



The

Criterion

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Catholic Schools Week



See our annual supplement celebrating the faith, excellence and service of our Catholic schools, pages 1B-20B.

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As this interaction shows, Anna Lubbers tries to add a touch of joy to the lives of the children she cares for as a registered nurse at Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis. (Photo courtesy of Mike Dickbernd)

Young adults share the impact of a program that changed them 'for the better'

By John Shaughnessy

At 27, Anna Lubbers looks back on her high school days and marvels at how far she has come as a person.

She feels blessed by the strong friendships she has in her life, including a friendship with God.

She takes joy in knowing she has found a calling in a nursing career that allows her to care for and make a difference in the lives of children who are struggling to live.

And she has learned the gift of being vulnerable—of opening her heart to other people.

She also shares that one of the key experiences that has led

to all these developments in her life happened in high school when she participated in the Student Leadership Program (SLP) at Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House in Indianapolis with other teenagers from Catholic high schools across the archdiocese.

As the faith-focused, three-day program celebrated its 20th year during this school year, Lubbers and other SLP alumni were asked to reflect on how it has had an impact on their lives.

"SLP changed me for the better as a 16-year-old," says Lubbers, a 2016 graduate of Bishop Chatard High School

See **YOUNG ADULTS**, page 2A

Legislation would offer state employees access to lower-interest loans

By Victoria Arthur

The Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) is among a wide range of advocates backing a bill that would offer state employees an alternative to relying on



high-interest payday loans in times of financial hardship.

Senate Bill 122 would allow employees of the state of Indiana to borrow up to \$1,000 through nonprofit loan programs already in place statewide and then repay them through payroll deductions. The lawmaker behind the bill says this lower-cost loan option could serve as an important new benefit for state employees, particularly those struggling financially or facing unexpected expenses.

"There are people in this state who face financial emergencies—perhaps because of their health or a car breakdown—and they need money," said Sen. Spencer Deery (R-West Lafayette), the primary author of Senate Bill 122. "The state can be a leader in saying that offering these nonprofit loans is an excellent benefit we can offer employees."

Under the proposed legislation, the state would gradually phase in this new benefit to its 32,000 employees by expanding nonprofit loan programs already in place through Community Loan Centers (CLCs) and credit unions and then offering them to employees of state agencies. The small loans would carry an 18% interest rate—dramatically lower than the more than 300% interest that many payday loan centers and other predatory lending institutions charge.

"These Community Loan Centers also offer opportunities for financial counseling and help people to build credit," Deery said. "So it's not just helping people in a particular moment, but

See **ICC**, page 11A

Wisdom and hope are focus of Inauguration Day prayers for President Trump

(OSV News)—As Catholics prayed across the country for President Donald J. Trump as he was sworn in as the nation's 47th president on Jan. 20, Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York was in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda in Washington offering an opening prayer during the inauguration ceremony minutes before Trump took the oath of office.

"Be still and know that I am God," Cardinal Dolan

See **PRESIDENT**, page 7A

New York Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan delivers the invocation during U.S. President Donald Trump's swearing-in as the 47th U.S. president in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda in Washington on Jan. 20. (OSV News photo/Saul Loeb, pool via Reuters)





In her role as a physical therapist at St. Louis Children's Hospital, Molly (Mitchell) Sokolis helps a child regain strength and movement.

(Submitted photo)

YOUNG ADULTS

continued from page 1A

in Indianapolis. "I created some of my lifelong best friends from the program. It was the first time that I truly started to believe that I have qualities to offer to those around me. We did many activities that encouraged us to dig deep and realize what attributes we have that make us a better part of this world.

"SLP also taught me how to use those to be a servant leader to others, the biggest of these being vulnerability. It was incredible to see a room of 50-plus strangers become close friends in three days, and the root of this was peeling back our outer shells and opening our hearts to each other and God."

The program also changed the focus of her relationship with God.

"I remember SLP giving me the wake-up call that God is not supposed to make everything 'right,' but rather when things go wrong, God will be your rock and keep you grounded. Because of this retreat, I started viewing God as a friend—someone I can rely on, speak openly to, and feel unconditionally loved by. I still live by this each day."

The program also influences the care she gives as a registered nurse at Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis.

"As a nurse, servant leadership is more prevalent than ever," Lubbers notes. "SLP taught me to use my strengths to connect with others, and this is what I do every day. I learned to be patient, to listen with

true intent, and understand that everyone has a story. I do this every day with my sweet patients, and it helps me to be the best caretaker I can for them each day."

Embracing the opportunity to change someone's life for the better

Grant Spicer remembers his sophomore year in high school as a time "where you are constantly comparing yourself to other people and trying to fit in."

Now 26, Spicer recalls his involvement in the SLP that year as an experience that "made me feel as though what I said, what I thought and what I felt, mattered."

"SLP is the first time in my life I felt as though I really had value and could contribute to something bigger than myself," says Spicer, now an attorney living in San Francisco. "Even though I attended Cathedral High School, I was not Catholic, and I was wary of religion because I knew so little about it. SLP showed me the human aspect of what it means to have faith, beyond the book and the teachings.

"While the program was instrumental in discovering my own faith, as a leadership program, the unique feature I loved most about SLP was learning how I can help others find or rediscover the faith in their own lives. Even though SLP was only a few days, and most of the people attending were strangers to each other, SLP ensured we all left as a member of a tight-knit community, and as an important piece in the newfound support system of many."

It all led to what Spicer considers "the

biggest lesson" he gained from his SLP experience—that "each and every day presents us the opportunity to change someone's life for the better."

"Everything we say, and everything we do, can have an ineffable effect on how another person views themselves, the world and those around them," he says. "We were all put on this Earth for a purpose, and the fact of the matter is much of life is stumbling through figuring out what that purpose might be.

"SLP showed me that journey does not have to be trekked alone. Your faith does not always have to come from within. You can find it in someone new every single day; and you never know who may find their faith through you."

The hardships we face are easier with someone by our side

As a physical therapist working in St. Louis Children's Hospital, Molly (Mitchell) Sokolis strives to help children who have faced hardships regain their strength and movement to enjoy their childhood on a deeper level.

Her experience in the SLP showed her the different challenges that her fellow teenagers at the time faced in their lives.

"It's easy to go through life wondering if you're the only one who doesn't have it all figured out yet," says Sokolis, who is 26 and a 2016 graduate of a Cathedral

High School. "SLP helped me realize at a young age that everyone has battles they're fighting and it's much easier to face them with someone by your side."

She believes that emphasis connects the students from different Catholic high schools.

"SLP broke down the unattainable ideals of perfection that every high schooler seems to strive for and built something stronger out of the pieces," says Sokolis, a member of St. Margaret of Scotland Parish in St. Louis. "Every high schooler wants to feel like a part of something, and SLP provided a safe and healthy environment for us to create a group that was exciting and meaningful."

Sokolis especially appreciates how the program also challenged the students to embrace their leadership potential.

"I was introduced to the value of my role as a leader and went on to pursue leadership roles in high school and beyond," she says. "My confidence in myself and my abilities grew because of the nourishment I received from this group and its members, which pushed me to set bigger goals and be OK with some failure along the way.

"SLP has helped me become a more caring daughter, a more patient wife and a more empathetic therapist. I'm so grateful for the memories, values and life lessons I gained from my time in SLP." †



Public Schedule of Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

January 26–February 2, 2025

January 26 – 5:30 p.m.
Mass and dinner at St. Paul Catholic Center, Bloomington

January 28 – 9 a.m.
School Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas School, Indianapolis

January 28 – 1 p.m.
Council of Priests meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara Catholic Center, Indianapolis

January 29 – 10:30 a.m.
Mass for Catholic Schools Week at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, Indianapolis

January 30 – 10 a.m.
Leadership Team meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara Catholic Center

February 1 – 5 p.m.
Confirmation Mass for youths of St. Monica Parish, Indianapolis, at St. Monica Church

February 2 – 2 p.m.
Annual Scout Award Ceremony at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral

What do we owe each other?

When he became the 18th president of the University of Notre Dame last year, Indiana native Holy Cross Father Robert Dowd chose a theme for the university's community to consider.

It's a theme connected to the ways that people are divided in this country, a theme based upon this question, "What do we owe each other?"

The Criterion is inviting our readers—our community—to share their answers to that question, as a way of starting the new year together. Your responses could range from a one-word answer to a personal story reflecting what you think we owe each other.

Please send your responses and stories to John Shaughnessy by e-mail at jshaughnessy@archindy.org or by mail in care of *The Criterion*, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46202. Please include your parish and a daytime phone number where you can be reached. †



'SLP showed me that journey does not have to be trekked alone. Your faith does not always have to come from within. You can find it in someone new every single day; and you never know who may find their faith through you.'

—Cathedral High School graduate Grant Spicer



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As ceasefire starts, first Israeli hostages, Palestinian prisoners return home

JERUSALEM (OSV News)—Starting at 4 p.m. on Jan. 19, crowds of Israelis arrived at what has become known as Hostages Square in the center of Tel Aviv to support the hostage families and watch the release screened on the giant screen in the square.

They hugged, cried and cheered as they watched the women being transferred from Hamas to Red Cross representatives.

In the West Bank, scenes of joy were delayed but the streets erupted in cheers as the first 90 prisoners, mostly women and teens, freed from Israeli prisons, were brought home in white Red Cross buses after midnight on Jan. 20. In the Gaza Strip, first caravans of those displaced by the 15-month war attempted return to their homes—of which scores are flattened—and the first 600 trucks of aid entered the strip.

The first Israelis to be released from Hamas captivity were Emily Damari, 28, and Doron Steinbrecher, 31, both of whom were taken from their homes in Kibbutz Kfar Gaza along the Gaza border in the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attack, and Romi Gonen, 24, who was among the 40 people kidnapped from the Nova dance festival that same day. Some 250 people were taken hostage in total on Oct. 7, and 1,200 were killed, according to Israel.

Almost 47,000 Palestinians have been killed in the ensuing war, according to the Hamas Ministry of Health in Gaza, which does not distinguish between civilian and combatant deaths.

Videos released by Israel showed the family of the released hostages breaking out in tears of joy as they privately watched the live broadcast of the release. In one recording, Gonen's brother asked his grandmother if she could believe her granddaughter's release was actually happening. The grandmother responded that the belief that Gonen would come home alive was the one thing that had kept her alive.

One TV report showed Damari's friends celebrating ecstatically and singing in her home as they waved flags, with one friend shouting "Emily, come home! We have waited for you, my life!"

Palestinian videos showed a stream of Gazan civilians returning through rubble to their homes in northern Gaza and armed Hamas militants celebrating perched in white pick-up trucks driving through throngs of cheering Palestinians also amid rubble.

The Israeli women appeared gaunt but were able to walk on their own. Videos showed the women being transferred from Hamas hands to the Red Cross representatives surrounded by armed Hamas gunmen and amid a shouting

thrang of Gaza civilians.

The Red Cross representatives then drove them to the border of Israel where they were met by elite units of the Israel Defense Forces who took them to the initial reception point inside Israel where they met with their mothers and underwent initial medical evaluation. They were then transferred by helicopter to a hospital where other family members awaited them.

In one released photo, Damari is shown smiling and speaking with her family on a mobile phone as she holds up her bandaged left hand with her two middle fingers apparently missing.

"After 471 days, Emily is finally home. I want to thank everyone who never stopped fighting for Emily throughout this horrendous ordeal, and who never stopped saying her name. In Israel, Britain, the United States, and around the world. Thank you for bringing Emily home," said Mandy Damari, mother of British-Israeli Emily Damari in a statement.

She continued, "Emily's nightmare in Gaza is over," but "for too many other families the impossible wait continues. Every last hostage must be released."

Pope Francis expressed his gratitude for the announced ceasefire in Gaza in his Jan. 19 *Angelus* prayer, and thanked the mediators for their efforts toward peace and in assisting to arrange the long-awaited ceasefire in Gaza after 15 months of war. The agreement will allow for the slow release of the first group of 33 Israeli hostages over the next six weeks, flow of international aid into Gaza and the release of 90 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

"I also thank all the parties involved in this important result. I hope that what has been agreed will be respected immediately by the parties, and that all the hostages may finally return home and embrace their loved ones. I pray a lot for them and for their families. I also hope that humanitarian aid will reach the people of Gaza, who so urgently need it, even faster and in large quantities," he said.

The agreement calls for all the hostages, both alive and dead, to be released in three phases, in exchange for 1,900 Palestinian prisoners. Hamas is still holding 94 captives, with reports varying on how many of them are still alive, which Hamas did not confirm to Israel.

According to the Israelis, Hamas is to give the names of the hostages to be released in the following weeks. Among those to be released in the first stage are Americans Keith Siegel and Sagui Dekel-Chen, as well as the Bibas family including their now-2-year-old and 5-year-old-sons. Some 1,167 of

the Palestinians to be released are from Gaza and were detained after Oct. 7, 2023, under emergency laws permitting arrest without charge or trial.

President Joe Biden spoke on Jan. 19 in Charleston, S.C., saying, "Today the guns in Gaza have gone silent," adding that "this is one of the toughest negotiations I've been part of."

Meanwhile, during a Jan. 19 rally in Washington ahead of his Jan. 20 inauguration, President-elect Donald J. Trump took credit for the Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal and said that in what was a "beautiful" event, "we achieved an epic ceasefire agreement as a first step toward lasting peace in the Middle East. And this agreement could only have happened as a result of our historic victory in November," Trump said.

In the first phase of the three-phased agreement, fighting will pause for the first 42 days, with Israeli forces withdrawing to a buffer zone from "all" populated areas of Gaza, displaced Palestinians returning home, and aid deliveries increasing.

In the second stage, the remaining hostages, including men and foreign nationals from Thailand and Tanzania, will be freed, more Palestinian prisoners released, and Israel will fully withdraw from Gaza. The Rafah crossing will open for the sick and wounded, though its control is unclear. The third phase, possibly lasting years, will address the exchange of bodies of the remaining hostages who are



Released Israeli hostage Doron Steinbrecher embraces loved ones at Sheba Medical Center in Ramat Gan, Israel, on Jan. 19 after being held in Gaza since the deadly on Oct. 7, 2023, attack by Hamas, in this handout image obtained by Reuters. (OSV News photo/Maayan Toaf/GPO/ Handout via Reuters)

dead and Gaza's reconstruction.

U.N. Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher highlighted the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza following the ceasefire on Jan. 19.

"As the ceasefire entered into force today, humanitarian aid moved into Gaza as part of a prepared surge to increase our support to survivors. More than 630 trucks with humanitarian aid entered Gaza today, with at least 300 of them going to the north," he said.

As joy intertwined with trepidation, both in Israel and in the Palestinian territories, Pope Francis said that both Israelis and Palestinians need "clear signs of hope," as he trusted that their political leaders with the help of the international community would yet be able to reach "the right solution" for the two states.

"May everyone be able to say yes to dialogue, yes to reconciliation, yes to peace. And let us pray for this for dialogue, reconciliation and peace," he said. †

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The importance of generational giving conversations

As a faithful Catholic, you understand the importance of giving back to God and the Church. Have you instilled this habit in your children? The future of the Church relies on generations being generous with their God-given blessings.

What should you discuss?

- We encourage parents to regularly discuss their giving with their adult children. Be sure to express to them your wishes regarding your estate and potential charitable bequests so that they understand and can carry through your intentions. Discuss with your adult children your desire that they follow in your footsteps in continuing the family tradition of charitable giving.
- Even from a young age, instilling a sense of philanthropy can help your children grow in the habit of giving back. Discuss with children that everything we have is a gift from God and He calls us to not only give back, but to benefit others.
- Did you know that a Donor Advised Fund with the Catholic Community Foundation is a great tool to facilitate generational giving?

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Editorial



Pope Francis prays during Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on Jan. 1, the feast of Mary, Mother of God, and World Peace Day. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

We are called to be stewards of peace

In his 2025 World Day of Peace message, Pope Francis reissued his urgent cry for peace. All popes in the past two centuries have called for world peace, and they have identified forgiveness and reconciliation as essential requirements for peace among diverse nations and peoples.

As Pope Francis says:

"God does not weigh up the evils we commit; rather, he is immensely 'rich in mercy, for the great love with which he loved us' [Eph 2:4]. Yet he also hears the plea of the poor and the cry of the Earth. We would do well simply to stop for a moment, at the beginning of this year, to think of the mercy with which he constantly forgives our sins and forgives our every debt, so that our hearts may overflow with hope and peace."

Without forgiveness, there can be no peace. Ancient hatreds must be set aside and peoples who have long been at war with each other must be reconciled.

The *Pax Christi* (Peace of Christ) is God's gift to the world. Announced by the angels to poor shepherds, this peace is very different from the *Pax Romana*, a purely political phenomenon. The temporary worldwide peace achieved by the Romans was a welcome change from the experience of constant warfare and oppression, but it didn't last. The forces of social decline caused by greed, ambition and deeply ingrained social inequality made lasting peace impossible.

The peace that Christ brings into our broken world begins with mercy and calls for a recognition of unity in diversity. As the pope says:

"In teaching us to pray the Our Father, Jesus begins by asking the Father to forgive our trespasses but passes immediately to the challenging words: 'as we forgive those who trespass against us' [Mt 6:12]. In order to forgive others their trespasses and to offer them hope, we need for our own lives to be filled with that same hope, the fruit of our experience of God's mercy. Hope overflows in generosity; it is free of calculation, makes no hidden demands, is unconcerned with gain, but aims at one thing alone: to raise up those who have fallen, to heal hearts that are broken and to set us free from every kind of bondage."

Clearly there is no room for unbridled ambition or ruthless greed in the *Pax Christi*.

On the contrary, true peace is built by women and men who truly respect one another and the Earth that is their common home. From their own experience of God's everlasting love and mercy, true peacemakers seek to be good and generous stewards of the priceless gift of peace.

From the depth of their hearts, people who work for peace cry out with our Holy Father:

"May 2025 be a year in which peace flourishes! A true and lasting peace that goes beyond quibbling over the details of agreements and human compromises. May we seek the true peace that is granted by God to hearts disarmed: hearts not set on calculating what is mine and what is yours; hearts that turn selfishness into readiness to reach out to others; hearts that see themselves as indebted to God and thus prepared to forgive the debts that oppress others; hearts that replace anxiety about the future with the hope that every individual can be a resource for the building of a better world."

Peacemaking is the work of everyone who wants to live in a world that is free from radical poverty, homelessness, exploitation of people and natural resources, slavery, addiction, racism and the horrors of war.

Anyone who wants to live free in harmony with their neighbors and the world at large must resist the temptation to be indifferent to the evils around them. We must all work for peace—proactively—or risk being overwhelmed by the forces of hatred, disharmony and open warfare.

The pope concluded his World Day of Peace Message with this prayer:

"Lord, grant us your peace!
"Forgive us our trespasses, Lord, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
"In this cycle of forgiveness, grant us your peace,
"the peace that you alone can give
"to those who let themselves be disarmed in heart,
"to those who choose in hope to forgive the debts of their brothers and sisters,
"to those who are unafraid to confess their debt to you,
"and to those who do not close their ears to the cry of the poor."

—Daniel Conway

Be Our Guest/Greg Erlandson

In Pacific Palisades, paradise lost

I have trouble talking about the loss without tearing up, as if the smoke and ash from Los Angeles traveled across country to find me.

