Pope Benedict XVI, a teacher and promoter of the faith, dies nearly 10 years after historic resignation

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Retired Pope Benedict XVI, who had an impressive record as a teacher and promoter of the Catholic faith, will also go down in history books as the first pope in almost 600 years to resign. He died on Dec. 31, 2022, at the age of 95, nearly 10 years after leaving the papacy to retire to what he said would be a life of prayer and study.

Pope Francis was scheduled to celebrate his predecessor’s funeral on Jan. 5 in St. Peter’s Square. Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office, said the funeral rites would be simple in keeping with the wishes of the late pope.

As the retired pope neared death, he was given the anointing of the sick on Dec. 28 in his residence, Bruni said. His body was placed in St. Peter’s Basilica on Jan. 2 so that people could pay their respects and offer their prayers.

Immediately after the pope died at 9:34 a.m., Bruni said, his personal secretary, Archbishop Georg Ganswein, phoned Pope Francis, who went immediately to the late pope’s bedside to pray and to offer condolences to those who had cared for him in the last years of his life.

Archbishop Ganswein told Vatican News on Jan. 1 that Pope Benedict’s last words were, “Lord, I love you.”

It was about 3 a.m. the day he died, the archbishop said. “In a faint voice, but in a clearly discernable way, he said in Italian, ‘Lord, I love you!’ I was not there at the time, but the nurse told me shortly afterward. These were his last comprehensible words, because afterward he was no longer able to express himself.”

A close collaborator of St. John Paul II and the theological expert behind many of his major teachings and gestures, Pope Benedict came to the papacy after 24 years of heading the doctrinal congregation’s work of safeguarding Catholic teaching on faith and morals, correcting the work of some Catholic theologians, and ensuring the theological solidity of the documents issued by other Vatican offices.

As pope, he continued writing as a theologian, but also made historically important gestures to Catholics who had difficulty accepting all of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, particularly about the liturgy. In 2007, he widened permission to use the “extraordinary” or pre-Vatican II form of the Mass and, a short time later, extended a hand to the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X. Besides lifting the excommunications of four of the society’s bishops who were ordained illicitly in 1988, he launched a long and intense dialogue with the group. In the end, though, the talks broke down.

Above: Pope Benedict XVI smiles as he bids the crowd farewell after celebrating Mass at Nationals Park in Washington on April 17, 2008. Pope Benedict died on Dec. 31, 2022, at the age of 95 in his residence at the Vatican. (CNS photo/Nancy Wiechec)
Reflecting on the life and ministry of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

At age 95, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI passed from earthly life into eternal life on Dec. 31, 2022. It is an occasion to reflect on the long life and ministry of a truly holy and brilliant servant of God. Some have even referred to him as the most intellectual of all the popes.

Pope Benedict XVI appointed me as Bishop of Evansville in 2011, where I served for six years before being named by Pope Francis as Archbishop of Indianapolis in 2017. I met Pope Benedict XVI on two occasions, the first time was shortly after I was ordained a bishop and the second time was during my first ad limina visit. He always struck me as very reserved and rather shy in demeanor. His decision to retire as pope in 2013, the first in centuries, was an incredible act of courage and humility.

I have often thought of Pope Benedict XVI as an excellent catechist, and Pope Francis as an excellent evangelist. Pope Francis often quoted Pope Benedict XVI, as well as Pope Paul VI. Despite media attempts to create some type of narrative of them as polar opposites, I believe that their affection and admiration for one another was quite genuine. In fact, they displayed a very complementary relationship.

My favorite quote from Pope Benedict XVI is from his December 2005 encyclical “Deus Caritas Est” (“God Is Love”). “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (#1). Authentic discipleship for Pope Benedict XVI, as for Pope Francis, begins with a personal encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. Every time we celebrate Mass, we encounter the events of his passion, death and resurrection.

Prior to being elected pope in 2005, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger served as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Pope John Paul II. It is said that he twice tried to resign from the position to return to pastoral or academic ministry in a less notable way. Both times, Pope John Paul II reportedly asked him to continue as prefect. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger was a dedicated, loyal son of the Church. No doubt, he accepted his election as pope in a rather reluctant but loyal manner.

I suspect that Pope Francis will miss Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI more than the world, and most in the Church, will ever know. Pope Benedict XVI’s decision to retire made it possible for Pope Francis to be elected. Had he not retired and continued until his death, it is hard to imagine that an 86-year-old Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio would be elected in 2013. It is our Catholic belief that the Holy Spirit guides papal elections.

The same Holy Spirit that guided the election of previous popes, like St. Paul VI and St. John Paul II, guided the elections of Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis.

Pope Benedict XVI served the Church well in all aspects of his ministry—whether as priest, bishop, cardinal, pope oremeritus pope. He was a good and faithful servant, a loyal son of the Church. May he rest in eternal peace, gazing on the face of God.

For Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Par Archibishop Charles C. Thompson

A los 95 años, el papa emérito Benedicto XVI pasó de la vida terrenal a la vida eterna en el último día de 2022. Así pues, esta es una ocasión para reflexionar sobre la larga vida y el ministerio de un servidor de Dios verdaderamente santo y brillante. Algunos incluso se han referido a él como el más intelectual de todos los papas.

El papa Benedicto XVI me nombró obispo de Evansville en 2011, donde servi durante seis años antes de que el papa Francisco me nombrara arzobispo de Indiana en 2017. Estuve con el papa Benedicto XVI en dos ocasiones: la primera poco después de mi nombramiento episcopal y la segunda durante mi primera visita ad liminum. Siempre me pareció muy reservado y bastante tímido. Su decisión de retirarse del papado en 2013—la primera vez que esto ocurre desde hacía siglos—fue un increíble acto de valentía y humildad.

A menudo me he pensado en el papa Benedicto XVI como un excelente catequista, el papa Francisco como un excelente evangelista. El papa Francisco lo cita frecuentemente, así como también al papa Pablo VI. A pesar de los intentos de los medios de comunicación de presentarlos como polos opuestos, creo que el afecto y la admiración que se sentían eran auténticos. De hecho, mostraban una relación muy complementaria.

Mi favorita del papa Benedicto XVI es de su encíclica de diciembre de 2005 “Deus Caritas Est” (”Dios Es Amor”): “No se comienza a ser cristiano por una decisión ética o una gran idea, sino por el encuentro con un acontecimiento, con una Persona, que da nuevo horizonte a la vida y, con ello, una orientación decisiva” (#1). Tanto para el papa Benedicto XVI como para el papa Francisco, el discípulo auténtico comienza con un encuentro personal con la persona de Jesucristo. Cada vez que celebramos la misa, nos encontramos con los acontecimientos de su vida, muerte y resurrección.

Antes de ser elegido papa en 2005, el cardenal Joseph Ratzinger fue prefector de la Congregación para la Doctrina de la Fe durante el papado de Juan Pablo II. Se dice que en dos ocasiones intentó renunciar a su cargo para volver al ministerio pastoral o académico de forma menos notoria. En ambas ocasiones, el papa Juan Pablo II lo pidió que continuara como prefector. El cardenal Joseph Ratzinger fue un hijo fiel y entregado a la Iglesia. Sin duda, aceptó su elección como papa de forma más reacia, pero leal.

Sospecho que el papa Francisco echará de menos al papa emérito Benedicto XVI más de lo que el mundo, y la mayoría de la Iglesia, nunca sabrán. La decisión del papa Benedicto XVI de retirarse hizo posible la elección del papa Francisco. Si no hubiera hecho, habría continuado hasta su muerte. En ese caso, resulta difícil imaginar que un cardenal Jorge Bergoglio de 86 años resultara electo papa en 2023. Nuestra creencia católica es que el Espíritu Santo inspira las elecciones papales. El mismo Espíritu Santo que guía la elección de papas anteriores, como san Pablo VI y Juan Pablo II, guió las elecciones del papa Benedicto XVI y del papa Francisco.

El papa emérito Benedicto XVI sirvió bien a la Iglesia en todos los aspectos de su ministerio como sacerdote, obispo, cardinal y sumo pontífice. Era un servidor bueno y fiel, un hijo de la Iglesia. Que descansen en la paz eterna, contemplando el rostro de Dios.

Par Arzobípso Charles C. Thompson

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Notas de reflexión sobre la vida y el ministerio de Benedicto XVI

Al cumplir 95 años, el papa Benedicto XVI pasó de la vida terrenal a la vida eterna el último día de 2022. Así pues, esta es una ocasión para reflexionar sobre la larga vida y el ministerio del servidor de Dios verdaderamente santo y brillante. Algunos incluso se han referido a él como el más intelectual de todos los papas.

