BALTIMORE (OSV News)—For two days, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) met in plenary assembly in Baltimore advancing key issues related to liturgy, living out the faith, including in the public square, and retooling the conference to better serve the Church’s mission.

However, the bishops’ Nov. 13–16 meeting, which took place nearly three weeks following the conclusion of the global Synod on Synodality, also concluded without a common game plan for how bishops could get consultative feedback from their local parishes with respect to the synod’s “halftime” report before it reconvenes in 11 months.

At the assembly’s opening Mass on Nov. 13, the bishops prayed for peace. In the homily given by USCCB president Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, he said they also asked for wisdom to help others embrace Jesus Christ. And he noted the feast day of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, the first American saint, herself an immigrant who championed care for immigrants.

The public portions of the bishops’ plenary assembly on Nov. 14-15 were marked with extraordinary unanimity as the bishops’ closed-door “fraternal dialogues” gave them time for face-to-face group discussions to work out contentious issues in advance of presentations and votes. The bishops approved a letter to Pope Francis, affirming their shared concern over global conflicts, his teaching on “ecological conversion,” and their commitment to prayerfully reflect on the Synod on Synodality synthesis report.

In their addresses, Cardinal Christophe Pierre, the apostolic nuncio to the U.S., and Archbishop Broglio offered contrasting viewpoints on synodality. Cardinal Pierre focused on Luke’s Gospel while Bishop Rhoades participated in the fall general assembly meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) which the bishops discussed how the Church in the U.S. will contribute during the next 11 months in preparation for the final meeting on the synod on synodality.

Bishop Rhoades experienced ‘deep sense of communion’ at October synod meeting at the Vatican

Bishops’ meeting shows united front on serving the faith, the Church

The bishops also reflected on the relationship of synodality to the three-year National Eucharistic Revival the Church in the U.S. is currently taking part in and the National Eucharistic Congress that will happen next July in Indianapolis. The interview took place days before Bishop Rhoades participated in the fall general assembly meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) which the bishops discussed how the Church in the U.S. will contribute during the next 11 months in preparation for the final meeting on the synod on synodality.

‘A sense of deep communion’

He came to the synod with other delegates from the U.S. that included bishops, religious, and lay Catholics. At the synod, getting to know bishops and other delegates from around the world made an impression on Bishop Rhoades.

He called the experience “very positive,” but admitted that “the schedule was a bit grueling. I think we would have unanimity on the part of the delegates if we voted on that.”

He said the highlight of the experience for him “was the opportunity to meet and get to know so many bishops and other delegates from around the world. It is enlightening to learn about the life of the Church, the challenges and the positive aspects of the Church in other parts of the world from which we can learn.”

See RHOADES, page 2A
Rhoades
continued from page 1A

Getting to know Catholics from around the world in the midst of a weeks-long, Spirit-led discussion and discernment process intensified Bishop Rhoades' ties to his fellow synod delegates.

"I was the only U.S. bishop who was in Spanish-speaking working groups," he noted. "Three of the five working groups that I was a part of were Spanish-speaking. So, I really developed some good relationships with bishops from Spain and Latin America. The two English-speaking working groups were extremely diverse with bishops and delegates from Africa, Asia and Europe. So, I pretty much covered the world in the bishops that I got to know."

The context of spiritual discernment
Bishop Rhoades has led the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend for more than 15 years. As the current longest-serving bishop in the state, he reflected on his experience of the Church in Indiana in light of conversations that came out of the synod meeting.

"There’s a good communion among the bishops of Indiana," Bishop Rhoades said. "We got together twice a year. In a sense, that’s a sense of communion. We also meet with people from the Indiana Catholic Conference.

"One thing that came out of the synod was that we should strengthen the communion of the Church within a province. An ecclesiastical province is a group of dioceses in one geographic region with one archdiocese in it. The five dioceses of Indiana make up the Province of Indianapolis.

"They said that we need to do more on that [provincial] level," said Bishop Rhoades of the synod delegates. "Coming from Indiana and the positive experiences I’ve had with my brother bishops in Indiana in some of our joint ventures, that was not only affirmed, but there was a call for more of that."

Bishop Rhoades also reflected on how his experience of the synod meeting might affect the leadership of his diocese going forward.

"Within my diocese, the methodology of the conversations in the Spirit is something that I would like to implement in particular situations and to share that with my priests," he said. "We face a lot of polarization in our country. It’s even seeped into the Church. I thought this was a method where you might have people who disagree but who, together, share a real mutual respect in how this works.

"It’s always in the context of spiritual discernment. It’s a much more positive way to move forward in communion even when there are disagreements. We’re still Christians. We’re still brothers and sisters in Christ. That’s something that I would like to see (in my diocese)."

"Done respectfully and prayerfully"
The methodology of the meeting was a model of the synodality Pope Francis is encouraging. Bishop Rhoades explained how the conversations in the Spirit methodology worked during the synod meeting.

The more than 300 delegates in the synod took part in a three-day retreat before the meeting. The meeting itself was broken up into four modules on the themes of synodality, communion, participation and mission.

"About 25% of the delegates were priests, religious and lay Catholics. The rest were bishops. During the meeting, they gathered in working groups of 10 at round tables to speak about specific questions related to the themes that were listened to what the others at the table had to say.

The process at each table was led by a facilitator who was not a delegate to the synod.

"Every one of the 10 people around the table spoke from their own experience and prayer," Bishop Rhoades said. "You had a limit of around three or four minutes. We were to listen carefully to what everyone said. After about three people gave their reflections, there would be about five minutes of silent prayer before the process was repeated.

"Then we went around again and shared what resonated with us," Bishop Rhoades said. "It could have been something that really moved me, or it could have been something that maybe didn’t resonate with me, something I might have disagreed with."

Bishop Rhoades emphasized that during the rounds of sharing experiences and responses by the delegates at the table, there wasn’t a discussion. When delegates spoke, they were not asked specifically to what others had to say. That happened later, after more prayer.

"There was a great method here that the synod delegates talked about," Bishop Rhoades said. "We’ve listened to each other. So, what are the convergences here? Where is there consensus where we all kind of agree in answer to the question? Then where are there some differences? Or maybe new questions or things we weren’t in agreement with? So, we discuss that.

"At a that point, we’re more typifying discussion, but always done respectfully and prayerfully again. Then we had to come up with and agree on a report to the whole body. So, the written report was to list the convergences, divergences and the proposals for further study.

Bishop Rhoades said this process took about two hours. Once done, a representative from each table would give a report of what happened at that table to all the delegates, with about 32 reports in all.

These reports were given at what were called general congregations.

"After that, the pope is open for anyone to make an intervention to the whole body," Bishop Rhoades said. "Now, the majority of the most general congregations … when the reports were being given. He wasn’t there when we had the small working groups.