My in-laws were French immigrants to California, proud Americans, hardworking and simple in their aspirations. Joseph Bischetti knew extreme poverty in France, and he believed the best way to take care of his family was to work hard and buy land.

In the mid-1970s, he and his wife Andrée purchased a modest house with a big yard in Pacific Palisades. He could not have known then how that area and its prices would grow, how celebrities and other wealthy elites would move there for the same reasons he did.

The Palisades felt separate from the rest of Los Angeles. It was backed up against the Santa Monica mountains, and as the population grew, newly erected houses slowly climbed the hillsides, along winding, narrow streets snaking down to Sunset Boulevard.

The neighborhood he moved into was full of little stucco houses, small and cute, modestly remodeled, with lawns and flower beds. People who lived in this neighborhood expected it to be the last move they made. They weren't rich, but they had a slice of heaven and planned to stay. Younger couples became older couples, then widowers or widows.

When they had to sell, the people who replaced them tore down their houses and squeezed "mcmansions" onto their lots. Two or three stories, with private theaters and pools and always a balcony or a rooftop patio pointed toward the Santa Monica Bay. People paid top dollar for the sense that one was far away from freeways and strip malls and congestion.

Joe and Andrée did not have such grandiose plans. The house was their dream, their refuge. It was a single floor, a simple stucco house—three bedrooms, a great room and a kitchen. Andrée, who was a wonderful cook, put up with a recalcitrant stove, but never allowed a microwave to enter.

The windows were open most of the time, and no matter how hot southern California was, the house would catch the breezes blowing from Santa Monica Bay. The wind blew in off the ocean, up the canyon's edge on which the house sat, over the fava beans, tomatoes

and zucchini that Joe had planted, past Andrée's basil plants, and into the house, where it mingled with the smells of couscous and pasta and coq au vin.

Joe was a remodeling contractor who spent much more time working on other people's houses than on his own. Yet when he was 80 years old, he single-handedly put on a new roof. Despite his age and his arthritis, he carried the heavy shingles up a rickety ladder and methodically reroofed it to his standards.

"Greg," he said proudly, "this roof will last 50 years." He wanted my wife and me to live in the house. To pass on his property would have been a dream fulfilled. I would always nod noncommittally, having taken his daughter and his four grandchildren to the other side of the country.

I am thankful that Joe did not live to see what happened on Jan. 7, 2025, for it would have broken his heart for sure.

The breezes vanished, replaced by snarling Santa Ana winds blowing westward from the desert. Somewhere a spark metastasized into a flame, and a flame into an inferno. Like marauders galloping out of the foothills, the flames swept down on the community that liked to call itself a village, as if its boutique shops and restaurants somehow protected it from a harsher world.

Not just Joe's house was reduced to ash, but every house around it for miles. The high school his children attended, the church where I married his eldest daughter, the hardware store where he bought supplies.

Gone in a day were the fruit trees he planted in the front yard, the canyon full of wild anise and chaparral his grandchildren would excitedly explore when they came to visit, the weathered basketball hoop, the basil, the lemon-scented Eucalyptus leaves.

No one was killed at that house that terrible day, although my brother-in-law stayed as long as possible watering that roof meant to last 50 years. Yet I find myself weeping at the loss, weeping at the remorseless erasure of a community, of a man's dream, of a place filled with wonderful human beings who had no idea what would one day befall it.

We have our memories, my wife said. We do indeed. That must suffice, I know. But it does not.

(Greg Erlandson is an award-winning Catholic publisher, editor and journalist whose column appears monthly at OSV News. Follow him on X @GregErlandson.) †



Destroyed homes are seen in Pacific Palisades on the west side of Los Angeles on Jan. 15 in the aftermath of wildfires. As of Jan. 21, the death toll numbered at least 27 people, but with several wildfires raging, officials warn the actual toll will remain unclear until it's safe for investigators to access neighborhoods. Tens of thousands of people have been impacted by evacuation orders since the blazes began on Jan. 7. (OSV News photo/Bob Roller)

ARCHBISHOP/ARZOBISPO CHARLES C. THOMPSON



Christ the Cornerstone

Like St. Paul, let's draw closer to Christ, lead others to him

Tomorrow, Jan. 25, we will celebrate the Conversion of St. Paul. We especially recall the moment when Saul, who was zealously persecuting the young Church, encountered the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus. This face-to-face meeting changed Saul's life and contributed directly to the growth of the Church and the spiritual formation of millions of people, up to and including our present day.

The remarkable evangelizing ministry of this great saint (now called Paul) is something that every baptized Christian is called to imitate in his or her own way.

Most of us cannot travel, write or inspire local communities the way St. Paul did, but we can cultivate our personal relationship with Jesus (especially in the Eucharist), and we can do our part to share with others the Good News of our salvation in Christ. This is what it means to be a missionary disciple: to go forth in joy and hope proclaiming the Gospel to everyone we meet along the way.

The story told in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 9:1-22) is inspiring. "Saul, still breathing murderous threats

against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, that, if he should find any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them back to Jerusalem in chains" (Acts 9:1-2).

It is shocking to think that the man we now consider one of the pivotal figures in Christian history began by committing "hate crimes" against a vulnerable minority in the Roman Empire. His story—and ours—might have turned out very differently had Christ not intervened.

Scripture tells us that the Risen Lord refused to allow his young Church to be thwarted by a murderous zealot:

"On [Saul's] journey, as he was nearing Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' He said, 'Who are you, sir?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do'" (Acts 9:3-6).

Many artistic portrayals of this dramatic event show Saul literally being

"knocked off his high horse." It was certainly a humiliation and a life-altering experience for him. St. Luke says he was struck blind and had to be led by hand the rest of the way.

Once he arrived in Damascus, he was placed under the care of a follower of Jesus named Ananias. The Lord appeared to Ananias in a vision and told him to "lay his hands on [Saul] that he may regain his sight" (Acts 9:12). Ananias wasn't sure about this, saying, "Lord, I have heard from many sources about this man, what evil things he has done to your holy ones in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to imprison all who call upon your name" (Acts 9:13-14). But Jesus had other plans and said to Ananias: "Go, for this man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings and children of Israel, and I will show him what he will have to suffer for my name" (Acts 9:15-16).

Jesus chose St. Paul to be his instrument. This demonstrates how God can take evil and transform it for his purposes. Even great sinners can see the light of Christ and be changed. Of course, Saul could have refused to accept the grace of Christ that

transformed his life. He could have clung to the blind hate that motivated his persecution of Jesus' followers. But Paul set aside his rigid approach to religious faith, and he opened his mind and heart to a new way. As a result, he became the man we reverence and respect as perhaps the greatest missionary disciple who has ever lived.

St. Paul's entire life changed as a result of his personal encounter with Jesus. St. Luke tells us that Ananias obeyed the Lord. He went and laid hands on his former enemy, saying:

"Saul, my brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus who appeared to you on the way by which you came, that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17). Immediately, things like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. He got up and was baptized, and when he had eaten, he recovered his strength.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, St. Paul went out to the whole world. His words and actions now resonate across the millennia reaching every corner of the globe. Let us praise God for the wonders he works through us, his chosen instruments! †



Cristo, la piedra angular

Como san Pablo, acerquémonos más a Cristo y guiemos a otros hacia él

Mañana, 25 de enero, celebraremos la Conversión de San Pablo. Recordamos especialmente el momento en que Saulo, que perseguía celosamente a la joven Iglesia, se encontró con Cristo resucitado en el camino a Damasco. Este encuentro cara a cara le cambió la vida y contribuyó directamente al crecimiento de la Iglesia y a la formación espiritual de millones de personas, hasta nuestros días.

El extraordinario ministerio evangelizador de este gran santo (ahora llamado Pablo) es algo que todo cristiano bautizado está llamado a imitar a su manera.

La mayoría de nosotros no podemos viajar, escribir o inspirar a las comunidades locales como lo hizo san Pablo, pero podemos cultivar nuestra relación personal con Jesús (especialmente en la Eucaristía), y podemos hacer nuestra parte para compartir con los demás la Buena Nueva de nuestra salvación en Cristo. Esto es lo que significa ser discípulo misionero: salir con alegría y esperanza anunciando el Evangelio a todos los que encontremos en el camino.

La historia narrada en los Hechos de los Apóstoles (Hch 9:1-22) es inspiradora. "Saulo, respirando

todavía amenazas y muerte contra los discípulos del Señor, fue al sumo sacerdote, y le pidió cartas para las sinagogas de Damasco, para que si encontraba algunos que pertenecieran al Camino, tanto hombres como mujeres, los pudiera llevar atados a Jerusalén" (Hch 9:1-2).

Resulta chocante pensar que el hombre que hoy consideramos una de las figuras fundamentales de la historia cristiana comenzara cometiendo "crímenes de odio" contra una minoría vulnerable del Imperio Romano. Su historia—y la nuestra—podría haber sido muy distinta si Cristo no hubiera intervenido.

Las Escrituras nos dicen que el Señor Resucitado se negó a permitir que su joven Iglesia se viera frustrada por un fanático asesino:

"Y mientras viajaba, al acercarse a Damasco, de repente resplandeció a su alrededor una luz del cielo. Al caer a tierra, oyó una voz que le decía: 'Saulo, Saulo, ¿por qué me persigues?' '¿Quién eres, Señor?' preguntó Saulo. El Señor respondió: 'Yo soy Jesús a quien tú persigues; levántate, entra en la ciudad, y se te dirá lo que debes hacer'" (Hch 9:3-6).

Muchas representaciones artísticas de este dramático acontecimiento

muestran a Saúl literalmente "derribado de lo alto de su caballo." Sin duda fue una humillación y una experiencia que le cambió la vida. San Lucas dice que quedó ciego y que lo tuvieron que llevar de la mano el resto del camino.

Cuando llegó a Damasco, se puso al cuidado de un seguidor de Jesús llamado Ananías. El Señor se le apareció a Ananías en una visión y le dijo que le pusiera "las manos sobre él [Saulo] para que recobre la vista" (Hch 9:12). Ananías no estaba seguro de esto, y dijo: "Señor, he oído de muchos acerca de este hombre, cuánto mal ha hecho a Tus santos en Jerusalén, y aquí tiene autoridad de los principales sacerdotes para prender a todos los que invocan Tu nombre" (Hch 9:13-14). Pero Jesús tenía otros planes y le dijo a Ananías: "Ve, porque él es Mi instrumento escogido, para llevar Mi nombre en presencia de los gentiles, de los reyes y de los israelitas; porque Yo le mostraré cuánto debe padecer por Mi nombre" (Hch 9:15-16).

Jesús eligió a san Pablo para que fuera su instrumento, lo que demuestra cómo Dios puede tomar el mal y transformarlo para sus propósitos. Incluso los grandes pecadores pueden ver la luz de Cristo y ser transformados. Por supuesto, Saulo podría haberse

negado a aceptar la gracia de Cristo que transformó su vida; podría haberse aferrado al odio ciego que motivó su persecución de los seguidores de Jesús. Pero Pablo dejó a un lado su rígido enfoque de la fe religiosa y abrió su mente y su corazón a un nuevo camino. Como resultado, se convirtió en el hombre que veneramos y respetamos como quizá el mayor discípulo misionero que jamás haya existido.

La vida de san Pablo dio un vuelco a raíz de su encuentro personal con Jesús. San Lucas nos dice que Ananías obedeció al Señor. Fue y puso las manos sobre su antiguo enemigo, diciendo:

"Hermano Saulo, el Señor Jesús, que se te apareció en el camino por donde venías, me ha enviado para que recobres la vista y seas lleno del Espíritu Santo" (Hch 9:17). Inmediatamente cayeron de sus ojos algo como escamas y recuperó la vista; se levantó y fue bautizado, y cuando hubo comido, recobró las fuerzas.

Lleno del Espíritu Santo, san Pablo se dirigió al mundo entero. Sus palabras y acciones resuenan ahora a través de los milenios llegando a todos los rincones del planeta. Alabemos a Dios por las maravillas que obra a través de nosotros, sus instrumentos elegidos. †

Events Calendar

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

January 29

Lumen Christi School, 580 Stevens St., Indianapolis. **School Open House**, 12:30-2:30 p.m., free. Information: 317-632-3174, erosko@lumenchristicatholicschool.org.

February 1

St. Susanna Parish, 1210 E. Main St., Plainfield. **Gabriel Project Training**, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., for those interested in working directly with women experiencing a crisis pregnancy, lunch included, free, RSVP required. Information, registration: linda@goangels.org.

February 1, March 1

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

St. Matthew the Apostle Church, 4100 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. **Children's Rosary**, 9 a.m., children of all ages invited to pray the rosary every first Saturday, donuts and

fellowship to follow, free. Information: julie3reyes@gmail.com.

February 5, March 5

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

February 7, March 7

Virtual Prayer with the Sisters of Providence, 7-7:45 p.m., for single women ages 18-42, prayer and sharing on topic of fear. Information, registration: events.sistersofprovidence.org, 361-500-9505, jluna@spsmw.org.

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

Our Lady of the Greenwood Church, 335 S. Meridian St., Greenwood. **First Friday bilingual celebration of**

the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mass 6 p.m. followed by adoration until 9 p.m., sacrament of reconciliation available. Information: 317-750-7309, msross1@hotmail.com.

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

February 8

Our Lady of the Greenwood, Parish Life Center, 399 S. Meridian St., Greenwood. **Celebrate Romance**, 6:30-11:30 p.m., dinner, dancing, door prizes, optional dance lessons 6 p.m., \$85 per couple, \$320 table of four couples. Information, registration: celebratemarriageministry.com.

February 9, March 9

Marian University, Norman Center Room 222, 3200 Cold Spring Road, Indianapolis. **People of Peace OFS Monthly Meeting**, 12:30-3 p.m., explore Franciscan spirituality with lay Franciscans, free. Information: 317-762-6259, popofsindy@gmail.com.

February 14-16

Louisville, Ky. **Retrouvaille Retreat**, for those in a struggling marriage, location disclosed upon registering. Information, registration: 502-479-3329, 3012@helpourmarriage.org, helpourmarriage.org.

February 16

Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, 1530 Union St., Indianapolis. **Indianapolis Symphony Sphinx Series Concert "Strings and Soul,"** 2-4 p.m., featuring string quartet of Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra musicians, tour of Sacred Heart Church available after concert, free. Information: 317-902-3006, judithessex@icloud.com.

February 19, March 19

Calvary Mausoleum Chapel, 435 W. Troy Ave., Indianapolis. **Mass**, 2 p.m. Information: 317-784-4439, catholiccemeteries.cc.

February 20, March 20

Our Lady of Peace Cemetery and Mausoleum,

9001 Haverstick Road, Indianapolis. **Mass**, 2 p.m. Information: 317-574-8898, catholiccemeteries.cc.

February 21

Northside Events and Social Club, 2100 E. 71st St., Indianapolis. **Catholic Business Exchange**, presenter TBA, rosary 6:35 a.m., Mass 7 a.m., buffet breakfast and program following, \$18 members, \$24 non-members. Register by 4 p.m. on Feb. 18. Information, registration: cutt.ly/CBE-Reg.

February 22

East Central H.S. Performing Arts Center, 1 Trojan Place, St. Leon. **E6 Catholic Men's Conference**, 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m., featuring keynote by author and speaker Chris Stefanick, other speakers: Jake Khym, Bobby Angel and Father Jonathan Meyer, includes Mass, confession, adoration, lunch, adults \$48, group of 10 or more adults \$43 per person, high school and college students \$18, clergy and religious free.

Information, registration: 812-576-4302, contact@efcatholicmensconference.com, efcatholicmensconference.com.

February 28

St. John the Evangelist Parish, Corpus Christi Hall, 126 W. Georgia St., Indianapolis. **Pro-life Film: The 1916 Project**, 6 p.m. doors open for pizza dinner, 6:30 p.m. film, panel discussion following, freewill offering for dinner. Information: 317-407-6881, smdye1@gmail.com. View trailer at the1916project.com.

March 28-30

Providence Spirituality & Conference Center, Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, 1 Sisters of Providence, St. Mary-of-the-Woods. **Come and See Retreat**, 4 p.m. Fri.-2 p.m. Sun., for single Catholic women ages 18-42 wanting to explore religious life, free, meals and housing provided. Information, registration: 361-500-9505, jluna@spsmw.org, events.siste4rsoprovidence.org. †

Disabilities Ministry will celebrate its 25th SPREAD dinner dance event on March 8

The archdiocesan Disabilities Ministry will celebrate its 25th annual SPREAD dinner dance event in the St. Pius X Parish Hall, 7200 Sarto Dr., in Indianapolis, from 6-8:30 p.m. on March 8, with the option of worshipping at the parish's 5 p.m. Mass.

SPREAD (Special Religious Education and Discipleship) groups in the archdiocese use adaptive programs and activities to enrich their faith formation and provide opportunities for discipleship in their parish.

The annual dinner dance is an opportunity for members of the various groups to come together for a fun evening of fellowship.

This year's theme is "Fiesta Celebration." Participants can enjoy a taco/fajita bar for dinner before dancing to beats spun by a SPREAD member as the evening's DJ.

The event will include a 50/50 raffle, a prize table, door prizes and a photo booth where participants can pose for selfies or for a professional photographer.

The event is \$20 per person, and registration is required by Feb. 3.

To download a registration form, go to archindy.org/specialneeds/events.html. For more information, contact Disabilities Ministry coordinator Jenny Bryans at jbryans@archindy.org. †

Vox Sacra to hold concert for feast of the Presentation with night prayer in Beech Grove on Feb. 2

Vox Sacra (Sacred Voice), the Schola Cantorum of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, will perform a concert of sacred music at Holy Name of Jesus Church, 89 N., 17th Ave., in Beech Grove, at 7 p.m. on Feb. 2.

All are welcome to this free concert, which will feature works

honoring the Blessed Mother by Mozart, Fauré, Lasso and more. The concert will finish with night prayer for the feast day.

For more information, contact Andrew Motyka at 317-236-1513 or amotyka@archindy.org, or go to www.voxsacra.com. †

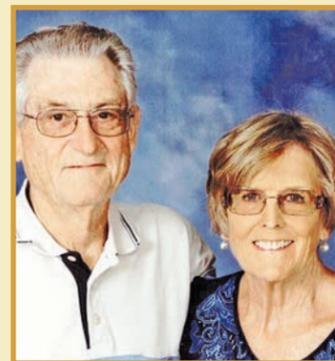
Wedding Anniversaries

IRVIN AND CAROL (FRICKE) TENHOLDER, members of St. Michael Parish in Greenfield, will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on Jan. 30.

The couple was married in St. Michael the Archangel Church in Indianapolis on Jan. 30, 1965.

They have two children: Brian and the late Mark Tenholder.

The couple also has one grandchild and one great-grandchild.



EDWARD AND DEBRA (DECKER) MILLER, members of Mary Queen of Peace Parish in Danville, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on Jan. 25.

The couple was married in St. Paul Church in Alsace, now a campus of All Saints Parish in Dearborn County, on Jan. 25, 1975.

They have three children: Darron, Doug and Kevin Miller.

The couple also has five grandchildren.



DAVE AND BEV (MARTIN) ORLANDO, members of St. Luke the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on Feb. 15.

The couple was married in St. Christopher Church in Indianapolis on Feb. 15, 1975.

