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Criterion

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Window Seat Wisdom

This Advent, focus on presence, not presents, page 8A.

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U.S. bishops spotlight programs on Eucharist, young people and moms in need

BALTIMORE (CNS)—The U.S. bishops spotlighted two major initiatives focused on the central role of the Eucharist on Nov. 17, the second of two days of public sessions of their fall general assembly.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) approved a 26-page statement, “The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church,” with 222 “yes” votes, and also OK’d plans for a three-year National Eucharistic Revival that will culminate with the National Eucharistic Congress 2024 in Indianapolis. (See related article below.)

On other matters, they were invited to take a multicultural journey with young Catholics to Chicago next June; were urged to implement a framework for marriage and family ministry that they had approved at their spring assembly in June; agreed to begin review of the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People” earlier than planned; and heard how the pandemic may have slowed but not stopped a pro-life initiative called “Walking With Moms in Need.”

They approved guidelines governing the USCCB’s financial investments that include wider limits on where money would be invested. The guidelines advance a policy of engagement on corporate practices that impact human dignity.

The prelates, meeting in person for a national gathering for the first time since 2019, also approved guidelines for the exposition of the Eucharist and Benediction, affirmed sainthood causes for three U.S. laypeople, approved revisions of statutes for the catechumenate and voted for revised English- and Spanish-language editions of the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults.

Their vote on the Eucharist statement came a day after their discussion of the document—a discussion that was markedly different than their debate in

See USCCB, page 3A

NATIONAL CATHOLIC YOUTH CONFERENCE 2021

Above: Teens from the Diocese of Des Moines, Iowa, kneel in prayer during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 20. The event drew young people from across the U.S. Read more about the biennial gathering in our special pull-out section on pages 1B-16B. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Ablaze • Enciende el Fuego



Bishops choose archdiocese to host national eucharistic congress in 2024

By Sean Gallagher

The U.S. bishops have selected the Archdiocese of Indianapolis to host the first national eucharistic congress in 48 years.

It will take place on July 17-21, 2024, in Indianapolis and is expected to draw at least 80,000 from across the country.

The bishops voted on the proposal on Nov. 17 in Baltimore during the fall general assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

See CONGRESS, page 3A



(Photo courtesy of Visit Indy)

Parishes, pope pray for victims after SUV plows through parade crowd

WAUKESHA, Wis. (CNS)— Church leaders and parishes offered prayers for the five people who died and dozens more who were injured, including a Catholic priest, church parishioners and Catholic school students, when an SUV plowed through spectators watching a Christmas parade.



Pope Francis

“Our prayers are with the people who have been injured and killed during the tragic incident in Waukesha,” Sandra Peterson, communication director for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, said in a statement posted on the archdiocesan website hours after the incident occurred on the evening of Nov. 21.

Waukesha is about 20 miles west of Milwaukee and is in the archdiocese.

“Among the injured are one of our Catholic priests, as well as multiple parishioners and Waukesha Catholic school children,” Peterson said. “Please join us in prayer for all those involved, their families, and those who are traumatized from witnessing the horrible scene.”

Pope Francis expressed his condolences to the victims of the tragic attack. In a message sent by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, to Archbishop Jerome E. Listeck of Milwaukee, the pope assured “his spiritual closeness to all affected by the tragic incident that recently took place in Waukesha.”

The pope “commends the souls of those who died to Almighty God’s loving mercy and implores the divine gifts of healing and consolation upon the injured and bereaved. He joins you in asking the Lord to bestow upon everyone the spiritual strength which triumphs over violence and overcomes evil with good,” said the message released by the Vatican.

A post early on Nov. 22 on the Facebook page of the Catholic Community of Waukesha, a group of four parishes, said Church leaders were monitoring “the impact of yesterday’s tragic event” and ministering to injured parishioners as well as those who attended the parade but were uninjured.

“It is in our most difficult hours that we, as a community, turn to our Lord for refuge, strength and love,” the post said.

Community members gathered soon after the incident to pray the rosary on Facebook. Mass was offered early on Nov. 22 at St. William Church, one of the churches in the community, for the victims. A prayer service was planned later in the evening at the church.

The Waukesha Catholic Community also was arranging for counseling and support services for anyone seeking assistance.

Authorities said early on Nov. 22 that five people died and at least 48 others—including 18 children—were injured when an SUV broke through a barricade about 4:39 p.m. local time and drove down the street on which the parade was taking place.

Waukesha Police Chief Daniel Thompson said the driver’s vehicle had been recovered, and the driver identified as Darrell E. Brooks, Jr. He faces five counts of first-degree intentional homicide, with additional charges possible based on the investigation, Thompson said.

News reports said Brooks was a Milwaukee man with a criminal history dating back to 1999 that includes numerous violent felonies.

Mayor Shawn Reilly described the incident as a “horrible and senseless act,” local media reported.

Officials at the School District of Waukesha canceled classes on Nov. 22.

A video posted on the website of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* showed an SUV speeding down the street between parade participants and parade watchers sitting and standing curbside as a police vehicle, with siren blaring, followed at a slower pace.

Another video showed bags, a baby stroller and other personal belongings strewn in the street along the parade route afterward.

The newspaper also reported that Thompson said that “an officer discharged his weapon at the suspect vehicle to try to stop the vehicle. No bystanders were injured as a result of the weapon discharge.”

The parade is one the city’s biggest and most beloved annual events, drawing viewers and participants from throughout southeastern Wisconsin. †



Public Schedule of Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

December 1–9, 2021

December 1 – 10 a.m.

Mass for seniors of archdiocesan high schools at St. Malachy Church, Brownsburg

December 1 – 12:30 p.m.

Lunch gathering with Archdiocese of Indianapolis priests, Indianapolis

December 2 – 10 a.m.

Leadership Team meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center, Indianapolis

December 2 – 12:45 p.m.

Lunch gathering with Marianhill priests, Indianapolis

December 2 – 3:30 p.m.

Catholic Community Foundation Advisory Board meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center

December 2 – 6 p.m.

Catholic Community Foundation Evening of Lights at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center

December 4 – 5:30 p.m.

Mass at St. Peter Church, Franklin County

December 5 – 8:15 a.m.

Mass at St. Bridget of Ireland Church, Liberty

December 6 – 6:15 p.m.

Mass for prisoners at Edinburgh Correctional Facility, Edinburgh

December 7 – 10:30 a.m.

Priest Personnel Board meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center

December 8 – 10 a.m.

Mass at Marian University Chapel, Indianapolis

December 8 – noon

Mass for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, Indianapolis

December 9 – 8:15 a.m.

Virtual Judicatories meeting

December 9 – 10 a.m.

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

December 9 – 12:30 p.m.

Lunch gathering with Archdiocese of Indianapolis priests, Indianapolis

Pope encourages young people to be the critical conscience of society

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis told young people that, with Jesus, people can find the courage to swim against the current, to be free and authentic, and to stand up for their dreams and ideals of truth, love, justice and peace.

“Be the critical conscience of society. Don’t be afraid to criticize. We need your criticism,” he said, citing for example, the disapproval coming from many young people about environmental destruction. “Be passionate about truth, so that, with your dreams, you can say, ‘My life is not captive to the mindset of the world. I am free, because I reign with Jesus for justice, love and peace!’ ”

Celebrating Mass on the feast of Christ the King in St. Peter’s Basilica on Nov. 21, the pope directed much of his homily to the world’s young people. This was the first year that the world’s dioceses were celebrating World Youth Day on the local level on the feast of Christ the King rather than on Palm Sunday. Pope Francis had announced the change last year.

As the Church begins its journey toward the next intercontinental celebration of World Youth Day in Lisbon in 2023, the pope asked young people to reflect on the image in the day’s Gospel reading of Jesus standing before Pontius Pilate and declaring, “I am a king” (Jn 18:37).

“We are struck by Jesus’ determination, his courage, his supreme freedom,” the

pope said, because he could have tried to defend himself or compromise to avoid being condemned to death.

Instead, Jesus did not hide his identity and he took responsibility for his own life and for his mission to testify to the truth, he said.

“Jesus came without duplicity to show his kingdom is different from the kingdoms of the world,” the pope said. “God does not reign to increase his power and to crush others; he does not reign by force of arms. His is the kingdom of love,” a kingdom of people who give their lives for the salvation of others.

Pope Francis encouraged young people to let Jesus’ freedom “resonate within us, to challenge us, to awaken in us the courage born of truth.” He encouraged everyone to look for and face the truth about themselves: what they are ashamed of, the ways they may be deceitful or duplicitous and the ways they displease God.

“It is good to stand before Jesus, who is truth, in order to be set free from our illusions,” to see life as it really is, “and not be deceived by the fashions of the moment and the displays of consumerism that dazzle but also deaden,” he said.

Pope Francis urged young people not to be “enchanted by the sirens of the world, but to take our lives in hand, to ‘take a bite out of life,’ in order to live it to the full!” †



Pope Francis’ intentions for December

- **Catechists**—Let us pray for the catechists, summoned to announce the word of God: may they be its witnesses, with courage and creativity and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

See Pope Francis’ monthly intentions at archindy.org/popessintentions.



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CONGRESS

continued from page 1A

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson, speaking before the bishops in Baltimore, told them in reference to the Indianapolis 500, "If you give us the green flag to this project, we'll be ready with the checkered flag."

The 2024 eucharistic congress will be the culminating event of a three-year eucharistic revival planned by the USCCB's Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis and which is scheduled to begin on June 16, 2022, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, traditionally known as the feast of *Corpus Christi*.

The revival will begin at the local and diocesan levels with such initiatives as eucharistic adoration and processions, the development of parish teams of revival leaders and conferences on the Eucharist.

Local, diocesan and regional revival events will then lead to the eucharistic congress in Indianapolis in 2024, the first to be held since one took place in 1976 in Philadelphia.

In an interview with *The Criterion* after the bishops selected the archdiocese as the host for the congress, Archbishop Thompson said the event in Indianapolis could be a pivotal moment for the Church in the U.S.—if it enters fully into the eucharistic revival.

"Much will depend upon how well we prepare and pilgrimage to that moment and are prayerfully attentive to how the Holy Spirit will lead us beyond that moment," Archbishop Thompson said. "The revival and the congress could have a profound effect on the renewal and enrichment of our eucharistic identity, witness and mission as Church, stewards and disciples of Jesus Christ."

Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens, the committee chairman who was also recently named by Pope Francis as the new shepherd of the Crookston, Minn., Diocese, spoke about the revival in an interview published in *The Criterion* in September.

He noted that the eucharistic revival was developed in response to recent trends in the Church and the broader society. Polling data in recent years suggest that a majority of Catholics in the United States no longer believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Mass attendance has also declined among Catholics in the U.S., a trend affected by the suspension of the public celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments at the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. When

churches began to reopen, many dioceses made efforts to invite Catholics to return to the Mass.

Bishop Cozzens hopes the eucharistic revival can build on these efforts and inspire a wider eucharistic movement.

"Now we are ready and eager to engage the people who come to Mass daily, weekly or perhaps who still participate virtually to come to a deeper awareness of what

the Church teaches about Communion," said Bishop Cozzens in his initial *Criterion* interview. "It is not an 'it' in holy Communion. It is a real person: Jesus Christ."

He also spoke of the goal of commissioning thousands of "eucharistic missionaries" at the congress in Indianapolis.

"These men and women will be sent forth to continue the movement in parishes, the Church and society at large," he said. "They will help those who are currently attending Mass frequently to deepen their faith, as well as reach those on the margins who are far from Christ. We also want to hold a special place for the family in all of this."

At the Baltimore meeting, Bishop Cozzens explained that the Archdiocese of Indianapolis was selected among two other archdioceses—Atlanta and Denver—that sought to host the congress because of its experience in hosting large events like the National Catholic Youth Conference. Indianapolis, he also noted, has the venues, hotel space and scheduling availability for such a large event. It is also within a day's drive of approximately 50% of the U.S. population.

Archbishop Thompson agreed.

"Our people are well equipped to pull this off, and to do so with incredible class and Hoosier hospitality," he said. "This is an opportunity to really draw from the rich fabric of our Catholic parishes, schools, health care, outreach and associations. We are blessed with wonderful Catholic individuals and families."

At the meeting in Baltimore, Bishop Cozzens said the eucharistic congress will be structured in a way similar to World Youth Day, where multiple events will take place over a series of days in multiple venues.

He reflected on the impact of such events in an interview with *The Criterion* after the Nov. 15-18 USCCB meeting.



'The revival and the congress could have a profound effect on the renewal and enrichment of our eucharistic identity, witness and mission as Church, stewards and disciples of Jesus Christ.'

—Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

"These large Catholic events are unique moments to experience the fruitfulness of the Holy Spirit, as we gather to share the incredible gift of our faith," Bishop Cozzens said. "They allow us to experience a small taste of the universality of our Church."

"Worshipping with Catholics from all over the country and from many different cultures throughout the United States shows us the true depth of the love of Christ which unites us. We are all different, but all one in our need for Christ's transforming love in the Eucharist."

In that same interview, Bishop Cozzens said that he hoped the eucharistic congress "will set a fire that I hope will burn in our country for many years."

"As Pope Francis has said, now is the time for every Catholic to understand that they are called to be missionaries of the love of Jesus," Bishop Cozzens continued. "The Eucharist is the source and summit of that mission. Come to Indianapolis in 2024 to celebrate the gift of the Eucharist and to have your faith set on fire."

Archbishop Thompson shared this hope, foreseeing how the eucharistic congress can deepen the faith of Catholics in central and southern Indiana.

"The eucharistic celebration is the source and summit of all that we are about as Catholics—our identity, mission, ministries and services," he said. "A personal encounter with the person of Jesus Christ is essential to that identity and mission as individuals and communities of believers."

"While there are many ways to experience this personal encounter with Jesus Christ, there is none more profound than in the real presence of him in the Eucharist. The eucharistic revival and congress—rooted in word, sacrament and service—provide an occasion of grace to deepen our appreciation of the precious gift of Jesus Christ for our salvation." †

USCCB

continued from page 1A

June about what it could potentially contain, namely a call for President Joe Biden and Catholic politicians who support abortion to be denied Communion. But the final document had nothing like that and is addressed to all Catholics in the United States.

It "endeavors to explain the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the Church," said Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind., chairman of the bishops' doctrine committee, in a short presentation on the statement on Nov. 16. It "addresses the fundamental doctrine about the Eucharist that the Church needs to retrieve and revive."

Even bigger than the statement is the plan for the three-year eucharistic revival, ending in 2024 with the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis. The bishops approved it 201-17, with five abstentions.

Philadelphia Archbishop Nelson J. Pérez invited fellow bishops to a national gathering in Chicago in June to participate with young Catholics in a dialogue about issues of culture, racism and inclusion through the prism of faith.

"Perhaps it was the Holy Spirit's way of telling us bishops that we really needed to take time to listen to young people, those who minister to them and, especially, those who are in the peripheries, feeling unimportant and unloved, and often alienated from the Church," Archbishop Pérez said on Nov. 17. He is chairman of the bishops' Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church.

He detailed the opportunity the coronavirus pandemic has provided in facilitating virtual gatherings between young Catholics and bishops during the last year and a half. More than 60 bishops have joined virtual gatherings as part of a process called "Journeying Together," he said.

The gatherings have taken place

online in the midst of a pandemic, under "social unrest, racial reckoning, and the polarization affecting U.S. society," he said. The process created "an opportunity for bishops, young adults, youth ministers and campus ministers, and leaders of various other ministries with young people, to engage in respectful yet honest dialogue in matters of faith, culture, racism, inclusion and the issues that affect them as young people," he explained.

The chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth called on his fellow bishops to work "in every way possible" to implement the national pastoral framework for marriage and family ministry that they approved in June.

Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone of San Francisco said that addressing marriage and family life is vital in a time when families are under increasing threats from "sweeping ideological currents that destroy and undermine our sexual identity as man and woman and God-given vocations as father and mother, son or daughter." Bolstering marriage and family ministry is an appropriate undertaking to start during the "Amoris Laetitia Family Year," declared by Pope Francis, the archbishop said.

Titled "Called to the Joy of Love: A Pastoral Framework for Marriage and Family Life Ministry," the document can serve as a practical guidebook to serve couples and families because it offers an adaptable set of principles and strategies for pastoral care, he said.

Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, Kan., chairman of the bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, told his fellow bishops that the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities' "Walking with Moms in Need" (WWMIN) initiative may have been slowed by the coronavirus pandemic, but it has by no means stopped helping expectant mothers from any walk of life. It was launched on March 25, 2020, just as the pandemic began to take hold.

This initiative "has the capacity to take what is often seen as a partisan

divide and transform it into pastoral unity, bridging the divide between Catholics who describe themselves using the labels of 'pro-life' or 'social justice,'" he said. "The vision of WWMIN is that a pregnant or parenting mother in need can turn to any local Catholic parish and be connected with the life-affirming assistance and accompaniment that she needs."

The initiative's website is WalkingWithMoms.com.

In presentations at the end of the Nov. 17 public session:

—Anna Gallagher, executive director of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, told the bishops 3 million to 11 million people in the U.S. could soon benefit from some type of immigration reform.

—Auxiliary Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville of Washington, chairman of the USCCB's migration committee, asked his fellow prelates to advocate, pray and walk with immigrants in their respective dioceses.

—The synodal process the Church is entering into is meant to show that "no one is unimportant in this time of listening," said Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas. The bishop, a member of the USCCB's Committee on Doctrine and voted its chairman-elect during the assembly, said the process during the next seven months must involve the participation of the whole Church "listening together, praying together, discerning together." †

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Editorial



A lit candle is seen on an Advent wreath. Advent is a season of waiting. (CNS photo/Lisa Johnston, *St Louis Review*)

Advent is a time of joyful anticipation

How is a Christian supposed to observe Advent in our secular society? As soon as Thanksgiving is over (actually, well before that), people are celebrating Christmas. Many of them may not know anything about Advent.

But they know about Christmas, at least society's Christmas. For many, it's just a major holiday and time for parties, presents, decorating their homes and perhaps sending holiday greetings to friends. The stores have had their decorations up for a long time and are expecting big sales.

What does all this have to do with "the reason for the season," to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ on Earth? Not much.

It's not that all the secular observances are bad, and Christians may certainly join in them, especially with the emphasis on gift-giving and making charitable contributions to organizations that serve the poor and others in need. The Catholic Church has some of the best of those organizations.

The secular holidays are also a wondrous time for children, and that's good. Parents and grandparents can let them believe in both Santa Claus and Jesus when they are very young. So, Christians can observe "the holidays" along with other Americans.

But we should do more than that. We must remember the spiritual aspects of this season of Advent. It's a season meant to prepare us for Christmas when Christ's first coming to us is commemorated. But it's also a season when the Church wants us to direct our minds and hearts toward Christ's second coming at the end of time. We must keep Christ in Christmas.

