Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Christmas greetings of good tidings and joy! Celebrating the incarnation of God becoming man in the person of Jesus Christ, whatever one’s plight in life, is a cause to rejoice. Our Savior was born into earthly poverty that we might reap the heavenly riches of eternal life. There has been much weighing upon the spirit of humanity during this last year. We continue striving to overcome the struggles of COVID amid an increase in violence, mental health issues, ever-increasing polarization, humanitarian concerns, impact of natural disasters and social unrest throughout our country as well as the world. Many are still struggling with health, economic, housing and justice issues. Underlying all these issues and concerns is our need for meaning, purpose and belonging. Christmas reminds us that our deepest hungers, thirsts, desires and needs are ultimately satisfied by divine grace, mercy and love. The celebration of Christmas marks how God provides for humanity what is beyond that which can be met by the world. After all, it is the Creator rather than created beings or things that make salvation possible for us. The Christmas event, the birth of Jesus Christ, involves nothing less than the supremely divine being of all creation breaking into the human condition in a way that exceeded human imagination and invention. In the person of Jesus Christ, God became one like us in all things but sin. He came to us so that nothing could prevent us from being reconciled to Him and one another. Today’s world is not completely unlike that of the first Christmas, when Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph in the humble surroundings of a cave-like manger. At that time, humanity was plagued with the scourge of war, insurrection and injustice that often resulted in the most vulnerable being cast into greater poverty and desperate for refuge. It is not by denying all the muck of our human condition, but by fully acknowledging its reality, that we are able to truly appreciate the gift of salvation offered in the coming of Emmanuel, a name meaning “God is with us.”

A Christmas Message from Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Queridos hermanas y hermanos en Cristo:

¡Saludos navideños de buena voluntad y alegría! Independientemente de la situación de cada uno en la vida, celebrar la encarnación de Dios hecho hombre en la persona de Jesucristo es un motivo de alegría. Nuestro Salvador nació en la pobreza terrenal para que pudiéramos cosechar las riquezas celestiales de la vida eterna. El espíritu de la humanidad ha sufrido mucho durante este último año y seguimos esforzándonos por superar las dificultades de la COVID-19 en medio del aumento de la violencia, los problemas de salud mental, la polarización cada vez más acentuada, las preocupaciones humanitarias, el impacto de los desastres naturales y el malestar social en todo el país, así como en el mundo entero. Muchos siguen luchando contra los problemas de salud, económicos, de vivienda y de justicia. En todas estas cuestiones y preocupaciones subyace nuestra necesidad de encontrar sentido, propósito y pertenencia. La Navidad nos recuerda que nuestras hambres, sedes, deseos y necesidades más profundas son satisfechas en definitiva por la gracia, la misericordia y el amor divinos. La celebración de la Navidad destaca la forma en que Dios brinda a la humanidad aquello que está más allá de lo que puede satisfacer el mundo. Al fin y al cabo, es el Creador y no los seres o las cosas creadas quien hace posible nuestra salvación. El acontecimiento de la Navidad, el nacimiento de Jesucristo, implica nada

Mensaje de Navidad del Arzobispo Charles C. Thompson

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CHRISTMAS
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with us.” Jesus is Emmanuel, our hope and salvation! In Him, we are able to rise from the pressing weight of despair, fear, guilt, shame and bitterness. To be drawn into a personal encounter with Him is to reverse course from the growing polarization and radical individualism of subjective truth and look to Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life of all that is good, beautiful and holy.

And so, regardless of whatever challenges or hardships we may be facing, every man, woman and child has cause to rejoice in Jesus Christ. In Him, love prevails over hate, hope springs eternal and faith does not disappoint. I pray that each and every soul may experience the peace and tenderness of divine mercy in celebrating the birthday of our Savor, Jesus Christ, keeping in mind that the best is still yet to come.

Blessed Christmas!

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

NAVIDAD
continua de la página 1
menos que el ser supremo de todo la creación irrumpió en el mundo terrenal de un modo que superó la imaginación y la invención humana. En la persona de Jesucristo, Dios se ha convertido en uno de nosotros en todo, excepto en el pecado. Se hizo hombre para que nada nos impida reconciliarnos con Él y entre nosotros.

El mundo actual no es completamente distinto al de la primera Navidad, cuando Jesús nació de María y José en el humilde entorno de un sencillo pesebre en forma de cueva. En aquella época, la humanidad estaba asolada por el azote de la guerra, la inseguridad y la injusticia, que a menudo provocaban que los más vulnerables cayeran en una mayor pobreza y buscaran refugio desesperadamente. Únicamente al reconocer a un pueblo en el abyecto de nuestra condición humana somos capaces de valorar verdaderamente el don de la salvación que nos ofrece la venida de Emmanuel, nombre que significa “Dios está con nosotros”. Jesús es Emmanuel, nuestra esperanza y salvación! En Él, somos capaces de levantarnos del peso apremiante de la desesperación, el miedo, la culpa, la vergüenza y la amargura. Llegar a un encuentro personal con Él es revestir el curso de la creciente polarización e individualismo radical de la verdad subjetiva y mirar a Jesucristo como el Camino, la Verdad y la Vida de todo lo que es bueno, bello y santo.

Por lo tanto, independientemente de los desafíos o dificultades que podamos enfrentar, todo hombre, mujer y niño tiene motivos para alegrese en Jesucristo. En Él, el amor prevalece sobre el odio, la esperanza es eterna y la fe no se desvanece. Rezo para que todos y cada una de las almas experimentan la paz y la ternura de la misericordia divina a celebrar el cumpleaños de nuestro Salvador, Jesucristo, teniendo cuenta que lo mejor aún está por venir.

¡Buena Navidad!

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Catholics must contribute to helping protect the rights of the defenseless, weak and rejected, Pope Francis said.

“This is an intrinsic call to our faith,” and not one insignificant or “passing” moral norm, he said in an audience at the Vatican with Italian legal experts, lawyers and judges.

“Even the least, the defenseless, weak individuals have rights that must be respected and not trampled on,” he said.

The pope met on Dec. 10 with members of the Italian Catholic Jurists Union who were in Rome attending a national congress on Dec. 9-11 dedicated to the legal protection of those who are vulnerable.

“Never before have Catholic jurists been so called upon to affirm and protect the rights of the weakest in an economic and social system that pretends to include diversity but, in fact, systematically excludes those who have no voice,” Pope Francis said.

“The rights of workers, migrants, the sick, unborn children, people nearing death and the poorest are increasingly neglected and rejected in this throwaway culture,” he said.

“Those who are not able to spend and consume seem to be worthless. But to deny fundamental rights, to deny the right to a dignified life, to physical, psychological and spiritual care, and to a fair wage means denying human dignity,” he said, highlighting the way many seasonal workers are treated and literally “used to pick fruit or vegetables and then paid miserably and thrown out without any social protection.”

Official Appointments

Effective Immediately

Rev. Thomas Schliesmann, pastor of St. Lawrence Parish in Indianapolis, while appointed administrator of St. Meinrad Church in Sellersburg, still yet to come.

St. Meinrad Church

Confirmation Mass for youths of St. Meinrad Parish in Indianapolis, while pastor of St. Meinrad, at St. Meinrad Church

December 18 – 2 p.m. CST
Confirmation Mass for youths of St. Boniface Parish, Fulda, and St. Meinrad Parish, St. Meinrad, at St. Meinrad Church

December 19 – 11 a.m. Dedication of St. John Paul II Church at St. John Paul II Parish, Sellersburg

December 20 – 3 p.m. Legal Department meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center, Indianapolis

December 20 – 5:30 p.m. Serra Club Dinner for seminarians and guests at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center

December 21 – 2 p.m. Mass for priests at Rockville Correctional Facility, Rockville

December 23 – 10 a.m. Leadership Team meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center

December 24 – 10 a.m. Christmas Mass During the Night at St. Peter and Paul Cathedral, Indianapolis

December 24 – 8 a.m. Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag at St. Meinrad Church

December 26 – 6:30 p.m. Mass at Bishop Simon Bruté College at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center

January 4 – 10:30 a.m. Priest Personnel Board meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center

January 6 – 10 a.m. Leadership Team meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center

January 9 – 9:30 a.m. Mass at Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary, Indianapolis

January 11 – noon Capital campaign lunch meeting at Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ Parish, Indianapolis

January 12 – noon Lunch gathering with Archdiocese of Indianapolis priests, Indianapolis

January 13 – 8:15 a.m. Virtual Indicators meeting

January 13 – 10 a.m. Leadership Team meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center

Catholics must defend rights of the weakest, defenseless, pope says

“We are called to defend the rights of the defenseless, and not to turn our backs on them,” Pope Francis said.