They have two children: Dominic and Joseph Orlando.

The couple also has five grandchildren.



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

According to statistics, 50% of marriages end in divorce.

DON'T BECOME A STATISTIC!



FIND HOPE!

Feb 14-16, 2025

RETROUVAILLE OF LOUISVILLE

For more information go to: helpourmarriage.org, call 502-479-3329, or email: 3012@helpourmarriage.org

REPORT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT NOW

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

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

Online Lay Ministry Formation

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

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

For more information, please log on to www.archindy.org/layministry





2025 Catholic Schools Week

A Special Supplement Celebrating the Faith, Excellence and Service of our Catholic Schools



Embracing the power of God's love

The foundation and quality of a Catholic education in central and southern Indiana are built upon God's love for children, his gift of the Eucharist and the hope to be reunited with him in heaven.

In this third year of the National Eucharistic Revival, *The Criterion* is dedicating this Catholic Schools Week supplement to the transformative power of God's love.

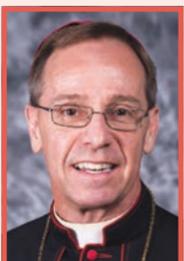
It's a power that shows up in the dedication of Catholic school educators across the archdiocese, the service that Catholic school children and youths offer to people in need, and the support and sacrifice of parents, grandparents and families who embrace the faith and Catholic education—and strive to share these gifts through the generations.

We hope you enjoy the stories and photographs that bring to life the difference that a Catholic education makes—to students now and to graduates who continue to be blessed by its focus on faith, family and friendship. †

Our 68 Catholic schools transform lives and instill hope

Dear Friends in Christ,

We have embarked on the Jubilee Year, exhorted by Pope Francis to be "Pilgrims of Hope." There is no greater means of experiencing hope than in communion with the Holy Trinity—God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This focus of our Jubilee Year is enhanced by the national theme for Catholic Schools Week, "Catholic Schools: United in Faith and Community." The 68 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

of Indianapolis provide a transformative impact of instilling hope for individuals and families throughout central and southern Indiana

Our Catholic schools excel in academics, athletics, the arts and service. Most fundamental to the identity and mission of any Catholic school, however, are its roots in the Church's task of evangelization and catechesis. With a primary focus on forming missionary disciples of Jesus Christ, our Catholic schools strive to form hearts and educate minds in the two-fold command of loving God and neighbor as a means of transforming students and educators as well as families and society.

In the spirit of synodality, we must be intentional about calling forth

each baptized member to embrace the universal call to communion, participation and mission in the life of the Church. For a Catholic school to be credible and effective in its core mission, its members must strive to cultivate a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, which requires a commitment to both worship and service.

It is the task of both students and educators to grow in the life of faith through an openness to the Holy Spirit by means of prayer, both personal and communal, the Word of God, the grace of the sacraments, the teachings of the faith and a life oriented toward service.

As a mission of the Church, Catholic schools strive to transform rather than be transformed by culture. Catholic teaching is predicated on the firm belief

in the saving grace of the *kerygma*—namely, the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is for this reason that Catholic schools are equipped with crucifixes, immersed in daily prayer, and find their ultimate meaning in the celebration of the Eucharist at Mass, the source and summit of our identity and mission as Catholics.

With assurance of my continued prayers, especially for blessings upon our Catholic schools, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Charles C. Thompson

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson



Schools embrace Eucharistic Revival's focus on 'mission'

By Natalie Hoefler

When the bishops of the United States called for a National Eucharistic Revival, they laid out a three-year, three-themed vision.

Year one focused on diocesan revival. Year two focused on parish revival.

Year three, which began in June 2024 and ideally never ends, focuses on the theme of mission: "sending out every member of the Church to spread the good news—sharing the gift of our eucharistic Lord with those on the margins" (eucharisticrevival.org).

Catholic schools throughout central and southern Indiana are striving to instill this third-year revival theme of mission in their students. The methods are many.

Here, principals from four archdiocesan schools share with *The Criterion* how they're helping students embrace the importance of mission.

Call 'to live out the Gospel values'

Serving those in need—even when not in person—is one way of sharing Christ's love.

The National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis last July offered a service project led by Million Meal Movement. The Indianapolis-based organization set up stations for participants to create pre-packaged meals for those in need in Indiana.

"After the congress, there were still funds available for more meals to be put together," says Gina Fleming, principal of Holy Spirit School in Indianapolis. "The [archdiocesan] Office of Catholic Schools contacted several schools to participate in making more meals."

She accepted the opportunity for Holy Spirit. On Nov. 19, older students were grouped with younger ones in shifts to participate in the project in the school gym.

"We were able to engage our kindergarten through eighth-grade students in packaging over 17,000 meals that will be distributed to local pantries and organizations in central Indiana," Fleming says.

The students did not simply show up for the activity. Gatherings were held "leading up to our Million Meal Movement day where we talked about Jesus calling us to feed the hungry. We tied it in with the Beatitudes and with his call to all Christians to live out the Gospel values," Fleming explains.

"We shared with students the fact that over a million individuals in our state don't know where their next meal is coming from, and that one in five children fit that [description], and that moved them."

Fleming recalls fourth-grade students asking if the school could hold another Million Meal Movement day.

"When I explained we would have to raise money, they were asking how we could do fundraisers to do [the project] again, and you could see the wheels turning to help tackle hunger in central Indiana."

'To live as Christ taught us to live'

It's easy for students of St. Rose of Lima School in Franklin to recite what's important at school and in their lives. All they need to do is look at the school name, ROSE: R-Respect for all, O-Obedience to Christ, S-Service to others, and E-Excellence in education.

The first three values tie in perfectly with the revival's third-year focus on mission, says St. Rose principal Kim Tekippe.

"The students are told to respect everyone, no matter if there's a difference in family, education or even faith," she says, noting 50% of the student population is not Catholic. "We tell them respect for all means to act as Jesus did, to treat each other the way you want to be treated."

That message ties in with obedience to Christ, "to live as Christ taught us to live," says Tekippe.

"We emphasize the importance of also being obedient in prayer. We pray at the beginning and end of the school day and before and after lunch, and we have weekly Mass."

This year, Tekippe added taking part in the parish's weekly day of adoration to the school schedule.

"That's how we've been keeping the revival mission alive," she says. "In this hustle and bustle world, people don't take time for prayer. I think it's crucial for the kids to learn that."

When it comes to service, students are taught that it is "not just getting out of class—it's doing good. It's bringing Christ to others and being Christ for others. We teach them that service can be a canned food drive, and it can also be as simple as opening the door for someone."

Students practice service throughout the year, from writing letters to residents at a nearby senior community, to penny drives for child cancer patients, to pairing with the parish's respect life committee for toy and coat drives.

The ROSE values are reviewed each week during a school gathering.

"Focusing on those values, the students can know how to go out into the community and share their faith," Tekippe says. "We tell them to 'go out into the world, making sure you're a rose.'"

'Christ as the source and summit'

During each year of the National Eucharistic Revival, the students of SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi School in Greenwood have focused on a specific theme.

"This year's theme is 'Embrace the Source and Summit,'" says principal Rebecca Stone. "It's about embracing Christ as the source and summit of our lives and how to live that out."

The theme is emphasized through looking at saints as models of Christ-like behavior and by recognizing students and teachers who do the same.

"Every class is learning about one saint a month, learning about their lives and how they can lead us closer to Christ," says Stone. "We use them as role models. They recognized Jesus as the source and summit of all that's good, so how can we model ourselves after them?"

"We talk about how, when we embrace Christ as the source and summit, it is across our lives—morning, noon, night."

To encourage such behavior, one student and one teacher are recognized each week for modeling Christ-like behavior, whether in big or small ways.

"One student received the award for owning up to a mistake," says Stone. "Because it's important to know that we're not perfect, that it's OK to admit that, and that God loves us the same."

Each receives a picture of Christ with children to hang on the wall outside of their classroom for the week.

"It's a way of noticing the little and big things we do to embrace that Christ is in us and how he should influence all the things we think, say and do," says Stone.



Students and staff of Holy Spirit School in Indianapolis prepare pre-packaged meals for Indianapolis-based Million Meal Movement in the school's gym on Nov. 19, 2024. (Submitted photo)

'I look for it to become a tradition'

Prince of Peace Schools in Madison have embraced new traditions during this third year of the National Eucharistic Revival.

"For years, we did adoration in the junior/senior high," says Curt Gardner, principal of Father Michael Shawe Jr./Sr. High School and assistant principal of Pope John XXIII Elementary School. "We increased our frequency when the revival started. Our goal is for each student to go at least once a month."

This year, adoration was added to the schedule for upper-level students at the elementary school.

"They went from zero to weekly," says Gardner. He credits the elementary school's principal and fourth- and fifth-grade teachers with starting the new tradition.

He also credits Pope John XXIII staff with planning the two neighboring schools' first eucharistic procession in memory.

The procession was held the day before the schools' Thanksgiving break and was led by Father Christopher Craig, pastor of Prince of Peace Parish in Madison.

"All of the grades lined up, K-12," says Gardner. "As the procession passed, they went to their knees then joined. They were so respectful and reverent. I look for it to become a tradition that later, people will say, 'They've done this forever.'"

He also said the staff has "used the revival as a way to refocus on the students' charitable giving. We looked at how to help them better understand the charitable side of what we do when we bring up the gifts [during Mass], that they represent what we give to Christ."

Now for the offertory procession during school Masses, students "bring in items for the charity we're supporting that month and place them by the altar. It helps them see how we're supposed to be sacrificing our own gifts with Christ's sacrifice." †

Catholic schools provide life-changing path for 'Pilgrims of Hope'

By Brian Disney

Superintendent of Catholic schools in the archdiocese

One of the most significant events in the Church's journey is the Jubilee Year, a time of reflection, renewal and reconciliation.



Brian Disney

The 2025 Jubilee Year offers an important opportunity for Catholic schools to deepen their role in the Church's mission, providing a life-changing path for their students, families, educators and the larger community as "pilgrims of hope," the theme for the jubilee. As we celebrate this special year, our Catholic schools are renewing themselves with the themes of the jubilee, emphasizing faith, reconciliation and hope.

The term "pilgrims of hope" suggests a journey, one that is both personal and communal. Pilgrimage, in Catholic tradition, is not just about a physical journey to a sacred place, but also a spiritual journey toward holiness.

Similarly, Catholic schools are places where students embark on a pilgrimage of faith, growing in their understanding of God's love, their relationship with Christ and their responsibility to serve others. The 2025 Jubilee Year acts as a catalyst for reinvigorating this journey, guiding students toward a deeper sense of purpose and a stronger commitment to living out their faith in the world.

The theme of "hope" is central to the jubilee year. In a world that often seems fractured by division, injustice and uncertainty, Catholic schools can provide a beacon of light. Hope, in the Christian sense, is not a naive or passive optimism but an active trust in God's promises.

Catholic schools have the responsibility of fostering this hope

within their students, helping them to see that their lives have meaning and that they are called to contribute to the transformation of society. This is not just about academic excellence, but about forming individuals who are compassionate, loving and committed to the common good.

In this context, our Catholic schools strive to cultivate an environment where students can encounter Christ, encounter one another, and encounter the world with eyes of faith. The 2025 Jubilee Year offers a perfect occasion for our schools to renew their commitment to integrating faith into every subject, every interaction and every decision. Religious education is not compartmentalized but permeates the entire school culture, forming students not just academically but also spiritually, emotionally and morally.

Reconciliation is another key theme of the jubilee year. Catholic schools are uniquely positioned to be places where

students learn to practice forgiveness, dialogue and understanding, modeling these virtues in their relationships with others. By promoting reconciliation, Catholic schools can create environments where students learn to overcome conflict and division with the love and mercy of Christ.

In this pilgrimage of hope, Catholic schools have a vital role in the Church's mission during the 2025 Jubilee Year. By fostering a deeper relationship with Christ, encouraging active hope and promoting reconciliation, Catholic schools help to form a new generation of faithful, compassionate individuals who carry the light of the Gospel into a world in desperate need of healing and transformation.

The 2025 Jubilee Year is not only a time for personal reflection and growth, but also a time for Catholic schools to reaffirm their commitment to being sources of hope and beacons of faith in the world. †



'My faith came alive': A conversation with God changes a student's life

By John Shaughnessy

The defining moment of Christian Mack's four years of high school came in his freshman year—during a conversation with God.

At the time, Christian was on a bus with other students from Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception in Oldenburg, traveling to Lucas Oil Stadium for the National Catholic Youth Conference in 2021.

"I said a little prayer on the bus ride up. 'All right, God, I don't really know what's going to happen, but I'm going to try to keep my heart open to whatever you have in store,'" he recalls.

Christian has no doubt that God answered his prayer in a moment he shared with more than 10,000 other youths from across the country in the stadium.

"Everyone was kneeling in front of the Blessed Sacrament," he says. "I started crying and weeping. I could really feel something. It was pure joy. My faith came alive. I truly felt at peace. It was the moment when I felt my life is now different, so I have to do something about it. It inspired me to change my life and make it more about using the joy I had to create a faith-filled life at Oldenburg."

Christian's closeness to God has continued in his four years at Oldenburg, including the challenging moments that nearly all high school seniors face at some point.

"It's a really stressful time with college and choosing where I'm going to be the next four years of my life," he says. "It's almost where I have to completely rely on God and his will. I have to trust he has the right things in store for me."

Christian has found those "right things" during his time in Oldenburg, in a wealth of opportunities.

He has competed on the boys' soccer team for three years, played drums and the violin in the school's orchestra, led retreats for younger students, sang with the school's Academy Singers, and experienced an internship with a law firm in Batesville.

"It was really cool," he says about the internship. "It helped solidify the idea that I want to focus on criminal law later in life."

He also participated in one of the special programs that Oldenburg offers—the Adopt-a-Sis program that connects students with the Sisters of St. Francis at Oldenburg.

"That's a program where we get to eat with the Sisters of St. Francis for lunch once a month," he says, his voice filled with joy. "It's like a whole new world. When you walk in, it's really cool to see their eyes brighten. They're really excited to see you and talk with you. It offers a different perspective to my life. It makes me realize how fortunate I am to have all the blessings that I have in my life—and all the people who surround me."

"It shows that not only am I blessing their lives a little bit, they're blessing me by letting me see their life."

Christian feels the same way about the group of friends he has made at Oldenburg.

"I think it's really important that you pick a group in high school that supports you. At Oldenburg, I've definitely been able to do that. I'm friends with a lot of good guys, and they've really helped me grow in my faith."

Those friendships have been enhanced by participating together in ECyD, standing for "Encounters, Convictions, your Decisions"—an international Catholic organization of youths who make a pledge of friendship with Christ and with each other.



Christian Mack has played three seasons on the boys' soccer team at Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception in Oldenburg. (Submitted photo)

It's been really cool to see how far we've come, and everything we've done together," says Christian, a member of St. Louis Parish in Batesville. "Oldenburg has been a really good vessel for my faith. It's almost completely transformed it."

"When I came in as a freshman, it was like my parents' faith. Now, it's mine. I've led the freshman retreat my junior and senior years. I've been able to give witness. It's definitely inspired me to branch out in my faith and do more because it's something I really love."

"To put it plainly, my relationship with God is good. But it can always use some work. I'm really trying to work on it." †

'You'll have a forever family': a senior embraces a gift shared by generations

By John Shaughnessy

All the time she was growing up, Samantha Manley heard how wonderful and life-changing the place is, a place where the emphasis on faith, family and a quality education is stressed—and where a sense of community is alive, thriving and passed down through the generations.

That description fits all of the Catholic high schools in the archdiocese, but for Samantha, all these conversations were focused on Father Thomas Scecina Memorial High School in Indianapolis.

It's where her maternal grandparents, Charles and Barbara (Fitzgerald) Kehrer, met as members of the class of 1968; where her paternal grandmother, Barbara (Greener) Manley, graduated in 1959; where her parents, Michael, class of 1990, and Jennifer (Kehrer) Manley, class of 1991, met; and where her sister Kylie graduated from in 2022.

"I've always been excited to come here," Samantha says. "Growing up, people would tell me Scecina is a small school, but the biggest thing about it is the community. My sister encouraged me to join a lot of things here and make the best of my experiences."

Four years later, Samantha has found the same sense of community at Scecina.

"I know all my peers and a lot about them, and that's what makes it special," she says. "We have a lot of leadership in our class. Everyone steps up. Everyone has a drive to be involved. We have this thing called Crusader Cup this year. Each class gets points for showing up for different things—not just sports—and for excelling in certain things in school. I saw a lot of change from that. We're more united, just overall closer."

As the president of the senior class, Samantha has been at the heart of that effort.

She was involved in the school's Warm Winter drive as a member of the National Honor Society, collecting clothing for refugees being served by Catholic Charities Indianapolis. During the Christmas season, she and other members of the senior class went shopping for gifts for children to make the day more joyful for them.

She was also a student leader at a retreat for sophomores this year. And she serves as an ambassador for the school at events, including giving a talk at Scecina's annual fund dinner.

"When I first came here, I wasn't able to present or talk in front of people," she says. "They've given me opportunities to step out of my comfort zone and reach my best potential. I feel I've had the education that will help me succeed in things other than high school."

Samantha especially appreciates how her Catholic education has deepened her faith.

"I think it's made my relationship with God stronger," says Samantha, a member of Holy Spirit Parish in Indianapolis. "I've gotten a better understanding of my relationship with God and how to strengthen it. I feel like I'm surrounded by my faith every day here. Little things like my prayers and talking to God have increased a lot. I just feel I'm a lot more confident in my faith. I feel I'm trusting him more."

It's all part of her growth as a person, a Catholic and a friend who now understands the fullness of what her grandparents, parents and sister told her as she was growing up.

"I've made so many memories and so many friends here. I feel like I'm super grateful, but I'm not ready to leave yet." Still, the third-generation member of



Samantha Manley, center, and other members of the National Honor Society at Father Thomas Scecina Memorial High School in Indianapolis show the bounty of clothing they collected for refugees being served by Catholic Charities Indianapolis. (Submitted photo)

Scecina is now in the position of sharing what makes the school so special to her.

"I would say to anyone, 'Make the best of all the opportunities you're given, and you'll have a great experience here. You'll have a forever family, whether that's with your classmates or the people who work here. You'll meet lifelong friends and have special moments you'll remember forever.'" †

As a student's faith grows, so does her friendships with God and others

By John Shaughnessy

Landry Cox's smile reveals so much as she talks about her Catholic education.

Her smile gets wide as she reflects on the ways her friendships have grown and her relationships have deepened during her 14 years in Seton Catholic schools in Richmond.



Landry Cox

"I've known most of my classmates since I was 4," says Landry, now a senior at Seton Catholic High School. "I feel like we're a family. You don't have to worry about feeling left out or bullied because someone is always there for you."

"We've all gotten our first Communion together. We've all gotten confirmed together. It's awesome to have these experiences

together and see them grow and mature as Catholics. You just feel like a family."

That feeling has been fostered at every step of the way by the education she has received at Seton Catholic. The school has also shaped her attitude toward her life.

"It's definitely prepared me for the hard moral challenges in today's society," says Landry, 18 and a member of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Richmond.

"Making the hard choices—do you want to drink at a party or do drugs? They've definitely set us on the right path to know what the right choice is. And that we can make that choice. With the teaching I've had, I know what's right. I know what's wrong. I'm strong in myself. I can be confident in myself and my decision-making."

