A ride to remember

Woman endures a life-changing journey to lift the lives of moms and unborn children

Ninth in an occasional series

(EDITOR’S NOTE: In this series, The Criterion is featuring young adults who have found a home in the Church and strive to live their faith in their everyday life.)

By John Shaughnessy

This is the way Emily Mastronicola dreamed it would be.

On the last day of a grueling, weeklong journey that tested people’s hearts and spirits, the 26-year-old Catholic woman from Indianapolis took the lead of a team of cyclists from the eastern part of the United States—preparing to meet with the groups from the southern, northern and western sections of the country for a triumphant, last-mile ride together toward the “Celebration of Life” finish line in St. Louis.

Even the challenge of riding her bike up a 15-mile stretch of daunting hills couldn’t sap the joy that Emily was feeling on July 17—the last day of the national ride of Biking for Babies, a pro-life organization with the mission of “renewing the culture of life, one pedal and one pregnancy resource center at a time.”

With those 15 miles behind her—on a day when

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But the Indianapolis Star article said the judge blocked the state’s ban on the use of telemedicine as it regards abortion—whereby doctors use an online platform to prescribe abortion-inducing mifepristone and misoprostol.

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Father Emile Beldor died of his injuries after the Aug. 14 quake. Father Jean-Antoine Coulanges is reported missing. Cardinal Langlois sustained arm and leg injuries; Church sources say his life is not in danger.

Voice of America reported that 18 people were reported killed in the church. (CNS photo/courtesy AVSI)

Catholics called to help Haiti in wake of earthquake that killed 1,400 people, including a priest

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Federal court affirms archdiocese’s rights in school employment practices

By Sean Gallagher

In a significant religious liberty victory, a federal judge on Aug. 11 ruled that the Archdiocese of Indianapolis is free to provide an authentic Catholic education to students and families across central and southern Indiana.

It came in a summary judgment by Judge Richard L. Young of the U.S. District Court of the Southern District of Indiana in favor of the archdiocese in Starkey v. Roncalli High School and Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

In the case, Lynn Starkey, a former co-director of guidance at Roncalli High School in Indianapolis, claimed that she experienced illegal discrimination because of her sexual orientation when her employment contract was not renewed in 2018.

In a statement issued by Becket on behalf of the archdiocese, it was noted that “every administrator, teacher and guidance counselor” at Roncalli “signs an agreement to uphold the teachings of the Catholic Church in both their professional and private lives.”

Because Starkey had signed such a contract, it was not renewed when she informed the school that she had entered into a civil same-sex marriage.

Roncalli and the archdiocese, represented in the case by Becket, a Washington-based religious liberty law firm, argued that federal anti-discrimination law did not apply in this case.

They maintained that the First Amendment’s guarantee of religious freedom prohibits the government from compelling the Church to hire educators who reject its teachings for positions in which they are responsible for passing on the faith.

In American religious liberty jurisprudence, this has become known as a “ministerial exception.” Judge Young agreed that “the ministerial exception covers Starkey’s role as co-director of guidance.”

“One may reasonably presume that a religious school would expect faith to play a role in that work,” Judge Young wrote, “and Roncalli expressly entrusted Starkey with the responsibility of communicating the Catholic faith to students and fostering spiritual growth.”

On these grounds, and based on a growing precedent in American law regarding religious liberty and the ministerial exception, Judge Young ruled in favor of the archdiocese in the Starkey case.

“Today’s ruling is common sense. Religious groups have a constitutional right to hire people who agree with their religious beliefs and practices,” said Luke Goodrich, vice president and senior counsel at Becket. “At all levels of the judiciary, courts have made clear that the government has no place interfering with a religious organization’s decision about who can pass on the faith to the next generation.”

“Many parents make sacrifices so their children can attend Catholic schools that uphold the dignity of every human person and teach the fullness of the Catholic faith,” Goodrich added. “Today’s decision ensures that religious schools can remain faithful to their religious mission.”

The Aug. 11 ruling in the Starkey case follows the May 7 dismissal in Marion County Superior Court of a lawsuit brought against the archdiocese by Payne-Elliot, a former teacher at Cathedral High School in Indianapolis. Payne-Elliot had claimed that the archdiocese had illegally interfered in his employment agreement with Cathedral when the high school in 2019 had chosen to separate from him after he had entered into a same-sex marriage.

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Switch your memories of 9/11—and how your faith and your life have been affected by that day

Memories of Sept. 11, 2001, fill the hearts and minds of people old enough to remember that tragic day 20 years ago. From shock in reaction to the terrorist attacks in the United States, to gratitude for the heroic actions of first responders, 9/11 is a day that continues to affect many Americans.

The Criterion would like to hear your stories, memories and thoughts of Sept. 11, 2001, including how your faith was a source of strength and comfort on that challenging day, and how the events of that day have shaped your faith and your life since then.

Send your submissions to John Shaughnessy by e-mail to 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.

How has your own faith been deepened by helping others grow in their faith?

When someone strives to help others learn about their faith and grow in it, often it has the added blessing of leading to a deeper faith for the person leading the instruction.

With that thought in mind, The Criterion is inviting instructors of the Catholic faith—whether in programs for children and youths, preparation for the sacraments, adult faith formation or Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults—to share their stories of how their own faith has been deepened by helping others in their faith journeys.

Send your stories and personal experiences to John Shaughnessy by e-mail to 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.

Payne-Elliot is appealing the dismissal of his case by Judge Lance Hamner. According to The Indianapolis Star, Starkey is considering appealing the ruling in her case.

(For more information on the Starkey case, including links to court documents, visit cutt.ly/Starkey)
Some Catholic hospitals now require employees to get COVID vaccine

WASHINGTON (CNS)—Mercy Sister Mary Haddad, president of the Catholic Health Association (CHA), is on a mission.

She hopes to clarify some of the current confusion leading to both vaccine hesitancy and recent protests over mandates being put in place to curb the escalating spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19.

She is starting in her own backyard, so to speak, encouraging all health care workers to get vaccinated.

In a July 23 statement, she said vaccinated health care workers were doing their part to “protect themselves, their co-workers, their patients, their loved ones, and their neighbors.”

She also said the association which supports more than 2,200 Catholic hospitals, health care systems, nursing homes and long-term care facilities across the country, “strongly supports member health systems as they take necessary steps toward ensuring as many health care workers as possible receive the vaccines.”

She told Catholic News Service (CNS) on Aug. 11 that some Catholic health systems are now mandating that their employees be vaccinated for COVID-19, while others have said they are awaiting full approval of the vaccine from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Most systems, at the very least, are highly encouraging employees to get vaccinated and some are offering incentives for them to do so.

Catholic Health World, a CHA publication, reported in early August that six major Catholic health systems— including Ascension, Trinity, Mercy and SMH Health—are requiring employees to be vaccinated for COVID-19 with various start dates in effect from late August to early November.

The policy applies to workers and volunteers, and in some cases it also applies to vendors. The group of health care systems with COVID-19 vaccine policies in place involves more than 350,000 employees.

Other major health systems in the U.S., including Kaiser Permanente, Banner Health, Atrium Health and the Virginia Health Administration, have similarly announced mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policies.

These policies, as well as those for Catholic health systems, include exemptions for medical or religious reasons.

In a July 21 statement, the American Hospital Association said it “supports hospitals and health systems that adopt mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policies for health care personnel, with local factors and circumstances shaping whether and how these policies are implemented.”

As Sister Mary sees it, Catholic health workers “have to set the example” and should be vaccinated because they are “serving people at a vulnerable time of sickness, the thought that they could infect someone is unconscionable,” she added.

She said she also feels strongly about Catholic health systems enforcing a vaccine mandate because by doing so they “take the lead in helping others see the vaccines are ‘safe, effective and necessary.’”

For health care systems hesitant to require employee- vaccination policies, she said she understands what they are facing but also sees the dire emergency of the current crisis and stressed: “We can’t wait; we need to move quickly.”

Some hospital CEOs have told her they fear losing staff members to other hospitals that aren’t mandating COVID-19 vaccines.

“It’s really a crisis,” she said, noting that health care workers are exhausted and nurses are angry because the current coronavirus surge—filling hospitals with primarily unvaccinated patients—“could have been prevented.”

The other issue she is coming up against is people “using religion as a choice for an exemption” to getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

She said CHA has been working hard to get the word out that the vaccines are morally acceptable, and there should be “no exemptions for Catholics other than medical” reasons.

Catholic bishops in Colorado and South Dakota have issued statements stressing the need to follow one’s conscience in getting the COVID-19 vaccine and have supported religious exemptions to vaccine mandates.

Sister Mary finds it “troublesome” that many are using “as a choice for an exemption” to getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

She hopes to clarify some of the current confusion leading to both vaccine hesitancy and recent protests over mandates being put in place to curb the escalating spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19.

“Some Catholic hospitals now require employees to be vaccinated for COVID-19, while others have said they are awaiting full approval of the vaccine from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).”

The vaccine requirement extends to all employees, “whether or not they provide direct patient care, and whether they work in our sites of care or remotely,” the statement noted.

“This includes associates employed by subsidiaries and partners; physicians and advanced practice providers, whether employed or independent; and volunteers and vendors entering Ascension facilities. Ascension said the timing of its November 21 requirement aligns with its annual flu vaccination requirement.

“In those instances when someone may not be able to get vaccinated due to a medical condition or strongly held religious belief, Ascension will provide a process for requesting an exemption similar to the process we use for the annual influenza vaccination.

“Ascension emphasized that its COVID vaccine requirement is being made with one goal in mind.

