those with intellectual disabilities.

Both programs adhere to the philosophy stated on the special services page of the school’s website: “All students can succeed when provided with the right atmosphere to meet their needs. It is our job ... to provide an atmosphere that will assist students to reach their potential and realize their God-given talents.”

‘Recognize they’re a whole person’

Roncalli launched the resource program STARS—a name, not an acronym—in 1994.

“It can be different for every student,” Roberts explains.

Students can enroll in a daily resource class with several teachers on hand for help.

“We work on their [individualized] service plan goals—maybe to develop better study habits as evidenced by test scores, or to be better organized, or to be re-taught certain content material,” she says.

“We also have kids who ... don’t qualify for a service plan but still need some help. We’re able to address those needs and move them out in about a year.”

The school also offers testing accommodations separate from the resource class.

“Perhaps a student needs extra time to take a test or have a reader or have a different location so they can focus and show a teacher what they know,” says Roberts, noting English-learning students often use this option.

STARS students receive help connecting with one of Roncalli’s many clubs, especially when developing social skills is part of their individualized plan. The school’s guidance counselors also help them determine their post-graduation plan and steps to accomplish it.

The end goal of the program is far greater than “making sure a kid gets an A on a test,” says Roberts.

“One of the biggest things we want to tackle is that they understand themselves and can advocate for themselves and be successful here.

“A big part of what we do as a whole school is work to develop kids to recognize ‘I have gifts God has given me.’ Rather than be embarrassed that ‘I have dyslexia,’ we want them to realize, ‘This is who God made me. I have dyslexia, but I’m a great basketball player.’ We want them to recognize they’re a whole person, that their needs are all a part of their whole, and help them determine what they’re good at, what they’re not, and what they’re good at that they’re surprised by.”

Those same concepts apply to Roncalli’s Life Academy program for those with intellectual disabilities.

Life Academy: ‘A blended program’

Roncalli had already welcomed a few students with intellectual disabilities before creating the Life Academy program in 2009.

Roberts describes it as “a blended program of some academic classes plus life skills and independent skills.”

Students work one on one with aids, and the school partners with local businesses to help them develop vocational skills.

“A big part of [Life Academy] is connecting them with the Roncalli community so they can fully participate,” says Roberts. “For instance, we have a senior who loves basketball. Life Academy coordinators met with the coach and some peers to figure out how he could have a real role with the team. He is now a basketball manager for some home games.”

Life Academy students are also paired with peers through Roncalli’s Royal Buddies club.

“They have peer buddies in class and during lunch,” says Roberts. “It’s a way for [Life Academy students] to build multiple friendships rather than focus on one.

“We also look at class rosters or ask teachers who might be a natural at lending a hand to a Life Academy kid in a class. We tap into who is right there rather than put someone next to [a Life Academy student], because that’s not what happens with everyone else in class. ... We really try to build as much independence for them as possible.”

Life Academy works to find clubs that match a student’s interests. The program is also connected with Special Olympics and that organization’s Unified Sports athletics teams that include those with and without intellectual disabilities.

Life Academy has been a great success, says Roberts. “A lot of Life Academy alumni have gone on to have a college experience,” she says.

Others find meaningful employment.

“One alum is on the football coaching staff at Franklin College [in Franklin],” says Roberts. “And Roncalli hired an alum as an assistant coach for the Unified [Sports] track team. She also aids at a [Roncalli] feeder grade school and works at a day school she did a work study with.

“Most students that graduate are gainfully employed, have successful lives and stay connected to the community through connections we helped them develop when they were here.”

Building ‘Christian men and women with character’

Roberts sees the overall success of the STARS and Life Academy programs. But the testimonies of students drive home the positive impact the programs have on a personal level.

“I like how I can have help on things from multiple teachers” present during her STARS class period, says Elle. “They show me how I could maybe do something different that I’m struggling with.



Roncalli senior and Life Academy student Suri Diaz works on a project as part of a work study experience at Catholic Concepts in Indianapolis. (Submitted photo)

“I made new friends in the resource period and [by] putting myself out there in clubs.”

Elle says the STARS program “made me realize how strong a person I am deep down and gave me the confidence to push myself. It helped me realize I’m not a quiet person like I was when I started [at Roncalli] and that God made me an extrovert.”

And the senior had some exciting news to share about her future plans. She learned she was accepted into the Empire Beauty School’s program for cosmetology on Indianapolis’ south side.

Senior Suri Diaz is just as enthusiastic about her Roncalli experience through the Life Academy.

The school is “amazing,” she says. “I like it. I like the teachers. I like making new friends.”

Suri says she “learned to be a leader at Roncalli,” a fact she backs up with a long list of sports and club activities, including serving on the student council.

She says her time at Roncalli has taught her to be “holy, kind, welcoming and serving to others,” like the school’s namesake Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli—St. John XXIII.

Roberts says the two programs are successful because of the philosophy behind them.

“Our philosophy is not about accommodating them,” she says. “It’s about, ‘This is who God made them to be. Let’s get them as far as we can and let them go.’

“We want kids to be successful, and kids are successful when we hold them accountable. Accountability builds them as Christian men and women with character.”

(For more information on Roncalli High Schools STARS and Life Academy programs, go to roncalli.org/academics/stars or contact Michelle Roberts at mroberts@roncalli.org or 317-787-8277.) †

A senior’s plan to lead others closer to Christ touches his own life

By John Shaughnessy

Liam Matta wanted to get to know people at his high school better.

He also wanted to explore his faith and his relationship with God on a deeper level—and invite his fellow students to do the same.

So, in his sophomore year at Our Lady of Providence High School in Clarksville, Liam did something unusual. He started a faith-discussion group, hoping that other people would be drawn to the opportunity to talk about their spiritual life—one teenager to another.

“I feel it’s a good mission,” Liam says.

“As Catholics, we’re called to preach the Gospel to everybody. And I think it’s a really great opportunity to do it in a way that’s more casual and conversational—that people don’t feel they’re being talked at. We’re all just sitting around and sharing our experiences. I thought it would also be a good opportunity for me to share about my faith and get to know other people.”

Now a senior, Liam feels blessed that his effort has continued to have an impact on him and others—“whether they’re practicing the

faith, whether they’re Catholic or not.”

“I get to learn from so many other students, especially if they have a different perspective,” Liam says. “I’ve had conversations with people who don’t necessarily believe. We just talk about what they might believe about heaven or God. It also forces me to know what I believe really well, when people have questions. It gives me opportunities to look into different things about our faith.

And to be supportive of one another because everyone is in a different place.”



Liam Matta



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Scecina High School's Catholic identity is exemplified in its cultural diversity

By Sean Gallagher

Father Thomas Scecina Memorial High School on the east side of Indianapolis has about 450 students and 70 faculty and staff members.

While a decent-sized school, it's still just a small part of the Church in central and southern Indiana.

But a closer look at the Scecina community shows it to be like a beautiful icon of the universal Church.

Many of its students are the children of parents born in numerous countries around the world who have migrated to the U.S. This academic year, Scecina also has 29 international students from 12 countries, including China, Vietnam, Thailand, Brazil, Germany, Spain and Italy.

Its teachers also hail from countries around the world such as the Philippines, India and the Dominican Republic.

"What a gift it is to have such a rich diversity of cultures, backgrounds and perspectives among the student body and staff," said Scecina principal Peg Dispenzieri. "Diversity helps students and staff develop and use real-world skills such as communicating across cultures, navigating differences respectfully and working with others whose life experiences are very different."

'It is a huge gift'

Scecina junior Miguelangel Flores came to the high school from Holy Spirit School in Indianapolis. There were many students there who were Hispanic like himself. He was born in the U.S. to parents who came to Indianapolis from the Mexican state of Jalisco. So, coming to Scecina with students and teachers from so many races and ethnicities was an eye-opener for him.

But it is a difference that he has welcomed.

"It was really interesting getting to know all these new people from different ethnic backgrounds. You learn their culture, the way that they interact," Miguelangel said. "I've made a lot of friends that come from various ethnic backgrounds. It's really cool that you get to come here and experience that."

Onoseh Akpeokhai, a member of St. Lawrence Parish in Indianapolis, was born in the U.S. to parents who immigrated here from Nigeria in west Africa.

She appreciates how Scecina is more culturally diverse than the public elementary and middle schools she previously attended.

"I take every opportunity as a learning moment," Onoseh said. "I can learn from a single person I meet from an Asian country or any Hispanic person that I've met. It's interesting. I like it."

John Hegarty, director of international programs at Scecina, made efforts to increase the number of its students from around the world when he served as its principal from 2011-17.

That growth took a downturn during the COVID pandemic, but it's now back to its pre-pandemic numbers.

"It is a huge gift," said Hegarty, who over the years has hosted dozens of international students in his home. "Our students get the opportunity to see the United States through the eyes of someone who's not from the United States, the good and the bad. I think that's huge."

Otto Hernandez, a Spanish teacher at Scecina who is from the Dominican Republic, says the benefits of diversity at the school enrich all of its students.

"International students can have a stereotype of what America is," said Hernandez, who also has hosted many international students. "Then, when they come over here, they face the reality. This is not what they watch on the news or see in the movies. This is a whole different thing."

"And it's the same for our kids [from the U.S.]. The majority of these kids have never been out of the United States. These international students give them the chance to experience the culture of all those countries right here."



Otto Hernandez, left, John Hegarty, Onoseh Akpeokhai and Miguelangel Flores pose on Dec. 11, 2025, in the lobby of Father Thomas Scecina Memorial High School in Indianapolis. Hernandez is a teacher in the school. Hegarty is its director of international programs. Onoseh and Miguelangel are both juniors at Scecina. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

'We're all children of God at the end of it all'

Dispenzieri emphasized that the broad array of cultures and races represented at Scecina is an expression of the Catholic belief in the dignity of all people as created in the image and likeness of God that stands at the heart of the school's Catholic identity.

