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All Encouraged to Attend Ecumenical Prayer Service as Part of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity



Scott Warden

Sister Maria Gemma Salyer of the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration, left, and Curtis Smith, second from left, the executive director of the Do It Best Foundation, join others in prayer during an ecumenical prayer breakfast sponsored by Love Fort Wayne at the Parkview Mirro Center in Fort Wayne on Wednesday, January 7.

BY SCOTT WARDEN

Before the sun had risen over Fort Wayne on the morning of Wednesday, January 7, dozens of Christians of various denominations gathered on the city's north side to worship together

and pray, as Christ did, "that all may be one."

Invited to speak at the monthly ecumenical prayer breakfast hosted by Love Fort Wayne at the Parkview Mirro Center, Bishop Rhoades, perched on a stool next to Pastor Chris Norman of

Grace Gathering Church, didn't mince words about the Catholic Church's position on Christian unity, calling it not just a priority but "a divine mandate."

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

To intentionally foster this call

for oneness among followers of Christ, Bishop Rhoades said, the Church participates in the observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, held annually from January 18 (the feast of the

UNITY, page 14

Pope Continues Synodal Path with College of Cardinals

BY CAROL GLATZ

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Pope Leo XIV and members of his College of Cardinals have begun what is a kind of synodal journey together to grow in communion and discern together "what the Lord is asking of us for the good of His people."

After convening the international group of cardinals in Rome for an extraordinary consistory January 7-8, the pope decided to make the gathering an annual event; however, there will be an additional meeting later this year.

It marked an approach that vastly expanded on what Pope

Francis established after his election in 2013. Wishing for a more decentralized and listening Church, the late pope created a nine-member Council of Cardinals to help and advise him on several critical matters facing the Church, particularly the reform of the Roman Curia, by meeting at least quarterly in Rome.

Pope Leo decided he would be inviting all the world's cardinals to Rome every year for a few days, Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office, told reporters at a news conference after the consistory ended on Thursday, January 8.

CONSISTORY, page 11



OSV News photo/Simone Risoluti, Vatican Media

Pope Leo XIV holds a consistory with cardinals from around the world at the Vatican on Wednesday, January 7.

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



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Pope Leo Officially Closes Jubilee Year of Hope

BY CAROL GLATZ

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – The powerful and violent cannot control, suppress, or commodify God's grace, friendship, and will in order to usher in a new dawn, Pope Leo XIV said during Mass on feast of the Epiphany, which officially closed the Jubilee Year of Hope.

"Around us, a distorted economy tries to profit from everything," Pope Leo said during his homily on Tuesday, January 6. "We see how the marketplace can turn human yearnings of seeking, traveling, and beginning again into a mere business," he said.

"Let us ask ourselves: Has the Jubilee taught us to flee from this type of efficiency that reduces everything to a product and human beings to consumers?" he asked. "After this year, will we be better able to recognize a pilgrim in the visitor, a seeker in the stranger, a neighbor in the foreigner, and fellow travelers in those who are different?"

Before the Mass, the pope, cardinals, and bishops present in Rome gathered in the atrium of the basilica and gave thanks to God for the gifts received during the Holy Year. Pope Leo went to the threshold of the Holy Door and pulled each side shut. The door will be sealed until the next Holy Year, which is likely to be 2033, the 2,000th anniversary of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

While the last of the Holy Doors in the city was closing, "the gate" of God's mercy will never be shut, Pope Leo said before shutting the door. God "will always sustain the weary, raise up those who have fallen," and offer "good things" to those who place their trust in Him.

In his homily, Pope Leo compared the millions of men and women who came to Rome on pilgrimage to modern-day Magi, "who left palace and temple behind" in search of a new "king," whom they found in the Baby Jesus in a humble grotto in Bethlehem.

"Yes, the Magi still exist today. They are the people who sense the need to go out and search, accepting the risks associated with their journey, especially in a troubled world like ours that may be unpleasant and dangerous in many ways," he said.

However, Pope Leo cautioned, today's seekers must encounter in today's churches and sacred



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Leo XIV closes the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica on January 6, marking the official end of the Jubilee Year of Hope.

places the same humble source of life, hope, and joy that the Magi encountered in Bethlehem.

"How important it is that those who pass through the doors of the church perceive therein that the Messiah has just been born, that a community gathers in which hope springs forth and that a story of life is unfolding!" he said.

"Jesus encountered and allowed Himself to be approached by all people," he said, because "the Lord wants His presence to grow among us as God-with-us."

"No one can sell this to us. The child whom the Magi adore is a priceless and immeasurable good," the pope said, criticizing "a distorted economy" that even tries to exploit and commodify the human desire for freedom and true fulfillment.

God revealing Himself to humanity as man is "a gift," Pope Leo said. "He reveals Himself and lets Himself be found."

"His ways are not our ways, and the violent do not succeed in controlling them, nor can the powers of the world block them," he said, recalling the great joy the Magi felt upon finding the Messiah and despite Herod's efforts to destroy what

had been promised.

The fear and violence unleashed by King Herod "make us think of the many conflicts by which people resist and even damage the new things that God has in store for everyone," he said. "Loving and seeking peace means protecting what is holy and, consequently, that which is newly born like a small, vulnerable, fragile baby."

"God challenges the existing order," the pope said. "God is determined to rescue us from both old and new forms of

slavery. He involves young and old, poor and rich, men and women, saints and sinners in His works of mercy and in the wonders of his justice."

"Let us ask ourselves: Is there life in our Church?

Is there space for something new to be born? Do we love and proclaim a God who sets us on a journey?" Pope Leo asked.

"Fear does indeed blind us. Conversely, the joy of the Gospel liberates us. It makes us prudent, yes, but also bold, attentive and creative; it beckons us along ways that are different from those already traveled," he said.

"It is wonderful to become pilgrims of hope," who journey

together and are amazed by God's faithfulness, he said.

"If we do not reduce our churches to monuments, if our communities are homes, if we stand united and resist the flattery and seduction of those in power, then we will be the generation of a new dawn," he said. In Jesus, "we will contemplate and serve an extraordinary humanity, transformed not by the delusions of the all-powerful but by God who became flesh out of love."

Outside on a cold, rainy winter morning, St. Peter's Square was filled with thousands of people watching the Mass on big screens and awaiting the pope to recite the Angelus at noon.

Hundreds of people dressed in traditional and festive costumes took part in an annual folkloric Epiphany procession along the main boulevard in front of the basilica. Marching bands and people in Renaissance costumes paraded up the street behind the Three Kings on horseback.

Before reciting the Angelus from the balcony of the basilica's loggia, the pope prayed that God's words "come to fulfillment in us, may strangers and enemies become brothers and sisters."

"In the place of inequality, may there be fairness, and may the industry of war be replaced by the craft of peace," he said. "As weavers of hope, let us journey together toward the future by another road."

"Jesus encountered and allowed Himself to be approached by all people. The Lord wants His presence to grow among us as God-with-us."

POPE LEO XIV

'Reborn as Sons and Daughters of God'

Bishop Rhoades Marks the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord at St. Matthew Cathedral

BY LISA KOCHANOWSKI

The Cathedral of St. Matthew in South Bend concluded the Christmas season with a special Mass and visit by Bishop Rhoades to mark the feast of the Baptism of the Lord on Sunday, January 11. The celebration included the baptism of two infant girls.

"Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, we can be reborn as sons and daughters of God and receive the gift of new life," Bishop Rhoades said in his homily. "This is what happens in the wonderful gift of the Sacrament of Baptism. We are inserted into the very life of Jesus who died on the cross to free us from sin, and in rising from the dead, conquered death. We are especially reminded of this gift today since during this Mass I will be baptizing two beautiful infants. ... With Baptism, they will become sharers in Christ's death and resurrection. They will be set free from original sin. The life of grace will be born within them, which is the very life of the Risen Jesus.

Bishop Rhoades continued, saying that when the two girls were both, "they exited the darkness of the wombs of their mothers and entered into the light of the outside world. Today, they will enter into the light of Christ and became children of the light. When they were born, they were able to see for the first time the faces of their mothers and fathers and to be held in their arms. Today, the day of their rebirth in baptism, they won't be exiting their mother's wombs; rather, they will be entering another womb, the womb of their spiritual mother, the Church. This mother, the Church, the Bride of Christ, will nourish and guide them, beginning with their family, the domestic church, in which their parents will teach them, protect them, and care for them, not only for their bodily needs, but for their spiritual growth in the life of grace that they receive in Baptism today."

The church echoed with sounds of active children, an ornately adorned altar full of lights and flowers, and the air



Lisa Kochanowski

Bishop Rhoades applies oils during the baptism of Genevieve Lucia at the Cathedral of St. Matthew in South Bend on Sunday, January 11.

was filled with the aroma of incense. The community was filled with joy on the last day of the Christmas season. At Mass, the congregation listened to the story of Jesus coming from Galilee to the Jordan River to begin his public ministry.

"He did so by joining the hundreds of people who were flocking from all over Palestine to hear the preaching of John the Baptist and to be baptized by John as a sign of their repentance and conversion from sin," Bishop Rhoades said. "John the Baptist was shocked to see Jesus in that line of sinners, for he had recognized Jesus as the Messiah, the One who was without sin, coming to him to be baptized. John knew that Jesus didn't need the baptism of repentance he was administering. The Gospel today tells us that John objected and said to Jesus, 'I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?' But Jesus insisted on being baptized. He gave the reason: 'to fulfill all righteousness.' In other words, to do the will of His Father and accomplish His plan of salvation. That plan includes His entering into solidarity with sinners, taking our sins upon Himself by suffering and dying for us. That was His mission."