There was a time when Christians were expected to live Advent as a time of penance, much like Lent, with an emphasis on fasting and almsgiving. Orthodox Christians still observe Advent in this way. And the period was longer, depending upon where you lived; some places (especially Gaul) began the season on the feast of St. Martin of Tours (Nov. 11).

Unlike Lent, which is 40 days, the number of days in Advent varies from year to year. This year, it's one day short of four weeks. Depending upon the calendar year, it can be as short as three weeks and one day.

Today, the Church wants us to see Advent as a time of joyful anticipation. That is reflected in the liturgy as we move through the season. If you can't get to daily Mass during Advent, perhaps you could at least read the scriptural readings for the Masses.

During the first part of Advent, until Dec. 16, the liturgy directs us toward Christ's anticipated second coming. The first Scripture reading at Masses is often from the prophet Isaiah, while the Gospel readings show how Jesus fulfilled the prophetic promises. Here, too, John the Baptist, with his message of repentance, makes his appearance.

Things change in the liturgy on Dec. 17. Here is when the Old Testament readings proclaim the most important Messianic prophecies, while the Gospel readings describe the events immediately before the birth of Christ. Of course, Mary and Joseph are the most prominent figures.

These are important readings because they show how the Bible's New Testament continues the story of humankind's salvation begun in the Old Testament.

There are other ways we can prepare for Christmas. We can, and should, make it a point to go to confession sometime during Advent. Our parishes try to make it as easy as possible for people to go to the sacrament of reconciliation, and we should take advantage of those opportunities. No matter how long it has been since your last confession, you'll feel much better after you go this Advent.

One of the popular devotions, in homes as well as in churches, is the Advent wreath. It is a circle of evergreens with four candles that are lighted successively in the weeks of Advent to symbolize the approaching celebration of the birth of Christ, the Light of the World. The wreath originated among German Catholics and Lutherans in the 16th century and was brought to the United States by German Catholics.

We pray you have a happy Advent as we prepare to remember Christ's first coming and look forward to his second coming.

—John F. Fink

Be Our Guest/Greg Erlandson

Communion lessons

It is hard to believe that people once considered the Catholic press boring.

At least when it comes to opinions, as opposed to news, it never lacks for controversy. Nothing is spared, from pope to priest and from left to right, with op-ed agreement only to be found, and here I paraphrase a Tom Lehrer lyric, in that "everybody hates the



USCCB [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops]." Should you seek out these opinions online, the vitriol is even worse.

I can always get an ironic laugh from those who make a habit of reading this stuff when I recall the lyrics of that 1960s-era Church staple, "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love."

For months, the back and forth among the opinionated has been about whether the bishops would, or should, censure Catholic politicians who support abortion, particularly President Joe Biden, perhaps by denying them holy Communion.

This debate was fueled, to be sure, by the call from some bishops to do exactly that. The Vatican weighed in, however, and despite a lively debate at their June meeting, it seemed obvious that this was not going to happen for a variety of reasons.

Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind., and chair of the bishops' doctrine committee, made it clear that the document he was drafting was not going to be naming or shaming specific politicians or even groups of Catholics.

The statement he delivered, titled "The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church," was overwhelmingly approved at the bishops' November meeting with little public debate.

What debate there was may have taken place in executive session, but even before then the bishops were sending signals that they planned to support the document with only modest modifications.

It does talk about the proper reception

of the Eucharist, and the fact that some sins (mortal) "rupture the communion we share with God and the Church." Someone in such a state of sin should not present himself or herself for Communion. Let all who have ears, let us hear.

The bigger challenge the statement hopes to address is Catholic understanding of, and appreciation for, the Eucharist and the communion it signifies. This is why the bishops are also planning a eucharistic revival from 2022 until a national congress in 2024 in Indianapolis. The Eucharist statement just approved may be the teaching document for this congress.

This revival is intended to impact all parishes and dioceses in our country during the next three years, and I wish it all the best.

The necessity for such a revival underscores an ongoing failing of our Church, however, which is the lack of continuous Catholic faith formation. Most Catholics received formal education in their childhood. They may be devout or disengaged, but they are often thinking in childhood categories. As St. Paul advises, at a certain point we put away childish things.

There are two ways that ongoing faith formation is likely to touch the majority of Mass-attending Catholics: the homily and Catholic media. The Catholic press in particular is the most widespread means of Catholic faith formation for adults.

News stories explain what the Church teaches and how it impacts the controversies and decisions that are visible every day. These reports implicitly or explicitly teach the principles of the faith and, more importantly, their relevance.

There is nothing flashy about homilies or diocesan newspapers, but they are the foot in the door. When it comes to talking about the sacraments, social teaching, morality and more, they are where the invitation is extended to grow in appreciation and knowledge for what it is we profess to believe.

(Greg Erlandson, director and editor-in-chief of Catholic News Service, can be reached at gerlandson@catholicnews.com.) †

Reflection/Maureen Pratt

A time of renewed welcome

An unexpected visit from a friend who lives quite a distance away became a blessing in many respects.



The visit prompted me to pick up the pace of tidying up more "lived in" spaces.

Yet another aspect of the visit has had spiritually profound effects. A renewed sense of eager anticipation energized my activity as the time for the visit drew near.

Much like the hallway that suddenly became brighter when I replaced an old bulb, the thought of extending hospitality overshadowed the long months of pandemic isolation and drew me into a more profound realization for this holiday season and, especially, Advent: How we prepare to welcome has a deep impact on what happens when we welcome.

For example, I realized early into preparations for my friend's visit that I could not do everything in one day. Instead, I made up a schedule, breaking up the tasks into smaller periods of time.

Advent devotions can be approached in much the same way: Instead of thinking of long readings or prayer time, smaller segments can build one on the other, to bring us forward throughout the season.

Observing my surroundings through my guest's eyes was a good way to notice details that needed attention and put my preparations in the context of wanting to do the best for a good friend.

During our soul-searching in Advent, if we try to see ourselves as God sees us—as

created in his likeness and image, as being so precious to him that we are known by name—we might be able to identify and improve on details of our faith, for example, finding more quiet or better focus, without being so critical or judgmental that we lose sight of God's love.

The preparations for my friend's visit made me realize that welcome is work, but need not be toilsome, if we look beyond the "pain." The bending and stretching and balancing benefited me as much as it would reflect my care for my friend and was pleasant, good exercise—another unexpected blessing!

So, too, each act of faith between now and Christmas can build our relationships with God and one another, sharing the "reason for the season" in a world where it is sometimes lost.

By the day of the visit, I'd made good progress on many things, but some things remained to be done.

I started to play "should have ..."

I should have started sooner, I should have anticipated, I should have ...

Then, I remembered Luke's Gospel passage (Lk 10:38-42) about Jesus' visit with Mary and Martha. We read about Mary sitting at Jesus' feet, listening, and Martha still distracted (Lk 10:40), working away beyond the time of Jesus' arrival. What a contrast! And how helpful for all who work hard to prepare.

There will undoubtedly always be things left to be done. Yet, once the guest of honor arrives, as with Christmas, it's time to put aside the work and enjoy!

(Maureen Pratt's website is www.maureenpratt.com.) †



Christ the Cornerstone

Gratitude leads us to hope and joy

“May the Lord strengthen your hearts at the coming of our Lord Jesus” (1 Thes 3:13).

Yesterday, we celebrated the great American holiday of Thanksgiving. If we were fortunate enough to be with people we love, we joined them in setting aside the sorrows and anxieties of the past 20 months, and we gave thanks for the many blessings we experienced even in the midst of health crises, economic hardship and social unrest.

Gratitude is more contagious than any pandemic. It soothes our bitterness, resentment and fear, and it opens the eyes of our hearts to see how blessed we truly are in spite of our difficulties. Simply by saying “thank you” for whatever blessings—large or small—we have received, we can find relief from whatever pain we feel in our minds, hearts or bodies.

Thanksgiving is a secular holiday here in the United States of America, but its roots are found in the deeply religious experiences of the women and men who came to this land as immigrants in search of a better life. We naturally think of the pilgrims who came from Europe in search of religious freedom, as they understood

it, but we should also consider the experiences of the native peoples whose ancestors came to this continent many generations earlier. And, of course, we should remember the millions of immigrants who have come here (and continue to come) because of the prospect of a better life for their families.

We are all the children of immigrants, and we should be deeply grateful for the blessings of this great land. Even the worst experiences in our nation’s history—including slavery, racism, nativism, greed, political oppression and unspeakable crimes against the most vulnerable members of our society—cannot completely overshadow the gifts we have received as a people struggling to make freedom, justice and peace realities in our society.

This year, we celebrated Thanksgiving in spite of many challenges in our society and in our Church. We are not naïve. Sin and evil surround us every day, but as long as we can find room in our hearts to say “thank you” for the good things that we enjoy as a result of God’s bounty, we can share in the joy of heaven, both here and now and in the life to come.

By the providence of God, this year our archdiocese is participating in a synod process along with all other dioceses throughout the world. We are trying to be more conscious of the fact that we are not alone, that we journey together as members of God’s family, and that the end or goal of this earthly pilgrimage is the joy of communion with Christ and with all members of his body, the Church.

Gratitude is an essential feature of this synodal process. By constantly giving thanks, we can walk together with minds and hearts that are unburdened. By sharing our gifts with others as we walk together in faith, we become better disposed to encounter Christ in our fellow travelers. By listening prayerfully to God’s word as the Holy Spirit guides us along the way, we can gradually discern what God is asking us—as individuals and as a Church—to do as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.

This Sunday, we will once again begin a new Church year with a season of waiting, a time of expectation and longing. If we embrace this special time, Advent will prepare us to celebrate Christmas, which is less than a month away, without falling into

the trap of superficial or unrealistic expectations. Advent teaches us that the greatest gift of Christmas is the Lord himself, and it shows us that a personal encounter with Jesus Christ is what we truly hope for during this synodal process (and always). Advent reminds us that all the joys of Christmas, and of the Lord’s second coming, can truly be ours—if we journey together prayerfully.

Authentic gratitude requires patience, trust and a firm belief that God will hear and answer our prayers. We pray that the Lord will give us everything we truly desire, and need, and that this worldwide synodal process will help to unite us and lead us to Christ, our greatest source of joy, who is coming again as he promised.

And, so, we pray: Come, Lord Jesus. Help us journey together in gratitude and in joyful hope. Prepare us for Christmas and for your coming again. Remove all the obstacles—our frustrations, pain and anger—that prevent us from walking together as brothers and sisters who long to receive you with joy. May we gratefully share your love with others and, so, become one with you always. †



Cristo, la piedra angular

La gratitud nos lleva a la esperanza y la alegría

“Que [Dios] los fortalezca interiormente para que, cuando nuestro Señor Jesús venga con todos sus santos, la santidad de ustedes sea intachable delante de nuestro Dios y Padre” (1 Ts 3:13).

Ayer celebramos la gran fiesta estadounidense de Acción de Gracias. Si tenemos la suerte de encontrarnos con personas que queremos, nos reunimos para dejar de lado las penas y ansiedades de los últimos 20 meses, y damos gracias por las muchas bendiciones que experimentamos incluso en medio de las crisis de salud, las dificultades económicas y el malestar social.

La gratitud es más contagiosa que cualquier pandemia y nos alivia la amargura, el resentimiento y los miedos, y nos abre los ojos del corazón para ver lo bendecidos que somos realmente a pesar de nuestras dificultades. Tan solo con decir “gracias” por cualquier bendición, grande o pequeña, que hayamos recibido, podemos encontrar alivio a cualquier dolor que sintamos en la mente, el corazón o el cuerpo.

El Día de Acción de Gracias es una fiesta secular aquí en Estados Unidos de América, pero sus raíces se encuentran en las experiencias profundamente religiosas de las mujeres y los hombres que llegaron a esta tierra

como inmigrantes en busca de una vida mejor. Naturalmente, pensamos en los peregrinos que vinieron de Europa en busca de libertad religiosa, tal y como ellos la entendían, pero también deberíamos considerar las experiencias de los pueblos nativos cuyos antepasados llegaron a este continente muchas generaciones antes. Y, por supuesto, debemos recordar a los millones de inmigrantes que han venido aquí (y continúan viniendo) por el prospecto de darles una vida mejor a sus familias.

Todos somos hijos de inmigrantes y debemos estar profundamente agradecidos por las bendiciones de esta gran tierra. Ni siquiera las peores experiencias de la historia de nuestra nación—como la esclavitud, el racismo, el nativismo, la codicia, la opresión política y los crímenes indecibles contra los miembros más vulnerables de nuestra sociedad—pueden ensombrecer por completo los dones que hemos recibido como pueblo que lucha por hacer realidad la libertad, la justicia y la paz en nuestra sociedad.

Este año hemos celebrado el Día de Acción de Gracias a pesar de los muchos desafíos que enfrentamos en la sociedad y la Iglesia. No somos ingenuos: el pecado y el mal nos rodean a diario, pero mientras podamos encontrar espacio en nuestros corazones para decir “gracias” por lo

bueno que disfrutamos como resultado de la generosidad de Dios, podemos compartir la alegría del cielo, tanto aquí y ahora como en la vida futura.

Por la providencia de Dios, este año nuestra arquidiócesis participa en un proceso sinodal junto con todas las demás diócesis del mundo. Procuramos ser más conscientes de que no estamos solos, de que caminamos juntos como miembros de la familia de Dios, y de que el fin o la meta de esta peregrinación terrenal es la alegría de la comunión con Cristo y con todos los miembros de su cuerpo, la Iglesia.

La gratitud es una característica esencial de este proceso sinodal. Al dar gracias constantemente, podemos caminar juntos con mentes y corazones desahogados. Al compartir nuestros dones con los demás al tiempo que caminamos juntos en la fe, estamos mejor dispuestos a encontrar a Cristo en nuestros compañeros de viaje. Al escuchar en oración la Palabra de Dios mientras el Espíritu Santo nos guía en el camino, podemos discernir gradualmente lo que Dios nos pide que hagamos, como individuos y como Iglesia, en calidad de discípulos misioneros de Jesucristo.

Este domingo comenzamos un nuevo año litúrgico con una temporada de espera, un momento de expectativas y de añoranza. Si nos entregamos a este tiempo especial, el Adviento nos

preparará para celebrar la Navidad, que está a menos de un mes, sin caer en la trampa de las expectativas superficiales o irreales. El Adviento nos enseña que el mayor regalo de la Navidad es el propio Señor, y nos muestra que el encuentro personal con Jesucristo es lo que verdaderamente esperamos durante este proceso sinodal (y siempre). Nos recuerda que realmente podremos disfrutar de todas las alegrías de la Navidad y de la segunda venida del Señor si recorremos el camino con recogimiento.

El auténtico agradecimiento requiere paciencia, confianza y la creencia firme de que Dios escuchará y responderá nuestras súplicas. Rezamos para que el Señor nos dé todo lo que realmente deseamos y necesitamos, y para que este proceso sinodal mundial nos ayude a unirnos y nos conduzca a Cristo, nuestra mayor fuente de alegría, que viene de nuevo como ha prometido.

Y así, rezamos: ¡Ven, Señor Jesús! Ayúdanos a caminar juntos con agradecimiento y alegre esperanza. Prepáranos para la Navidad y para tu nueva avenida con gloria. Elimina todos los obstáculos—nuestras frustraciones, dolor e ira—que nos impiden caminar juntos como hermanos y hermanas que anhelan recibirte con alegría. Que con agradecimiento compartamos tu amor con los demás y, así, seamos siempre uno contigo. †

Events Calendar

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

November 29

The Villages of Indiana online, **Foster Parenting Virtual Information Night**, 6-8 p.m., for those interested in becoming a foster parent, no fee. For more information or to register: 317 775-6500 or visit www.villageskids.org.

St. Simon the Apostle Parish, 8155 Oaklondon Rd., Indianapolis. **SHIP (Singles Hoping Involved Partnership)**, 6:30-8:30 p.m., fellowship ministry for singles ages 45 and older, Euchre tournament and Mexican snack pitch-in, free. Information: martinlow8@cs.com 317-826-6000.

December 1

Mount St. Francis Chapel, 101 St. Anthony Dr., Mount St. Francis. **Advent Service of Hope and Healing**, 7:30 p.m., online option available. Information: www.mountsaintfrancis.org/advent-hope, 812-923-8817.

MCL Cafeteria, 5520 Castleton Corner Lane, Indianapolis. **Solo Seniors**, 5:30 p.m., Catholic, educational, charitable and social singles—separated, widowed or divorced—age 50 and older, new members welcome, also call about regular Friday night dinner events. Information: 317-796-8605 or 317-243-0777.

December 2-10

St. Lawrence Church, 6944 E. 46th St., Indianapolis. **Our Lady of Guadalupe Novena**, 7 p.m. Information: 317-546-4065, ext. 340, or dbergeron@saintlawrence.net.

December 3

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

Our Lady of the Greenwood Church, 335 S. Meridian St., Greenwood. **First Friday bilingual celebration of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus**, Mass, 5:45 p.m., exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, following Mass until 9 p.m., sacrament of reconciliation available. Information: 317-750-7309, msross1@hotmail.com.

St. Alphonsus Liguori Parish, 1870 W. Oak St., Zionsville (Lafayette Diocese). **Advent Transformation Night**, 6:30 p.m., Encounter event with worship, talk and prayer, Father Ben Muhlenkamp speaking, free. Information: 317-795-4912 or indianapolis@encounterschool.org.

December 4

St. John Paul II Parish, St. Paul Chapel, 216 Schellers

Ave., Sellersburg. **First Saturday Marian Devotion**, 8 a.m. rosary, meditation, prayer; 8:30 a.m. Mass with confessions prior. Information: 812-246-3522.

St. Michael Church, 145 St. Michael Blvd., Brookville. **First Saturday Marian Devotional Prayer Group**, Mass, devotional prayers, rosary, 8 a.m. Information: 765-647-5462.

Clay County Courthouse lawn, 609 E. National Ave., Brazil. **Pray USA Prayer Rally**, noon, sponsored by Annunciation Parish Legion of Mary, prayers for the country. Information: tana.donnelly@fontier.com.

Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. **Shop Inn-spired Annual Christmas Sale and Open House**, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Information: 317-788-7581.

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. **Black Catholic Women Advent Gathering – This is Us: Women of the Bible**, 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m., Child Jesus Sister Maria Rukwishuro, facilitator and Divine Word Missionary Father Charles Smith Mass celebrant. In-person registration:

cutt.ly/BLKWomen21. Online registration: cutt.ly/BLKWomen21online. Information: Pearlette Springer, pspringer@archindy.org or 317-236-1474.

December 5, 12, 19

Benedictine Conversations via GroupMe, 4 p.m. Sundays, Benedictine Sister Jill Marie Reuber, facilitator, sponsored by Sisters of St. Benedict, Ferdinand, Ind. (Diocese of Evansville). Information: vocation@thedome.org.