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Archdiocesan priests shaped by writings and examples of Pope Benedict

By Sean Gallagher

For decades before he was elected bishop of Rome in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI had been one of the Church’s leading theologians. So, it’s not surprising that three archdiocesan priests ordained during the past 15 years interviewed by The Criterion read his writings during their coursework in seminary.

But they later discovered that Pope Benedict would shape them by his example of faith and pastoral leadership in addition to his profound writings on the faith.

Now that he has died, Pope Benedict’s legacy continues in the way these priests try with God’s help to follow in his footsteps in their parish ministry.

A ‘loving pastor to the whole world’

Father John Hollowell was enrolled at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad when Pope Benedict was elected bishop of Rome.

“I immediately went to the bookstore and bought every book by him that they had, which was about five,” Father John recalled. “I read them and fell in love with his teaching and writing style.

“I went on to read about 50 more books by Cardinal Ratzinger, as well as everything that he wrote as pope. I have no doubt that he will be named a doctor of the Church.”

Father John, pastor of St. Luke Parish in Greencastle, had many classes at Saint Annunciation Parish in Brazil and St. Paul the Apostle Parish in Brazil and St. Paul the Apostle Parish in Brazil and St. Paul the Apostle Parish in Brazil.

Pope Benedict’s 2008 visit to the U.S. came near the end of his formation in seminary.

“I read every speech he gave while here, and found everything he said while here directly on point,” Father John remembered. “I also remember how absolutely joyful President George W. Bush was to meet Pope Benedict.

“I think that visit in particular, for many Americans, dispelled the image of Pope Benedict as a cold theologian and showed him to be a loving pastor to the whole world.”

For Father John, this is the way he will remember Pope Benedict.

Pope Benedict XVI was ‘like a second father’ for St. Malachy parish pastor

By Sean Gallagher

As a college seminarian in the spring of 2005 at the time of the death of St. John Paul II, Father Sean Danda knew little about then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.

But watching Cardinal Ratzinger celebrate the funeral of St. John Paul II left a “deep impression” on him, noted the pastor of St. Malachy Parish in Brownsburg in a recent interview with The Criterion.

“I could tell that he loved John Paul,” said Father Danda. “He loved the God John Paul loved, and he loved and believed in the Church John Paul had shepherded up to that point.

“I thought to myself: ‘This is the kind of priest I want to be.’”

Cardinal Ratzinger was soon elected to succeed St. John Paul II as bishop of Rome and took the name Benedict XVI.

Father Danda arrived in Rome two months later for the last four years of his priestly formation.

The day after he arrived, he attended a Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican celebrated by Pope Benedict. Although Father Danda didn’t yet know Italian, the language in which the Mass was celebrated, the new pontiff continued to affect him.

“I recognized the noble humility with which he carefully celebrated the Mass,” said Father Danda. “And when he spoke his homily, it was with confidence and authority. He embodied both the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah. Although I didn’t understand his words, I understood [something greater]. Pope Benedict’s actions were always as clear as his words—he made himself available to God and God’s word.”

As Father Danda studied Pope Benedict’s writings in seminary, his attraction to him grew.

Although he saw the pontiff as an intellectual, he also recognized that “his words came not only from a gifted mind, but also from deep reflection and pondering all things in his heart like the way St. Luke described Mary ‘pondering all these things in her heart’ (Lk 2:19).

“He wrote about who God is,” Father Danda said. “He was simple, direct and clear, and gave great images that played upon the imagination.

“He wrote and spoke like a father who sits down with his son to teach him the most important profound truths and mysteries of the universe. It is no wonder his first encyclical was Deus Caritas Est [‘God Is Love’]. If we miss this image of God, we miss everything.”

Because Father Danda was far from his family in Rome, Pope Benedict became “like a second father” to him. Instead of going to a Christmas Mass with his family back in Indiana, he went to a Christmas Eve Mass at St. Peter’s Basilica celebrated by Pope Benedict.

“The images from his homily consoled me and revealed to me that my home is not anywhere on this Earth,” Father Danda recalled. “I am a citizen of heaven because of who I am and who my Father is.”

He recalled the words of Pope Benedict during a Christmas Eve Mass: “ ‘The Lord said to me: You are my son; this day I have begotten you.’ With these words of the second psalm, the Church begins the Vigil Mass of Christmas. … God is so great that he can become small. God is so powerful that he can make himself vulnerable and come to us as a defenseless child, so that we can love him.”

“Two years later, the first volume of Pope Benedict’s three-volume set of God and gracious God, give us loving eyes to see You at work in the hearts of all who cross our path. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

See PRIESTS page 8

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God bless you!

See PRIESTS page 8

Good and gracious God, give us loving eyes to see You at work in the hearts of all who cross our path. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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Benedict XVI was a good and faithful servant, loyal son of the Church

On Wednesday, Dec. 28, 2022, Pope Francis concluded his general audience with a request for prayers for his predecessor, the 95-year-old Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

Pope Francis said:

“I ask all of you for a special prayer for the pope emeritus Benedict, who, in silence, is sustaining the Church. Remember him—he is very ill—asking the Lord to console him and to sustain him in this moment of prayer for the Church until the end.

Three days later, on Dec. 31, at 9:34 a.m. in the Vatican City State, Pope Benedict returned to the Lord he loved and served during his long and holy life.

Born Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger in Bavaria on April 16, 1927, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI was elected pope on April 19, 2005, and served as bishop of Rome until his voluntary resignation on Feb. 28, 2013. Since that time, he has lived in relative seclusion in a former monastery in the Vatican City State devoting his time to prayer.

Pope Francis remembered that his predecessor was sustaining the Church in silence contrasted with the former pope’s many years of spiritual formation,

ronal Dump 
everyday, in 
church
Benedict XVI was a good and faithful servant, loyal son of the Church

As Indianapolis Archbishop Charles C. Thompson, publisher of the Criterion, Friday, January 6, 2023

On the hallway wall leading to my office at Catholic News Service (CNS) is arrayed a series of eight photographs of its previous directors.

Justin McGrath, the first director, guided the service from 1920 to 1931. Frank Hall, with the longest tenure, led the service from 1932 to 1988. The most recent photos include Richard Daw, Tom Lorsung and Tony Spence.

I pass those photos every day, a very personal reminder not only of the more than 90 years that CNS has served as an instrument of the Church, but that there has been existence, but that it has been staffed by flesh and blood, men and women who dedicated themselves to the being of news service of record.

From manual typewriters to cellphones, they documented events and the people that made up the Church in this country for the past century. Our first Catholic presidential candidate in 1828. Our first Catholic president in 1960. The Second Vatican Council and all the changes that followed. The civil rights movements. The wars. The papacies.

CNS was originally founded by editors before the bishops’ conference assumed responsibility for it in 1920. It evolved through the decades, expanding its coverage of the Vatican into a full-fledged bureau in 1950, a fortuitous decision in advance of the dramatic events of Vatican II. The council’s 50th-anniversary documentary service Origins was established. It became a necessary resource for understanding the changes following Vatican II as the great debates of the U.S. bishops themselves as they hammered out the work of the pastoral, the economics pastoral, and, later, their repeated efforts to address the sexual abuse crisis.

In all of its coverage, CNS amplified not only the voices of the popes, but also those of the bishops and lay leaders of the Church in America, giving them an international audience and an international influence.

Along with the reporting, the news service kept pace with technology, introducing the photo service, then digital services, video, and most recently podcasts, all in an effort to reach the clients’ needs and changing toolbox.

What did not change was that the work of reporting, editing, photography and filming has always been done by men and women who committed themselves to doing the best job possible to get the story and to get it right.

The list of editors and reporters who have worked for CNS is long and noteworthy. Less known but also deserving of note are the interns and reporters who were “graduates” of CNS, taking their skills to other organizations in the Catholic press, helping to spread a culture of professionalism and dedication to the craft of Catholic journalism.

Many of them, like myself, dedicated the better part of their professional lives to documenting the faith lived out in practice, documenting the Church’s engagement with the great issues of the day, and telling the stories of ordinary and extraordinary Catholics who were the face of the Church.

This is noble, necessary work. For most of us, it is as it is a vocation, a career, a vocation, a mission. It melds, whether we want it or not, our professional life with our faith life. It is a spiritual double helix of the personal and the professional that becomes part of our DNA.

Journalists are by stereotype a pretty cynical bunch, but I’ve seen the change being made. They shed a lot of their illusions. But to combine faith and career is personal and times even fragile. To put 20 or 30 or 40 years into this effort is a vocation lived out in service to the people and certain that that of any priest or bishop or deacon.

The news that CNS would be forced to shutter its Washington and New York offices at the end of 2022 was greeted with shock and dismay.