"Diversity allows students to encounter that truth firsthand—seeing God's image expressed in many cultures, languages and backgrounds," she said. "A diverse school embodies the very meaning of the word 'catholic,' which means 'universal.'"

Onoseh and Miguelangel agreed.

"We all come together for one common goal," said Miguelangel. "We're all trying to get closer to God."

"We're all made in the image of God, no matter if we come from the eastern part of the world or the northern part of the world," Onoseh said. "We're all children of God at the end of it all."

Hernandez hopes that students at Scecina learn from this belief in the dignity of all people, and how they in the U.S. have deep connections with other peoples around the world.

"This is a great country, one of the greatest countries ever," he said. "We call it the country of freedom. But we still need one another. The United States needs the help of other countries, help from other peoples."

"It doesn't matter if someone comes from Peru, El Salvador, Ecuador—we're all the same."

Hegarty said that Scecina's racial and ethnic diversity "magnifies the fact that we're all created in the image of God."

"When you can see that on a daily basis that this image is not exactly the same, but it is still the image of God, I think that in itself creates respect."

And he's seen this Catholic belief put into action in the school where students rub shoulders with so many peers who are so different from them at an age when fitting in is often highly valued.

"I never see any disrespect," Hegarty said. "I never hear any of the international kids say they're being bullied or they're being made fun of because of their accent."

'It's just preparing you even more for the outside world'

While racial and ethnic diversity are valued at Scecina, it can be a challenge at times, especially for its international students, something that Dispenzieri says the school community helps them overcome.

"We have a very specific onboarding process for the students who join us from different countries," she said. "We have specialized classes for those whose English is not yet fluent, then the rest of the student body takes it from there, welcoming new students through class discussions, athletics and extracurriculars."

"Sharing in introducing someone new to our community creates a sense of shared identity without requiring everyone to be the same."

Onoseh and Miguelangel both remarked how their experience of being fellow students alongside peers from so many countries and cultural backgrounds is preparing them well for life as an adult in a very diverse world.

"Going through what you go through here, seeing everybody having their own opinion, their own stand on certain circumstances, it's just preparing you even more for the outside world," Onoseh said.

"The diversity here and getting to interact with so many different people from so many different backgrounds really helps to give you an idea of the world that we're going into," Miguelangel said. "It really helps you to learn how to interact, not just with people from specific cultures but people in general."

(For more information about Father Thomas Scecina Memorial High School in Indianapolis, visit www.scecina.org.) †

SENIOR

continued from page 13B

really impactful. But I've also learned a lot academically. And I've become friends with kids from different grades. I haven't always had that."

Providence has also given him opportunities to explore different interests, including being involved in the speech team, joining the school's pro-life club and working behind the scenes in theater productions.

"Especially with the theater shows,

even though I'm not involved with acting, just running the sound or running the lights you become very involved with the people who are super passionate about what they are doing," says Liam, a member of St. Martin of Tours Parish in Louisville, Ky. "We all go out to eat before the shows. Through that way, I've become a lot closer to some of my friends who I don't have classes with."

He also says he has become closer to God by attending Mass before school on Thursdays and participating in eucharistic adoration and the sacrament of penance.

"You're not required to take advantage of those opportunities, but having them there and being able to invite other people to go with you really allows you and your friends to experience the faith together."

That focus on faith is helping him through some of the uncertain elements of his senior year.

"I'm working on trust in God, especially as I'm super unsure about where I'll even be living in a few months once I graduate, where I'll be going to school, what I'll be studying," he says. "I'm just having a lot of confidence that

God has a plan and that it will be good."

He is also certain that his parents' plan to have him attend Providence has given him the foundation he will need for the future.

"More than anything, it's been the connections you form with other people," he says. "From a spiritual perspective, that can really strengthen your faith. It's been a lot of meeting really great people who otherwise I wouldn't have had the opportunity to know. And that's really allowed me to draw closer to God and inspect and strengthen my faith further." †

A defining moment in adoration leads to a commitment to Catholic education

By John Shaughnessy

In his journey to helping advocate for all the Catholic schools and other non-public schools in Indiana, James McNeany traces his path back to a moment of doubt, when he listened to the one voice he couldn't ignore.

The defining moment came during a spiritual retreat 18 years ago when McNeany listened for God's guidance as he prayed during eucharistic adoration.

"I feel God speaks to me in adoration every time I'm there, but sometimes it's *really* loud. And this was the loudest he's ever spoken to me," he recalls with a smile.

At the time, McNeany was in his sixth year of teaching and coaching in a public school in the northern Indiana community of Logansport—a time when there was an opening for a principal at the nearby Catholic school of All Saints Parish in the Lafayette Diocese, where he served as a volunteer youth minister.

McNeany had already applied and interviewed for the principal job, before withdrawing his name. Still, it stayed in his mind, especially at a point in the retreat when everyone was asked to meditate on the Gospel story in which Christ calls Peter to walk on water.

"Peter does, then he realizes what he's doing, gets scared and falters," McNeany notes. "Jesus has to catch him and says, 'Oh ye of little faith, why did you doubt?' " (Mt 14:31)

That theme hit home to McNeany, leading him to hear God speaking to him in adoration: "What are your doubts? Why are you doubting me? I have this plan for you. Just say yes, and you'll be fine. I've got you."

McNeany contacted All Saints—and became its principal for the next six years.

He smiles again and says, "I realized God was right. I fell in love with Catholic education in so many ways. I just love what it provides for our students, and the faith foundation it provides. I love the family connection. You can take what's happening in the home and build that up in so many ways at a Catholic school. It not only builds the kids up, it builds the families up in a lot of ways, too."

A success story and a great gift

As McNeany shares that story and that belief, 18 years have passed, including the 12 years he served as the principal of Guerin Catholic High School in Noblesville, Ind., in the Lafayette Diocese.

For the past seven months, he has been settling into his position as the executive director of the Indiana Non-Public Education Association (INPEA). The association advocates on behalf of the state's 400 non-public schools, according to its website, including the 69 Catholic schools in the archdiocese.

"I really just had an appreciation for the support INPEA gave to leaders of Catholic schools," McNeany says about his time as the principal of All Saints and Guerin.

"I wholeheartedly believe, too, that in order for Catholic schools to thrive in Indiana, this association is necessary.

"Someone needs to be here to make sure that each school has the ability and the freedom to boldly proclaim their mission and the freedom to carry it out. For that to happen, this association needs to be there to liaison from Catholic schools to our state. It's work I'm passionate about. We're just trying to make sure that Indiana provides rich soil for Catholic schools to continue to grow and thrive."

One of the greatest success stories of INPEA is its involvement in working with Indiana's legislature to make sure that school choice and the state's voucher program are extended to every Hoosier family without exception—a reality that will start in the 2026-27 school year.

"It's a gift in so many ways," McNeany says. "For so many families, Catholic education may not be an option without it. So, it's a tremendous tool to make Catholic education affordable to Hoosier families, which is incredibly important.

"It also does another thing. I mentioned before about providing that rich soil, that environment where Catholic schools can remain viable. Choice allows Catholic families to find environments where the values that are taught in school are the values that are taught at home.

"When parents have the opportunity to make that choice—and finances can be less a part of that decision—then they're really free to find the environment that fits for them. I'm very grateful we have that here in Indiana."

The beauty of God's plans

McNeany has also seen the impact of a Catholic education from his family's perspective. He and his wife of 27 years, Jennifer, have made Catholic education a foundation for the lives of their five children, who range in age from 24 to 12.

"It's been nothing short of a gift and a blessing," McNeany says. "Parenting is difficult, and anyone who tells you it's not, I'm not sure they're fully invested in it. It takes more than just two people dedicated to raising a child. You want them in an environment that mirrors what's happening at home.



The members of the McNeany family—Jennifer, left, Noah, Colin, Evan, Adam, Mary and James—know the benefits of a Catholic education. (Submitted photo)

"I've always been one who's inspired by other faithful men and women I've encountered, and I want that for my kids, too. I want them to be around faithful men and women who they see as smart and motivating but also faithful. That's what I want for them in their teachers and school leaders. So, it's been a gift to have them in Catholic schools."

He views the gift of a Catholic education from another perspective, too.

"Catholic education is this beautiful intersection of learning about God and learning about the world he created at the same time," he says.

McNeany views mathematics as "not just numbers that make sense, but the language that God wrote the world with." He sees science through the lens of "the beauty of God's creation and the respect for that." He considers the history of the world and the United States as "woven into God's bigger history which is God's plan for salvation."

He also marvels at God's plan for him.

"I wholeheartedly believe I'm where God wants me to be. There's a lot of good work that needs to be done to support our Catholic schools and our Catholic school leaders and educators throughout our state.

"I see the importance of that every single day in the work our team does in helping to advance school choice in Indiana and the mission of our Catholic schools."

He also still relies on hearing God's voice to guide him.

"I pray that God shows me the meaning of my work and gives me the courage to undertake it. That's been my daily prayer." †

CLADY

continued from page 8B

"We had over 500 kids," Clady said. "It became evident that SS. Francis and Clare needed their own school."

The new school opened in 2006, and "we helped families navigate what would be the best place for them and

their children," he said.

Meanwhile, the Hispanic population in the area also grew.

As Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish added bilingual options for Mass and the sacraments, "a large number of Hispanic families started sending kids to the school," said Clady. "Thirty-five percent of our students are now Hispanic bilingual speakers."

Speakers of eight other languages are also enrolled at the school, he added.

"Our diversity now is one of the best legacies I helped foster, so now it's just who we are," said Clady. "Allowing our families and kids to be able to share what's alike and what's different and to be a part of each other's lives—that's, I feel, one of my greatest accomplishments, that we made that work and made it feel safe and comfortable for families to make a transition to a different school."