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Archbishop Charles C. Thompson remembers it as a moment filled with sweetness and joy. The moment occurred at Camp Atterbury in Johnson County, the place where thousands of refugees from Afghanistan have lived since they fled their country after the United States withdrew all its military troops from their homeland on Aug. 30.

As the archbishop toured the camp on Nov. 4 and viewed the efforts to create a welcoming, temporary home for the refugees at the Indiana National Guard facility, he was touched by a moment when he was greeted with a loud “hello!” from about 40 refugee children who also wanted to shake his hand.

“Interacting with them was certainly a highlight of the visit,” the archbishop recalls. “Although their English was very limited, their smiles and sense of joy were quite inspiring.”

Archbishop Thompson was also impressed by the combined efforts of people from the local and national government—plus military units and religious and charitable organizations—to help make the transition to America as comfortable as possible for the Afghan refugees.

“It is well organized and very humane,” the archbishop says about the camp. “I was impressed with how everyone at the camp referred to the Afghan people as guests.

“They spoke of the transformation that has taken place from the first arrivals until our visit, and how much interaction was taking place among various groups of peoples. They were certainly trying to provide as much safety, care and respect as possible. At one point, they had over 7,000 guests. The number was just more than 5,000 at the time of our visit, as they were working toward resettlement for as many as possible.”

In all, the U.S. Department of Defense, in support of the Department of Homeland Security, is “providing transportation, temporary housing, medical screening and general support for at least 50,000 Afghan evacuees at suitable facilities in permanent or temporary structures as quickly as possible.” (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Trinity Carter/14th Public Affairs Detachment)

By John Shaughnessy

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson visits with Team Rubicon members supporting Operation Allies Welcome at Camp Atterbury on Nov. 4. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops offers activities and programs for Afghan guests to boost morale as they await resettlement at Camp Atterbury. This initiative provides essential support at secure locations outside of Afghanistan. The Department of Defense, through U.S. Northern Command, and in support of the Department of Homeland Security, is providing transportation, temporary housing, medical screening and general support for at least 50,000 Afghan evacuees at suitable facilities in permanent or temporary structures as quickly as possible. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Trinity Carter/14th Public Affairs Detachment)

SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral and Saint Meinrad announce Christmas liturgies

The Christmas liturgical schedules for SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, 1347 N. Meridian St., in Indianapolis, and the Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad, are as follows:

SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral
Both liturgies will be livestreamed at www.sswcc.org/streaming.
Dec. 24—10 p.m. Mass with Archbishop Charles C. Thompson as the principal celebrant. Parking will be available from 9 p.m. to midnight behind the cathedral and at the Archdiocese, contact their offices.

Saint Meinrad Archabbey Church
Christmas services will be livestreamed at www.saintmeinrad.org/live.
Dec. 24—Vespers (Liturgy of the Hours) 5 p.m. CT and Mass 10 p.m. CT
Dec. 25—Mass 10:30 a.m. CT, Vespers 5 p.m. CT
For the Christmas liturgical schedules of other religious communities or parishes in the archdiocese, contact their offices.

Pope Francis’ intentions for January

• For true human fraternity—We pray for all those suffering from religious discrimination and persecution; may their own rights and dignity be recognized, which originate from being brothers and sisters in the human family.

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

Archdiocesan agencies will reopen at 8 a.m. on Monday, Jan. 3, 2022.

Remember Those We Serve This Christmas

THOSE WHO LACK THE BASIC NECESSITIES FOR LIFE
• You serve warm meals to those who are hungry.
• You teach life skills to help people stay out of poverty.
• You keep Indianapolis center-city schools open for families who cannot afford tuition but who wish for their children to receive a Catholic education.

OUR PRESENT AND FUTURE PRIESTS AND DEACONS
• You subsidize the high cost of education for our seminarians.
• You support the formation programs for future deacons.
• You care for the retired priests who served in our Archdiocese.
• You offer retreats and sabbaticals for current priests.

PEOPLE IN VARIOUS STAGES OF LIFE WHO NEED TO KNOW AND FEEL THE PRESENCE AND LOVE OF JESUS
• You keep Catholic student centers open on college campuses.
• You support teachers and students in 67 Catholic schools.
• You offer programs for young adults.
• You help young mothers choose life instead of abortion.
• You prepare catechists to teach the faith to our children.
• You sponsor faith-centered activities for youth.

To give the gift of hope this season, scan the QR code to the right, or visit www.archindy.org/uca.

The Criterion and Catholic Center are closed from Dec. 24 to Jan. 2 for Christmas holiday

This week’s issue of The Criterion, which is our annual Christmas publication, is the last issue of 2021. The Criterion will be published again on Jan. 7, 2022, and resume its weekly schedule.

The Archdiocese of Indianapolis offices and Catholic Center, 1400 N. Meridian St., in Indianapolis, are closed from Dec. 24 through Jan. 2 in observance of the holidays. Archdiocesan agencies will reopen at 8 a.m. on Monday, Jan. 3, 2022.
God emptied himself to become human

Christians are all familiar with the story that St. Luke and St. Matthew tell about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, along with angels appearing to shepherds, and a star alerting wise men that a new king has been born. We will hear Luke’s and Matthew’s readings in liturgies during the Christmas season. But let us also meditate on the beginning of a very early Christian hymn, quoted by St. Paul in the second chapter of his Letter to the Philippians. It describes the mystery of the Incarnation: “Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness” (Phil 2:6-7).

This hymn shows that the early Christians, certainly at that time, St. Paul wrote his letter in the 50s, believed that Jesus was God. They sang that Jesus was not born at the same time when there were a number of gods in the Roman Empire. Many of those gods, though, were humans who, their followers believed, became gods. Jesus was different. He was God, who existed from all eternity, who emptied himself to become a human being.

The hymn says that Jesus was willing to empty himself to take on the form of a slave. He was emptying himself of the outward qualities of his divinity to be born as a human. For someone with the divine power of God, that is humbling himself indeed. He did not abandon his divinity when he became human. Rather he took on the form of a slave while continuing in the form of God. He was the only one in history to have two natures, the divine and the human. He was in the form of God, which means that he was part of the Holy Trinity, fully equal to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. As the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults says, “All three persons work together in the works of creation, Redemption and sanctification” (p. 62). Yet he was also a distinct person.

The prologue to the Gospel of St. John, calling Jesus “the Word,” tells us that “the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be” (Jn 1:1-3). And yet he emptied himself of those powers to become a human, like us. Well, maybe not completely. He showed himself capable of performing feats beyond human capacity like multiplying food, or healing the sick with only a word, or calming a storm at sea.

But he also took on the weaknesses of humans. He was truly a human. He felt pain, cried when his friend died, slept when he was tired. This, then, is what we celebrate at Christmas—the doctrine, and the mystery, of the Incarnation. We believe that the second person of the Holy Trinity, fully God, humbled himself to become fully human, born of a human mother through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Why did he do that? Why would someone with the powers of God lower himself to become a human? In Jesus’ case, because that was the will of his Father. As the First Letter of St. John says, “In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him” (1 Jn 4:9). St. John was even more direct in his Gospel when he told us, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

The Incarnation must lead to our redemption, which is what we celebrate during Holy Week. God determined that no more human being had the power to reconcile us with God, that it had to be done by a divine person. So, he sent his Son to do it.

Let us rejoice in the fact that God’s love for us was so great that he gave us his Son in the Incarnation. May you all have a merry Christmas.

—John F. Fink

Reflection

God guides and helps those who feel distant from him

If a day could personify my mood, this one did. Grumpy. I would call it. Gray and blustery.

I had been feeling distant from Christ for some time. It was a slow-moving train, the process that caused this feeling. It started several months ago when, just once or twice a week, I skipped my daily prayer and Scripture time. Soon I was only praying and reading Scripture now and then, and for less and less time. Before long, I felt out of the practice altogether.

I made a few feeble attempts to jump start my prayer life, but like the seeds scattered on rocky soil, the roots of my efforts withered and died.