But the truth is, we’ve seen a disturbing number of Catholic news staff—diaconate and national—laid off in recent years and months. Some of the most highly or most acclaimed Catholic newspapers have been shut down. People are dismissed with little notice.

“The only way to go is to lay off everyone, and we’ve kicked to the curb,” is an oft-heard complaint.

That CNS newsrooms, even Church businesses, run into financial pressures is nothing new. That management decides, rightly or wrongly, that another media strategy is necessary is nothing new, either.

I think it is fair to say that collectively, we as Catholic journalists, have handled these kinds of transitions well. Perhaps that’s because of a certain cleaneess that the Church knows best. Perhaps it is a bit of guilt, people representing an institution big on mercy and small on forgiving, uneasy about tossing people out of jobs.

But for a moment let us, in the words of W.H. Auden, “Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone” and salute not just the staff of CNS, but all of those extraordinary editors, reporters, designers, ad managers and more who have lost their jobs these past few years.

I have come to acknowledge that these are men and women, flesh and blood, who worked long hours and weekends, who made sacrifices, who went above and beyond when necessary, and who did their level best to report the news and serve their readers even as being made to feel unwelcome, even unworthy.

Let us remember not just the 14 employees of CNS, but also those of Catholic New York, the Catholic Sentinel, the Catholic Miscellany, the Pittsburgh Catholic, and so many other newspapers who were dedicated to recording the first draft of our Catholic history.

To our colleagues, our peers, our clients, our friends, yours has been a noble work.

May the spirit of our profession continue in the work of the CNS Rome bureau, in the work of CNS News, and in the work of all the Catholic journalists who will continue to serve the Church they report on in the coming years.

Greg Erdanson is the ninth director of Catholic News Service. This column was reprinted with permission from The Catholic Journalist. †

Letters to the Editor

Letters from readers are welcome and every effort will be made to include letters from as many people as possible. Please include your name, address and phone number. Please keep your letters to a maximum of 250 words.

Letters will be edited for clarity and may be assigned parallels. To our readers: Name and address are required for serious reasons, names may be withheld.

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@catholicindy.org.
The light of Christ shines in the world’s darkness

El fin de semana celebramos la solemnidad de la Epifanía del Señor. La palabra “epifanía” no resulta muy común ya que tiene un significado específico, principalmente en un contexto religioso. Una sagrada epifanía (del griego ἐπιφάνεια) es una experiencia de revelación repentina e impactante que llega a través de una manifestación de la presencia de Dios en nuestras vidas. La Epifanía del Señor que celebramos cada año al final del tiempo de Navidad es la manifestación de la luz de Cristo en las tinieblas del mundo. Es el anuncio de la Buena Nueva de nuestra salvación en Cristo a todas las naciones y pueblos del mundo entero. Esta epifanía divina está simbolizada, por supuesto, por la visita de los tres Reyes Magos que viajaron “después de Oriente,” preguntando: “¿Dónde está el rey de los judíos que ha nacido?” Por supuesto, este es el gran privilegio que se nos concede cada vez que recibimos el Cuerpo y la Sangre de Cristo en la Sagrada Eucaristía. Cristo se entrega a nosotros; nos ama y se hace uno con nosotros de la forma más íntima imaginable. Jesús es nuestra epifanía, la manifestación de la presencia de Dios en nuestras vidas. Lo único que debemos hacer es reconocerlo, y luego seguir su ejemplo en nuestro amor por los demás, que es lo que finalmente cambiará la oscuridad del mundo para todos podamos vivir en su santa luz.

En la segunda lectura de la solemnidad de la Epifanía del Señor, san Pablo se refiere a su propia experiencia de epifanía:

“Sin duda ustedes se habrán enterado del plan que Dios, en su bondad, me asignó para el bien de ustedes; me refería al misterio que me declaró por revelación. [...] Conozco al misterio de Cristo, misterio que en otras generaciones no se dio a conocer a la humanidad tal y como ahora se ha revelado a sus Santos Apóstoles y profetas por el Espíritu que se estaba imaginado, el propio Jesucristo, la revelación en carne humana de Dios Todopoderoso. ¿Qué honor poder tocarlo y abrazarlo de cerca, junto a tu corazón?" (Ef 3:2-3a, 5-6).

Pablo nos dice que este es el momento en que se le reveló a él, a su vez, compartiría la Buena Nueva con los demás. El gran Apóstol de las gentes se reconoce correspondiente de la gracia de Dios, llamado a compartir con todo el mundo su experiencia de la revelación del Señor. La primera lectura de esta gran fiesta de la Epifanía del Señor (Is 60:1-6) anuncia la visita de los Reyes Magos. También refleja la luz radiante —y la alegría— que se compartirá con todas las naciones cuando llegue el elegido:

“Cuando veas esto, te pondrás radiante; tu corazón se ensanchará y quedará maravillado al ver que a ti llega la abundancia del mar, y sobre ti se vuelcan las riquezas de las naciones. Una multitud de camellías te cubrirá; vendrán a ti dromedarios de Medinán y de Elía, y todos los que hay en Sabá, cargados de oro e incienso, y se proclamarán alabanzas al Señor” (Is 60:5-6).

Mientras continuamos nuestro viaje sinodal de la oscuridad a la luz y de la desolación a la alegría abrumadora, requerimos que también nosotros estamos llamados a ser administradores de la gracia de Dios y portadores de la epifanía del Señor, de su presencia entre nosotros aquí y ahora.

Un bendecido Año Nuevo para todos!

La luz de Cristo ilumina las tinieblas del mundo

The light of Christ shines in the world’s darkness

This weekend, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. “Epiphany” is not a word we hear very often, but it is one that is celebrated, especially when it is used in a religious context. A sacred epiphany (from the ancient Greek ἐπιφάνεια) is an experience of a sudden and striking revelation that comes through a manifestation of God’s presence in our lives.

The Epiphany of the Lord that we celebrate each year at the end of the Christmas season is the manifestation of the light of Christ in the world’s darkness. It is the announcement of the Good News of our salvation in Christ to all nations and peoples throughout the entire world. This divine epiphany is symbolized, of course, by the visit of the Magi who traveled “from the east,” saying, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews?” We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage” (Mt 2:2).

Jesus was a Jew. He was born of the line of King David, and from his earliest youth he absorbed the teachings of the law and the prophets of Israel. Jesus came to fulfill the Messianic promise and to manifest the love and mercy of the God of Abraham to the Jewish people. And yet, there was nothing insular or parochial about Jesus or his ministry, since he was about to do something that was more than the sum of all the preceding dispensations. The Magi we meet in this Sunday’s Gospel (Mt 2:1-12) were wise men—sometimes called “astrologers.” There is no evidence to suggest that they were kings or that there were only three of them. In fact, a popular legend suggests that a fourth Magus arrived without a gift and was discreetlyembarrassed to appear before the newborn king empty-handed. Mary, the compassionate mother, sensed her visitor’s discomfort and asked if he would mind holding the baby while she and Joseph received the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh from the other Magi. While he was holding the Christ Child, the fourth Magus had a personal epiphany. He realized that he had been given the most precious gift imaginable: Jesus Christ, the true King of Jerusalem and the Messiah of God. Almighty. What an honor to be able to touch him and hold him closely, next to his heart?

Of course, this is the great privilege that we are given every time we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the holy Eucharist. Christ gives himself to us. He loves us and becomes one with us in the most intimate way imaginable. Jesus is our epiphany, the manifestation of God’s presence in our lives. All we have to do is acknowledge him, and then follow his example in our love for others, which is what will ultimately change the world’s darkness so we can all live in his holy light.

In the second reading for the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, St. Paul refers to his own experience of epiphany:

“You have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for your benefit, namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation. It was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy Apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that the Gentiles are cohered, members of the same body, and copartners in the possession in Christ Jesus through the Gospel” (Ef 3:2-3a, 5-6).

Paul tells us that Christ revealed himself to him so that he, in turn, would share the Good News with others. The great Apostle to the Gentiles acknowledges that he is a steward of God’s grace called to share his experience of divine revelation with the whole world.

The first reading for this great feast of the Lord’s Epiphany (Is 60:1-6) foretells the visit of the Magi. It also reflects the radiant light—and joy—that will be shared with all nations when the Promised One arrives:

“Then you shall be radiant at what you see, your heart shall throb and overflow, for the riches of the sea shall be emptied out before you, the wealth of nations shall be brought to you. Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord” (Is 60:5-6).

As we continue our synodal journey from darkness to light and from desolation to abundant joy, let’s remember that we too are called to be stewards of God’s grace and witnesses to the Lord’s epiphany, his presence among us here and now.