In retirement, Clady will still work with children. Well, just one, actually.

"Our grandson just turned 6 months, so I'll take turns with caregiving to help his parents," he said.

Retiring after being named Principal of the Year could be seen as leaving on top. But that is not Clady's character.

"It's a great honor, but also humbling, because I work with an amazing group of principals who answer the call, and I'm proud to be part of that group." †

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A tax-friendly way to help families receive a Catholic education

Indiana’s Tax Credit Scholarship program was created in 2009 as a way to give families who meet income guidelines an opportunity to send their child to a participating private school. Through the generosity of Hoosiers like you, private donations are given as scholarships so students may attend a private school that may not have been an option to them otherwise.

Why donate?

Donors receive a state tax credit of 50% of their donation amount!

In addition to supporting Indiana students and giving them access to a high-quality education they may not have received otherwise, Indiana donors receive a state tax credit equal to 50% of their donation amount. Donations also qualify as a charitable deduction on federal tax returns.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is there a limit to how much I can give and still receive the tax credit?
No, provided the donation does not exceed the available credits under the cap. (The state has allocated \$18.5 million for fiscal year 2026 and resets annually on July 1).

Who receives the scholarships, and can I designate a school or a student to receive my gift? Indiana K-12 students who meet income eligibility guidelines and attend a participating school. You may designate your gift to a specific school, but not to a specific student.

Are gifts from a Donor Advised Fund eligible for the tax credit?
Yes, with certain conditions. The credit is available only to the original donor of the funds. Federal provisions may include a reduction in deductible charitable contributions and potential exposure to excise taxes.

DONATION FORM

Complete all fields and mail with your donation

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EMAIL

TELEPHONE

DONATION AMOUNT

DATE

☐ I'd like to designate my gift to a specific school(s):

Make checks payable to
Institute for Quality Education
101 W. Ohio St. Suite 700
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Donations can also be made **ONLINE** at www.i4qed.org/donate

How do I donate to IQE?

Donations must be directed to “Institute for Quality Education” in order to receive the tax credit, not to your school or church. Donations may be made via cash, check, credit/debit card, grain, RMD, DAF, stock or mutual funds. Please refer to FAQ for more information. Giving options:

- 1) Use the form on this brochure & mail it with a check made out to Institute for Quality Education.
- 2) Go to www.i4qed.org/donate to make an online donation.

Contact IQE at (317) 951-8781 with any questions.

Tax Credit Examples

This chart illustrates the potential tax savings for a donation to the Institute for Quality Education Scholarship Granting Organization.

Contribution of \$5,000	Federal Tax Brackets			
	25%	28%	33%	35%
Indiana Tax Savings (50%)	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$2,500
Federal Tax Savings (1)	\$625	\$700	\$825	\$875
Total State & Federal Tax Savings	\$3,125	\$3,200	\$3,325	\$3,375
True Cost of Donation	\$1,875	\$1,800	\$1,675	\$1,625

(1) The federal tax savings is generally equal to the net federal deduction multiplied by the donor’s federal tax rate. The net federal deduction is equal to the donation amount less the state tax credit as state income taxes are deductible as itemized deductions for federal income tax purposes. Actual federal tax savings will vary based on your individual income tax status. Please consult your tax advisor.

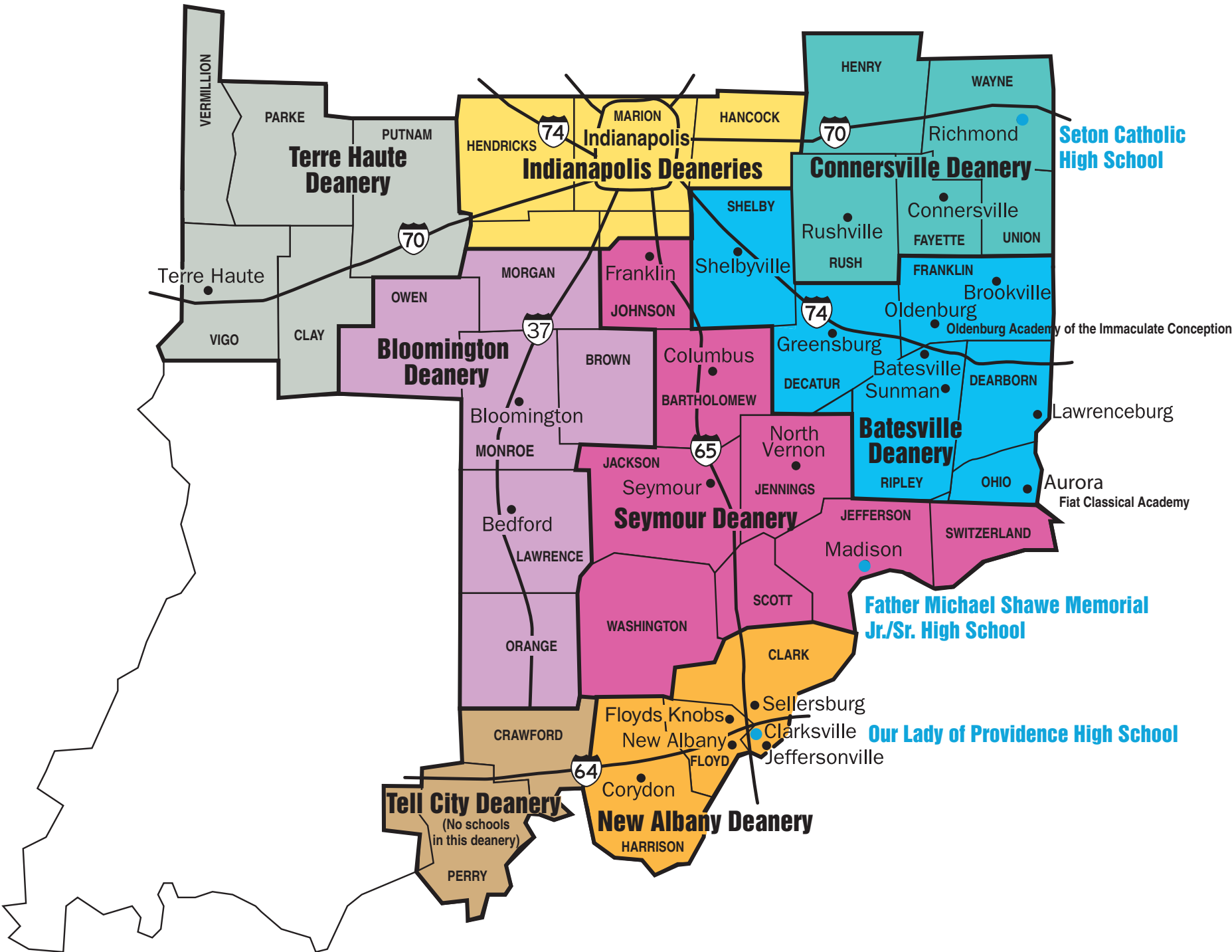


The Institute for Quality Education (IQE) is the largest of six state-approved scholarship granting organizations (SGO) in Indiana. Since the beginning of this program, SGOs have awarded more than \$45 million in scholarships to nearly 35,000 Hoosier students, in partnership with nearly 300 private schools statewide. IQE donors are responsible for almost half of these donations.

For more information about scholarship giving, please visit
IQE’s website - www.i4qed.org/sgo
Social media - @i4qed



Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis



DEANERY SCHOOLS

Batesville Deanery

- Batesville**
St. Louis School (PK–8)
17 St. Louis Place
Batesville, IN 47006
812-934-3310
- Brookville**
St. Michael School (PK–8)
275 High St.
Brookville, IN 47012
765-647-4961
- Greensburg**
St. Mary School (PK–8)
1331 E. Hunter Robbins Way
Greensburg, IN 47240
812-663-2804
- Lawrenceburg**
St. Lawrence School (K–8)
524 Walnut St.
Lawrenceburg, IN 47025
812-537-3690
- Ripley County**
St. Nicholas School (PK–8)
6459 E. St. Nicholas Drive
Sunman, IN 47041
812-623-2348
- Shelbyville**
St. Joseph School (PK–5)
127 E. Broadway
Shelbyville, IN 46176
317-398-4202

Bloomington Deanery

- Bedford**
St. Vincent de Paul School (PK–8)
923 18th St.
Bedford, IN 47421
812-279-2540
- Bloomington**
St. Benedict Classical School (K–12)
4609 W. State Road 46
Bloomington, IN 47404
812-606-4917
- St. Charles Borromeo School (PK–8)**
2224 E. Third St.
Bloomington, IN 47401
812-336-5853
- Connersville Deanery**
- Connersville**
St. Gabriel School (PK–6)
224 W. Ninth St.
Connersville, IN 47331
765-825-7951
- Richmond**
Seton Catholic High School (7-12)
233 S. 5th St.
Richmond, IN 47374
765-965-6956
- St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School (PK–6)**
801 W. Main St.
Richmond, IN 47374
765-962-4877
- Rushville**
St. Mary School (PK–6)
226 E. Fifth St.
Rushville, IN 46173
765-932-3639

New Albany Deanery

- Clarksville**
Our Lady of Providence High School (9-12)
707 Providence Way
Clarksville, IN 47129
812-945-2538
- St. Anthony of Padua School (PK–8)**
320 N. Sherwood Ave.
Clarksville, IN 47129
812-282-2144
- Corydon**
St. Joseph School (PK–8)
512 N. Mulberry St.
Corydon, IN 47112
812-738-4549
- Floyd County**
St. Mary-of-the-Knobs School (PK–8)
3033 Martin Road
Floyds Knobs, IN 47119
812-923-1630
- Jeffersonville**
Most Sacred Heart of Jesus School (PK–8)
1842 E. Eighth St.
Jeffersonville, IN 47130
812-283-3123
- New Albany**
Holy Family School (PK–8)
217 W. Daisy Lane
New Albany, IN 47150
812-944-6090
- Our Lady of Perpetual Help School (PK–8)**
1752 Scheller Lane
New Albany, IN 47150
812-944-7676