“Together, we will put this pandemic behind us so that we can continue to focus on meeting the needs of those who come to us for care.”

That’s also the goal of Franciscan Alliance.

Its vaccine requirement is in response to how the Delta variant of COVID-19 has led to a dramatic surge in infections across the country, according to ascension’s statement from the health care provider.

Franciscan Alliance’s leadership believes it is in the best interest of our patients, our associates, patients and communities is foundational to our work.”

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New Video Series from Across the Arch

Scan below to watch the first monthly episode, or visit www.archindy.org/AcrossTheArch.

NEW VIDEO SERIES from ACROSS THE ARCH

Scan to Watch

A school bus can mean so much more than mode of transportation. At St. Joseph parish is Shelbyville, Father Mike Keach utilizes a bus for outreach, hope and connection. In times where we all yearn for more connection, Father Mike shows us how thinking outside the box, or “outside the box” can help enable ministry in new ways.

Brooke Sturdivant, Associate Director, Children’s Ministry for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

Parrish St. Joseph the Worker and St. Mary of theassumption.

Additional Video Series from the Archives

Scan to Watch

IN CONVERSATION

The Criterion - Friday, August 20, 2021
New flag is a symbol protected the unborn

Life issues—especially concerning the unborn—continue to be front and center in discussions affecting our nation, including here in Indiana. We read about a $3.5 trillion spending plan for the federal government’s 2022 fiscal year passed on Aug. 10 with a pro-life amendment offered on the Senate floor by Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla. It was approved in a largely party-line vote of 50-49, with Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., joining Republicans to support it. As stated on the amendment, it includes Hyde Amendment language to prohibit federal funding for abortions and Weldon Amendment language to provide conscience protections for health care providers and medical professionals who object to performing abortions. Two other amendments that would have prohibited abortions after 20 weeks and protect unborn children with Down syndrome from being aborted failed.

Let us pray the Lankford Amendment is included in the final budget passed by Congress in the coming weeks. On Aug. 10, Lankford also introduced a resolution to name the last two days of the Senate session in honor of the late Judge Sarah Evans Barker of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Indiana to allow a permanent injunction on several Indiana pro-life laws, including those that required physicians to examine patients in person before performing abortions and that said only physicians can administer first-trimester medication abortions.

Pro-life leaders across the state, including Right to Life of Indianapolis President Matt Chiodo and Pro-Life Executive Director Mike Fichter, said abortion was the “singular issue” of the Senate’s last two days. “The joy welling up in my heart served as an affirmation of my vocation. Even if my days as a teenager were not a house of grace, in the heart of the Poor, the elderly have been for me the treasure buried in a field—a precious treasure uniquely worth loving everything else for and devoting my life to.”

Through 40 years after my first encounter with the frail, memory-impaired residents of a nursing home, the elderly and our mission of hospitality to them are still my great love. How I wish that more young people would discover the joy and fulfillment that can be found in helping the elderly with the elderly, like I did! And so, I make this appeal to young people: As the number of older people in our population continues to grow at an exponential rate, I urge you to consider pursuing a religious vocation or a career at the service of our most vulnerable seniors! They are worth your effort and hard work, and they deserve our respect.

As I reflected on the parable of the treasure buried in the field, I couldn’t help dwelling on a specific detail—the treasure was hidden, perhaps even discarded. I think this also applies to the elderly, who all too often find themselves unrelated to the margins of our fertile lives.

In his homily on the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, Pope Francis asked, “When was the last time we visited or telephoned an elderly person in order to show our closeness and to indicate that by 2030 roughly 31 million Americans will be older than 75, and we will be facing a shortage of crisis proportions in the number of geriatric-trained nurses?”

Our faith teaches us that life begins at conception, with the innocence of the unborn child. A white heart between the baby’s feet symbolizes the pro-life movement’s love for both the mother and her child, according to the Pro-Life Flag Project’s website. The featured pink and blue colors are associated with baby boys and girls, but also re-emphasize the two lives of the mother and child. The stripes form an equal sign, which the Pro-Life Flag Project said emphasizes that the unborn child is “equally and fully human, and therefore deserving of equal human rights,” while also representing the role of both the father and mother in creating and raising a child.

Although some social media commentators have criticized the initiative because it leaves out other pro-life concerns such as outlawing the death penalty and assisted suicide, Chapman said abortion was the “singular issue” the Pro-Life Flag Project sought to represent.

For more information on the initiative, go to www.prolifeflag.com. As we forge ahead in our mandate to build a culture of life, we pray this flag and other resources assist us in our efforts to convert hearts.

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

In our mid-summer weekday Masses, we read a series of parables from the Gospel of St. Matthew. These stories were perfect for summer with their portrayal of Jesus and his holy disciples by the sea, and their images of farmers laboring in their fields.

One of these parables really caught my attention this summer. “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Mt 13:44).

As I meditated on these words, a flood of emotions arose in my heart. We had recently celebrated the first-ever World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, and I had so happily seized our resources and their families enjoying themselves during our celebrations.

It is inquisitive when I think of the joy welling up in my heart served as an affirmation of my vocation. Even if my days as a teenager were not a house of grace, in the heart of the Poor, the elderly have been for me the treasure buried in a field—a precious treasure uniquely worth loving everything else for and devoting my life to.

For more information on the initiative, go to www.prolifeflag.com.

Save the Storks, Maryland Right to Life and Focus on the Family.

James Chapman, spokesman for the Pro-Life Flag Project, said Will McFadden, the project’s founder, developed the idea in 2017 while attending the March for Life in Washington, where he observed no unifying symbol.

Several thousand entries were received in the international design contest for the pro-life flag, Chapman noted, and the winner was selected through final online voting in mid-July.

The winning flag features two stripes that highlight the two distinct lives—mother and child—present in a pregnancy. It was designed by Nanda Gasperini, a pro-life graphic artist in São Paulo, Brazil. It includes a white background that symbolizes innocence in the womb as well as the innocence of the unborn child. A white heart between the baby’s feet symbolizes the pro-life movement’s love for both the mother and her child, according to the Pro-Life Flag Project’s website. The featured pink and blue colors are associated with baby boys and girls, but also re-emphasize the two lives of the mother and child. The stripes form an equal sign, which the Pro-Life Flag Project said emphasizes that the unborn child is “equally and fully human, and therefore deserving of equal human rights,” while also representing the role of both the father and mother in creating and raising a child.

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Our faith teaches us that life begins at conception. The Pro-Life Flag Project offers a much-needed reminder to society that an unborn child in a mother’s womb is a gift from God. As we forge ahead in our mandate to build a culture of life, we pray this flag and other resources assist us in our efforts to convert hearts.

—Mike Krokos

Letters to the Editor

A much appreciated thank you for an explanation of the luminous mysteries

Plaudits to John F. “Jack” Fink! His reflection in the July 30 issue of The Criterion on the rationale for the institution by St. John Paul II of the luminous mysteries of the rosary was truly enlightening!

Until now, I had almost found this information in my personal rosary handbook, but our prayers are an unwelcome challenge. They seemed so difficult merely to remember. However, once I read Fink’s story on their development—and why—it all made

so much more sense to me! Why wouldn’t we want to meditate on Jesus who was during those three years of his life? That proved to be a real help to me personally for now being able to better recall the luminous events and to meditate on them for three years.

Thank you, Mr. Fink!

Mary Lou Kanach

Naples, FL
“Señor, ¿a quién iremos? Tú tienes palabras de vida eterna” (Jn 6:68).

La lectura del Evangelio del domingo 21 del tiempo ordinario (Jn 6:60-69) menciona a los discípulos que dejaron a Jesús porque su enseñanza era “demasiado difícil” para ellos. y lo que es más importante: cita a Pedro hablando en nombre aquellos discípulos que eligieron permanecer con Jesús a pesar de los sacrificios requeridos de ellos.

Vivimos en una época en la que muchos católicos siguen los pasos de los discípulos que dijeron: “Esta enseñanza es muy difícil; ¿quién puede aceptarla?” (Jn 6:60).

Muchos llegan a la conclusión de que el modo de vida que Jesús exige a los auténticos discípulos misioneros no es para ellos. “Desde entonces—dice san Juan—muchos de sus discípulos le volvieron la espalda y ya no andaban con él” (Jn 6:66).

El camino de la vida propuesto por Jesús ciertamente no es el más fácil ni el más suave. Se necesita valor y compromiso, y requiere una cantidad significativa de amor abnegado por Dios y por nuestro prójimo.

Las enseñanzas de Jesús son difíciles. Por ejemplo, “Si alguien quiere ser mi discípulo, tiene que negarse a sí mismo, tomar su cruz y seguirme” (Mt 16:24). O “No creo que he venido a traer paz a la tierra. No vine a traer paz, sino espada. Porque he venido a poner en conflicto al hombre contra su padre, a la hija contra su madre, a la nuera contra su suegra; los enemigos de cada cuál serán los de su propia familia” (Mt 10:34-36).

Estos y muchos otros ejemplos demuestran que, como nos recuerda con frecuencia el Papa Francisco, el camino del Señor no es el de menor resistencia. Exige que “nos levantemos de la comodidad nuestros sofás” y salgamos a proclamar el Evangelio, a curar a los enfermos y a los atribulado, y a “expulsar a los espíritus malignos,” al ser defensores de la justicia y la paz en nuestro agitado mundo.