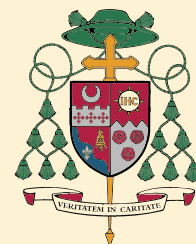
When Jesus emerged from the water, we see the Spirit revealed, descending upon Jesus in the form of a dove, Bishop Rhoades said. The baptism of Jesus is a splendid revelation of the Most Holy Trinity: the voice

of God the Father, the presence of God the Holy Spirit, and the Son, Jesus.

"Jesus became one with humanity by becoming man and shows His becoming one with our sinful humanity when He chose to be baptized even though He is without sin," Bishop Rhoades said. "Jesus began His public activity by stepping into the place of sinners and being baptized by John in the waters of the Jordan River. The Baptism of Jesus was an anticipation of His passion, the baptism of His bloody death. ... By loving us to the end, He accomplished our redemption. When Jesus' side was pierced with the soldier's spear after His death on the cross, blood and water flowed from His heart, signs of the sacraments of new life, baptism and the Eucharist, and the Church was born," said Bishop Rhoades.

It was noted at Mass that St. Matthew Cathedral was embarking on the parish phase of the diocesan synod, the first in the diocese since 1926. Father Andrew Budzinski, rector of the cathedral, noted the feast of the Baptism of the Lord is a time to begin intentional prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to show us what to do.

"As disciples of Jesus Christ, we're required by Him to take stock of how we're doing in His mission, and to take steps to do the things we're not doing that He is calling us to do," shared Father Budzinski.



PUBLIC SCHEDULE OF
BISHOP KEVIN C. RHOADES

Veritatem In Caritate
(Truth in Charity)

- ◆ **Wednesday, January 21, at 12 p.m.** – Priest Personnel Board Meeting, Sacred Heart Rectory, Warsaw
- ◆ **Thursday, January 22, at 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.** – Right to Life Events: Youth Rally and Mass, Indiana Convention Center, followed by March for Life and Rally at Statehouse, Indianapolis
- ◆ **Friday, January 23, at 5 p.m.** – Mass for Catholic Nurses' Association, Holy Spirit Chapel, Le Mans Hall, Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame
- ◆ **Sunday, January 25, at 11:30 a.m.** – Mass, St. Thérèse, Little Flower Church, South Bend

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Documenting 'the Miracle Man' of Notre Dame

BY LISA KOCHANOWSKI

The cause for sainthood for Holy Cross Brother Columba O'Neill is the result of years of research, interviews, and study by Holy Cross Brother Philip Smith, the archivist for the Midwest Province of the Congregation of Holy Cross and the USA coordinator of the cause for Brother Columba, CSC.

Brother Philip's work regarding Brother Columba took him to a new venture – the recent production of a new documentary titled "In Kind Love: The Life and Legacy of Brother Columba O'Neill, CSC."

In April of last year, Bishop Rhoades officially opened the inquiry into the life and holiness of Brother Columba, telling a crowd at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart at the University of Notre Dame that "he was a great believer in the merciful love of Jesus and so had a deep and fervent devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and spread that devotion by his words and deeds."

Today's Catholic reached out to Brother Philip recently and asked him about the film documenting Brother Columba's legacy.

Today's Catholic: How did the project for a documentary come about?

Brother Philip Smith: As the work of reading the Brother Columba letters and other documents progressed, I asked my superiors to consider having a video produced to record Columba's life and ministry. I had seen a documentary on Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman that was produced by NewGroup Media and was very impressed with the depiction of her life. NewGroup Media is located in South Bend, so I con-



Holy Cross Brother Philip Smith, the archivist for the Midwest Province of the Congregation of Holy Cross and the USA coordinator for the cause for Brother Columba O'Neill, poses in his office at the University of Notre Dame among a collection of photos and artifacts of Brother Columba's life.

Provided by the Midwest Province of the Congregation of Holy Cross

tacted them and was introduced to Sister Judith Zielinski, OSF, who produced the Bowman piece. Eventually, an agreement was struck between NewGroup and the Congregation of Holy Cross to produce a documentary about Brother Columba.

Today's Catholic: What was your role in the production?

Brother Philip: I am listed as the assistant producer. My role was to supply the videographers with whatever they needed to produce the most authentic account of Brother Columba's life as a Holy Cross

Brother and his ministry of prayer to the Sacred Heart as intercessor for people who asked his prayers for relief of their physical and spiritual distress.

Today's Catholic: You have years of research to share. How hard was it to compress all that data into a 45-minute documentary?

Brother Philip: Thankfully, that was not my task. It is Sister Judy and her staff who had to take all that I provided and craft it into 45 minutes. They did an outstanding job. From the first minutes, one becomes absorbed into the life of 'the Miracle Man of Notre Dame.'"

Today's Catholic: What were some of the challenges you faced when making the film?

Brother Philip: My challenges were all related to providing what they needed – letters, media items like newspaper articles, photos, etc. Because of the great number of items, I needed to find what would most accurately and efficiently work. Often, I had to rework what was

asked for based on the script that was composed by Sister Judy. The script went through a number of revisions.

Today's Catholic: What are some memorable moments of the production process?

Brother Philip: The depictions of various events in Columba's life that required actors: Columba learning to read with his mother; the young Columba arriving at Notre Dame; the cures that were filmed. Some of the actors are members of the congregation: Brother Clay Jaskowski, Brother Joseph Fox, and Brother Thomas as Rock.

Today's Catholic: What was it like working with a professional production company?

Brother Philip: I learned so much about the time and talent needed to complete a quality [film on the] life of Brother Columba. There are scores of people who worked as a team to see the project to completion. I am thankful to one and all of them. The project required two years to complete.

Watch the Film

To view the documentary "In Kind Love: The Life and Legacy of Brother Columba O'Neill, CSC," and learn more about his cause for canonization, visit holycrossusa.org/brothercolumba.

Today's Catholic: What do you hope viewers take away from the documentary?

Brother Philip: I want everyone to know about Brother Columba and his devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. My hope is that they will pray to Brother Columba to intercede for them to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for cures. Currently, there are many people throughout the world who pray to Columba for intercession. Many make a novena and pray five times a day, "Sacred Heart of Jesus, please cure my loved one of (whatever the need)." I want this documentary to increase devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and promote the canonization of Brother Columba.



Brother Philip Smith discusses the life and legacy of Brother Columba O'Neill in this screenshot of the new documentary on Brother Columba.

SCHOOL SPIRIT

YOUR SCHOOLS, YOUR STORIES

This academic year, Today's Catholic is partnering with the student media programs at all four Catholic high schools in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. Each week, student writers, editors, and photographers from Bishop Luers and Bishop Dwenger in Fort Wayne, Saint Joseph in South Bend, and Marian in Mishawaka will share their work on this new page, School Spirit, dedicated to telling the stories of their school communities.

All-American Fencer Driven to Succeed

Huskies' Sophomore Harper Schmitt Excels Athletically, Academically

BY GENESIS RUIZ

Saint Joseph High School sophomore Harper Schmitt defines the term “student athlete.” Her dedication to both fencing and academics has led her to excel at both. Schmitt was named a 2024-25 First-Team All-American by USA Fencing, which requires her to earn either an “A” or “B” rating during competition, and she is an All-Academic Team member as well, which requires a GPA of 3.85 or higher. Schmitt also is a two-time National Medal winner, and she currently ranks nationally in both the Cadet (under age 17) and Junior (under 20) fencing categories. On top of all of this, she also qualified to compete in the Junior Olympics in 2024, 2025, and 2026.

Schmitt loves the sport, noting that she enjoys “just how competitive it is” and how fencing allows participants to use both their mental and physical skills to gain an advantage over opponents. Schmitt explains the tactical and cerebral aspect of the sport by saying that “most people compare [fencing] to chess, which I think is interesting.”

However, success brings its own set of challenges and obstacles as well. Schmitt said she often feels a lot of pressure and recognizes that the sport can take a physical toll. “I’m hyper-mobile in all my joints, so



Provided by the Schmitt family

Saint Joseph High School sophomore Harper Schmitt, left, scores a touch against an opponent at a recent USA Fencing event.

I’ve had a shoulder injury, and that’s been a really painful thing to deal with. And just mental blocks in general are challenging in fencing once you’ve reached a certain level.”

Despite her challenges, Schmitt continues to put in the work needed to achieve her goals, and she remains driven. She maintains a rigorous training schedule, participating in a regional or national tournament once a month, with the local tournaments being held in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois. She practices year-round at Escrime du Lac Fencing Club in Mishawaka and at various training camps across the country. This past fall, Schmitt com-

“I think in fencing, losing happens a lot, because it’s one on one and you could just completely destroy a person one day, then get destroyed by them the next. It’s not a very consistent sport, so it’s common to feel defeated, but just don’t give up.”

HARPER SCHMITT



Schmitt, a First-Team All-American according to USA Fencing, poses with her épée.

peted in the October North American Cup in Salt Lake City, where she placed 27th out of 176 fencers in Cadet Women’s Epee.

Schmitt said she appreciates the dedication of her instructors, who she said “are very inspirational. They’re very successful fencers, and also being so close to Notre Dame is very inspirational

because of how many Olympians come out of their fencing program.” Schmitt aspires to continue her fencing career at the University of Notre Dame.

Reflecting on the lessons she has gained from fencing, Schmitt said: “Just keep going, keep practicing, everyday counts. I think in fencing, losing

happens a lot, because it’s one on one and you could just completely destroy a person one day, then get destroyed by them the next. It’s not a very consistent sport, so it’s common to feel defeated, but just don’t give up.”