"You might have 50 or so of us who want to make an intervention and speak. Obviously, there wasn’t enough time. And you were limited to, I think, a couple of minutes at that point. So, if you didn’t get in then you would be allowed to submit your intervention—what you were going to say—in written form to the synod secretary."

"Focus on the major things"
The preparation for the synod meeting took place during the course of about two years at local to continental levels. How the preparation for next year’s meeting, which will start in 11 months, was something that Bishop Rhoades had questions about.

"It’s really left in the hands of the episcopal conferences," Bishop Rhoades told The Criterion a few days before the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) semi-annual meeting in Baltimore on Nov. 13-16. "So, I think at the U.S. bishops meeting, we will probably hammer out how the next level of consultation. Certainly, it would be local again. But it’s not going to be able to go through all these stages followed before. There’s just not enough time.

The bishops in Baltimore did not determine any detailed guidelines for dioceses on how to contribute to the preparation for next year’s meeting, in part, because they would like the time to have time to review “A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report,” the document that the synod issued at the end of the meeting.

"I can’t say for sure, but I would guess that all of the dioceses would submit to the synod any detailed guidelines for further consultation," Bishop Rhoades said. "It may be left to individual bishops how they’re going to do that consultation in their own dioceses.

"One of the challenges is that we have a 4-page document to reflect on," Bishop Rhoades said. "How are we going to do that? … I think we’re going to have to kind of focus on the major things for this consultation.”

(To read “A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report,” visit bit.ly/SynodalChurch. In the second part of this page, the bishops published the documents in the Nov. 1 issue of The Criterion, Bishop Rhoades will reflect on the spiritual aspects of synodality, the role of the teaching church of bishops and the synod and the synod’s relationship to the National Eucharistic Revival and National Eucharistic Congress.)

Corrections
The names of two archdiocesan deacon aspirants, Peter Majeski and Agustin Torres-Lozano, were misspelled in a graphic showing the aspirants in the Vacations Awareness Supplement in the Nov. 3 issue of The Criterion.
As a Church, we are stronger together. The impact of your religious order leaders as examples that synod participants reflections during the gathering. in Indianapolis. The public is invited to attend.

meeting at 4 p.m. on Dec. 6 at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral at the Vatican, will speak on his experience of the synod “new possibilities.”

account of the risen Jesus revealing himself to his disciples on the road to Emmaus as illustrating “precisely the synodal path in its essential elements: encountering, accompanying, listening, discerning and rejoicing at what the Holy Spirit reveals.” Archdiocese Broglio shared his view that current advisory structures in the U.S. Church, both at the diocesan and national level, are examples of existing synodal realities to “recognize and build on” while remaining open to “new possibilities.”

On Nov. 14-15, the bishops voted with overwhelming majorities on every issue: U.S. adaptations to the Liturgy of the Hours and liturgical drafts related to religious life, and national revised statutes for Christian initiation. It also approved without controversy supplements to its teaching on faithful citizenship that references Pope Francis’ 2020 encyclical letter “Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship” while calling abortion as “our pre-eminent priority” among other threats to human life and dignity.

The bishops voted to support the sainthood cause launched by the Archdiocese of New York for Father Isaac Hecker (1819-1888), founder of the Paulist Fathers. They also endorsed an effort to declare St. John Henry Newman a doctor of the Church.

S. Coakley of Oklahoma City as secretary-elect of the USCCB, and also elected chairmen-elect for six committees—education, committee, culture, doctrine, diversity, national collections and pro-life activities—as well as bishops for the boards of Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc., CLINIC, and Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. Church’s overseas relief and development agency.

On Oct. 27 at the Vatican, Father Timothy said he had shared his view that current advisory structures in the U.S. Church, both at the diocesan and national level, are examples of existing synodal realities to “recognize and build on” while remaining open to “new possibilities.”

A surprise came when the bishops decided to punt approval of a pastoral framework for Indigenous Catholic ministry that they had commissioned four years ago in order to revise and revisit the plan at their June 2024 assembly.

Outside the hotel where the bishops’ assembly was held, the Baltimore-based Defend Life organization held a rosary rally led by Bishop Joseph E. Strickland. The event, however, was planned in advance of the discussions on Oct. 11, just days before the assembly, that Pope Francis had removed him from pastoral governance of the Diocese of Tyler, Texas. About 125 participants, including some clergy and religious, participated.

Archbishop Broglio said that USCCB’s current strategic planning cycle with a mission planning process that would allow the conference to have defined regular responsibilities and the flexibility to focus on “mission directives that evolve after a process of discernment” that can be informed by bishops engaging in local and regional consultation.

He indicated a synodal culture needs to take root in the local Church first—nothing parish or diocesan pastoral councils are not used in some places since they are not mandatory—in order to discern what structures are needed to support it at all levels of the Church.

The bishops showed a move toward deepening that kind of engagement by replacing the USCCB’s current strategic planning cycle with a mission planning process that would allow the conference to have defined regular responsibilities and the flexibility to focus on “mission directives that evolve after a process of discernment” that can be informed by bishops engaging in local and regional consultation.

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May our faith of hope and joy continue to burn brightly in the hearts of the youths at NCYC—and in our hearts, too

“It’s been almost a year and a half since Corpus Christi Sunday 2022—June 19—the launch date of the ongoing National Eucharistic Revival. At the time of the revival launch, Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minn., who is heading up the initiative, said the following: ‘It’s our mission to renew the Church by enkindling in God’s people a living relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. We want every person who encounters the love of Jesus Christ truly present in the Eucharist and to experience the transforming effects of that love. We want to see a movement of Catholics across the United States who are healed, converted, formed and unified by an encounter with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and sent out on mission for the life of the world.’

So I’m sure there’s a better mission than that. I also am not sure there’s a bigger one. Following the timeline of the revival, we are currently in its second phase—which is called a time for ‘fostering eucharistic devotion at the parish level, strengthening our liturgical life through a faithful celebration of the Mass, eucharistic adoration, missions, resources, preaching and organic movements of the Holy Spirit.’

At my parish, we are having a 40 Hours Devotion at the start of Advent, where parishioners can come and spend time intimately with the Lord. I’d imagine most parishes around the country are doing something similar for foster devotion to our Lord in the Eucharist.

Then, of course, in just eight short months there will be the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis on July 17-21. ‘Every movement needs a moment,’ the website says. ‘This is ours.’ A lot of time and money and planning are going into this national event, and it’s exciting. We’re going, and I hope you go, too.

But it’s also one event. What about the in-between times? What about the times when our parishes are not bringing in a speaker, or facilitating small group discussions, or coordinating special devotions? What about the times when we will not be gathered together by the thousands, being affirmed in our faith and encountering the Lord together? It’s in these in-between times that the habits of daily life are formed and where virtue is born.