A blessed New Year to all!
Retreats and Programs

For a complete list of retreats as reported to The Criterion, log on to www.archindy.org/retreats.

January 23, 30
Men’s Study Group for Spirituality, 101 St. Anthony Dr., www.benedictinn.org/programs.

February 5
Mercy Chaplet followed by the Sacrament of Penance, 11 a.m.-12:15 p.m., Our Lady of Peace Cemetery and Mausoleum, 9001 Haverstick E. 13th St., Indianapolis. Information: 317-788-7581 or benedictinn.org.

February 5-12

February 7
From Cave to the Mountaintop Part II: Benedict’s Vision for a Spiritual Life—“Building the Kingdom of God” (via Zoom), 7:30-8:30 p.m., Benedictine Sister Antoinette Parcell presenting. Fourth of four independent sessions, $25. Registration: www.benedictin.org/programs.

March 10-12
Spirituality and Ministry for Men and Women, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Our Lady of Fatima Retreat Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. Information: 317-788-7581 or benedictin.org.

March 20
Benedict Covenant Retreat and Program, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Our Lady of Fatima Retreat Center.

May 1
First Saturday Devotion, 8 a.m. Mass. Information: 317-574-8898 or archindy.org.

May 1
First Friday Devotion, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., lunch and use of campus facilities. Information: www.archindy.org/events.

June 6
Masses celebrated by Father Daniel Bedel, Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary spiritual director, on the theme of the seminary forms future priests. Information: Ellen Sanders, 317-236-1501 or esanders@archindy.org.

June 7
First Saturday Devotion, 8 a.m. Mass. Information: 317-574-8898 or archindy.org.

June 11
Masses celebrated by Father Daniel Bedel, Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary spiritual director, on the theme of the seminary forms future priests. Information: Ellen Sanders, 317-236-1501 or esanders@archindy.org.

June 11
First Friday Devotion, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Mass. Information: 317-574-8898 or archindy.org.

June 12
First Friday Devotion, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Mass. Information: 317-574-8898 or archindy.org.

July 9
First Friday Devotion, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Mass. Information: 317-574-8898 or archindy.org.

July 9
First Saturday Devotion, 8 a.m. Mass. Information: 317-574-8898 or archindy.org.

July 16
First Friday Devotion, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Mass. Information: 317-574-8898 or archindy.org.

July 16
First Saturday Devotion, 8 a.m. Mass. Information: 317-574-8898 or archindy.org.

July 23
First Friday Devotion, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Mass. Information: 317-574-8898 or archindy.org.

July 23
First Saturday Devotion, 8 a.m. Mass. Information: 317-574-8898 or archindy.org.

July 30
First Saturday Devotion, 8 a.m. Mass. Information: 317-574-8898 or archindy.org.

From Ashes to Reurrection Day, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Benedictine Sister Heather Joan Pfohl facilitating, $75 includes lunch. Information, registration: benedictin.org/programs.

See more retreat listings at www.archindy.org/retreats.
Pope Francis pays tribute to the late Pope Benedict XVI

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Keeping his appointment to celebrate Vespers as 2022 was ending, Pope Francis also paid tribute in his homily to Pope Benedict XVI, who died early on Dec. 31.

“At this moment, our thoughts go spontaneously to our deceased brother, Pope Benedict XVI,” the pope said in a statement praising the late pope. Benedict XVI “continued to teach us how to live with us here, I join Catholics everywhere in my heart.” The Dec. 31 statement also paid tribute to his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, who died early on Dec. 31, 2022.

Benedict XVI “showed us what the intellectual and theological tradition, he was able to engage the modern world with intellectual clarity and pastoral charity,” Bishop Broglio said.

“As the last pope who attended the Second Vatican Council, he has served as a bridge to the future, reminding us all that the reform and renewal of the Church is ongoing,” the cardinal said in a Dec. 31 statement. Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston also noted Pope Benedict XVI’s “first-hand knowledge of Vatican II’s teaching, and his scholarly work will shape the Church for years to come. His statement said the former pope’s “keen intellect ingratiated the New Evangelization by drawing hearts and minds into the mystery of our redemption in Christ, and compelling countless men and women to spread the Gospel by the example of their lives.”

“Many generations to come will benefit from the breadth and depth of his understanding of our faith tradition and ability to communicate it clearly and effectively,” he said in a statement provided to CNS News by his communications office. “For those of us who have had the great blessing of interacting with him on a personal level, we will always be inspired by his gentleness, wisdom, ability and ability to listen with respect and compassion.”

Many U.S. bishops also reflected on how Pope Benedict XVI’s intellectual contributions and humility went hand-in-hand, rooted in a life of following Jesus Christ.

Bishop Donald J. Hying of Madison, Wis., said one found in Pope Benedict XVI a “remarkable convergence of the soul, intellect and heart” and that of a man “who radiated truth in the face of any kind of intimidated the truth of the Gospel and fully dedicated to serving the Lord Jesus Christ and his Church.”

“He knew who he was before the Lord, without pretense or artifice,” Bishop Hying said. “This humility ground him through the trials difficulties and controversies of his varied and demanding life, poured out for Christ and the saving truth of our beautiful Catholic faith.”

Pope Benedict XVI also was a “man of true humility” who radiated “quiet, authentic joy in Christ,” said Ukrainian Catholic Archbishop Borys Gudziak of Philadelphia in a Facebook post written originally in Ukrainian. “In an age of floundered raw ambition, he did not cling to power. He lived eucharistically. He witnessed a spiritual peace, a focus on the Lord, a profound goodness, forged by the capacity to say ‘I am sorry.’”

Cardinal Robert W. McElroy of San Diego also reflected on Pope Benedict XVI’s death with “sadness and gratitude,” saying he served God “with sacrifice and courage, brilliance and wisdom, humility and kindness for his entire life.”

“He was a theologian of immense depth, a caring pastor and a prayerful servant who unswervingly sought to follow the pathway to which God was calling him,” Cardinal McElroy said.

“Pope Benedict XVI’s death with a wealth of learning for the faithful to unite in mourning for retired pope Benedict XVI, who died on the eve of the new year. "With emotion we remember him as such a noble, such a gentle person," the pope said. "And we feel so much gratitude in our hearts, gratitude to God for having given him to the Church and to the world; gratitude to him, for all the good he accomplished, particularly for his witness of word and prayer, especially in these last years of his retired life. "Only God knows the value and strength of his intercession and the graces offered for the good of the Church," Pope Francis said of the 95-year-old Pope Benedict, who had spent almost 10 years in retirement in a monastery in the Vatican Gardens. "The prayers of the faithful also included special mention of the deceased Pope Benedict, asking God to allow him to see Jesus face to face. "In the main section of his homily, Pope Francis focused on kindness and gentleness as both a religious and human virtue. "From the Christmas season still underway and the basilica’s Christmas decorations still in place, Pope Francis said that Jesus “did not come into the world to swooping down from heaven; he was born of Mary.” Jesus became human “with her consent; in freedom, in gratuitousness, in respect, in love,” the pope said. "Focusing specifically on the Diocese of Rome, his diocese, Pope Francis urged citizens to cultivate kindness in their lives in relation with their fellow citizens. "Kindness is an important factor in the culture of dialogue," he said, “and dialogue is indispensable if we are to live with one another as brothers and sisters, and not always get along—that is normal—but who nevertheless talk to each other, listen to each other and try to understand each other. "Kindness is not just politeness, it is a virtue that can “humanize our societies. "In the main section of his homily, Pope Francis focused on kindness and gentleness as both a religious and human virtue. "Kindness is an antidote against some of the pathologies of our societies: against cruelty, which unfortunately can creep in like a poison in the heart and intimate relationships," he added, and also against “distracted anxiety and frenzy that make us focus on ourselves and close us off to others. "Too often, the pope said, people get caught up in their own lives and do not realize how aggressive they are and how they stop asking ‘please,’ or saying ‘sorry’ or ‘thank you.’” "Peace progresses with those three words,” he said. "It would be good for us to think about using ‘please,’ ‘sorry’ and ‘thank you’ every time. "Pope Francis said his wish for the new year would be that everyone try harder to be kind. "Experience teaches us that it becomes a way of life, it can create healthy coexistence," he said, and "it can humanize social relationships by dissolving aggression and indifference." After the service, Pope Francis joined thousands of people in St. Peter’s Square to admire, and stop to pray, in front of the Nativity scene. ©
books Jesus of Nazareth was released. The books showed Father Danda “how capitivated Benedict was with Jesus.”

“We did not just want us to know about Jesus but who Jesus is,” Father Danda said. “It was as if I was reading the desert fathers, St. Augustine or St. Ambrose. He saw things I never noticed before, and I was amazed how he could discover the timeless hidden questions of humanity.”