So here I was with Advent underway, doing nothing to prepare my heart for Christmas and feeling too ashamed to even try. Why would Christ welcome the approach of so lukewarm and lazy a disciple, one who chose to do basically anything rather than spend time with him? Such were my thoughts as I drove to work. But when I suddenly, unexpectedly, my monologue turned into a dialogue.

“Do you think you’re the first person to ever abandon me?”

It wasn’t a question I asked myself. It was a question being asked of me, and the voice continued.

“How many stories have you heard of people who turn their back on me, but eventually come back and find themselves wrapped in my love? Think of the prodigal son. Think of Peter. Don’t be afraid to come to me.”

Then just as unexpectedly, my reticence and fear simply vanished. I felt light. I felt happy, and a wide, involuntary smile lit my face.

That day on my lunch hour I practically skipped to the Catholic Center’s chapel. I felt no wariness, no dread, no shame. I knelt before the tabernacle and with a grin simply said, “Thank you.”

I immediately had an image of myself as a child with God standing next to me, holding my hand and leading me gently forward toward Christ, as a parent reassuringly guides an unsure child.

Those words from Scripture were an extension of the grace-filled experience I’d had earlier that day.

Some say Christmas is all about children. As Christians, we know that it is all about Christ. Child.

In the reality of God made flesh as a completely and utterly dependent infant, he gave us an image of the ideal relationship with him: as trusting children who know no fear in approaching their love-smitten maker.

Should fear, doubt or distance take hold through sin, there is no need to lose hope. Simply recall all the sinner-saints living and dead who abandoned Christ, but were welcomed back with infinite love and mercy when they sought him.

And if there is still fear or shame in approaching him, we can take comfort in the faithful truth of his words: “For I am the Lord, your God, who grasp your right hand. It is I who say to you, ‘Do not fear, I will help you’” (Is 41:13). 

(Natalie Hoefner is a reporter for The Criterion and a member of St. Monica Parish in Indianapolis. I)

Letter to the Editor

Consent does not make an act morally acceptable, reader says

In a recent “Making Sense of Bioethics” column by Father Tad Pacholczyk in the Dec. 3 issue of The Criterion (“Sexual Atoms and Molecules”), the point is made that consent forms the basis of various sexual activities between humans in our “anything goes” culture.

Father Pacholczyk points out that consensus sexual relations create a bond between two people, whether they choose to recognize that fact or not. However, there is another aspect of “consent” that needs to be explored. Does giving consent for an act make that act morally acceptable?

Though consent is certainly important, it is not the green light our liberal culture seems to accept. Far from it. Two or more persons can consent to sin. Take the bank president who would like to skim some personal funds off the top of the bank’s income. This is known as the crime of embezzlement and is simply stealing, a violation of the Seventh Commandment.

He needs help to pull off his scheme. So the bank president approaches the chief financial officer (CFO) about “cooking the books” to hide the loss of funds, and the CFO would also get a cut. If the CFO consents to this scheme, does that make it right? Of course not.

The same applies to sexual relations. Stipulations against various sexual acts are contained in the Bible, and the Catholic Church has gone to great lengths to outline what is healthy moral sex. Two or more people consenting to do otherwise does not excuse the sin. What it does is replace God’s law with personal whim.

So the concept “consent” as allowing all manner of sexual perversion has no logical basis and should be considered sinful rationalization.

Robert Rose

Letters Policy

Letters from readers are published in The Criterion as part of the newspaper’s commitment to “the responsible exchange of freely-held and expressed opinions among the People of God” (Communio et Progressio, 116).

Letters from readers are welcome and every effort will be made to include letters from as many people and representing as many viewpoints as possible. Letters should be informative, relevant, well-expressed and temperate in tone. They must reflect a basic sense of courtesy and respect.

Letters should be typed, double spaced, and no longer than 300 words. Send letters to: “Letters to the Editor,” The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367. Readers with access to e-mail may send letters to criterion@archindy.org.
“And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Lk 1:43)

The longing for the Savior, which we experience most intensely during Advent, arises from our troubled hearts. We live in difficult times, and in spite of our many blessings as people chosen by Christ to be his missionary disciples, we are often anxious and fearful.

We know that our Lord came to our world 2,000 years ago. We know that he is present now in his word, in the sacraments (especially the Eucharist), and wherever two or three are gathered in his name. We can see our Savior in the faces of our brothers and sisters, especially those who are most in need. And yet, we long for his coming again.

The Scripture readings for the Fourth Sunday of Advent assure us that the Lord’s coming will provide comfort, healing and hope to all of us, especially to those who need us most.

In the first reading, the prophet Micah declares: “He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock among the stones of his threshing floor, by the strength of the Lord, in the majestic name of the Lord, his God; and they shall remain, for now his greatness shall reach to the ends of the Earth; he shall be peace” (Mi 5:3-4). Christ our peace will come to us from one another and from him.

The responsorial psalm gives voice to our longing: “Our shepherd, Israel, hearken, from your throne upon the cherubim, shine forth. Rouse your power, and come to save us” (Ps 80:2-3). The psalm refrain—Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved—reminds us that we are not simply passive spectators in the Lord’s coming. We must turn to him, and see his face in others, in order to experience his saving power.

The second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews draws our attention to the purpose of the Lord’s coming—past, present and future. “Behold, I come to do [God’s] will” (Heb 10:7), he says, and the letter explains, “by this ‘will’, we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10). The Savior that we long for comes to do his Father’s will and by confirming us to that same will he saves us from all our fears. He sets us free.

The Gospel reading from the first chapter of Luke illustrates how the Lord’s coming can transform us from timid, fearful and self-centered people into women and men for others. Mary opens her heart and says “yes” to God’s will for her. Then she immediately sets out on a difficult journey to provide comfort, healing and hope to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, who St. Luke tells us “leapt for joy” (Lk 1:41) while still in his mother’s womb. Two unknown children, Jesus and John, encounter each other for the first time as a result of Mary’s decision to comfort her cousin in her time of need.

Elizabeth’s response, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Lk 1:42), echoes across two millennia as the devotional prayer of Christians who acknowledge Mary as the mother of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We say these words now because we are confident that Mary will help us prepare for the Lord’s coming, and that her ‘yes’ to God’s will is the key to our ability to encounter him—now and in the future.

As we prepare for Christmas, let’s pray using the words of the prophet Isaiah:

“Drop down dew from above, heavens, and let the clouds rain down the Just One; let the Earth be opened and let the Savior come forth” (Is 45:8).

May your fervent desire for Jesus’ coming again cause us to remember that we each play an important role in making Christ present to others. When we set aside our own needs and desires to help others, we become the face of the Lord for them. When we follow Mary’s example, and go out of our way to bring comfort, healing and hope to those who need our help, Christ comes with us. In this way, dew drops down from heaven; the clouds rain down the Just One: and the Earth opens and brings forth our Savior.

At this time of year, many of our brothers and sisters are lost, lonely or afraid. Let’s bring Christ to them. Let’s set aside our own worries, frustrations and pains long enough to bring comfort, healing and hope to family members, friends, neighbors and even strangers.

When we do this, we’ll discover that our own longing for Christ’s return will be satisfied.

Have a blessed Christmas! 

Cristo viene a nosotros cuando lo compartimos con los demás

“Pero ¿cómo es esto, que la madre de mi Señor venga a vernos?” (Lc 1:43)

El anhelo de tener un Salvador, algo que experimentamos más intensamente durante el Adviento, surge de nuestros corazones atribulados. Vivimos tiempos difíciles, y a pesar de nuestras muchas bendiciones como personas elegidas por Cristo para ser sus discípulos misioneros, a menudo nos sentimos ansiosos y temerosos. Sabemos que nuestro Señor vino al mundo hace 2,000 años, y sabemos que ahora está presente en su Palabra, en los sacramentos (especialmente en la Eucaristía) y allí donde dos o tres se reúnen en su nombre. Vemos a nuestro Salvador en los rostros del prójimo, especialmente en los más necesitados. Y, sin embargo, anhelamos su regreso.

Las lecturas de las Escrituras del cuarto domingo de Adviento nos aseguran que la venida del Señor nos dará consuelo, curación y esperanza a todos, pero especialmente a los que más lo necesitan.

En la primera lectura, el profeta Miqueas dice que el Salvador mantendrá de pie y los apacentará con la fuerza del Señor, su Dios. Ellos habitarán tranquilos, porque él será grande hasta los confines de la tierra. ¡Y él mismo será la paz!” (Mi 5:3-4).