Genesis Ruiz is a junior at Saint Joseph High School.

Minnesota Archbishop Calls for Prayers after Woman Shot Dead by ICE Officer

MINNEAPOLIS (OSV News) – Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis called for prayers after a woman died from a shooting involving a federal agent on Wednesday, January 7, in south Minneapolis. The woman shot by an officer with Immigration and Customs Enforcement has been identified as Renee Nicole Good, a 37-year-old mother originally from Colorado. Archbishop Hebda appealed for all people “to lower the temperature of rhetoric, stop fear-filled speculation, and start seeing all people as created in the image and likeness of God.” He said, “That is as true for our immigrant sisters and brothers as it is for our elected officials and those who are responsible for enforcing our laws.”

Pope Leo XIV to Visit Spain This Summer

VATICAN CITY (OSV News) – With the jubilee year now officially ended, the pope’s travel schedule is also expected to ramp up, with one trip especially dear to the pontiff just confirmed: a June visit to Madrid, Barcelona, and the Canary Islands. Cardinal José Cobo of Madrid confirmed that the delegation of Spanish bishops had a meeting with the Vatican’s Secretariat of State on Friday, January 9, to discuss a papal trip to Spain with “a first draft” of the plan “prepared for the Holy Father to review.” “This came directly from the pope ... this was his personal initiative,” Cardinal Cobo said of the idea behind the trip. “Spain has long been in need and has continually requested a papal visit. So, I think that the opening of this door now is a cause for hope and joy for everyone,” Cardinal Cobo told the media in Rome on January 9. The first apostolic trip to Turkey and Lebanon was inherited by Pope Leo from Pope Francis’ calendar. Pope Francis was invited to Spain several times but never went, leaving the traditionally Catholic country – struggling with dropping Church attendance – without a papal visit for 14 years.

Venezuelan Nobel Laureate Asks Pope to Help Free Political Prisoners

ROME (OSV News) – Venezuelan opposition leader and Nobel laureate María Corina Machado has asked Pope Leo XIV to help secure the release of political

NEWS BRIEFS

POPE BAPTIZES 20 CHILDREN IN SISTINE CHAPEL



OSV News photo/Simone Risoluti, Vatican Media

Pope Leo XIV baptizes one of 20 children in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican on Sunday, January 11, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Pope Leo told the parents that baptizing one’s children is as essential as providing them with food and clothing. “Just as they received life from you, their parents, now they receive the meaning to live it: faith,” he said in his homily. “Who among us, in fact, would leave newborns without clothes or food? ... If food and clothing are necessary for life, faith is more than necessary, because with God, life finds salvation.”

prisoners and support a transition to democracy in Venezuela. The Vatican confirmed the January 12 meeting, held in the Apostolic Palace, but released no details. In a statement posted on X, Machado said she urged the pope to intercede for more than 1,000 political prisoners and for Venezuelans who are “kidnapped and missing.” She also thanked Pope Leo for closely following events in the country and emphasized the resilience and faith of the Venezuelan people. The meeting comes days after the capture of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife in a U.S. military operation. Pope Leo has since called for respect for the will of the Venezuelan people and for the protection of human and civil rights. “I renew my appeal to respect the will of the Venezuelan people, and to safeguard the human and civil rights of all, ensuring a future of stability and concord,” the pope said on Friday, January 9, during a meeting with members of the

diplomatic corps accredited to the Vatican.

Nigerian Bishop Calls for Military Action to ‘Eliminate’ Bandits

KONTAGORA, Nigeria (OSV News) – A Nigerian bishop urged intensified military action to “eliminate” bandits and their hideouts in the Kainji Game Reserve amid reports of the killing of 50 people between Christmas and New Year’s and the traumatizing of children recently abducted from St. Mary’s Catholic School in Papiri. Bishop Bulus Dauwa Yohanna of Kontagora recounted multiple attacks on both Christians and Muslims in his January 6 news release, saying that the armed bandits had killed at least 50, attacked a Catholic church and police station, and carried out abductions of women and children, as they roamed freely in the Niger and Kebbi states from December 28-January 3. The massacres were confirmed by the pontifi-

cal charity Aid to the Church in Need. “Pending the elimination of the bandits and their hideouts in Kainji Game Reserve, there is an immediate need for large and well-equipped military task force in the area” or “there will be a massive and ongoing loss of lives and permanent displacement of large numbers of people,” Bishop Yohanna said.

Journalist Russell Shaw Remembered as ‘Giant of the Church’

SILVER SPRING, Maryland (OSV News) – Russell Shaw, a veteran journalist who led communications for the U.S. bishops and Knights of Columbus and authored numerous articles and books, died on Tuesday, January 6, at the age of 90. Friends and colleagues recalled the Washington, D.C. native as a man of deep intelligence, keen insight, and personal discipline whose prolific writing and communications work helped to shape the U.S. Catholic Church for more than a half-century. After decades work-

ing in Church communications beginning in the 1960s, Shaw returned to journalism in the late 1990s. He wrote on a broad range of topics from Catholic education and civic responsibility to the sacraments and suffering. He was especially known for championing the role of the laity, a sharp criticism of clericalism, and an advocate for transparency among the bishops. Friends recalled him as charitable and respectful in his opinion writing and a man of abiding faith who modeled the lay apostolate in the Church. His columns appeared in Our Sunday Visitor as well as Today’s Catholics.

Trump Meets with USCCB President Archbishop Coakley at White House

WASHINGTON, D.C. (OSV News) – President Donald Trump met with Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, on Monday, January 12, a spokesperson for the USCCB confirmed. The private meeting, which was listed on the official White House schedule for Trump, was closed to press. The White House did not specify the topic of the meeting. In a statement provided to OSV News, a USCCB spokesperson said, “Archbishop Coakley had the opportunity for introductory meetings with President Trump, Vice President Vance, and other administration officials, in which they discussed areas of mutual concern, as well as areas for further dialogue.” The statement said Archbishop Coakley was “grateful for the engagement and looks forward to ongoing discussions. Meetings between a sitting president of the USCCB and the president of the United States are not without precedent, but do not always happen. Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, who served as USCCB president prior to Archbishop Coakley, told OSV News in November that he was never able to meet with either President Joe Biden nor with Trump. Trump had a brief meeting in 2017 that included Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, who was president of the conference at the time. USCCB presidents, including then-Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Kentucky, and Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York, had several meetings between the two of them with then-President Barack Obama over the course of his presidency.

Firing Squad as New Execution Method Draws Concerns

BY VICTORIA ARTHUR

The Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) is speaking out against legislation that aims to introduce death by firing squad as a new method of capital punishment in the state.

With the 2026 legislative session now underway at the Indiana Statehouse, the ICC acted quickly to oppose Senate Bill 11, stating that the additional execution method it proposes “only underscores the brutality and savagery” of the death penalty itself.

“When we commit violence against another man, we not only hurt him but the image of God in him, which affects the humanity in us all,” said Roarke LaCoursiere, associate director of the ICC, during a January 6 hearing on the bill. “For this reason, killing someone, especially by firearm, should be resorted to in only the most necessary, life-threatening situations.”

After reiterating the Catholic Church’s opposition to the death penalty in any form, LaCoursiere told lawmakers that the provisions of Senate Bill 11 raise unique concerns because of

the trauma they would inflict not only on the person facing execution but on the individuals tasked with carrying them out.

The bill, authored by Senator Mike Young (R-Indianapolis), proposes a five-member firing squad that would be composed of Indiana Department of Correction officers. Four of the officers would fire weapons using live ammunition, while one would fire a weapon containing a blank round, thus ensuring that no one would know who dealt the fatal shot.

“Even in instances where fatal force is used to save lives, people struggle with the long-lasting trauma that accompanies taking someone’s life,” LaCoursiere said during the hearing in the Senate Committee on Corrections and Criminal Law. “It goes against our God-given nature to do so. But under this bill, we would be asking five people to pull the trigger not for the purpose of saving life but for the purpose of ending it.”

Currently, Indiana law allows only lethal injection as a means of carrying out the death penalty. In presenting Senate Bill 11, Senator Young argued that the high cost of the drugs involved along with their limited shelf life



OSV News photo/Sean Gallagher, The Criterion

Indianapolis Archbishop Charles C. Thompson prays at a rally against the death penalty on November 17, 2024, on the grounds of the Indiana Statehouse.

are complicating factors driving the need for an additional execution method.

Senate Bill 11 would authorize the death penalty to be carried out by firing squad if execution by lethal injection could not occur due to unavailability of the required drug – or if the condemned person requests it instead of lethal injection.

But one opponent of Senate Bill 11 described the proposed legislation as “a solution in search of a problem.” Zach Stock, a representative of the Indiana Public Defender Council, told lawmakers that with only five people currently on death row in Indiana, obtaining the drugs to administer lethal injection should not be an issue.

“We don’t need large quantities of drugs now, and we’re unlikely to need them in the future,” Stock said.

But he also addressed a major point of controversy in the proposed bill – that it is a response to the federal government’s desire to offer an additional execution method at Indiana’s federal death row site in Terre Haute. The U.S. Penitentiary in Terre Haute currently houses three inmates awaiting federal execution.

“Indiana doesn’t need to permanently alter its execution laws to accommodate a federal request that may change with the next administration,” said Stock, who serves as legislative counsel for the Indiana Public Defender Council.

Additionally, Stock emphasized that never in its history has Indiana authorized execution by firing squad. He noted that Indiana’s methods for carrying out the death penalty have evolved from hanging to electrocution to now lethal injection.