Four eucharistic tips

This time of year offers us a prime opportunity for eucharistic purging sessions for our own personal revival in the Eucharist. With the start of Advent in a few weeks, we begin to prepare to welcome the Presence into our homes. Here are a few things we could do to draw closer to him in the Eucharist:

—Make time for some spiritual reading on the Eucharist. In particular, sit and pray with Pope Francis’ ‘Laudato Si’ or John Paul II’s 2003 encyclical on the Eucharist, ‘Ecclesia de Eucharistia,’ available from Our Sunday Visitor or on the website for free. If you’ve never read it, or read it 100 times, there’s always more to glean from it—if we make the time.

—Speaking of making time, any personal eucharistic revival has to start with our own commitment of time spent in the presence of the Eucharist. Maybe we’re being called to attend daily Mass during Advent—or perhaps make a weekly holy hour. Or maybe you do both of those things, and the Lord is asking you to up the ante and make a daily holy hour! Pick something and commit to it.

—Try really paying attention to the word of the eucharistic prayer during Mass. I’ll be the first to admit, it can be easy or tempting to lose focus during this part of the liturgy. But try to really focus on what’s happening and let it inspire you.

—Every time you learn more about Christ, spend more time with him and seek to better understand his saving love for us in the Mass, the natural next step is to resolve to bring Christ to others. Perhaps there’s an opportunity to bring your kids to adoration—or your parents, a friend or a sibling. Maybe, once you’ve read and enjoyed a book on the Eucharist, you could share it with others. Most importantly, we bring our eucharistic Lord to the world through our love and sacrifice for others.

We’re just about halfway through with the revival, which wraps up on Pentecost 2025. Let’s embrace the opportunity for renewal this Advent.

(Gretchen R. Crowe is the editor-in-chief of OCN News.)

Letter to the Editor

Reader: Use holiday season to give “thanks generously and joyfully”

A big “thanks” to editorial writer Daniel Conway for his piece in the Nov. 17 issue of The Criterion on “Living life as Jesus, giving thanks generously and joyfully.”

Conway likened Catholic life to being like “stewards,” with Jesus being our perfect example. The key factors in all of this are to be grateful, responsible, caring, sharing, and to not be consumed with self.

His best line of the editorial to me though, was when he quoted Pope Francis as saying that we all ought to try harder at not being “sourpusses.”

Yes! I agree! And with the holidays now here and us all having shopping and travelling and guests in our home, let’s accept the challenge to up our game and be happy and grateful this holiday season—and not sourpusses!

Sonny Shanks
Corydon
The publication date for this column is Friday, Nov. 24, the day after Thanksgiving, which is a holy day of obligation. I was privileged to participate in a blessed Thanksgiving celebration. I also pray that yesterday was a day of rest for those who are suffering from hunger, homelessness and all forms of spiritual and material poverty.

Thanksgiving Day is a secular holiday, but those of us who believe in a generous and loving God can’t help but use this opportunity to give thanks for all the gifts we have received from him. For Catholics, there is no greater way to express our gratitude than to participate fully in the holy Eucharist whose very name means “to give thanks.”

Many pastors say that Mass on Thanksgiving morning is one of their favorite celebrations. Although it’s not a holy day and no one is obliged to attend, there is a great sense of gratitude that fills the Church because those who are present truly want to be there and to give thanks to God. The Eucharist is the incomparable gift of our Lord’s body and blood, soul and divinity, to us. When we receive the Eucharist, we accept into our minds, hearts and the very being of Jesus Christ. We praise him and give him thanks for this most intimate gift-of-self to us who are in no way deserving of such a precious gift.

Even the most devout Catholics are sometimes tempted to neglect their responsibilities to participate actively in the eucharistic liturgy or to adore the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass. We are busy with many things, and we too easily forget (or fail to appreciate as we should) that Christ’s gift of himself to us is the source and summit of our lives as missionary disciples of Jesus.

As I trust many of you know, we are now in the midst of a three-year revival of eucharistic devotion sponsored by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. This special initiative was launched on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) in 2022. Dioceses throughout the United States are conducting local events to celebrate the holy Eucharist and promote the objectives of the National Eucharistic Revival. These local events will culminate in the National Eucharistic Congress, which will be held on July 17-21, 2024, in Indianapolis.

At this special time of offering the Eucharist of all ages will come together to worship our Lord with a joyful, expectant faith. There, the Holy Spirit unites people to enkindle a missionary fire in the heart of our nation as we recommit ourselves to the source and summit of our faith.

Just over a year ago, at the Italian Eucharistic Congress on Sept. 26, 2022, Pope Francis said to the clergy, religious and lay faithful in attendance:

“Would I like to tell you: Let us return to Jesus! Let us return to the Eucharist! While we are broken by the trials and sufferings of life, Jesus becomes food that feeds us and heals us.

Especially during the eucharistic revival, we are invited, and challenged, to develop a deeper awareness of the significance of this great sacrament. “Returning to the Eucharist” is not just for those who have stopped practicing their faith, although one of the primary objectives of this revival is to encourage and support those who have either rejected their Catholic faith or have simply drifted away. Returning to the Eucharist—in the depth of its richness—requires a deliberate decision to center our lives on the great mystery of Christ’s real presence—is something that all of us are urged to do.

Turning back to Jesus—conversion—means allowing him to show us the way to give thanks to the Father by surrendering our minds and hearts to God’s will for us. Returning to the Eucharist allows Jesus to feed our hungry hearts and heal our brokenness.

It is a great privilege for us to host the National Eucharistic Congress here in our archdiocese next summer. It’s also a serious responsibility. The official purpose of the revival is “To inspire and prepare the people of God to be formed, healed, converted, united, and sent out to a hungry and hurting world through a renewed encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist—the source and summit of our Catholic faith.”

As the host archdiocese, we must be prepared—spiritually as well as organizationally—to accomplish this ambitious objective by welcoming pilgrims from all regions of our nation as we celebrate the Lord’s great gift of himself to us in the Eucharist. During this special time of Thanksgiving, let’s return to the Eucharist. Let’s give thanks to God for the wonderful gift of Christ’s presence among us in this Most Blessed Sacrament.