She also appreciates the opportunities that Seton has made possible to deepen her faith, starting with Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology's One Bread One Cup, a summer program designed to help young people grow in their faith and their leadership skills.

"I loved it," she says. "It definitely molded me into the Catholic I am today."

So did the opportunity to participate in the eucharistic procession at the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis in July, joining more than 50,000 people on the streets of downtown Indianapolis to honor the Blessed Sacrament.

"That was incredible. It was so cool," she says. "You'd walk and you'd hear people praying the rosary. It just felt

like a family. That's what I love about the Catholic Church."

She also enjoyed the opportunity to take part in the Mass that Archbishop Charles C. Thompson celebrated for high school seniors from across the archdiocese at St. Malachy Church in Brownsburg on Dec. 4.

"In this world, we often feel alone and isolated from Catholicism," she says. "I really like going to these kinds of activities because you get to see you're not alone, that there are other Catholic teens who share the faith and share the belief in God. I feel that can help ignite faith because you don't feel alone."

Best of all, she says, is the way her education at Seton has helped her deepen her relationship with God.

"It used to be, 'Oh, he's up there. He's aloof.' But now through my faith and all these experiences I've had, he kind of feels like my best friend. He's always there with me. I can always talk to him."

"A lot of people pray the rosary over and over again. At Seton, they've taught us that you can do that stuff—and you should—but you can also talk to him. I've definitely benefitted from that because sometimes you just need someone to talk to. Even when I'm scared or confused, I know God's got me. I definitely feel like he's my best friend." †



10 guiding principles for everyone involved in Catholic education

By John Shaughnessy

For 17 years, Kristin Mitchell has dedicated her life to teaching in a Catholic school, trying to model her approach on her favorite teacher.

“There is no better leader than Jesus,” says Mitchell, the middle school coordinator and teacher of health and physical education at St. Charles Borromeo School in Bloomington. “He guides my teachings on a daily basis.”

When Mitchell became a finalist in the 2023-24 school year for the Saint Theodore Excellence in Education Award—the highest honor the archdiocese gives an educator—she shared an essay that could serve as a guide for everyone involved in Catholic education. Gleaning from her essay, here are 10 guiding principles to consider.

- 1 “Teaching is a work of art, and it is a true commitment to give each child the gift of grace, acceptance and love. These are the same gifts that Jesus bestows upon each of us daily.”
- 2 “Mistakes, poor choices, confusion and bad attitudes will happen, yet how we react to those issues is always under our control. Modeling self-control, mercy and grace for our students, no matter the circumstance, is a valuable part of leadership.”
- 3 “Before we can expect our students to excel and prosper, we must create an environment in which they are included, seen and valued.”
- 4 “I pray daily for the strength and patience to make a positive contribution to our school.”
- 5 “The culture of our school chooses joy over judgment, faith over negativity, and hope over despair.”
- 6 “Each day, I set a goal to smile and greet every student that comes my way. I love to stand at the door and make eye contact with every sweet soul that enters the gym or my health classroom.”
- 7 “I work to know my students’ interests, stories, struggles and passions. Connecting with students is the very important first step to being able to teach them. I believe that the Lord desires a connection with each one of us.”
- 8 “I work to integrate the Catholic faith into all I do as a teacher. This is apparent in the physical education setting as we constantly discuss sportsmanship and the true purpose of sports and games. I tell my students that God did not create sports for personal glory, but rather as an opportunity to come together in fellowship to better ourselves and our opponents.”
- 9 “My students are often reminded that how we treat each other in a sport or game is more important than individual statistics or the number of victories attained. We leave our true mark on others not with superior skill, but by choosing respect, kindness, sportsmanship and integrity.”
- 10 “The Catholic faith is present in my health classroom as we discuss making choices that God would want for us. My students know he desires a relationship with us and hopes to guide us, but we need to embrace *the power of a pause* to let God into our choices. We discuss the power of thinking, ‘What would Jesus do?’ before we make quick, impulsive decisions.” †



Kristin Mitchell, the middle school coordinator and teacher of health and physical education at St. Charles Borromeo School in Bloomington, shares a moment of joy with students Evelyn Giant, left, Enedina Kassamanian and Lucy Laughlin. (Submitted photo)

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Faith is at the heart of Bishop Chatard High School's athletic program

By Sean Gallagher

Anni Felts' nerves start to rise as she steps into the batter's box as an outfielder for the softball team of Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis.

Just 43 feet away from her stands a pitcher on the opposing team poised to throw a softball toward the plate at up to 65 miles per hour.

As she awaits that first pitch to come blazing her way, Anni turns her heart and mind to God.

"I tell myself to try my best and that God only wants my best," she explains. "That usually helps calm my nerves."

But even with her nerves calmed, she knows that mistakes will still happen.

"Softball is a sport where you're always going to make a mistake," says Anni, a senior at Bishop Chatard and a member of St. Simon the Apostle Parish in Indianapolis.

Her faith and the faith of her teammates, though, help them to put those mistakes in the rear-view mirror.

"It's special to have that focus on faith, not just personally, but also as a team," Anni says. "We can always come together. And if any of my teammates makes a mistake, we can always pick each other up and move on."

During the past four years, Bishop Chatard's softball team and its 27 other boys' and girls' athletic squads have taken intentional steps to form the faith of their student athletes in a faith formation program tailored to their needs.

In the 2023-24 academic year, more than 75% of Bishop Chatard's 732 students were members of the school's extracurricular sports teams.

Putting faith at the heart of its athletic program is a key way for Bishop Chatard to help its students apply what they learn about the faith in the classroom to life in the broader world and to grow in holiness.

'More than just a sport'

Kerry Lynch, the head coach of Bishop Chatard's softball team, knows the impact that fostering the faith of her players can have in their lives, leading them to take on important student leadership roles in the school community.

"That's not something that we make them do," Lynch said. "It's because we have given them the opportunity to make their faith a priority and encouraged them to do it. The more that we encourage them to apply what they're learning about their faith in the classroom, they'll see that it's OK to do."

She also knows in a personal way how athletics and faith can be closely interwoven.

Lynch played softball as a student at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis. So did her younger sister Katie, who died of cancer in 2011 at 17 while a student at Roncalli.

Though rivals on the field, the softball teams at Bishop Chatard and Roncalli now gather annually with others for a fundraising walk for a foundation established in Katie's honor that supports scholarships and gives help to families with hospitalized children.

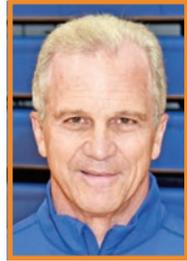
"Every girl, from freshmen to seniors and those who have graduated, and parents—they all know about Katie," Lynch said. "The whole team shows up and they make her a priority because it's bigger than a game, a sectional championship or a state championship. It's doing the right thing for other people."

"It shows that it's more than just

a sport or competition," said Bishop Chatard senior Anna Caskey, a starting pitcher on its softball team and a member of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Indianapolis. "Everybody is there to benefit the common good, grow together and care for the people we love. You take the competitiveness out of it."

'It's who we are'

Dan Wagner has been a leader in one way or another of Bishop Chatard's girls' basketball team for 30 years. In his fourth year as its head varsity coach, Wagner knows from his long experience the importance of keeping faith at the forefront of his players' hearts and minds.



Dan Wagner

"It's who we are," he said. "Everything we do is tied in with our faith."

Making faith a priority in the life of his team has allowed Wagner to be a witness of his faith to his players. This has led a couple of them to ask him to be a confirmation sponsor for them.

"I take it as a high honor when a kid asks me to do that," Wagner said. "It's a great opportunity to speak further to that individual about what's important to her with her faith."

But while he wants to be a good example of faith to his players, Wagner is especially gratified to see them lead each other in faith.

At the end of a practice, he'll gather the team to talk about what went well and what they need to improve.

"Then we'll grab pinky fingers, and I'll say, 'Who's got this?' And, invariably, one of the girls will step up and will offer an extemporaneous prayer," Wagner explains. "It's relevant to what we just went through or what we're in the process of going through. They're not just making things up."

"Just the way that they bring the activity we're doing to the prayer that they're making for guidance and help is very impactful. It's a joy to see."

Whatever the team members might ask God for in prayer, Wagner said that they never ask for a win in their next game.

"The only thing that we pray for is that we do our best and have no regrets," he said. "We are looking for guidance, help and to do our best."

'It's opened my eyes to faith in everything that I do'

Brian Shaughnessy, a theology teacher at Bishop Chatard and a former head coach of its boys' varsity basketball



Brian Shaughnessy

team, oversees the school's athletic faith formation program.

"We're always trying to make connections to the kids' journeys of faith that we're doing here at school," Shaughnessy said. "It strikes me that, as a Chatard grad myself, the thing that I was often looking forward to most in my day at Chatard was the extracurriculars and the athletics."

"So, if you can make some connections between the students' faith and the things that they love to do, that could really bring their faith to life."

What he also knows from having been a coach and closely observing teams at Bishop Chatard is that "there's a special kind of close" when a team fosters the faith of its members and practice it together as a team.

"Close" matters in high-intensity



Anni Felts, a senior at Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis, swings at a pitch as a member of her school's softball team. The school seeks to put faith at the heart of its 28 boys' and girls' athletic teams, in which some 75% of its students participate. (Submitted photo)

games," Shaughnessy said. "Close teams have an advantage."

More important for Shaughnessy, though, is recognizing that the closeness of teammates who are bonded in a shared faith is that it mirrors what those student athletes are called to be as members of the Church.

"It's what we're meant to be as the body of Christ," he said. "This should be getting us closer to a sensibility that we are one body in Christ. If they can see that in microcosm on their team, that's an awesome thing."

Anna Caskey, a senior and starting center on Bishop Chatard's girls' varsity basketball team, in addition to being on

its softball team, says that, during her nearly four years at the school, faith has become the foundation of everything she does athletically—and in the rest of her life.

"Right now, I couldn't really imagine basketball and softball without that faith aspect," she said. "It's opened my eyes to faith in everything that I do, whether it's school, sports, hanging out with my friends, activities with my family. All of that can involve faith and help me to grow closer to God."

"Learning how important it is to have God in my athletics shows me how important it is to have him in every aspect of my life." †

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A grandmother's lasting gift touches her granddaughter and the children she teaches

By John Shaughnessy

Of all the gifts that Amber Barker has received, the one with the most lasting impact may have come from her grandmother.

That gift across the generations has shaped her family, her faith, her choice of career, her life.

"My grandmother lived her faith. She worked hard in Catholic schools. She taught and drove the school bus," Barker recalls. "She also volunteered her time and money to help her parish and the community in whatever way she could."

Beyond her example, her grandmother changed the course of Barker's life by encouraging her parents to send her to St. Christopher School in Indianapolis.

"There was a real sense of community there. The older students helped the younger students. The teachers and staff members loved one another," Barker notes. "God was present there each and every day."

"I have fond memories of each of the teachers I was honored to have. From Mrs. Evans putting the Advent wreath candles out by licking her fingers and pinching the wicks, to twirling in my first Communion dress with Mrs. Betz, to Mrs. Lindop's big embrace when I lost my uncle unexpectedly. Those teachers loved me."

Barker's grade school experience inspired her to become a teacher, and for the past 13 years she has lived her dream at her dream school—St. Christopher.

Her gifts as a teacher also led to her being named as one of the finalists for the 2023-24 Saint Theodore Excellence in Education Award, the highest honor the archdiocese gives an educator

"When I was offered the job, I accepted without hesitation. I knew God wanted me to be here," says Barker. "St. Christopher School is the vessel God blessed me with, to share my gifts and my faith with others. I have prayed with students and staff members through good times and bad. We have worshipped together and

worked together. We have served together. I work every day to be the face of Christ."

As a third-grade teacher, she also strives to share one overriding message with her students.

"The most important thing I want them to know and remember about me is that I love them, believe in them, and trust that they can go out into the world and be kind. More than anything, I want for them to feel as at home and cared for here as I did. Just as our mission statement says, we 'seek to be an extension of our students' homes.' That is something that sets our school apart from others—part of what makes Catholic education different and special."

In nominating her for the Saint Theodore Excellence in Education Award, fellow teachers highlighted her "creative ways to help children who are struggling or to push others to excellence," her "technologic prowess" to create activities that help students grow in their faith, and her development of a new school-wide system of behavior "named after four different saints and based on cardinal values."

Barker views her every effort as a way of paying forward the gift of faith and love that her grandmother gave her.

"St. Christopher School has been a part of my life in some way for the better part of 24 years. It is literally part of who I am," she says. "The community that lives within these walls has been my family in good times and bad. They helped to raise me and taught me about love, kindness and what it means to be a 'Christ-bearer.'"

"Now it is my turn—my honor—to live my faith, to return the favor." †



As a teacher at St. Christopher School in Indianapolis, Amber Barker is living her dream—teaching at the school that had a great impact on her childhood. (Submitted photo)

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From the heart: A child celebrates Jesus by writing a song about the gifts he shares

By John Shaughnessy

As a second-grade student, Emma Brose felt so inspired about going to confession for the first time and receiving her first holy Communion that she did something that has touched the hearts of people.

She wrote a song that shares her love for Jesus. "A few people said, 'The song is so beautiful, it made me cry,'" says Emma, a student at Our Lady of Perpetual Help School in New Albany. "And there's this boy who's in the children's choir with me. He said, 'How do you do that?'"

"I just love listening to the songs about God and Jesus at church, and I love singing. I'm always in theater, and that inspired me to write my own song. I just tried to put my feelings about Jesus into words."

Consider some of the lyrics she wrote for "We Love You, O Lord"—lyrics that reflect the essence of the two sacraments that the now third-grade child received last spring.

"We praise you, O Lord,
"When we sin, he forgives us,
"When he forgives us, we come closer
"When we come closer, we will pray
"And say, 'We love you, O Lord.'
"Dear Jesus, thank you for being the bread of life,
"For you're the Savior of the world."

She sang the song for the first time in public at a school Mass with the parish's children's choir in September, and later that month during a parish Mass.

"When I'm singing it in church, it makes me feel like I'm talking to Jesus," says Emma, the 9-year-old daughter of Amy and Kay Brose. "I am very thankful for all he has done for us."

As the director of liturgical music for Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, Katelyn Stumler remembers the moment when Emma approached her about her song.

"She just told me, 'I wrote a song, and I want to

share it with you.' I was really excited," Stumler notes. "I remember when she first showed me her lyrics, which were just written out on a piece of paper by hand. I was truly inspired that such a beautiful prayer to Jesus had just come right out of her. And associating it with being in that year of receiving those two very special sacraments, I could just see how God was at work within her, using her talents and inspiring her to write this."

"And when I heard the tune she had come up with to go with the lyrics, I was really blown away—just how beautifully she had put it together. I asked her if it would be OK if we used the song for our children's choir and use it at Mass to help other people pray and bring them closer to Jesus. It was really awesome, especially to see a second-grader come up with such a song."

Using Emma's lyrics and tune, Stumler wrote the sheet music for the song and the piano accompaniment for the piece—a collaboration that Emma described as "fun."

Emma also notes that she wrote the song shortly after she received the sacrament of reconciliation and before she received holy Communion for the first time.

"It just kind of flowed when I was thinking about it. It just came out of me," she says.

The joy of receiving both sacraments still lingers for her.

"It just felt like a sweet moment—both first reconciliation and first Communion," she says. "I'm thankful for Jesus forgiving us when we sin. I'm thankful for him saving us from sin."

Her gratitude for the gift of the Eucharist has especially deepened since the time she wrote the song, a time when she had yet to receive Communion for the first time.

"Now that I know what it's like to receive Communion, I feel even better about my song."

"I feel closer to Jesus."



As a second-grade student at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in New Albany, Emma Brose wrote a song praising Jesus, getting help with the sheet music for the song from Katelyn Stumler, director of liturgical music for the parish. (Submitted photo)

(To view a video of Emma singing "We Love You, O Lord" with the children's choir of Our Lady of Perpetual Help School, follow this link, tinyurl.com/OLPHEmmaSong.) †



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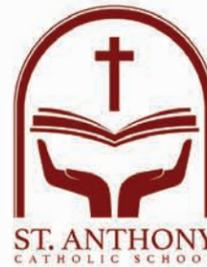


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In leading students to build community, teacher advises, 'Be present, be pleasant'

By John Shaughnessy

Early in his teaching career, Dan Reichley had a conversation with a veteran teacher that has shaped much of his approach to education. It's an approach that also offers a valuable way for anyone to live their life.

"One teacher, when I asked for advice about whether to proceed with a project, asked the question, 'Does it build community?' " Reichley recalls. "That is the litmus test for any project. Does it bring people together? Does it foster communion? Having a community prepares the soil and allows the possibility for the seed of Jesus' Gospel to be sown on fertile ground."

Reichley has followed that guiding principle in his 22 years as a math and science teacher at Seton Catholic High School in Richmond, both in the classroom and outside of it.

"I think in the classroom God wants me to engage in interactions with the students," says Reichley, a finalist for last year's Saint Theodore Excellence in Education Award, the highest honor the archdiocese gives an educator. "I try to give them a glimpse into what I'm thinking, what I'm praying about. We have a list of prayer intentions on the board. They know what's on my mind and my prayer life, and I know what's on their minds and their prayer life."

Having set that foundation of accompanying his students in their lives, he strives to help them do the same for people in their larger community. Heavily involved in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's efforts in Wayne, Fayette and Union counties, Reichley invites his students to help in its furniture ministry, picking up donated furniture and then delivering it to people in need.

"I've had a lot of students help out with lifting furniture at sometimes inconvenient places and times. Sometimes on Saturday mornings or right after school," he says. "There's a lot of people in need of furniture. They've just moved into an apartment or a rental house,

and they have just enough to meet the payments, but they need furniture. I've had a lot of students who have graduated who continue to help with the furniture ministry."

Reichley also leads Seton students in organizing and conducting an electronics recycling program for everyone in the Richmond area twice a year.

"We've diverted a lot of electronic waste from our landfill into an Indianapolis company that recycles it. We hold the event on our parking lot. We have one in the fall and one in the spring. The Catholic community and the wider community are very appreciative of it."

Reichley is grateful that he has shared his journey as a teacher with his wife Tina and their four grown children.

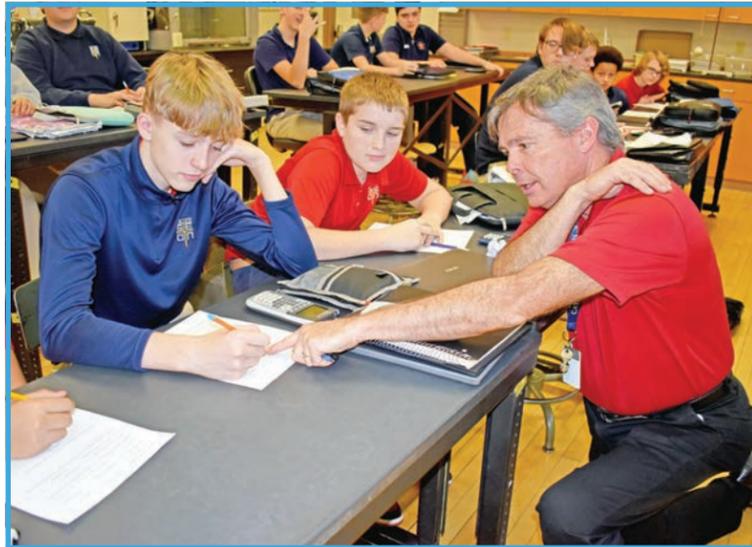
"It's been a blessing being a teacher, especially when I think back on having my four kids in this school building with me," says Reichley, a member of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Richmond. "With four kids going through Seton, we've always been active. We're always looking at how to use our resources, our time, our talents and our treasures. So, there's always a tape measure of should we do this or should we not."