“This reflects a sustained judgment since the (state) Constitution was ratified in 1851 that methods of execution should

become less violent, not more so,” he said.

Currently, only five states allow firing squad as a legal execution method: Idaho, Utah, Oklahoma, Mississippi, and South Carolina.

Another opponent of Senate Bill 11 told lawmakers of an example in South Carolina highlighting that there is no fail-safe means of execution – firing squad included.

Robert Dunham, executive director of the national Death Penalty Information Center, described how a team of firing squad sharpshooters “largely missed the target of the heart” in what he termed their “botched” attempt at executing an inmate.

He also described Indiana’s execution process as “shrouded in secrecy,” which he says makes it impossible to have a fully informed discussion about the process.

“The state shouldn’t be giving the Department of Correction more unchecked latitude in carrying out executions,” said Dunham, who also serves as a professor at Temple University’s School of Law in Philadelphia.

In keeping with the Catholic Church’s long-standing teaching on the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death, the ICC is calling on the Catholic faithful in Indiana to oppose Senate Bill 11 and contact their lawmakers to express their concerns. The ICC has issued an action alert on the bill via its website, indianacc.org.

“Legalizing a firing squad method of execution would be a step in the wrong direction in Indiana’s efforts to build a culture of life,” LaCoursiere told lawmakers at the January 6 hearing, which involved testimony only.

She and Alexander Mingus, executive director of the ICC, were working on proposed language to add conscience protec-

tion to the bill for those who wished to be exempt from the execution process on religious or moral grounds. The Senate committee was expected to vote on the proposed legislation the week of January 12.

A similar measure, House Bill 1119, proposes the addition of firing squad along with another execution method, death by nitrogen gas. That legislation had not been brought up for a hearing at press time.

Anticipating that capital punishment would once again be at the forefront of issues before the Indiana General Assembly this year, the ICC hosted a panel discussion in Evansville in September bringing together numerous people who have personally been affected by the death penalty.

The event was held less than two weeks before Indiana executed its third death row inmate since the state resumed capital punishment in December of 2024 following a 15-year hiatus.

In their first podcast of 2026, Mingus and LaCoursiere discussed Senate Bill 11 as well as other anticipated legislation on issues including immigration, education, family policies, and protecting children online.

This is a short, non-budget-year session of the Indiana General Assembly – made even shorter by the legislature’s efforts in December to redraw congressional maps in the state of Indiana, which ultimately stalled.

“We expect to be done in late February, with a hyper-focus on a few key issues making their way through the Statehouse,” Mingus said.

As it has throughout its nearly 60-year history, the ICC will serve as the official public policy voice for the Catholic Church in Indiana at the General Assembly and beyond.

“In everything we do, we will always advocate for the dignity of human life and the protection of the common good,” Mingus said. “And we ask all of the Catholic faithful throughout Indiana to join us in this mission.”

To follow priority legislation of the ICC, visit 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.

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SEEK 2026: 'An Experience Like No Other'

Diocesan Pilgrims, Clergy, Seminarians Attend Annual Conference for Young Adults in Columbus, Ohio

BY TODAY'S CATHOLIC

Dozens of young adults from the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend were assured of God's love – and encouraged to respond to His call in their lives – during the SEEK 2026 conference that took place from January 1-5 in Columbus, Ohio.

This year, SEEK was held at three sites across the country – Columbus, Denver, and Fort Worth, Texas, drawing more than 26,000 people total to the conference for talks and workshops on encountering Jesus Christ. The schedule included daily Mass, Eucharistic adoration, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and fellowship.

One of the highlights of the event was a video message delivered by Pope Leo XIV, who told the attendees, "Be open to what the Lord has in store for you."

Among the numerous conference speakers were Father Mike Schmitz, Matt Fradd, Chris Stefanick, Sister of Life Mary Grace, and Sister Josephine Garrett, a sister of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

Father Mark Gurtner, vicar general of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, told Today's Catholic that while he was a first-time attendee at SEEK, he was thoroughly impressed with the conference.

"The level of organization, thought, and zeal put into this outreach to young adults is amazing, all to give young adults a deeper encounter with the Lord Jesus through evangelization, catechesis, and sacramental ministry," Father Gurtner said. "Also, like with World Youth Day, it witnesses to the young adults that they are not alone in the practice of the Catholic faith as they experienced each other by the tens of thousands and also saw hundreds of happy priests and religious joining them. Praised be Jesus Christ!"

SEEK is sponsored by FOCUS, an international Catholic missionary outreach that serve more than 200 college campuses in the U.S., Mexico, and Europe. In his January 4 keynote address, Curtis Martin, the founder of FOCUS, told attendees that God "wants to dance with" them. Martin stressed the transformative power of God's love, which enables those infused with it to in turn become missionary disciples, able to "go love the world."

SEEK 2026 centered on the



Provided by Father Mark Gurtner

Young adult pilgrims, clergy, and seminarians pose for a photo during the SEEK 2026 conference in Columbus, Ohio, during the first week of January.

theme "To the Heights," a favorite exhortation of the recently canonized St. Pier Giorgio Frassati, an avid mountaineer and patron of young adults.

Bishop Earl K. Fernandes of Columbus reflected in his homily at the SEEK 2026 opening Mass in that city that the conference's timing and its 2026 theme harmonized well.

"The mighty God descended from the starry heaven and became a child so that we might go up to heaven, 'toward the heights,' as Pier Giorgio Frassati might say," Bishop Fernandes said.

Eli Shoup, a Michigan native who studies mechanical engineering at Trine University in Angola, said the most impactful experience at SEEK for him was "worshipping the Lord at Mass with 16,000-plus students who were just like us – earnestly

striving for sainthood."

Shoup, who runs track and cross country at Trine, where he is an active member of the university's Newman Catholic Fellowship, said he hopes to take the lessons he learned at SEEK back to Trine and practice "confident, fearless, and loving evangelism on campus to grow and strengthen our Catholic community."

Shoup and his fellow attendees were encouraged to boldly live the Faith by Pope Leo, who addressed the crowds in all three cities in a pre-recorded video message. The pope appeared to echo St. Frassati's sentiment to go "to the heights," urging SEEK attendees to reflect on the call of the first two disciples of Jesus as detailed in John 1:35-51.

The pope said that St. Andrew and the other disciple – initially followers of St. John the Bap-

"The mighty God descended from the starry heaven and became a child so that we might go up to heaven, 'toward the heights,' as Pier Giorgio Frassati might say."

BISHOP EARL K. FERNANDES

tist – pursued Jesus, whose first recorded words in John's Gospel were a question posed to the two: "What do you seek?"

"Jesus asks the disciples this question because he knows their hearts," said Pope Leo. "They were restless – in a good way. They did not want to settle for the normal routine of life. They were open to God and were longing for meaning."

And, said the pope, "today, Jesus directs this same question to each one of you."

Pope Leo noted that conference attendees' hearts may also be "restless, searching for meaning and fulfillment" as well as for "direction in your lives."

To such profound questions, said the pope, "The answer is found in a person. The Lord Jesus alone brings us true peace and joy and fulfills every one of our deepest desires."

As they "draw close to Jesus" during the SEEK 2026 conference, Pope Leo urged attendees,

"Do not be afraid to ask Him what He is calling you to," whether that vocation is the priesthood, religious life, or marriage and family life.

"If you sense the Lord calling you, do not be afraid," said Pope Leo. "Once again, let me emphasize that He alone knows the deepest, perhaps hidden, longings of your heart, and the path that will lead you to true fulfillment. Let Him lead and guide you!"

Aaron Reichert, a pilgrim from the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, told today's Catholic that "the constant grace" at SEEK "was unbelievable."

"Being there with so many priests, so many holy people, is an experience like no other. So many confessions, so many people in adoration, so many faithful receptions of the holy Eucharist," said Reichert, a freshman at Trine who is studying civil engineering. "In line for confession, I looked at another faithful Catholic who I did not know and said, 'There has to be few moments since Christ's resurrection that Satan has hated as much as this, and he's helpless!' The grace of God was in the air, and it was unavoidable."

Reichert said he hopes "to use the SEEK experience to love adoration so much more and come closer to the Lord, along with the Newman Catholic Fellowship at Trine to help transform our campus into a hub of Catholics on fire for the Lord. Please pray for our mission!"

OSV News contributed to this report.



OSV News photo/Juan Guajardo, courtesy North Texas Catholic

Pope Leo XIV shares a video message on Thursday, January 1, at the SEEK conference at the Gaylord Texan in Grapevine, Texas. Young Catholics and attendees of all ages were invited to embrace the conference's theme inspired by St. Pier Giorgio Frassati: "To the Heights."

'We Should Strive to Embody the Grace We Have Received'

Diocesan Seminarian Shares Fruits of Time Spent at SEEK Conference

BY STANLEY AMUCHAKA

At the beginning of the new year, my brother seminarians and I attended the SEEK Conference in Columbus, Ohio. The conference commenced with the celebration of the Holy Mass, presided over by Bishop Earl K. Fernandes of Columbus.

In his homily, Bishop Fernandes exhorted the attendees to embrace generosity as a central aspect of their New Year's resolutions. He emphasized that faith, prayer, and commitment to our less fortunate brothers and sisters should be our highest priorities. As Bishop Fernandes observed, we often neglect those who are less privileged individuals who silently endure suffering, frustration, and rejection from both family and society. He reminded us that it is our responsibility and duty as Catholics to reach out to these "least of our brothers and sisters" and to love them as Christ loves us. This call challenges us to move beyond complacency and to embody the Gospel through concrete acts of compassion and solidarity.