...
November 27
St. Therese of the Infant Jesus (Little Flower) Parish, 4720 E. 13th St., Indianapolis. Jesus and the Eucharist Bible Study, 2-3 p.m., last of seven Monday evening stand-alone sessions, content also available through formed.org, free, registered preference. Information, registration: 317-501-0060, cnicsher@email.com

November 30
St. Therese of the Infant Jesus (Little Flower) Parish, 4720 E. 130th St., Indianapolis. Jesus and the Eucharist Bible Study, 1-2:30 p.m., last of seven Wednesday afternoon stand-alone sessions, content also available through formed.org, free, registered preference. Information, registration: 317-501-0060, cnicsher@email.com

December
Women’s Retreat at Saint Meinrad, 4901 W. 86th St., Indianapolis. First Friday Mass, 5 p.m., optional to repeat on Friday evening. Information: 317-829-6800, womenescrcenter.com
Our Lady of the Greenwood Church, 335 S. Meridian St., Greenwood. First Friday bilingual celebration of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Mass 6 p.m. following by adoration until 9 p.m., schedule and registration available. Information: 317-750-7309, mauss10@hotmail.com
St. John Paul II Church, 2253 St. Joe Road, Sellersburg. First Friday Devotion, 11:40 a.m., litany, consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Divine Mercy Chaplet followed by noon Mass. Information: 824-226-2512.
The Village Dome, 6935 Lake Lehen Drive, Indianapolis. Ken Ojegoke’s book signing: Breaking the Bread: A Biblical Devotion for Catholics (Cycle B), 3:30-7:30 p.m., copies signed by co-author Scott Hahn will be raffled for charity. Information: theelgadepdx.com, 317-845-5487.
Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. Shop INN-Spired Christmas Sale, Mon.-Fri. 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Dec. 9, 16 and 23, 9 a.m.-noon; many new items available. Information: 317-788-7581, benedictinn.org/directions.
St. Matthew the Apostle Parish, 4100 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. Advent Eveing of Music and Reflection, 6 p.m., featuring choirs, handbell choir, readings and reflections followed by refreshments in parish cafe. Information: 317-257-4297, stmatthew@stmatthewindy.org.
Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center, 812-923-8817, ftm.retreatportal.com/events, 317-501-0060, cnicsher@email.com

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

December 8
Old St. Joseph’s Center, 22143 Maus St., Noblesville. A Day of Quiet Renewal, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., $20, $80 with spiritual direction. Information, registration: 812-933-1877, oldstjosephscenter.com

December 11
Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5533 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. Movie Night at Fatima: The Nativity Story, 5:9 p.m., includes dinner, prayer, refreshments, $16. Registration: fmريط entertain.com/event/317-745-7681, lbloom@archindy.org

December 12, 14, 14
Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5533 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. Advent Days of Spiritual Renewal, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., $40 per day, includes room, lunch and use of common areas and grounds, overnight stays available for additional $30 per night, dinner additional $10 per meal. Registration: fmريط entertain.com/event/317-745-7681 or 317-829-6800, womenescrcenter.com

December 13, 19
Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. Personal Day of Retreat, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., $40, includes private room for the day and lunch at Benedict Inn. Space available for additional $30, must be scheduled in advance. Information, registration: benedictinn.org/programs, 317-788-7581, benedictinn@archindy.org

December 16
Santa Maria Archabbey Guesthouse, 200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad. Organ Workshop and Concert.

December 17
Saint Meinrad Archabbey, 317-788-7581, benedictinn.org/programs, 317-788-7581, benedictinn@archindy.org

December 18
St. Mary’s of the Greenwood Church, 101 St. Anthony Dr., Oldenburg. Father Jack Clark Robinson presenting, $75 for four sessions or $25 per session. Information, registration: benedictinn.org/programs, 317-788-7581, benedictinn@archindy.org

December 22-22
Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. Shop INN-Spired Christmas Sale, Mon.-Fri. 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Dec. 9, 16 and 23, 9 a.m.-noon; many new items available. Information: 317-788-7581, benedictinn.org/directions.

January 3
Mount Saint Francis, Center for Spirituality, 101 St. Anthony Dr., Mt. St. Francis. Grecius 800, Fri. 4 p.m.-Sun. 1 p.m., retreat celebrating 100 years of the nativity scene St. Francis shared with the people of Grecius, Italy. Franciscan Father child Michel Robinson and Third Order Franciscan Divine F fever presenting, $150 for two nights, $255 includes two nights’ accommodatios and four meals. Information, registration: 812-923-8817, tremut@franciscarosica.org

2024
January 4

January 11

January 12-14
Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5533 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. YOBTH Marriage Preparation Weekend. 7 p.m.-11:35 a.m. Sun., $298 per couple, separate rooms, includes meals and materials. Registration: fmريط entertain.com/event/317-545-7681, lbloom@archindy.org

January 18

January 22-26
Santa Maria Archabbey Guesthouse, 200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad. Winter Challenge Workshop. Benedictine Brother John Glaspenn presenting, for directors of liturgical music and singers in parish liturgies, $750 single, $835 double. $200 commuter. Registration: saum@archindy.org/events

January 25
Creative Ways to Encounter the Divine (via Zoom): “Hearing God’s Voice in People, Events and Dreams,” offered by Benedict Inn Retreat & Conference Center, 7:40-9 p.m., Thursday, fourth of four stand-alone sessions, $25. Information, registration: benedictinn.org/programs, 317-788-7581, benedictinn@archindy.org

Wedding Anniversaries
JOHN and SUSAN (WILSON) O’NAN, members of St. Matthew the Apostle Parish in Indianapolis, will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on Dec. 2. The couple was married in Holy Name of Jesus Church in Henderson, Ky., on Nov. 28, 1958. They have two children: Chad and Kevin O’Nan. The couple also has four grandchildren.

RICK and PEG (BECKER) METZLER, members of St. Jude Parish in Indianapolis, will celebrate their 55th wedding anniversary on Nov. 30. The couple was married in Holy Name of Jesus Church in Beech Grove on Nov. 30, 1968. They have one daughter, Keri. The couple also has three grandchildren.

GREGORY and REBECCA (HARLICK) KOER, members of Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ Parish in Indianapolis, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on Nov. 24. The couple was married on Nov. 24, 1973. They have two children: Cynthia Pacheco and Matthew Koer. The couple also has six grandchildren.

Announcements for couples celebrating 50, 55, 60, 65, 70 or more years of marriage are accepted. Go to cthc.com/anniversary or call 317-236-1585.
A Special Supplement
of The Criterion
Fun and faith combine to create a ‘Fully Alive’ celebration at NCYC

“You’re not a problem to be solved, you are a mystery to be encountered.”

Those words shared by Archbishop Charles C. Thompson during the opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 16 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis set the tone for a three-day gathering of faith for more than 12,000 teenagers, chaperones, clergy, religious, speakers and volunteers. That phrase was repeated several times during the weekend.

The archbishop’s message tied in with the gathering’s theme, “Fully Alive,” where young people were reminded that they are called to be disciples who let the light of Christ shine through them in all they say and do.

Archbishop Thompson reminded the teens that each of them is defined by their identity in Christ, whose body, blood, soul and divinity is present in the Eucharist.

“The Eucharist has been given to us through the passion, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ so that we have life, that we have what is necessary to be witnesses to the good news, what it means to be fully alive,” he said.

We are most fully alive when we live our lives not with ourselves at the center, but keeping Christ at the center. We are fully alive when we live for the glory of God and in service to others.

The teens were reminded several times during the weekend that Jesus loves them and wants to have a relationship with them.