Cristo, nuestra paz, pondrá fin a todo lo que nos separa de los demás y de él.

El salmo responserional expresa nuestro anhelo: “Pastor de Israel, tú que guías a José como a un rebaño, tú que reinas entre los querubines, ¡escúchame! ¡Muestra tu poder, y ven a salvarnos! Restauranos, oh Dios; haz resplandecer tu rostro sobre nosotros, y salvámonos” (Sal 80:1-2). La respuesta del salmo (Señor, haz que nos volvamos a ti, que veamos tu rostro y nos salvemos) nos recuerda que no somos simples espectadores pasivos en la venida del Señor. Para ser capaces de experimentar su poder salvador, debemos dirigirnos a él, y ver su rostro en los demás.

La segunda lección de la Carta a los Hebreos destaca el propósito pasado, presente y futuro de la venida del Señor. “He venido, oh Dios, a hacerte tu voluntad” (Heb 10:7), dice, y, según explica la carta, “en virtud de esta voluntad nos santificamos mediante el sacrificio del cuerpo de Jesús Cristo, ofrecido una vez y para siempre” (Heb 9:14). El Salvador que anhelamos viene a hacer a la voluntad de su Padre y al adherirnos a esa misma voluntad nos salva de todos nuestros miedos; nos hace libres.

La lectura del Evangelio del primer capítulo de Lucas ilustra cómo la venida del Señor puede transformarnos de personas tímidas, temerosas y centradas en sí mismas en mujeres y hombres dedicados al prójimo. María abraza su coraje y le dice “sí” a la voluntad de Dios para ella. A continuación, emprende inmediatamente un difícil viaje para dar consuelo, curación y esperanza a Isabel, la madre de Juan el Bautista, de quien San Lucas nos dice que “saltó de alegría” (Lc 1:14) cuando aún estaba en el vientre de su madre. Dos niños no nacidos, Jesús y Juan, se encuentran por primera vez como resultado de la decisión de María de consolarlo a su prima a un paso en el momento de tribulación.

La respuesta de Isabel, “Bendita tú entre las mujeres, y bendito el fruto de tu vientre” (Lc 1:42), resuena a lo largo de dos milenios como la oración devocional de los cristianos que reconocen a María como la madre de nuestro Salvador, Jesús Cristo. Decimos estas palabras ahora porque estamos convencidos de que María nos ayudará a preparar la venida del Señor, y en que su “sí” a la voluntad de Dios es la clave de nuestra capacidad para encontrarlo, ahora y en el futuro.

¡Vivan las santas bajas de nuestra Navidad! 

¡Que tengas una buena y bendecida Navidad! 

Have a blessed Christmas! 

Cristo viene a nosotros cuando lo compartimos con los demás
December 22

January 12, 26

December 26

January 5, 6, 20

January 7

January 8

January 9

January 10

January 11

January 12

January 15

January 18

January 21

January 24-28

January 27

January 30

February 4

February 5

February 6

February 8

February 10

February 14-16

February 17

February 21

February 28

Announcements for couples celebrating 50, 55, 60, 65, 70 or more years of marriage are accepted. Go to cutt.ly/tmarriages or call 317-236-1858.
At a meeting of the Italian bishops’ conference last month, Pope Francis shared a reflection written by Archbishop Domenico Battaglia of Naples, Italy. The address offers some striking insights into the way Pope Francis views the episcopal ministry.

Here are the eight “Beatitudes of the Bishop”:

—“Blessed is the bishop who makes poverty and sharing his lifestyle, because with his witness he builds the kingdom of heaven.”

Pope Francis has often expressed his hope that Church leaders, and the Church herself, “would be poor” and “be for the poor.” In the spirit of his nameake, St. Francis of Assisi, the Holy Father urges all of us, but especially those who are in positions of leadership, to embrace poverty as Jesus did.

—“Blessed is the bishop who is not afraid to wet his face with tears, so that in them may be reflected the sorrow of the people, the work of priests, and who finds God’s consolation in the embrace with those who suffer.”

“Tenderness” and “closeness” are characteristics that Pope Francis frequently suggests are signs of the presence of God. During this Advent season especially, the pope reminds us that the Lord “draws near,” that he is not distant or remote but “God-with-us” (Emmanuel).

—“Blessed is the bishop who considers his ministry a service and not a power, who makes meekness his strength, gives everyone a right to a place in his heart, so as to give the promised land to the weak.”

The paradox of Christian leadership is that all power and authority come from others, and that they must become a bureaucrat more attentive to statistics than to faces, to procedures than to stories, who seeks to fight alongside man for God’s dream of justice because the Lord, encountered in the silence of daily prayer, will nourish him.

Pope Francis reminds us that missionary disciples of Jesus Christ must move beyond their comfort zone to meet the needs of God’s people even at the “peripheries,” the farthest edges of social boundaries.

—“Blessed is the bishop who has a heart for the misery of the world, who is not afraid to dirty his hands with the mud of the human soul in order to find the gold of God there, who is not scandalized by the sin and fragility of others because he knows his own at the look of the Risen Crucified One will be the seal of infinite forgiveness.”

Recall the pope’s image of “the smell of the sheep” that he says must identify true priests. Bishops are not supposed to act like princes who think they are the seed of royalty. They should be familiar with the dirt and drudgery of people’s daily lives.

—“Blessed is the bishop who stays away from the duplicity of the heart, who avoids every ambiguous dynamic, who dreams of the good even in the midst of evil, because he will be able to rejoice in the face of God, finding his reflection in every puddle in the city of people.”

Pastoral leaders should be pure of heart, not deceitful or dishonest in the dealings with others. Even when confronted with political intrigues or public controversy, bishops should “speak the truth with charity.”

—“Blessed is the bishop who works for peace, who walks along the path of reconciliation, who has a heart for the poor in the hearts of priests, who accompanies a divided society along the path of reconciliation, who takes every man and woman of good will by the hand to build fraternity: God will recognize him as his Son.”

Pope Francis describes Church leaders in three ways: walking ahead of the crowd (leading), traveling alongside their people (accompanying), and bringing up the rear (following). All three are needed. All build unity, fraternity and peace.

—“Blessed is the bishop who is not afraid to go against the current for the Gospel, and hardships his face like Jesus going to Jerusalem, without letting himself be stopped by misunderstandings and obstacles because he knows that the kingdom of God moves forth against the world.”

Bishops, pastors and all Church leaders should have the mind of Christ, undeterred by opposition or temptation as they travel together in a synodal journey to God’s kingdom. The witness of the martyrs and all the saints should help bishops negotiate the difficult road that must face as they lead us to our heavenly homeland.

(Daniel Conway is a member of The Criterion’s editorial committee.)
Pope closes Year of St. Joseph with marginalized young adults

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis closed the Year of St. Joseph with a private visit to a community in Rome that helps people experiencing marginalization, crisis or substance abuse.

“Do not be afraid of reality, of the truth, of our misery,” he told volunteers and the people they assist at the Good Samaritan fraternity or “Comunità Cenacolo,” which was founded in 1983 by Italian Sister Elvira Petrozzi to help the homeless and the sick.

Among those welcoming the pope were Cardinal Angelo Becciu, who is in charge of the Vatican’s charitable operations, and slices of the “Comunità Cenacolo,” which was founded in 1983 by Italian Sister Elvira Petrozzi to help the homeless and the sick.

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The pope encouraged all the residents “to have the courage to tell others, ‘there is a better way.’”

Pope Francis also visited and blessed the Criterion 8, a number of young people who find help at the Good Samaritan fraternity, reflecting the fact that many of the refugees are “deeply invested” in helping the children.

The educational and recreational activities are all part of an overall effort to help Afghan refugees resettle into new homes in Indiana. The men are excited to have many skills that will be welcomed in their new homes. The women are receptive to our outreach to help them deal with the stress and anxiety of leaving their homeland and begin a new life in a different country.

“Catholic Charities Indianapolis has worked very closely with an art therapy organization that we brought to the camp to help the Afghans with legal and cultural challenges as they transition to life in the United States.”

Bethuram says.

National government officials have also asked Catholic Charities and Migration Resettlement Services to lead a plan that involves training lawyers to help the Afghan guests get legal papers. The new social workers will work with adults and children in the camps across the country.