One of the keynote speakers at SEEK, Sister Josephine Garrett, further deepened this reflection by emphasizing the

primacy of love in the human vocation. She stated, "We are not made for any kind of relationship; we are made for love, and it is nonsensical to think that we could do anything to merit God's love." Consequently, we are called to love others as we desire God to love us, even when this love requires sacrifice. Such love may involve stepping outside our comfort zones, giving our time to those we might otherwise avoid, or persevering in prayer even when motivation is lacking – all for the sake of Jesus Christ.

A personal highlight of the conference was the video message delivered by Pope Leo XIV. He invited us to reflect on the question Jesus posed to Andrew and the other disciples in the Gospel of John: "What do you seek?" This question, Pope Leo XIV explained, is one that arises whenever we stand at the threshold of a significant life decision. The disciples received this question with a sense of restlessness – a restlessness rooted in their deep desire for a profound relationship with Jesus. They opened their hearts honestly and courageously to the boldness that comes from following Christ, the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, and the



Seminarian Stanley Amuchaka, right, takes a selfie with other diocesan pilgrims at the SEEK conference in Columbus, Ohio.

fullness of truth. We seek Christ not for personal gain but for who He is, desiring an authentic relationship grounded in love. This desire, placed within our hearts by God, draws us to know and love Him more deeply and calls us to become docile to His will. As a seminarian discerning the priesthood, this theme of docility is central to my formation. Formation is not merely something I undergo; it is also something that shapes me interiorly. Through humility and sincerity, I strive to follow the true mission of Jesus Christ, opening the window of my heart to receive Him and to proclaim Him to others.

As a young man growing in

faith, I wish to encourage other young people with the words of St. Paul to Timothy: "I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim 1:6). This gift, received in confirmation, completes our initiation into the sacramental life of the Church. The devil seeks to obscure this truth, preventing us from recognizing the spiritual vitality we receive through the sacraments, which find their perfection in Jesus Christ. Therefore, we must not fall prey to such deception. Rather, we should strive to embody the grace we have received and to protect our light from the distractions of this passing world

so that it may not grow dim. As St. Paul reminds us, "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim 1:7).

Moreover, we must recognize our unique vocations and missions in life. As Pope Leo XIV stated, we are called to cultivate a "missionary zeal rooted in a genuine encounter with Christ." He encouraged us not to be afraid to ask God what He is calling us to – whether it be the priesthood, religious life, or marriage and family life.

In conclusion, attending the SEEK Conference taught me the importance of seeking a deep and intimate relationship with God – one that resists rebellion, temptations of sin, and worldly allurements. When I fall short of God's grace, the Sacrament of Reconciliation restores me as a child of God and renews my freedom to respond generously and faithfully to His will. Through this grace, I continue to discern and embrace my vocation to the priesthood with renewed hope and commitment.

Stanley Amuchaka is a seminarian for the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend studying at Saint Meinrad Seminary in southern Indiana.

Pope Calls Catholics to Rediscover Vatican II Teachings

BY CAROL GLATZ

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – The teachings of the Second Vatican Council are still "the guiding star" the Catholic Church is meant to follow, Pope Leo XIV said on Wednesday, January 7, during his weekly general audience.

Rereading all of its teachings "is a valuable opportunity to rediscover the beauty and the importance of this ecclesial event," he said of the council's work, which remains "a guiding principle for us today."

"We have yet to achieve ecclesial reform more fully in a ministerial sense, and, in the face of today's challenges, we are called to continue to be vigilant interpreters of the signs of the times, joyful proclaimers of the Gospel, courageous witnesses of justice and peace," he said.

Speaking to visitors gathered in the Paul VI Audience Hall,



OSV News photo/Ernst Herb, KNA

An undated photo shows prelates during the Council Hall in St. Peter's Basilica during the third session of the Second Vatican Council. At his general audience on Wednesday, January 7, Pope Leo announced he would begin a new catechetical series on the documents of Vatican II.

the pope said that with the conclusion of the Holy Year on January 6, he was beginning a new series of talks dedicated to the Second Vatican Council.

The council, which convened for four sessions from 1962 to 1965, produced 16 documents, addressing everything from

liturgy to Scripture, missionary activity to ecumenism and interfaith relationships, and the functions of clergy and laity to religious freedom.

"Vatican Council II rediscovered the face of God as the Father who, in Christ, calls us to be His children," Pope Leo said.

The council looked at the Catholic Church "as a mystery of communion and sacrament of unity between God and his people; it initiated important liturgical reform, placing at its center the mystery of salvation and the active and conscious participation of the entire People of God," he said.

"At the same time, it helped us to open up to the world and to embrace the changes and challenges of the modern age in dialogue and co-responsibility, as a Church that wishes to open her arms to humanity, to echo the hopes and anxieties of peoples, and to collaborate in building a more just and fraternal society," he said.

For the past six decades, the popes have repeatedly under-

lined the importance of Vatican II, its teachings, and its fuller implementation.

However, since the council was held so long ago, that means that "the generation of bishops,

"[Vatican II] is the magisterium that still constitutes the guiding star of the Church's journey today."

POPE LEO XIV

theologians, and believers of Vatican II is no longer with us," said the pope, who would have been 10 years old when the council ended in December of 1965.

"It will be important to get to know it again closely and to do so not through 'hearsay' or interpretations that have been given but by rereading its documents and reflecting on their content" directly, he said.

"Indeed, it is the magisterium that still constitutes the guiding star of the Church's journey today," he said.

Eucharistic Pilgrimage Returns – with Patriotic Twist

BY MARIA WIERING

(OSV News) – The National Eucharistic Pilgrimage is back for 2026 with a special route that will travel the East Coast from St. Augustine, Florida, to Portland, Maine, ending in Philadelphia, organizers announced on Thursday, January 8.

The pilgrimage – the third of its kind – will begin in May on Memorial Day weekend and end on July 5. This year's pilgrimage celebrates America's 250th anniversary with the theme "One Nation Under God," and its route incorporates key sites in the history of the country and its Catholics.

Organizers described the pilgrimage as "a nationwide call to renewal, unity, and mission rooted in the Eucharist."

In a January 8 media release announcing the route, organizers noted that 2026 marked the 75th anniversary of the lobbying campaign, led by the Knights of Columbus, to add the phrase "One nation under God" to the

nation's Pledge of Allegiance.

"One Nation Under God is not a borrowed slogan; rather, it is an invitation to realign our lives, our communities, and our country under the sovereignty of Jesus Christ," said Jason Shanks in the media release. Shanks is president of the National Eucharistic Congress and a parishioner at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Fort Wayne.

The National Eucharistic Congress nonprofit organizes the pilgrimage, which first took place as four routes in 2024 ahead of the 10th National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis as part of the National Eucharistic Revival and that returned last summer with a route from Indianapolis to Los Angeles. Two Catholic young adults from the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend participated in the first two National Eucharistic Pilgrimages – Mason Bailey, a seminarian of the diocese, was a perpetual pilgrim in 2024, and last summer, Johnny Hernandez, a parishioner at St. Henry Catholic Church in Fort

Wayne, joined the group.

"Our hope is that Catholics will come together on this significant anniversary to give thanks for our country and to pray for our future," said Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minnesota, who serves as chairman of the National Eucharistic Congress, in the statement. "We want all Catholics to be inspired with missionary zeal to bring revival through the light and love of Jesus Christ."

The pilgrimage has been placed under the patronage of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, an Italian American immigrant and the first U.S. citizen to be canonized a saint. It will also take place in solidarity with the U.S. bishops' call to consecrate the United States to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Like previous National Eucharistic Pilgrimages, the route will be traveled by "perpetual pilgrims," eight young adults selected among a group of applicants (plus a "media missionary") who will attend Mass, Eucharistic adoration, other

devotions, and community-building events along the way.

The pilgrimage will launch Memorial Day weekend with Mass at Our Lady of La Leche Shrine in St. Augustine, the site of the first Mass celebrated on American soil in 1565. It will also include commemorations of the Georgia Martyrs, five Franciscan missionaries who were killed for their faith in 1597, whose path for beatification Pope Francis cleared in January of 2025; the celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi in the Archdiocese of Washington and the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia; and stops in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the nation's first Catholic diocese.

The pilgrimage will pass through most of the original 13 colonies, with stops in 18 dioceses and archdioceses: St. Augustine; Savannah, Georgia; Charleston, South Carolina; Charlotte, North Carolina; Richmond, Virginia; Arlington, Virginia; Washington, D.C.; Baltimore; Wilmington, Delaware; Camden, New Jersey; Paterson,

New Jersey; Springfield, Massachusetts; Manchester, New Hampshire; Portland, Maine; Boston; Fall River, Massachusetts; Providence, Rhode Island; and Philadelphia.

The pilgrimage will end in Philadelphia with events planned for July 4-5, Independence Day weekend, to commemorate the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

Organizers said in the media release that "the pilgrimage seeks to extend the fruits of the three-year National Eucharistic Revival that began in 2022 and culminated in the 2024 National Eucharistic Pilgrimage and subsequent Congress in Indianapolis. The fruits of the 2025 Drexel Pilgrimage carry forward into the 2026 Cabrini Route."

The pilgrimage also will connect with a national prayer campaign and digital lecture series "that highlights themes and topics of America through a Catholic lens and framework," organizers said. Learn more at eucharisticpilgrimage.org.



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Pope Delivers Strong Defense of the Unborn

BY PAULINA GUZIK

ROME (OSV News) – Pope Leo XIV strongly defended the family, marriage, and unborn life during his first-ever New Year's address to the diplomatic corps on Friday, January 9, telling the diplomats accredited to the Holy See that abortion "cuts short a growing life and refuses to welcome the gift of life."