December 6, 13, 20

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, joane632003@yahoo.com or soulcore.com.

December 7

Ritz Charles, 12156 N. Meridian St., Carmel. **Right to Life of Indiana Christmas Gala**, 6:30 p.m., former Vice President Mike Pence Lifetime Achievement Award recipient, keynote by pro football champion Matt Birk, Christian music artist Colton Dixon performing, individual reservation \$100, table for 10 \$1,000, table

sponsorships available. Information and reservations: www.irtl.org/gala or 317-413-9123.

December 8

Group Lectio via Zoom, 7 p.m., second and fourth Wednesdays of each month, Benedictine Sister Jill Marie Reuber, facilitator, sponsored by Sisters of St. Benedict, Ferdinand, Ind. (Diocese of Evansville). Information: vocation@thedome.org.

Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, 5692 Central Ave., Indianapolis. **75th Anniversary Mass and Reception**, 6 p.m., reception follows Mass in the activities center. Information: 317-257-2266 or cduenne@ihmindy.org.

December 9-12

Holy Spirit Parish, 7243 E. 10th St., Indianapolis. **Our Lady of Guadalupe Events**, Dec. 9—7 p.m. Mass of St. Juan Diego, 7:30 p.m. novena, 8:30 p.m. apparition re-enactment; Dec. 10—7 p.m. Mass, 7:30 p.m. rosary, 8:30 p.m. apparition re-enactment, 9 p.m. adoration; Dec. 11—7 p.m. rosary and novena, 7:30 p.m. apparition re-enactment, 8 p.m. dances/serenade, 10 p.m. holy hour, 11 p.m. Mass;

Dec. 12—midnight *mañanita*. Information: qrodriguez@holyspirit.cc.

December 10-11

St. Paul Catholic Center, 1413 E. 17th St., Bloomington. **Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe**, Dec. 10—10 p.m. music and presentation; Dec. 11—midnight Mass followed by festive meal. Information: frdennis@hoosiercatholic.org.

December 11

St. Lawrence Parish, 6944 E. 46th St., Indianapolis. **Our Lady of Guadalupe Celebration**, 8 p.m. Mass, 9:30 p.m. dancing, 9:30-11 p.m., *mañanitas*, free. Information: 317-546-4065, ext. 340, or dbergeron@saintlawrence.net.

St. Bartholomew Parish, 1306 27th St., Columbus. **Our Lady of Guadalupe Feast**, 9 p.m.-midnight, rosary, *matachines* dance, apparition narrative, *mañanitas*. Information: 812-379-9353 or kcamargo@stbparish.net.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, 720 N. "A" St., Richmond. **Misa de nuestra Virgen de Guadalupe (Mass for Our Virgin of Guadalupe)**, 11 a.m. †

'Royals' entrance



Roncalli High School in Indianapolis recently changed their mascot name from "Rebels" to "Royals." The school's new mascot named Rowdy was revealed during a rally at Roncalli on Oct. 29. Here, the Royal lion mascot poses with sophomores Jose Silva-Aguilar, Thawng Bawihrin and Drew Kegerreis. (Submitted photo)

Wedding Anniversaries

GARY AND JANE WILLIAMS



GARY AND JANE (KIESLE) WILLIAMS, members of St. Joan of Arc Parish in Indianapolis, will celebrate their 55th wedding anniversary on Nov. 26.

The couple was married in St. Joan of Arc Church in Indianapolis on Nov. 26, 1966.

They have two children: Barbara Ott and Gary Williams.

The couple also has five grandchildren. †

JOHN AND BECKY BOREL



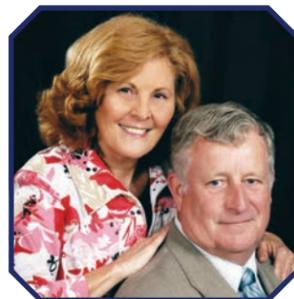
JOHN AND BECKY (MACKEY) BOREL, members of St. Monica Parish in Indianapolis, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on Nov. 27.

The couple was married in St. Thomas Aquinas Church in Indianapolis on Nov. 27, 1971.

They have three children: Theresa, Tracy and John Borel.

The couple also has two grandchildren. †

RICHARD AND COLLEEN SIMON



Richard and Colleen (Lenahan) Simon, members of Holy Spirit Parish in Indianapolis, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on Nov. 27.

The couple was married in the former St. Bernadette Church in Indianapolis on Nov. 27, 1971.

They have two children: Angela Clark and Heather Simon.

The couple also has two grandchildren. †

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



Ablaze • Enciende el Fuego



Top photo: A crucifix leads a procession into Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the opening general session of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 18. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

Bottom photo: Youths hold hands for the Our Father during the National Catholic Youth Conference closing Mass in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 20. (Photo by Natalie Hoefer)

Youths encounter Christ through talks, sacraments, fellowship and music at NCYC

By Natalie Hoefer

There is no simple answer to the question, “What is the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC)?”

It is so many things.

Logistically, it is a three-day gathering of Catholic high school youths from around the country that happens every two years.

There are talks, Mass, eucharistic adoration, music, service projects, and a convention hall filled with exhibitors from religious institutions and organizations, vendors of religious items and areas for teens to play and pray.

That is the structure of NCYC. But the spirit of the youths and the Holy Spirit comprise the flesh and breath of this event. Every component of it is designed to nurture today’s Catholic youths in their faith and their relationship with Christ.

“NCYC is an opportunity for young people to experience the breadth of our Catholic Church and an opportunity to have an encounter with Jesus Christ amongst their friends, and all their new friends,” said Christina Lamas, executive director of the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry which organizes the event. “It provides hope, inspiration, and gives life to our present and our future Church.”

Speakers ‘on fire for Christ’

Much of the teens’ time at NCYC is spent listening to faith-nourishing and thought-provoking talks by renowned Catholic speakers.

“We look for individuals who can speak from their own personal relationship with Christ, who reflect Church teaching, who can be an example, model and witness of what it means to live a life in Christ that young people can look up to, hear their witness and see elements of that witness in their own life,” said Lamas. “We want speakers on fire for Christ who are filled

with the Holy Spirit.”

“I really enjoy the talks,” said Ellie Fulbright, 17, of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, Mont. “I’m really into seeing different people’s points of views and being able to dive in deeper and realizing maybe, ‘Oh, that’s an interesting point,’ or maybe, ‘Oh, now I understand why we do that.’ ”

This year, she and the nearly 11,000 participants had five break-out sessions, three general sessions and three types of youth-led discussions to choose from.

‘It’s super meaningful’

NCYC abounds with opportunities for young people to partake in the sacraments.

The event begins with a eucharistic procession through the halls and outside of the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis, with participants kneeling along the path then joining in the procession after the Blessed Sacrament passes by.

Masses are celebrated at various times during each day, including a conference-wide Mass in Lucas Oil Stadium that closes the event and sends the youths back home to put into practice what they learned. (See related article on page 3B.)

The sacrament of reconciliation is offered throughout the event. (See related article on page 12B.) Kaylee Klos, 17, of the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa, listed confession among her favorite aspects of NCYC.

“Getting out of my hometown and speaking with a priest I’ve never seen, it was something I’d never experienced before,” she said.

Many youths interviewed by *The Criterion* during the event cited the group adoration on the second night of NCYC as their favorite part of the three-day event.

Elaina Deardorff, 17, of the Archdiocese of Dubuque, was one such teen.

“My favorite thing is adoration as a huge group,” she said. “Seeing how everyone comes together to worship the Lord—it’s super meaningful.” (See related article on page 7B.)

Pointing ‘back to the Catholic faith’

The Village is the primary source of interaction among the teens.



Teens participate in karaoke in the National Catholic Youth Conference Village in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 19.



National Catholic Youth Conference participants listen to a talk by Steve Angrisano in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 19.



Youths pray during eucharistic adoration on Nov. 19 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the National Catholic Youth Conference. (Photos by Natalie Hoefer)

The theme of this year’s Village was “Holy Spirit Mall,” with different areas named after common-known stores.

For instance, Service Merchandise was the area where youths could participate in service projects. (See related article on page 11B.) At the Camelot Café, kids could enjoy karaoke. One of the hot spots in the Village was the Arcade, where participants could take part in games like dodge ball, Human Hungry Hippo and large-sized chess.

The Village also included exhibitors from numerous Catholic universities, religious orders and organizations, plus vendors selling anything from books to rosaries to Catholic-themed T-shirts and socks.

“The Village provides an opportunity for young people to see their faith in action,” Lamas explained. “The opportunities for service, the universities, different organizations and their missions—they all point them back to the Catholic faith.

“It’s also an opportunity to have fun, to learn, to have fellowship, to be with one another. I think the Village does all that and more. And it’s a hot spot for all the trading that takes place, especially those desired hats!”

Abigail Woodley, 15, of the Archdiocese of Anchorage-Juneau, Alaska, mentioned the Village as one of her favorite aspects of NCYC “because it’s so amazing to see all the places around the world that I can connect with.”

‘Great to hear music I can vibe to’

Woven into almost every aspect of NCYC is something most teens connect

with—music. Breakout sessions, general sessions, adoration, Mass—all begin with, include and end with music appropriate to the desired tone whether upbeat, worship, reflective or prayerful.

“Music speaks to all of us, but it’s very close to home with young people,” said Lamas. “They identify with the art, the lyrics. It’s a critical part of the program.”

Texas resident Adeline Fellona, 14, of the Archdiocese of the Military Services, appreciates the music of NCYC.

“The music at my home parish is kind of old-timey,” she admitted. “It’s really great to hear music that I can vibe to and that also praises Jesus. It’s a lot of fun to hear that here.”

‘Potential to transform society’

Lamas said her “hope and dream” for NCYC participants “is that they experience God’s love and have an encounter with Christ. How that transpires in each one’s life, that’s for God to determine.”

She said the event is scheduled to occur again in Indianapolis in 2023 and 2025.

“If you haven’t experienced an NCYC, you definitely want to make sure that you experience it once in your lifetime,” Lamas advised. “You can’t step into an environment of 10,000 or 20,000 kids who want to be here and not be affected. You won’t leave the same.

“There’s something about the joy that young people bring that transforms us individually and as a community and has potential to transform society and our world.” †

Archbishop Thompson urges youths to 'keep the fire alive' at NCYC closing Mass

By Sean Gallagher

At the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC), Archbishop Charles C. Thompson encouraged the nearly 11,000 teens from across the country to return home with the fire of the Holy Spirit.

"Let us go forth with that fire to more fully embrace the Lord's mission in bringing about the kingdom of God, striving always to be Christ-centered in all that we are about," said Archbishop Thompson. "Let us go and be disciples. Let us go and make a difference. ... Let us take courage. His dominion is indeed everlasting. The glory of God shall not be denied."

The closing Mass was celebrated on Nov. 20, the final day of the three-day conference, in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

Throughout NCYC, the youths were led through a meditation on the Apostles and the Blessed Virgin Mary receiving the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, symbolized by tongues of fire that came to rest above their head. Thus, the theme for the conference was, in English, "Ablaze," and in Spanish, "Enciende el fuego."

During his homily, Archbishop Thompson called out at various times the theme in one language with his listeners responding with the theme in the other language.

The Mass took place on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

Archbishop Thompson noted that Christ's kingship stands in contrast to the image of the kings of this world.

"His throne was a cross," Archbishop Thompson said. "His crown was made of thorns. He was adorned with nails rather than jewels. And rather than an ornate shrine for burial, he was laid in a borrowed tomb."

This humble vision of Christ's reign, however, Archbishop Thompson said, is essential to the life of the Church.

"After all, without the cross, there is no Eucharist," he said. "Without the Eucharist, there is no Church. And without the Church, there is no NCYC. It all hinges on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, his total gift of self for our salvation."

Archbishop Thompson encouraged his listeners to nurture a relationship with Christ so that they could learn to recognize the voice of him who is their shepherd and friend.

"Just as we do with family and our closest friends, we must spend quality time with him—not just at NCYC, but every day," Archbishop Thompson said.

Having an active life of faith in which Christ can reign as



Deacons Matthew Perronie, left, and Michael Clawson, third from left, assist Archbishop Charles C. Thompson during the closing Mass at the National Catholic Youth Conference in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 20. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



Deacon John Jacobi, who ministers at St. Michael Parish in Bradford, distributes Communion to an NCYC participant during the closing Mass on Nov. 20 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)



Participants in the National Catholic Youth Conference raise their hands in prayer before the closing Mass of the conference on Nov. 20 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)



Father Ajani Gibson of the Archdiocese of New Orleans preaches before the closing Mass of the conference on Nov. 20 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

king in our heart throughout the rest of the year beyond NCYC is the challenge, Archbishop Thompson noted.

"It's easy when we're all here together sharing the same faith," he said. "It's another thing when we have to do that sometimes out on that limb alone, out in our schools, neighborhoods and workplaces. In other words, we cannot let the world get the best of us, but to dare to give our best for the mission of Jesus Christ in transforming the world. You possess that grace within you."

Annalise Loucks knows that challenge well. Attending NCYC for the second time, she is a student at a public high school in Salina, Kan., where she said living Gospel principles is far from the norm.

On the last day of the conference, not long before she'd return home, Annalise spoke of her renewed desire to "spread the word" in her school.

"There are a lot of people at my school who are scared to show their faith," she said. "I want to open up and spread God's word more and be unashamed."

Speaking to Annalise and the nearly 11,000 other youths at the closing Mass, Archbishop Thompson urged them to allow the fire of the Holy Spirit "to permeate your particular gifts, talents and energy in service to others, not merely in our own name,

but in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, king of the universe."

He also reminded them of the importance of their putting into action their God-given talents to the life of the Church.

"Embrace your place in the Church," Archbishop Thompson said. "To carry out the mission of Christ, the Church needs each and every one of us. To be clear, you are not the future Church, but the young Church here and now."

Youths at the Mass spoke afterward of the joy they felt about gathering with their fellow Catholic teens from across the country, especially after all of the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic, which began just a few months after the last NCYC in late 2019.

"It was one of the most touching ceremonies I've ever seen," said Aaron Baker of Barnesville, Minn., of the closing Mass. "It's so nice to just be back here with all my friends and peers, and all the friends I made before at the last NCYC."

"I grew quite a lot in my spiritual journey," said Sloane Janopoulos of Naples, Fla. "I didn't know that that many people feel the same way that I do."

In his final words to his young listeners, Archbishop Thompson encouraged them to "keep the fire alive. By God's grace, keep the fire alive." †

Despite COVID measures, the 'spirit of NCYC will remain the same'

By Natalie Hoefer

Each National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) is unique, but perhaps none more so than this year's, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Christina Lamas

There was much to consider. From determining safety measures to deciding whether the event would happen at all, the staff of the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM) which organizes the event was even busier

than normal the last two years.

The Criterion spoke with NFCYM executive director Christina Lamas to discuss the effects of the pandemic on planning and conducting this year's NCYC, and any changes that might be seen in the future.

'Day by day, minute by minute'

"Safety is a number one priority for the organization," said Lamas. "Not just having a safe environment, but that we provide an opportunity for young people to walk in and know they are taken care of, and for their parents to know that we're taking care of them."

That's why several factors went into determining whether or not to have the event and, once the decision to go forward was made, identifying what safety measures would need to be put in place.

"We were constantly having conversations with health care professionals and conference industry experts," Lamas said.

The organization announced in January that the event would take place, but the decision was not final.

"We were advised not to make any final decisions until we got closer to the event simply because, as we were living through a pandemic and still are, things were always changing day by day, minute by minute," she explained.

"When we opened registration in May, the trend nationally seemed to be going fairly good. We saw a lot of restrictions being removed, parts of the country opening up, travel beginning to happen, so it was a very good prognosis."

More safety decisions needed to be made as the event drew near, decisions about face masks and how to assure participants were COVID-free before coming to the event.

"There were multiple factors that went into the decision," said Lamas. "We had to make sure the environment was safe, yes, but also security, the number of participants, what activities we would and wouldn't offer.

"So all of the program aspects, plus the building and personnel, all of that went into the criteria of making the final decision of whether or not NCYC would take place and how it would look if it did."

Of course, prayer was part of the process in discerning the right and best path forward.

"God has ways of working," Lamas said with a smile. "Problems would come up, and conversations with health professionals and others in the conference industry. We kept moving forward in faith. The unknown became known, so we kept walking in faith that God would provide. And here we are!"

Keeping everyone safe

One major decision affecting the look of NCYC this year was the determination to limit the number of participants to half of the normal 20,000. Including young people and all those contributing behind the scenes, the number participating this year was nearly 11,000.

All were required to submit either proof of receiving the COVID vaccine or results showing a negative COVID test result within 72 hours of the event.

Face masks were also required to completely cover both nose and mouth. Volunteers offered gentle reminders when spotting a mask dangling from an ear or tucked under a chin.

This year, NFCYM also offered a virtual NCYC. While the numbers fluctuated through the course of the livestreamed event, Lamas said the average number of virtual participants was about 2,000.

'The spirit of NCYC will remain'

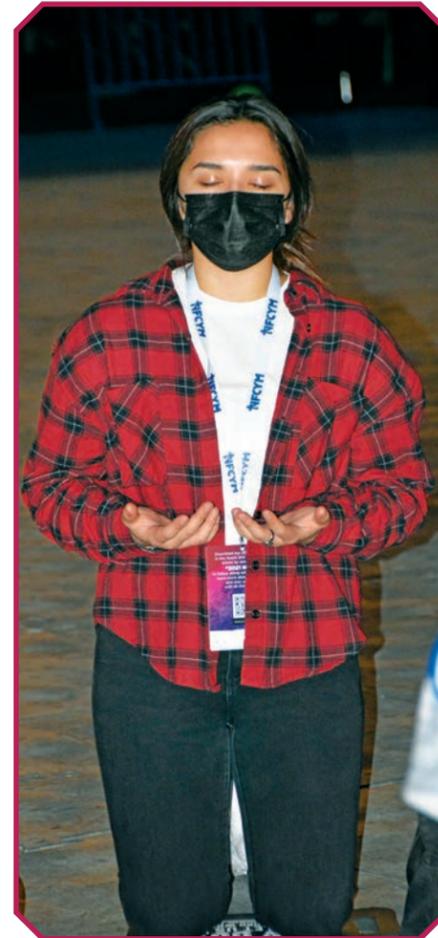
While NCYC might have looked different in terms of numbers and safety measures this year, Lamas noted that every NCYC is unique.

"It's the first NCYC for everyone attending this year," she said. "Whether it's their first or second or 10th, we're all experiencing for the first time this NCYC."

"Things may be different, but God's spirit is the same. The energy, the joy, the smiles, those encounters, those haven't changed."

As for the future, Lamas noted COVID-19 might have an effect on the event, but in a positive sense, such as "thinking outside the box," she said.