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“I am at peace now, and all the pain is gone. I love everyone from the bottom of my heart, and I had the best 25 years of my life anyone could ask for,” he told volunteers and the people they assist at the Good Samaritan fraternity, reflecting the fact that many of the refugees are “deeply invested” in helping the children.

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VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Every human being is precious and has a value that does not depend on his or her abilities, but on the fact that he or she is a person created in the image of God, Pope Francis said.

“If disability or illness makes life more difficult, it is no less worthy of being lived, and lived to the full. After all, who among us does not have limitations and does not, sooner or later, come up against limitations, even serious ones?” he said during an audience on Dec. 13 in the Vatican’s Paul VI hall.

The pope was speaking to staff and students of the Seraphic Institute of Assisi, which specializes in education, rehabilitation and care for children and young people with disabilities; the institute was celebrating its 150th anniversary.

“Disability or chronic illness does not make life less sacred, pope says

“Disability or chroni...
Mourning, prayer and a resolve to rebuild follow devastating tornadoes

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Mourning, prayer and a resolve to rebuild shattered lives, homes and businesses in Mayfield followed one of the most powerful twisters in U.S. history that leveled the city of 10,000 in western Kentucky overnight on Dec. 10.

The Bluegrass State was the worst hit as numerous devastating tornadoes traveled across it and its neighboring states of Illinois, Tennessee, Arkansas and Missouri, leveling entire communities.

As of Dec. 14, at least 74 people were confirmed dead in Kentucky, including a 2-month-old infant. 109 people remained unaccounted for.

At least 14 other people were killed in the other states: six in Illinois, four in Tennessee, and two each in Arkansas and Missouri.

As members of two of Mayfield’s faith congregations came together to pray on Dec. 12 amid rubble—piles of brick, metal and glass—prayers for their city and all of those affected by the ferocious mid-December twisters came from far and wide, including from Pope Francis and the U.S. Catholic bishops, and from close to home—Bishop William F. Medley of Owensboro, whose diocese covers western Kentucky.

A papal telegram conveyed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, said Pope Francis “was saddened to learn of the devastating impact of the tornadoes” in the Midwest and the South.

“He offers heartfelt prayers that Almighty God will grant eternal peace to those who have died, comfort to those who mourn their loss, and strength to all those affected by this immense tragedy,” it said.

“With gratitude for the tireless efforts of the rescue workers and all engaged in caring for the injured, the grieving families and those left homeless, Pope Francis invokes upon all engaged in the massive work of relief and rebuilding the Lord’s gifts of strength and generous perseverance in the service of their brothers and sisters,” the telegram, which Cardinal Parolin sent to Archbishop Christoph Pierre, the apostolic nuncio in the U.S.

Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, said the destruction and devastation was “heartbreaking”, and called for prayer and assistance for all those who were in the path of the storms.

“During this Advent season where we await in joyful anticipation for the birth of our Lord, we pray for those who have been injured, for those who have lost their lives, and for their grieving families and communities,” said Archbishop Gomez and Coakley. “May those who have been impacted by these storms find peace, comfort and hope in our faith and in God’s endless love.

“We also pray for the emergency responders and those who have begun the work of providing for the needs of the impacted in these communities in the recovery efforts,” they said in a statement issued late on Dec. 11. “We entrust all of our brothers and sisters in harm’s way to our Blessed Mother, and we ask for her continued protection and for her intercession in comforting those who are suffering.”

The two prelates urged Catholics and all people of goodwill to donate to recovery efforts and financial help for tornado victims by supporting the work of Catholic Charities USA at cut.ly/disasterrelief.

Bishop Medley in a Dec. 11 statement called on the Catholic community of the diocese “to unite in prayer ... for all of the suffering that was caused by this disaster.”

The bishop also took note of the leveling of Mayfield’s candle factory, where 110 employees were working around the clock, which is customary during the Christmas season, according to news reports.

Initially, city officials feared the death toll among factory workers would reach 70. Late on Dec. 12, a company representative told reporters that eight workers were confirmed dead, and a day later the workers who had been missing were accounted for.

“Many of those injured in the Mayfield candle factory were parishioners, and others represented migrants and the marginalized in our communities,” Bishop Medley said in his statement.

He added that through its Catholic Charities office, the diocese planned “to offer immediate help and services” for those displaced by the tornado and in need of immediate emergency financial help.

“I am proud of the many ways that your generosity always allows the Catholic Church to respond to the suffering and to families in crisis,” Bishop Medley said. “So I thank you in advance for your generous response to this terrible devastation. God will bless our generosity.”

In a Dec. 12 tweet, Bishop Medley said he visited the Catholic community of St. Joseph Parish in Mayfield: “Fr. Eric Riley, the pastor, preached on the Advent and Our Lady of Guadalupe themes of hope and joy. Neighboring parish St. Jerome of Fancy Farm welcomed them.”

A diocese briefing on Dec. 12 cited Michigan, Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear noted one tornado traveled 227 miles. “It didn’t take a roof, which is what we’ve seen in the past. It exploded the whole house. People, animals, just gone.”

“The very first thing that we have to do is grieve together,” he said, “and we’re going to do that before we rebuild together.”
Sister Jeanne Hagelskamp honored for work in founding Providence Cristo Rey High School

By Sean Galagher

The seeds of Providence Sister Jeanne Hagelskamp's vocation to religious life were planted when she grew up in her hometown—the founding of Providence Cristo Rey High School on Indianapolis' west side.

In 1997, this experience also prepared Sister Jeanne for a special mission in her hometown. She was a 30-year member of the Sisters of Providence, an order of religious sisters that has been an active presence in Indianapolis since 1840. The order is dedicated to education and ministry, and has a long history of working with students who come from low-income families.

When the Ministry of Providence asked her in 2005 if she would be willing to work with low-income kids, she accepted. She wanted to be able to do that.

"If there is one thing that has led to the school and its outcomes than Sister Jeanne," said Sister Mary Beth, a member of the Ministry of Providence.

"I can think of few other leaders who inspire better than Sister Jeanne. She's also got a wonderful caring spirit. She guided and led with a firm hand.

"And the home message was something that pertained to the school—regarding discipline and structure. She's a brilliant person and educational leader," Lechleiter said.

"So, from an academic point of view, we couldn't have had anyone stronger. She's also got a wonderful caring spirit. Yet, she was as tough as nails when she needed to be in matters that pertained to the school—regarding discipline and structure. She guided and led with a firm hand."

"We loved it. We both just laughed," Sister Jeanne said.

"I didn't know that I was getting his award. It was perfect," Providence Cristo Rey's current president Tyler Mayer said. She said that Sister Jeanne's legacy still shapes the ministry of the school today.

"The foundation laid by her hands is the key to our success past, present and, God willing, the future," he said.

"Sister Jeanne's accomplishments are far-reaching and exceptional. However, what is most impactful about Sister Jeanne is not what she does, but the way she goes about her work. In every interaction, under the spirit of Mother Theodore [Gearen], Sister Jeanne makes you feel loved and challenges you to be better. I can think of few other leaders who inspire better outcomes than Sister Jeanne.

"Eight years after she stepped away from Providence Cristo Rey, Sister Jeanne is gratified for her role in getting it started and that the school continues to carry out its special mission.

"It was a gift of a lifetime to be able to do that work with so many like-minded women and men who wanted to see a miracle happen," said Father Narvaja. "So now, Creator God, we pray that You will come among us, as we let Your Presence within us be the present we joyfully share with those we will greet and meet this day.

And joy that holds both the memory of Christ's birth and the mystery of God's desire to dwell among us.

---Sister Connie Kramer, S.P.
Archbishop dedicates new space at Mary, Queen of Peace Parish

By Peg McRoy Glover
Special to The Criterion

DANVILLE—Archbishop Charles C. Thompson blessed a newly constructed narthex at Mary, Queen of Peace Parish in Danville on Nov. 21. The dedication and blessing ceremony took place after the archbishop celebrated Mass in the parish’s church. The offering of the holy Mass and solemn blessing of our newly-built facilities,” said Father Michael Fritsch, the parish’s pastor.

About 300 parishioners gathered around Archbishop Thompson and Father Fritsch as they stood in the new narthex before a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the ceremony. “May the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, may the word of Christ dwell in us, and that all you do in work and in word you will do in the name of the Lord. May Almighty God bless and keep you all,” the archbishop prayed at the beginning of the ceremony. He then visited each classroom and office, blessing the spaces with holy water.