There are two pieces of advice that he always encourages his students to follow.

"I tell them, 'Be present, and be pleasant.' You really want them to be engaged with the people in front of them. And then be pleasant. I tell them they can bring so much joy to their family members, to their siblings, their parents and their grandparents, if they're just present and pleasant."

Reichley also advises his students to rely on God in their lives.

"If we cooperate with God, God provides all we need,"



Dan Reichley is quick to help his students in his role as a math and science teacher at Seton Catholic High School in Richmond. (Submitted photo)

he says. "I'm not a gifted teacher by any stretch of the imagination. I see gifted teachers. I work with really good and gifted teachers. I'm OK. But I'm effective, I think, because I cooperate with what God wants me to do."

For Reichley, cooperating with God always leads him back to building community.

"A lot of students and a lot of people need some accompaniment. It's a really good word to have in the back of your mind as you work with people, as you walk with people, as you communicate with people in the community."

"Accompanying people, whether it be students, family members, the families of our students or the people in our community who are struggling economically or socially, to accompany them is to be in community with them." †



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Her mom's wedding day advice and a program on virtue guide a teacher

By John Shaughnessy

While 31 years have passed, Estelle Britner still remembers the advice her mother gave her on her wedding day.

"It was when I was getting dressed at home," Britner recalls about that special moment in 1993. "My mom was in there, helping me like moms always do on girls' wedding days. It was just the two of us. She told me, 'Always be on the side of your husband, but God always comes first, no matter what.' She said that she and my dad were always on the same side because God came first."

That advice dovetailed with the example that her parents, Bob and Anne Armbruster, consistently showed to their nine children.

"Our parents molded my siblings and me to be workers for others," says Britner, the youngest child. "My thoughts, words and actions were never exclusive to me. I had a responsibility to use them to help make others better."

For the past 32 years, Britner has lived those two goals—placing God first and helping others become better—as a Catholic school teacher in the archdiocese. And she has taken that emphasis to an even higher level in her 11 years as a social studies teacher at St. Joan of Arc School in Indianapolis.

"When I joined the St. Joan of Arc faculty, it felt as if I had made it home. With the monikers 'leadership, integrity and service,' the stage was set for me to fully live what I had been taught," says Britner, a finalist for last year's Saint Theodore Excellence in Education Award, the highest honor the archdiocese gives an educator. "I was immediately encouraged to share my faith by highlighting faith leaders within the social studies curriculum."

"It just feels so natural that as I'm talking about historical events to also focus on the role that our faith has played in those historical events. And because it feels so natural to me, it comes across that way to the kids. It helps them see that faith is an everyday part of everything you do in your life."

She shares the example of St. Junipero Serra and how his creation of mission churches on the west coast of the United States ties in with the development of that part of the country, bringing together the Spanish influences of Catholic faith and culture.

"It became more understandable to the kids when you talk about all the names of different cities in not only California but Texas and all the Southwest that were all colonized by the Spanish—including San Francisco, San Jose, Santa Barbara, San Antonio, Los Angeles," she says.

In teaching her sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students, Britner uses a textbook that highlights the role of the Church throughout history. She also embraces a program called Education in Virtue, which allows her to apply Catholic virtues into the social studies classes.

"A regular question on homework, quizzes and tests is to identify how historical people were also virtuous people," she says. "Having the students recognize the virtuous people encourages them to be virtuous as well."

"History classes are often filled with less than virtuous people, but using this program has helped me encourage students to find the lack of virtue and then apply how historical figures could have been more virtuous to better history."

That approach has led to interesting and even difficult discussions, including about George Washington.

"Historically, he is viewed as the father of the country and setting us on the course of this great democracy that we have. But our kids still recognize that he was a slave owner," Britner says. "They have a hard time with that. They question, 'How can we look at him as a father figure and still see him as virtuous?'"

"We talk about how we are people—and how we have the capacity to do great things and how we have the capacity to do things that are not great. And we have to learn to recognize the best things we can take from other people. As we went along, we looked at his actions and evaluated that you can do good things and still have bad and wrong things that are part of your life, but you can still have value."

Britner finds a major source of her value in "working



As a teacher at St. Joan of Arc School in Indianapolis, Estelle Britner has followed her mom's advice to place God first and help others become better. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

to build the Catholic faith in the young people of our school."

"Watching the students of our middle school pray, do and learn our faith while getting to be the social studies teacher is my biggest privilege," says the mother of three grown children with her husband Mark. "Every day, we learn about history, but more importantly we learn how our faith has made a difference in the world. It is the best work to help the students today learn the good, so that they can be the good of the future."

"It is the best way to serve God, work for the good of others and live a life that my family will be proud of." †

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A question and a challenge are shared as archbishop connects with seniors at Mass

By John Shaughnessy

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson began with a question—and a hint of a challenge—as he shared his homily with 1,200 Catholic high school students from across the archdiocese.

The question concerned two points: how their senior year is going, and whether the younger students at their schools are listening to them and following their direction.

“The reason I ask that question is I’ve been a high school chaplain in three different high schools, and I was the pastor of large parishes that had grade schools,” the archbishop said during his Mass with the seniors at St. Malachy Church in Brownsburg on Dec. 4. “And I’m convinced that the school year goes according to the upper class.

“If it’s grade school, it’s the eighth-grade class. If it’s high school, it’s the senior class. That class sets the tone of the year—not the principal, not the president, not the teachers, not the priest, not the chaplain, not the coaches. The senior class always sets the tone for that year. So, if you’re having a good year, it’s a good sign of your leadership. And if it’s not such a good year, you might ask yourself, ‘What could I do better to be a part of that?’”

Archbishop Thompson then tied the students’ experience in their senior year to the Gospel for that day, the miracle of the loaves and fishes on a mountain setting (Mt 15:29-37).

“Great things happen on mountains. Your senior year is kind of a mountain top. Soon you will have prom and graduation,” he told the seniors. “You seniors set the tone in your mountain moments. What graces and gifts are given by you? It’s not what we get, but what we give. Jesus made that very clear to the Apostles.”

Before the miracle of the loaves and fishes happened, the Apostles saw the problem of trying to feed all the people, but Jesus saw that moment as an opportunity, the archbishop noted.

“He sees an opportunity to show even more fully how God breaks into the human condition, into our lives. Not only does Jesus see an opportunity for the people, he sees an opportunity for the disciples. Jesus doesn’t perform this miracle on his own. He has the disciples participate. Have them be seated. Pass out the food. It’s a very eucharistic theme here. He took the

bread, blessed it and broke it and gave it to them.

“To give of ourselves, in his name, in service to others. Jesus wants us to participate in the moment, in the event.”

To follow that call of Jesus, the archbishop told the seniors they have to come down from the mountaintop moments of life and bring the everyday blessings of life to the people that God puts in their lives.

“You can’t sit on the sidelines,” he said. “In your schools, in your communities, in your families, in your churches and parishes—how do we participate in the miracles that continue to happen in our midst today? How do we continue to recognize and see not how the world sees but how God sees?”

“Not to see problems but opportunities. Not to see someone to despise, fear or reject, but how to see an opportunity for dialogue, for listening? If it doesn’t come from you, where does your school get that leadership, that opportunity to show others how to live and be in a Christ-like way?”

Noting that Pope Francis has designated 2025 as

a jubilee year with the theme of encouraging people to be “pilgrims of hope,” Archbishop Thompson encouraged the seniors to embrace that call in their lives.

“As pilgrims of hope, let us help others be led to that mountain top experience of encounter with the sacred, with the divine,” he said. “[Let’s] open ourselves to being his disciples, his pilgrims, being leaders not just when we’re seniors, not just when we’re on

the top, but day in and day out—by simply being true to our values, to our character, to our virtues, to what it means to be Christ-centered people, people of God.”

The archbishop ended his homily with this request to the seniors, “Never take for granted the miracles that God can work in your lives.”



A choir composed of seniors from Catholic high schools across the archdiocese sings during a Mass with Archbishop Charles C. Thompson at St. Malachy Church in Brownsburg on Dec. 4. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

The homily resonated with seniors. So did the opportunity to share the Mass with the archbishop and their fellow seniors from across the archdiocese.

“We’re sharing the same experience together,” said Dionte Greathouse, a senior at Father Thomas Scecina Memorial High School in Indianapolis. “And it’s amazing to have the archbishop here. He’s pretty high up. Having someone like that being able to come and show us grace, I feel that’s very loving and important.”

Stella Huber was among the seniors from Our Lady of Providence High School in Clarksville who made the two-hour bus trip both ways to participate in the Mass.

“We’re so blessed to be with all the other seniors in the archdiocese and unite for the Mass, which is our greatest form of prayer,” said Stella, a member of St. Mary-of-the-Knobs Parish in Floyd County. “I think it makes it even more special that the archbishop is here.

“For me, he confirmed all of us. And he’s our leader. So for us, as we’re going from high school to college, we’re so blessed to be in communion with each other and have this send-off for us.” †



Dionte Greathouse



Stella Huber

Four archdiocesan schools receive Blue Ribbon honor for academic excellence

(Editor’s note: This story is a shortened version of the original one that appeared in the Sept. 27, 2024, issue of The Criterion.)

By Sean Gallagher and Natalie Hoefler

Four Catholic schools in the archdiocese were named a national Blue Ribbon School during this academic year, adding to a 42-year tradition of excellence.

The U.S. Department of Education bestowed the Blue Ribbon School recognition on Roncalli High School and St. Pius X School, both in Indianapolis, SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi School in Greenwood and St. Mary-of-the-Knobs School in Floyd County.

Catholic schools in the archdiocese have now received 43 Blue Ribbon School designations since the program was started in 1982.

Brian Disney, archdiocesan school superintendent, said he was “extremely excited” by the honor for the four schools.

“These schools are led by outstanding leaders who integrate the Catholic faith into all aspects of the school experience,” Disney said. “The partnerships between their outstanding teachers and engaged parents support the spiritual, academic and character growth of all students.”

Disney praised the four schools as continuing “a long trend of archdiocesan schools being recognized for excellence by the U.S. Department of Education.”

This year, 16 schools in Indiana received the Blue Ribbon honor. Seven are Catholic.

Chuck Weisenbach was on Roncalli’s staff the last three times it was named a Blue Ribbon School, in 1993, 1998 and 2003. A 1979 graduate of the school, he later served as a coach, teacher and principal at Roncalli before becoming its president.

“Things have changed since the last time we won, so I think it represents our great work,” Weisenbach said.

One change he noted is the student population’s increased diversity in ethnicity, socio-economic status and its range of learners, “from kids with special needs, to kids working toward a four-year college degree, to internships for kids who want to pursue a more hands-on career.”

What hasn’t changed at Roncalli, principal Kevin Banich noted, is the centrality of its Catholic identity, which he insisted has “everything—period, exclamation point”—to do with its academic excellence.

Banich noted that the 10 Catholic grade schools of the parishes in the Indianapolis South Deanery that send students on to Roncalli “deserve a large portion of the credit” for their role in making the honor possible. “We stand on the shoulders of the foundations they laid.”

SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi School in Greenwood is one of those South Deanery schools. Its 430 students reveled in their own Blue Ribbon honor—the first time the Greenwood

school, founded in 2006, has been so recognized.

“To be recognized as a Blue Ribbon School has been a goal of ours for years,” said Rebecca Stone, the school’s principal. “We’ve known that we’re this great. Now the whole nation will know about the great things that are happening at SS. Francis and Clare.”

Stone says the academic excellence at SS. Francis and Clare is rooted in its dedication to “center all of our decisions around our faith.”

When that happens, she said, “then that bleeds into everything we do throughout the school day. Then it ends up being the way that the kids make decisions and interact with one another.”

Another first-time archdiocesan recipient of the Blue Ribbon award is St. Mary-of-the-Knobs School in Floyd County in the New Albany Deanery.

While principal Tracy Jansen said the school community feels “very honored,” the designation is something she had faith the school would one day achieve.

The school is one of only five rural, non-public schools to receive the honor this year.

She credits the recognition in part to “our exceptional Catholic faith community that we have at our school, and our excellent teachers and staff. I can’t say enough about our community. You walk in our school and it’s palpable, the presence of the Holy Spirit.”

Another aspect Jansen is “really proud of” is the school’s “focus on our environment and culture and the way we engage learners through our school

mission: That, guided by Christ, all students will be nurtured spiritually, academically and individually. Our teachers do all they can do to carry out our mission.”

Keely Beaudette has known for more than 30 years that St. Pius X School was special. She first arrived as a third-grade student in the late 1980s and has been on staff there for 12 years, the last six years serving as principal. So, she wasn’t surprised when St. Pius was named a Blue Ribbon School this year.

“I knew we had received it in the past,” Beaudette noted, referring to St. Pius being named a Blue Ribbon School in 2007. “It was important for me in my leadership role to get our teachers and students back to that. This is who we are.”

When the announcement was made on Sept. 23, Beaudette was especially happy for the teachers at St. Pius.

“It’s a true testament to them and everything that they’ve done, and their dedication to the students, the parents and the community,” she said.

Beaudette also expressed her pride in the school’s students.

“They kept working. They kept going. They helped us get this honor, which is wonderful.”

One of the factors Beaudette said that helps St. Pius excel academically is its Catholic identity.

“We want to develop the whole child, not only to be academically strong, but spiritually strong, and socially and emotionally strong,” she said. “The Catholic identity piece helps us to move our kids closer to that every single day.” †



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Programs prepare students for game-changing paths

By Natalie Hoefler

When it comes to Catholic high schools, “We can’t be one-size-fits-all,” says Jo Hoy, president of Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School in Indianapolis. “We want all of our students to have opportunities for their future based on their interests and gifts.”

For some, that might mean earning a college degree. For others, it could mean earning a technical certification, learning a trade, joining the military or becoming a firefighter or law enforcement officer.

This article features how two Catholic high schools within the archdiocese are offering programs for students to explore potential postsecondary paths.

As it happens, both schools’ established programs satisfy a new high school graduation option recently announced by the Indiana Department of Education (DOE).

‘A great way to explore future options’

That option is for students to earn an “honors” or honors-plus” seal for their diploma proving “postsecondary readiness” for higher education, employment or a military/public servant path.

Talk of such an option is not new, particularly in terms of students seeking employment after graduating.

“We knew there was a movement a couple of years ago about how [Indiana business and industry] leaders were looking for employability skills from students graduating from high school,” says Hoy.

In researching the future job market, she and her team discovered a growing demand in the STEM fields—science, technology, engineering and math. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, more than 80% of jobs will require STEM skills in the next decade.

“We took that information and looked at what fields had shortages,” Hoy explains. “A few years ago, we were able to start putting plans in place.”

The result is the school’s Career Technical Education Programs (CTEP). It enlists professionals to prepare interested students for certification exams—currently as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), pharmacy tech or in cybersecurity—and to learn from technical experts for a career in heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems.

Based on the DOE’s recently released document, these established programs can now qualify students for an honors and honors-plus employment seal years before the DOE’s deadline of 2029.

CTEP “gives our kids a beautiful advantage,” says Hoy. “Very often for many students, they don’t know what they don’t know. Our hope is to show them, ‘There is more, and you can do it. You have that opportunity, and you’re better set up for the future.’”

“It’s an additional opportunity for them to further educate themselves and make a decision on what they want to do in the future.”

That opportunity has proven impactful for Ritter junior Ashley Escamilla.

“I originally wanted to go into the psychology field to become a social worker,” says Ashley. “But then I

decided to see if maybe nursing had an interest.”

She enrolled in Cardinal Ritter’s CNA program last fall. Students take a special class and participate in clinicals.

“At first, it was very nerve-wracking,” Ashley admits of her first clinical experience in a nursing home. “But everyone there was very welcoming, and they showed me a lot. I got to practice bed showers, helping [residents] change, feeding them.”

The course and hands-on experience have changed Ashley’s thoughts about her future.

“As of right now, nursing seems to be the way to go, not psychology anymore,” she says. “So, if it continues working out, then I would go to college, get a nursing degree and go into the nursing field.”

Meanwhile, if she passes the CNA certification exam later this spring, she can confirm her choice and gain more experience—and get paid—by working as a CNA.

Ashley says she would “definitely recommend” Cardinal Ritter’s certification and technical path programs.

“If you’re still deciding what you want to do, it’s a great way to see if maybe [nursing, pharmacy, cybersecurity or HVAC] is what you want to do,” she says. “Because maybe you think it’s what you want to do, and then when you actually study it in college and don’t like it, you’ve wasted a whole year.

“It’s a great way to explore your future options.”

‘The most transformative experience in my life’

For students of Providence Cristo Rey High School (PCR) in Indianapolis, work is woven into their education experience.

“As part of the Cristo Rey Network, we’re required to have every student work one day a week [during the school year] freshman through senior year” through the network’s Corporate Work Study program, says Tyler Mayer, PCR’s president and CEO. “It could be in health care, engineering, finance, banking, insurance, non-profits, construction—we’re open to almost any industry.

“The program is a real game-changer.”

New students attend a two-week general job training—learning how to dress, how to use basic equipment, even taking a personality test to help identify possible fields of interest.

The training concludes with a job fair. Students interview with companies of their choice, then input from both the student and company is considered and a match is made.

“About half of our students end up staying at a company for four years,” says Mayer. “Some decide later they want to try a different industry.”

With each student working about 250 hours per year, the Corporate Work Study program “has the hours built into our school schedule that are required” to earn an honors or honors-plus employment seal.

Through the work study, students “develop soft skills, hard skills, the ability to understand what kind of jobs are out there, and they get a career mentor,” Mayer says.

For a school catering to families in economic need,



Javion Newell, a senior at Providence Cristo Rey High School in Indianapolis, poses with one of the many animals he helped care for at the Indianapolis Zoo through the school’s Corporate Work Study program. (Submitted photo)

“The biggest thing is that [the program] provides students opportunities or opens doors for them they couldn’t have otherwise,” Mayer adds. “Developing good relationships and building networks are important to finding a job. [The work study program] maximizes the possibility of breaking out of that cycle of poverty.”

Ultimately, he says, the goal is “to maximize [students’] potential and have them become the best version of themselves.”

Javion Newell is succeeding in that goal.

Having a lifelong love for animals, the PCR senior has worked for the Indianapolis Zoo for his work study experience since his freshman year.

“For the first couple of years I worked with elephants, orangutans, penguins, doing husbandry, enrichment creating and diet preparation,” says Javion.

“They also offered a chance for him to work there in the summer as an animal caregiver,” Mayer adds. “Usually, only college students get to do that.”

As part of his work study, Javion also attended zoo staff meetings. What he learned during the meetings’ “Conservation Minute” talks intrigued him.

“The zoo let me switch to their global department,” says Javion. “Now I’ve shifted my focus toward the conservation side of animal care. It’s really expanded my vision of what I want to do.”