"We all had to think and stretch



Participants in the National Catholic Youth Conference this year were required to wear masks during the event. (Photo by Natalie Hoefer)

ourselves like we've not done before. I think you'll see a lot of innovation and creativity here moving forward—I think the pandemic sparked that in all of us.

"But the spirit of NCYC will remain." †

Creative effort gives youths the opportunity to express how they view their lives

By John Shaughnessy

Zoey Dennler was intrigued as she came upon one of the most popular areas of the interactive Village of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis.

The teenager from the Diocese of Davenport, Iowa, saw a crowd of youths flowing through the area where a series

of small walls were marked with a few red "I am" stickers, stickers that were surrounded by numerous white notes that completed that thought:

I am ... lonely.
I am ... beautiful.
I am ... more than my anxieties.
I am ... loved, but I need to remember how much.



One of the most popular areas in the Interactive Village of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 18-20 offered youths the opportunity to anonymously describe the way they feel about their lives. Their notes were then posted on walls for public viewing. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

Zoey soon learned that all the descriptions on the hundreds of white notes were written by the youths attending the conference, anonymously sharing their insights on their feelings, their joys, their challenges, their lives.

Asking how she could write one of the white notes herself, she was told that all she needed to do was to enter one of the four blue-curtained booths for privacy, write whatever she wanted to share, and then place her white note in a box on the inside of the booth. Later, one of the organizers of the area would empty the box of new messages and put them on the walls.

I am ... not perfect (and that's OK).
I am ... the quiet weirdo who expresses themselves and cares for others.

I am ... trying to fit in.
I am ... an empathetic woman who wants to be loved the way I deserve.

Coming out of the booth after she wrote how she felt about herself, Zoey said she was grateful for the opportunity.

"I saw the stickers with the 'I am' and saw the different things people wrote," said Zoey, a member of St. James Parish in Washington, Iowa. "It's really cool that they're letting people have a voice—without getting in front of a lot of people—and doing it anonymously."

The "I am" effort was offered by Ablaze Ministries, a ministry focused

on connecting youths, parents and youth ministers, to deepen their relationship with each other and with God.

"It's not too often that teens get asked how they're doing. And sometimes, it's in large groups where that can be intimidating at times," said P. J. Lozano, an Ablaze staff member who was helping to oversee the area. "We wanted to give them a safe place to say who they are."

I am ... not who I want to be.
I am ... strong, beautiful and deserving of your attention.
I am ... struggling but finding my way with the strength given me by God.

Lozano said that there have been many times when the youths were waiting in line for a booth to become available, so they could write their thoughts about their life.

"Some of the kids are spending a lot of time in there," he said. "It's amazing what happens when we really give teens the opportunity to express themselves."

After every day of the conference, Ablaze staff members prayed over the notes, praying for the youths who wrote them.

I am ... a child of God, never perfect, and always striving for a better relationship with God.

I am ... not someone you can just forget about and come back to. I am here to stay. I am loved. I'm me. †

From its soaring start, NCYC calls youths to rely upon the Holy Spirit to transform the world

By John Shaughnessy

In the middle of one of his powerful, pulsating songs that rocked Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on the night of Nov. 18, Lecrae suddenly stopped singing to talk to the nearly 11,000 youths from across the United States who had come together for the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC).

“I just wanted to say something to all you,” the Grammy Award-winning singer said as the raucous crowd went silent. “God wants to use you in this stage of your life now. There is a zeal inside you. Use that passion to change the world for the Lord. Go crazy for the Lord now, and go crazy for him for the rest of your life.”

Lacrae then shared a story about a woman he came upon on a bridge in New York City, a woman who was getting ready to jump from it until he held onto her.

“I said, ‘What are you doing?!’ She started kicking and screaming, saying, ‘Let me go! I’m trying to go meet God!’ I said, ‘Sweetheart, you can meet God on this side of the bridge.’”

That line from Lacrae resulted in a roar of approval from the youths in the stadium, and more cheers followed when the singer added, “The thing I wanted her to know is the same thing I want you to know. Let me tell you all, if God woke you up this morning, he’s not done with you yet. So if you got things that God needs you to do, you need to keep going. If you’re going through some tough times, just fight a little longer, my friends.”

“You may be battling the storm. You may be feeling you don’t have what it takes. But I promise you, God is speaking in this moment. The Holy Spirit is speaking to you, and he’s saying something like”—which led Lacrae to start singing a song that begins, “Fight a little longer, my friend. It’s all worth it in the end.”

In that span of a few minutes, Lacrae had set the tone for the evening and the three-day conference.

As he ended his part of the opening program with one last song, a number of youths rushed toward the stage, jumping and dancing while many in the stands swayed back and forth as the flashlights from their cell phones lit up the darkened stadium.

The scene marked the transition for the mood that enveloped the stadium for the rest of the night. That moment of storming toward the stage gave way to a theme of



Grammy Award-winning singer Lecrae delivered a soulful and spiritual performance during the opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 18. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

calming the storms that rock the lives of teenagers—that rock the lives of people of all ages.

As a huge, towering image of a dove was projected above the stage, the rest of the night focused on the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome fear, doubt and heartbreak and lead people to their true identity as children of God who have a distinct purpose in life to change the world and the people they encounter.

Readings from the Bible echoed that theme. So did a series of soothing, calming songs whose lyrics called upon the Holy Spirit to descend upon the crowd, to let his spirit fill the youths.

“*Holy Spirit, come rest on us. You’re all we want. You’re all we want.*”

The evening’s keynote speaker—Chika Anyanwu—continued that theme in her presentation.

She shared her own story of saying “yes” to the promptings of the Holy Spirit—even though it took her away from everyone and everything she loved.



An image of the Holy Spirit—a powerful theme and presence during the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis—rose above Lucas Oil Stadium on Nov. 18 where nearly 11,000 youths from across the country came together for the opening session of the conference. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

The Catholic evangelist initially turned down an offer to move from her California home to work for Vagabond Missions in Pittsburgh, an initiative that strives to support inner-city high school youths and bring them closer to God. She said no because it would mean moving away from her family, her friends and the warm weather she loved. She was also afraid of making the move.

“I had a lot of fear,” she told the youths, adding that she talked to God in this way. “What if I fail? What if I mess up? What if I just want to move back home? God, I’m scared.”

Yet she made the move after she visited Pittsburgh and saw the need of the youths and saw how she could help them.

“A lot of us are living in fear,” she told the crowd. “Whether it’s the fear of the unknown, a fear of someone, a fear of a virus that’s unknown. But God is with us. He always will be.”

“The Lord has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Everything that we need to do his will, to do his work, to do it well, he’s given it to us. We are moving forward. We are focusing on our faith over fear. We are focusing on Jesus who says he is the way.”

Anyanwu told the youths that it all comes down to one question, a question that seemed to inspire nearly every aspect of this year’s National Catholic Youth Conference:

“Are you ready to be transformed by the Holy Spirit?”

She provided her own answer to that question.

“The Holy Spirit has a plan, a purpose for you,” she said. “Wherever you are in your relationship with the Lord, it doesn’t matter. Today, you can choose to be an open vessel to the Holy Spirit, who will take you places that you never thought you would ever go. This Holy Spirit has a plan for you, if you say yes.”

“The Lord has not given you a spirit of fear, a spirit of timidity. The Holy Spirit has given you a spirit of courage.” †



Youths from across the country use their cell phones to light up a darkened Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during a performance by Grammy Award-winning singer Lecrae during the opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 18. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

Youths share defining moments in their lives when they turned to God

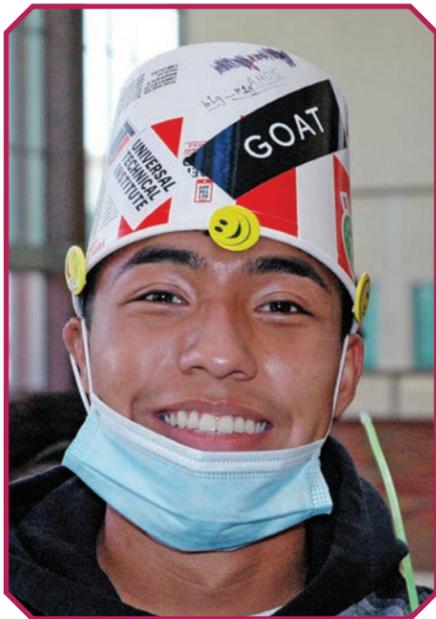
By John Shaughnessy

Sixteen-year-old Roch Egan remembers the moment as a turning point in his faith—the day when his mother was near death.

“Five years ago, my mom had a miscarriage, and she almost died at home and in the hospital,” recalled Roch, a member of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish in Indianapolis. “I remember that night praying like crazy. Ever since then, I’ve gotten so much closer to God. I trust him more.

“Now, I like to think of God as a friend, even though I know he’s much more than that. I can go to him whenever I need him. My faith is what my life is for now.”

Roch shared that turning point in his faith during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis on Nov. 18. He is one of the nearly 11,000 youths from across the country who attended the three-day event, and many of



Turning to God, Miguel Saucedo found comfort and hope during a tough time in his life. Miguel is a member of Church of the Annunciation Parish in Shelbyville, Ky., in the Archdiocese of Louisville. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

them came with their own story of turning closer to God and wanting to deepen their relationship with him even more.

In a year when masks were required to attend the conference, the youths may have had to hide their smiles, but they still freely expressed the joy of their faith and their bond with God.

At 18, Ava Yurczyk shared that her Catholic faith is the focal point of her life.

“It’s what I base my values, my decisions around,” said Ava, a member of St. Luke Parish in Shoreline, Wash., in the Archdiocese of Seattle.

A high school senior, Ava turned to her faith in God when she was trying to make a decision that countless peers will be making this year—choosing the right college.

“I’ve always felt called to be a caregiver, which has led to my desire to be a nurse in a neo-intensive care unit,” she said. “I wanted to find a place where I could combine deepening my faith along with my education—and being around people who can support me and so we can grow together.”

That desire led her to choose the University of Mary in Bismarck, S.D., as her college destination.

“The second I stepped on campus, I turned to my dad and said, ‘I could live here for four years.’” Ava recalled. “I knew it was the place for me.”

She also feels confident in her choice knowing the Catholic university is named after the Blessed Mother.



Youths from Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish in Indianapolis pose for a photo in the Interactive Village of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 18. Roch Egan, left, Kierra Wilson, Moire Roller, Mataya Watson and Elianna Watson are all wearing the NCYC sweatshirt for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

“I know I’m going to be a mom someday, and I’ve turned to Mary for that calling. I’ve found comfort in my relationship with her.”

Miguel Saucedo was seeking a measure of comfort and hope in his life about a year ago.

“I was struggling. I was lonely,” said Miguel, a member of the Church of the Annunciation Parish in Shelbyville, Ky., in the Archdiocese of Louisville. “Then I realized there was somebody who knew more about me than I do myself. God has been there for me from day one.

“I asked him to promise me to help me through everything I was going through. I heard something pop into my head—‘I promise.’ I actually did cry when that happened. I cried tears of joy.”

At 16, Valentina Chavez has the same deep love of her faith that brought so many Catholic youths to NCYC.

“For most of us, our faith has always been there for us since we were born,” said Valentina, a member of St. Patrick Parish in Indianapolis. “It’s something we’ve learned to love and appreciate, thanks to our parents. We’re very blessed to have a very supportive parish and families to help us get involved in church.”

Still, she says, the teenage years are a time of challenge in many youths’ lives in regard to their faith.

“Especially at our age, as teenagers, we get judged a lot about our faith,” Valentina said. “A lot of people don’t have the same faith as us. Coming from our youth group, we have a strong faith, but it does get difficult at times. We remind ourselves that God is with us.”

It’s a feeling that resonated with many of the youths attending NCYC this year.

“We’re here for a reason,” Valentina said. “And God is always here for us.” †

NCYC deepens the faith of adult leaders as they help to bring youths closer to God

By John Shaughnessy

Angela Guynn always marvels at the transformation that youths experience during the three days of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis.

“What they believe they’re going to get out of it is different than what they will get out of it,” said Guynn, a youth group leader at St. Rita Parish in Indianapolis who has helped chaperone teenagers at several of the youth conferences.

“Just that there are kids the same age who believe it’s OK to show their love of God, to share what they believe without being judged, that there are others who have questions about their faith, and others they can lean on.”

Guynn smiled as she recalled the experience of one youth from her predominantly African-American parish, a youth whose only initial reason for coming to NCYC was because his mother had signed him up to attend.

“The energy from that first night is eye-opening, from the music to the kids storming the stage. For him it was, ‘I love this! I can’t wait to do this again!’”

That energy—and that reaction from the youths—fuels Guynn’s commitment to bring more teenagers to the conference which takes place every two years. And seeing NCYC’s impact on their faith also deepens her faith.

“With everything that’s been changing in the world, just helping the youths along in their journey helps me in continuing my faith,” she said. “It feels good to help others grow in their faith.”

That feeling is prevalent among adult group leaders and chaperones who embrace NCYC as a faith-affirming experience for their youths and themselves.

Mike Sylvester led 23 youths from St. Gregory the Great Parish in Bluffton, S.C. “Coming from South Carolina, where the population is 5% or so Catholic, for

See LEADERS, page 16B



Youth minister Mike Sylvester of St. Gregory the Great Parish in Bluffton, S.C., towers above some of the 23 youths he led at the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

Adoration leads teens to experience 'the true love of God'

By Natalie Hoefler

For many youths, group eucharistic adoration on the second night of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) is the part of the event they look most forward to and find most memorable.

And it is indeed memorable. For as raucous as the energy of nearly 11,000 spirited, joyful teens is, just as palpable is their reverent silence when kneeling together before Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

The juxtaposition became especially clear throughout the evening of Nov. 19 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis as the evening began with upbeat Christian music, leading the young people to jump and sing along.

But as soon as the Eucharist was processed into the space, the party-like atmosphere changed. Kneeling, the youths watched in silence as the monstrance was placed on an altar.

'He wants to feed us with himself'

The next hour was consumed in silence and reverent music, broken only by the occasional voice of Father Leo Patalinghug, the priest-member of a community of consecrated life called *Voluntas Dei* ("The Will of God") who led the adoration service.

First, he helped the young people enter into conversation with Christ.

"Can Jesus really squeeze his body into this small piece of bread? Can he really squeeze his blood into wine?" he asked. "Truly he wants to feed us with himself.

He wants to dwell in us because he made us so beautiful.

"Let Jesus tell you how he sees your life, not in condemnation but in how beautiful he made you."

After time for quiet reflection, Father Leo spoke about the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. He shared how scientists who studied consecrated hosts from eucharistic miracles determined two things.

"One thing that scientists were able to discern is that the blood type is AB+ like on the Shroud of Turin, making it a universal recipient—anyone can take that blood type and make it their own," he explained.

"They also discovered very impressively that when the host turned to flesh, that it was actually myocardial tissue—heart muscle.

"Could it be, then, that the traditional prayer, 'Jesus Christ, make my heart like unto thine?' that it is real? Could it be



Voluntas Dei Father Leo Patalinghug speaks during adoration on the second night of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 19. (Photos by Natalie Hoefler)

that when we say at Mass, 'We lift up our hearts up to the Lord,' that it's a mutual exchange—I give you my heart Lord, because my heart is broken, and he gives us his?"

"Think in your heart what needs to be healed in your life today. Let Jesus in as the divine physician."

More reflection and music followed before Father Leo's final words to the youths.

"I would ask you if you want to become a saint, and you might say, 'Ain't no way I'm going to become a saint.' And that's because the devil is lying to you and you are listening to him," he said.

"With Christ, all things are possible. You can be a saint—you are supposed to be a saint.

"In your heart, ask Jesus to root out whatever needs to be rooted out of your heart, to have the strength to go to confession, to put in you the virtue to be holy and to give you holy friends and people to get back on the right track."

'My soul was filled here'

The impact of the encounter with Christ was visible. Hands were folded and heads were bowed in prayer. Tears streaked down the cheeks of some, while others raised their hands in praise.

"I just opened up and really felt Jesus here tonight," said Annalise Bird, 18, of the Diocese of Syracuse, N.Y. "It's a feeling I'll always cherish."

Ryan Perez, 17, of the Archdiocese of Baltimore said it was "so powerful seeing so many people come together to worship our God. The Spirit in the room



A teen bows her head in prayer during adoration in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 19 during the National Catholic Youth Conference.

was just overflowing. It was really a life-changing experience."

During one point in adoration, 17-year-old Jaidn Asch of the Syracuse Diocese stood and hugged those on either side of him.

"My soul was just filled," he said. "That led me to feel the true love of God, which made me want to just spread his love to others. Me and my friend here have been close for a while and I wanted to show love to him, and to my brother here, just having this feeling that my soul was filled.

"I go about my day and I get busy, and I'm trying to prove my worth. My soul gets empty, but my soul was filled here. It's something I've been chasing my whole life." †



Youths kneel and pray during adoration in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 19 during the National Catholic Youth Conference.

Keeping the Fire Alive



Transitional Deacon Michael Clawson, a member of Annunciation Parish in Brazil, proclaims a Gospel reading during a morning prayer service that was part of the Saturday morning general session of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 20 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)



Befitting the theme of "Ablaze" for the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 18-20, images of fire flash above a stage on the floor of Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the opening session on Nov. 18 for the nearly 11,000 youths from across the country. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)



Amy Smith, a chaperone for a group of youths from the Diocese of Des Moines, Iowa, kneels in prayer on Nov. 20 during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)



Youths from Holy Family Parish in New Albany wave their arms while music is performed before the start of the Saturday morning general session of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 20 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)



Youths from across the country take turns adding their unique style to spelling out NCYC at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 18. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)



Youths take a break from the talks to enjoy coloring in the Interactive Village during the National Catholic Youth Conference in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 19. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



Youths play Human Hungry Hippo in the Interactive Village during the National Catholic Youth Conference in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 19. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)



A priest hears the confession of a National Catholic Youth Conference participant on Nov. 20 in a ballroom of the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)



As the keynote speaker of the opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium, Catholic evangelist Chika Anyanwu shares her story of saying yes to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and how it transformed her life. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

Archdiocesan teens enjoy 'amazing experience' of NCYC opening Mass

By Natalie Hoefler

The National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) had barely begun by mid-afternoon on Nov. 18, but already the hallways of the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis were coming to life with excited, silly-hat-wearing teens from around the country.

Not so in one conference hall. There, about 900 youths from all over central and southern Indiana chose to start their NCYC experience by worshipping together at an opening archdiocesan Mass with Archbishop Charles C. Thompson.

The large hall went from silence to song as the archbishop, about 13 priests and more than 25 seminarians processed toward the altar located atop a stage.

"Life, as they say, is full of choices," Archbishop Thompson said during his homily. "Choices of course have consequences. On a regular basis, confronted with opportunity and challenge, we make choices. Sometimes we make choices between good and evil. Other times we make choices between seemingly equally good options, or so-called lesser of evils."