- Sellersburg**
St. John Paul II School (PK–8)
105 St. Paul St.
Sellersburg, IN 47172
812-246-3266

Seymour Deanery

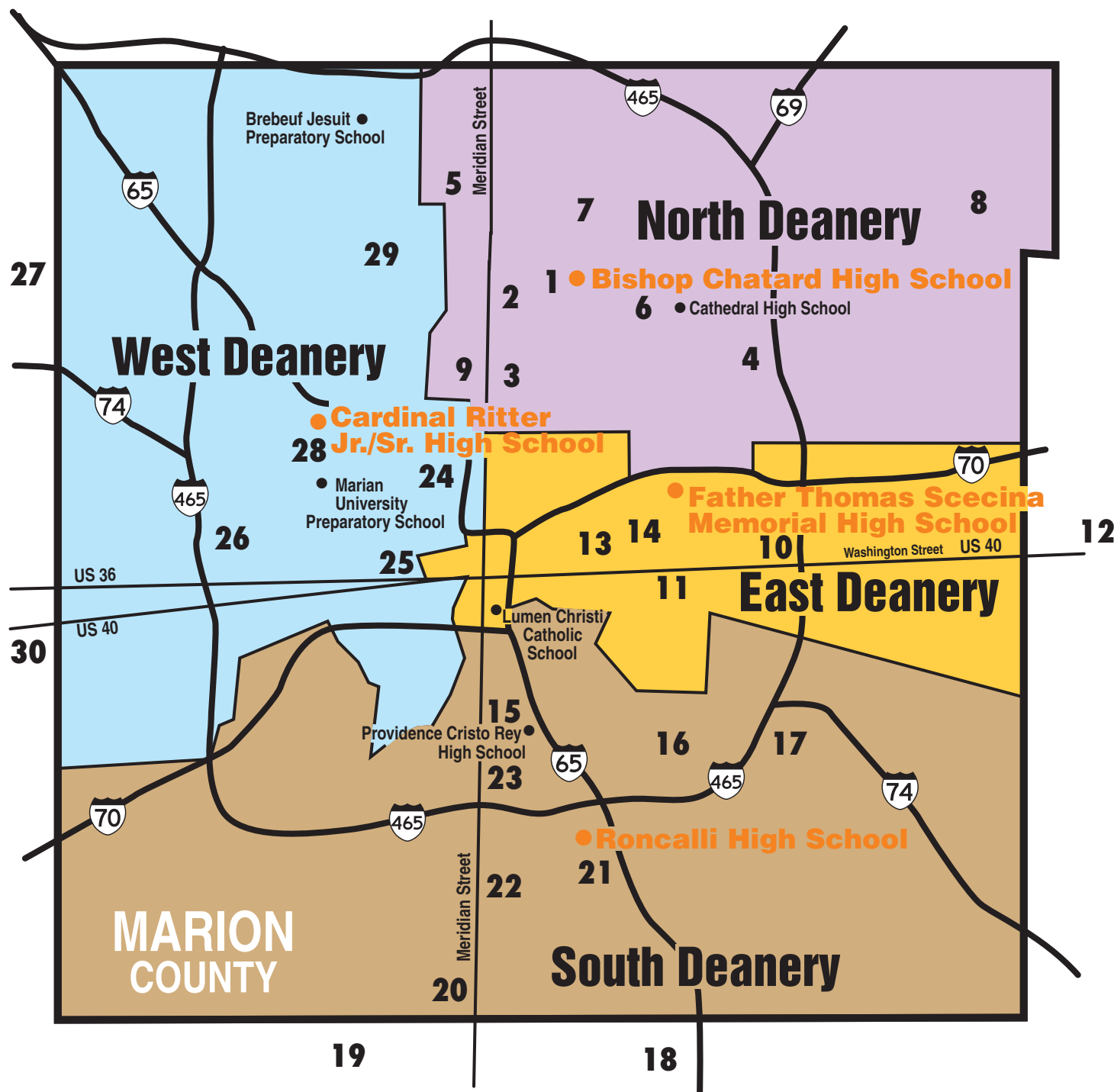
- Columbus**
St. Bartholomew School (K–8)
1306 27th St.
Columbus, IN 47201
812-372-6830
- Franklin**
St. Rose of Lima School (PK–7)
114 Lancelot Drive
Franklin, IN 46131
317-738-3451
- Madison**
Father Michael Shawe Memorial Jr./Sr. High School (7-12)
201 W. State St.
Madison, IN 47250
812-273-2150
- Pope John XXIII School (PK–6)**
221 W. State St.
Madison, IN 47250
812-273-3957
- North Vernon**
St. Mary School (PK–8)
209 Washington St.
North Vernon, IN 47265
812-346-3445
- Seymour**
St. Ambrose School (PK–8)
301 S. Chestnut St.
Seymour, IN 47274
812-522-3522

Terre Haute Deanery

- Terre Haute**
St. Patrick School (PK–8)
449 S. 19th St.
Terre Haute, IN 47803
812-232-2157
- Private High Schools**
- Aurora**
Fiat Classical Academy
211 Fourth Street
Aurora, IN 47001
812-954-2045
- Oldenburg**
Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception (9-12)
1 Twister Circle
P.O. Box 200
Oldenburg, IN 47036
812-934-4440



Catholic Schools in the Greater Indianapolis Area



GREATER INDIANAPOLIS DEANERY SCHOOLS

Indianapolis North Deanery

- **Bishop Chatard High School (9-12)**
5885 N. Crittenden Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46220
317-251-1451
- 1. **Christ the King School (K-8)**
5858 N. Crittenden Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46220
317-257-9366
- 2. **Immaculate Heart of Mary School (K-8)**
317 E. 57th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46220
317-255-5468
- 3. **St. Joan of Arc School (PK-8)**
500 E. 42nd St.
Indianapolis, IN 46205
317-283-1518
- 4. **St. Lawrence School (PK-8)**
6950 E. 46th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46226
317-543-4923
- 5. **St. Luke the Evangelist School (PK-8)**
7575 Holliday Dr. East
Indianapolis, IN 46260
317-255-3912
- 6. **St. Matthew the Apostle School (PK-8)**
4100 E. 56th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46220
317-251-3997

- 7. **St. Pius X School (K-8)**
7200 Sarto Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46240
317-466-3361
- 8. **St. Simon the Apostle School (PK-8)**
8155 Oaklandon Road
Indianapolis, IN 46236
317-826-6000
- 9. **St. Thomas Aquinas School (PK-8)**
4600 N. Illinois St.
Indianapolis, IN 46208
317-255-6244

Indianapolis East Deanery

- **Father Thomas Scecina Memorial High School (9-12)**
5000 Nowland Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46201
317-356-6377
- 10. **Holy Spirit School (PK-8)**
7241 E. 10th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46219
317-352-1243
- 11. **Our Lady of Lourdes School (PK-8)**
30 S. Downey St.
Indianapolis, IN 46219
317-357-3316
- 12. **St. Michael School (PK-8)**
515 Jefferson Blvd.
Greenfield, IN 46140
317-462-6380

- 13. **St. Philip Neri School (PK-8) ***
545 N. Eastern Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46201
317-636-0134
- 14. **St. Therese of the Infant Jesus (Little Flower) School (PK-8)**
1401 N. Bosart Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46201
317-353-2282

Indianapolis South Deanery

- **Roncalli High School (9-12)**
3300 Prague Road
Indianapolis, IN 46227
317-787-8277
- 15. **Central Catholic School (PK-8) ***
1155 E. Cameron St.
Indianapolis, IN 46203
317-783-7759
- 16. **Holy Name of Jesus School (PK-8)**
21 N. 17th Ave.
Beech Grove, IN 46107
317-784-9078
- 17. **Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ School (PK-8)**
3310 S. Meadow Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46239
317-357-1459

- 18. **Our Lady of the Greenwood School (PK-8)**
399 S. Meridian St.
Greenwood, IN 46143
317-881-1300
- 19. **SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi School (PK-8)**
5901 Olive Branch Road
Greenwood, IN 46143
317-215-2826
- 20. **St. Barnabas School (PK-8)**
8300 Rahke Road
Indianapolis, IN 46217
317-881-7422
- 21. **St. Jude School (PK-8)**
5375 McFarland Road
Indianapolis, IN 46227
317-784-6828
- 22. **St. Mark the Evangelist School (PK-8)**
541 E. Edgewood Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46227
317-786-4013
- 23. **St. Roch School (PK-8)**
3603 S. Meridian St.
Indianapolis, IN 46227
317-784-9144

Indianapolis West Deanery

- **Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School (7-12)**
3360 W. 30th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46222
317-924-4333

- 24. **Holy Angels School (PK-6) ***
2822 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. St.
Indianapolis, IN 46208
317-926-5211
- 25. **St. Anthony School (PK-8)**
349 N. Warman Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46222
317-636-3739
- 26. **St. Christopher School (PK-6)**
5335 W. 16th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46224
317-241-6314
- 27. **St. Malachy School (PK-8)**
330 N. Green St.
Brownsburg, IN 46112
317-852-2242
- 28. **St. Michael-St. Gabriel Archangels School (PK-8)**
3352 W. 30th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46222
317-926-0516
- 29. **St. Monica School (PK-8)**
6131 N. Michigan Road
Indianapolis, IN 46228
317-255-7153

- 30. **St. Susanna School (PK-8)**
1212 E. Main St.
Plainfield, IN 46168
317-839-3713

Private Schools

- **Lumen Christi Catholic School (PK-12)**
580 E. Stevens St.
Indianapolis, IN 46203
317-632-3174
- **Marian University Preparatory School (K-12)**
2916 W. 30th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46222
855-777-0679
- **Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School (9-12)**
2801 W. 86th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46268
317-524-7128
- **Cathedral High School (9-12)**
5225 E. 56th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46226
317-542-1481
- **Providence Cristo Rey High School (9-12)**
2717 S. East St.
Indianapolis, IN 46225
317-860-1000

* Mother Theodore Catholic Academies

A year of celebrating the fun and friendships of the Catholic Youth Organization



School’s surge in student literacy reflects archdiocese’s overall success

(This story is an edited version of the one that first appeared in The Criterion on Sept. 19, 2025)

By John Shaughnessy

When Tami Clouse received the invitation from the Indiana Board of Education to share the remarkable story of what happened at Central Catholic School in Indianapolis, she became emotional, viewing the honor as a celebration of “a beautiful community.”