Seeing him celebrate Mass from afar soon turned into an up-close encounter for Father Danda when he was asked to be an altar server at a papal Mass on Jan. 1, 2009. He was specifically assigned to hold the missal from which Pope Benedict would pray the prayers of the liturgy.

“When I came up the first time, I held the book a little lower than I knew I was supposed to so that I could see his face,” Father Danda recalled. “And he looked me right in the eyes with a fatherly gaze for quite some time.”

“But I started to shake because the missal was getting heavy from the awkward way I was holding it. When the master of ceremonies reached over to steady the book to make sure I didn’t drop it, I moved it back up to where I knew it should be.”

“Later that October, I met Pope Benedict in person. He was meeting many different people that spoke different languages so we didn’t speak, but he pointed at me as if to say: ‘You were that seminarian who held the missal for me, weren’t you?’ Or, at least, I would like to think that was what he was thinking.”

As he moved toward his ordination in 2009 and returned to Rome for a year of graduate studies, Father Danda experienced new ways that Pope Benedict shaped his priestly life and ministry.

“Pope Benedict was an introvert who followed an extrovert—St. John Paul II,” Father Danda said. “Pope Benedict offered us freedom to be ourselves. He showed that priests ought to be themselves, not someone else, even if we have to step out of our comfort zone at times.”

“This was very freeing for many young priests who saw and realized this through him.”

Fr. Anthony Hollowell, who is known as Father Tony, and who is a younger brother of Father John Hollowell. After being ordained a priest in 2016, Father Tony returned to Rome for graduate studies and eventually earned a doctorate in moral theology. He now ministers as pastor of St. Mark Parish in Perry County and St. Paul Parish in Tell City.

Pope Benedict’s often “academic priesthood” has influenced him.

“Although most priests are not called to active academic ministry, his example continues to influence my priestly life by encouraging me, and all priests, to keep alive an academic foundation to my ministry,” Father Tony said.

Pope Benedict’s decision to step down as pope in 2013 left a deep impression on him.

“His humility, self-awareness, and wisdom in stepping down as the active pope is an example for us all,” Father Tony said. “By this act, he has taught the Church about the need to remove ourselves from a position in the Church if we discern in our conscience that we can no longer serve well in this position.”

For Father Tony, the word “continuity” summarizes Pope Benedict’s legacy for the Church.

“His academic writings sought for continuity among a variety of Jewish, Protestant and Catholic authors whom he harmonized into a masterful synthesis on many topics,” Father Tony said. “After the Second Vatican Council, he dedicated many years of his life to an interpretation of the council as continuous with, and not a rupture from, the previous councils of the Church.”

“His papacy solidified the moral and doctrinal legacy of his predecessor, St. John Paul II, and he actively wrote about the moral and doctrinal continuity between his papacy and that of his successor, Pope Francis. Whenever he spoke, he was in continuity with both his contemporaries and predecessors. His ability to articulate that continuity and to illuminate its intrinsic authority is a wonderful legacy for the Church.”

Fr. Anthony Hollowell
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VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Retired Pope Benedict XVI’s final message to Catholics around the world was: “Stand firm in the faith! Do not let yourselves be confused!”

Less than 10 hours after informing the world that the 95-year-old pope had died on Dec. 31, 2022, the Vatican press office released his spiritual testament, a statement of faith and of thanksgiving.

Unlike St. John Paul II’s spiritual testament, Pope Benedict’s included no instructions for his funeral or burial and made no mention of what should happen to his belongings.

“To all those whom I have wronged in any way, I ask forgiveness from my heart,” Pope Benedict wrote. Written in German and dated Aug. 29, 2006—in the second year of his almost eight-year pontificate—Pope Benedict wrote with great affection of his parents, his sister and his brother, the beauty of Bavaria and his faith in God.

“If at this late hour of my life I look back over the decades I have been living, I first see how many reasons I have to give thanks,” he wrote in the document when he was 79 years old.

“First of all, I thank God himself, the giver of every good gift, who gave me life and guided me through various moments of confusion; always picking me up whenever I began to slip and always giving me the light of his countenance again,” he said.

“In retrospect, I see and understand that even the dark and tiring stretches of this path were for my salvation and that it was in them that he guided me well.”

Born in 1927, Joseph Ratzinger was raised in a Germany struggling to recover from the first World War; Adolf Hitler came to power when the future pope was only 7.

In his testament, he offered thanks to his parents, “who gave me life in a difficult time and who, at the cost of great sacrifices, with their love prepared a magnificent home that like a clear light still enlightens my days.

“My father’s lucid faith taught us children to believe, and as a signpost it has always stood firm in the midst of all my academic achievements,” he said. “My mother’s profound devotion and great goodness are a legacy for which I cannot thank her enough.”

Pope Benedict thanked God for the many friends, both men and women, he had had by his side, and for his teachers and students—many of whom he continued to meet with late in his life.

A pope known for his concern for the environment, he thanked God for the beauty of his Bavarian homeland, “in which I always saw the splendor of the Creator himself shining through.”

“I pray that our land remains a land of faith,” he wrote before pleading with his fellow Germans to let nothing draw them from the faith.

“And, finally,” he wrote, “I thank God for all the beauty I experienced at every stage of my journey, especially in Rome and in Italy, which became my second homeland.”

Addressing the whole Church, Pope Benedict urged Catholics to hold fast to their faith and to not let science or research shake the foundations of their belief.

“It often seems as if science—the natural sciences on the one hand and historical research, like the exegesis of Sacred Scripture, on the other—are able to offer irrefutable results at odds with the Catholic faith,” he said.

“Yet it is in dialogue with the natural sciences that faith too has learned to better understand the limits of the scope of its claims, and thus its specificity.”

At the same time, he said, “it is in dialogue with the natural sciences that faith too has learned to better understand the limits of the scope of its claims, and thus its specificity.”

In 60 years of theological study and observation, he said, he had seen “unshakable” theses collapse, including those offered by the “Marxist generation” of theologians.

“The reasonableness of faith has emerged and is emerging again,” he wrote. “Jesus Christ is truly the way, the truth and the life—and the Church, with all its inadequacies, is truly his body.”

In the end, Pope Benedict wrote, “I humbly ask: pray for me, so that the Lord, despite all my sins and inadequacies, may receive me into his eternal dwelling.”
Pope Benedict XVI addresses the General Assembly at the UN headquarters in New York on April 18, 2008. (CNS photo/Ray Stubblebine, Reuters)

Above, Pope Benedict XVI greets a cheering crowd as he arrives with young people for his visit to the cathedral in Cologne, Germany, during World Youth Day in this Aug. 14, 2005, file photo. The pope placed young people at the center of his concerns and reached out to them with networking media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. (CNS photo/Wolfgang Rattay, Reuters)

Pope Benedict XVI visits the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest prayer site, in the Old City of Jerusalem on May 12, 2009. The pope left a written prayer for peace in a crevice of the wall. (CNS photo/Menahem Kahana, Reuters)

Pope Benedict XVI distributes Communion as he celebrates Christmas Eve Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on Dec. 24, 2012. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

Left, Pope Benedict XVI plays a piano during his summer retreat in Les Combes, northern Italy, in July 2006. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Joseph Ratzinger, second row at right, is pictured with his sister, Maria, brother, Georg, and parents, Maria and Joseph in this July 8, 1951, file photo. Pope Benedict died on Dec. 31, 2022, at the age of 95 in his residence at the Vatican. (CNS photo/pool/Left, Menahem Kahana, Reuters)

Pope Benedict XVI waves to the crowd after celebrating Mass in Yankee Stadium in New York on April 20, 2008. (CNS photo/Nancy Wiechec)

Pope Benedict XVI wears a kaffiyeh, a traditional Arab headscarf, presented to him in Amman, Jordan, during his 2009 visit to the Holy Land. (CNS photo/Catholic Press Photo)

“Lord, I love you!”
(The final words of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, 1927-2022)
BENEDICT
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His papacy, which began when he was 78, was extremely busy for a man who already had a pacemaker and who had wanted to retire to study, write and pray when he turned 75. He used virtually every medium at his disposal—books and Twitter, sermons and encyclicals—to catechize the faithful on the foundational beliefs and practices of Christianity, ranging from the sermons of St. Augustine to the sign of the cross.

Pope Benedict was the first pope to meet with victims of clerical sexual abuse. He clarified Church laws to expedite cases and mandated that bishops' conferences put in place stringent norms against abuse. Although he did not expect to travel much, he ended up making 24 trips to six continents and three times presided over World Youth Day mega-gatherings in Germany in 2005, Australia in 2008, and Spain in 2011.