"The institution of the family faces two crucial challenges today," the pope said, naming "a worrying tendency in the international system to neglect and underestimate its fundamental social role, leading to its progressive institutional marginalization" and "the growing and painful reality of fragile, broken, and suffering families, afflicted by internal difficulties and disturbing phenomena, including domestic violence."

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 and a man," he said of traditional marriage and "implies a fundamental ethical



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Leo XIV meets with members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Vatican at the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican on Friday, January 9.

imperative for enabling families to welcome and fully care for unborn life."

Calling it "increasingly a priority, especially in those countries that are experiencing a dramatic decline in birth rates," he said that life "is a priceless gift that develops within a committed relationship based on mutual self-giving and service."

"In light of this profound vi-

sion 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 pope firmly stated, calling abortion a practice that "cuts short a growing life and refuses to welcome the gift of life."

Delivering the address in English, he 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."

Many of the diplomats are from countries that facilitate abortion in their legal systems, such as France, which has enshrined abortion in its constitution.

Pope Leo also expressed "deep concern" about "projects aimed at financing cross-border mobility for the purpose of accessing the so-called 'right to safe abortion.'"

Strongly opposing surrogacy as well, he said that "by transforming gestation into a negotiable service, this violates the dignity both of the child, who is reduced to a 'product,' and of the mother, exploiting her body and the generative process, and distorting the original relational calling of the family."

"In light of these challenges, we firmly reiterate that the protection of the right to life constitutes the indispensable foundation of every

other human right. A society is healthy and truly progresses only when it safeguards the sanctity of human life and works actively to promote it," Pope Leo said.

Protecting life means also rejecting euthanasia, the pope emphasized, calling assisted dying methods "deceptive forms of compassion."

"Similar considerations can be extended to the sick and to those who are elderly or isolated, who at times struggle to find a reason to continue living," he said. "Civil society and states also have a responsibility to respond concretely to situations of vulnerability, offering solutions to human suffering, such as palliative care, and promoting policies of authentic solidarity rather than encouraging deceptive forms of compassion such as euthanasia."

The pope met the world's diplomats a day after he finished a consistory with cardinals, one that strengthened his relationship with the college and set him off for his own agenda after following Pope Francis' calendar in the Jubilee Year.

CONSISTORY, from page 1

College members will meet with the pope again for at least three days sometime in June, possibly around the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul on June 29, and then the gathering will be held over three to four days once a year in the following years.

The College of Cardinals is made up of 245 cardinals from all over the world. About 170 of them – nearly 70 percent – made it to Rome after the pope's invitation December 12.

Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe, a Dominican theologian, offered a reflection on January 7 to help the cardinals understand their role not just as advisers to the pope but as much-needed companions. He recalled St. Mark's account of Jesus making His disciples go out ahead of him by boat, which encountered a "great storm."

Jesus does not want Peter or any of the disciples to go into the storm alone, Cardinal Radcliffe said. "This is our first obedience, to be in the barque of Peter, with his successor, as he faces the storms of our times."

Some of the storms shaking the Church, Cardinal Radcliffe said, include "sexual abuse and ideological division. The Lord commands us to sail out into

these storms and face them truthfully, not timidly waiting on the beach. If we do so in this consistory, we shall see Him coming to us. If we hide on the beach, we shall not encounter Him."

However, Cardinal Radcliffe said, "If the boat of Peter is filled with disciples who quarrel, we shall be of no use to the Holy Father. If we are at peace with each other in love, even when we disagree, God will indeed be present even when He seems to be absent."

Pope Leo emphasized the essential element of love in his opening remarks to the cardinals in the Vatican's Synod Hall on January 7.

"To the extent that we love one another as Christ has loved us, we belong to Him, we are His community, and He can continue to draw others to Himself through us. In fact, only love is credible; only love is trustworthy," Pope Leo said.

"Therefore, in order to be a truly missionary Church, one that is capable of witnessing to the attractive power of Christ's love, we must first of all put into practice His commandment ... 'Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another,'" the pope said. Jesus underlined that it will be by a Christian's love that the world will know "that you are

my disciples."

The "collegial journey" that they have begun with their first consistory, he said, would be an opportunity to reflect together on two themes of their choice out of the following four themes: the mission of the Church in today's world, especially as presented in Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium*; the synod and synodality as an instrument and a style of cooperation; the service of the Holy See, especially to the local Churches; and the liturgy, the source and summit of the Christian life. The cardinals voted with "a large majority" to discuss the first two themes – mission and synodality – Bruni told reporters.

Following a synodal structure, the cardinals were broken into 21

groups, but nine of those groups, made up of cardinals younger than 80 years old, who were not residents in Rome, were asked to submit reports based on their small group discussions, which followed the Synod of Bishops on synodality's "conversation in the Spirit" method.

"I am here to listen," Pope Leo told the cardinals before they began their two days of reflection and dialogue.

"We must not arrive at a text but continue a conversation that will help me in serving the mission of the entire Church," he said. Specifically, he wanted the groups to look at the next one or two years and consider what "priorities could guide the action of the Holy Father and of the Curia

regarding each theme?"

The pope further encouraged the cardinals the next day in his homily during an early morning Mass in St. Peter's Basilica.

Their task, he said, was to discern what "the Lord is asking of us for the good of His people," not "to promote personal or group agendas."

Through prayer, silence, listening, and sharing, Pope Leo said, "we become a voice for all those whom the Lord has entrusted to our pastoral care in many different parts of the world."

The pope underlined how important hope was in the life and mission of the Church, he said. When Christ is at the center of one's life, proclaiming His word "fills us and the world with hope."

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The Transformative Power of Our Participation at Mass



INTO THE TRUTH

FATHER MARK HELLINGER

On the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, we will pray this wonderful Prayer over the Offerings: "Grant us, O Lord, we pray, that we may participate worthily in these mysteries, for whenever the memorial of this sacrifice is celebrated the work of our redemption is accomplished. Through Christ Our Lord." The other time that we hear this prayer is during the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. There are three basic points of the prayer worth considering: participation, celebration, and the work of our redemption.

Indeed, if we think of the work of our redemption, we are put into the heart of the Christian mystery: the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. Liturgy – the word itself – means a public work, a work for the people. In this sense, we can recall the important teaching of *Lumen Gentium* that the Mass is the source and summit of the Christian life, precisely

because at Mass the work of our redemption is accomplished in a unique way. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it in paragraph 1069, "Through the liturgy Christ, our redeemer and high priest, continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through His Church." The passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ are the acts by which redemption has been accomplished, and so we are redeemed only by participation in that mystery.

This is why it is important for us to understand what the celebration actually is. In some catechesis, Mass can often be reduced to the reenactment of the Last Supper, which limits it terribly. In fact, the use of this Prayer over the Offerings in the Holy Thursday liturgy helps draw this out even further. This is because the Mass of the Lord's Supper is not an isolated event – it seamlessly flows into the transfer of the Most Blessed Sacrament and into the Commemoration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday, notably lacking a dismissal rite.

Mass, the Church's central liturgy, is the celebration of the whole Paschal Mystery – including the Last Supper but also the

death, resurrection, and ascension of the Son of God. It is Christ who celebrates the Paschal Mystery, as the Catechism also makes clear: "Seated at the right hand of the Father' and pouring out the Holy Spirit on His Body which is the Church, Christ now acts through the sacraments He instituted to communicate His grace. The sacraments are perceptible signs (words and actions) accessible to our human nature. By the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit they make present efficaciously the grace that they signify" (No. 1084).

Our greatest task, then, is to participate in the mystery Christ celebrates that accomplishes our redemption. It is essential, though, that we understand the primary meaning of participation in the context of this prayer and the Church's own understanding. In order to understand it, we do well to recall the Catechism's point about where the reality of the mystery is focused: "In the earthly liturgy, we share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as

HELLINGER, page 13

The Grandparent Shortage



AMID THE FRAY

GREG ERLANDSON

There's been a lot written about falling birth rates in the United States. Less covered has been the simultaneous decline in grandparenthood.

Grandparents, to hear friends tell it, are an endangered species. Virtually every child-bearing demographic group except women over 40 is having fewer, if any, children. And let's be honest: Potential grandparents with children over 40 are likely to be rapidly aging out of the "fun grandparent" demographic and into the "granny flat" demographic.

Our birth rate, according to the latest government statistics, is now 1.6 – below replacement level and sinking to where countries like Italy used to be. Italy's birth rate has now fallen further to 1.18, which makes nonno and nonna even more endangered than grandpa and grandma.

Wannabe grandparents are addressing this issue in a variety of ways. Frequently asking their children when they are planning to reproduce is probably one of

the least effective stratagems. Putting a brave face on the child's decision to "parent" a couple of labradoodles doesn't get you anywhere either, even if you slap a bumper sticker on your car boasting that "my grandchild has four paws."

Politicians want to throw money at the issue, of course. After all, prospective grandparents vote. Governments for the past hundred years have tried to bribe would-be parents into having children. It doesn't really work – whether in China or France or South Korea – because such a life-changing experience as parenthood is not so easily incentivized by a couple thousand dollars and a tax break. The disincentives are significant: Most cited are cost of living issues such as the expense of daycare and education, but everything from school shootings to the state of the world can be cited as well.