The dedication and blessing were the culmination of a process that began in 2015. The parish council took part in a “visioning day,” where they envisioned what Mary, Queen of Peace could look like in the future to enhance parish life. After much discernment, they developed plans to build a new parish office, religious education classrooms and a fellowship hall. To bring these plans to fruition, a building committee was formed.

Town hall meetings were conducted so parishioners could learn of the plans and voice their opinions. A three-year capital campaign was started in hopes of raising the $3 million needed to begin construction. Although the capital campaign fell short of its goal, enough was raised to begin construction on much-needed offices and classrooms. The religious education building that was built in 1954 leaked and was unsafe, and the parish offices were located in the rectory. The religious education building was razed to make way for the new structure.

In its place is a beautiful education wing with 11 classrooms and parish offices that are attached to the church with an expanded narthex.

“The newly constructed religious education wing, parish offices and connecting narthex to our existing church are a sign of the vitality and continued growth of our parish within the larger community of Danville,” said Father Fritsch.

“These are tangible results of people’s stewardship of their time, talent and treasure.”

The parish council is already looking forward and eyeing two more construction projects that will fulfill the initial vision.

The rectory needs to be renovated where the previous offices were located. Plans are also in the works to repurpose that space into guest rooms to accommodate visiting clergy and the fellowship hall will provide an excellent gathering space for parishioners and the community.

(Peg McRoy Glover is a member of Mary, Queen of Peace Parish in Danville.)
Catholic bishops decry California’s plan to become a ‘sanctuary’ for abortion

LOS ANGELES (CNS)—California’s Catholic bishops slammed a new plan endorsed by Gov. Gavin Newsom to make the state a “sanctuary” for legal abortion if Roe v. Wade is overturned.

“When families are struggling to put food on the table and pay rent, it is absurd for the state to focus on expanding abortion when the real needs of families for basic necessities remain unmet,” said Kathleen Buckley Domingo, executive director of the California Catholic Conference, the public policy arm of the state’s Catholic bishops.

“The U.S. move toward restricting abortion is underscored by the fact that while the United States has some of the highest abortion rates in the developed world, there is no discussion of the factors that cause women to seek abortions,” she said.

Domino noted that not one of the group’s recommendations considers alternatives to abortion, and there is no discussion of the factors that cause women to seek abortions.

The report, which was released this week, called for a ban on state funding for abortion and for all schools to be required to teach about alternatives to abortion, including using taxpayer money to help pay for travel expenses and lodging, child care and abortion procedures for women.

A critical piece of the bill was the requirement that educational programs about abortion must include information on alternatives to abortion.

The state’s Catholic bishops decry California’s plan to become a ‘sanctuary’ for abortion

WASHINGTON (CNS)—The Supreme Court said on Dec. 10 that clinics can continue to challenge a Texas law that bans most abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, but in the meantime the law would remain in effect.

Eight justices said the challenge could go forward.

Justice Clarence Thomas opposed it.

Chief Justice John Roberts, writing separately, urged the U.S. District Court judge to act quickly in reviewing the law.

“Today the court ruled on a procedural issue without addressing the merits of the case challenging the Texas Heartbeat Act.”

When the Supreme Court first ruled against blocking the Texas abortion law, the Texas Catholic Conference, the public policy arm of the state’s Catholic bishops, said it was a “right created by the Constitution and called it ‘inherently different from other types of personal decisions to which this court has accorded constitutional protection.’”

The day before the Supreme Court’s opinion on the Texas abortion law, a Texas state district court judge issued an advisory ruling in which he argued that the measure enforcing the state’s abortion law—involving citizens to sue its violators and receive financial compensation—was unconstitutional.

The decision, issued by Judge David Peeples, keeps the state’s abortion law in effect.

A pro-life supporter takes part in a demonstration outside the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington on Nov. 1 as the court heard arguments over a challenge to a Texas law that bans abortion after six weeks. On Dec. 10, the Supreme Court said clinics’ legal challenge to the law can continue but in the meantime the law would remain in effect.

“Today the court ruled on a procedural issue without addressing the merits of the case challenging the Texas Heartbeat Act,” was released by the Protect, Strengthen and Expand Abortion Care in California,” said released by The Criterion.

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“California doesn’t need more abortion. It needs to support women and help them be the mothers they want to be,” she said in a Dec. 9 statement.

The report, titled “Recommendations to Protect, Strengthen and Expand Abortion Care in California,” was released by the California Future of Abortion Council, a group made up of more than 40 abortion providers and advocacy groups, led by Planned Parenthood, and convened by Newsom, according to The Associated Press.

“We’ll be a sanctuary,” Newson told the AP in an interview about the proposal.

The groups’ 45 recommendations include using taxpayer money to help pay for travel expenses, lodging, child care and abortion procedures for women who come from out of state seeking an abortion in California.

Domingo noted that not one of the group’s recommendations considers alternatives to abortion, and there is no discussion of the factors that cause women to seek abortions.

She said the group’s plan would also violate “conscience protection for medical students by forcing them to be trained in abortion procedures” in order to receive scholarships, and force Catholic hospitals to either offer abortions or get out of business.

The report came a week after the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments for and against upholding a Mississippi law that bans most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy, which is what the law considers the viability of the fetus; in other words, when the unborn baby is said to be able to survive on his or her own.

During the Dec. 1 arguments, the majority of the justices appeared willing to let the ban stay in place, although analysts said the justices seemed uncertain whether to overturn Roe v. Wade or limit the degree to which it ensures a legal right to abortion on the national level.

“A decision on the case is expected sometime in the late spring or summer of 2022,” said the report.

“As more and more states in the U.S. move toward restricting abortion, California seems only able to talk about increasing access,” said Domingo, who reaffirmed the bishops’ support for “nonsurgical solutions to issues that women face” such as affordable health care, paid family leave and the resources offered by the more than 150 pregnancy care centers in California.

“The state’s Catholic bishops decry California’s plan to become a ‘sanctuary’ for abortion

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The pride and economy of our family working together makes a difference.
On Dec. 8, Catholics around the world worship at Mass in honor of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, acknowledging that Mary was born without the stain of original sin. But for the last seven years, new students and staff at Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception in Oldenburg have enjoyed an additional ceremony in conjunction with the holy day: the reception of a Miraculous Medal.

The December feast day serves as the school’s “namesake day,” explained Oldenburg Academy president Diane Laake. “To celebrate, each year new students and staff of the academy are presented with a Miraculous Medal to remind them that God’s abundant graces and protection are always near, available to assist each person as they grow in the fullness of a child of God.”

‘Franciscans have a special bond with Mary’

Laake said the tradition started “as part of our mission effectiveness plan to be more intentional about integrating our Franciscan Catholic identity and history!” The medal ceremony takes place after Communion during the academy’s all-school Mass for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. After a priest blesses the medals, Laake and school principal Angie Parmer place one around the neck of each eligible person, saying, “The Lord bless you and keep you safe under the protection of our Mother Mary.”

During the ceremony, students hear an explanation of the significance of the feast for the school, the Sisters of St. Francis, and all Franciscans, and a history of the Miraculous Medal.

The bestowing of the Miraculous Medal in conjunction with the feast of the Immaculate Conception is tied to the apparitions of Mary to St. Catherine Laboure in 1830 in France. During one of the visions, Mary told the young girl, “I am the Immaculate Conception,” the Marian title for which the academy is named.

At one point, Mary showed St. Catherine an oval frame around her image, with the words “O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you,” and requested that the image be formed into a medal. According to miraculousmedal.org, Mary explained to the young saint that those who wear the medal, which honors her Immaculate Conception, “will receive great graces, especially if they wear it around the neck.

The name of the academy—which was founded by the Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis in Oldenburg—reflects the academy’s Franciscan roots, said Laake. “Franciscans have a special bond with Mary, so it isn’t unusual to see chapels, schools and other institutions begun by Franciscans taking on a title of Mary,” she explained. “Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception is just one example.”

Others include the Oldenburg Franciscan sisters’ Chapel of the Immaculate Conception and Marian University in Indianapolis, which the Oldenburg order also established.

“It helps keep me safe and holy’

Oldenburg Academy (OA) freshman Ninah Lewis said receiving the medal “was special because it was for all freshmen, and it was like a medal welcoming you as a part of the OA family under the protection of Mary.”