During a Mass on Nov. 17 at St. John the Evangelist Church in Indianapolis, Bishop Bruce A. Lewandowski, an auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Md., told young people, “Jesus only wants one thing from you—make him the love of your life!”

In today’s ever-growing secularistic world, we know that charge is no easy task.

In his homily at the closing Mass on Nov. 18, Bishop Joseph A. Espaillat, an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New York, implored his young listeners to take up the mission given to them by Christ in their baptism.

“We are the now of God,” he said. “NCYC, we are counting on you. Jesus started with 12 Apostles. We have 12,000 here today. So, we can change the world!”

“God bless you. God keep you. May he continue to let his face shine upon you. And always remember: have faith, have fun while you’re doing it,” Bishop Espaillat continued. “And remember, hold on to the Church, because the Church is holding on to you.”

We hope the stories and photos featured on pages 1B-12B in this week’s issue of The Criterion paint a portrait of a young Church that is serving as a beacon of light in a troubled world.

For more photos from the conference, visit www.CriterionOnline.com.

And we pray that you enjoy the young people’s stories, their enthusiasm and their passion for our shared faith.

—Mike Krokos, editor
Bishop exhorts youths at closing Mass of NCYC to choose ‘joy over fear’

By Sean Gallagher

The joyful shouts of 12,000 Catholic teens from across the country echoed loudly during the two-hour closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

Bishop Joseph A. Espaillat, an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New York, described the scene well during his homily in which he often led a loud call-and-response dialogue with the youths.

“Jesus, my sisters and my brothers, left us the best gift,” he said. “The gift of faith. And faith is the key.”

Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minn., was the principal celebrant of the Mass. He was joined by 17 concelebrating priests, including Indianapolis Archbishop Charles C. Thompson and approximately 175 concelebrating priests.

Bishop Espaillat had many moments of fun and laughter during his homily, he also gave important messages to his listeners to take with them as they returned to their homes across the country.

The first was that they were called to choose “joy over fear.”

In explaining this, Bishop Espaillat distinguished between a “worldly fear that creates panic and anxiety” and a “holy fear, or fear of the Lord, [that] is a source of peace and happiness.”

“If we love God and know that we are loved by God, then why do we need to fear?” he asked his listeners. Bishop Espaillat par了解ed the fear of the young people at NCYC “to take home with them.”

You’ve got to have faith,” he said. “You’ve got to have fun while you do it. And you need family and friends and community along the way.”

Bishop Espaillat added that the faith to which he exhorted the youths involved more than simply affirming that God exists.

“It’s not just about believing in God,” he said. “It’s accepting what God gives us, especially through the Church, and then responding by our actions by how we treat each other and the way we live.

“Faith is critical because it leads us to joy. And joy overcomes worldly fear because it leads us outside of ourselves.

During his homily, Bishop Espaillat quoted from Pope Francis’ 2013 apostolic exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium” (“The Joy of the Gospel”), in which the pontiff wrote that all believers have the “mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing” (#273).

Regarding the blessing mentioned by the pope, Bishop Espaillat asked his listeners with a smile to raise their hands if they knew how to curse at people.

Many in the stadium predictably did. They also cheered loudly after Bishop Espaillat told them that “if you know how to curse, you know how to bless. If you know how to curse, you are following what the enemy wants you to do. That’s what the devil wants. But God doesn’t want you to curse. God wants you to bless. So, instead of cursing somebody out, we need to bless people up.”

In closing his homily, Bishop Espaillat called his young listeners to take up the mission given to them by Christ in their baptism.

“We are the now of God,” he said. “NCYC, we are counting on you. Jesus started with 12 Apostles. We have 12,000 here today. So, we can change the world!”

A long, loud cheer filled the stadium in response to Bishop Espaillat’s call. As the cheer died down, the bishop gave a parting blessing.

“God bless you. God keep you. May he continue to let his face shine upon you. And always remember: have faith, have fun while you’re doing it. And remember, hold on to the Church, because the Church is holding on to you.”

The raucousness of the 35-minute homily later gave way to quiet, emotional and heartfelt prayer during Communion as the house band played such popular contemporary Christian meditative songs as “Yeshua” and “Lord, I need you.”

As the Mass closed, the rejoicing returned, with flashlights on smartphones lighting up the floor and stands in the stadium. When the closing procession was over, the band began playing upbeat music and teens rushed forward to celebrate as close to the stage as they could get.

Zach Spahr, a member of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Indianapolis, was proud that so many of his Catholic peers from across the country had come to his hometown to celebrate their faith.

“There are a lot of times when I think that Indy is not really the best place,” said Zach in a concourse of the stadium after the liturgy. “But then you see something like this and it’s like, ‘What a great place to live!’ There’s a little bit of pride.”

He spoke about how he, as a Catholic, sometimes feels alone at North Central High School in Indianapolis where he is a student.

“So, seeing that there are so many other Catholics across the country is important to me,” Zach said.

The jubilation of the 12,000 young Catholics at the closing Mass confirmed that conviction in Ean Nelson, a sophomore from the Diocese of Des Moines, Iowa.

“It was something like I’d never seen before,” he said of the closing Mass. “It’s something that I’ll never forget. It was cool being able to see that I’m not alone.”

For Ean, NCYC “was life-changing.”

“It’s something that I’ll never forget. It was cool being able to see that I’m not alone.”

Ean Nelson, a sophomore from the Diocese of Des Moines, Iowa, kneels in prayer during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Participants in the National Catholic Youth Conference raise their hands in prayer during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Mike Krokus)

Youths from the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa, kneel in prayer during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)
Archbishop calls on archdiocesan youths to be ‘eucharistic people’

By Natalie Hoefler

Nina Krue is amazed when she looked around the room filled with more than 1,100 teens from all corners of central and southern Indiana.

When asked if she’d ever been to Mass with so many of her peers, “That’s an easy no,” said the member of Holy Family Parish in New Albany.

The youths filled a section of the Indiana Convention Center’s 500 Balloon for a special Mass celebrated by Archbishop Charles C. Thompson on the opening day of the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) on Nov. 16.

It’s likely that Nina had also never been to a Mass with so many archdiocesan priests and seminarians, either. At least 20 archdiocesan priests processed in with the archbishop. And all of our 32 seminarians for the archdiocese are here, including these three [transitional] deacons up here [on the stage] that we’ll ordain priests next year,” Archbishop Thompson said at the beginning of his homily.

“I expect a few of you to be thinking about that and praying about that, about how we might add to those numbers very soon. So, keep open to how the Holy Spirit moves you throughout these couple of days.”

‘Called to be eucharistic people’

The special Mass just for the NCYC participants of central and southern Indiana was celebrated “to keep the Eucharist not as a mere symbol but as the body and blood, soul and divinity of Christ.’” Howard envisioned the youths that any concerns, struggles or issues they left at home will still be there after the conference.