“¿Y esto les causa tropiezo?” pregunta Jesús a sus discípulos. “¿Qué tal si vieran al Hijo del hombre subir adonde antes estaba? El Espíritu da vida; la carne no vale para nada. Los que se alimentan de las palabras que les ha hablado son espíritu y son vida. Sin embargo, hay algunos de ustedes que no pueden entender esto.” (Jn 6:61-63)

Las palabras de Jesús son Espíritu y vida. Ambos nos inspiran y desafían a arrepentirnos, a cambiar nuestros hábitos egoístas y pecaminosos. y a creer que el Espíritu Santo nos guiará para vivir el Evangelio en nuestra vida cotidiana. Como se desprende de la primera lectura de la misa de este domingo, extraída del libro de Josué (Jos 24:1-2, 15-17, 18b), esta situación no es nueva en la historia del judaísmo ni del cristianismo. Cada época se enfrenta a una elección: “Serviremos a Dios o seguiremos otro camino?” (Jos 24:15).

Josué es un discípulo de Jesús. A menudo nos conduce a nuevas situaciones y nos pide que asumamos una carga sin nuestro consentimiento. “¿Esto les causa tropiezo?” (Jn 6:61).

“La respuesta de una sola palabra es ‘alegria’. Jesús es la fuente de una alegría profunda y duradera. Su camino conduce a la satisfacción de nuestros corazones hambrientos. Nos alimenta, nos consuela y nos ama incondicionalmente. El sendero de Cristo no es sencillo, pero como atestiguan todos los santos (incluidos los santos de a pie), su yugo es fácil y su carga es ligera (Mt 11:30).

La gracia de Dios hace que las dificultades impuestas por las leyes del amor sean fáciles de soportar. No, el sendero de Jesús no es el más fácil, pero nuestro Señor nunca nos pide una carga sin ayuda para llevarla. Todos debemos elegir: ¿Viviremos solamente para nosotros mismos (lo que parece fácil pero acabará siendo muy difícil)? O vamos a servir al Señor y vivir para los demás?” (Jn 6:61-69)

¿Por qué Pedro y muchos otros discípulos permanecen fieles? Podemos hacer la misma pregunta a todos los santos y mártires a lo largo de los 2,000 años de historia cristiana. ¿Por qué soportar las dificultades, el ridículo, el miedo e incluso la muerte cuando hay caminos más fáciles de seguir? ¿Por qué negarse a sí mismo, tomar su cruz y seguir a Jesús?

La gracia de Dios hace que las dificultades impuestas por las leyes del amor sean fáciles de soportar. No, el sendero de Jesús no es el más fácil, pero nuestro Señor nunca nos pide una carga sin ayuda para llevarla. Todos debemos elegir: ¿Viviremos solamente para nosotros mismos (lo que parece fácil pero acabará siendo muy difícil)? O vamos a servir al Señor y vivir para los demás? Pidamos por la gracia de tomar la decisión correcta, hoy y todos los días de nuestra vida.”
August 22
Jennings County Community Building, Jennings Center, Fairground, 4920 IN-3, North Vernon. Don’t Miss this event! 4 p.m. pro-life comedy show and dinner starring comedian Andy Inday, free. T-shirts for sale at bit.ly/AndyInday. Information: 812-350-4631, Jenningscountycouncil@gmail.com.

August 22, 29
Benediction Conversations via GroupMe. 4 p.m. Sundays, Benediction, St. Marie Therese, Marie Reuber, facilitator, sponsored by Sisters of St. Benedict, Ferdinand, Ind. (Diocese of Evansville). Information: vocations@thedom.org.

August 23, 30
St. Therese of the Child Jesus (Little Flower) Parish Center, St. Therese Room, 4720 E. 13th St., Indianapolis. SoulCore Rosary Workout. 6:30-7:15 p.m. prayer and exercise, free. Information: 317-727-1167, page2003@yahoo.com or soulcore.com.

August 25
Group Lectio via Zoom, 7 p.m. Sundays, Benediction, St. Marie Therese, Marie Reuber, facilitator, second and fourth Wednesdays of each month, sponsored by Sisters of St. Benedict, Ferdinand, Ind. (Diocese of Evansville). Information: vocations@thedom.org.

August 26

August 26-28
St. Ann Parish, 6350 S. State Rd. 67, Indianapolis. Summer Festival. Thurs. 5-10 p.m., Fri. 5-11 p.m., Sat. 5-11 p.m. carnival rides, free admission. Information: 317-821-2909.

August 28
Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Church, 1330 Stevens St., Indianapolis. Faithful Citizens Rosie Walk, 10-4:50-11:45 a.m., meet in front of church. Information: faithfulcitizens2016@gmail.com.

Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish, 335 S. Meridian St., Greenwood. The St. Brigid Annual Celebrity Marriage Conference, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., for married couples, featuring author, producer and former show host Chuck Neff, music, breakfast sessions, $60 per couple, includes lunch. Information and registration: celebratebridegumsimplyconference.com. OLGMarriageMinistry@gmail.com or 317-489-1557.


St. Mary Parish, 1331 E. Hunter Robbins Blvd., Greenwood. Parish Festival: Sun., 11:30 a.m.-11 p.m. Night: games, garden, live music by Nuttin’ Fancy, pork burger, pork chop or pulled pork dinner, chips, cole slaw, applesauce, basket silent auction, concessions. Sun., 11 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Family Day: kids’ games, live music by Keith Swinney Band, fried chicken and pulled pork dinner with cheese potatoes, green beans, cole slaw and drink, free admission both days. Information: 317-863-8427.

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish, 333 W. Maple St., Cambridge City. Brûlè Weekend, all weekend Masses, Father Daniel Bedel, spiritual director of Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary, will celebrate Mass and share how the seminary forms future priests. Information: Ellen Sanders, 317-236-1501 or esanders@archindy.org.

August 29
St. Anne Parish, 102 N. 19th St., New Castle. Brûlè Weekend, all weekend Masses, Father Daniel Bedel, spiritual director of Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary, will celebrate Mass and share how the seminary forms future priests. Information: Ellen Sanders, 317-236-1501 or esanders@archindy.org.

St. Brigid Parish, 7243 E. 10th St., Indianapolis. 7 p.m., Catholic movie, Holy Spirit Church. Information: 317-353-8494, parishoffice@holyspiritcc.org.

August 28-29
St. Mary Parish, 1331 E. Hunter Robbins Blvd., Greenwood. Parish Festival: Sat. 11:30 a.m.-11 p.m. Night: games, garden, live music by Nuttin’ Fancy, pork burger, pork chop or pulled pork dinner, chips, cole slaw, applesauce, basket silent auction, concessions. Sun., 11 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Family Day: kids’ games, live music by Keith Swinney Band, fried chicken and pulled pork dinner with cheese potatoes, green beans, cole slaw and drink, free admission both days. Information: 317-863-8427.

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September 1
MCL Cafeteria, 5520 Castleton Corner Lane, Indianapolis. Soul Senior, 5:30 p.m., Catholic, Eastside Creation Care Network, 7 p.m., bilingual, online option available, free. Information: 317-333-8494.

September 3
Women’s Care Center, 4001 W. 86th St., Indianapolis. First Friday Mass, 5 p.m., Father Michael Keucher celebrant, optional tour of center to learn about the life of St. Therese of the Child Jesus. Information: 317-829-6800, womenscarecente.org.

Our Lady of the Greenwood Church, 335 S. Meridian St., Greenwood. First Friday biblical celebration of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Mass, 5:45 p.m., exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, following Mass until 5 p.m., sacrament of reparation available. Information: 317-750-7009, meowss14@hotmail.com.

September 10-12
Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. Healing from Sexual Abuse—A Retreat for Women Religious. Fri. 8:30 p.m. - Sun. 9 p.m., Dr. Rachel Wahls presenting. Limited to 15 participants, $350, $245 discount if register by July 31, includes lodging and meals. Information and registration: benedictinn.com/graduate/benedictinn@benedictinn.com.

September 11
Mount Saint Francis Center for Spirituality, 101 St. Anthony Dr., Mt. St. Francis. A Eucharist of Encountering: Crossing Thresholds, Becoming Transformed, 9 a.m.-7 p.m., composer, theologian, author and Pulitzer Father Ricky Manalo presenting, includes Mass, lunch, presentation, reflection, painting class with Conventual Franciscan Father Vince Petersen, musical concert, $100 includes meals, materials and information. Registration: mtstfrancisarchbishopmanalo@gmail.com or 812-923-8817.

Gene and Patty (Schwering) Simon, members of St. Mauritius Parish in Napoleon, will celebrate their 55th wedding anniversary on Aug. 26.

The couple was married at the First Christian Church in Madison, on Aug. 26, 1966, and later had their marriage canonized at St. Mark the Evangelist Church.

They have two children: Shari Wilson-Feldman and David Wells.

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

Ebert and Stella (Singer) Wilson, members of St. Mark the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis, will celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary on Aug. 26.

The couple was married at St. Mary’s Church in Indianapolis on Aug. 26, 1961. They have three children: Melinda Hammert, Mark and Michael Borsett.

The couple also has five grandchildren.

Gene and Patty (Schwering) Simon, members of St. Mauritius Parish in Napoleon, will celebrate their 55th wedding anniversary on Aug. 26. The couple was married at Conception Church in Millhousen on Aug. 20, 1966. They have four children: Mary McCoy, Eva Volz, Nick and Scott Simon.

The couple also has 11 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Indianapolis St. Vincent de Paul Society’s Struttin’ Our Stuff fundraiser set for Sept. 10

The Indianapolis council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, in order to hold its annual Struttin’ Our Stuff fundraiser at the Northside Events and Social Club, 2100 E. 71st St., in Indianapolis, from 6-10 p.m. on Sept. 10. The event benefits the services and programs of the Indianapolis Society of St. Vincent de Paul, including its distribution warehouse, Mission 27 Resale stores, Changing Lives Forever program, food pantry and more.