On a historic visit to the United States in 2008, the pope brought his own identity into clearer focus for Americans. He set forth a moral challenge on issues ranging from economic justice to abortion. He also took Church recognition of the priestly sex-abuse scandal to a new level, expressing his personal shame at what happened and personally praying with victims.

When he turned 75, he served as an influential adviser during the Second Vatican Council, 1962-65, and as pope, he made it a priority to correct what he saw as overly expansive interpretations of Vatican II in favor of readings that stressed the council's continuity with the Church's historic traditions.

Under his oversight, the Vatican continued to highlight the Church's moral boundaries on issues such as end-of-life medical care, marriage and homosexual acts. But the pope's message to society at large focused less on single issues and more on the risk of losing the basic relationship between the human being and the Creator. Surprising those who had expected a by-the-book pontificate from a man who had spent so many years as the Vatican's chief doctrinal official, Pope Benedict emphasized that Christianity was a religion of love and not a religion of rules.

The German-born pontiff did not try to match the popularity of St. John Paul, but the millions of people who came to see him in Rome and abroad came to appreciate his smile, his frequent ad-libs and his ability to speak from the heart.

Some of Pope Benedict's most memorable statements came when he applied simple Old Testament values to social issues such as the protection of human life, the environment and economics. When the global financial crisis worsened in 2008, he said, the pope insisted that financial institutions must put people before profits. He also reminded people that money and worldly success are passing realities, staying true forever builds his life on these things—on material things, on success, on appearances—is building on sand.

He consistently warned that unless its secularized society rediscovered religious values, it could not hope to engage in real dialogue with Muslims and members of other religious traditions.

In his encyclicals and in his trilogy of books Jesus of Nazareth, the pope honed that message, asking readers to discover the essential connections between spiritual love, works of charity, a dedication to the truth and the Gospel of Christ.

The retired pope looked in-depth at his papacy and resignation, his relationships with St. John Paul and Pope Francis and a host of other issues in Last Testament, a book-length interview with journalist Peter Seewald published in 2016.

In the book, Pope Benedict insisted once again that he was not pressured by anyone or any event to resign and he did not feel he was running away from any problem. However, he acknowledged “practical governance was not my forte, and this certainly was a weakness.”

“Inspecting ‘my hour had passed, and I had given all I could,'” Pope Benedict said he never regretted resigning, but he did regret hurting friends and faithful who were “really distressed and felt forsaken” by his stepping down.

Less than a month after resigning, he already looked frailer and walked with noticeably more difficulty than he did when he left office. The video images released by the Vatican on March 23, 2013, when his successor Pope Francis, visited him at Castel Gandolfo underscored the “diminishing energy” Pope Benedict had said led to his resignation.

Pope Benedict moved to the papal summer villa at Castel Gandolfo on Feb. 28, 2013, the day his resignation took effect. He remained at the south of Rome for two months—a period that included the conclave that elected Pope Francis as his successor and the first month of the new pope’s pontificate. The retired pope moved back to the Vatican on May 2, 2013, living in a monastery remodeled as a residence for him, his secretary and the consecrated women who cared for his household before and after his resignation.

On his only post-retirement trip outside of Italy, he flew to Germany in June 2020 for a five-day visit with his ailing 96-year-old brother.

Answering questions from reporters on a flight back from Brazil in July 2013, Pope Francis spoke with admiration of the retired pope’s humility, intelligence and prayerfulness. The unusual situation of having a pope and a retired pope both living at the Vatican was working out very well, Pope Francis said. Having the retired pope nearby to consult with, or ask questions of, Pope Francis said, was “like having a grandfather at home—a very wise grandfather.”

By the time Pope Benedict had been retired for a year, his routine was set. Archbishop Georg Ganswein, his personal secretary, said his days began with Mass, morning prayer and breakfast. Although mostly hidden from public view, he was not cloistered, but continued welcoming old friends and colleagues, engaging in dialogue or offering spiritual counsel. He spent hours reading and dealing with correspondence before a 4 p.m. stroll in the garden and the recreation of the rosary.

In the early days of his retirement, to the delight and surprise of people around him, Pope Benedict appeared at major events with Pope Francis, including the opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica on Dec. 8, 2015.

At a June 2016 ceremony in the Apostolic Palace, where Pope Benedict once lived and worked, Pope Francis, top official of the Roman Curia and a few friends gathered with him to mark the 50th anniversary of the retired pontiff’s priestly ordination.

Pope Francis told Pope Benedict that with him in residence, the monastery in the St. Paul Gardens “emanates tranquility, peace, strength, faithfulness, maturity, both, dedication and loyalty, which does so much good for me and gives strength to me and to the whole Church.”

Pope Benedict replied to Pope Francis, “More the beauty found in the Vatican Gardens, your goodness is the place where I live; I feel protected.”

He prayed that Pope Francis would continue to “lead us all on this path of divine mercy that shows the path of Jesus, to Jesus and to God.”

Mercy was a prominent topic in an interview Pope Benedict gave in 2015. The Catholic focus on mercy really began with St. John Paul, the retired pope told Belgian Jesuit Father Jacques Servais in the written interview, which was not released until March 2016.

From his experience as a youth during World War II and his ministry under communism in Poland, St. John Paul II “affirmed that mercy is the only true and ultimately effective reaction against the power of evil. Only where there is mercy does cruelty end, only there do evil and violence stop,” said Pope Benedict, who worked closely with the Polish pope for decades.

“Pope Francis,” he said, “is in complete agreement with this line. His pastoral practice is expressed precisely in the fact that he speaks continuously of God’s mercy.”

Pope Benedict had said he planned to live a “hidden life” in retirement—and to a large extent he did. But when he did make contributions to public discussions, they became headline news. For instance, when he did make contributions to public discussions, they became headline news. In April 2019, for instance, what he described as “notes” on the clerical sexual abuse crisis were published; and, in January 2020, an essay he wrote on priestly celibacy was published in a book by Cardinal Robert Sarah, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments.

In the text on abuse, which the retired pope said was motivated by the February 2019 Vatican summit on the crisis, Pope Benedict traced the abuse crisis to a loss of certainty about faith and morals, especially beginning in the late 1960s. To address the crisis, he wrote, “‘what is required first and foremost is the renewal of the faith in the reality of Jesus Christ given to us in the Blessed Sacrament.”

The 2020 text on celibacy became the center of a media storm, not only because of its content, but also because Catholics were awaiting Pope Francis’ official response to the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon and suggestions made there that in remote areas the Church could consider ordaining some married men to take the sacraments to Catholics who usually go months without receiving them.

Since marriage and priesthood both demand the total devotion and self-giving of a man to his vocation, “it does not seem possible to realize both vocations simultaneously,” Pope Benedict wrote in his essay.

The retired pope’s contribution to the discussion became even more controversial when Archbishop Georg Ganswein informed media and the original publisher that while Pope Benedict contributed an essay to Cardinal Sarah’s book, he did not want to be listed as co-author of the volume.

As inevitable as his election seemed after St. John Paul II died in 2005, Pope Benedict’s path to the papacy was long and indirect.

Joseph Ratzinger was born on April 16, 1927, in the Bavarian town of Marktl am Inn, the third and youngest child of a police officer, Joseph, Sr., and his wife, Maria. Young Joseph joined his brother, Georg, at a minor seminary in 1939.

Like other young students in Germany at the time, he was automatically enrolled in the Hitler Youth program, but soon stopped going to meetings. During World War II, he...
Continued from previous page

was conscripted into the army, and in the spring of 1945, he deserted his unit and returned home, spending a few months in an Allied prisoner-of-war camp. He returned to the seminary late in 1945 and was ordained six years later for reading the council through a “hermeneutic of criticism” that would become even sharper in later years. The priest told CNS that “without a doubt, his example of simplicity, and above all how he spent his last few years, always in prayer, is a great example for us young people.”

Inside the basilica, staff and security kept visitors moving smoothly and quickly, letting people stop before the body was laid out in red vestments on a damask-covered platform. Pope Benedict’s mortal remains were placed inside the basilica in silence, he told CNS. “I was here in the square when he was elected, I was here in the square when he resigned, and now here when he’s lying in state.”

“When we read his writings, or heard him preach, or saw him celebrate the Mass, we really saw a man that cares for his sheep and gives us an example of how to care for ours,” he said.

Hannah O’Connor from Rhode Island credits Pope Benedict as being instrumental in her conversion during college, where “we read a lot of Ratzinger.” Her writings and pontificate were an important part of my journey,” she said, and “I hope that people keep encountering his works and are brought to the one Church through beauty; that’s what really drew me in.”