In just one year, the school made a dramatic improvement in student literacy, with a 51.7 percentage-point increase in its Indiana Reading Evaluation and Determination (IREAD) testing scores. The school’s pass rate among its third-grade students improved from 48.3% in the 2023-24 school year to 100% in 2024-25.

“The celebrations that we have had at my school with the children are phenomenal,” said Clouse, the school’s principal, during her presentation to the state’s board of education on Aug. 13, 2025. “So, we are very excited about that. Makes me a little emotional.”

That success at Central Catholic, one of the archdiocese’s three Mother Theodore Catholic Academies, also reflects the overall success of the 55 Catholic elementary schools in the

archdiocese regarding IREAD.

Combined, archdiocesan elementary schools achieved a 93% total pass rate compared to the state average of 87.3%, according to Sarah Watson, assistant superintendent of elementary education in the archdiocese.

Watson also noted that 23 of the 55 schools had a pass rate of 100% while six more schools surpassed the 90% rate. At the same time, she added, 82% of second-grade students in the archdiocese passed the literacy test and won’t have to take it again.

The success of the Catholic grade schools drew high praise from Brian Disney, superintendent of Catholic schools in the archdiocese.

“We are very happy for the success our Catholic school students had on IREAD,” Disney said. “Our students, schools and families deserve credit for their efforts to ensure all students can read by the end of third grade. Some students need additional support and time, which our schools provided. The parent-school partnership was essential for our success.”

Watson also noted that the Catholic schools’ success in the past year reflected “a clear plan at the archdiocesan, state and local levels, and the daily fidelity of teachers to practices that work.”

“In our Catholic schools, that plan

meets our mission,” she said. “We want children to read with confidence because we are preparing them for life and for heaven. Literacy opens minds to truth and hearts to beauty, and our schools take that charge seriously.”

“What is most encouraging is that gains reached students across the board. Black and Latino students grew. Students with disabilities grew. English learners grew. Students from low-income households grew. That breadth tells us the strategy is working for all of God’s children, not only for some.”

Statewide statistics showed that Black students, Hispanic students and students in special education all achieved a 7.5% increase in student literacy in the past school year, while English learners improved at a 7.2% rate.

That achievement reflects both the success and diversity at Central Catholic School. In her presentation to the state board of education, Clouse noted that the school serves 239 students from across Indianapolis, with 97% of the children identifying as “Hispanic, multi-cultural, multi-racial or Black.”

“They represent 11 countries across the world,” she said. “At home, they speak English, Spanish and Swahili.”

Clouse credits the success at Central Catholic to several factors, factors that

Watson also credits for the overall success of Catholic schools in the archdiocese.

Schools tapped into approaches that include tutoring, after-school labs and family involvement, as well as skilled coaches, earlier and more frequent assessment, and curriculum that focused on the science of reading.

The cooperation of parents is always a key, they both note.

Watson praised the overall collaboration that led to the success achieved at Central Catholic and the overall success of the 55 Catholic elementary schools in the archdiocese.

“Central Catholic stands out as a witness to what is possible when mission meets method,” she said. “Tami and her team set a culture where every minute of instruction counts, families are true partners and children are known by name and loved. The academic results are impressive. The deeper story is formation. Students are growing in confidence, perseverance and joy.”

That same goal is being achieved in Catholic schools across central and southern Indiana, she said.

“In the archdiocese, we have seen what happens when parishes, community partners and schools pull together. Families leaned in, teachers stayed the course, and students felt the support around them.” †

Survey: Eucharistic Revival rekindled faith, outreach, but challenges remain

(OSV News)—The National Eucharistic Revival—a three-year initiative to renew belief in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, following a marked decline in belief among U.S. Catholics—has rekindled both faith and outreach, according to a new study.

At the same time, several challenges remain in extending those results to those not already in the pews.

The findings were released on Jan. 15 in “Share Your Perspective” (“*Comparte tu perspectiva*”), a national survey of the impact of the National Eucharistic Revival conducted by the Catholic market research firm Vinea Research, which had been engaged by revival organizers and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

“The bishops decided to take time to hear from Catholics in the United States about their experiences of the fruits of the Eucharistic Revival, to recognize ongoing needs within the Church, and to identify areas for potential growth in the future,” wrote Archbishop Charles C. Thompson of Indianapolis, chair of the USCCB’s Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, in a Jan. 15 letter announcing the data’s release.

He explained the survey had been developed in two phases, with one-on-one interviews shaping the questions ultimately provided to nearly 2,500 respondents.

The second phase’s online data collection took place during the summer and fall of 2025—one year after the 10th National Eucharistic Congress, held in July 2024 in Indianapolis and preceded by the first National Eucharistic Pilgrimage, the four routes of which converged at the congress.

Of the online sample, 2,058 were lay Catholics who had not been involved in

the revival’s organization, with 1,758 coming from lists provided by the USCCB. The other 300—lay Catholics who attended Mass at least monthly—were drawn from Vinea’s general population panel. The firm noted in its report that “lay Catholic respondents were not made aware of the purpose of the survey.”

Lay Catholics were classified in the survey as national participants (50%), meaning they participated in either the National Eucharistic Congress or National Eucharistic Pilgrimage; as local participants (24%), meaning they joined in a local Eucharistic Revival activity but not in a national event; or were non-participants (26%) in revival activities.

The remaining sample, which the report described as “ecclesial,” represented 414 respondents who were priests, deacons or revival point persons, drawn from USCCB (294) and Vinea (120) lists. Of those, 60% were clergy, 41% of whom were pastors; 20% were a combination of diocesan (15%) or parish (5%) staff; and 20% were non-staff and non-ordained “point person” parishioners.

The USCCB confirmed to OSV News that the data was not further broken down according to demographic parameters such as age, gender and ethnicity. It was also not clear if the sample had been weighted, or statistically adjusted, to be representative of the broader U.S. Catholic population.

On balance, the survey data showed both the “lay” and “ecclesial” groups benefited from the National Eucharistic Revival, reporting enhanced faith and spirituality as well as community outreach.

However, the report also discovered several challenges to be addressed, including reaching beyond already engaged Catholics, while providing more parish-level support for such initiatives.

In his letter, Archbishop Thompson noted that “much of the data in the survey pertains to observations from the general laity segment or about them by the ecclesial segment,” since “the bishops hoped to inspire a grassroots initiative among Catholics” with the revival.

Specifically, the survey measured the frequency of participation in various faith activities, the personal importance of such activities, the level of conviction in Catholic beliefs as well as comfort in evangelizing, and the extent of respondents’ understanding of beliefs.

Participants in the lay segment compared their present experiences with those in post-COVID 2021, ranking them along five-point scales from “never” to “very often.”

According to Vinea, “the greatest growth in importance” for the lay segment “was observed in volunteering and spending time in eucharistic adoration,” with faith-related activities—especially volunteering—all showing “significant increases since 2021.”

Notably, belief in the real presence among all three segments edged to 90% and above, with the greatest increase detected among national participants (92%, up from 73% in 2021). Local participants saw an 11-point jump (93%, up from 82%), while belief among the general Catholic segment rose by 12 points (90%, up from 78%).

National participants (60%) reported a 17-point increase in eucharistic adoration since 2021 (up from 43%), with local participants (64%, up from 49%) and Vinea’s general Catholic population segment (43%, up from 37%) also spending more time before the Blessed Sacrament over the four-year time frame.

Community volunteer work rose among the three measured Catholic segments, with national participants (52%), local participants (64%), and the general Catholic population (40%) up 16, 17 and 13 points respectively since 2021.

Other increases among the survey’s national, local and general segments over this time frame included:

—Scripture or spiritual reading, with national at 83% (up from 66%), local at



Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minn., chairman of the board of the National Eucharistic Congress Inc., blesses pilgrims on July 17, 2024, during adoration at the opening revival night of the 10th National Eucharistic Congress at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (OSV News photo/Bob Roller)

88% (up from 78%) and general at 80% (up from 71%).

—Attending Mass beyond the Sunday obligation, with national and local both at 74% (up from 55% and 64% respectively) and the general segment at 50% (up from 46%).

—Going to confession, with national at 61% (up from 43%), local at 58% (up from 41%) and the general group at 43% (up from 30%).

Among the ecclesial segment, the survey found that “leadership enthusiasm

See EUCHARIST, page 11A

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Marriage

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Be a part of our Spring Marriage Edition

Feb. 13 issue of *The Criterion*

Couples who are planning to be married between Feb. 13 and July 16 in a marriage that is recognized as a valid sacramental or valid natural marriage, or couples who were wed between July 11, 2025, and Jan. 25, 2026, in such a recognized marriage and did not have their engagement announcement in *The Criterion* are invited to submit the information for the upcoming Feb. 13 Spring Marriage Edition. Announcements can be submitted by mail using the form at www.archindy.org/engagements.