“For the time being, however, we take solace in the joy, the wisdom, the beauty and spirit of this sacred time in prayer, fellowship, adoration and celebration of our faith in Jesus Christ. … Let us keep before us the wisdom of his words, namely that the kingdom of God is among you.”

We’re going to do a lot of idolatry, Archbishop Thompson said, where some believers “attempt to create God in their own image, picking and choosing what to believe about Jesus. Maybe that’s why so many think it’s a mere symbol, the Eucharist.

“It is only by seeking and embracing divine wisdom … that we are able to rise above the idolatry, keeping before us the wisdom of his words, namely that the kingdom of God is among us.”

We’re not saved by trying to conform Jesus to our image, but through his passion, death and resurrection we are saved. It is for this reason that we celebrate and adore Jesus in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist throughout this weekend, revival, congress and beyond.”

The kingdom of God is among you

After the Mass, which included music by a choir of Cathedral High School in Indianapolis, Archbishop Thompson processed with the Blessed Sacrament through the halls of the convention center and along Georgia Street. Those present at the Mass joined the procession. Thousands of other NCYC participants either joined in or knelt along the procession route.

Before embarking on the procession “I’m just thankful that all those gathering for NCYC—as well as those who may just happen to be there Along the way,” Archbishop Thompson urged the youths of the archdiocese “to realize the awesome privilege and responsibility placed upon us as companions of Jesus Christ and echoing his proclamation: ‘The kingdom of God is among you.”

Dozens of priests at NCYC give the gift of mercy in the sacrament of penance

By Sean Gallagher

The National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) is known for its large crowds of boisterous Catholic teens from across the country rejoicing together as one. But the conference is also marked by more intimate experiences. That happens especially, and in large numbers, in the sacrament of penance.

Dozens of priests from across the U.S. heard confessions for hours in a large ballroom on Nov. 17 and 18 in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis and during conference general sessions in a concourse of the adjacent Lucas Oil Stadium.

Nina Krue, left, Avery Drury and Tessa Hofstedt, all members of Holy Family Parish in New Albany, sing a song for the opening procession during a Mass for National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) participants from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis on Nov. 16.

Teens gladly waited for the sacrament of penance for 30 minutes in a long winding line that extended from the confession room well out into a convention center hallway.

Demi Bolen, a high school junior and member of St. Susanna Parish in Plainfield, went to confession at NCYC this year, the second time she had attended the conference.

“It’s worth it,” she said of waiting in line for the sacrament. “You’re confessing your sins and getting forgiven. That’s important. Having that weight lifted off your chest is really good.”

Seeing so many of her peers wanting to receive God’s mercy in the sacrament was encouraging to her.

“It just shows that everyone’s going through the same things you are,” Demi said. “Everyone has their faults just like I do.”

She was also impressed by the dozens of priests hearing confessions.

“It’s insane how many priests take their time to do this for people,” Demi said. “They’re passionate in what they do, and they’re here to help you.”

One of those priests was Father Jeffrey Starkovich of the Diocese of Lake Charles, La.

The greatest encounter of our life is the encounter with mercy and forgiveness,” he said. “In my experience as a priest, to be forgiven is one of the deepest desires of the human heart. That applies whether you’re a 7-year-old making your first confession or you’re at the end of your life and you want to be forgiven before you go to your judgment and eternal reward.

Teenagers are human, just like everybody else. They want to be forgiven.”

Being in the ballroom with so many priests from across the country was a blessed reminder for Father Starkovich of the fraternity of the priesthood.

Father Noah Diehm of the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa, hears the confession of a National Catholic Youth Conference participant on Nov. 17 at the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

“Twenty-five years or so ago, I was a seminarian and I was the only Black seminarian in the U.S. I was the only African American in my class. It’s nice to see the diversity in the seminaries over the years,” Father Jeffrey said.

“I love being part of what I call the world’s biggest fraternity,” he said. “I’ve never met you. I don’t know anything about you. But I know the most important thing about you. We both love the Lord, and we’ve been ordained to serve.

And we’re willing to sit in these not very comfortable chairs for long hours hearing stories from everybody about their sins to give them the gift of mercy and forgiveness. It’s what unites us. I love the visual of seeing 50 priests hearing confessions at the same time and seeing the people in line.”

Monica Robinson loved that sight as well. A pastoral associate at St. Francis and Clare of Assisi Parish in Greenwood, Robinson has been a chaperone at many past NCYC gatherings. This was the first time she served there as a volunteer. Her job was to give out stickers to penitents leaving the confession room, stickers that said, “I’m forgiven.”

She remarked on Nov. 17 that many people receiving the sticker had said that it was like an “I voted” sticker handed out at polling places on election day.

“I told them, ‘No, it’s way better,’” said Robinson. She was amazed at the long line of teens waiting to experience God’s mercy in the sacrament of penance.

“I’ve been here since [noon], and the line has not ceased the entire time,” said Robinson more than three hours later. “There are more than 50 priests here. It’s unbelievable. To see all of this beauty in front of me, my heart has just exploded.”

Not only was Robinson impressed by the number of teens waiting to confess their sins and be forgivener, she was also encouraged by the number of priests ready to hear those confessions.

“Teenagers are mad about the vote. They’re offering these young people volumes about our Church,” she said.
Some 12,000 youths from across the country showed their love for Christ in the Eucharist in a profound time of adoration on Nov. 17 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC).

From the start of the conference the day before, the Blessed Sacrament had been exposed in a monstrance for adoration in a chapel in the adjacent Indiana Convention Center.

During the evening general session of NCYC on Nov. 17, Bishop Joseph A. Espaillat, an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New York, carried the monstrance in a procession from the convention center to the stadium where he placed it on an altar for all 12,000 youths to see and adore.

Dominican Sister Jude Andrew Link gave a reflection before the Eucharist was brought to the stadium that helped prepare the youths for that time of adoration. She told them that the Eucharist is "the secret of transformation" in their own lives.

"When you and I go to Mass, bread and wine are brought up and offered to God. And he changes them into himself," Sister Jude Andrew said. "Then, in the very same spot where we brought up the bread and wine, we now receive Jesus Christ. "When that happens at Mass and the bread and wine are offered up to God, offer yourself. I promise you, if you offer yourself, your whole self to God, he will transform you. It’s what he does. He makes all things new."

A young man from the archdiocese who has experienced that transformation then offered a witness talk to the youths in the stadium.

Garet Colburn is a member of St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg. A senior at Silver Creek High School in Sellersburg, he grew in his appreciation of the Eucharist and the Church’s liturgy through taking part twice in One Bread One Cup, a summer youth liturgical leadership program of Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad.

Garet shared with his Catholic peers from across the country how he was afraid in the past to share his faith with his non-Catholic friends because of how they ridiculed him for it.

"One Bread One Cup and his parish helped change him, and the entire before Jesus present with them in the Blessed Sacrament."