Prospective grandparents understand this, of course. But the desire to "live to see your children's children," as Psalm 128 puts it, is wired deep inside the human heart. We want to see the children we worked so hard to parent in turn bring the next generation into being. It's a sign of hope and resilience that

ERLANDSON, page 13

John the Baptist Calls Each of Us to 'Behold the Lamb of God'



THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MONSIGNOR OWEN F. CAMPION

The Book of Isaiah furnishes this weekend's first reading. Relief and joy uplifted the atmosphere. Hopes centered upon a bright future, all because of the fact that, after the humiliation, uncertainty, and anguish of being conquered by Babylon, and then after generations of exile in Babylon for many, the People of God had returned to their homeland and hopefully to lives of prosperity and security.

Lest anyone think that this fortunate turn of events was the mere outcome of changing politics, or luck, the prophet eloquently insisted that the plight of the people was improving because of God's direct and merciful intervention into human affairs. God brought their relief. God promised to protect and

sustain the people, despite the misfortunes that might befall them, and God was faithful.

In turn, the Hebrews were faithful during their years of trial. They never succumbed to the paganism of Babylon.

For its second reading, the Church selects a passage from St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. Today, the apostle Paul ranks among the greatest Christian figures of all time, and certainly he stands as a most extraordinary figure in the development of Christianity in the crucial time of the first century.

Attaining this distinction was not without personal cost for Paul. He had to contend with converts to Christianity who were not always loyal to the Gospel. The very culture in which they lived not only surrendered without a whimper to human instincts but also elevated these instincts literally to the level of the divine, delighting in lust, gluttony, drunkenness, and so on.

The Christian converts in Corinth, then one of the ma-

jor cities of the Mediterranean world, literally were awash in this culture.

Another burden for Paul was that he had to defend his very credentials to preach the Gospel. He had to insist that Jesus had called him to be an apostle.

The last reading is from St. John's Gospel. The author of the Fourth Gospel was devoted to John the Baptist, possibly coming from a group influenced by him. Among John the Baptist's qualities was his absolute intellectual and religious honesty. He was fearless. He thoroughly believed that God had called him to be a prophet.

So, St. John's Gospel presents John the Baptist in most admiring terms.

In this reading, John the Baptist saw Jesus in the distance and acknowledged Jesus as the Redeemer. The element of sacrifice was vividly present. John identified Jesus as the "Lamb of God."

Finally, treasured Old Testament symbols testified to the identity of Jesus. The dove

descended from the sky, from heaven, to rest upon Jesus. God is in Jesus.

Reflection

At Christmas, the Church excitedly told us that Jesus was born. Son of Mary, Jesus was a human, as are we. The shepherds adored Jesus, representing all humanity.

At the Epiphany, the Magi found Jesus after searching for God. To assist them, God led them and protected them. In Jesus, they found God.

At the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the Church introduced us to Jesus as the Savior of humankind. In Jesus, humans would have access to eternal life.

Now, continuing the process, John the Baptist, so reliable and so insightful in his holiness, proclaimed Jesus as the Lamb of God. In all these settings, the Church carefully puts before us the person of Jesus the Lord and tells us about Jesus.

We are invited to follow Jesus. We are invited to know Jesus. He

is one of us. He spoke to us. He died for us. We only must truly know the Lord.

READINGS

Sunday: Isaiah 49:3, 5-6; Psalms 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; John 1:29-34

Monday: 1 Samuel 15:16-23; Psalms 50:8-9, 16bc-17, 21, 23; Mark 2:18-22

Tuesday: 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalms 89:20, 21-22, 27-28; Mark 2:23-28

Wednesday: 1 Samuel 17:32-33, 37, 40-51; Psalms 144:1b, 2, 9-10; Mark 3:1-6

Thursday: 1 Samuel 18:6-9; 19:1-7; Psalms 56:2-3, 9-10a, 10b-12, 13-14; Mark 3:7-12

Friday: 1 Samuel 24:3-21; Psalms 57:2, 3-4, 6, 11; Mark 3:13-19

Saturday: 2 Samuel 1:1-4, 11-12, 19, 23-27; Psalms 80:2-3, 5-7; Mark 3:20-21

Embryo Adoption: An Open Question?



MAKING SENSE OF BIOETHICS

FATHER TAD PACHOLCZYK, PH.D.

When it comes to the plight of the hundreds of thousands of IVF embryos frozen in the United States and elsewhere, it is often claimed that the Catholic Church has never definitively addressed the liceity, or moral allowability, of “embryo transfer” (also known as embryo rescue or embryo adoption).

I recently had the chance to participate in a public debate on this topic in Indianapolis. I argued that the magisterium of the Catholic Church has, in fact, settled this question. If we scrutinize the two major teaching documents of the Church dealing with this issue, the immorality of the practice of embryo transfer becomes clear.

The 2008 document entitled *Dignitas Personae* states, “The proposal that these embryos could be put at the disposal of infertile couples as a treatment for infertility is not ethically acceptable” (No. 19). It identifies a specific situation – namely, attempting to treat a couple’s infertility by embryo transfer as being always immoral.

The document then goes on to point out that these moral objections extend beyond this single case, so that the same set of concerns will apply in other instances where embryo transfer might be proposed or considered. The document states: “It has also been proposed, solely in order to allow human beings to be born who are otherwise condemned to destruction, that there could be a form of ‘prenatal adoption.’ This proposal, praiseworthy with regard to the intention of respecting and defending human life, presents

however various problems not dissimilar to those mentioned above” (No. 19).

This passage reveals that even when we face the stark prospect of the outright killing of frozen human embryos (“otherwise condemned to destruction”), this does not allow us to bypass or ignore the substantive moral objections inherent in embryo transfer proposals.

The final section of the passage concludes with a forceful and unambiguous assertion: “All things considered, it needs to be recognized that the thousands of abandoned embryos represent a situation of injustice which in fact cannot be resolved” (No. 19).

Despite the tragedy of the countless embryonic humans “frozen in time” (with thousands more each day being added to the stockpiles), *Dignitas Personae* rejects the practice of embryo adoption.

A second, older Church document released in 1987 and entitled *Donum Vitae* references the “absurd fate” to which human embryos have been exposed by freezing them, and then notes that there is “no possibility of their being offered safe means of survival which can be licitly pursued” (No. 5). Hence, it would seem even as far back as the late 1980s, a negative judgment had already been made by the teaching authority of the Church regarding the question of embryo adoption.

In addition to there being no morally permissible means of a path to survival for these embryos, *Donum Vitae* declares the basic human right of every person “to be conceived and to be born within marriage and from marriage.” For embryos to be “born from marriage” points also to the moral significance of the circumstances of our gestation.

Interestingly, *Donum Vitae* repetitively employs the phrase, “IVF

and ET” (in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer). This conjoined phrase appears a remarkable 16 times throughout the document as it seeks to explain the ethical concerns surrounding assisted reproductive technologies.

The deliberate inclusion of “ET” points to the fact that it is not merely the “in vitro” or “extracorporeal conception” aspect that renders the procedure immoral but also that the ET step itself violates sound ethics.

Taken together, these documents point to the fact that transferring a stranger’s embryo into one’s wife violates the inner structure of marital fruitfulness.

Based on these texts, we can also begin to grasp how embryo transfer, even motivated with the best of intentions, nevertheless involves a form of “pirating” the wife’s body for designs that are not proper to its intrinsic order within marriage. *Dignitas Personae* also compares embryo adoption to “any form of surrogate motherhood,” which the Church teaches to be morally unacceptable.

Couples who have done IVF and ended up with frozen children face an excruciatingly difficult situation as they try to figure out what to do with their “leftover” embryonic offspring.

So, it is clearly problematic to assert that embryo adoption remains an “open question” for Catholics. Close scrutiny of key magisterial texts and reflection upon the explanations provided by those documents indicate that the practice of embryo transfer involves fundamentally unethical actions.

Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk, Ph.D. is a priest of the Diocese of Fall River, Massachusetts, and serves as senior ethicist at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia.

HELLINGER, from page 12

pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle. With all the warriors of the heavenly army we sing a hymn of glory to the Lord; venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them; we eagerly await the Savior, Our Lord Jesus Christ, until He, our life, shall appear, and we too will appear with Him in glory.”

To participate in the primary sense is to draw from a greater source – or in our case, to draw from reality itself. Thus, participation has first to do with our

interior sentiments toward the reality we come to in the Mass. To participate worthily first has to do with being in communion with the Church, the Body of Christ – living under the law set forth by the Church and therefore being in visible communion. From there, our participation can have the vital link of the communication of grace in attaching ourselves to the mystery made present before us. Worthy participation, therefore, has less to do with our actions (not only following along but also ministries we might engage in) and more to do with the reality of our hearts. Thus, even a distracted person striving to draw from the

mystery placed before him or her by Christ in a way could “participate” in the sense meant by this prayer more than someone who is, for example, serving in a ministry during a Mass.

This prayer gives us a program of prayer for the time leading up to Lent – to allow the grace and life of God, made present to us perfectly in the Mass, to overtake us, to transform us, and to draw us into deeper communion – with the Church and, through that communion, with God Himself.

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

SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for January 18, 2026
1 Corinthians 1: 1-3 / John 1: 29-34

Following is a word search based on the Second and Gospel Readings for the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

PAUL	APOSTLE	CHRIST
JESUS	SOSTHENES	CHURCH
CORINTH	GRACE	PEACE
LORD	LAMB OF GOD	TAKES AWAY
RANKS	WATER	ISRAEL
SPIRIT	LIKE A DOVE	BAPTIZE
HAVE SEEN	TESTIFIED	SON OF GOD

PAUL AND JOHN SPEAK

C H D O G F O N O S W L
H A S H T N I R O C K T
O V P R A N K S E Y T E
D E A O J O T Z A Y I S
O S U S S H I W A Y R T
G E L R E T A W G F I I
F E R N P S L O R D P F
O N E A E I L E A R S I
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A T R O H C R U H C E D
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ERLANDSON, from page 12

surpasses the headlines and the crises and the never-ending worries we have for our planet and our species.