Sugey Vironantas from Mexico told CNS that, “without a doubt, his example of simplicity, and above all how he spent his last years, always in prayer, is a great example for us young people.”

Visitors were falling in line with thousands of people slowly filling up the square. By 2 p.m. on Jan. 2, Vatican police said that 40,000 people had entered the basilica by 2 p.m. on Jan. 2. The body of Pope Benedict XVI lies in St. Peter’s Basilica for public viewing at the Vatican on Jan. 2. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)
Archdiocese welcomes new leader of evangelization and discipleship

By Natalie Hoeter

The archdiocese has hired Anita Bardo as its new coordinator of evangelization and discipleship. She has served for 12 years, and has led youth ministry for St. Rita and the Indianapolis East Deanery for 22 years.

She is currently her parish’s director of faith formation, a role in which she has served for 12 years, and has led youth ministry for St. Rita and the Indianapolis East Deanery for 22 years.

“Through these two ministries, I find myself evangelizing to youth, families, parishioners and those that are not members of our parish community,” says Bardo. “We are all called to spread the Good News to each other. You never know who may convert or who may want to talk to you more about their own faith journey.”

For Bardo, leadership is more than directing and delegating—it’s a way of life. “Leadership for me is to be more Christ-like in my efforts to evangelize,” she says. “We are called to guide others in their faith, in their role of being a disciple of Christ,” including practicing Catholics, those who have stepped away from the faith and those of no faith, to bring them together “for one goal, and that is to move one another to live out the true meaning of being a disciple of Christ.”

Bardo says her new role with the archdiocese is an answer to prayer—three months of prayer, in fact. After working for 32 years in the mortgage industry and 22 years for the same employer, she was laid off on Aug. 3 last year.

“Wow, was that a surprise,” Bardo admits, then adds, “But God knew what I needed”—she had been discerning for some time whether God might be calling her elsewhere.

“I believe that opportunities don’t just happen,” says Bardo. “We create them with the help of God, beautiful people of faith, family and being able to say, ‘Yes, Lord, use me.’”

She was hired for the position in December.

“Because I was supposed to be and the plan God had already had in place,” she says.

In her new role, Bardo will reach out to the archdiocese’s 126 parishes to offer help and guidance with their evangelization and discipleship efforts.

Catholic media company OSV created Catholic News Service (CNS), a news agency founded in 1920 and owned by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

In May, CNS announced that the USCCB had decided to close CNS’ domestic bureaus in New York and Washington, D.C., eliminating its national news and most of its international news coverage. The USCCB continues to operate CNS’ Rome bureau, which reports on the pope and matters pertaining to the Holy See. CNS provided news stories on issues and events about or affecting the Catholic Church to subscribers, with a focus on diocesan media. In 2022, it was serving the majority of U.S. dioceses, according to CNS Director and Editor-in-Chief Greg Erlandsen. Our Sunday Visitor was among its subscribers. When CNS announced its closure, Erlandsen said he had a sense that OSV was well positioned to address the anticipated need. “Someone is going to have to fill that hole” created by CNS’ closure, he recalled thinking in a Dec. 6 interview. “We’re going to have to find their hole for us. We don’t want that hole for anyone else, as well.” OSV is the largest Catholic publisher in the United States, and one of the largest in the world. Based in Huntington, Ind., the company was founded in 1912 by Archbishop John Flannel Noll as the Catholic newspaper Our Sunday Visitor. OSV has grown to include other periodicals, books and parish resources with a shared mission: “to equip parish resources with a shared mission: ‘to equip parishioners with the tools they need, increasingly, digital publications, websites, apps, social media. We need audio and video. We need all of that because that’s what’s necessary to spread the Gospel.”

OSV News clients can expect national and international news, feature stories, columns, and photographs. The company, which traditionally published print editions, released an e-edition in 2020. The move to digital was part of a strategy to reach those who prefer digital content, but also to adapt to changing consumer habits. OSV News’ editor-in-chief, Gretchen Bey, who joined OSV in 2013 as its newsletter’s editor. She has most recently served as OSV’s editorial director for periodicals, overseeing the operation of Our Sunday Visitor, The Priest and The Deacon magazines, OSV Kids magazine, RadiantMagazine.com and SimplyCatholic.com.

OSV News is going to stand out by providing really excellent journalism and context that helps explain what the Church teaches and why,” Crowe said. “OSV News will become that go-to resource for Catholics that want to understand what’s happening in the world and how that affects them, in terms of their faith and how they should be living their faith.”

OSV News’ digital team includes Julie Asher, senior editor; Maria-Pia Chui, senior writer; Paulina Guzik, Spanish editor; Paulina Guzik, Spanish editor; Lizzy Meakin, Spanish editor; and Maria-Wiener, senior writer; Gina Cherubini, executive editor; and Kate Scepanik, national reporters, and John Muldert is OSV News’ media reviewer.

The company will partner with diocesan media to share news and feature stories from their publications with OSV News.

Richert hopes OSV News will “excite the imagination of Catholic media watchers,” he said, adding, “to turn Catholic media from something that is largely talking to an established clientele, to a vehicle that increasingly can become a vehicle for evangelization, reaching more people, bringing more people to Christ.”
Pope Benedict's special focus on God's love surprised and inspired local Catholics

By John Shaughnessy

David Siler will always remember the moment when he was surprised and inspired by Pope Benedict XVI.

It came in 2008 when Pope Benedict shared his first encyclical with the world—"Dei Caritas Est" ("God Is Love")—the papal letter that totally changed Siler’s initial impression of the then recently elected pope.

"My great love for him started with that encyclical," he said. "I was the executive director for Catholic Charities in the United States at the time," recalls Siler who served in that role from 2003-2016. "The encyclical perfectly captured the essence of God, which is love."

"I remember being at a Catholic Charities national conference, and we were all answering about how it was such a surprise, coming from this seemingly staid German pope... but I had expected such a soft letter. I’ve reflected on it many times."

While the Pope Benedict’s Eminence Benedict’s death on Dec. 31, 2022, at the age of 95 saddened Siler, it also brought to the memory of how it was a highlight of his ministry.

"It was an incredibly powerful experience. It was a highlight of my spiritual life," Siler says. "Just being in the presence of so many people who wanted to spend time with the pope."

"I never expected to share a Mass with a pope. Just felt you were on holy ground."

Ever since, Siler’s career choices have been influenced by those experiences and "Dei Caritas Est." Siler currently serves as the executive director of the Parish Twinning Program of the American, an organization that connects parishes in the United States with needy parishes in Haiti and Latin America.

"My career choice have been directly connected to service," he says. "It seems like a great response to the encyclical. Let me invite people to share my love of God with many people in the world, especially Haiti and Latin America."

"I thought that was a brave thing he did."

"Mickey" Lenz had a similar reaction of being inspired and surprised by Pope Benedict when she was among a select group chosen to meet with him during his 2008 visit to Washington.

She was a part of a group of about 350 individuals that represented the most influential people in Catholic education in the United States. "At the time, Annette was the executive director of Catholic Education and Faith Formation for the archdiocese," Lenz says.

"I appreciated so much his teachings on the Eucharist and the pursuit of truth, and his understanding of our faith as first and foremost a relationship with Christ."

In a speech to the U.N. General Assembly, Pope Benedict said neither government nor religion has a right to limit human rights, because these rights flow from the dignity of each person created in God’s image. "The pope insisted that human rights cannot be limited or rewritten on the basis of national interests or majority rule."

He also said the role of religions is not to dictate government policy, but to help their members strive to find the truth, including the truth about the dignity of all people, even if their religious views are different.
Mom was recuperating, years ago, in front of the television set in her hospital room following surgery. As she grew older, surgery was hard on Mom, both physically and mentally. It took her down, and she was never the same. She would climb to pre-operation levels. tell stories, and watch their favorite shows. On the day when the nurse came in, Mom looked away from the TV and told the story of St. John Paul II had died. This was big news, and unexpected. It was also not true. The pope was very healthy, but Mom sounded lucid and concerned. Word traveled swiftly around the hospital floor, and someone even said that several states away that the pope was dead.

Later, we laughed about how fast Mom innocently and convincingly spread that rumor, and how gullible those who believed it felt. But even then, before smartphones were in every pocket, we had grown accustomed to hearing news from around the world within minutes. And Mom was sitting in front of the television set in her hospital room following surgery.

St. Francis Xavier died on Dec. 3, 1552, trying to reach the mainland of China. He was only 46.