Bishop Espaillat invited the youths to place themselves further from God, there are still people wanting to stay close and get others to stay close,” Liam said. “It encourages me to dedicate more time in my life to God and try to encourage some of my peers, whom I know aren’t religious at all, to have a deeper thought about experiences like that.”

In a later interview with The Criterion, Garet said the time of adoration at Lucas Oil Stadium “was the most moving adoration experience I’ve ever had.” He added that he hoped that the adoration that night would help all the teens at the stadium “turn closer to God and grow closer in their relationship with Jesus Christ.”

The adoration that took place after Garet’s witness talk featured a homily by Bishop Espaillat and contemporary Christian meditative music played by the house band. While they played Matt Maher’s song, “Lay It Down,” Bishop Espaillat invited the youths to place themselves entirely before Jesus present with them in the Blessed Sacrament.

Youths came from their seats higher up in the stadium to get as close to the stage as possible. As they prayed before the Blessed Sacrament, many knelt, others stood with their hands raised in prayer and a handful laid prostrate on the stadium floor.

After the music and homily, Bishop Espaillat invited the youths to move to silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. “At this moment, just let this beautiful silence reign in this arena right now,” he said. “We’ve laid it down. But what does God say to us? Let’s spend a couple of moments in deep silence, in piercing silence, and let God speak to us. . . There’s beauty in the silence.”

The band stopped playing. And Lucas Oil Stadium, which so often was pulsating with loud music and the rejoicing of jubilant teens in other NCYC sessions, was entirely silent.

Afterwards, Bishop Espaillat presided over Benediction before taking the Blessed Sacrament from the floor of the stadium.

Liam Slotten, a member of Holy Family Parish in New Albany and a sophomore at Our Lady of Providence High School in Clarksville, was present during the time of adoration in the stadium.

“It shows that, even with our society starting to stray further from God, there are still people wanting to stay close and get others to stay close,” Liam said. “It encourages me to dedicate more time in my life to God and try to encourage some of my peers, whom I know aren’t religious at all, to have a deeper thought about experiences like that.”

Garet Colburn, a youth of St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg, gives a witness talk on Nov. 17 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the National Catholic Youth Conference. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)
More than 12,000 youths, chaperones and volunteers stand as nearly 200 priests and bishops process in for the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

Below: A teen readies his bow and arrow to aim for a target in the interactive exhibit hall in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 18 during the National Catholic Youth Conference.

Jose Alvarez, an adult from the Diocese of Gary, Ind., stands with hands raised in prayer on Nov. 18 during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. Kneeling in prayer behind Alvarez are teens from the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa.

Father Michael Keucher, pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Shelbyville and St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Shelby County, gives absolution in the sacrament of penance on Nov. 17 to a youth taking part in the National Catholic Youth Conference. The three-day gathering of faith took place at the Indiana Convention Center and the adjacent Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. Father Keucher also serves as archdiocesan vocations director.

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson addresses more than 12,000 youths in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 16.

Karen Araya-Castro of the Diocese of Rosarito, Tijuana, reflects on her Mexican heritage and explains her family’s tradition of recognizing “El Dia de los Muertos” (“The Day of the Dead”) during a Nov. 17 general session in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

Teens and adults kneel as Archbishop Charles C. Thompson processes with the Blessed Sacrament through the halls of the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 16 for the opening of the National Catholic Youth Conference.

Teens use their cell phones to record the band for KING + COUNTRY playing their rendition of “The Little Drummer Boy” before the opening general session of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 16.

Holy Family of Nazareth Sister Josephine Garrett, a National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) emcee, offers a reflection to more than 12,000 youths in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis during the opening session of NCYC on Nov. 16.

Karen Araya-Castro of the Diocese of Rosarito, Tijuana, reflects on her Mexican heritage and explains her family’s tradition of recognizing “El Dia de los Muertos” (“The Day of the Dead”) during the closing Mass of the National Catholic Youth Conference on Nov. 18 in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

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NCYC is a place where seeds of vocations are planted in hearts of teens

By Sean Gallagher

When archdiocesan seminarian Kristopher Garlitch first came to the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC), he was a high school senior and a member of St. Mary Parish in North Vernon.

While he was discerning a possible priestly vocation at the time, taking part in a Mass at NCYC in which many archdiocesan seminarians were assisting in the liturgy helped confirm in him God’s call.

“Every boy who comes to NCYC for the first time,” said Garlitch, who is now in priestly formation and Loaves’ soup kitchen when they decorated brown lunch bags among a group who embraced the opportunity to make Christmas cards for their brothers and sisters in Christ.

At NCYC this year, Garlitch got to do what he witnessed many seminarians doing when he was a high school senior—assisting in liturgies and taking part in a eucharistic procession.

“Openness to a variety of vocations was emphasized during NCYC,”

At 19, Bridget Hegarty was technically a chaperone at NCYC for youths from the Diocese of Springfield, Mass. But discerning God’s will in her life was still very much on her mind and her wish for the high school students traveling with her to Indianapolis.

“You get so much insight from so many people in so many different ways of going about the faith,” Hegarty said. “It’s good for kids in high school who don’t know what they want to do in life yet to get a little peek at everything and then choose what they want.”

She spoke with The Criterion on Nov. 16 in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis after speaking with Providence Sister Marilyn Baker at a booth for her work with Providence Sisters of the Holy Family.

“Everybody is a vocation promoter,” said Brother John. “It starts in the home and among friends. I’m a religious because my friends sold me on it. They saw something in me, knew the Vincentians and said, ‘John would be good at that.’”

“My hope is that every single person knows that God’s invitation is waiting for them and probably will come to them from someone they’re not expecting.”

Dominican Sister Mercedes Torres serves as the vocations director for the Dominicans of Mary Mother of the Eucharist based in Ann Arbor, Mich. She spoke with The Criterion on Nov. 17 in Lucas Oil Stadium.

Looking out at the 12,000 teens filling the floor and stands of the stadium filled her with wonder.

“It’s such a blessing,” Sister Mercedes said. “These young people come here because they choose to be here. They choose to have an encounter. They’re hungry for it. That encounter is what’s going to help them grow and understand over time their vocation.”

She and everyone else at the stadium looked forward that night to eucharistic adoration. Sister Mercedes said time of prayer and an encounter with Christ in the Eucharist could be an important moment in the vocation journey of many at NCYC.

“Right now, the Lord is planting seeds,” she said. “Just seeing the religious, seeing the priests and speaking with them is all very encouraging to them. The Lord is working in their hearts now.”

“The encounter with the Eucharist that they’re going to have here is going to be what transforms their hearts and opens their hearts to what’s going to do to bring them to himself and their vocation. For a lot of them, that’s going to start here.”

As Garlitch saw the 12,000 Catholic youth at NCYC, he appreciated their openness to the faith and wondered what the future held for them.