The archbishop noted that each of those present made an intentional choice to be at NCYC.

"The consequences of this choice hopefully include strengthening our Catholic identity, deepening our faith, meeting new friends and having a memorable experience," he said. "The ultimate consequence, however, will be a personal and even deeper personal encounter with Jesus Christ in the various ways that are made available during this NCYC."

Archbishop Thompson acknowledged that youths today are faced with many sources "wanting your loyalty, wanting



National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) participants kneel in reverence as Archbishop Charles C. Thompson processes with the Blessed Sacrament through the Indiana Convention Center at the beginning of NCYC on Nov. 18. (Photos by Natalie Hoefler)

you to sacrifice to false gods rather than the true God we worship here at this altar. ... The overwhelming array of voices vying for our attention and dedication can be deafening at times."

He cautioned the teens to resist such messages. Instead, he said, "We need to be grounded in prayer, in the word of God, reflection, sacraments, discernment and service.

"These ways of discerning and praying allow us to encounter the person of Jesus Christ in our lives, in our relationships, in our families and in our communities."

He said the choices Catholics make should reflect and honor "the choice God made for our salvation," and Jesus freely choosing "to accept the Father's will, entering into his passion and death, trusting in the ultimate outcome of the Resurrection."

"Choices have consequences," he reminded the youths. "Many consequences can be long lasting, some even eternal.

"Let us not squander the opportunity to draw closer to the Lord during these special days at NCYC. May the choices we make here lead us to an



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson delivers a homily to nearly 900 youths of the archdiocese at the beginning of the National Catholic Youth Conference in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 18.

ever-deepening encounter with the person of Jesus Christ our Savior, and continue to have lasting consequences of peace, joy, faith, hope and blessings despite the burdens and crosses we must carry in this life. ...

"We have chosen to be here. Let the consequences begin."

During Archbishop Thompson's closing remarks, a long, loud cheer erupted after he shared with those present the news of the archdiocese hosting a national eucharistic congress in 2024.

He then prepared them for the eucharistic procession through and outside of the Indiana Convention Center that would take place after the Mass.

"We talk about the Indy 500 and how it's the greatest spectacle in racing," he said. "Well, it doesn't compare to the Eucharist. What a great message it is, what a great spectacle, as we begin this eucharistic procession. The witness we

give in our reverence and our adoration and great respect to the Eucharist—but not only to the Eucharist, but how we live out this eucharistic experience in our lives."

Evan Sahlstrom of the Archdiocese of Anchorage-Juneau, Alaska, took part in the eucharistic procession. The 17-year-old found it "really touching to see everyone drop what they were doing and kneel. I really enjoyed seeing the Knights of Columbus out [along the street] with their swords raised to reverence the Eucharist."

After the procession and adoration, 18-year-old Hanna Helt of St. Joseph University Parish in Terre Haute reflected on the Mass.

"It was honestly amazing, especially with getting to be with all the other teenagers that were there, and hearing [the archbishop] speak," she said. "It was such an amazing and warming experience." †



A eucharistic procession with Archbishop Charles C. Thompson holding a monstrance files past St. John the Evangelist Church in Indianapolis during the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 18.

Youths at NCYC rush to fill a Box of Joy for children—and other service projects

By John Shaughnessy

Charlotte Wiman and Aidan Sauls kept quickly returning to fill another Box of Joy for a child who wouldn't otherwise experience the magic of Christmas.

Two thousand boxes needed to be filled with an assortment of gifts—one of the service projects that teenagers at the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) worked on in the conference's Interactive Village on Nov. 18-20.

Charlotte and Aidan smiled at the thought of the boxes being distributed at Christmas to children in need in Central America—boxes that will include a toy, candy, school supplies, socks, a rosary and a coloring book of Jesus, among other items.

"I just feel grateful I can help and give back," said Charlotte, a member of Our Lady of the Hills Parish in Columbia, S.C., the same parish as Aidan. "It will show them that God loves them."

Aidan added, "It really makes you view Christmas from a different perspective. I come from a middle-class family, and I get a lot. I realize there are people in the world who don't. It feels good helping them. I hope that person will feel the love."

The enthusiasm of Charlotte and Aidan is exactly the reaction that was hoped for by Terry Waters, the special initiatives manager for Cross Catholic Outreach, a nonprofit organization that coordinated the Box of Joy effort and two other service projects at NCYC. About 75,000 food packages were made for families in Guatemala. Another 7,500 food packets will be distributed to Indianapolis area food pantries by the Knights of Columbus.

"For us and for the youths, this is a wonderful opportunity to live out our faith, to put our faith into action," Waters said. "This Box of Joy is what we call a two-way ministry. It's the joy of serving, and it gives others the joy of experiencing Christmas."

The 2,000 boxes of joy from NCYC are part of an overall effort across the country to provide a touch of Christmas to more than 100,000 children in Central America, Waters noted.

"For the kids who get a Box of Joy, this is their Christmas gift. It's the only gift they will get," he said. "All three projects are corporal works of mercy. They'll make a difference in the lives of families."

In a nearby area, Ava Keicher and Bella Doyle of the Diocese of Buffalo, N.Y., used their talents for a service project called Hands Across Haiti. The effort is a ministry of St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg. Youths decorated backpacks, totes and T-shirts that will be shared with members of two parishes in Haiti that have a special "sister" connection to St. John Paul II Parish.



Charlotte Wiman, left, and Aidan Sauls of Our Lady of the Hills Parish in Columbia, S.C., are all smiles as they help with the Box of Joy service project at the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 19. (Photos by John Shaughnessy)

"I went on a trip to the Dominican Republic with my high school, and the fact that Haiti is so close to there touched my heart. I know how much they go through," said Ava, a senior at Sacred Heart Academy in Buffalo and a member of Immaculate Conception Parish in nearby East Aurora, N.Y.

Bella added, "I like that these are going to people who need clothing. I think that getting something that was pretty would make them see the spirit of God."

At another area, Paloma Escobedo cut pieces of fabric with three of her friends—Valentina Chavez, Monserrat Gomez and Maria Sanchez. The fabric pieces will be sewn together to create bags for the Christmas Store in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis—an annual effort by Catholic Charities Indianapolis to bring a touch of Christmas joy to families in need. The bags will be filled with hygiene products for parents, complementing the toys and other gifts the children get.

"Cutting fabric is actually pretty fun," said Paloma, a member of St. Patrick Parish in Indianapolis. "It makes me feel good I'm helping out and someone will appreciate what we're doing."

It's the double blessing of service projects. †



Bella Doyle, left, and Ava Keicher show the totes they made for people in Haiti, part of the Hands Across Haiti service project at the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 19.

Wacky hats still reign at NCYC, but messages show the heart of youths' faith

By John Shaughnessy

Masks were required at the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis, but wacky hats still reigned on Nov. 18-20, adding an extra touch of joy that has always marked this celebration of the young Church.

Once again, there were youths donning racecar hats, cowboy hats and brightly-colored umbrella hats. Maybe the best were the KFC red-and-white-striped bucket hats proudly worn by the group from Church of the Annunciation Parish in Shelbyville, Ky.—a tip of their hat to Harlan Sanders, the founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken who once lived in their community.

While the colorful hats proclaim fun, another part of the youths' attire reveals the heart of how they embrace and live their Catholic faith. That more serious side is displayed in the messages that appear on some of the

T-shirts and sweatshirts they wear. Here's a sampling from this year's conference:

"Faith does not make things easy. It makes them possible."

"Be who God meant you to be and set the world on fire."

"All I need is a little bit of coffee and a whole lot of Jesus."

"*Nunc Coepi*," (the translation of this Latin phrase means "Now I begin.")

"Comfort Like Veronica"

"Lead Like Joan"

"Accept Like Mary"

"As iron sharpens iron, one person sharpens another. Proverbs 27:17"

"I am the pro-life generation"

"Be not afraid"

"Child of God"

"Church is not just something you go to. It's a family you belong to."

"Child of God"

"Blessed." †



Youths used messages on T-shirts and sweatshirts to show their Catholic faith, including their support for pro-life concerns. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)



Father Andy Hammeke of the Diocese of Salina, Kan., hears the confession of a National Catholic Youth Conference participant on Nov. 20 in a ballroom of the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis. (Photos by Sean Gallagher)

God's mercy flows through the sacrament of penance at NCYC

By Sean Gallagher

The nearly 11,000 youths may have just come from Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis rocking with loud music, cheering and flashing bright lights.

But all of that disappeared the instant they set foot in a large, dimly lit and quiet ballroom in the Indiana Convention Center.

Pairs of chairs dotted the expansive room, some with cloth screens dividing

them, others arranged close together so that the two people sitting in them could see each other.

This was the room where dozens of priests shared God's mercy in the sacrament of penance with thousands of participants during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 18-20 in Indianapolis.

Whenever the room was open, a steady, long line of penitents waited to be directed to a priest who could celebrate

the sacrament of penance with them.

Seminarians directed penitents to chairs while other volunteers guided people in the confession lines and handed "I'm forgiven" stickers to those leaving the room after receiving sacramental absolution of their sins.

This year's NCYC was the fourth at which Tara Donovan of the Diocese of Des Moines, Iowa, volunteered as a chaperone. But talking about the reconciliation room still moved her.

"It's amazing," said Donovan through tears. "As parents, we try to guide our kids to make right choices. But you can only do so much. I'm just really glad that the kids are making themselves available and giving it all up to God."

This was the second NCYC for Kellie Simon, a teenager from Abingdon, Md., in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Taking the opportunity to experience God's mercy in the sacrament of penance at the conference is important for her.

"It's such a different experience than going [to confession] at your own church," Kellie said. "You get to speak to a priest you've never met before."

"It's such a peaceful entrance with the dim lights and music in the background. And you get to see a ton of youths also doing the same exact thing. It really makes you feel welcome and to know that you're not the only one. To see all the youths around you, all believing the same thing you do, is really a wonderful experience."

It's also a wonderful experience for the priests hearing confessions at the

conference, said Father Raphael Assamah of the Diocese of Des Moines, Iowa.

"It's a great opportunity and a great sacrifice," he said. "It tells you how the young people want to reconcile themselves with God. They may have a broken relationship with him and are finding ways with [coming to know] themselves and reconciling themselves with God and the Church."

Father James Brockmeier, pastor of St. Mary Parish in Rushville, came to NCYC on the closing day of the conference to hear confessions, as he has done at previous NCYC's since being ordained in 2016.

"One of the neatest things about a conference like this is that people come to confession who haven't been to confession in a long time, many times," he said.

Father Brockmeier also noted that conferences like NCYC can lead to powerful experiences of the sacrament of penance because many of the event presentations help prepare participants for confession.

"People will be inspired by what's going on at the conference, the talks," Father Brockmeier said. "It kind of acts as a giant examination of conscience."

"Everything here helps people to be focused on making a confession of their faith, which confession certainly is. They're confessing sins, but they're also confessing their trust that God forgives them and loves them."

That certainly was the case for Kellie. "It helps me to remember that God loves me no matter what," she said. †



A priest hears the confession of a National Catholic Youth Conference participant on Nov. 20 in a ballroom of the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis.

Talk on trusting God helps teens see 'God controls everything'

By Natalie Hoefler

Maxwell Benefield admitted it—he has control issues, and that leads to trust issues.

So the 18-year-old National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) participant from the Diocese of Nashville, Tenn., attended a talk called “Trusting in God” by Catholic singer, songwriter and speaker Steve Angrisano.

“It was a really good talk,” he said.

Here’s a look at the heart of the session’s message.

‘Nothing fills us except for God’

Angrisano began by posing a question from God to those present: “Do you know me?” That’s the question God has for every one of us.”

He quoted from saints who commented on trust in God.

“I have a holy card from my first youth rally,” he said. “It says, ‘There is a God-shaped vacuum in your heart that only God can fill.’ It’s a paraphrase of the words of St. Augustine, which are, ‘Our hearts will be restless until they rest in you.’

“What it means is, you were created by God and for God. ... No music, no sport, no boyfriend, no girlfriend, no good thing, no bad thing—nothing fills us except for God.”

Angrisano also quoted St. John Chrysostom’s words on the trust of the early Christians.

“What does it mean that the Apostles were so bold, that these men who abandoned him when he was alive would stand for him at the risk of death after he died?” he quoted from the saint.

Those same men saw Christ resurrected, and their trust in God was sealed, he explained.

Angrisano noted that the Church “began with a small community of people who were given a choice: ‘Say it’s not true, or you will be burned alive.’ That’s the truth. Those are the origins of our faith,” an origin founded on faith in Christ and in what the Apostles professed.

The ‘reckless love of God’

Catholics are called not just to trust in God but also to trust in God’s love, said Angrisano.

“Genesis 1:27 says that you and I and not anything else were created in the image and likeness of God,” he noted.

He played the song “Reckless Love”

by Cory Asbury on his guitar to further illustrate the point, inviting the young people to sing the chorus:

“Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God.

Oh, it chases me down, fights ‘til I’m found, leaves the ninety-nine.

I couldn’t earn it, and I don’t deserve it, still, You give Yourself away.”

Angrisano reminded the youths that “God desires to know you and be in friendship with you. That’s the word [St.] Paul used in Latin, not ‘relationship.’ Jesus wants to be in friendship with us.”

He noted that friends come to know each other well by “wasting time together.”

“So how do we know God?” he asked.

“We waste time with God. ... That means praying because you know what praying is? ... Prayer is wasting time with God.

Prayer is about taking meaningful minutes of your day and letting God be God in your life, and then we begin to understand God and we begin to see his way in our life.

“You don’t have to pray for long hours,” he said before leading those present in a *lectio divina* meditation.

“If you have a long ride on the bus to school, just pull up the daily Gospel on your phone, read it, and reflect on the one word or phrase that jumps out at you.”

‘There is no fear in love’

Session emcee Donna Catherine and musician Thomas Muglia shared witnesses after Angrisano’s talk.

Catherine spoke of the plans she had for her life and the resistance and lack of control she felt when she sensed God calling her to a life of ministry.

“It’s either us hiding from God or running from him, never him running or hiding from us,” she said.

Muglia noted it was difficult to accept God’s love.

“As humans, we like conditional love,” he said. “The concept of not earning it, just being loved for who you are by God, that’s kind of a scary thing.

“But that has to be the foundation, it has to be. Imagine what we might have the courage to be and do in this world with God’s love as our foundation—not our efforts, but God’s love.

“[1] John 4 says there is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear. ... We love because he first loved us.”



Steve Angrisano talks to teens about trusting in God during a National Catholic Youth Conference session in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 19. (Photos by Natalie Hoefler)

‘I can’t control everything’

Shayla Drimsley, 14, of the Diocese of New Ulm, Minn., said she was glad she attended the talk.

“I liked how they had songs and made it so it was really understandable for us to get [the message] better,” she said. The talk helped her realize “that God will help you. Even if you think he can’t, he will. You can believe it or not, but he will.”

As for Maxwell, he appreciated

Angrisano’s humor, but especially related to Catherine’s witness.

“What she said about wanting everything to be controlled, I could really relate to that,” he said. “I feel like prayer and relying on God has a lot to do with controlling that urge to control. That really spoke to me.

“I can’t control everything. God controls everything, so if I rely on him, it will put me on the right path.” †



Teens do hand motions to a song prior to a talk on trust during the National Catholic Youth Conference in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 19.

Youth-led sessions help teens connect, create action plan for life after NCYC

By Natalie Hoefler

Face masks were not the only thing new at the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis this year.

New on the schedule of optional activities were youth-led sessions called “Youth 2 Youth” and “Spirited Conversations.” Each was offered several times, with a different youth group from around the country taking ownership of the session.

When registering teens from Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Anniston, Ala., to attend NCYC, Ricardo Amaral noticed the option for his group to lead a youth session.

“I didn’t know what it was, but I thought, ‘Sure, why not?’” said Amaral, an assistant to the parish’s youth minister.

He signed the group up to lead a 30-minute Spirited Conversations session. According to a description of Spirited Conversations in the NCYC app, these “roundtables offer a space for young people to pause for reflection and further discussion about the different topics and themes being shared in general sessions and breakout sessions.”

“We were really surprised because he signed us up before we came here, and we didn’t even know!” said his 17-year-old daughter Anna Amaral. “We planned it before we left. It was fun!”

Ricardo Amaral said the four teens of their group “did everything—they came up with the instructions, the questions for discussion, the group activity. They led the prayers, they spoke at the podium. We adults were there if anyone needed help, but the girls did all the work.”

The teens split the session participants into groups with members from various dioceses.

“You spent sometimes 12 hours on a bus talking with your best friends” on the way to NCYC,” Ricardo Amaral told *The Criterion*. “You know what they think already. When you force the situation a little bit, you expose them to new ideas.”

One of the teens leading explained to the participants that the ultimate goal of the session was for the participants to come up with concrete ways they could put into action at home what they learned at NCYC.

The groups were asked to discuss their favorite thing about NCYC up to that point, what session messages most impacted them and why, what was the most important thing they’d learned, and how those ideas could be put into practice back home.

“I got a lot of things out of it when we were planning it,” said Anna. “Delving into the questions, at first we were just scraping the surface, giving simple answers.”

“But after we started talking a little more, we started seeing more ideas, thinking of more in-depth answers. Like, instead of just saying we can go to church on Sunday, we started talking about how we could reach out to non-profits and volunteer, or even just get involved in our parish.”

After discussing the questions, each group was asked to list on a poster their main NCYC takeaways and how they can implement them. Photos of each group were taken and posted on social media.

Tessa Fellona, a 16-year-old member of the Archdiocese of the Military Services from Abilene, Texas, summarized the discussion at her table, which included



Abilene, Texas, residents Adeline Fellona, left, and her sisters Tessa and Margaux, fourth and fifth from left, of the Archdiocese of the Military Services, pose on Nov. 19 with the poster they and members of the archdioceses of Atlanta, Chicago and Indianapolis made of their take-aways from NCYC in Indianapolis and how they can put them into action. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)

youths from the archdioceses of Chicago, Atlanta and Indianapolis.

“The people at our table really liked the community here, learning and growing with other young people who are in the same situations as them,” she said. “They can really relate to the talks.”

“It’s hard to be a young Catholic these days because so many people beat down on you and say, ‘You hate who I identify as,’ so it can be hard to relate to kids our age. Coming here, it’s crazy to see how many people are in the same boat as we are.”

Making connections among their peers was one aspect of the Spirited Conversations that excited Ricardo.

“The important thing of this exercise was the communication between the different people that came,” he said. “That communication is extremely important, extremely. By talking, you can see how you’re not the only one who feels the same way about certain things.”