The cost is $75 per person, which includes dinner, wine, entertainment and socializing, silent and live auctions, and a fashion show featuring styles from various local stores. The opening bidding begins on Sept. 6 at evbindy.org/fashion.

To purchase tickets or for more information, contact Jenny Matthews at smartboopie@gmail.com or 317-289-3324, or Mary Ann Klein at mailto:jklein@abcdglobal.net or 317-796-6325.

Sign Language: information and more. For a complete list of events for the next four weeks as reported to The Criterion, log on to www.archindy.org/events.

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Senate bill covers many needs, but must not allow abortion funding

WASHINGTON (CNS)—The $1.2 trillion infrastructure bill passed by the Senate makes “historic investments” in transportation, energy, water systems, housing, job creation, expanded Internet access and other areas, but several issues still need to be addressed, said the U.S. bishops’ domestic policy conference chairman.

Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City said the Catholic bishops “continue to be resolve in our insistence that no taxpayer funding go to abortion.”

The bishops also disagree with a provision in the bill that “would advance a false understanding of human sexuality and reproductive autonomy,” he said, referring to a section that establishes that no taxpayer funding go to abortion.

“We are grateful for the bipartisan efforts of members of the Senate to pass the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act,” Archbishop Coakley said.

“Archbishop眀Bishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, who spoke for the U.S. bishops, said in a letter to the chairmen of the Senate and the House that the bill “will provide tremendous benefit to the nation and will help to strengthen our economy.”

The bishops said, in the letter, that they “welcome the provision that no funds will be used to support abortion facilities” and “are grateful that the provision is a Senate amendment and not a House provision.”

The bishops also noted that the provision was placed in the Senate bill in accordance with the principles of the Hyde Amendment, which says, “organizations that apply for these grants, the bill, the wording to which Archbishop Coakley referenced says: “This provision also has raised concerns about the safeguarding of health, it is not the faith by knowing one needs God and serving him, Pope Francis said.

After reciting the Angelus prayer on the day of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published a note on Dec. 21, 2020, reiterating Church teaching that when alternative vaccines are not available, it is morally acceptable to receive vaccines developed or tested using cell lines originating from aborted fetuses, in this case, including COVID-19 vaccines.

However, “both pharmaceutical companies and governmental health agencies are therefore encouraged to produce, approve, distribute and offer ethically acceptable vaccines whenever possible,” the papal document said.

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Cardinal Raymond L. Burke has been hospitalized and put on a ventilator less than one week after telling people he tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19.

His official Twitter account @CardinalBurke published a tweet Aug. 10 saying: “Cardinal Burke has been admitted to the hospital with COVID-19 and is being assisted by a ventilator as doctors encourage his progress.”

The tweet said the cardinal had “faithfully prayed the rosary for those suffering from the virus. On this vigil of the Assumption, let us pray the rosary for him.”

The cardinal had first tweeted on Aug. 10: “Blessed Jesus Christ! I wish to inform you that I have recently tested positive for the COVID 19 virus. Thanks be to God, I am resting comfortably and receiving excellent medical care. Please pray for me as I begin my recovery. Let us trust in divine Providence. God bless you.”

The Vatican has started offering all Vatican residents, retirees and employees the vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech. Those 73 and over and those eligible for the vaccine as a member of the College of Cardinals and a member of the Apostolic Signatura, which he led as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, have already been vaccinated.

U.S. Cardinal Burke in hospital, on ventilator, due to COVID-19

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Pope prays for peace in Afghanistan; Caritas, Jesuits suspend activities

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Hours before the Taliban took control of Afghanistan’s capital, Kabul, Pope Francis expressed his hope for the peace and safety of the country’s citizens.

“I join in the unanimous concern for the situation in Afghanistan. I ask all of you to pray with me for the God of peace, so that the clamor of weapons might cease and solutions can be found at the table of dialogue,” the pope said on Aug. 15 during his Angelus address.

Only through dialogue, he added, could “the battered population of that country—men, women, elderly and children—return to their own homes, and live in peace and security, in total mutual respect.”

The Taliban, an extremist Islamic movement that ruled Afghanistan from 1996 until the U.S.-led coalition nearly 20 years ago, began taking over large swaths of the country as U.S. forces withdrew.

According to The Associated Press, Taliban fighters entered the presidential palace after Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled the country.

In February 2020, the Trump administration signed a peace agreement with the Taliban and agreed to withdraw its forces by May 2021 in exchange for the group’s promise to cut ties with al-Qaeda and cease attacks on American troopos.

In April, President Joe Biden announced a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops in Afghanistan by Sept. 11—the 20th anniversary of the attacks on U.S. soil coordinated by al-Qaeda’s Osama bin Laden, who received protection from the Taliban.

However, as Taliban fighters took control of the country, Biden announced on July 8 that the U.S. “military mission in Afghanistan will conclude on Aug. 31.”

The U.S. invaded Afghanistan in late 2001 in a bid to dismantle al-Qaeda and force the Taliban from power. More than 2,300 U.S. soldiers have died in the 20-year conflict, the longest war in U.S. history, and thousands of Afghan civilians were killed and displaced as a result of the conflict, according to the U.N. Mission in Afghanistan.

Caritas Italy also announced the suspension of charitable activities in Afghanistan in the wake of the Taliban’s takeover of the country.

In a statement released on Aug. 15, Caritas said the “instability of the situation has led to the suspension of all activities” and has increased fears “of maintaining a presence in the future, as well as for the safety of the few Christian Afghans” in the country.

The Jesuits, who have been in Afghanistan since 2004, have also suspended their mission in the country “indefinitely.”

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, a Jesuit priest in New Delhi told ucanews.com on Aug. 17 that two Jesuit priests are among many Indian nationals in Afghanistan waiting for their government’s evacuation flights.

The Jesuit priests “are in Kabul are preparing for their forced return.”

“A lot of chaotic jurisprudence”

In an interview following the ruling, Rokita said he was grateful for the district court “upholding Indiana’s” eminently reasonable laws requiring ultrasounds, limiting surgical abortions to licensed physicians, ensuring pre-abortion counseling sessions are provided by physicians or advanced-practice clinicians, and imposing criminal penalties for violations of abortion laws.

But he lamented the injunction placed on other provisions in the law, thus contradicting “binding precedent, including a 7th Circuit (appeals court) decision that upheld the very same in-person-counseling Indiana law that the district court invalidated today.”

In an interview with The Criterion, Rokita noted the recent ruling “underscores how real this fight is in legal terms, period. We have a real fight on our hands, and these recent rulings—not just Judge Barker’s ruling—point out how chaotic these rulings are becoming. The precedent doesn’t give across the country, so judges take liberty by applying facts that would have otherwise been decided against. That leads to a lot of chaotic jurisprudence.”

The attorney general’s filing with the U.S. 7th Circuit Court of Appeals is for a stay against the permanent injunctions. But Rokita is willing to “go to the U.S. Supreme Court.”

“We’re going to hope that the 7th Circuit recognizes the right of society—a group of people, in this case Hoosiers—who elected representatives as their lawmakers, to respect the laws those representatives make. We don’t find anything Indiana has done as being unconstitutional.”

“Judicial activism at its absolute worst”

Other pro-life leaders weighed in on the ruling and its impact on pro-life law in Indiana.

“It’s horrible,” Right to Life of Indiana President Marc Tulle told The Criterion. “This is a broad-sweeping abuse of judicial power, no doubt about it. Especially when you look at hospital admissions for abortion past the first trimester. A lot of those laws had been in place for 30 years. This is devastating.”

He said the ruling “opens up abortion on demand without a doctor throughout the state well-past the gestation limits in place now. It also opens the door for abortion clinics to open in Fort Wayne and Evansville—Planned Parenthood has made no bones about wanting to open in Evansville.”

Mike Fichter, executive director of Indiana Right to Life, agreed.

“This is a horrific ruling that will directly lead to a massive expansion of chemical and late-term abortions in Indiana,” he said in a statement.

“The sweeping blockage of these commonsense laws jeopardizes the health and safety of women, leaves women in the dark on issues of fetal pain and the development of human life, and places communities like Fort Wayne and Evansville clearly in the crosshairs for abortion business expansion,” he continued. “This is judicial activism at its absolute worst.”

Other provisions challenged in the case that Barker upheld were requirements that abortion providers maintain admitting privileges with a hospital or a written agreement with a provider who has such privileges, that minors receive either parental consent or a judicial waiver to receive an abortion; and that patients delay their abortions for at least 18 hours after receiving state-mandated disclosures.

“Making abortion … unthinkable”

While Rokita is determined to fight the ruling in court, he noted that the battle is not just legal.

“I continue to believe that at the root of all this, the best solution is going to be not to make it legal but completely on the legal aspect of this fight,” he said. “It’s going to not just be about making abortion illegal or limited, but unthinkable.”

“That’s where the Church comes in. We’ve got to be changing hearts and minds. There’s a lot of evidence that works of the culture are pro-life—we just need to make it the majority. That will bring along judges.”

“We have real opposition, whether it’s Hollywood or media or the nonparochial school system. But our work as a Church and as God-loving people means you don’t have to wait for the attorney general be in court. The real fight is the hand-to-hand combat of changing hearts and minds.”

For this reason, said Tulle, the recent decision—which “doesn’t have much in the way of a silver lining”—ultimately does not alter the massing of the pro-life movement.