I am fortunate that I have one child who is now a parent. Non-grandparent friends listen to my stories with a touch of envy. We aren’t sure when our kids will be having kids, they say wistfully.

I’m honest with them about the work of grandparenting. There are good reasons why childrearing should be left to the young. Childcare is exhausting! It takes us two or three days to recover from a weekend of book-reading and diaper changing and meal negotiating.

At the same time, grandparenting is a little bit of a time-travel experience, for we are reminded of what is generally a blur – what we did and how hard we worked when we were younger parents.

Recently, in the middle of the night, a crying 1-year-old woke up both my son and me. I

stayed in the dark room as my son rocked the baby and fed him a bottle. It evoked so many nights when I did that for him. I felt a great surge of parental affection for my son. The love I had shown him long before he could remember, he was now passing on to his son as he gently rocked him back to sleep. It’s a circle of life I’m blessed to be a part of.

Parenting isn’t easy, but it’s the most rewarding work there is. There’s probably never a perfect time to decide to have children, but in general, we rise to the occasion and become better people for it.

As for the perfect time to be a grandparent, I think that is now. For would-be grandparents still waiting for the privilege, perhaps offer a prayer to St. Anne and St. Joachim, who tradition teaches us were the grandparents of Jesus. I’ll bet they could tell stories.

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

UNITY, from page 1

Confession of Peter, the Protestant variant of the ancient feast of the Chair of St. Peter) through January 25 (the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul).

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity dates back more than 100 years. First celebrated in 1908 as the Octave of Christian Unity, the week was established by Servant of God Father Paul Wattson, an episcopal priest who founded the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement before his conversion to Catholicism in 1909. Upon Father Paul's conversion, Pope Pius X gave his blessing to the Octave of Christian Unity. His successor, Pope Benedict XV, encouraged its observance throughout the universal Church in 1916.

Decades later, the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, promulgated in 1964, ushered in a new era of the ecumenical movement, as the document stated clearly that "the restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only" (No. 1).

With this renewed commitment to ecumenism, beginning in 1968 the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity have collaborated annually in selecting scriptural themes and providing other resources to promote this worldwide observance. The theme for this year's



Photos by Scott Warden

Bishop Rhoades and Pastor Chris Norman speak during Love Fort Wayne's prayer breakfast on Wednesday, January 7.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is taken from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling" (4:4).

Ecumenical Prayer Service

At the prayer breakfast in Fort Wayne, Bishop Rhoades noted that it has been "a number of years" since the diocese has marked the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity with an observance in Fort Wayne, and when there have been events, they've "been celebrated separately," he said. However, he stressed, "it should be celebrated together – as brothers and sisters in Christ."

To mark the opening of the Week of Prayer for Christian

Unity, Bishop Rhoades will join Pastor Norman of Grace Gathering Church, Pastor Anthony Opliger of Northeast Christian Church, and Father Emmanuel Abuh of St. Jude Catholic Church to lead an ecumenical prayer service at 5 p.m. Sunday, January 18, at St. Jude in Fort Wayne.

Pastor Norman, who has served the Grace Gathering community for more than 30 years, told the audience at the Love Fort Wayne prayer breakfast that, among Protestants, "I don't think it's as well known how committed the Catholic Church is to Christian unity. And I think this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity that focuses on praying for Christian unity is just so meaningful."

Pastor Norman shared a story with the crowd, telling them that while he was on sabbatical a couple of summers ago traveling to learn about different worldwide prayer movements, he met a Catholic in Paris who contributed to the resources of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Pastor Norman said it made a big impact on him "being able to see that there is a desire for us to come together and to pray together under the banner of Jesus, that it actu-

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity January 18-25

"There is one body, and one spirit, just as you are called to the one hope of your calling."

– Ephesians 4:4

The theme for the 2026 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was approved by the Catholic Church's Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. The chosen passage for reflection is Ephesians 4:4, where the apostle Paul reminds the early Christians in Ephesus of the unifying power of the Holy Spirit: "There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called." This verse calls believers to remember that, despite differences, all are part of the one Body of Christ and share a common hope through the Spirit.

For more information and resources for the 2026 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, including daily reflections and prayers, visit geii.org/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity.

ally is possible to pray together and be united, even though we do have differences theologically," he said. "I just think it's really, really important. I'm just so grateful that the Catholic Church really desires to pray for that unity."

'No Holiness Without Humility'

At the prayer breakfast, both Bishop Rhoades and Pastor Norman noted that while there are serious theological differences among Catholics and Protestants that cannot be ignored, it is important to remember what unites us – namely, that we profess Jesus as Lord and acknowledge that the foundation of His church is based upon holy Scripture, giving most Christians a shared moral code derived from the teachings of Christ.

To advance this unity, Bishop Rhoades said, "I think we have to be focused on what God has revealed to us through His son, Jesus Christ, through His holy word in the Scriptures, and I think that keeps us very well grounded."

One of the keys of fostering unity among Christians, Bishop Rhoades said, is humility.

"There's no holiness without humility," Bishop Rhoades

stressed. "In the ecumenical sphere, humility is essential, and that means that even though we have our own particular beliefs ... what is so important ... is that we respect one another and that we listen to one another. ... Rather than kind of presuming that a particular church or community teaches something or believes something, really listen to how the other understands that particular doctrine or that particular teaching. When we do that, I think a lot of times we find out we're really not as far apart as we thought."

Ultimately, Bishop Rhoades told those gathered for the prayer breakfast, unity "is something that's at the core of our Christian identity. It's not simply an ideal. It is of the essence of the Church's calling, the Church's vocation, a call to reflect the harmonious oneness of our life in Christ amidst our diversity. And Love Fort Wayne is an example of truly living and celebrating, praying together. This is an expression of our unity in Christ."

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

Prayer for Christian Unity

God of all, we pray as one, that we may be one, just as the Lord Jesus prayed we may be one in Him. Your son Jesus compels us to be reconciled to one another. May our spirits be joined to your Holy Spirit, that we may witness to the visible unity of your Church. May we all recognize that we are truly one with you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and grow together in peace. We ask this in the name of Jesus Our Lord. Amen.

– Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute



Attendees sing praises to God during the Love Fort Wayne prayer breakfast at the Parkview Mirro Center in Fort Wayne on Wednesday, January 7. The theme of the event was Christian unity.



Natali Perkins and Craig Eakright lead praise and worship music at the Love Fort Wayne prayer breakfast.

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Registration deadline: Wed., Feb. 25



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Holy Cross Sister M. Kenneth Regan Dies at 99

BY TODAY'S CATHOLIC



Mary Kathleen Regan was born during Holy Week on March 30, 1926, in Chicago. Her family moved to Austin, Texas, within a few years of her birth, where all three of her younger sisters – Patricia, Donna

Ann, and Brigid – were born.

In Austin, Mary was taught by Holy Cross sisters at Saint Mary's Academy from the first through 10th grade, and then at Saint Mary's Academy in South Bend until her graduation. After graduating high school in 1943, she worked as a clerk for the local post office in Austin until her entrance into the Congregation. Her "indescribable love" for Holy Cross, fostered by her Holy Cross teachers, guided her in discerning her vocation. On July 30, 1945, Mary entered the Sisters of the Holy Cross at Notre Dame. Upon reception of the holy habit, she received her religious name – Sister Mary Kenneth.

For 67 years, Sister Kenneth was missioned to parochial elementary schools in Washington, D.C., New York, Virginia, and Texas. She taught a variety of subjects to kindergarten through eighth grade, including religion, math,

reading, and spelling. She also served as a principal for three elementary schools in Texas. In 1963, Sister Kenneth graduated from Incarnate Word College in San Antonio, Texas, with a bachelor's degree in elementary education. She also earned two master's degrees – one in elementary education from Incarnate Word College in 1971 and another in theology from Saint Mary's University in San Antonio in 1989.

Sister Kenneth firmly believed that she belonged in the classroom. Her positive attitude toward life and passion for Catholic school education made her a beloved teacher. She felt that teachers had an obligation to accommodate diversity and "break down prejudice," so she often found herself "going to bat" for students who needed encouragement and support.

In 2015, Sister Kenneth concluded her lifelong education ministry and retired to the motherhouse at Saint Mary's at Notre Dame. Sister Kenneth was grateful for all the love, joy, and support she felt from living in her religious community for more than 80 years, dying at Saint Mary's Convent at 99 years old in the last hours before sunset on Christmas Eve.

Sister Kenneth was commended to the holy ground of Our Lady of Peace Cemetery in the company of the Holy Cross sisters she loved so much following a Mass of the Resurrection.

REST IN PEACE

Fort Wayne

Ann Baker, 71,
St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Theresa A. (Vastano) Huntine,
89, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Nicole Lang, 41;
St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Bob Smeltzley, 74,
St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Mishawaka

John C. Matthews, 62, St. Bavo

South Bend

Rudolph R. Miller Jr., 77,
Christ the King

Dennis "Mike" M. Finley, 79,
St. Jude

Walkerton

Janet Virginia Futa, 90,
St. Patrick

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*"The Lord awaits us, and
when we finally meet Him
at the end of our earthly
journey, we shall rejoice with
Him and with our loved ones
who have gone before us."*

— POPE LEO XIV



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