He was also thrilled to see youths have the opportunity to take leadership at NCYC. †

NCYC talk shows compatibility of science and faith

By Natalie Hoefler

Many talks at the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) address hot topics, particularly those where Catholic teaching comes into conflict with the secular world.

The talk “Faith, Science and the Gift of Wonder” addressed the fallacy that faith and science are incompatible.

“Today, most scientists see that science can inform faith and faith can inform science,” said speaker Dr. Bradley Gregory, associate professor of biblical studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington.

But many in the secular world have lagged in that understanding, he said. His talk addressed the history of the

relationship between faith and science in the Church, and how Catholics going forward can recover the traditional Church view of the compatibility of the two topics.

‘In the beginning’

Gregory began with a reading of the creation of the world in Genesis, chapter 1.

Of course, he said, “Scripture is not a science textbook. It’s an ancient text trying to communicate things about God, not chemistry or physics.”

When Genesis was written, he said, “Many people thought that the Earth was an unpredictable and unsettling place.

“Genesis, chapter 1, said no to that view of the world. ... For our biblical writers and early Christians, the world was a theater that unveils the goodness, the truth, the beauty of God, not in spite of its natural laws, but precisely through those natural laws.”

The growing Church continued studying the world. By the medieval era, Catholic universities included math and the sciences.

“The Church was open to science and discovering things about the natural world,” said Gregory. “They believed that the natural world in its regularity and its order told them something about the goodness of God.”

‘Science can’t answer the meaning of life’

So what happened? How did we get to the place we are today that so many believe that faith and science are opposites of one another?

“A couple hundred years ago, some people started thinking of God as one more character in the theater of a play of the created world,” Gregory explained. “People would look around and would find something else that made something happen, and ruled God out.”

The problem with such thinking, he said, is that “it means every time humanity advances in knowledge, God gets smaller and smaller and smaller, until eventually people think there’s no need for God. We can explain everything or will one day be able to explain everything.

“This left many people with the impression that God is unnecessary if we have science.”

Fortunately, he said, many theologians in the last 150

years have insisted that science and faith are compatible.

“St. John Henry Newman said there is nothing in science that is incompatible with God,” said Gregory. “He said science tells us about the laws and how they work, and faith tells us about the author and maintainer of those laws.

“Pope Pius XII said the scientific advances of the past 200 years have shown us a lot about the bodies we have. He said what science can’t answer for us is the meaning of life and the nature of the soul.

“Pope John Paul II gave full support to the exploration of evolutionary science and the other sciences as things that would shed light on the world we live in.”

‘We need to recover a sense of wonder’

To “bring our hearts and imaginations back into alignment or strengthen their alignment with the traditional view of the Catholic Church,” Gregory suggested turning to Pope Francis encyclical, “*Laudato Si’*: On Care for Our Common Home.”

“The major theme of his encyclical is that for us to be right in relation with the created world, we need to recover a sense of wonder,” he said. “We need to stop seeing the world just as something we can exploit or abuse and find amazement that it’s the way God created it.”

Gregory closed with impressing upon the youths that “faith is critical to all intellectual work. All truth is God’s truth, and when you pursue it, it’s your wonder that will lead you to find God’s handiwork.”

‘It shows how he loves us’

Margaux Fellona is an 18-year-old member of the Archdiocese of the Military Services from Abilene, Texas, who loves Church history.

“I think it was really interesting,” she said. “I think it’s really important that we recognize the Church’s history and continue the traditions.”

Andrea Cox, 15, of the Diocese of Wichita, Kan., said she walked away from the talk with a sense of awe for “how God made nature and how he made us, even.

“I really appreciated the talk. It made me think about the beauty of the Earth God made for us, and it shows how much he loves us.” †



Dr. Bradley Gregory, assistant professor of biblical studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, talks to youths at the National Catholic Youth Conference about the compatibility of faith and science in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 19. (Photo by Natalie Hoefler)

NCYC presents a positive vision of the priesthood for Catholic youths

By Sean Gallagher

“Follow me to arm wrestle a seminarian! See if you can beat a man who receives Communion every day!”

Holding a chalk board with “Arm Wrestle a Seminarian” written on it, seminarian Samuel Hansen barked this and similar calls while walking through the crowded halls of the Indiana Convention Center on the afternoon of Nov. 20 during the final day of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC).

“It was incredibly fun,” said Hansen, a senior at Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary and a member of St. Roch Parish, both in Indianapolis. “Just walking with the sign made a lot of people laugh. I felt like a ballpark food salesman. But it energized the convention center quite a bit.”

In response to Hansen’s hawking, a steady group of challengers gathered around a table promoting vocations to the diocesan priesthood that had earlier attracted fewer visitors when the seminarians manning it waited for NCYC participants to come to them on their own.

As lighthearted and winsome as this strategy to attract attention was, Hansen saw it as following in the tradition of the saints. St. John Bosco, for example, did slight of hand tricks and juggling acts for the children in his village to get them to listen to him give a catechesis lesson.

“The saints stepped out of line and took extraordinary actions to inspire others,” Hansen said. “That’s exactly what Catholic youths need to know about the vocation [to the priesthood]. It’s not a day job. It’s not for the faint of heart. Enthusiasm is necessary, and we need to reflect that.”

Archdiocesan seminarians were present to NCYC participants in other ways. Those in the last four years of their priestly formation wore clerical attire in being a candidate for the priesthood.

“Wearing clerics makes [seminarians] that much more obvious,” said seminarian Tyler Huber, a member of St. Mary-of-the-Knobs Parish in Floyd County. “When you’re walking around the thematic park and you engage in conversations with kids, playing games with them, they think it’s awesome. You show them that this is a viable option for them. Young people are doing it. It’s joyful. Jesus will provide for

you. It’s going to be a wonderful life.”

At the same time, Huber was encouraged during a time of eucharistic adoration at the conference in Lucas Oil Stadium when dozens of priests were available in the arena’s concourse to hear confessions of participants.

Huber helped direct participants to the priests sitting in chairs.

“In my section alone, I looked down and saw four or five guys who are now priests that I’ve been in seminary with,” Huber said. “They were now the guys in the chairs—and they loved it. I got so excited. And they were in heaven. To see them thrive and do well in ministry, having a good relationship with their youth groups, getting the kids excited about the faith, celebrating the sacraments—it’s all awesome.”

Huber is in his third year of theological formation at Saint Meinrad and expects to be ordained a transitional deacon next spring.

“My next NCYC will be as a priest, which is awesome,” Huber said with palpable enthusiasm.

Father James Brockmeier knows that feeling.

He was a high school student when he first attended NCYC.

“It was such a new experience to be with 20,000 other young Catholics, to experience the Mass in something bigger than your own parish and your own experience of it,” said Father Brockmeier, pastor of St. Mary Parish in Rushville. “Seeing all of the priests process into the Mass was one of the things that really got me thinking about the priesthood.”

In 2015, Father Brockmeier, as a seminarian and transitional deacon, experienced a “full circle moment” when he served as the principal deacon at the closing Mass of NCYC and took part in the same procession that had so impressed him earlier.

The same day that Father Brockmeier described his full circle moment, it may have been beginning for NCYC participant Matthew Heidenreich of the Columbus, Ohio, Diocese, who first attended the conference in 2019.

“It’s inspirational at the Saturday night Mass to see so many priests [processing] down the aisle,” Matthew said. “As someone who’s discerning the seminary, you have to ask the question, ‘What if that



Seminarian Alex Lindbergh, a freshman at Bishop Bruté College Seminary in Indianapolis, arm wrestles Asia Carmon of the Diocese of Raleigh, N.C., during the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 20 at the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis. (Photos by Sean Gallagher)

was me? What if I was walking down that aisle?”

Returning to the conference this year to celebrate the sacrament of penance with Catholic teenagers from across the country, Father Brockmeier spoke of the benefits of dozens of priests coming to minister together at NCYC.

“The priesthood is something that we do communally,” he said. “A lot of times we feel like individuals at our parishes. But we are brother priests. To be able to come and hear confessions with brother priests is a reminder of the communal nature of our ministry.”

Father Brockmeier also serves as an archdiocesan associate vocations director who works with Father Michael Keucher, the vocations director for the archdiocese.

Father Keucher took part in NCYC this year—the seventh such conference he’s



Dozens of priests process on Nov. 20 into Luca Oil Stadium in Indianapolis for the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference.

attended. He sees it as a tremendous time to invite young people to begin discerning the vocation to which God has called them.

“Once kids open the door of their hearts to the Holy Spirit, he makes his will known,” said Father Keucher. “The Holy Spirit is so palpable here. It’s so real. And the kids are finding the Holy Spirit and nurturing their relationship with the Holy Spirit. That will do wonders for vocations.” †

Catholic youths encounter a variety of religious orders at NCYC

By Sean Gallagher

Several religious communities had booths in the Interactive Village of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 18-20 in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis.

Franciscan Sister Kathleen Branham, vocations director for the Sisters of



Society of Our Lady of the Trinity Sister Mary Claire Strasser, left, chats with Sofia Sauls, center, and Ava Glemming, both of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, Okla. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

St. Francis in Oldenburg, said she had more young women express interest in her religious community than at NCYC in 2019.

“There are more people who want to stay in touch,” she said. “It’s been a blessing. The young people of today want community. I think [NCYC] plays a really big part with community. After the pandemic, they realize that there’s more to life than materialistic and consumer stuff and that community means everything.”

Society of Our Lady of the Trinity Sister Mary Claire Strasser was one of three members of her community at the conference.

“It’s a beautiful chance to encounter [youths] and to let them encounter us,” she said. “We’ve met many who have never seen or talked to sisters before. For us, it’s a sign of hope. This is the future of the Church. It’s really beautiful.”

Describing NCYC as an

event “where their faith is encouraged and strengthened,” Sister Mary Claire said that “the Lord gives a lot of grace in events like this” for Catholic teenagers.

“There are a lot of graced moments of deep encounter with Christ,” she said. “Those deep encounters open their hearts to this God that loves them and has a plan for their lives. What might that plan be?”

Holy Cross Brother Jacob Eifred, who is in his third year of temporary vows with the Congregation of the Holy Cross, said he is encouraged in his discernment and formation by NCYC. He also saw hope in the conference for the future of religious vocations.

“When youths come to an event like this, they’re reminded that they’re not alone,” said Brother Jacob. “The Church is much bigger than just their parish. There’s a lot of opportunity out there for ministry, evangelization and growing in their faith. They can be supported by like-minded people. We’re all in this together in the Church.”

Matthew Heidenreich of the Columbus,

Ohio, Diocese stopped by the Holy Cross booth and chatted with Holy Cross Father Brendan McAleer, the vocations director for the order’s U.S. province.

Matthew said that NCYC brings religious orders “into the spotlight a little more.”

“A lot of times as young Catholics, it’s almost like religious orders are off on their own,” he said. “They’re mysterious things that we don’t really see. So, being here face-to-face with brothers and sisters and interacting with religious orders is really cool. You get to learn more about their charisms.”

Ava Glemming of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, Okla., echoed such thoughts after visiting the booth of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Trinity.

“Every vocation has a place,” she said. “Every order is different—from Franciscans, to Dominicans, to Benedictines. They’re all different in their own special way. Vocations are all about figuring out what God wants you to do that is unique to you.” †

Teens reflect on challenges to faith caused by pandemic

By Sean Gallagher

Tessa Junk first experienced the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis in 2019.

Less than four months after the conference, the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic in the U.S. changed her life of faith, especially with the suspension of the public celebration of the sacraments during the first months of the pandemic.

“I definitely distanced myself from my faith, with not being able to go to church,” said Tessa, a student at Sacred Heart Jr./Sr. High School in Salina, Kan. “And I wasn’t able to be with Catholic teenagers at my school that I can share my faith with and talk to.”

So, returning to NCYC this year was a moving experience for her.

“Yesterday, I was bawling my eyes out all day long,” Tessa said of her experience of the first full day of the conference on Nov. 19.

“So, with all of that distancing, coming back here just makes me feel like the Spirit is back in my heart,” she said. “I feel like God is holding onto me. I feel loved way more than I have ever felt love before.”

Many other youths at NCYC this year who attended the conference in Indianapolis in 2019 echoed Tessa’s experience.

“I won’t lie,” said Kellie Simon of Abingdon, Md. “Going through the pandemic put a strain on my faith, especially with not being able to go to

Mass every weekend, having to [watch] it online. I thought about why God put us through all of this.”

“The most challenging thing was when we had to watch Mass on TV,” agreed Emma Donovan of Hazel Green, Wis. “It was easy to get distracted and not pay attention as much when we were in the comfort of our own home rather than in a church.”

For some, the challenge to their faith during the pandemic ran even deeper.

Shelby Mai of Salina, Kan., said she didn’t go to Mass as often after parishes started reopening.

“I lost touch with my faith, even though I go to a Catholic school,” she said.

Coming to NCYC this year with many friends from her parish and Catholic high school, though, made a difference for Shelby.

“This has helped me grow in my faith,” she said.



Youths from Holy Family Parish in New Albany take in the sights and sounds of the Saturday morning general session of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 20 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photos by Sean Gallagher)

Matthew Heidenreich of the Columbus, Ohio, Diocese said that he may have been in the minority among NCYC participants in noting that his faith grew stronger during the pandemic.

He and about 20 friends met daily on the online video conference platform Zoom during the height of the pandemic to talk about their faith and have one of the group members give a presentation.

“It gave me a chance to root myself more in prayer, because there wasn’t much else to do,” Matthew said. “I re-centered myself because I had been losing my focus on my faith. So, it was a really good time for me.”

Coming to NCYC this year has only increased his positive experience of his faith.

“It’s reassuring to see that the community is still here,” he said. “Everyone’s willing to come back and bear with the confusion and chaos. But we’re all still here and united in faith, which is really cool.”

Seeing enthusiasm in nearly 11,000 Catholic teenagers at NCYC this year gave hope to Ava Glemming of Epiphany Parish in Oklahoma City, Okla.

“It’s rejuvenating,” she said. “The Church was in such a quiet, stagnate place in the middle of the pandemic. It was

hard on all of us. So, to see this life again is really magnificent. It’s a testament to God’s glory and all that he can do for us.”

The public suspension of the sacraments, including the Eucharist, helped Jailynn Rowe of Salina, Kan., appreciate the Mass more consciously since parishes reopened.

This was strengthened by her participation in NCYC this year, especially in her experience of eucharistic adoration on the evening of Nov. 19 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

“After this, I’ll definitely see going to church and the Eucharist a lot differently. During adoration last night, seeing the priest hold the [monstrance], I was like, ‘That’s Jesus Christ right there,’” Jailynn said. “So, when I go home, when the priest holds up the host at church, I’m just going to see Jesus.”

Whether the pandemic challenged the faith of some, strengthened it in others or has helped them to appreciate it anew, Matthew said that God has brought good out of the hardships of COVID-19.

“A lot of times, all God needs is an occasion,” he said. “He needs that door being opened. And the pandemic was that door being kicked open with a sledgehammer.” †



Youths from the Diocese of Des Moines, Iowa, cheer while deacons process off the floor of Lucas Oil Stadium on Nov. 20 in Indianapolis at the end of the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference.

LEADERS

continued from page 6B

our young people to see the larger Church and to be in a stadium worshipping God with so many people from across the country, it’s amazing the impact it has on them,” said Sylvester, the youth minister of the parish.

“I’ve lost count of the number of conferences I’ve been to, but I’ve seen the way they take it in, the way they own their faith. I’m fed here, too. The faith, the joy and the energy these kids have brings me hope—not just for the future of our Church but for today. These kids are our present now. We need to affirm that as a Church and celebrate it.”

Kim Sprague and Lucy Herth have the same belief in the youths of the Church. They combined to lead 100 youths from four parishes in southern Indiana to NCYC this year—All Saints in Dearborn County, St. Lawrence in Lawrenceburg, St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception in Aurora

and St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross in Bright.

“I love witnessing kids experience the larger Church,” Sprague said. “They have an authentic joy to be surrounded by peers of the same faith. You witness them just being true to themselves, to making Jesus their friend.”

Herth also appreciates the continuing impact that NCYC has on youths after the three-day event ends.

“Any kid who’s been to NCYC wants to invite others to the next conference,” Herth said. “They have this joy when they see other kids on fire for their faith, and they want to share that joy with others.”

Sprague added, “They’re not afraid to witness, to be more of a leader.”

She has experienced the same impact.

“It breathes new life into my ministry, just in witnessing the kids come alive in their faith,” Sprague said. “To see them open up and let the Holy Spirit work in their lives during the three days at NCYC is a blessing.

“It makes it more than worthwhile.” †



Lucy Herth, left, and Kim Sprague led a group of 100 youths from four Dearborn County parishes in southern Indiana to the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 18-20. They posed together for this photo at a pre-conference meeting of archdiocesan youth ministers. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

Faith *Alive!*

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Advent can help believers be content, see waiting as a gift

By Shemaiah Gonzalez

We know Advent is a season of waiting. But what if you feel like you've been waiting for a long time? We've been waiting for the pandemic to be over. We've been waiting to "go back to normal."

But ultimately, and for 2,000 years, we've been waiting for Christ to return to reconcile all things, to make everything right.

What if we reframed the act of waiting as a gift?

There is a refining that happens when we wait. A transformation of our spirit. When we wait, we prepare. We gain experience. And there is a hope that in that transformation God's will becomes our will.

We have been given this opportunity as a gift, a gift for almost the past two years—and now as we wait during Advent and ultimately as we wait for Christ's second coming.

The early 20th-century English writer and theologian G.K. Chesterton appreciated how waiting could be a gift. To Chesterton, waiting opened possibility:

"Around every corner is another gift waiting to surprise us, and it will surprise us if we can achieve control over our natural tendencies to make comparisons [to things that are better rather than things that are worse], to take things for granted ... and to feel entitled!"

Have we grown so entitled that we no longer see the gift of waiting and of life ready to surprise us? Chesterton's words ring true as we have compared now to B.C., "before COVID-19."

We reflect longingly back to 2019 as our glory days. We don't appreciate now for what it is. Now is good. It can be beautiful if we let it surprise us.

I remember when I was younger, I always thought I would be happy when I graduated from college, when I found a husband, when I had my own home.

These are good and happy events, and it is good to have goals to work toward, but I needed to learn to be content and happy in the moment each day. When we learn this, God's will takes over our desires.

Advent is the season of waiting. Chesterton wrote, "The aim of life is



A young man kneels in prayer in St. Columba Church in Douglas, Ireland, on June 9. Advent can be a season where, in waiting for Christmas and Christ's second coming, we align our will more with the will of God. (CNS photo/Cillian Kelly)

appreciation. There is no sense in not appreciating things; and there is no sense in having more of them if you have less appreciation of them."

I think of our current supply chain shortages. Some say these issues threaten Christmas celebrations. Do they really?

Or do they refine us? Do they remind us what Christmas is truly about? Like Chesterton writes, why do we need more if we don't even appreciate what we already have?