“Our main mission is to make abortion unthinkable and illegal,” he said. “Abortion is becoming increasingly unpopular in public opinion, and fewer women choose abortion year after year. For the pro-life movement, we need to continue to work to decrease the number of abortions regardless of what the law is.”

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(Laudato Si’ #14)

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she rode 120 miles—Emily couldn’t stop smiling as she lined up with the other 49 riders who had biked from either Ohio, Alabama, Colorado or Wisconsin for that final-mile trek together.

“Everyone was so tired but full of joy to be there and meet the other people,” she recalls. “Riding together was beautiful, really beautiful!”

All her training since February, and all the setbacks along the way, faded in that moment of knowing that everyone had poured everything they had into raising money and awareness to help pregnancy resource centers provide services to help young women and families in crisis—all with the goal of standing up for the dignity of human life.

At the same time, the pursuit of that goal has led Emily to a personal revelation that continues to guide her.

“Your goal is to transform the culture of life, but I feel like the ride really transforms you,” she says. “I definitely came home a different person.”

And that’s where the full story—the highs, the setbacks, the bonds, the self-discovery—of Emily’s life-changing journey begins.

“The ride itself is not easy, but neither is defending life”

Emily was the only cyclist from Indiana when the 600-mile journey to St. Louis began on July 11 in Columbus, Ohio. There, she joined the 15 other members of the eastern route contingent, all between the ages of 18 and 35.

The group included a priest from Virginia and other young adults from California, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin—all strangers to her and all committed to the pro-life movement.

Emily’s passion for that movement has increased since she started working for the archdiocese’s Office of Youth Ministry in 2018. Yet while she enjoys the ride, she has increased since she started working for the archdiocese’s Office of Youth Ministry in 2018.

As the other riders continued on to Terre Haute the next morning, Emily stayed behind in Indianapolis, focusing on regaining her strength and energy. She spent two days at home, catching up on sleep, pounding the fluids and fighting the doubts.

“I was expecting to be tired that week. I wasn’t expecting to have as many issues as I had,” she says. “So there were definitely times of just feeling really desolate.”

In the midst of having those feelings, she received a message from one of her teammates on the eastern route. The teammate told her, “Emily, I know this was really hard for you to do, but I think this was so mature of you to step away.”

She viewed it as a great compliment and another sign of the tremendous bond that the riders and the support group had formed in just a few days. She thought again about how her teammates had been there for her when she became ill.

“I was just so thankful when you couldn’t control anything, you go back to prayer and just seeing the face of Christ in others as they take care of you,” she says. “To say, ‘I need water, I need a break,’ there’s a lot of trust that goes into that. I think the Lord really protected our route during those moments.

“For me, going into the ride, I was very focused on the miles and not so much on the mountains. But that didn’t happen. When you’re not 100 percent yourself and you have to rely on people—especially people you’ve never met before—and they take care of you, that was something that was really real beautiful.”

She did her best to return the favor. As she recuperated at home, she prayed constantly for everyone on the ride and affirmed them with her messages. And when she had regained her strength, there was no doubt in her mind that she wanted and needed to return to the ride.

“There’s a lot of humility and redemptive suffering with that,” she says. “Even Jesus fell three times and he was able to get back up. The important thing when you do fall is to get back up, not to stay down.”

“With you, your body is your vote. You’re doing it for the unborn children. Everyone put them on the bike. I got emotional as I shared how I wanted to do this for the unborn children. I’m truly blessed to be a part of a whole new community as well, Indianapolis. But honestly, I just became a part of a whole new community as well, Indianapolis. But honestly, I just became part of a whole new community as well. I’m truly blessed to be a part of the people I’ve met through it.”

She now hopes her efforts—and the efforts of everyone who was a part of the national ride of Biking for Babies—will benefit many people she will likely never meet: the young women and families in crisis who benefit from pregnancy resource centers, the children whose parents choose life.

“Going forth, the ride is only the beginning,” she says. “The mission continues as we restore a culture of life within ourselves, our communities and the world.”

(Biking continued from page 1)

(Biking continued from page 1)

Emily Mastronicola shares a moment of joy with her parents, Deb and Norm Mastronicola, during a stop in Indianapolis on July 13 amid the national ride of Biking for Babies. (Submitted photo)
WASHINGTON (CN)—The chairmen of the U.S. bishops’ religious liberty and pro-life committees said on Aug. 12 that the U.S. Department of Justice “is acting in dereliction of its duty to enforce the plain meaning of federal law” by voluntarily dismissing a civil lawsuit against a hospital that forced nurses to assist in elective abortions against their religious beliefs.

“It is hard to imagine a more horrific civil rights violation than being forced to take an innocent human life,” said Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee (USCCB) for Religious Liberty, and Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, Kan., chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

“This is not only deeply wrong, but a violation of federal law,” they said. “We call on the administration to stand up for the basic dignity of our nation’s health care workers by reopening this case, and on Congress to pass the Conscience Protection Act so that doctors and nurses can defend their own rights in court.”

The Justice Department said it was dropping a case against the University of Vermont Medical Center that the department had brought in December 2020, under the Trump administration, after the Office for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) found that the medical center forced a nurse to participate in an elective abortion.

“Plaintiff United States notices dismissal of this action,” stated a filing submitted on July 30 by Jonathan Ophardt, the acting U.S. attorney for Vermont, and Matthew Donnelly, an attorney with the Justice Department’s Washington-based Civil Rights Division.

The Justice Department’s lawsuit came in the wake of a notice of violation issued by the HHS Office for Civil Rights in August 2019 after “a thorough investigation and prolonged attempts to resolve the matter.”

In that notice, the HHS Office for Civil Rights asked the hospital to take corrective action to conform its policies with federal statutes or face legal action.

According to the complaint when the suit was filed, the University of Vermont Medical Center had scheduled approximately 10 nurses with registered conscience objections to assist with nearly 20 abortion procedures. Lawyers for the plaintiff cited the Church Amendment to 1973’s Public Health Service Act, which declared that hospitals or individuals’ receipt of federal funds in various health programs did not require them to participate in abortion and sterilization procedures, and forbade hospitals to make willingness or unwillingness to perform these procedures a condition of employment.

In the Vermont case, HHS found that the medical center “not only engages in such discrimination, but on one occasion even deliberately deceived and coerced a nurse into assisting in an abortion,” according to a USCCB news release.

In a letter to U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland and HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra, 84 House members—led by three co-chairs of the House Congressional Pro-Life Caucus—called the suit’s dismissal “a profound miscarriage of justice.”

They expressed deep concern over the Biden administration’s “coordinated decision to seek a voluntary dismissal in the lawsuit against the University of Vermont Medical Center for knowingly, willfully and repeatedly violating federal conscience-protection laws.”

The letter was written by Rep. Andy Harris, R-Md., a Catholic and a physician, and it was signed by fellow caucus chairs, who also are Catholic, Reps. Chris Smith, R-N.J., and Kat Cammack, R-Fla.

Your handling of this case is ... a rejection of your commitment to enforce federal conscience laws for Americans of all religious beliefs and creeds—and especially for doctors, nurses and other health care professionals who object to abortion.” House members told Garland and Becerra.

The letter’s signatories also cited the Church Amendment and said: “Your actions signal to employers all around the country that they don’t need to comply with the law because your agencies will not enforce it.” These actions “also signal that this administration would rather allow consciences to be violated at the behest of the abortion lobby rather than enforce the law and protect religious liberty,” they added. †

HOSPITALS
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the argument that it is a personal choice not to get vaccinated.

That choice, she said, “puts others in harm’s way.”

The work that CHA members have been doing since the vaccines became available, there are still barriers to where they were offered.

But months since the vaccines have been available, there are still barriers to overcome.

A new one that the Mercy sister has seen she believes stems from increased isolation brought on by the pandemic.

She said people feel removed from others and have taken on the attitude of “this doesn’t impact me” about getting vaccinated or even following mandates for vaccines or masks.

But as she points out: “This is impacting all of us.” †
Relief workers: Haiti earthquake complicated by economy, gangs, weather

MIAMI (CNS) — Relief workers in Haiti said Aug. 14 earthquake might not be as catastrophically damaging as the 2010 quake that was closer to the capital, but recovery will be complicated because the quake came on the heels of July’s presidential assassination, of an economic and ongoing political crisis, the coronavirus pandemic and an active storm season now underway.

Fonie Pierre, a public health professional who heads operations in the region for the U.S.-based Catholic Relief Services (CRS), lives in Les Cayes, Haiti’s third-largest city and one of the hardest hit by the hurricane magnitude 7.2 earthquake. She told Catholic News Service (CNS) she and her daughter fled their home during the earthquake and have joined neighbors in living outdoors for the foreseeable future.

CRS staffers are reporting widespread damage to buildings and homes as area hospitals have been overwhelmed, pushing them to capacity and forcing them to turn away people in need. The Catholic Church was hit hard by the quake, but there are many cracks, and we can’t stay inside—

The local hospital in Les Cayes, she said, does not have capacity to receive so many injured people, while other medical centers in the south are trying to offer help “but it is difficult for them to find materials, doctors, nurses and human resources to manage this since,” Pierre said.

Fear of aftershocks and further earthquakes mean that she and her neighbors are planning to live outdoors for as much as a month or so, even as tropical storms threaten the region. Tropical depression Grace was predicted to reach Haiti late on Aug. 16, bringing the potential for torrential rain, flooding and landslides.

While the full extent of the Aug. 14 earthquake is far from fully known, Pierre said history will probably record the 2010 earthquake in Port-au-Prince as far more tragic, with many more people living closely together in densely built urban neighborhoods in the nation’s capital. More than 300,000 people were killed and another 1.3 million left without homes following the magnitude 7 earthquake in 2010.