He plans to attend college and earn a biology degree, noting that there are “different paths to get into conservation, and science is the path for me.”

Javion says he has learned “so much more” than how to care for animals through his work study experience.

“Being in a professional workspace, you learn how to make conversation and keep conversation going,” he says. “You’re networking, learning from people, being trainable. Most important is learning to be able to adapt to different environments.

“This has been the most transformative experience in my life.” †

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School choice advocates seek to get voucher program ‘across the finish line’

By Sean Gallagher

Rep. Julie McGuire (R-Indianapolis) was an advocate of school choice in her first term in the state House of Representatives starting in 2022.

While she wanted parents in her district on the south side of Indianapolis and others across the Hoosier State to be able to choose the best educational setting for their children, McGuire came to this cause from personal experience.

Through the years, her youngest son Viktor has been enrolled at a public, a charter and a private school.

In 2017, McGuire and her husband Mark, members of St. Roch Parish in Indianapolis, adopted Viktor, who was born and raised in Ukraine and was 11 at the time.

When the McGuires brought Viktor home, they knew he needed intensive help with learning English, something that St. Roch School could not offer him. So, they enrolled him in a public school.

Later, he experienced challenges there.

“It was a very difficult year for him,” McGuire said. “He couldn’t deal with all of the distractions in the classroom. There were a lot of behavior issues, substitute teachers all the time. He would come home stressed out.”

So, she and her husband moved him to a charter school for his middle school years.

“It was very strict and fit his needs better,” McGuire noted.

Viktor is now a junior at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis.

“I believe in school choice because I think it’s the right thing for families,” McGuire said. “And I believe in it personally because I’ve been able to experience the flexibility that it’s given my family.”



Rep. Julie McGuire poses with her son Viktor, a junior at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis. Viktor, adopted by McGuire in 2017, was born and raised in Ukraine. An advocate for school choice in Indiana, McGuire has experienced personally in the life of her son in the U.S. how vouchers help parents meet the educational needs of children. (Submitted photo)

Crossing the finish line

After being re-elected last November, McGuire returned to the Statehouse for the 2025 session of the Indiana General Assembly where she joined other advocates for school choice.

Two years ago, the legislature approved a major expansion of the state’s voucher program, giving some 97% of Hoosier families access to vouchers.

Legislators are now considering removing all income requirements from the voucher program and making school choice universal in Indiana.

John Elcesser, executive director of the Indiana Non-Public Educational Association (INPEA), is working with legislators to move universal school choice in the state, in his words, “across the finish line.”



John Elcesser

“We’re so close to having all families be able to take advantage of this without significant financial sacrifice,” Elcesser said. “We just need to take this last step.”

“There are 10 other states right now that have universal choice or have passed universal choice legislation. Indiana once was a leader in school choice. Now, we’re trying to play catch up.”

Elcesser was an educator before coming to the INPEA in 2008 and knows from that experience in the classroom the difference school choice can make.

“I saw kids over the years that continued to struggle,” he recalled. “But then they get to the right teacher or the right school and, boom, the light goes on and they take off.”

“We want all kids to be in the place where that light goes on and they can be successful, because they’re with the right teacher, in the right environment, the right social setting and the right values-based setting for them to be successful.”

Sue Prewitt is thankful that vouchers made it possible to enroll her twin granddaughters Cameron and Adrienne Prewitt at St. Roch School.

When she became their guardian about two years ago

when their mother, her daughter, died, the twins were behind in their education.

Now in the eighth grade at St. Roch, Cameron and Adrienne have caught up with their classmates.

“Had I not had any vouchers for the twins, I wouldn’t have been able to afford it,” Prewitt said. “I’m 71. I still work part time, and I have Social Security. There would have been no way I could have afforded St. Roch without the vouchers.”

For Prewitt, sending her granddaughters to St. Roch wasn’t just about the educational help they have received there.

“It’s a community,” she said. “It’s more than just education. It’s faith and the community. I don’t feel like you get that in a public school.”

‘The money follows the child’

As good an educational experience as Cameron and Adrienne have had at St. Roch, it could be made even better if universal school choice is approved by the legislature.

As Chris Brunson, INPEA’s associate executive director, explained, many private schools that receive vouchers up to now have had to hire administrative staff members simply to manage the voucher application process.

“Schools that are not going to see one more dollar or enroll one more child because of the move to universal choice are going to free up a whole lot of administrative time to reinvest to direct services to students and improve quality of outcomes,” Brunson said.

He added that providing financial information to qualify for vouchers is “invasive to families.”

“They have to divulge all kinds of things, not just their tax records,” Brunson said. “In some cases, it’s a lot more than that. And it’s a burden to schools.”

The principles of school choice in Indiana go back much further than when the voucher program was created in 2011. Before then, moves were made to allow parents

to enroll their children in any traditional public school district of their choice or in charter schools, which also pre-date the voucher program.

McGuire emphasized that all of these changes have been based in the simple policy that “the money follows the child.”

“We’re a state that believes in choice for parents to make the best decision about what setting is going to fit the education needs of their child,” she said.

Brunson added the most common school choice decision made by parents in Indiana is to send them from one traditional public school district to another one, not to a charter school or to a private school.

“It’s bigger than vouchers,” he said.

Elcesser noted that bringing the voucher program “across the finish line” and giving the last 3% of Hoosier families ineligible for a voucher access to one is a matter of fairness, because all families pay taxes that fund the program.

“We’re all contributing to that public funding. We’re all taxpayers,” he said. “We’re excluding a subset of folks from being able to participate in this program who are taxpayers and potentially significant taxpayers.”

“Why would we exclude 3% of Indiana’s population from participating in this program and being able to exercise their responsibility as parents without significant financial sacrifice?”

And, in the end, Elcesser noted that it’s important for Hoosiers to know that the voucher program only takes up 2% of the state budget, less than 5% of the state education budget, and that only 6% of students in the state receive vouchers.

He added, “We believe that all families that are paying taxes should be able to use that small percentage of their state tax dollars to support private school choice.” †



Chris Brunson

Ways to show support for universal school choice in Indiana

Criterion staff report

The Indiana General Assembly is considering removing all income restrictions from the state school voucher program and making educational choice universal in the state.

The Indiana Non-Public Educational Association (INPEA) recommends the following actions for people to let legislators know of their support

for this legislation that will bring the voucher program “across the finish line,” according to the INPEA’s executive director, John Elcesser:

—Follow the Indiana Non-Public Education Association on Facebook and X and sign up to receive INPEA’s newsletters with updates throughout the legislative session.

—Send an e-mail, note or letter in support of universal choice to your

legislators. Handwritten notes are especially effective. Visit INPEA’s Legislative Action Center at bit.ly/INPEALegislativeActionCenter for contact information.

—Record a video telling legislators how school choice has impacted your family and how universal choice would be beneficial. You can share this video on social media or send it via e-mail to your legislators.

—Be willing to testify at the Statehouse in support of universal choice. For more information, reach out to Andrea Anderson, INPEA’s communications and member relations director, at aanderson@inpea.org.

—Respond to INPEA’s legislative action alerts throughout the legislative session. This information will be shared via e-mail and on social media. †



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

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

Why donate?

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

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

Frequently Asked Questions

Is there a limit to how much I can give and still receive the tax credit?

No, provided the donation does not exceed the available credits under the cap. (The state has allocated \$18.5 million for fiscal year 2025 and resets annually on July 1).

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

Are gifts from a Donor Advised Fund eligible for the tax credit?

Yes, with certain conditions. The credit is available only to the original donor of the funds. Federal provisions may include a reduction in deductible charitable contributions and potential exposure to excise taxes.

DONATION FORM

Complete all fields and mail with your donation

- Individual Donation or
- Business Donation

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY/STATE/ZIP

EMAIL

TELEPHONE

DONATION AMOUNT

DATE

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

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

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

How do I donate to IQE?

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

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

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

Tax Credit Examples

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

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

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



**The Institute for Quality Education
Scholarship Granting Organization**

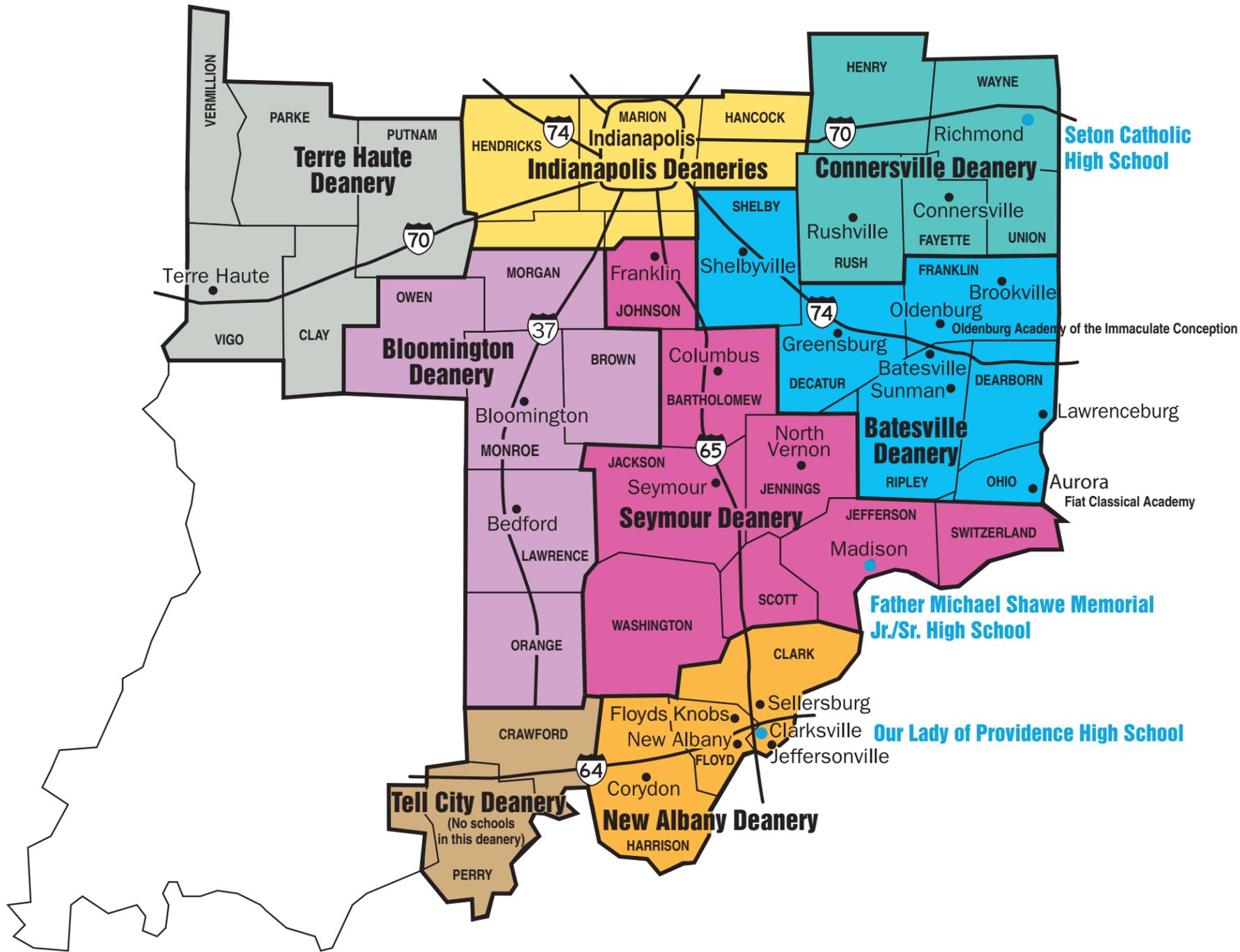
The Institute for Quality Education (IQE) is the largest of six state-approved scholarship granting organizations (SGO) in Indiana. Since the beginning of this program, SGOs have awarded more than \$45 million in scholarships to nearly 35,000 Hoosier students, in partnership with nearly 300 private schools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

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





Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis



DEANERY SCHOOLS

Batesville Deanery

Batesville
St. Louis School (PK-8)
 17 St. Louis Place
 Batesville, IN 47006
 812-934-3310

Brookville
St. Michael School (PK-8)
 275 High St.
 Brookville, IN 47012
 765-647-4961

Greensburg
St. Mary School (PK-8)
 1331 E. Hunter Robbins Way
 Greensburg, IN 47240
 812-663-2804

Lawrenceburg
St. Lawrence School (K-8)
 524 Walnut St.
 Lawrenceburg, IN 47025
 812-537-3690

Ripley County
St. Nicholas School (PK-8)
 6459 E. St. Nicholas Drive
 Sunman, IN 47041
 812-623-2348

Shelbyville
St. Joseph School (PK-5)
 127 E. Broadway
 Shelbyville, IN 46176
 317-398-4202

Bloomington Deanery

Bedford
St. Vincent de Paul School (PK-8)
 923 18th St.
 Bedford, IN 47421
 812-279-2540

Bloomington
St. Charles Borromeo School (PK-8)
 2224 E. Third St.
 Bloomington, IN 47401
 812-336-5853

Connersville Deanery
Connersville
St. Gabriel School (PK-6)
 224 W. Ninth St.
 Connersville, IN 47331
 765-825-7951

Richmond
Seton Catholic High School (7-12)
 233 S. 5th St.
 Richmond, IN 47374
 765-965-6956

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School (PK-6)
 801 W. Main St.
 Richmond, IN 47374
 765-962-4877

Rushville
St. Mary School (PK-6)
 226 E. Fifth St.
 Rushville, IN 46173
 765-932-3639

New Albany Deanery

Clarksville
Our Lady of Providence High School (9-12)
 707 Providence Way
 Clarksville, IN 47129
 812-945-2538

St. Anthony of Padua School (PK-8)
 320 N. Sherwood Ave.
 Clarksville, IN 47129
 812-282-2144

Corydon
St. Joseph School (PK-8)
 512 N. Mulberry St.
 Corydon, IN 47112
 812-738-4549

Floyd County
St. Mary-of-the-Knobs School (PK-8)
 3033 Martin Road
 Floyds Knobs, IN 47119
 812-923-1630

Jeffersonville
Most Sacred Heart of Jesus School (PK-8)
 1842 E. Eighth St.
 Jeffersonville, IN 47130
 812-283-3123

New Albany
Holy Family School (PK-8)
 217 W. Daisy Lane
 New Albany, IN 47150
 812-944-6090

Our Lady of Perpetual Help School (PK-8)
 1752 Scheller Lane
 New Albany, IN 47150
 812-944-7676

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

Seymour Deanery
Columbus
St. Bartholomew School (K-8)
 1306 27th St.
 Columbus, IN 47201
 812-372-6830

Franklin
St. Rose of Lima School (PK-7)
 114 Lancelot Drive
 Franklin, IN 46131
 317-738-3451

Madison
Father Michael Shawe Memorial Jr./Sr. High School (7-12)
 201 W. State St.
 Madison, IN 47250
 812-273-2150

Pope John XXIII School (PK-6)
 221 W. State St.
 Madison, IN 47250
 812-273-3957

North Vernon
St. Mary School (PK-8)
 209 Washington St.
 North Vernon, IN 47265
 812-346-3445

Seymour
St. Ambrose School (PK-8)
 301 S. Chestnut St.
 Seymour, IN 47274
 812-522-3522

Terre Haute Deanery

Terre Haute
St. Patrick School (PK-8)
 449 S. 19th St.
 Terre Haute, IN 47803
 812-232-2157

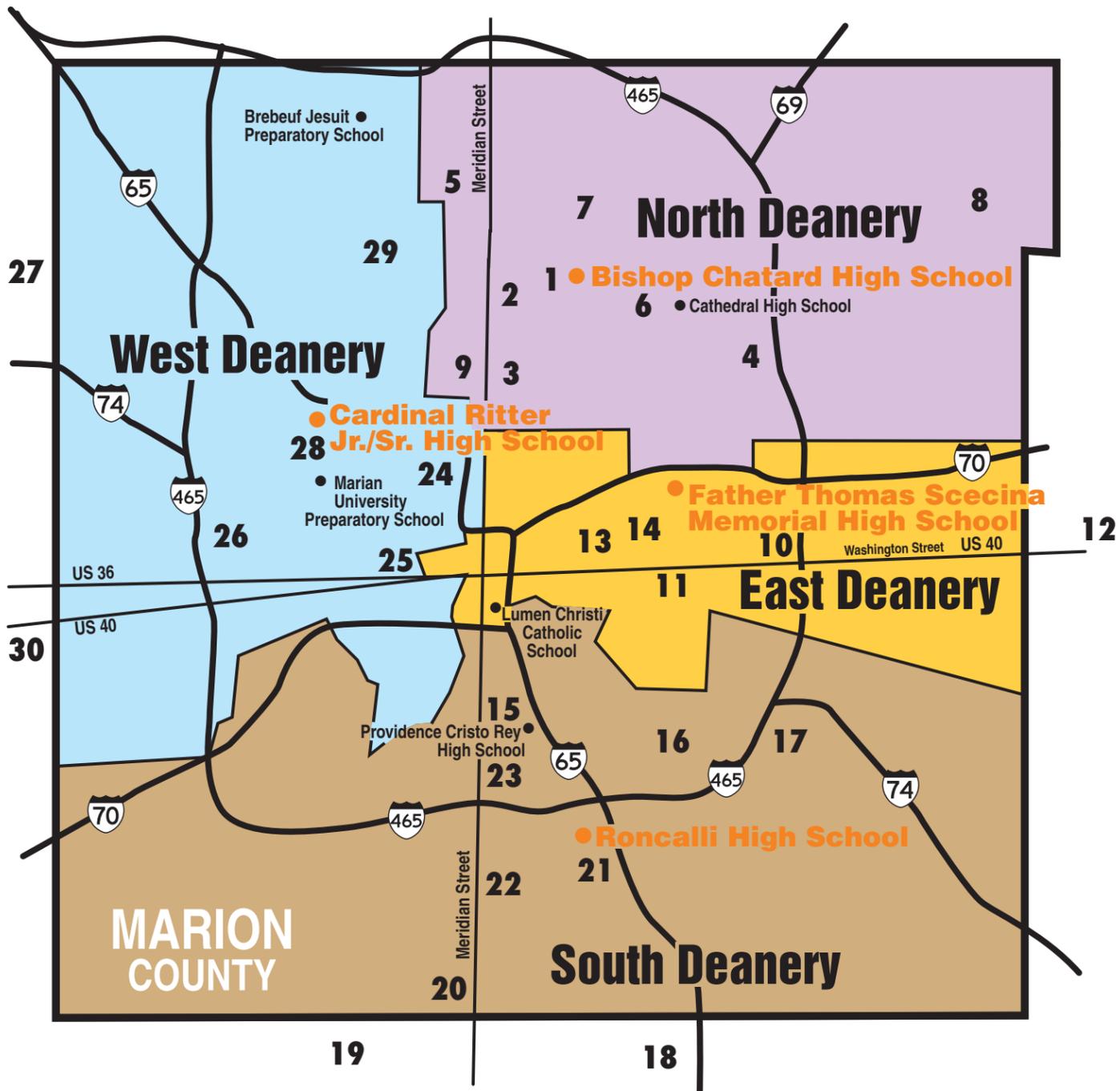
Private High Schools

Aurora
Fiat Classical Academy
 211 Fourth Street
 Aurora, IN 47001
 812-954-2045

Oldenburg
Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception (9-12)
 1 Twister Circle
 P.O. Box 200
 Oldenburg, IN 47036
 812-934-4440