It is not about the gifts and wondering if the cargo ships will be unloaded on time, if the semi-trucks will deliver all the gifts you wanted to make Christmas perfect. It can be about being more thoughtful about what we consume and how much of it.

Do we buy and consume with intentionality? Has Christmas become more about the gifts and less about Jesus?

Waiting is the gift. It is a time to change our hearts. While waiting, God can take something that is difficult and use it to shape us into the person he created us to be. And we can get to know him better.

In St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians, he writes, "I know indeed how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need. I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me" (Phil 4:12-13).

Waiting helps us understand what it is like to be content with what we have. It means learning to appreciate what we do have instead of stewing over what we do not.

It will never be 2019 again. Do we want things and comfortability? Or do we want Jesus? Do we want the saving transforming grace of our relationship with the Savior?

This makes me think of the words of one of Chesterton's contemporaries, C. S. Lewis, who wrote:

"We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

I love the tension of being content in our circumstance, but not so easily pleased that we fail to recognize the glory that God is offering us. Isn't this what we do when we fail to see waiting as a gift?

What are we waiting for? Christmas? A turkey, tree and a holiday movie? Are we waiting for another new normal? Or the pandemic to be over?

Or are we waiting for Christ? To finally be reconciled to our God? To know fully this God who we worship? And then too, we will be fully known.

I am content to wait for Jesus.

(Shemaiah Gonzalez is a freelance writer. Her website is www.shemaiahgonzalez.com.) †



An Advent wreath is seen as Pope Francis leads a general audience in the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican on Dec. 16, 2020. Advent is a season of waiting. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Corrections Corner/Ed Witulski

Trusted Mentors program continues to change lives for the better

(This column was written by a person returning from incarceration who took a chance and asked to be matched with a mentor through the Trusted Mentors program, which for more than 17 years has connected and trained volunteer mentors with at-risk adults [mentees] to help keep them housed and out of prison. The column was contributed by Ed Witulski,



the Mentors Match Coordinator for Trusted Mentors who is a member of the archdiocese's Corrections Ministry Advisory Committee. He is also a member of St. Monica Parish in Indianapolis.)

My name is Lisa, and I have had a trusted mentor since January. When I applied to the Trusted Mentors Program, I had just arrived at a women's work release facility from the Indiana Department of Corrections (IDOC) Women's Prison. I had been within the

IDOC for about nine months, then was sent to work release to complete the last nine months of my sentence. This was my first time ever being involved in the legal system and my first term of incarceration.

Before I got in trouble, I had worked in various positions within the social service and court system realm. So, my experience was only from the outside. I was in a domestic violence situation, which prompted my actions, which then ended up with me being sent to IDOC. Now I have a criminal record. I asked for a mentor because I was in a new city, looking for a job, just came from a prison, and I felt like I had no extra support or friends. My family lived three hours away, and because of COVID they were not even permitted to visit.

I was matched with a wonderful mentor named Terri. I was a little unsure at first if this was something that was going to work. However, after we first talked, I really felt like I could relate to her in many ways. There was not the barrier of a label like I had been given for the last year of being IDOC property and a criminal. I was a person who made a poor choice and had to deal with the consequences. That was the start of the

encouragement and support she has given me this time and to this day.

At first, we met about every two weeks and tried to communicate via phone or e-mail weekly. We also had a few outings, which I looked forward to so much because at work release this was a rare opportunity and a privilege. It was also wonderful to have an interaction with someone who believes your past doesn't define you, and she was always there to talk or if I needed a resource or idea about something. Most of all, she was a friend. I can say that having a mentor has been a positive influence on my life.

I am no longer in the IDOC. I have returned home with my family, and I have a good job. Terri has been there every step of the way and has encouraged me even when things didn't go as planned or changed, sometimes not for the best. Most of all, I have realized my value as a person, and I know that I am worthy of the best life has to offer. My past doesn't have to define my future. I strongly recommend to anyone wanting to have a mentor or anyone needing one, to do it, because one person has the power to impact someone's life for the better. †

Faith and Family/Sean Gallagher

Waiting is a theme in Advent that parents know well

Even though I'm north of 50 now and have much more gray hair on my head than my original brown, I still at times get called a "young man" by my seniors.



My creaking joints and muscles suggest to me, though, that I'm far from young.

But I've found that those called by God to marriage and family life need to always be youthful, no

matter how long they've been at it. They are always entering new territory in their vocations.

I've been married for 20 years, and been a father for 19. Still, I find new challenges and blessings all the time in this sacred calling. As my five sons have entered into new stages in their lives, they've all been new to me because their own unique personalities make those transitions different each time.

And although Cindy and I first met in 1991 and were married in 2001, there are still days when we still find each other a mystery.

There are always new blessings to receive gratefully and new crosses to bear patiently with the help of God's grace.

And there are always new experiences to anticipate.

My youngest son Colin will soon experience his first confession and later receive his first Communion—two events that I look forward to as much as I did with my four older sons.

Cindy and I also watch in anticipation as our oldest sons Michael and Raphael move into adulthood. How will they learn to navigate on their own all of its challenges? Most importantly, we ponder, anticipate and pray about how all our sons will discern God's call in their lives.

Moments of waiting in family life can be difficult. My mind goes back to the anxious waiting Cindy and I experienced 17 years ago when our oldest son Michael, then 14 months old, laid in a hospital bed on a ventilator as he battled pneumonia.

Then there's the waiting to see how each of our boys will work through the often-difficult process of psychological, emotional and spiritual maturing. All parents have great hopes for their children in these matters. Waiting for them to be fulfilled can be grueling at times.

The waiting that is part and parcel of the life of parents is filled with blessings and crosses. For in waiting to see how the life that God has planned for them for all eternity will unfold before our eyes through the years, we await at the same time the continuing manifestation of the life of Christ given to them at their baptism.

This happens as much in the times of laughter and joy as those marked by trials and tears. Sometimes in those dark moments, parents can feel like they're in the middle of an endless night. But they can find solace in and make their own the deep yearning heard in Psalm 130:

"My soul is waiting for the Lord, I count on his word. My soul is longing for the Lord more than watchman for daybreak. Let the watchman count on daybreak and Israel on the Lord" (Ps 130:5-7).

Our Lord wants to make the times of trial in the lives of our children that moment of darkness just before daybreak. The first light of dawn might be very different from what we parents had envisioned. But its God's light that we and our children are being offered. We're invited to trust that it's better than anything we can plan for our children.

The season of Advent that begins this weekend is a time of waiting and yearning for a gift from God that will brighten our darkness in wholly unexpected ways. May this holy season transfigure this waiting that parents live every day of their vocations. †

For The Journey/Effie Calderola

Like pope, be a positive influence for good in the midst of negativity

A friend has been diagnosed with stage 4 lymphoma. She is part of my faith sharing community, which means she is surrounded by prayer, support and hearts that listen.



Her attitude inspires us. She is filled with gratitude for the life she has lived, and faith that God is with her through this struggle no matter the outcome. One thing she says fills

her with joy and hope is the pontificate of Pope Francis.

When someone's world is turned upside down, it can be hard to summon joy and hope. But when you find someone like my friend, you know you have encountered a person of genuine faith. As someone in my group remarked, here we stand on sacred ground.

The world can tempt all of us to despondency, and we can always find something to be anxious about.

But a Christian is called to joy. "Rejoice in the Lord always," St. Paul tells us (Phil 4:4).

The key question is: Where do we find the peace and joy that surmounts these nagging anxieties? How do we make Jesus our center?

When traveling cross-country recently, I noticed an enormous building. A sign proclaimed it was an "Amazon fulfillment center." I prayed over that word, fulfillment.

What does it mean to be fulfilled? To achieve what has been promised or hoped for? Can Amazon fulfill my hopes and dreams? Or was this facility's use of that word a laughable parody of true fulfillment?

Then, there was this recent headline: "Will supply chain issues ruin Christmas?" Ruin Christmas? Because you don't get the toy, the device, the sweater, the "stuff" you were hoping for? This headline speaks to the desert that is our consumer culture.

So, like my friend, I turn to Pope Francis. In my lifetime, I have not encountered a more prophetic figure. His encyclical, "Laudato Si", on Care for Our Common Home, was an environmental clarion call unheeded in many churches in the U.S.

Each day, his words spur us to prayer and to action and remind us of the Church's long legacy of social justice.

"Christian joy is peace, peace that is deeply rooted, peace in the heart, the peace that only God can give," said Pope Francis, whose apostolic exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel," helps us understand what true joy is to a Christian.

Pope Francis constantly draws us closer to the poor, to the social justice mission that is the heart of the Gospel and must be the heart of the Church. He reminds us that we need Jesus, and that when we encounter him, he sends us forth to the least among us, to the margins, to the refugee, the unborn, the death-row inmate, to those in need of healing.

An article in *Commonweal* magazine tells the inspiring story of a Catholic Worker House, Casa Juan Diego, in Houston, which serves migrants arriving from Central America. It quotes Pope Francis, who often speaks of the plight of refugees: "This is the work the Lord asks now of us, and there is great joy in it."

Pope Francis reminds us that what brings joy is doing the Lord's work. So don't fret constantly about the future, about the plastics that engulf us, about the rising sea temperatures. Ask: What can I do? And then, do it joyfully. Be a positive influence for good, as Pope Francis is, in the midst of negativity.

Rejoice in building a Church that is devoted to the Gospel, which calls us to Christ, he who sends us to serve with trust and gratitude the poorest among us.

(Effie Calderola writes for *Catholic News Service*.) †

Window Seat Wisdom/Katie Prejean McGrady

This Advent, 'wait in joyful hope' and focus on presence, not presents

I ordered our matching Christmas pajamas in early October. Worried about supply chain issues and shipping delays, I picked the Nordic blue print we liked best and bought them 11 weeks early. And then I found Jesse Tree ornaments I liked, so I ordered those too.



Advent candles came soon after, three boxes on sale on Amazon, so it

just made sense to get them now and set them aside. A new set of Christmas candy canes for the pathway came next, then an inflatable Clark Griswold my husband still doesn't know will be sitting in the front yard come Dec. 1.

"Am I ready?" I thought to myself. The gifts are hidden and all the "fixings" are ready to celebrate Advent and Christmas. Menus are prepared. Decorations are at the ready. Nativity sets have a spot on a

shelf or mantle. Now we just wait. But is it enough? Are we ready?

I'm willing to admit that my assumption of readiness based purely on having a lot of "stuff" for Advent and Christmas is entirely wrong. And I'm happy to admit that my belief that I'm ready because of having all this stuff has been fueled by this weird belief that we have to do "all the things" to make Advent and Christmas special.

But it isn't the "stuff" that makes us ready or better prepared to "wait in joyful hope" for the arrival of baby Jesus. And it isn't the perfect set of Jesse Tree ornaments or pristinely wrapped presents that make the four weeks of Advent and Christmas morning good and fruitful.

Far too often, I've fallen into the trap of thinking it is the stuff that makes us ready, makes the holidays and our celebration of them somehow better.

I've convinced myself that "liturgical living" has to include products and programs and that what we do as a family

has to measure up to some proverbial "Catholic living checklist" created by people watching us from afar.

Social media hasn't helped this. Scrolling past pictures of perfectly decorated homes and pristinely photographed desserts makes me jealous and competitive. A consumeristic culture convincing us to buy more has only accelerated this misguided approach to Advent and Christmas.

Not fully understanding the gift and meaning of Advent, and why the Church has us slowly build to the birth of Christ, has only hurt any healthy approach to the holidays.

If we can get back to the realization that Advent is fruitful because we have four weeks set aside to focus on hope in God's promises, peace in God's plan, joy in God's providence, and love of the Lord and others, then maybe we'll see it as a gift of four weeks to slowly prepare for Jesus instead of a competition of liturgical

See ADVENT, page 11A

First Sunday of Advent/Msgr. Owen F. Campion

The Sunday Readings

Sunday, November 28, 2021

- Jeremiah 33:14-16
- 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:24
- Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

With this First Sunday of Advent, the Church begins a new liturgical year. As such, the readings for Mass on Sundays in the year to come will be from the “C” cycle of the Lectionary, the collection of biblical texts used by the Church for readings at Mass.



The first reading for this weekend is from the Book of Jeremiah, written when times were hard for God’s people. The dynasty formed by King David had disappeared, extinguished by infighting and internal intrigue. Its collapse had deep religious implications.

God had a covenant with David and his successors. Their task was both to govern and to keep the nation of Israel faithful to God.

With the end of the unified monarchy under David and his heirs, no other figure or authority had God’s commission to exercise the role of strengthening the national bond with the Almighty.

More ominously, it seemed as if the instrument selected by God for this purpose, namely kings of the Davidic dynasty, yielded to pressures and temptations. Obviously too often the monarchs forgot their obligation to preserve the people’s relationship with God.

Despite these circumstances, Jeremiah promised that indeed God will endure. His justice will prevail. The people must not lose faith.

For its second reading, the Church presents a passage from St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Thessalonians, modern Saloniki, in Greece. The reading calls upon the Christians of Thessalonica to love each other. The call was simple, but not easily achieved given human nature. Christians must love all, no exceptions.

Paul insists that the Lord soon will return to Earth in triumph as the great judge. It will be a revolutionary moment. All evil will be subdued. Good and truth will reign supreme. Jesus will reign.

Christians should prepare themselves for this great event by loving others in the model of Jesus, who loved all humanity, even to the point of sacrifice on Calvary.

St. Luke’s Gospel furnishes the last reading. When reading or hearing a reading from any of the Gospels, it is important to realize that the Gospels were written decades after Jesus had ascended to heaven.

This does not mean that the Gospels are fiction. Rather, each evangelist saw Christ and the events in his life with his own perception and in the light of events and attitudes experienced by each when the Gospel was written. The message of Jesus is timeless, but it must be applied to real life moments.

When Luke’s Gospel was written, the tide was turning against Christians. They were in danger.

The author of St. Luke’s Gospel recalled words of Jesus to encourage and embolden his disciples. Come what may, the Lord will return and be victorious over all evil. The forces of darkness will be laid low.

Do not weaken. Stay with Jesus.

Reflection

Advent often is described as a time to prepare for Christmas. It is this, but it has two other purposes. It exists to enable us to reform ourselves, so that we can worthily meet the Lord when he returns.

Finally, it calls us to prepare ourselves for the decisive coming of Jesus when we die, and at the end of time, by reminding us that we are mortal. Jesus will return to the Earth. He will vindicate the right.

The forces of evil will wither and die. They will fall before the glory of the risen Lord. He will reign forever. Everything else will pass away.

We must be with the Lord or place ourselves opposite the Lord. If we reject God, we shall die.

How do we prepare for all this? We prepare by keeping first and foremost our purpose to love God above all else, and by loving all others, in the example of the Lord. †

Daily Readings

Monday, November 29

Isaiah 2:1-5
Psalm 122:1-9
Matthew 8:5-11

Tuesday, November 30

St. Andrew, Apostle
Romans 10:9-18
Psalm 19:8-11
Matthew 4:18-22

Wednesday, December 1

Isaiah 25:6-10a
Psalm 23:1-6
Matthew 15:29-37

Thursday, December 2

Isaiah 26:1-6
Psalm 118:1, 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a
Matthew 7:21, 24-27

Friday, December 3

St. Francis Xavier, priest, principal patron of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis
Isaiah 29:17-24
Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14
Matthew 9:27-31

Saturday, December 4

St. John Damascene, priest and doctor of the Church
Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26
Psalm 147:1-6
Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5a, 6-8

Sunday, December 5

Second Sunday of Advent
Baruch 5:1-9
Psalm 126:1-6
Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11
Luke 3:1-6

Question Corner/Fr. Kenneth Doyle

The Church observes Sunday as the Lord’s Day, not as the Sabbath



Why do some religions say that the Sabbath day is Saturday while others—including Catholics—say it’s on Sunday? (Missouri)

No, Catholics do

not say that the Sabbath is on Sunday. The Sabbath is on Saturday, as it was in the Old Testament when God rested from all the work he had done in creation (Gn 2:2-3) and as it is observed by Jews today.

Christians, though, celebrate Sunday instead, because that is the day on which Jesus rose from the dead and the day on which the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains: “Sunday is expressly distinguished from the Sabbath which it follows chronologically every week; for Christians its ceremonial observance replaces that of the Sabbath. In Christ’s Passover, Sunday fulfills the spiritual truth of the Jewish Sabbath and announces man’s eternal rest in God” (#2175).

What Christians are celebrating instead

of the sabbath is what the Church calls the Lord’s Day, and that has been the case since the first century. As the Acts of the Apostles relates: “On the first day of the week, when we gathered to break bread, Paul spoke to them” (Acts 20:7).

So, for Christians, Sunday is the pre-eminent holy day of the week, the day on which we refrain from servile work, devote ourselves to the Eucharist, to prayer and family gatherings.

Around 110, St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch and a disciple of the Apostle John, proclaimed: “Let every friend of Christ keep the Lord’s Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days.”

Some Protestants believe in the rapture. This was never really discussed in Catholic school when I was a student. What is the Catholic Church’s belief regarding it? It would be wonderful to know that we will not have to live through the tribulation. (Indiana)

If, by the “rapture” one understands that, at the second coming of Jesus, all the faithful, living and dead, will undergo a bodily assumption into heaven—then, yes, I would say that Catholics do believe this.

But there are other elements in what is sometimes understood as “rapture theology” that are not consistent with Catholic teaching—especially the notion that there will be a secret coming of Christ where he will snatch believers up to heaven and leave others behind to experience a period of severe tribulation.

Supporters of this view look to the passage in St. Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians, which says, “For the Lord himself ... will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess 4:16-17).

The Catholic understanding of this passage is simply that those believers who are alive at Christ’s second coming will not experience death, but will be transformed in glory and join the saints already with the Lord.