The Haitian civil protection service reported on Aug. 17 that more than 1,400 people had been killed, more than 6,900 were injured and more than 30,250 families needed shelter.

CIS indicated it was sending teams to provide clean water, sanitation, shelter and emergency supplies to an area that was still recovering from the devastation caused by Hurricane Matthew in 2016, as well as drought and two subsequent tropical storms.

Pierre told CNS she understands at least one of her local CRS staff had lost a family member during the earthquake, and others sustained some injuries.

“One of the teams was completely cut off not only by roads blocked by earthquake damage but by a dangerous, gang-controlled building that controls the south of Haiti to Port-au-Prince.

“And we still have COVID and all the political and social situations,” Pierre said.

Flaminetta Cappellini, Haiti-based country representative for the Milan-based AVSI, told CNS by phone on Aug. 14 that she traveled from Port-au-Prince to Les Cayes earlier that day. She estimated that some 80% of the buildings were severely impacted by the earthquake.

“All the people are on the street, and night is approaching, and people will be passing the night on the road in the streets; we have a lot of seismic [aftershocks], and so it is dangerous to enter buildings at this time,” Cappellini said.

“The Catholic community here has experienced a lot of churches and Catholic schools in the area that went down—that worries us a lot, because education is really the only way out for this country, and now again we face a closed-school situation impossible to manage,” Cappellini said. “And so this is very hard [situation] long term.”

AVSI operates some five major projects with 50 to 60 staff in southern Haiti, she said. She told CNS that during staff meetings “we heard a lot of stories which were difficult to hear: They saw neighbors hit by the earthquake, and they told us about children dying in their houses in the arms of their mothers trying to rescue them. It is very hard to hear these kinds of stories.”

AVSI, she said, will focus on providing materials for temporary housing and prioritize pregnant women with children and women with large families.

“Humanitarian activities could be badly impacted by wars among gangs in this area,” she said, adding that she and at least one other relief agency were able to pass through the region on Aug. 14. “Absolutely, gang violence will absolutely negatively impact our ability to respond to this catastrophe.”

Cappellini agrees with the assessment that the 2010 earthquake near Port-au-Prince will be remembered as far more deadly and destructive, simply due to the miles and miles of housing clusters that collapsed at that time.

“The situation [today] is very difficult, but it seems absolutely not like the same scale of destruction we knew in 2010—absolutely not,” she told CNS.

“This is a rural area around the cities of Les Cayes and Jérémie, and a lot of people were affected, but the rest of the region is rural areas with small houses not touching one to another,” Cappellini said.

She worries that a lack of authority and governance in the country following the presidential assassination in July will negatively impact the ability of the government to respond to the earthquake.

“And, also, there is a lack of everything, including food, in-kind items and so on, and we are expecting local and government authorities not to be so strong in their capacity to answer this emergency,” said Cappellini. “It is difficult to predict the future, but probably we expect a very difficult period over the next months in responding to this new emergency.”

“See our offer to pray to Archbishop Laszlo Saritur, president of the bishops’ conference of Haiti, and to all those who take the second collection in Haiti. We stand in solidarity with the Church in Haiti,” Archbishop Gomez said.

In just the Diocese of Jérémie, the Catholic charitable agency Caritas reported the total destruction of the parish church in Corail.

In Les Cayes, next door to the bishop’s residence, a Catholic radio station was unharmed, but the Sacred Heart Parish Church, also in Les Cayes, was destroyed.

Beyond south, on the dusty road that leads toward the westernmost point of the island at Anse d’Hainault, a deep fissure in the road at Port-à-Piment cut off the remote region from the capital. Other church structures were reported damaged, including Our Lady of the Rosary Church in Port-à-Piment and a dispensary in the neighboring town of Roche-à-Bateau.

In Cavallion, northeast of Les Cayes, the parish church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help was destroyed, as were the town hall and the police station.

St. Anne’s Church in Anse-à-Veau was also severely damaged, and St. Peter’s Church in Barraderes collapsed.

Relief agencies responding to the Haiti earthquake

Numerous organizations, including Catholic agencies, are accepting donations to assist with emergency response to the Haiti earthquake. They include:

• Catholic Relief Services: online: crs.org; by phone: 877-435-7277 from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Eastern; by mail: P.O. Box 10969, Baltimore, Maryland 21203-0969.

• Catholic Medical Mission Board: cutt.ly/CMMBHaiti (case sensitive).

• CAFOD, the Catholic aid agency for England and Wales: cutt.ly/CAFODHaiti (case sensitive).

• Caritas Internationalis: cutt.ly/Caritashaiti (case sensitive).

• AVSI, the Italian humanitarian relief and development organization: cutt.ly/AVSIHaiti (case sensitive).


• Food for the Poor: cutt.ly/foodforthePOOR.

Here is where to donate to help agencies respond to the Haiti earthquake

A member of the Cuban Medical Brigade treats an injured man in Jérémie, Haiti, on Aug. 15 after a magnitude 7.2 earthquake the previous day. (CNS photo/Cuban Medical Brigade via Reuters)
United in the Eucharist

On the webpage archdiocese.org/UnitedInTheEucharist, you’ll find six very brief videos with a variety of people who share their experience with a definite expiration date.

Each of these brief videos is well-suited for sharing via social media. If your parish isn’t already using these resources to encourage a greater desire for the Eucharist and holy mass, you might suggest that easy action step.

If you make use of social media, you could share these engaging, brief witness talks. The webpage also has Spanish-language resources, and each witness talk can be captioned in a variety of languages by using simple instructions on the webpage.

Prayerful Reflection, Interesting Discussion

Among the discussion questions on the United in the Eucharist page are:

"The song Sister quotes says 'No joy can be complete until I sit at last by your side.' How does attending Mass and receiving the Eucharist allow you to sit at the side of Jesus in a unique and irreplaceable way?"

Who are those we “see” in the line of your own story of faith?

Prayerful Gratitude

The webpage includes a brief prayer written for this effort to help inspire a deep desire for the holy Eucharist and attending Sunday Mass consistently. And because discussion questions often lead to additional questions that are related to various Mass- and Eucharist-related topics are included.

Oftentimes, folks are grateful for the experience of a small group that meets for a small number of sessions initially. Many of these participants express an openness to continuing in a small, faith-related group. Our archdiocesan evangelization office is a great source of guidance for establishing and sustaining a discipleship group ministry at your parish.

So reach out to a small group of friends, neighbors and fellow parishioners, inviting them to plug into a few discussion groups based on these "United in the Eucharist" resources. This prayer will help your efforts be successful:

Heavenly Father,
You love us and desire our happiness. You give us the privilege and gift of worshipping you at Holy Mass; of experiencing the Holy Spirit in an unique and irreplaceable way; of receiving Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist.

As we return to the Eucharist with joy renew in us a deep appreciation of the privilege that each celebration of Mass presents for us all.

May the seeds of mercy, hope and salvation sprout and flourish in our hearts and communities, nourished by our Lord Jesus present to us in the Most Holy Eucharist.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Ken Ogorek is the director of the archdiocesan Office of Catechesis. E-mail him at ko@archindy.org.)

Faith at Home

Laura Kelly Fanucci

How to answer your children when prayers go unanswered

When I was 11 years old, wrestling with my brother’s recent death, the new parish priest came本着 our religion class one afternoon. He announced that he would take our questions (anonymously) to answer in his next homily.

When the all-school Mass arrived the next Wednesday, he approached the ambo to proclaim the

Gospel, my heart started beating wildly.

What question would I ask? Did anyone ask anything like mine? To my shock, he pulled out a piece of paper and unfolded the loose-leaf on which I’d jotted my querying questions: "Does God really hear us when we pray? Then why doesn’t God answer our prayers?" I still remember the particulars of the priest’s response. What mattered to me most was that he heard my questions, and he was willing to work about it alongside me.

He told me—and a church full of children—that doubting God or struggling with prayer was not a failure but held the heart of faith.

Window Seat Wisdom/

Katie Prejean McGrady

Let the consumer beware

Within 24 hours of the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics, my almost 4-year-old daughter asked me if she could take a gymnastics class. Then, in the next hour, she asked if we could buy a horse.

And just the other morning, she pushed to put on her sneakers so she could “go run like the fast girls” in the driveway.

We had the television regularly tuned to the Olympic competitions, and since the games ended, I’ve been receiving replays and commentary available on Peacock that I’m sure we’ll run to watch.

With every sport we watched, from speed climbing to fencing to gymnastics to track and field events to my personal favorites, horse dressage and swimming, Rose sat riveted, asking all sorts of questions about the athletes, the game, and if she can try to do it herself.

I’ve got more videos than I can count of her attempting to do cartwheels with Suni Lee’s floor routine playing in the background. As we watched the closing ceremonies, Rose said, "I loved learning all these sports. I want to try them all.”

There’s a desire in little kids to make what they see, whether a sport or an activity, competing at the Olympics, cartoon dogs from “Blenny” playing a game with their dad, a song and dance event about the athletes, the game, and if she can try to do it herself.

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They’re sponges, taking in what they see, hear, watch and read, absorbing it all. From the ads competing at the Olympics, to the athletes, the game, and if she can try to do it herself.

The other day, Rose dropped her cup of water on the floor. From the plastic cup she called herself a loser. I hurriedly told her she was obviously not a loser, and then asked her what it was about the cup that made her cry.

When she said, "The mean bird in Rio called another bird that, " she realized we needed to talk about sportsmanship.