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This week’s Church celebrates the ancient Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, commemorating and reflecting upon the visit of Magi “from the East” to the crib side of the newborn Savior (Mt 2:1). For the first reading, the Church presents a passage from the third and last section of Isaiah. After four generations of exile in Babylon, survivors or descendants of the long past Babylonian conquest of the Holy Land finally were able to return to their homeland. When Persia in turn overtook Babylon, Persia’s King Cyrus allowed the exiles to leave Babylon and to return to the Holy Land. Their homecoming was bittersweet. The land to which they returned after so many years was desolate and uncultivated. The prophets insisted that, despite this desolation, times would change for the better because God would not forget the chosen people. Then, the prophet rejoices in God’s salvation. He will vindicate the people. God will come in justice and mercy. The prophecy predicts a great new day!

For the second reading, the Church offers us a selection from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians. It is a frank and direct statement that God intends salvation also for the Gentiles, not only for the chosen people.

St. Matthew’s Gospel furnishes the last reading. Among the four Gospels, only Matthew and Luke refer to the conception, birth and early life of Jesus. Only Matthew has the story of the Magi. St. Matthew’s Gospel presents a passage that according to the Scriptures, the Savior would be born in Bethlehem. This discovery put it jeopardy the infant Lord and the young boys of the town, traditionally known as the Holy Innocents.

Overall, the message is powerful. The Magi, only humans, yearn for God but cannot find him on their own. God assists them with a star in the sky and even through the evil Herod.

Reflection

This wondrous feast teaches us a vital lesson. The Magi were humans—lost and not knowing where to go. We are often similarly lost. Additionally, we are sinners, choosing to distance ourselves from God. We are helpless in the last analysis.

The Magi remind us to consider what is truly important in life. Too often, people allow themselves to look for rewards in earthly terms. Inevitably, they are disappointed.

Therefore, in order to offer sacramental absolution, it is necessary for priest-confessors to be made aware of a penitent’s sins. This typically happens through a spoken confession. Additionally, one requirement for absolution within the sacrament of reconciliation is true sorrow for our acts and a resolve to avoid sin in the future. Confessions spoken aloud give a penitent the opportunity to express real contrition.

That being said, while we know for sure that sins are forgiven through the sacrament, God is of course free to extend his grace beyond even what he has promised. If circumstances prevent you from getting to the sacrament of reconciliation in person, you can always directly, prayerfully petition God for the forgiveness of your sins in the meantime. As soon as circumstances allow you to go to confession, though, it is good to do so in order to receive sacramental absolution from a priest.

Q: Why must I confess to a priest, when I can just talk to God?

A: Jesus told his Apostles: “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (Jn 20:23).

Q: I have not gone to confession in a long time. Am I worried about it? Will the priest be angry with me?

A: Most priests will be happy to welcome you back to the sacrament, and not angry at all. Your finally making it to confession is what is important. The priest asks how long it has been since your last confession only to gain some context, so he can better understand your situation and thus counsel you more effectively.

On the other hand, if you want your confession to be as anonymous as possible, you can go to a parish other than your own, even one in another town. If you have a shrine or pilgrimage site within driving distance, these places will often offer reduced anonymity during the process of the sacrament of reconciliation. In this case, if you have never gone to confession in a long time or simply have not received sacramental absolution from a priest.

Be The Light

By Cathy Lamperski Dearing

That Star in the East—
The Angels heralded it
Shepherds and the Wise Men
Followed it
We too seek and follow
This light
And like the Shepherds
And the Wise Men
Once we find it
We are to become it
We are to become light

(© Cathy Lamperski Dearing is a member of Saint Barnabas Parish in Indianapolis. Photo: The visit of the Magi is portrayed in a stained-glass window at St. Michael’s Cathedral in Toronto. The Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord is on Jan. 8. It commemorates the adoration of the newborn Christ by the Magi, or Wise Men. (CNS photo/Danny Wicentowski) )
Rest in peace

Please submit in writing to our office by 10 a.m. Thursday before the week of publication; be sure to state date of death. Obituaries of archdiocesan priests serving our archdiocese are listed elsewhere in The Criterion. Order priests and religious sisters and brothers are included here, unless they are natives of the archdiocese or have connections to it; there are separate obituaries on this page.


BURGER, Mary Jane, 76, St. Anthony of Padua, Clarksville, Dec. 7. Mother of Kari Bryce, Mindy Dubble and Jaime Williams. Grandmother of three.


On New Year's, pope calls for taking the risk of changing the world

By Victoria Arthur

When state lawmakers return to downtown Indianapolis on Jan. 9 to begin the 2023 General Assembly, the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) will stand ready to work for the most vulnerable and shed light on the key issues facing the state each day.

The opening of this year’s General Assembly will occur Monday after an unprecedented special session of the state legislature that saw Indiana become the first state in the nation to enact and extend legal protection to unborn babies.

As it did during the summer session and has for the past five decades, the ICC will draw upon 2,000 years of Catholic social teaching to influence the discussion of important legislation.

“The ICC is the public policy voice for the Catholic Church in the state of Indiana,” said Angela Espada, executive director of the ICC. “Simply put, we advocate either for or against proposed legislation in line with the long and rich history of Catholic social teaching. As always, promoting the common good and protecting the most vulnerable members of society is the basis for the Church’s engagement in the public arena.”

Screening harmful ideas from conception to natural death remains the most pressing issue of the Church’s priorities—and, therefore, the ICC’s—this year.

A previous case was decided on June 24, 2022, when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling that had declared a constitutional right to an abortion, returning regulation of the procedure to the states.

The high court’s ruling in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization served as the catalyst for the special session of the Indiana General Assembly that met in late July to early August that culminated in the passage of groundbreaking legislation significantly limiting abortion. A separate Enrolled Act 1 banned both surgical and chemical abortions with some exceptions.

They include pregnancies resulting from rape or incest (within 10 weeks of fertilization), and cases where the mother has suffered a fetal anomaly or to save the life of the mother (up to 20 weeks post-fertilization).

In addition, the measure terminated the licensure of all abortion centers and required abortions to be performed in hospitals or surgical hospitals. Historically, nearly all abortions in Indiana have taken place in abortion centers, such as those operated by Planned Parenthood.

Senator Enrolled Act 1 went into effect Sept. 21 and was immediately challenged in court by Planned Parenthood and the American Civil Liberties Union.

The Indiana Supreme Court has taken up the case against the legislation. Hearings in the case are scheduled to begin later this month.

During the 2023 legislative session, the ICC will continue to advocate for the unborn while also advocating for other key issues across the pro-life spectrum.

“God will redouble his efforts to fight for the dignity of life at all stages,” Espada said. “This includes opposing assisted suicide and advocating for an end to the death penalty in Indiana. We also will continue to encourage lawmakers to fund programs that support mothers, babies and families, especially as historic inflation disproportionately affects the most vulnerable among us.”

Last summer’s special session, which also provided Hoosiers with relief from soaring inflation, included the allocation of $45 million to support pregnant women, postpartum mothers, babies and families.

Fiscal concerns will top the agenda for this long session of the General Assembly, held every two years and culminating in the passage of the state budget, likely in early May.

As in past legislative sessions, the ICC hopes to see a long-overdue update to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. TANF is a federal government program that provides grants to the states for distribution to families in dire economic circumstances.

Because of outdated state guidelines, the $288 maximum monthly cash payment for a family of three in deep poverty has not been adjusted for inflation since 1998. Much to the dismay of the ICC and other advocates for the poor, the proposed legislation to update TANF has been passed over in the General Assembly.

“Even though TANF money flows to the states from the federal government and is readily available, Indiana has not offered an increase in monthly payments for the neediest of the needy in more than three decades,” Espada said. “With inflation continuing to grip our economy, we need these changes more urgently than ever.”

Other key priorities for the ICC that remain constant include supporting religious freedom and protecting the ability of families to make the best decisions for their children’s education.

“There are so many other issues that fall under the umbrella of the common good,” Espada said. “The Church, and therefore the ICC, will continue to promote the dignity of workers and care for creation, for example.”

In all its efforts, the ICC calls upon the Catholic faithful to stay informed and engaged on key issues in legislation and offers numerous resources to do so.

The ICC website, www.indianaccc.org, provides access to I-CAN, the Indiana Catholic Action Network. Those who sign up for I-CAN receive action alerts on important legislation and ways to contact their elected representatives.

The recently revamped website also includes access to a podcast hosted by Espada and Alexander Mingus, associate director of the ICC. In a recent podcast, “Faithful Citizenship,” the two discussed the duty and responsibility that Catholics have to bring their faith to the public forum.

The ICC now has a special section dedicated to resources and methods to get involved with the ICC and its mission, www.indianaccc.org.

(Victoria Arthur, a member of St. Malachy Parish in Brownsburg, is a correspondent for The Criterion.)

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