E-mailed photos
Photos should be saved in jpg format and be at least 500 kb. Color photos are preferred. We recommend sending a photo where the couple’s faces are close to each other. Please send the photo as an attachment to the e-mail: alewis@archindy.org. Subject line: Spring Marriage (Last name). Photos may also be texted to 317-236-1585 with the couple’s names.

If it is not possible to e-mail a photo, a photo can be mailed with the names of the couple to *The Criterion*, 14000 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis 46202. Please no photocopies or laser prints. To have the photo returned, please include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Deadline
All announcements and photos must be received by 5 p.m. on Jan. 27.

Go Forth

ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS
The Church in Central and Southern Indiana

From Fear to Freedom: How Dorcas Found Hope and a New Beginning.

When Dorcas realized she needed to leave an abusive situation, she turned to St. Elizabeth Catholic Charities. Moving into a shelter was frightening, but she quickly discovered she wasn’t alone.

With the help of case managers, she found a job, stabilized her children’s environment, and eventually became a Habitat for Humanity homeowner. Today, she is a shining example of what is possible when mercy meets opportunity.

A commitment from you touches the lives of more than 75,000 of the most vulnerable among us each year. Make a gift today by returning your pledge card or making your gift online.

Visit www.archindy.org/UCA or Scan this QR code to make a difference today!

Evangelization Outreach/Ken Ogorek

What is ‘synodality?’ You’re invited in March to come and see!

While the word “synodality” can be off-putting to some, at its heart this topic of the current and most recent Synod of Bishops on synodality connects closely with the mission and ministry of evangelization.

As our local Church continues implementing this synod’s vision of communion, participation and mission, you have an opportunity to learn a new way of approaching conversations at an upcoming event (see details below).

A northern workshop—with a southern one to come!

Back in November, more than 40 representatives of eight parishes gathered at an archdiocese-sponsored event—hosted at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Indianapolis—for an experience called “Conversations in the Spirit.” This method for facilitating discussions, both small and large, is easily learned and replicated; it encourages deep, authentic listening, ensuring that each participant is heard.

“Conversations in the Spirit” has been the method used for recent gatherings of the Synod of Bishops in Rome. This tool for constructive dialogue is encouraged in the synod’s final document being implemented throughout the world—including our archdiocese—during the next couple of years.

You’re invited to the sunny south in March!

This coming March—a Saturday—you have an opportunity to experience “Conversations in the Spirit” at an archdiocesan workshop hosted at St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg in the New Albany Deanery. The two-hour event starts at 9:30 a.m. and is open to all interested adults—especially lay and ordained parish leaders.

While there is no cost to attend this workshop, called “Growing Together as a Listening Church,” registration is required and can be accomplished using the QR code on this page. Questions about the event can be addressed by calling 317-236-1550.

A listening Church

Participants in the November workshop in Indianapolis expressed appreciation for the way “Conversations in the Spirit” provides an opportunity for each person to express herself or himself, sharing thoughts and feelings without immediate interruption or being judged as a person.

In a culture where our ability to listen and learn from each other can be challenging, “Conversations in the Spirit” helps us hear each other’s voices—as well as that of the Holy Spirit and the Church he helps guide.

Our Church is more of a listening Church than many people realize. That being said, there’s always room for improvement in how we collaborate as members of

Christ’s body, striving among other goals to foster parish health and vibrancy.

Roll out the synod!

As mentioned above, our Church is in the implementation phase of this Synod on Synodality. You’ll be hearing and experiencing more of what it means to be a synodal community of faith and discipleship in the months ahead, including how better to answer the call of Jesus to be disciples who make disciples—the very essence of evangelization.

Please jumpstart your experience of enhanced communion, participation and mission as a Catholic by attending the workshop on March 7 in Sellersburg. See you there!

(Ken Ogorek is executive director within the archdiocesan Secretariat for Evangelizing Catechesis. He can be reached at kogorek@archindy.org.) †



‘Faith at Home’/Laura Kelly Fanucci

Let’s plan to move outside of our comfort zone this year

Picture your favorite place to sit. A cozy recliner near the TV, a reading spot on your couch or your usual chair at the kitchen table. Remember how your body sinks into that space without a second thought. After a long day, there’s nothing better than settling in where we feel most at home.

Now picture the place where you usually sit at Mass. You might have a regular pew, a certain side of the church you love or the same exact seat every Sunday. Why do you pick this spot?

Maybe that’s where your family or friends have always sat. Maybe you like the view or the acoustics: You can see and hear well here. Or maybe you’re simply a creature of habit!

There’s nothing wrong with having a favorite place. In a chaotic, ever-changing world, our nervous systems sigh with relief at routines. We need the expected. Even Jesus liked to recline at table with his friends.

But in this in-between stretch of Ordinary Time, between the high feast of Christmas and the solemn preparation of Lent, we find ourselves in a new place as we settle into the New Year. What will 2026 hold, the good and the bad? Who might we become by year’s end?

At home, at church, in our communities and in the wider world, we can find ourselves seeking what is comfortable. We like this kind of food, that style of worship, this grocery store or that politician. We feel at home in our particular camp.

Yet Christ came both to comfort (with God’s mercy) and challenge (with God’s justice). His call to discipleship is always prophetic, asking each of us to leave behind the nets of our comfort zones and venture into the deep.

As a parent of children ranging from kindergarten to high school, I find myself thinking often about the home as a place of comfort—but also challenge. I want our family home to be a space of safety, solace and love for our kids, but I also know it

must be a source of difficult lessons: how to forgive, how to change and how to do the right thing even when it’s hard.

In 1902, humor columnist Finley Dunne coined a famous phrase about the duty of journalism, writing that the role of the newspaper is to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” Catholics sometimes say the same about the mission of the Church, too. We need only look to the Gospels to see how Jesus comforted the suffering and spoke out strongly against the wealthy and powerful who did not care for the poor and vulnerable.

Where we stand (or sit) determines our view—of our home, Church and society. If we stand with the least among us as Christ did, we will see things very differently than if we side with the powerful, the popular or the strong.

What if we took one step out of our comfort zone in 2026?

It might be a small change, like sitting in a different pew, to meet new parishioners in our community and see our physical church home from a new perspective. It might be a big change, like deciding to volunteer as a family with a local food shelf, to get to know our neighbors in need and serve them with our time and energy. Or we might devote this short season of Ordinary Time to deeper prayer, asking God to lead us further in faith even when it gets uncomfortable.

When we know we have safe spaces where we can return—like our family home, our favorite chair or our regular parish pew—we can strike out in good faith and courage to do whatever challenging work that God calls us to do.

I pray this for my children when they leave the house each day, that God might go with them and lead them home safely. I pray the same for each of us: that we will always remember there is nowhere we can go, even the farthest leap from our comfort zone, where God has not already gone before us.

(Laura Kelly Fanucci is an author, speaker and founder of Mothering Spirit, an online gathering place on parenting and spirituality.) †

Papal Words/Michael R. Heinlein

Taking time to ‘pause’ and reflect on Pope Leo’s extraordinary consistory

In the discussions leading up to the conclave last May, members of the College of Cardinals shared that they wished for more collegiality between themselves and the pope.

So, from the earliest days of his pontificate, Pope Leo XIV indicated that he wanted gatherings of the cardinals to not be as “extraordinary” (or, out of the norm) as its name suggests, but rather ordinary events in the life of the Church.

As a result, the first consistory in many years took place in early January. But after so few of such gatherings in the last decade-plus, it seems that many observers had hoped for the gathering to bring extraordinary results (usually regarding pet concerns).

Alas, they were disappointed.

But should they be? By all appearances, January’s consistory was a first step to returning to a more collegial sense of governance that has largely marked the exercise of papal ministry since the Second Vatican Council. A fraternal body such as the College of Cardinals inherently needs such occasions to be together—to pray, think and discern—for the pope to be effective in animating ecclesial life and to model for the Church what it means to be a leaven in the world.

In some ways, the extraordinary character of this particular extraordinary consistory was the fact that the

cardinals met as a body, aside from seeing new members created or electing a new pope, for the first time in a long time.

It illustrates the kind of leadership we might expect now with Pope Leo at the helm of Peter’s barque—a leadership intent upon uniting the ship’s crew amid the kinds of threats found in the storms that make up so much of ecclesial life today.

As I read Pope Leo’s homily from Jan. 8, I thought of how the return of this ordinary gathering was indeed extraordinary—particularly for the kind of leadership that it models to humanity. Pope Leo’s description of the event offers a powerful witness for all of us blessed with the task of leadership, and which resonated as especially true as a leader in a family.

I couldn’t help but think that what Pope Leo is effecting within the college of his closest collaborators is also a model for marriage and family life.

In his homily, Pope Leo observed that the word “consistory” comes from the Latin verb “*consistere*,” which means “to stand still.” He had me hooked already. Of course, it is important in marriage to find such opportunities, especially if blessed with children and all the busyness they often bring. Truly, such an opportunity to “pause” is, in Pope Leo’s words, “a highly significant and prophetic gesture, particularly in the context of the frenetic society in which we live.”

He continued, “[Pausing] reminds us of the importance, in every aspect of life, of stopping to pray, listen and reflect.” This is important because this permits us to “refocus our attention ever more clearly on our goal, directing every effort and resource toward it, lest we risk running blindly or ‘beating the air’ in vain, as the Apostle Paul warns” in 1 Corinthians 9:26.

And Pope Leo remarked that the consistory’s “pausing”—and by the time I got to these lines I was fully committed to thinking the same about my wife and me—“is first and foremost a profound act of love for God, for the Church and for the men and women of the whole world.”

What might a consistory with my spouse look like, I began to wonder.