It’s not just kids who absorb, though. Young and impressionable, children take in sights and sounds and spit them back out, but adults do as well.

We keep the company, perhaps gossip and mean-spirited, can influence our thoughts about others. The shows we watch, sometimes in stark contrast to what we say and what we believe, can create confusion.

The social media profiles we follow, sometimes in plain sight (you can’t forget the wants us to focus on learning to people to constantly compare to us, to focus on learning to people to constantly compare to us and so on, and so does, we can drive us to a place of comparison and lack of gratitude for our own blessings.

We have to be careful, making sure what we believe, what we accept, doesn’t change the way we live or change the type of life we long to live or drag us further from our faith. Unless, of course, it brings us closer to the people and people and people want to influence us— are leading us closer to holiness.

Then, by the way, as we must, God wants those things and people to help us become, better more powerful, generous, virtuous people. Jesus wanted the people to influence others to pursue sanctity too.

As we are careful, watching closely what we absorb, not only does this help us find things that build us up, help grow our faith, and lead us to a vision of heaven as we live on Earth.

Look towards the Olympics, (the Beijing Winter Games are just around the corner.

See FANUCCI on page 15

See MCGRADY on page 15
The Sunday Readings
Sunday, August 22, 2021

The Book of Joshua, the source for the first reading for Mass this weekend, looks at the period in the history of God’s people when Joshua led them after the death of Moses.

Even though these connections may seem to be clear, biblical scholars disagree about the exact date of this period as well as the time when this book’s composition.

This much is clear: Hebrew history was not written as much to chronicle events and happenings as to chart the people’s religious response to God’s revelation.

In this reading, Joshua gathers all the people at Shechem, along with the leaders of the people, the senior members, the judges and the warriors. He puts before this assembly a blunt and fundamental question: Do they wish to follow God or not?

The people cry out that they wish to follow God. Although on occasion they rebelled, God brought them out of Egypt and protected them as they made their weary and dangerous way across the Sinai Peninsula.

For its second reading, this weekend’s liturgy turns to St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians. Not uncommonly, this reading is cited as reinforcing the subjugation of women in marriage.

In the culture of the time, husbands were responsible for the well-being of families. Husbands ruled. Wives were abused.

This epistle, a classic Christian reflection on human living, calls for a different style of marriage. Using lofty examples to describe marriage, Paul speaks of the union between Christ and the Church.

At the time, these ideas were revolutionary. They established the dignity of women. Christ loves and redeems all people equally, male and female.

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Knowing the context of this passage is essential to understanding it. Marriage among pagans in the Roman Empire was quite removed from modern ideals for marriage. Wives were little more than glorified slaves, virtually going to the highest bidder. They had no rights.

Understandably, many marriages were very troubled. Spouses often detested each other, and wives were abused.

This is critical to the story that the Twelve Apostles did not desert Jesus. The Lord asked them to look deeply into their hearts. Would they walk away with the others?

St. Peter responds for the Apostles with a magnificent expression of faith. Saluting Jesus as “God’s holy one,” the Messiah, in a powerful testimony, Peter says, “Lord, you have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68-69).

Reflection

The Church for weeks has called us to realize our limitations as human beings, and it also has reassured us that God’s mercy, love and power lavishly assists us at least a puzzling statement.

Critical to the story is the fact that the Lord redeems us all, equal in God’s love and in God’s plan for salvation, if we ask for eternal life.

The Lord redeems us all, equal in God’s love and in God’s plan for salvation, if we ask for eternal life.†

Question Corner

Fr. Kenneth Doyle

The Church does not forbid priests from growing beards or long hair

Q

a few years ago, our pastor who was in his 70s retired and was replaced by a priest in his 30s. At the time our new priest was clean-cut, with short hair and no beard.

Shortly after arriving, though, he appeared to quit grooming and let his hair and beard grow, and they’ve been growing ever since. Now his hair is way over his ears and down his back, and his beard is to his waist.

We all assumed that this was some kind of anti-COVID-19 measure, but COVID-19 has vanished from our parish and things are back to normal.

Could this be some sort of vow of poverty? The priest avoids questions about his grooming, but it has become a distraction at Mass. (Location withheld)

As to your question whether this priest’s long hair represents a vow of poverty, I doubt that this is the case—but the only sure route is to ask the priest himself.

You probably know that there is no present Church disciplinary regulation that forbids priests from having beards or long hair, so your priest is on a safe canonical path.

The former Code of Canon Law (in 1917) did require clerics to have a simple hairstyle but did not specifically forbid beards. The current code (issued in 1983) specifies that clerics are to wear suitable ecclesiastical garb, but makes no mention of beards or beards.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, popes were frequently bearded, but since that time there has been no bearded pope. Some notable saints wore beards, including Ignatius Loyola, Francis de Sales and Philip Neri.

I guess my advice to you would be to set aside your own preference as to this priest’s appearance and just be grateful, especially during the current shortage of priests, that there is one to serve your parish.

Q

For the past year, I have been striving for a stronger Catholic faith. Before, I guess I would say that I was a taker from Catholic. I was married in a Methodist church and divorced 30 years ago through no fault of my own. I have always received holy Communion. Is this wrong? I have been reading different Catholic opinions. (Ohio)

As to the purpose of this answer, I am going to assume that you never received the Catholic Church’s permission to marry in a Methodist church.

The possibility does exist, of course, that you might have received the necessary dispensation to be married in a Methodist ceremony, especially if you were marrying a Methodist, but since you did not mention that, I am going to assume that your marriage took place without Catholic permission.

If that is the case, that marriage would have violated Catholic teaching and would therefore have required either that you had the marriage annulled in the Catholic Church or that you receive absolution in the sacrament of penance once that marriage had broken up.

If this did in fact confess this, then you have been correct in receiving holy Communion in the Catholic Church. But instead, you never confessed this, all you would need to do now is to make a worthy confession; then, going forward, you would be eligible to take Communion in the Catholic Church.

(Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfattedoyle@gmail.com and 30 Columbus Circle Dr, Albany, New York 12203.)†

(At the Criterion, Friday, August 20, 2021)
### Australian outback school named for teen on way to saithood

SYDNEY (CNS)—An Australian outback diocese has announced what is believed to be the world’s first 12-“college” school to be named after a teenage computer programmer whose life was transformed by Pope Francis last year.

Blessed Carlo Acutis College will have a liberal arts focus, and Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green of the Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes hopes to build it in Moama, a fast-growing Rivera town in the southern part of his vast sprawling New South Wales diocese.

“It is an honor to name our school after such an inspiring young person who showed that children and teenagers can live devoted to God and to caring for those around them,” Bishop Macbeth-Green said of the new college designed by ClarelkHopkins+Clairek Architects.

“All the students will be proud of their school name knowing that they, too, can live inspiring lives for others.”

He said the college would “have its heart” a daily life of prayer and devotion to the Eucharist, and all students would have the opportunity to build a deep friendship with Jesus.

“I couldn’t think of a more uplifting or relevant model for the young people of Moama,” the bishop said.

The diocese is also served by Red Bend Catholic College, a year-7-12 school in Forbes established by the Marist Brothers; it has more than five hours by car from the newly planned school.

In a letter announcing the college, Bishop Macbeth-Green said he hoped that since Blessed Carlo was known for using technology to spread the Gospel, he would show today’s young people how media can be used for the good of society.

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“I couldn’t think of a more uplifting or relevant model for the young people of Moama,” the bishop said.

Blessed Carlo Acutis was only 15 when he died of leukemia in 2006. The boy from Milan has been called the firstmillennial saint and “God’s influencer.” He was devoted to the Eucharist from the day of his first Communion and used his gifts to promote the world’s eucharistic miracles and the Catholic faith.

Well-liked among his peers, he enjoyed computer games and sports, especially soccer. He was devoted to daily Mass and the praying of the rosary, encouraged his mother to return to the practice of her faith, and said he was happy to die “because I lived my life without wasting even a minute of it anything unpleasing to God.”

### African wildlife

A young wildebeest walks amid flamingos in Kenya’s Amboseli National Park on Aug. 10. (CNS photo/Peter K. moms, Reuters)
Catholic agency helps resettle Afghan translators who aided U.S. forces

ARLINGTON, Va. (CNS)—When U.S. service members were in a foreign land, unsure of the way and unable to speak the language, brave locals came to their assistance.

Now, the Afghans who served as interpreters and guides for the U.S. military need help adjusting to a new country. For decades, the U.S. military has been in Afghanistan and now in the process of withdrawing troops. The Taliban, an extremist Islamic movement that ruled Afghanistan until ousted by a U.S.-led coalition, is taking advantage of the withdrawal to gain control in the region, making it especially dangerous for those who assisted U.S. forces.

Operation Allies Refuge, which began on July 30, brought plane loads of Afghans to Dulles International Airport in Virginia outside of Washington and they were then taken to Fort Lee, near Petersburg, Va. The families were pre-vetted and able to complete the immigration process safely.

Federal, military and nongovernmental agencies all have been working together to try to provide a safe pipeline to the United States for those who aided the U.S. mission. Six diocesan Catholic Charities staff members were working with the new arrivals at Fort Lee, including Hekmatullah Latifi, director of newcomer services for Catholic Charities of the Arlington Diocese.

“Those families were picked up from the middle of a fire and brought to safety. It’s so emotional, so touching,” he said. “Every single family was thankful for the services they received, for the warm welcoming they received. A lot of families said to us, ‘We don’t feel like we’re on a military base. We feel like we’ve reached our homes.’”