Catholic Schools in the Greater Indianapolis Area



GREATER INDIANAPOLIS DEANERY SCHOOLS

Indianapolis North Deanery

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

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

- **Father Thomas Scecina Memorial High School (9-12)**
5000 Nowland Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46201
317-356-6377

- 10. Holy Spirit School (PK-8)**
7241 E. 10th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46219
317-352-1243
- 11. Our Lady of Lourdes School (PK-8)**
30 S. Downey St.
Indianapolis, IN 46219
317-357-3316
- 12. St. Michael School (PK-8)**
515 Jefferson Blvd.
Greenfield, IN 46140
317-462-6380

Indianapolis East Deanery

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

- 13. St. Philip Neri School (PK-8) ***
545 N. Eastern Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46201
317-636-0134
- 14. St. Theres of the Infant Jesus (Little Flower) School (PK-8)**
1401 N. Bosart Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46201
317-353-2282
- 15. Central Catholic School (PK-8) ***
1155 E. Cameron St.
Indianapolis, IN 46203
317-783-7759
- 16. Holy Name of Jesus School (PK-8)**
21 N. 17th Ave.
Beech Grove, IN 46107
317-784-9078
- 17. Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ School (PK-8)**
3310 S. Meadow Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46239
317-357-1459

Indianapolis South Deanery

- **Roncalli High School (9-12)**
3300 Prague Road
Indianapolis, IN 46227
317-787-8277
- 18. Our Lady of the Greenwood School (PK-8)**
399 S. Meridian St.
Greenwood, IN 46143
317-881-1300
- 19. SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi School (PK-8)**
5901 Olive Branch Road
Greenwood, IN 46143
317-215-2826
- 20. St. Barnabas School (PK-8)**
8300 Rahke Road
Indianapolis, IN 46217
317-881-7422
- 21. St. Jude School (PK-8)**
5375 McFarland Road
Indianapolis, IN 46227
317-784-6828
- 22. St. Mark the Evangelist School (PK-8)**
541 E. Edgewood Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46227
317-786-4013
- 23. St. Roch School (PK-8)**
3603 S. Meridian St.
Indianapolis, IN 46227
317-784-9144

- 24. Holy Angels School (PK-6) ***
2822 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. St.
Indianapolis, IN 46208
317-926-5211
- 25. St. Anthony School (PK-8)**
349 N. Warman Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46222
317-636-3739
- 26. St. Christopher School (PK-6)**
5335 W. 16th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46224
317-241-6314
- 27. St. Malachy School (PK-8)**
330 N. Green St.
Brownsburg, IN 46112
317-852-2242
- 28. St. Michael-St. Gabriel Archangels School (PK-8)**
3352 W. 30th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46222
317-926-0516
- 29. St. Monica School (PK-8)**
6131 N. Michigan Road
Indianapolis, IN 46228
317-255-7153
- 30. St. Susanna School (PK-8)**
1212 E. Main St.
Plainfield, IN 46168
317-839-3713

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

- 29. Providence Cristo Rey High School (9-12)**
2717 S. East St.
Indianapolis, IN 46225
317-860-1000

- 30. Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School (9-12)**
2801 W. 86th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46268
317-524-7128

- 31. Cathedral High School (9-12)**
5225 E. 56th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46226
317-542-1481

- 32. Lumen Christi Catholic School (PK-12)**
580 E. Stevens St.
Indianapolis, IN 46203
317-632-3174

- 33. Marian University Preparatory School (K-12)**
2916 W. 30th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46222
855-777-0679

- 34. St. Pius X School (K-8)**
7200 Sarto Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46240
317-466-3361

Private Schools

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

* Mother Theodore Catholic Academies



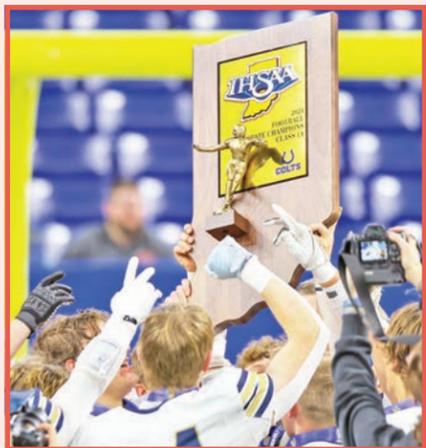
A year of celebrating the fun and friendships of the Catholic Youth Organization



‘We’ll have those memories forever’: Catholic teams savor state championships

By John Shaughnessy

In any given year, sports teams and individuals of Catholic high schools in the archdiocese always compete in—and



Members of the football team of Our Lady of Providence High School in Clarksville raise Indiana’s Class 1A state championship trophy in joy after completing a perfect 14-0 season when they defeated the team from North Judson High School 35-20 on Nov. 30. (Submitted photo)

often win—state championships.

That reality has once again been true during this school year.

The boys’ tennis team of Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School in Indianapolis started the state championship success by defeating the team from Center Grove High School in the finals. With the teams tied at 2-2 after the first four matches, the state championship came down to the nail-biting fifth match. The final two points played out in volleys that lasted beyond 20 times before Brebeuf secured the state championship on Oct. 19.

On Nov. 9, the girls’ volleyball team of Roncalli High School in Indianapolis won Indiana’s Class 3A state championship, completing its season with a perfect 35-0 record. In the team’s 3-0 victory over the team from Angola High School, the Royals added to their astonishing total of winning 97 sets and losing just five sets during their season-long march to being crowned state champs.

The football team of Our Lady of Providence High School in Clarksville also completed a perfect season—14 wins without a loss—when it defeated

the team from North Judson High School 35-20 on Nov. 30 in Indiana’s Class 1A state championship game.

The head coaches of each of these state champions exuded emotion as they reflected on their team’s memorable seasons.

In talking about his Brebeuf Jesuit players, boys’ head tennis coach Brandon Gill said, “I told them that nothing was given to them, they earned everything this season, and they showed a resiliency and mental toughness to come through in the big moments.”

Roncalli’s achievement in girls’ volleyball meant everything to head coach Chrsitina Erazmus, a 2001 graduate of the school who played on the school’s volleyball team during her four years there.

“It was just special being able to go around and hug each of my players, just embracing them and thanking them for their commitment to our program,” Erazmus said. “Roncalli is just such a wonderful community. I love this community, and it means so much to me that I was able to guide the girls on this

team to a state championship.”

As the head coach of Providence’s football team, Daniel McDonald had similar praise for his school community. He also shared a special salute to the eight seniors on the team.

“They’re high-character individuals,” McDonald said. “They’re the kind of kids you know they’re going to be successful in life no matter what they do. They’re going to be great husbands. They’re going to be great fathers. And that’s really what I want our kids to take away from our program.”

The girls’ soccer team of Our Lady of Providence also had a remarkable season, making it to Indiana’s Class 1A state championship game, finishing as runner-up.

While talking about Brebeuf’s championship in boys’ tennis, Gill shared a thought that could connect with all the teams and athletes of Catholic high schools across the archdiocese.

“As time goes on, it’s always going to be something that we can look back on, and we’ll have those memories forever.” †

PRESIDENT

continued from page 1A

began, before evoking pivotal moments in U.S. history where the nation's leaders turned to the Lord.

"Remembering General George Washington on his knees at Valley Forge. Recalling Abraham Lincoln at his second inaugural, 'with malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right.' Remembering Gen. George Patton's instructions to his soldiers as they began the Battle of the Bulge eight decades ago: 'Pray! Pray when fighting. Pray alone. Pray with others. Pray by night. Pray by day.'

"Observing the birthday of the Rev. Martin Luther King who warned, without God 'our efforts turn to ashes,' we, blessed citizens of this one nation under God, humbled by our claim that 'In God We Trust,' gather indeed this Inauguration Day to pray," he said.

Cardinal Dolan prayed "for our president Donald J. Trump, his family, his advisers, his cabinet, his aspirations, his vice president; for the Lord's blessings upon Joseph Biden; for our men and women in uniform; for each other, whose

hopes are stoked this new year, this inauguration day."

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops did not release an Inauguration Day statement on Jan. 20, but did post an Inauguration Day prayer on X. "Assist with your spirit of counsel and fortitude the President of these United States, that his administration may be conducted in righteousness, and be eminently useful to your people over whom he presides," it began. "May he encourage due respect for virtue and religion. May he execute the laws with justice and mercy. May he seek to restrain crime, vice and immorality."

The prayer also asked that the "light of your divine wisdom direct the deliberations of Congress" and for all U.S. citizens, "that we be blessed in the knowledge and sanctified in the observance of your holy law."

In a Jan. 20 statement, Louis Brown Jr., executive director of the Christ Medicus Foundation, a Catholic health care ministry that works to protect religious freedom for medical professionals and patients, said that with the new administration, the organization had "great hope for the renewal of a culture of life, justice and human dignity for all Americans."

A former political appointee at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the first Trump administration, Brown said that "we offer prayers for President Donald Trump, his administration and our elected leaders that they be guided by our Lord, that they may do justice, protect life, protect our country, and respect and defend human freedom."

In his inauguration invocation, Cardinal Dolan referred to King Solomon's appeal "for wisdom as he began his governance." "God of our fathers, in your wisdom you set man to govern your creatures, to govern in holiness and justice, to render justice with integrity," the cardinal prayed. "Give our leader wisdom, for he is your servant aware of his own weakness and brevity of life. If wisdom, which comes from you be not with him, he shall be held in no esteem. Send wisdom from heaven that she may be with him, that he may know your designs."

"Please, God bless America, please mend her every flaw," he continued. "You are the God in whom we trust, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen."

For the inauguration's closing prayer,

Father Frank Mann, a retired priest of the Diocese of Brooklyn, N.Y., prayed with gratitude for the "many gifts you have bestowed upon our lands," and "the freedoms we cherish, for the strength of our communities and for the resilience of our spirit."

"As our president and vice president embrace their newly appointed roles, we humbly implore that your everlasting love and wisdom will envelop them," he prayed. "Grant them the clarity of mind to navigate the challenges that lie ahead and the compassion to serve all citizens with fairness and integrity."

He also prayed for comfort for "those who feel lost or disheartened. In this time of transition, may your light shine upon them, reaffirming their belief in a brighter tomorrow," he prayed.

Father Mann had befriended the president after caring for the graves of Trump's parents, Mary and Fred Trump, in a Queens cemetery. He recalled their memory in his prayer.

"From their place in heaven, may they shield their son from all harm by their loving protection and give him the strength to guide our nation along the path that will make America great again." †

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Joyful Witness/Kimberly Pohovey

God redirects us on our life journey for our protection if we listen

Have you ever had the experience of hearing the same Scripture over and over throughout your life, but you suddenly hear something new in the story?



On Jan. 5, when we observed the feast of the Epiphany, I again listened to the Gospel story of the visit of the three wise men at Jesus' birth. The line that struck me was at the end. The Gospel of Matthew reads: "And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way" (Mt 2:12).

The wise men were warned by the Lord in a dream to go home by using a different route, which both spared the baby Jesus from Herod's slaughter of innocent children and the kings from his wrath. I had an epiphany upon hearing these words. I wondered how many times God has sent me "another way" throughout my life?

I have to admit, I envy the Bible characters who received direct messages from God via a burning bush, a dream or the glow of a star to follow. It's not always clear

in which direction God is pointing me.

An intuitive dream or bright star would certainly come in handy. But the truth is, I know God speaks to me continually—maybe not in a dramatic dream—but through others in my life, through Scripture messages, and sometimes a thought that seems to be implanted in my brain.

You hear stories of folks averting catastrophe because of a traffic jam, delayed flight or other detour that helps them avoid being in an unforeseen accident, explosion or natural disaster. But I think God redirects us just as often for less dramatic consequences.

I've had plenty of times when I have changed course because a small voice inside my head led me elsewhere. Hearing the Scripture about the wise men on Epiphany helped me to see that it was most likely God sending me "another way" for my own protection or simply because he had something different or better in store for me.

Years ago, I applied and interviewed for a corporate position. I was disappointed that I was not offered the position but, not longer after, God pointed me in the direction that led to my 35-plus year career working for the Catholic Church.

Of course, finding another way requires us to be open to and actually follow God's direction. For just as many times as I have heeded God's voice in my head, there are probably just as many times that I ignored it.

For instance, it's very possible that the night I got mugged many years ago, God tried to redirect me, but I failed to listen. I recall thinking I probably shouldn't be walking out of a store alone at closing time in the pitch black of winter, but I rationalized that I wasn't parked that far away. Had I allowed God to lead me another way, I would have been spared a great deal of fear and frustration.

I am sure our heavenly Father knows what is best for me. Hopefully, the next time I feel God is leading me another way, I won't rationalize ignoring his voice.

Whether he leads me in a particular direction for my own protection or to show me something better, it would just be plain silly of me not to listen.

(Kimberly Pohovey is a member of St. Jude Parish in Indianapolis. She is the director of major and planned gifts for the archdiocese.) †

Journey of the Heart/Jennifer Burger

Like God, take time to offer embraces of unconditional love

With two adult children living out of state, we make frequent trips to the Indianapolis International Airport to pick them up when they come home.

Sometimes we opt for the easier in-and-out method of waiting in the remote cell



phone parking lot for the call that they've landed and pick them up outside the terminal. For their most recent visit, however, I decided that rather than stay in the remote cell phone lot, I would park in the garage and wait for their arrival inside the terminal.

There were a handful of people waiting for their loved ones, and I enjoyed watching their happy

reunions as I awaited my own.

One interaction caught my attention: a man walked into the main area of the terminal and was enthusiastically greeted by a woman. Their embrace lasted a long time as they rocked back and forth, and I could hear their cries of laughter and joy. It was a beautiful embrace, and I was deeply moved by it. They passed me as they were leaving, arm and arm, and their faces still radiated the joy of the embrace they had just shared.

Embraces such as this are memorable. I love a good hug and love to give them as I greet others, but an embrace is something more than a greeting. An embrace is not simply arms wrapped around another, but a holding of one another's heart.

It is an intimate exchange that remains with us long after arms are released. An embrace has the power to transform, to give new or renewed life, to restore and rebuild what has been lost or has been missing.

It is the embrace of joy between friends reuniting after a long time away or of support between two people consoling each other during a loss, moments when words

cannot express what the heart is feeling—a deep expression of a love shared.

Indeed, a true embrace reveals love. In this, we are reminded and assured that we are loved and held by God and carry that with us.

*It is the embrace of joy
between friends reuniting
after a long time away
or of support between
two people consoling
each other during a loss,
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shared.*

One of the most beautiful embraces we know from Scripture is from the Gospel of Luke in the Parable of the Lost Son—the father "ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him" (Lk 15:20). This was more than a homecoming but a reunion of two hearts—a love exchanged between the father and son.

The words they shared came after the embrace: the son's admission and the father's response to dress him in fine clothing and to declare a feast for him. But the embrace itself was an act of the heart—pure love!

The words of the older son who witnessed this embrace tell a different story, but I wonder if what he really wanted was not the material gifts and party, but the "embrace"? The love of his father was never far from him, but perhaps he never revealed his heart to the father to make this exchange complete?

The embrace of God's love is for us all. God does not hold back, but so often we do.

There are places in our hearts that need this embrace, as well as in our families and in the world today. The embrace may find us as we wait in remote places, but most often we have to "go inside" first to awaken the heart to reveal what needs embracing.

Where hearts are hardened, let there be the embrace of reconciliation; where wounded, the embrace of healing; where curious, the embrace of faith and understanding; and where there is joy, let us share this embrace with each other!

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

Evangelization Outreach/Ute Eble

Community has a role and responsibility in shaping our young Church

I am in the midst of knitting a huge blanket.

In a moment of motherly sentimentality at the thought of our oldest son leaving home for college in a few months, I asked him if he wanted a hand-knit blanket.



He delightedly said "yes," but added that it had to be really big, since he is quite tall. So, really big it will be. But whether it is finished by the time he actually leaves is another question.

Besides the 4,000 yards of yarn, lots of prayers for him are knitted into this blanket as well. As he is getting ready to leave the nest, I'm asking myself many questions: Did we prepare him well for college? Is he going to find a good career that will not only help him make a living but also bring him joy? And most importantly: will he stay faithful to Jesus and continue being a member of the Catholic Church?

The statistics are abysmal, to be honest. In a recent webinar, we were given some statistics by Catholic radio hosts and authors Dr. Greg and Lisa Popcak. If their recent survey results are valid, only 15% of children from

Catholic families are going to stay practicing Catholics as adults.

Maybe because I am both a parent and a catechist, I'm not quick to blame anyone. Let's just agree that it is hard in our current age to pass on the faith.

Children are taught the faith first and foremost by their parents, but the community of the faithful also has a role and a responsibility in shaping the young Church. We hear this in every rite of baptism, and it is why our parish communities need to accompany parents, why we need faith formation programs, and why the Catholic identity of our schools is so important.

One thing has already become clear: no matter how much time is spent on it, or how well it is done, teaching the doctrines of our faith is not enough for a young person to stay Catholic—not even if it is accompanied by doing all the right things, like going to Mass regularly, participating in service projects and praying.

Too often, young adults tell us, "I listened to everything I was told in church and in school, and I did all the things, but it never 'clicked' for me."

What our young people need is to be evangelized, to

be told the good news of Christ in a way that touches their heart, to be invited into a personal relationship and friendship with Christ, and to be accompanied on their faith journey.

Catechesis is effective when it is evangelizing. This is why our archdiocesan Office of Catechesis is working diligently in cooperation with many other archdiocesan offices and departments in supporting pastors and their leaders so that all young people—but also their parents and catechists—experience evangelizing catechesis.

Lifelong discipleship requires that we at some point make a conscious decision to follow Christ because we have personally encountered him. And so, gradually, my conversations with my children have changed. I'm quizzing them less, and I'm explaining theology less.

Instead, I share more how I see God working in my life and I ask them, "How is your relationship with God these days?"

I'm hoping my son will take this relationship with him to college. And his blanket—if it gets finished.

(Ute Eble is the director of catechesis within the archdiocesan Secretariat for Evangelizing Catechesis. She can be reached at ueble@archindy.org.) †

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

The Sunday Readings

Sunday, January 26, 2025

- Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-30
- Luke 1:1-14, 4:14-21

The Book of Nehemiah furnishes the first reading for Mass this weekend. At one time in the Hebrew editions of the



Bible, this book and the Book of Ezra formed one volume. In time, they were separated and so they remain today.

Although some Old Testament books tell the history of the people of Israel, all are chiefly concerned

with inspiring God's people to be faithful and eager in their religious practice. In this reading, Ezra, who was a priest, called together men, women and children old enough to comprehend precisely to this end. He admonished this gathering to listen carefully to the Scripture.

After hearing the reading of the Scriptures, the people in this audience affirmed their faith. Ezra continued by interpreting what he had read.

Finally, Ezra and Nehemiah called the people to rejoice—for cause. God had spoken to them. God was guiding them.

For the next reading, a passage from St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians is offered. The Christian community in Corinth especially challenged Paul. Corinth was an important commercial center, one of the major markets and distribution centers in the Roman empire. Moreover, it was a very large city.