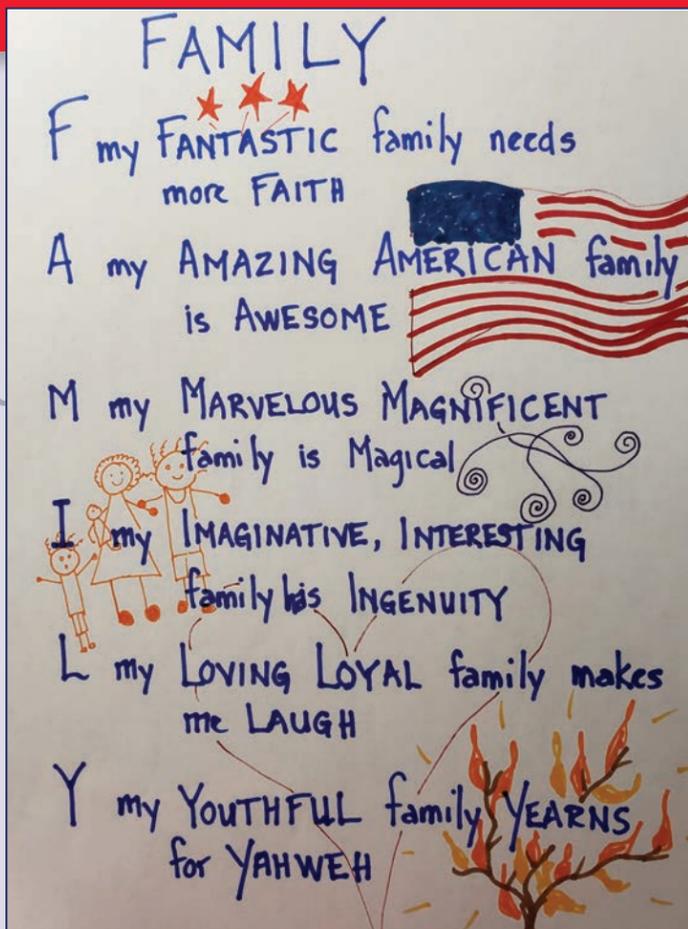
Catholic theology finds no evidence to support a belief in a subsequent period of tribulation and chaos. At the same time, the Church, in contrast to some Protestant traditions, does not teach that believers will be saved from tribulation before Christ’s return.

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

My Journey to God

FAMIL
FAMIL
FAMIL

(This poem was written communally by a group of Catholics who attended the 2021 Special Religious Development [SPRED] retreat at the Benedict Inn & Conference Center in Beech Grove on Aug. 7-8. As a retreat activity, four separate groups of retreatants and volunteers each created an acrostic poem by thinking of words that started with the letters of a primary word. Benedictine Sister Cathy Anne Lepore then copied and decorated each poem. The additional poems will run in future editions of The Criterion. This poem was created by Andrea Alexander, Kathleen Fitzgerald, Amy Korzekwa, Nicole McConnell, Mary McCoy, Chris Rish, Michael Rish, Jenny Stetzl, Nicholas Swallers and Sandy Toll.)



Advent during pandemic remains a season of compassion, pope says

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—
With Advent coming during an ongoing pandemic, Christians are called to hold on to hope and foster a season of compassion and tenderness, Pope Francis said.

During Advent this year, too, “its lights will be dimmed by the consequences of the pandemic, which still weighs heavily on our time,” he said on Nov. 22. “All the more reason why we are called to question ourselves and not to lose hope.

“The feast of the birth of Christ is not out of tune with the trial we are going through because it is the quintessential feast of compassion, the feast of tenderness. Its beauty is humble and full of human warmth,” the pope said during an audience with organizers and participants in a Christmas music contest. The contest was proposed and promoted by the Pontifical Foundation Gravissimum Educationis and Don Bosco Valdocco Missions association, based in Turin.

The contest invited people between the ages of 16 and 35 to produce new songs inspired by Christmas and its values: life, love, peace and light, according to the initiative’s website, christmascontest.it/en/. Contestants were competing in three categories: lyrics, music and interpretation, and the best three pieces will be performed during the 2021 edition of the annual Christmas concert at the Vatican.

The pope thanked the groups who came up with the idea for the contest, “which gives voice to the young, inviting them to create new songs inspired by Christmas and its values.

“The beauty of Christmas shines through in the sharing of small gestures of genuine love. It is not alienating, it is not superficial, it is not evasive,” he said.



Pope Francis touches a soccer ball during an audience with Christmas music contest participants at the Vatican on Nov. 22. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

The beauty of Christmas “expands the heart, opening it up to gratuitousness—gratuitousness, a word artists understand well!—to the giving of self,” and it can also foster cultural, social and educational life and activities, he added.

Pope Francis quoted what St. Paul VI told artists during Advent in 1965: “This

world in which we live needs beauty in order not to sink into despair.”

It must not be the false beauty “made of appearances and earthly riches, which are hollow and a generator of emptiness,” Pope Francis said. It must be the real beauty “of a God made flesh, the one of faces—the beauty of faces, the beauty of

stories” and the beauty of “creatures that make up our common home.”

He thanked the young people, artists and other participants “for not forgetting to be custodians of this beauty that the nativity of the Lord makes shine in every daily gesture of love, sharing and service.” †

Advent penance services are scheduled at archdiocesan parishes

Parishes throughout the archdiocese have scheduled communal penance services for Advent. The following is a list of services that have been reported to *The Criterion*.

Batesville Deanery

- Nov. 30, 7 p.m. at St. Mary, Greensburg
- Dec. 3, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. at All Saints Parish, St. Martin Campus, Dearborn County
- Dec. 5, 9:30 a.m. at Immaculate Conception, Millhousen
- Dec. 10, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. at Camp River Ridge, 6145 Harvey Branch Road (A-frame house), Oldenburg.
- Dec. 12, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. at St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Aurora
- Dec. 12-14, 7-7:50 a.m. and 6-6:50 p.m. at St. John the Baptist, Osgood
- Dec. 14, 7 p.m. at St. Catherine of Siena, St. John the Evangelist Church, Decatur County
- Dec. 15, 6 p.m. at St. Vincent de Paul, Shelby County
- Dec. 15 and 16, 6:30 p.m. at Holy Family, Oldenburg
- Dec. 17, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. and 2:30-6:30 p.m. for St. Louis, Batesville and St. Anthony of Padua, Morris, at St. Louis
- Dec. 17, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. at St. Joseph, Shelbyville
- Dec. 21, 6-7 p.m. at St. Michael, Brookville

- Dec. 22, 7 p.m. for St. Louis, Batesville, and St. Anthony of Padua, Morris, at St. Louis
 - Dec. 22, 6:30-7:30 p.m. at St. Peter, Franklin County
- Additionally, recurring opportunities for reconciliation in the Batesville Deanery are as follows:*
- Half-hour before all Masses at Oratory of SS. Philomena and Cecelia, Oak Forest
 - Expanded reconciliation times at St. Charles Borromeo, Milan; St. Maurice, Napoleon; and St. Nicholas, Ripley County. Contact parishes for details.

Bloomington Deanery

- Dec. 2, 7 p.m. at St. Vincent de Paul, Bedford
- Dec. 9, 6-9 p.m. for St. Charles Borromeo Parish and St. Paul Catholic Center, Bloomington, at St. Paul Catholic Center
- Dec. 14, 6:30 p.m. at St. John the Apostle, Bloomington
- Dec. 15, 6:30 p.m. at St. Jude the Apostle, Spencer
- Dec. 16, 6 p.m. at St. Martin of Tours, Martinsville
- Dec. 16, 7 p.m. at St. Agnes, Nashville

Connersville Deanery

- Dec. 1, 6:30 p.m. at St. Gabriel, Connersville
- Dec. 6, 6 p.m. at St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Cambridge City
- Dec. 14, 6 p.m. at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Holy Family Church, Richmond
- Dec. 16, 6:30 p.m. at St. Mary, Rushville

Indianapolis East Deanery

- Nov. 30, 7 p.m. for Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Therese of the Infant Jesus (Little Flower) at Our Lady of Lourdes
 - Dec. 1, 7 p.m. at St. Thomas the Apostle, Fortville
 - Dec. 14, 7 p.m. at Holy Spirit
- Additionally, reconciliation in the East Deanery is available on the following dates:*
- Dec. 14, 9 a.m.-7 p.m. at Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St.

Indianapolis North Deanery

- Nov. 28, 2 p.m. at St. Lawrence
- Nov. 29, 7 p.m. at St. Joan of Arc
- Nov. 30, 7 p.m. at St. Matthew the Apostle

Indianapolis South Deanery

- Dec. 15, 7 p.m. for St. Jude, St. Mark the Apostle and Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ at St. Jude
- Dec. 16, 6:30 p.m. for Holy Name of Jesus, Beech Grove, and Good Shepherd, Indianapolis at Holy Name of Jesus
- Dec. 18, 8:30 a.m. at SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi, Greenwood

Indianapolis West Deanery

- Dec. 9, 7 p.m. for St. Thomas More, Mooresville, and St. Ann (South Deanery), at St. Thomas More
 - Dec. 10, noon-1 p.m. at St. Malachy, Brownsburg
- Additionally, recurring Advent opportunities for reconciliation in the West Deanery are as follows:*
- Sundays: 8-8:30 a.m. at St. Anthony; 9:30-10 a.m. at Holy Angels; 1:45-2:45 p.m. at St. Monica; 3 p.m. at St. Gabriel the Archangel
 - Mondays: 5:15-5:35 p.m. at St. Michael the Archangel
 - Tuesdays: 5-5:45 p.m. at St. Michael the Archangel; 6-7 p.m. at St. Monica
 - Wednesdays: 5:30-5:50 p.m. at St. Susanna, Plainfield; 6 p.m. at St. Gabriel the Archangel; 6-7 p.m. at St. Monica; 6-7 p.m. at Mary, Queen of Peace, Danville
 - Thursdays: 6-7 p.m. at St. Monica; 7-8:30 p.m. at St. Malachy, Brownsburg
 - Fridays: 4-5 p.m. at St. Christopher; 5-5:45 p.m. at St. the Archangel; 5:30- 6 p.m. at St. Susanna, Plainfield; 7 p.m. at St. Gabriel the Archangel
 - Saturdays: 10-10:30 a.m. at St. Susanna, Plainfield; 3-4:30 p.m. at St. Anthony; 3:45-4:30 p.m. at Mary, Queen of Peace, Danville; 4 p.m. at St. Gabriel the Archangel; 4-4:45 p.m. at St. Monica; 4-5 p.m. at St. Michael the Archangel; 4:30-5 p.m. at St. Christopher

New Albany Deanery

- Dec. 1, 6:30 p.m. at St. Michael, Bradford
- Dec. 9, 6:30 p.m. at St. John Paul II, St. Paul Campus, Sellersburg
- Dec. 14, 7 p.m. at St. Mary, Lanesville
- Dec. 15, 7 p.m. at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, New Albany
- Dec. 15, 7 p.m. at St. Mary, Navilleton
- Dec. 19, 4 p.m. at St. John the Baptist, Starlight
- Dec. 21, 7 p.m. at St. Anthony of Padua, Clarksville
- Dec. 22, 7 p.m. at St. Mary-of-the-Knobs, Floyd County

Seymour Deanery

Parishes in this deanery are expanding reconciliation periods and priest availability. Contact parishes for information.

Tell City Deanery

- Dec. 12, 1-2:30 p.m. at St. Paul, Tell City

Terre Haute Deanery

- Dec. 1, 8, 9 and 15, 7 p.m. at St. Benedict, Terre Haute
- Dec. 10, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. “Twelve Hours of Grace” at St. Margaret Mary, Terre Haute
- Dec. 15, 6:30 p.m. at Sacred Heart, Clinton
- Dec. 16, 1:30 p.m., Sacred Heart of Jesus, Terre Haute †

Online Lay Ministry Formation

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

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

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



REPORT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT NOW

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

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

Investing with Faith/Jolinda Moore

Consider ways to support the Church with end-of-year gifts

It's hard to believe, but 2021 is entering its final month in a few days. The beautiful season of Advent begins this weekend, and hopefully you just enjoyed a memorable Thanksgiving holiday. At its best, these days each year are marked with faith, family and friends, as well as a spirit of connectedness and thinking of others. Our own blessings from God often come into focus in a unique way, and the joyful urge to share those with others can play upon our hearts.



In the archdiocesan Office of Stewardship and Development, we have a unique opportunity to witness firsthand how this sense of gratitude and generosity often continues on through Christmas and the end of the year in the form of gifts for archdiocesan ministries. Whether it's someone's United Catholic Appeal (UCA) pledge contribution or parish capital campaign gift or donation to a school's endowment, the Catholic faithful's desire to give back and care for those in need is evident.

If you find yourself with this inclination to support the Church before the end of the calendar year, we want to share that there may be certain types of charitable gifts that can offer advantages to you as well. A number of giving strategies can help lower your income and taxes this year, shifting tax dollars to charitable dollars to support your favorite cause. Though rarely the

primary motivation, these personal tax benefits can factor into one's stewardship of resources and even allow for a greater charitable gift.

In this brief space, I'll mention two of the most popular end-of-year gifts that we see as well as a unique option for 2021:

• **A gift from your IRA**—If you are 70½ or older, a tax-friendly alternative to an outright gift of cash is a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) from your individual retirement account (IRA). Although this gift does not qualify for a tax deduction, it is tax-free, as it goes from your IRA custodian directly to the parish, school or agency of your choice. Moreover, it does not count toward your gross income, which can provide additional tax advantages. If you are 72 or older and have a required minimum distribution (RMD), a QCD can satisfy some or all of your IRA's RMD. Even if you don't itemize on your tax return, a QCD gift can offer unique benefits to a donor.

• **A gift of appreciated securities**—A gift of appreciated assets, such as stocks, bonds or mutual funds to benefit your favorite parish, school, agency or appeal (like UCA!) can make a big impact for the cause and, potentially, for you. It avoids capital gains tax, with the ministry receiving its current value, and allows you to take an income tax deduction for this fully appreciated amount, even if you paid much less for it years ago. As a service to all of our parishes, schools and agencies, all gifts of securities are processed through the archdiocese's single brokerage

account, with the designee receiving 100% of the gift.

• **Raised AGI limit for cash gifts**—In 2021, there is an increased limitation on charitable deductions for cash gifts, from 60% adjusted gross income (AGI) to 100% AGI. Some donors could find 2021 a very good year to make a large cash gift.

As you experience this season of giving, please know that we are here to help you explore any end-of-year charitable strategies and serve the parish, school or ministry that you cherish. We take great care to ensure that all gifts are used to fulfill a donor's intentions. Please visit our website, www.archindy.org/CCF, to share with us details on gifts of IRA, stock or transactions from your donor advised fund. If you would like further information on any of these gifts, please contact us.

(Jolinda Moore is executive director of the archdiocesan Office of Stewardship and Development and the Catholic Community Foundation [CCF]. Tax or legal information provided herein is not intended as tax or legal advice. Always consult with your legal, tax or financial advisors before implementing any gift plan. If you would like to learn more about including your parish in your estate plans, please contact us any time. We exist to exclusively serve you and your parish in planned giving. For more information on the CCF, visit www.archindy.org/CCF, e-mail ccf@archindy.org, or call 317-236-1482.) †

ADVENT

continued from page 8A

living activities to complete.

If we can remember that it's the arrival of the newborn king, Emmanuel, that makes Christmas good, then maybe we'll realize all the other "stuff" (even stuff I've frantically purchased and set aside) are just extras, maybe helping make those days better, but certainly not things required or necessary for the seasons we're approaching to matter.

Rather than fall prey to the belief that

we have to do a dozen family devotionals and handcraft our Advent candles from beeswax kits because we will craft our way through the season (damn it!), maybe this Advent can be one of intentional slowing down, and doing more with less.

Maybe this Christmas can be one focused less on presents under the tree and more on the presence of loved ones. Maybe we avoid running the "liturgical living rat race" by recognizing that we're not in competition with anyone else and the way they prepare for and live the holidays is not the way we have to do it.

I rushed to buy all the "stuff" (and

bought it early) because I weirdly believed it would help me be more ready for a liturgical season that seeks to end our rushing and wants to change our misguided perceptions of readiness.

Rushing to have and do all the things and readying stuff to look at and cling to does nothing to help us let Christ rush into our lives and ready our hearts for the kingdom of heaven.

As we get ready for Advent (beginning on Sunday, Nov. 28), let's strive to slow down and intentionally and purposefully look to buy and do less so we can make room for more of the Lord in our lives.

(Katie Prejean McGrady is an international Catholic speaker and award-winning author and host of The Katie McGrady Show on Sirius XM.) †

Employment

Director of Pastoral Care St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic Church

St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic Church, which serves a Roman Catholic community of more than 9,700 in Carmel, IN, seeks candidates for our position of Director of Pastoral Care to serve seniors in our area with compassionate, supportive care.

The successful candidate will be responsible for providing pastoral care, support, programs and resources to meet the needs of the members of the community with the love of Christ and extending the resources of the parish to meet each person in their specific circumstances – whether one is middle-aged to senior, or struggling with physical or mental-emotional health, grieving, or otherwise in need of support. By providing practical assistance and spiritual guidance for life's transitions and crises, the Director of Pastoral Care will serve as a leader in the community and resource to the parish in implementing an integrated and Comprehensive vision of Pastoral Ministry.

The responsibilities of the Director will cover many functions relating to spiritual health, counseling and education: providing spiritual support services and outreach programs; collaborating with parish staff to educate parishioners on mental health issues; coordinating "needs specific" support groups; palliative and bereavement care; Responsibilities also include maintaining a network of institutional/community contacts, organizations, and volunteers to ensure that each person has access to appropriate, helpful resources; Home visits and hospital visits/One-on-one visits with parishioners dealing with transitions; Follow-up with the bereaved/ One-on-one bereavement sessions as needed.

The Successful candidate will be a Catholic in good standing, a Bachelor's degree is required (master's preferred) Pastoral Ministry, Catholic Studies, Theology, Divinity Studies, Clinical Pastoral Education preferred, but not required. Additionally, prefer five+ years' experience in pastoral care in a church setting or in a counseling setting. Working with the aging population also preferred.

Qualified and interested candidates are invited to send letter (email preferred) of interest and resume to:

 Kevin Sweeney
Director of Operations and Finance
St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic Church
10655 Haverstick Road
Carmel, IN 46033
kevin.sweeney@setoncarmel.org

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Employment

Director of Operations

Our Lady of Mt Carmel is currently seeking a candidate to fill the position of Director of Operations ("DOO"). The DOO supports the Pastor with the stewardship of the human, financial, informational and physical resources of the Parish and serves as the professional administrator and strategic leader of the Parish. Applicant must have a Bachelor's degree in Business (preferably accounting) and a minimum of 5 years of experience in accounting or business management, possess advanced proficiency in computer use in general and Microsoft Excel specifically, be very organized and confidential, and possess strong interpersonal skills. Pay is commensurate with experience and benefits are included.

To apply, please send your resume to Glen Ritchey at ritchevg@olmc1.org by Dec 10, 2021.

Director of Liturgical Music Ministries

St. Louis de Montfort Church in Fishers, Indiana has an immediate opening for a *Director of Liturgical Music Ministries*.

The director is responsible for the effective preparation, coordination, performance and leadership of music with the liturgical celebrations of the parish including the school liturgies. Recruiting, forming and supervising music ministers will be important in this role.

This person of faith is both a pastoral minister who possesses a vision of how SLDM can develop its potential and a professional who holds specialized credentials in music and has a thorough understanding of Roman Catholic liturgy. A Bachelors Degree in Music and at least 3 years experience as a pastoral musician is required.

To apply for the position, please send your resume to BFreyberger@sldmfishers.org.

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Questions: Contact Dana Stone at 317-236-1591.

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