Pope Leo’s words—recalled from the fifth century and originating from the first pope to bear his name, St. Leo the Great—seem like a great place to start for any “consistory” for the cardinals or at home: “It is a great and very precious thing in the sight of the Lord when the whole people of Christ apply themselves together to the same duties, and all ranks and orders ... cooperate with one and the same Spirit.”

(Michael R. Heinlein is author of Glorifying Christ: The Life of Cardinal Francis E. George, O.M.I. and a promised member of the Association of Pauline Cooperators.) †

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time/Msgr. Owen F. Campion

The Sunday Readings

Sunday, January 25, 2026

- Isaiah 8:23-9:3
- 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17
- Matthew 4:12-23

The Book of Isaiah supplies the first reading at Mass this weekend. It offers us a powerful lesson.



When this part of Isaiah was written, God’s people were skating on thin ice. They still had their independence, at least after a fashion. Hebrew kings still reigned in the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. The

religious, social and political structures all still gave lip service to the ancient religion and to the holy covenant between God and the chosen people.

Everything, however, was at risk because devotion to the covenant and obedience to God’s law were at a low ebb. Isaiah boldly warned that disaster was just around the corner. But, he said, the people could be rescued if they returned to religious faithfulness and obeyed God, as the prophets had taught. They had this potential, this ability, within themselves.

They did not sin because they were helpless in the face of temptation. Rather, they were weak because they ignored God. If they were determined, God’s grace could make them strong and virtuous.

For its second reading, the Church has selected a section from St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians.

Paul obviously loved the Christians of Corinth. He yearned to see them saintly and eternally with the Lord. But, just as obviously, they troubled him because they seemed so attracted to the many vices of their great, worldly and wealthy city. They seemed to be vulnerable to the feelings of competitiveness and insecurity that vex all humans if not checked.

Never willing to accept passivity or indifference, he loudly called the Christians in Corinth to be true to Christ.

He taught a basic message. Earthly reward will pass, and more quickly than many might realize. Earthly wisdom is unreliable. True wisdom is to understand the meaning of the cross. This

understanding requires grace, available only to those who earnestly follow the Lord.

St. Matthew’s Gospel supplies the last reading. It is situated in Capernaum, the fishing village located at the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is there, having left Nazareth. His public ministry has begun.

As a center of commerce, albeit a modest one, Capernaum saw people come and go. Jesus used this coincidence as an opportunity to encounter many people. He called them to fidelity to God. He repeated for them the admonitions of the ancient Hebrew prophets.

Jesus met in this place Andrew and his brother Simon, whom Jesus renamed Peter. These brothers became the first of the Apostles in the sequence of calling. In time, Christianity was to grow from and build upon the Apostles.

It is interesting that the Gospels, such as the case in this reading, refer to these Apostles so specifically by giving their names. The Gospel leaves no doubt whatsoever about their identity since it was vital in the early Church that the teachings of the genuine Apostles be known and be kept intact.

Reflection

These readings remind us both of how blind we humans can be and of how powerful we can be.

In the first reading, Isaiah criticized the people for their religious listlessness, but he reminded them that, if they wished, they could reverse their wayward paths.

God would supply the insight and the strength, if requested.

The same message was in the second reading. St. Paul boldly denounced the Corinthians’ sins and quarrels, calling them to genuine conversion, insisting that they could withstand temptation.

While we are sinners, we can break away from sin by willfully turning to God and by allowing divine grace to empower us. The impulse to sin, while real, is no match for God and the power of his grace working in our lives.

The teachings of the Apostles guide us to our own empowerment given us by the Lord if we honestly seek it. †

Daily Readings

Monday, January 26

St. Timothy, bishop
St. Titus, bishop
2 Timothy 1:1-8
or Titus 1:1-5
Psalm 96:1-3, 7-8a, 10
Mark 3:22-30

Tuesday, January 27

St. Angela Merici, virgin
2 Samuel 6:12b-15, 17-19
Psalm 24:7-10
Mark 3:31-35

Wednesday, January 28

St. Thomas Aquinas, priest and doctor of the Church
2 Samuel 7:4-17
Psalm 89:4-5, 27-30
Mark 4:1-20

Thursday, January 29

2 Samuel 7:18-19, 24-29
Psalm 132:1-5, 11-14
Mark 4:21-25

Friday, January 30

2 Samuel 11:1-4a, 5-10a, 13-17
Psalm 51:3-7, 10-11
Mark 4:26-34

Saturday, January 31

St. John Bosco, priest
2 Samuel 12:1-7a
Psalm 51:12-17
Mark 4:35-41

Sunday, February 1

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13
Psalm 146:6-10
1 Corinthians 1:26-31
Matthew 5:1-12a

Question Corner/Jenna Marie Cooper

Sacramental confession is required to receive a plenary indulgence

Q Is confession required for obtaining a plenary indulgence if there is no mortal sin? A diocesan hermit, who is



homebound, says his ministry is to gain plenary indulgences for the poor souls by various devotional practices which confer a plenary indulgence. He formerly had asked for confession twice a month to take

care of that requirement. Now he has decided that confession is required only if there is a mortal sin to confess. Does canon law provide any guidance on this issue?

A Yes, it would seem that a sacramental confession is indeed required for obtaining a plenary indulgence, regardless of whether the one seeking the indulgence has committed any mortal sins since his or her last confession.

I suspect the hermit might be confusing the requirements for obtaining an indulgence with canon 989 of the *Code of Canon Law*, which states that: “All the faithful who have reached the age of discretion are bound faithfully to

confess their grave sins at least once a year.” Since canon 989 refers only to grave rather than merely venial sins, we can deduce that Catholics who have not committed any mortal sins in the past year are thereby “excused” from this general canonical requirement. (Though of course regular confession is always a good idea, even if it’s not strictly required.)

However, most indulgences indicate that, in addition to completing the specific indulgenced prayer or pious act, the indulgence is gained “provided the usual conditions are met.” One place where these “usual conditions” are listed is the document from the Apostolic Penitentiary. It is the Vatican office responsible for overseeing indulgences.

In a document the

office issued in 2000 titled “The Gift of the Indulgence,” we read that: “A plenary indulgence can be gained only once a day. In order to obtain it, the faithful must, in addition to being in the state of grace: have the interior disposition of complete detachment from sin, even venial sin; have sacramentally confessed their sins; receive the Holy Eucharist; [and] pray for the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff” (#4).

Relevant to your question, it’s useful to observe that the Church presumes that one seeking an indulgence will already be in a state of grace, meaning free from unconfessed mortal sin. Thus, since freedom from mortal sin is envisioned as a prerequisite for even attempting to earn an indulgence, logically this absence of mortal sin would not serve as a sort of loophole for getting out of the requirement to make a sacramental confession.

Likewise, another “usual condition” for obtaining an indulgence is “complete detachment from sin, even venial sin.” This condition is perhaps the most difficult one to meet, and it might be just as difficult to explain. But essentially, detachment from sin means that a person is sincerely sorry for his or her sins and has genuine and heartfelt desire to avoid sin in the future. True detachment from sin is incompatible with being in a state of mortal sin, so here again freedom from mortal sin is portrayed as a “given” for seeking an indulgence and not as a special exception.

Fortunately, it sounds like the hermit you know enjoys a decent level of pastoral support, despite being homebound. Still, it’s helpful to keep in mind what “The Gift of the Indulgence” says about the timing of the requisite sacramental confession with respect to the plenary indulgence being sought: “It is appropriate, but not necessary, that the sacramental confession and especially holy Communion and the prayer for the pope’s intentions take place on the same day that the indulgenced work is performed; but it is sufficient that these sacred rites and prayers be carried out within several days [about 20] before or after the indulgenced act” (#5).

So, even if a Catholic were homebound and not able to go out to go to confession, a pastoral visit from a priest-confessor within 20 days in either direction would be sufficient for the purposes of obtaining the indulgence.

(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.) †

My Journey to God

Post Christmas

By Linda Abner

I took a walk on Christmas Day
And let my spirit lead the way
The streets were still, as if aware
Of secrets that they could not share

The air, unseasonably, was warm
And misty rain blurred shape and form
The gravid silence seemed to say
Take note, this is no ordinary day

No ordinary day
No ordinary birth
No ordinary Child
Now born to Earth

Whose birth two thousand years ago
We honor still, with heart and soul
And celebrate with much ado
The promise of all things made new

This neighborhood is very old
With stories known, and those untold
With houses built a century past
And gates and gardens made to last

I mused along the cobbled streets
And wondered at how life repeats
Of joy and sorrow; tragedy
And never-answered mystery



Yet from Infinity’s “I am”
From every mote, to every man,
Through all the throes of history
The Alpha and Omega, He

I took a walk on Christmas Day
And as I went my wandering way
I felt o’er all, and every place
The timelessness of Christmas grace

(Linda Abner is a member of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Indianapolis. Photo: A Christmas star shines over St. Anthony Church in Karachi, Pakistan.) (OSV News photo/Akhtar Soomro, Reuters)

Pope Leo sets Jubilee to mark 800th year since St. Francis’ death

(OSV News)—Pope Leo XIV has proclaimed a special Jubilee Year coinciding with the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis of Assisi.

The Apostolic Penitentiary, a Vatican tribunal that deals with matters of conscience, issued a decree published by the Franciscan Friars on Jan. 10, declaring a yearlong celebration in honor of the Poverello, or the Little Poor One.

According to the decree, Pope Leo has established that from Jan. 10, following the closing of the Church’s Jubilee Year, until Jan. 10, 2027, a special Year of St. Francis may be proclaimed, in which every Christian, “following the example of the Saint of Assisi, may himself become a model of holiness of life and a constant witness of peace.”

Noting previous jubilee celebrations related to the works of St. Francis—such as the eighth-centenary commemorations of the first Nativity scene, as well as his composition of the “Canticle of the Creatures” and his receiving of the stigmata—the decree stated that “2026 will mark the culmination and fulfillment of all previous celebrations.”