Her classmate Jill Witkemper considers the Miraculous Medal “a very special devotion because it relates to our school specifically since we are named Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception. “Receiving a medal of this honor helps to remind me how God is directing me in the right path and helps me to grow closer to him and to Mary.” Not only freshman were given the medal. Will Rees, who started this school year as a junior at the academy said the medal was “special” to him. “When I put it on, it reminds me to pray and ask Mary to wrap her mantle around me and protect me throughout the day. I also ask her to keep me close to her Son and keep me from getting in the near occasion of sin.

“It’s a special devotion because it helps keep me safe and holy, and gives me faith to believe from some of the stories that I have heard of it and from those who wear it.”

The Franciscan Kitchen has a simple mission: feed the hungry.

Volunteers make up the workforce that provides a balanced, hot meal each weekday and most Saturdays from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. to those in need among us. We invite you to join us in this rewarding and uplifting ministry as a cook, doing meal prep, or serving the meal. You can schedule your preferred date and time by going to the SignUp-Genius button on our website and selecting the time slot you choose to work. We are located at 748 S. Preston St., one block south of Broadway, easily reached from I-65 in downtown Louisville.

If you wish to provide financial support, your gift would help cover the cost of making our daily meals available “to -go,” an expense that has increased since the pandemic hit. You can easily give by clicking the Donate button on our website. Expanding tax benefits enacted last December allow individuals who file the standard deduction to claim a deduction up to $300 in charitable contributions this year. A married couple filing a joint return can claim up to $600.

Will you help?

In the spirit of St. Francis, we wish you all the joys and blessings of the Advent and Christmas seasons! Thank you!

The Franciscan Kitchen
748 S. Preston St., Louisville, KY 40203
franciscankitchen.org (website)
franciscankitchen@gmail.com (email)
502-589-0140 (phone)
Christmas story can strengthen hope amid today’s hardships

By Fr. Herbert Weber

I took the time to reread my annual letter to the parish from Advent 2020. In anticipation of Christmas last year, I reminded everyone that we would find a way to celebrate the birth of the Lord that would help people remain safe, as well as participate in this wonderful mystery. Then I listed ways for families and individuals to be present, even if they couldn’t come to church.

I wrote that our parish had been livestreaming Mass for nearly 10 years, and our new church building with three cameras and skilled volunteer technicians could provide a very powerful at-home experience for those uncomfortable with gathering in a larger group.

I encouraged families to participate as a family, and I reminded them that the local bishop had lifted the obligation of Mass attendance ever since COVID-19 had shut down our parishes the previous March.

Even at that, I told parishioners that we would celebrate a number of Masses and that every other pew was closed off, that the church air filtration was good, and that people were to wear masks to protect one another.

All of that was a year ago. When Christmas arrived, the parish music director was out due to COVID-19. So was Christmas. Even at that, I told parishioners that we would celebrate a number of Masses and that every other pew was closed off, that the church air filtration was good, and that people were to wear masks to protect one another.

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In anticipation of Christmas last year, I took the time to reread my annual letter to the parish from Advent 2020. In preparation for Christmas last year, I wanted to forget. But I chose to decorate as much as other years because I wanted to remember that this wondrous mystery of the incarnation is real and needs to be celebrated. God truly is with us; we don’t want to rebel! We want to placate Rome while others wanted to rebel!

I was into that era and time that Jesus’ birth took place. The Scriptures remind us he was born among the poor, and Joseph and Mary had to flee to protect him. Life was hard. Yet we celebrate his birth as the ultimate sign of hope.

Hope is not some artificial construct of mind that causes people to overlook reality. Instead, hope is all about reality. It admits difficulties even as it reminds people they are not abandoned or alone. As I talk with people about the issues of our present day, I discover that many feel they’re powerless, abandoned or alone. Some are hanging on to a small branch as they feel they are falling off a cliff.

A mistake that we often make is thinking of hope only in terms of the future. We even say God will protect or God will save. Hope actually is about the present. Relief is already here in the belief of this season: God truly is with us now. Interestingly, such belief does not take away the issues at hand. What it does provide is the strength to continue to walk through the various difficulties and concerns. Hope has an element of certainty to it; with the virtue of hope, we intentionally acknowledge that God dwells in this land.

In the weeks before Christmas last year, I was tempted not to put up Christmas decorations in my own house, rather certain that no one else would be visiting or see the tree or mantle scene. I was not depressed by that thought, simply aware of reality.

But I chose to decorate as much as other years because I wanted to remember that this wondrous mystery of the incarnation is real and needs to be celebrated. God truly is with us; we don’t want to forget.

(Father Herbert Weber is founding pastor of St. John XXIII Parish in Perrysburg, Ohio. His weekly podcast can be found at 23church.net)
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is a sign of universality

As the cold sweeps over us during the coming winter months, we long for the warmth of August. My column that year focused on an interfaith gathering and an ecumenical gathering: the Festival of Faiths and Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

That longing finds deep expression when human beings gather to worship and witness the longing of Christians for a world united.

That All May Be One/

Fig. Rick Ginther

Faith and Family/Sean Gallagher

Let Christ transfer the family hardships into a new kind of Christmas joy

In 1734, the great classical musician J.S. Bach penned his Christmas Oratorio. Most of the music is bright and joyful as is fitting for such a happy feast. But, in the middle of it, there is a chorale with the tune of the Holy Saturday lament, a well-known commonly in English translations today, “How Is Mary Head Surrounded.”

A text related to Christmas was sung to the tune. But the message sent by the use of that tune, so well-connected in people’s minds to Christ’s crucifixion, was unmistakable.

While Christians do well to celebrate the birth of the Christ Child with great joy, they must not lose sight of the understanding consciously that the holy child of Bethlehem was destined to die a gruesome death. But it was in that death with jubilant meaning—a death that reconciled all humanity with God. The joy of Christmas is only a small footnote of the earth-shaking event that won us for his death on the cross.

But Bach didn’t discover the connection between Christmas and Good Friday. It’s been a part of the Church’s tradition since its earliest centuries. It’s seen in the ancient tradition of the Church celebrating the feast of St. Stephen, the first to die as a martyr for Christ, on the day that marks our first ever not only a clear reminder of the trajectory of Christ’s life. It also suggests that we, his followers, are asked ourselves in his story with the help of his grace.

St. Paul mysteriously wrote about this week of prayer, “Let this week be a reminder of the Ascension when we are to fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ” (Col 1:24).

The Church’s tradition tells us that while Christ’s sufferings were sufficient for our salvation for all time, nonetheless allows us to join our sufferings to his and have them thus gloriously transfigured and changed.

All of this was made possible by the Son of God—the second person of the Blessed Trinity. In other words, and thus, this one week, this seven-day cycle, affirms that we, as the Church, can allow those seven days, that is, this one week, to be a sign of the universality of the divine call, the document notes.

Leaders of worship will be the heads (judicators) of the Christian denominations, and the diocesan-widewide headquarters are located in Indianapolis. Archbishop Charles C. Thompson will be among them. The prayer service is open to all Christians. People of other faiths may also attend to witness the longing of Christians “to be one.”

Loving God is the basis of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity’s prayer service will be both in-person and livestream. This arrangement simultaneously cares for our hunger for gathering and allows those who are more virus-vulnerable to participate. It also provides for large-scale prayer for all Christians.

The church, which is located west of Bishop Chatard High School and Christ the King Parish, has existed since 1945 as a member church of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA). The church is also a member of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). Four Church families—Evangelical, Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and Catholic—make up the MECC.

The Council has a multifaceted mission. It acts as a bridge: first, between Churches, removing barriers and prejudice, and building a common witness to the resurrections Lord; next, between Christians and peoples of other religions in the region, especially with Muslims; and finally, between the Middle East and the rest of the Christian world.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is a sign of universality for us in his death on the cross. This is a death with jubilant meaning—a death that reconciled all humanity with God.

Let Christ transfer the family hardships into a new kind of Christmas joy.
The Sunday Readings
Sunday, December 19, 2021

• Micah 5:1-4a
• Hebrews 10:5-10
• Luke 1:39-45

This weekend, the Church observes the last Sunday in Advent. The first reading is from the Book of Micah. Micah is regarded as one of the minor prophets. It is a relatively short book, containing only seven chapters. (By contrast, the Book of Isaiah has 66 chapters.) Few biographical facts about the author of Micah are known, but it is thought that the author was a contemporary of the author of the first section of the Book of Isaiah and that he came from a small village some 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem.