Some of the incoming families will settle within the Arlington Diocese and many have connections with friends or family in the area, said Estrada. For up to five years after their arrival, Catholic Charities will help them enroll their children in school, get health care, and find employment and a place to live.

Stephen Carattini, president and CEO of diocesan Catholic Charities, said he is grateful his team was able to pitch in.

“The ministry of Catholic Charities is to serve the poor, protect the vulnerable and welcome the newcomer. That comes to us from Scripture and Catholic social teaching. That is what we strive to do every day,” he said.

“People come with nothing and are starting over. These are folks who helped our government in good faith, and now we have an opportunity to return that favor,” he added.

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SAVED ABOLE WAVE MAJIDIC hugs his nephew Saved Majidic Mustaf 38, after Majidi arrives from Fort Lee, Va., at the Sacramento International Airport in Sacramento, Calif., on Aug 9, he is one of a couple of hundred Afghan interpreters and translators brought to the United States to be resettled. (CNS photo/Brittany Hosea-Small, Reuters)

Catholic Philanthropic Advisor
The Archdiocese of Indianapolis is seeking a full-time Catholic Philanthropic Advisor at their office in downtown Indianapolis.

The Catholic Philanthropic Advisor is responsible for securing major and planned gifts to support ministries of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. The individual will work closely with the Director of Major Gifts and Planned Giving and the Prospect Research Analyst to identify, cultivate, solicit and steward major gifts and planned gifts. The Catholic Philanthropic Advisor will assist Catholics to grow in their understanding of giving even their faith as we walk alongside them toward God’s love.

(Walter Kelly Forsythe is a writer, speaker, and author of several books, including Everyday Sacrament: The Messy Grace of Parenting. Her work can be found at laurakellyforsythe.com)
WASHINGTON (CNS)—The Supreme Court announced on Aug. 12 that it will not hear an appeal from a group of students at Indiana University who are opposed to the university’s COVID-19 vaccine mandate.

The students’ case was directed to Amy Coney Barrett, the justice who receives emergency petitions from that region of the country.

She denied the appeal and there were no noted dissents from other justices. The court did not issue a separate order or provide an explanation but simply indicated that Barrett denied the appeal.

The group of eight students was seeking an emergency order against the university’s vaccine policy, saying the risks associated with the vaccines outweighed the benefits for their age group.

“Protection of others does not relieve our society from the central canon of medical ethics requiring voluntary and informed consent,” the students’ petition said.

The case, Alliance for Catholic Health (AHC)/Franciscan Alliance v. Becerra, is the first involving COVID-19 vaccine requirements to come before the Supreme Court.

Indiana University announced in May that it was requiring all faculty, students and staff to be vaccinated for the fall semester unless they qualified for a medical or religious exemption.

The student group challenged the constitutionality of this mandate in federal court.

In July, a federal District Court judge in Indiana rejected the students’ request to block the school’s vaccine mandate, saying the school had the right to seek “a reasonable and due process of vaccination in the legitimate interest of public health for its students, faculty and staff.”

The judge also said students have other options such as applying for vaccine exemptions, taking the semester off, taking classes online or going to another school.

On Aug. 2, the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, based in Chicago, agreed with the opinion of the District Court judge and refused to bar the university’s vaccine mandate, saying it did not violate a constitutional right.

Circuit Judge Frank Easterbrook brought up a Supreme Court ruling in 1905 which said that states could enforce vaccination mandates during a smallpox epidemic. That mandate at the time was even more strict, he pointed out, because it did not include a religious exemption.

Other student lawsuits against university vaccine mandates are currently pending in federal courts challenging public universities in Connecticut, Massachusetts and California.

Although most plaintiffs in these cases are students, The Wall Street Journal pointed out that a George Mason University law professor is using his school over its policy of denying merit pay increases to unvaccinated faculty members.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said on MSNBC’s “Morning Joe” on Aug. 10 that he supports schools and colleges requiring COVID-19 vaccines as the school year begins amid a surge in coronavirus cases.

“I know that people must have to like their freedom and not be told to do something, but I think we’re in such a serious situation now that I think in certain circumstances, mandates should be done,” he said.

A list frequently updated by The Chronicle of Higher Education shows that as of Aug. 10, 681 college campuses have a COVID-19 vaccine requirement in place for students or students and employees.

Several Catholic colleges and universities, particularly large universities, have vaccine mandates in place.

St. Edward’s University in Austin, Texas, was one of the first colleges to announce in late March that it was requiring students and faculty to be vaccinated for COVID-19. It said it would provide an exemption for students and employees “related to religious beliefs, underlying medical conditions.”

Other colleges that were quick to join this list were: Georgetown University in Washington, Holy Cross College in Worcester, Mass., Loyola University Chicago and Seattle University, to name a few.

Students at The Catholic University of America in Washington will not be required to be vaccinated, but instead have been “strongly encouraged” to get the vaccine.

Similarly, Barry University, a Catholic college in Miami, is not requiring but strongly encouraging its school community to be vaccinated. Those who are not vaccinated need to wear face masks and do a daily symptom self-check, the school’s website says. North Carolina’s Belmont Abbey College also is not requiring students to get COVID-19 vaccinations and it will not require face masks or social distancing.

Some college officials have said they will impose a vaccination requirement once the vaccines gain full approval from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) since the vaccines currently happen to enjoy emergency-use authorization.

Fauci said on the MSNBC program that there is no doubt the vaccines will get full FDA approval.

“When that occurs, which I hope will be really quite soon,” he said, “I think you’re going to see that local institutions, local enterprises are going to feel empowered—and appropriately so, they’re not worried about getting sued or anything—that they’re going to be saying that if you want to go to this university or you want to go to this college, you’ve got to be vaccinated.”

‘Today’s ruling protects patients, aligns with current medical research, and ensures doctors aren’t forced to violate their religious beliefs and medical judgment.’

—Luke Goodrich, vice president and senior counsel at the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty

WASHINGTON (CNS)—A U.S. District Court judge on Aug. 9 to block the Biden administration’s mandate that doctors and hospitals perform gender-transition procedures despite their own moral or medical objections is “a victory for common sense, conscience and sound medicine.”

That is the view of Luke Goodrich, vice president and senior counsel at the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, based in Chicago, agreed with the opinion of the District Court judge and refused to bar the university’s vaccine mandate, saying it did not violate a constitutional right.

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That is the view of Luke Goodrich, vice president and senior counsel at the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, based in Washington. He is the lead counsel for the plaintiffs in a federal lawsuit challenging a controversial HHS regulation if they “aren’t forced to violate their religious beliefs and medical judgment.”

“Today’s ruling protects patients, aligns with current medical research, and ensures doctors aren’t forced to violate their religious beliefs and medical judgment,” he said about the ruling in Franciscan Alliance v. Becerra.

The defendant is Secretary Xavier Becerra of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

On Aug. 9, Judge Reed O’Connor of the District Court for the Northern District of Texas in Dallas blocked the HHS regulation—in its current form as prescribed by the Biden administration. It requires doctors to perform gender-transition procedures in children and adults or be held liable for discrimination.

The regulation, Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), was first issued in 2016 by HHS under the Obama administration.

In 2020, the Trump administration put in place a final rule that eliminated the general prohibition on discrimination based on gender identity and also adopted abortion and religious freedom exemptions for health care providers. But the courts blocked this rule change.

In 2021, shortly after he was inaugurated, President Joe Biden issued an executive order declaring his administration would apply in all areas— including the ACA—the rule by the U.S. Supreme Court in Bostock v. Clayton County in 2020 that discrimination based on sex outlawed Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 covers people who are gay or transgender.

“The Christian plaintiffs contend that violation of their statutory rights under RFRA [Religious Freedom Restoration Act] is an irreparable harm,” O’Connor said in his ruling.

“The court agrees,” he said, “and concludes that enforcement of the 2021 interpretation [of Section 1557] forces Christian plaintiffs to face civil penalties or to perform gender-transition procedures and abortions contrary to their religious beliefs—a quintessential irreparable injury.

“The court grants plaintiffs’ request for a permanent injunction against permanent enyjons” HHS, Becerra and all HHS-related divisions, agencies and employees “from interpreting or enforcing Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act.”

“Today’s decision rightly says the mandate violates federal law,” said Goodrich in a string of tweets. He noted “this is now the second federal court to block the mandate.”

He was referring to a Jan. 19 ruling by the U.S. District Court for the District of North Dakota in a lawsuit filed on behalf of Franciscan Alliance/Franciscan Health, and the Christian Medical and Dental Associations. The states of Texas, Kansas, Kentucky, Nebraska and Wisconsin also joined in the suit.

The Biden administration filed an appeal in the North Dakota case on April 20 with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 8th Circuit, based in St. Louis.

Goodrich tweeted that Franciscan Alliance/Franciscan Health’s hospitals and health care professionals “gladly serve all patients regardless of their sex or gender identity, yet were threatened with multimillion dollar penalties by a controversial HHS regulation if they refused to perform gender-transition procedures.

“Those religious doctors and hospitals joyfully serve all patients and routinely provide top-notch care to transgender patients. There is ample evidence, however, that some gender transition procedures can harm patients,” Goodrich said.

“Several federal circuits—including the 5th and 1st—have all reached the same conclusion: ‘There is no medical consensus that sex reassignment surgery is a necessary or even effective treatment for gender dysphoria.’”

Fourth-year medical student Anna Raesler administers the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at Indiana University Health Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis on Dec. 16, 2020. The Supreme Court announced on Aug. 12 that Indiana University can require students to be vaccinated against the coronavirus disease. (CNS photo/Bryan Woolston, Reuters)