Paul wasn't troubled because Corinth was large and rich. Instead, he saw that its size and wealth produced a cultural atmosphere in which vice and greed reigned supreme. Indeed, Corinthians had the reputation of being exceedingly licentious even in the Mediterranean world of the time in which license and exploitation were commonplace. The evils in this atmosphere were contagious, enticing many Christians.

In addition, Corinthian Christians vied with each other within the Church. They quarreled with each other. They schemed against each other. They gossiped about each other. They toyed with pagan practices and customs.

Paul constantly and energetically called the Corinthian Christians

away from the temptations the pagan environment pressed upon them. In particular, he scorned the competitiveness among the Christians.

In this reading, Paul insists that all the baptized are in the mystical body of Christ; however, the body has many members. Each has a particular and needed role to play in the life of the Church.

Finally, St. Luke's Gospel supplies the last reading. The text includes the addressing of a person named Theophilus, who is given the honorific title "your excellency" (Lk 1:3). Luke's Gospel seemingly was written for this person.

Scholars have put forth many theories about who Theophilus may have been and how this name, which means "friend of God," may have come to be given to this person. In any case, the person apparently enjoyed some prestige, hence the use of the words "your excellency."

In this reading, Jesus appears in the synagogue of Nazareth to explain the mission of salvation. Salvation, unfolding in Jesus, was the gift of God's love, the final chapter in the long record of the merciful deeds of God among God's people.

Reflection

The Church celebrated Christmas, the feast of the birth of Jesus, as well as the feasts of the Epiphany of the Lord and of the Baptism of the Lord. In the lessons of these great liturgical events, the Church introduced us to Jesus. It identified him. He is the son of Mary, so Jesus was a human. He also is the Son of God. He is the Redeemer.

Now the Church begins to tell us about salvation and about how we personally should respond to salvation.

Paul sets the stage in First Corinthians. If we have accepted Christ into our hearts, we belong to God. Each of us has a personal vocation, although we may consider this term too lofty or too suggestive of a religious life. Regardless of occupation or circumstance, our individual vocation is to follow and reflect Christ.

God provides for us in this effort. He assists and strengthens us. He never forsakes us. Still, we are free and must decide to be loyal to God. †

Daily Readings

Monday, January 27

St. Angela Merici, virgin
Hebrews 9:15, 24-28
Psalm 98:1-6
Mark 3:22-30

Tuesday, January 28

St. Thomas Aquinas, priest and doctor of the Church
Hebrews 10:1-10
Psalm 40:2, 4ab, 7-8a, 10-11
Mark 3:31-35

Wednesday, January 29

Hebrews 10:11-18
Psalm 110:1-4
Mark 4:1-20

Thursday, January 30

Hebrews 10:19-25
Psalm 24:1-4b, 5-6
Mark 4:21-25

Friday, January 31

St. John Bosco, priest
Hebrews 10:32-39
Psalm 37:3-6, 23-24, 39-40
Mark 4:26-34

Saturday, February 1

Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19
(Response) Luke 1:69-75
Mark 4:35-41

Sunday, February 2

The Presentation of the Lord
Malachi 3:1-4
Psalm 24:7-10
Hebrews 2:14-18
Luke 2:22-40
or Luke 2:22-32

Question Corner/Jenna Marie Cooper

Jubilee years in the Church are rooted in Scripture and go back far in history

Q What is the significance of a jubilee year in the Church? (Florida)



A The short answer is a jubilee year is a special year of grace and reconciliation. Today, the Church celebrates a jubilee year every 25 years, although the pope can also declare an extraordinary jubilee year between

the regularly scheduled jubilees (as Pope Francis did from December 2015-November 2016 with the Year of Mercy.) The year 2000 was a jubilee year, as is 2025.

The concept of a jubilee year is rooted in the ancient Jewish tradition described in chapter 25 of the book Leviticus. As we read: "You shall count seven weeks of years—seven times seven years—such that the seven weeks of years amount to forty-nine years. [...] You shall treat this fiftieth year as sacred. You shall proclaim liberty in the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to your own property, each of you to your own family" (Lv 25:8,10).

In fact, the word "jubilee" originates from the name of the ram's horn, called a "yobel," which is sounded on Yom Kippur, the Jewish holy day of atonement and which was used to mark the opening of a jubilee year.

As the Vatican Jubilee website describes, the Catholic adaptation of jubilee years began in the Middle Ages: "In 1300, Pope Boniface VIII called the first jubilee, also known as a 'Holy Year,' since it is a time in which God's holiness transforms us. The frequency of Holy Years has changed over time: at first, they were celebrated every 100 years; later, in 1343, Pope Clement VI reduced the gap between Jubilees to every 50 years, and in 1470 Pope Paul II made it every 25 years."

There are a

number of ways in which Catholics can participate in a jubilee year. The most traditional jubilee observance is making a pilgrimage, as pilgrimages are emblematic of our life's journey toward God and of conversion in general. Historically, the classic Jubilee pilgrimage was to the four major basilicas in Rome: St. John Lateran, St. Peter's, St. Mary Major, and St. Paul outside the Walls. Today, while many Catholics still make a traditional pilgrimage to Rome for a jubilee, local diocesan bishops typically designate a local site, such as the diocesan cathedral or a local shrine, as a jubilee pilgrimage destination for those who are unable to travel to Rome.

Connected with the tradition of pilgrimage, another key symbol of a jubilee is a holy door, which is a reminder of Jesus' saying in the Gospel of St. John: "I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture" (Jn 10:9). The current jubilee formally began when Pope Francis opened the until-now sealed holy door in St. Peter's Basilica on Dec. 24. There are holy doors in all the major Roman basilicas which pilgrims may pass through as a sign of their desire to return to the Lord or renew their relationship with God.

Finally, another major part of a jubilee year is the special opportunities to receive indulgences. According to the *Code of Canon Law*, an indulgence is "the remission in the sight of God of the temporal punishment due for sins, the guilt of which has already been forgiven" (#922).

Indulgences are attached to certain prayers or pious acts which the faithful who are properly disposed—that is, spiritually healthy and free from attachment to sin—may fulfill in order to free themselves from the need for purgatory or to hasten the journey to heaven for a soul that is already in purgatory. Indulgences are a beautiful way to commemorate a jubilee, as they perfectly represent the jubilee themes of reconciliation and return to God.

An indulgence during a jubilee year is traditionally attached to passing through the holy doors in the four major basilicas in Rome. However, the Holy See can designate additional ways for the faithful to receive indulgences during a jubilee year. For a list of designated sites in the archdiocese and indulgence information, go to archindy.org/jubilee/indulgence.html.

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

My Journey to God

Infinite Things

By M. Lynell Chamberlain

From whence do we come
And where do we go?
These are the questions
Of an inquisitive soul.
Searching for answers
In a finite place
To questions asked
Of infinity's ways.
The answers come
In all due time,
When the mind matures
Leaving this world behind.
But until that time,
That some call the end,
We cannot know,
Cannot comprehend,
The joy that exists
Beyond this place,
In a world not confined
By time and space.

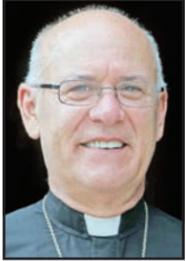


(M. Lynell Chamberlain is a member of St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg. Photo: Combined observations on Sept. 12, 2023, from NASA's James Webb Space Telescope's near-infrared camera and Hubble's wide field camera 3 show spiral galaxy NGC 5584, which resides 72 million light-years from Earth.) (CNS photo/courtesy NASA, ESA, CSA and Adam Riess)

Bishops report cites 5 top areas of ‘critical concern’ on religious liberty

WASHINGTON (OSV News)—A new annual report by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) identified what it called five areas of critical concern, defined as both threats and opportunities, for religious liberty.

“The State of Religious Liberty in the United States,” published on Jan. 16, highlighted the targeting of faith-based immigration services, elevated levels of antisemitic incidents, *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) coverage mandates, the “scaling back of gender ideology in law,” and promoting parental choice in education as areas of concern for the conference.



Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades

Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind., chairman of the USCCB’s Committee for Religious Liberty, noted in the report’s forward that the theme of the 2025 Jubilee Year underway is “Pilgrims of Hope.”

“In calling for the celebration of this holy year, our Holy Father identifies two features of hope that must sustain us in our work to promote religious liberty: patience and stability,” he said.

In 2025, “we anticipate that long-standing concerns will continue to require our vigilance, while new concerns, and perhaps opportunities, will also present themselves,” Bishop Rhoades said.

Three days before the release of the report, the Texas Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a case concerning Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton’s attempt to shut down El Paso’s Annunciation House, a Catholic nonprofit serving migrants. The case is one of several instances of religious liberty challenges for Catholic ministries that serve migrants as part of their mission, especially those at the U.S.-Mexico border.

The USCCB report noted that immigration was a prominent issue in the 2024 presidential election, with President-elect Donald J. Trump’s campaign relying “heavily on messaging about immigration.”

“With the Republican Party finding electoral success with this kind of messaging, efforts to restrict the ability of Catholic ministries serving migrants will likely receive new momentum,” the report said, expressing concern about a news report that the Trump administration

would consider rescinding a policy against performing immigration enforcement raids in “sensitive locations,” such as churches.

But threats to the Church’s service to migrants, the report said, is not “limited to legislation and executive action,” and “the physical safety of staff, volunteers, and clients of Catholic ministries and institutions that serve newcomers may be jeopardized by extremists motivated by false and misleading claims made against the Church’s ministries.”

The report additionally notes that this year, “the role of Catholics in political life will continue to be a hotly debated subject in the national discourse.

“Vice President-elect J.D. Vance has spoken openly about his conversion to the Catholic faith, and he has said that his views are motivated by Catholic social teaching,” the report stated. “In addition to the vice president, it appears there will be a significant Catholic presence in the Trump administration. Both supporters and opponents of the Trump administration can be expected to highlight the role of Catholicism in the administration, which may be a fresh source of partisan division among Catholics.”

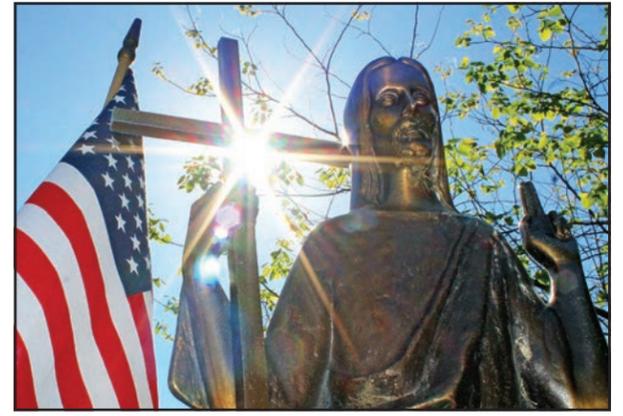
On IVF, the report noted that in reaction to a ruling by the Alabama Supreme Court that found that frozen embryos qualify as children under the state law’s wrongful death law, bipartisan interest has grown for “legally enshrining rights or promoting access to IVF or assisted reproductive technologies [ART] more broadly.” Trump has pledged a nationwide IVF insurance coverage mandate.

IVF is a form of fertility treatment opposed by the Catholic Church on the grounds that it separates procreation from sexual intercourse and often involves the destruction of human embryos, among other concerns.

“It is unclear what kinds of exemptions for conscientious objectors the Trump administration will include in its plan,” the report said. “While much remains unknown, IVF mandates could pose religious liberty problems, as well as life and dignity problems, in 2025.”

Meanwhile, a still-pending ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in *United States v. Skrametti*, the Biden administration’s challenge to a law in Tennessee restricting gender transition treatments, including puberty blockers, for minors, “could be catastrophic for religious liberty” if the court sides with the petitioners, the report said.

“Historically, in conflicts between religious liberty and



The sun shines through a statue of Christ on a grave marker alongside an American flag at St. Mary Catholic Cemetery in Appleton, Wis., in this 2018 photo. A new annual report by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued on Jan. 16 identified what it called five areas of critical concern, defined as both threats and opportunities, for religious liberty. (OSV News file photo/Bradley Birkholz)

gender ideology, religious liberty has generally had the advantage of being a right secured in the Constitution, whereas rights associated with the concept of gender identity have been creations of statute,” the report stated. “A ruling against Tennessee in *Skrametti* could upend that dynamic by establishing a constitutional presumption that the teachings of the Catholic Church on this issue are bigoted.

“On the other hand, a favorable ruling could curtail some of the constant litigation religious groups have faced in recent years,” it said.

The report also pointed to efforts to combat antisemitism, stating that a threat to one faith is a threat to all.

“Religious freedom is not simply a matter of government policy. It is also a matter of culture,” the report said. “A political community does not have a culture of religious freedom when people are attacked for their faith.”

The USCCB published its first annual religious liberty report in 2024.

(“The State of Religious Liberty in the United States” can be found at tinyurl.com/2025RelLibReport.) †

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ICC

continued from page 1A

it's helping them to build the skills to become financially self-sufficient."

The ICC—the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana—supports the measure because of the Church's longstanding commitment to fairness and justice in financial matters, especially concerning the poor.

"Financial health and how we loan money to other people is something that has long been of interest to the Church, even back to the Middle Ages," said Alexander Mingus, executive director of the ICC, during a committee hearing on the legislation on Jan. 15. "In fact, the Franciscans were among those who helped develop the first systems of small-dollar loans—microloans—to people who were most in need.

"We think this bill is a common-sense way to provide alternatives to potentially higher-cost options for people who have need for a small-dollar loan."

During a recent ICC podcast, Mingus elaborated on the subject, pointing out that payday lending institutions often locate themselves in lower-income neighborhoods and target people in desperate financial situations. By contrast, he said the Church has taught for centuries that lending money should be considered a way to help people in the spirit of love and charity—not a means to profit from someone else's need.

"We have many Church documents on the intricacies of economic life, and the moral questions deeply embedded in economic life," Mingus said during the podcast that he co-hosts with Roarke LaCoursiere, the ICC's new associate director. "The Church has had a long history of teaching on the sin of usury—essentially charging too much interest on a loan and profiting from it while taking advantage of somebody else. The Church looks at loans and says that these are things made to be offered out of love for another person."

One key advantage of the nonprofit loan program proposed in Senate Bill 122, according to Mingus, is the relationship between employer and employee that underpins it all.

"Employers want their employees to be financially

stable, to be healthy and well, so that they can show up and do the work they are employed to do," he said. "Whereas when we look at high-cost loans, that relationship aspect—which in Catholic social teaching on loans is so important—isn't there."

Another advocate for Senate Bill 122 offered lawmakers a different economic perspective during the Jan. 15 hearing.

Andrew Bradley, senior director of policy and strategy for Prosperity Indiana, discussed the long-term fiscal implications of freeing people from what he termed the "debt trap" of small-dollar loans offered by predatory lenders.

"If [state employees] have to go to a payday lender, they're going to be faced with APR rates of up to 391%," said Bradley, whose organization is the Indiana statewide coordinating body for the Community Loan Center (CLC) program. "This alternative provides us with around an 18% APR. That is potentially thousands and maybe millions of dollars over time that could be saved of taxpayer money through this more responsible alternative."

This is the second year that the ICC and its allies have supported this type of legislation. In last year's General Assembly, Deery introduced an almost identical bill that passed resoundingly in the Senate but did not receive a hearing in the House of Representatives. He said he is hopeful that leadership and committee changes in the House will improve prospects for the legislation this year.

During the Jan. 15 committee hearing, the bill saw overwhelming support from a wide array of advocates—from the ICC and other faith-based organizations to representatives of credit unions and other financial institutions. The only objection came from the state comptroller's office, which would oversee the administration of the loan program.

Because of questions raised about resources that the office would require to carry out the program, no



'The Church has had a long history of teaching on the sin of usury—essentially charging too much interest on a loan and profiting from it while taking advantage of somebody else. The Church looks at loans and says that these are things made to be offered out of love for another person.'

—Alexander Mingus, executive director of the Indiana Catholic Conference

vote was taken on the bill. Advocates for the legislation maintain that time and effort would be minimal for processing the loans and administering the payroll deductions for their repayment.

Deery emphasized that the nonprofit loan centers that would partner with state government and offer the loans as an employee benefit are already "established, regulated entities within our state." He and advocates for the bill also stressed the gradual rollout of the program for state employees and estimated that each new loan would take approximately 15 minutes to process.

At press time, Deery was optimistic that the issues could be resolved for the bill to move forward.

"I'm confident that we can work out the issues with the comptroller's office," he said. "There really isn't anything revolutionary in the payroll system, and the 15 minutes we estimate per loan is not a big burden. I think the state can lead in this effort, and I think we will work these issues out."

To follow this and other priority legislation of the ICC, visit www.indianacc.org. This website includes access to ICAN, the Indiana Catholic Action Network, which offers the Church's position on key issues. Those who sign up for ICAN receive alerts on legislation moving forward and ways to contact their elected representatives.

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

Pope Francis offers sharp words, prayers for President Trump, his agenda

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis offered mixed messages to U.S. President Donald J. Trump.

On the eve of Trump's inauguration, Pope Francis said the new president's potential action to begin a massive deportation of immigrants would be a "disgrace."

In an interview on Italian television on Jan. 19, the pope said that if Trump carries out his threat "it will be a disgrace, because it makes the

poor wretches who have nothing pay the bill" for problems in the United States.

"This won't do! You don't resolve things this way," the pope told the interviewer, Fabio Fazio, host of a popular Sunday night talk show.

A day later, the Holy Father told the president he hoped that the nation would prosper under his leadership and make no room for hatred, discrimination or exclusion.

The pope offered his "cordial greetings and the assurance of my prayers that Almighty God will grant you wisdom, strength and protection in the exercise of your high duties," in a message marking Trump's inauguration as the 47th president of the United States on Jan. 20.

"Inspired by your nation's ideals of being a land of opportunity and welcome for all, it is my hope that

under your leadership the American people will prosper and always strive to build a more just society, where there is no room for hatred, discrimination or exclusion," the pope wrote.

"At the same time, as our human family faces numerous challenges, not to mention the scourge of war, I also ask God to guide your efforts in promoting peace and reconciliation among peoples," the message said. †

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Job Summary: The Director of Operations will serve as professional administrator and strategic leader. This position will work closely with the Pastor and Principal to drive positive financial performance for the parish and school. The Director of Operations assists the Pastor with the stewardship of the human, financial, and physical resources of the parish, in accordance with diocesan policies and guidelines. This role will have responsibility for leadership of operations staff (accounting, parish office, technology, administration, human resources, and facilities). Position is available in April 2025.

Education/Experience:

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Interested and qualified candidates should submit a cover letter and resume, including at least three references, to Larry Kunkel, ljunkel@ologn.org.

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Director, Our Lady of Fatima Archdiocesan Retreat House

The Secretariat for Evangelizing Catechesis, Archdiocese of Indianapolis, seeks a leader to direct retreat and renewal ministry at Fatima Retreat House.

This director oversees all aspects of activity at the retreat center as well as serving as a liaison between Fatima and the Archdiocese. Familiarity with Catholic retreat/renewal experiences is required, as is at least 5 years of related experience. The equivalent of an undergraduate major in Catholic theology or a related field is preferred.

Cover letter, resume and references may be sent in confidence to kogorek@archindy.org.

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