As was the case with so many prophets of ancient Israel, Micah saw his mission as calling the chosen people away from indifference to God and from sin to piety and loyalty to the covenant with God. He lived in a time when piety was in short supply. Greed and exploitation flawed the economy. Religious practices were sparse and often insincere, and poorly presented when they did occur.

In this weekend’s reading, Micah promises that a savior will come. This savior will lead the people away from sin and to God. To be precise, the savior will come from Bethlehem.

Of course, for Micah, the reference is to a king who comes from Bethlehem. Kings had special roles for ancient Hebrews. The royal role was not primarily political. It was religious. The king’s task was to see that the nation upheld the covenant, that the people obeyed God.

The Savior inherited this role. When the Savior appears all will be well because the nation will obey God. For its second reading, the Church gives us a lesson from the Letter to the Hebrews. Heavy with its Hebrew symbolism, this epistle eloquently extolls Jesus as the Lamb of God.

In Hebrews, Jesus appears as the one true sacrifice. With this epistle, the reader is upheld as the son or daughter of God, and thus is endowed with the divine status. The Nero function of that entire passage was to prepare the reader for the Church’s celebration of Jesus as the one true sacrifice. The point is underscored in the Gospel as well. John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus to be received. The Church calls us to reality. Jesus is the one we must believe in and serve. Let Me Be an Advent Tapestry

By Sr. Susan Lindstrom, O.S.B.

O Emmanuel, weave anew Your Kingdom-tapestry in my heart this Advent season. Penetrate and reinforce the fibers of my being. Repair what has become frayed and worn. Create new patterns from life-weared threads. Re-energize me for the journey into Christmas and beyond, opening my eyes to the beauty and wonder of Your presence within and around me.

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Question Corner

Fr. Kenneth Doyle

Title of “father” for priests is a reminder of their call to serve others

Q When I came into the Church a few years ago, one of the hurdles I had to get past was addressing the priest as “Father.” My understanding of the prohibition against this was based on Jesus’ comment in the Gospel of Matthew: “Call no one on Earth your father” (Mt 23:9). What is the wider Catholic understanding of this verse? (Indiana)

A Let’s put Jesus’ directive that you reference into context by quoting the surrounding verses: “As for you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’: You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers. Call no one on Earth your father; you have but one father in heaven. So you shall not be called ‘master’; you have but one master, the Messiah” (Mt 23:8-10).

The Catholic understanding of this passage is that it was not meant to be taken literally. Otherwise, it would contradict other significant verses in the Scriptures. Doesn’t the Lord instruct us in the Book of Deuteronomy: “Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord, your God, has commanded you?” (Dt 5:16)?

So, it seems reasonable to conclude that God himself commends others to be “fathers.” And doesn’t St. Paul say: “Even if you should have countless guides to Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel”? (1 Cor 4:15)

The passage from Matthew to which you refer (Mt 23:9) came in the context of Christ’s criticizing the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of his day, the scribes and the Pharisees, because they were doing all they could to achieve rank and standing, because they “love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in the synagogues, greetings in marketplaces and the salutation, ‘Rabbi’” (Mt 23:6-7).

The focus of that entire passage was on humility and servanthood: “The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Mt 23:11-12).

So, as a priest, when parishioners call me “Father,” I don’t feel it grants me status; instead, it serves as a reminder that I am there to serve them, as any father is pledged to serve his children.

When children who have been living together in a romantic relationship with someone else for years without being married come to visit, do I put them in separate bedrooms? People laugh at me for this, but I have a real problem: Is living together no longer a sin? (Sorry—I can’t move on from my upbringing.) (Location withheld)

I am glad that you haven’t “moved on from your upbringing.” The value you are upholding is a perennial one. Yes, living together without being married is still a sin and always will be. You have every right, if unmarried grandchildren come to visit you, to assign them to separate bedrooms—and you should.

It would also be helpful to explain to them the reason: that you love them deeply and are glad to see them, but not at the expense of the values you cherish and choose to live by—values that you believe they could benefit from. If they are close to you and respect you, it might also be good, once in a while, to mention the prospect of their behavior endorsed in a Church-approved ceremony.

(Responses may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 30 Columbia Circle Dr., Albany, New York 12203.)
Dec. 1. Father of Beth Tracey, BAUMANN, Cletus R., 84, of 11. Great-grandmother of Michael Barnes. Grandmother Stepmother of Cynthia and Timothy Robinson. Earle III, Kenneth and of several. 18. Step-great-grandmother of nine. Step-grandmother of Quirn, Lawrence and Paul Dennis Amrhein. Sister of Phyllis Schwegman and Dec. 1. Mother of Lois one. Patricia Reed, Pamela Vogel Brother of Judith Kuhn, those are separate obituaries natives of the archdiocese or Order priests and religious our archdiocese are listed archdiocesan priests serving The Criterion  Friday, December 17, 2021 tions to it;
Investing with Faith/Kimberly Pohovey

In spirit of Christmas, ask how to answer God’s call to generosity

I have spent my entire career working in stewardship, development or advancement roles for Catholic churches, schools and dioceses. I am often asked how I can do this for a living, and usually those who question me quickly add that they could never do it themselves.

My reply is normally two-fold:
1) I am only successful in this profession because God is leading the conversations; and,
2) I am not asking for contributions for myself, but for the Church, schools and ministries for which I am privileged to represent.

Fundraising is not always easy, but it is incredibly fulfilling. My role, and this is true for all our staff in the archdiocesan Office of Stewardship and Development and the Catholic Community Foundation (CCF), is to help donors match their passions with God’s calling and the needs of the Church throughout the archdiocese.

Through the years, I have witnessed great generosity from the faithful. From million-dollar gifts to the sweet lady I knew who literally gave $1 to a ministry (and I happen to know she probably could not spare even that amount), I have a first-row seat to the power of the Lord working through individuals to give of their first fruits, their surplus and, sometimes, their very last dollar. All these gifts directly impact the services, activities, education and faith enhancement we offer to more than 70,000 households in our archdiocese as well as community members in need.

“We’ve all heard the adage “money is the root of all evil.” When it comes to contributing to a cause, I would challenge you to view money not as an “evil,” but an extraordinary opportunity to help bring about God’s kingdom. Like every enterprise, the reality is that the Church needs funding to continue serving others. Supporting the Church and its ministries allows each of us to give, not responding to a neediness on the ministries’ part, but to an opportunity to respond to God’s call to transform others’ lives spiritually, educationally, physically and mentally.

The great Catholic author Father Henri Nouwen wrote, “The kingdom is where God provides for all that we need.” In terms of our earthly kingdom, God works through each of us to provide collectively for the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Father Nouwen translates Ephesians 3:20 to mean “Even a small act of generosity can grow into something far beyond what we could ever ask or imagine.”

Most often, we give to the causes that are important to us. While there is nothing wrong with this, how many of us, in prayer, ask God where he wants us to contribute that will bring about his kingdom? Perhaps in the quiet of Advent, you can ask God to inspire you to give. And in the spirit of Christmas, ask yourself how you can answer God’s call to generosity.

The CCF is the conduit for God to work through you. Our staff members are honored to serve in this role. Please contact us if we can help you serve others.

(Kimberly Pohovey is the director of major and planned gifts for the archdiocese. 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. For more information on the CCF, visit www.archindy.org/CCF, e-mail ccf@archindy.org, or call 317-236-1482.)

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Saint Luke Catholic Church is seeking a Parish Manager. This person serves as the Operating Officer of the parish. Duties include planning and managing administrative and business functions including finance, human resources, and general administrative services. The Parish Manager reports directly to the Pastor.

The job description is available from the Indianapolis Archdiocesan Office of Human Resources.

Interested candidates should submit a letter of interest, resume, and any other pertinent information to Human Resources, Archdiocese of Indianapolis: hhr@archindy.org or P.O. Box 1410, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1410.

Employment

Saint Mary Academy (SMA), a National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence in Louisville, Ky., is searching for an experienced Catholic principal for the 2022/2023 academic year. A parish ministry of Saint Bernadette, SMA seeks to build a foundation for lifelong learning by opening hearts to faith, minds to knowledge, hands to service, and eyes to the world so as to achieve extraordinary lives. We are a growing Catholic school with strong parental support. Our current enrollment is 490 students from Preschool through eighth grade.

Inquiries and resumes may be sent to PrincipalSearch@SaintMaryAcademy.com.

The deadline for applications is January 21, 2022.

Saint Mary Academy

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