In its decree, the Apostolic Penitentiary also announced that plenary indulgences will be granted to Catholics “under the usual conditions [sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father], which can also be applied in the form of suffrage for the souls in purgatory.”

The indulgence will be granted to those who participate in a pilgrimage “to any Franciscan conventual church, or place of worship in any part of the world named after St. Francis or connected to him for any reason,” it stated.

The sick, the elderly and caretakers unable to leave their homes can also obtain a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions “if they join spiritually in the Jubilee celebrations of the Year of St. Francis,

offering their prayers to the Merciful God, the pains or sufferings of one’s life.”

In a statement announcing the decree’s promulgation, the Franciscan Friars invited Catholics to take part in the Jubilee celebrations and hope that St. Francis’ example would inspire participants “to live with authentic Christian charity toward our neighbor and with sincere longings for concord and peace among peoples.”

May this year of St. Francis “be for each one of us a providential occasion for sanctification and evangelical witness in the contemporary world, for the glory of God and the good of the whole Church,” the statement read.

In a Jan. 10 letter to the ministers general of the Conference of the Franciscan Family, Pope Leo said St. Francis’ message of peace was needed now more than ever.

“In this age, marked by so many seemingly interminable wars, by internal and social divisions that create mistrust and fear, he continues to speak. Not because he offers technical solutions, but because his life points to the authentic source of peace,” the pope wrote.

That peace, the pope added, “is not limited to the relations between human beings,” but extends to “the entire family of Creation.”

“This insight resonates with particular urgency in our time, when our common home is threatened and cries out under exploitation,” he wrote. “Peace with God, peace among human beings, and with creation are inseparable dimensions of a single call to universal reconciliation.”

Pope Leo concluded his letter with a prayer to St. Francis, asking the saint’s intercession “to give us the courage to build bridges where the world raises up boundaries.”

“In this time afflicted by conflict



Pope Leo XIV and Franciscan friars pray before the tomb of St. Francis in the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, Italy, on Nov. 20, 2025. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

and division, intercede for us so that we may become peacemakers: unarmed and disarming witnesses of the peace that comes from Christ,” the pope wrote.

The pope’s letter was read during a Jan. 10 celebration marking the start of the Franciscan Jubilee Year at the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels in Assisi, which houses the Chapel of the Transit, marking the site where St. Francis died.

Archbishop Domenico Sorrentino of Assisi, who was present at the ceremony, said the start of the centenary celebration was “an explosion of true joy” that comes from the heart and “from the commitment of each one of us to rediscover Francis in all his dimensions.

“The wish I make to everyone and to the entire Church is to rediscover this saint of ours, to rediscover Jesus, the only source of joy and peace,” the bishop said.

Among the notable events taking place in Assisi during the Franciscan Jubilee Year will be the first public display of St. Francis’ body.

In October, the Basilica of St. Francis announced that Pope Leo had granted permission to display the saint’s body from Feb. 22 to March 26.

According to the basilica’s website for the historic event, as of December, some 250,000 pilgrims have so far registered for the veneration of St. Francis’ remains.

A free but mandatory online reservation system has been set up on the centenary website, available in both Italian and English.

(More information about locations in the archdiocese where the indulgence applies will appear in a future edition of The Criterion.) †

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PHYSICIAN NETWORK

HOUSING

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“The goal of Senate Bill 285 is not to criminalize homelessness,” Carrasco said during a Jan. 14 hearing on the bill in the Senate Judiciary Committee. “This bill is structured so that initial interactions are focused on intervention rather than punishment.”

Carrasco described the misdemeanor provision of the bill as means to “create a moment where outreach, diversion and connection to services can occur, and to move individuals to a healthier and more stable life through a clear, multi-step process that prioritizes services before enforcement.

“For individuals struggling with serious mental health or substance abuse issues who are unable or unwilling to seek help on their own, this bill creates a pathway to connect them with health care, housing resources, treatment and support systems that can help begin to stabilize their lives,” Carrasco said. “To be clear, it is not compassionate to allow our neighbors to die on the streets. This is a solvable problem, and I believe this bill is part of that solution.”

But the majority of those testifying at the hearing spoke in opposition to the bill, arguing that the legislation would indeed criminalize homelessness and place more barriers to self-sufficiency in the way of the most vulnerable people in Indiana. The ICC stopped short of taking an official position, praising the bill’s author for her good faith effort on a serious issue while maintaining that there is more work to be done on the bill.

“This is obviously a multi-layered, complex issue,” said Alexander Mingus, executive director of the ICC, in his most recent podcast with LaCoursiere. “And this is certainly a complex bill, and we’re certain there will be changes as

the legislation moves through the process. We will continue to ask questions about when trying to get someone off the streets, what is the most holistic solution that’s feasible [beyond] putting someone in jail or giving them a fine.”

Senate Bill 285 passed the committee on an 8-2 vote and now awaits further action in the Senate.

Its most vocal support came from representatives of the Cicero Institute, a Texas-based think tank that is behind similar legislation passed in Florida, Georgia and Texas banning homeless encampments. The Cicero Institute backed a measure almost identical to Senate Bill 285 in last year’s General Assembly.

The ICC, however, points to another policy source closer to home for additional perspective. The University of Notre Dame’s Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) conducts research and aims to identify innovative and effective programs nationwide that help move people out of poverty for good.

In an op-ed piece addressing last year’s homelessness legislation in Indiana, a LEO professor argued that criminalizing those living on the street would only exacerbate a serious problem.

“The root causes of homelessness—unaffordable housing, untreated mental illness or substance use disorder, an unforeseen financial crisis such as a health scare or loss of a loved one—are not mysteries,” said David Phillips, research professor of economics at the University of Notre Dame. “Criminalization does not address these problems. In the absence of strong evidence, we should be skeptical that its primary effect will be anything other than sweeping real problems under

the rug, pushing vulnerable people from one community in Indiana to the next.”

Another program at Notre Dame—the Church Properties Initiative at the university’s Fitzgerald Institute for Real Estate—could hold the key to one type of innovative solution that lawmakers are seeking in another major bill.

One element of House Bill 1001, a significant housing affordability measure under consideration at the General Assembly, proposes streamlined zoning to allow religious entities to build affordable housing on church property. The ICC supports this effort, which falls under the growing “Yes in God’s Backyard” (YIGBY) movement nationwide.

YIGBY efforts encourage churches and other faith-based institutions to use their underutilized land or current structures to create dignified, attainable housing for low- and moderate-income households. They are a counterpoint to more restrictive zoning practices that are often categorized as “Not in My Backyard” (NIMBY).

House Bill 1001 has been referred to the House Committee on Local Government, where it awaits further review. LaCoursiere and Mingus said they would continue to monitor developments on the housing affordability measure, particularly as it relates to the potential use of church property.

“We believe this is a good idea—certainly one small piece in a much broader, complex puzzle,” Mingus said.

To follow priority legislation of the ICC, visit www.indianacc.org. This website includes access to ICAN, the Indiana Catholic Action Network, which offers the Church’s position on key issues. Those who sign up for ICAN receive alerts on legislation moving forward and ways to contact their elected representatives.

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



Alexander Mingus

EUCCHARIST

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for the Revival was strong at every level, with 92% of bishops and 92% of pastors described as supportive.”

Just under half (49%) of 249 clergy polled perceived clergy morale in themselves or peers to be somewhat (38%) or significantly (11%) more encouraged by the revival. Another 40% reported their morale remained about the same. But 7% said their morale had been somewhat more discouraged and an estimated 4% described it as significantly more discouraged.

Vinea found the revival overall “refocused clergy on the Eucharist, with a majority reporting substantive changes to their pastoral approach since 2021.”

Topping the list of those changes was a “somewhat” (44%) or “significantly stronger” (28%) level of encouraging parishioners in eucharistic devotion, with an enhanced attention to the Eucharist in teaching and ministry (70%), as well as a greater emphasis on evangelization and outreach (69%).

Clergy also reported their time spent

in personal eucharistic adoration was “somewhat” (36%) or “significantly stronger” (15%). Both collaboration with, and training or support for, other leaders also improved by 45% and 43% respectively, said clergy respondents.

The revival also “had some direct influence on preaching about the Eucharist, with nearly one-third reporting an influence on the frequency with which they did so,” said Vinea.

At the parish level, clergy reported that the “most fruitful” revival activities were holy hours and eucharistic adoration events (53%), eucharistic catechesis and teaching (41%), and local eucharistic processions (39%).

Roughly one-quarter of clergy described the National Eucharistic Congress (26%) and the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage (23%) as fruitful, although the numbers were significantly higher for clergy who had attended the congress (64%) or pilgrimage (63%).

Less likely to be reported by clergy as fruitful were parish missions or speakers (20%), or small group studies (20%), with much lower numbers for youth-focused (8%) and family-focused (7%) revival activities.

Ordained point persons for the revival found the initiative most successful— inclusive of “slightly successful,” “moderately successful” and “very/ extremely successful”—at engaging regular Mass-attending Catholics (98%), followed by parish volunteers and ministry leaders (88%), senior parishioners (88%), families with children (85%) and youth and young adults (74%).

A total of 70% of ordained revival point persons said the initiative had been able to reach less engaged or lapsed Catholics. But most of that success was categorized as “slightly successful.”

Challenges for revival activities

reported by point persons, along with priests and deacons, centered around “two key obstacles: external barriers and internal constraints,” said the report.

“Staff cited resource limitations and time constraints at higher rates (63% and 58%), while parishioners more often mentioned lack of awareness among target audiences (51%),” the report said.

Still, the report concluded, the revival fostered both personal and parish renewal—and “the evidence suggests that a future revival could bear similar fruit and, with clear support and capacity, potentially expand its reach further.” †

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