“They just being here is a sign of that openness,” he said. “This is kind of the first step for them, in a sense, no matter what vocation they’re called to. Just being here is a good start.”

(For more information on vocations to the priesthood and religious life, visit the website of the archdiocese’s vocations office at HearGodsCall.com)

Teenagers embrace volunteer opportunities during NCYC

By Mike Krokos

It may still be a month away, but the Christmas spirit was alive and well in an exhibit hall at the Indiana Convention Center during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC).

As part of an outreach effort for Catholic Charities of Terre Haute, teenagers from across the U.S. spent time decorating brown lunch bags—many with faith-based messages—and making Christmas cards that will be shared with the less fortunate through the agency.

“I think it’s really cool that through this conference we’re able to spread a little bit of holiday cheer to the Indianapolis [area] community,” Julia said, “and to make a difference.”

Added Taylor, “There are a lot of families out there that might not experience joy [during the Christmas season], … and I think it’s great that we’re able to do this.”

Taylor Vitecek, a sophomore from the Diocese of Davenport, Iowa, and a group of her friends were all smiles as they decorated lunch bags.

A few feet away in the convention center, other teenagers were embracing the mission of Hands Across Haiti, a ministry of St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg.

The outreach provides decorated T-shirts, school supplies, tote bags and backpacks, among other things, to its sister parishes in Haiti.

Natalie Bixerman, a freshman from the Diocese of Fort Wayne, Indiana, volunteered to help Hands Across Haiti.

“Some girls were able to do it, but I couldn’t because I needed to go to practice,” Natalie said. “But I was able to do it here.”

Jennifer Tames, assistant agency manager with Catholic Charities of Terre Haute, said the lunch bags will be distributed to families who visit its Christmas store.

“It’s a great opportunity for the kids not only to be creative and to take a break, but then, to pass along that love they have for God and for Jesus to others in our community,” she said. On Nov. 17, the second day of the three-day conference.
Hunger, an Indianapolis-based organization that provides nutritious dehydrated meals to local food pantries throughout Indiana and around the world. (Photo by Mike Krokos)

By Natalie Hofer

Grace Stecker of the Diocese of Helena, Mont., pulled out her cell phone and called her dad, right in the middle of a talk during the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC).

In fact, teens all around her were talking on their phones, even as the speaker stood on the stage. But they had his permission.

"I want you right now, in one minute, to just make a call to somebody in your life whom you love, who's pretty special, whom you appreciate," Scripture scholar and astrophysicist Father John Kartje asked of the more than 12,000 NCYC participants.

The request came as part of his talk on the oneness of God and the universe—faith and science—that served as the topic of the opening session of NCYC in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Nov. 16.

He began the talk echoing words spoken by Archbishop Charles C. Thompson just moments before.

"The line that really struck me amongst everything [Archbishop Thompson] said is this," Father Kartje noted: "You're not a problem to be solved, but you are a mystery to be encountered."

"‘What it means to be fully alive’

Archbishop Thompson spoke to the teens about this year’s NCYC theme: ‘Fully Alive’ in a prayer service at the beginning of the opening session—after the teens had settled down from a rousing concert by Christian rock band for KING + COUNTRY.

He quoted his "favorite line" from Pope Francis' encyclical, 'Laudato Si’: On Care of Our Common Home": "Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise." (12)

“We heard that beautiful reading about creation from the Book of Genesis," Archbishop Thompson said of the Scripture proclaimed at the beginning of the prayer service. "But the ultimate part of that creation is when God created humanity, when God created us. We are part of that creation that’s been given life by the Spirit breathing into us, by the Word taking root in us, claiming us as his own.

“And so, no one here is a problem to be solved, but is to be contemplated as a joyful mystery with gladness and praise.

“Whatever pains in our lives, whatever is going on, whatever hurts, whatever guilt, whatever fears, whatever anxieties, whatever sadness that doesn’t define us.

Rather, he said, we are defined by our identity in Christ, whose body, blood, soul and divinity is present in the Eucharist.

“The Eucharist has been given to us through the passion, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ so that we have life, that we know what is necessary to be witnesses to the good news, what it means to be fully alive,” Archbishop Thompson said.

“We are most fully alive when we live our lives not with ourselves at the center, but keeping Christ at the center. We are fully alive when we live for the glory of God and in service to others.

“We gather tonight remembering that we belong to something greater than ourselves as children of God, created in the image of God. We have a dignity, a dignity no power on Earth can take away.

“That’s why we can claim to be fully alive.”

‘The one through whom astronomy is possible’

Father Kartje, a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, picked up where Archbishop Thompson left off—speaking about the NCYC theme.

“If you talk about being fully alive, I can’t think of a better way to get at what that actually looks like in our world today than to look at this interaction between faith and science,” he said. With doctorates in Scripture and astrophysics, the current rector and president of the University of Saint Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary in Mundelein, Ill., is an expert on both topics.

He quoted John 1:3: “All things came into being through him. Without him, not one thing came to being.”

“The Eucharist you see through the glass of the monstrance. That’s why Christ came into the world—the one through whom all of that glorious astronomy is possible.”

To gaze upon the universe or to gaze upon Christ in the Eucharist, said Father Kartje, “is literally to let yourself be gazed upon by the one who delights in your very existence.”

As for his request for the more than 12,000 youths to call someone they love, Father Kartje explained the connection to faith and science.

“The person you called is probably feeling loved right now,” he said. “The reason something special happened at that connection is because of what you see in the monstrance. That’s why Christ came into the world—the one who does all of this is love.” †
Bishop Cozzens: NCYC is a preview of the National Eucharistic Congress next summer in Indianapolis

First of two parts

By Sean Gallagher

As Bishop Joseph A. Espaillat of the Archdiocese of New York processed into Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis with the Blessed Sacrament in a monstrance, thousands of youths fell to their knees in adoration. For Bishop Cozzens, adoration on Nov. 17 and NCYC’s closing Mass the following night, at which he was the principal celebrant, was a preview of the National Eucharistic Congress to be held in Indianapolis on July 17-21 next year. Bishop Cozzens has led the National Eucharistic Revival and the planning for the eucharistic congress.

He spoke with The Criterion earlier in the day before the closing liturgy of his experience of the love of the teens at NCYC showed for Christ in the Eucharist and how it was encouraging for the eucharistic revival and eucharistic culture.

The following interview has been edited for clarity and content.

Q: What were your impressions from being present during the time of adoration in the stadium?

A: “It was inspiring to be there, especially with the young people. Of course, I was praying for them, but also for the eucharistic revival and for the eucharistic congress. There was just a sense of the Lord wanting to continue to bless the young people and our country through a love of the Eucharist.

“Seeing the power of this event certainly helps me to remember the power of the event that we’re planning.”

Q: The Eucharist has long been at the heart of NCYC. What can the rest of the Church in the U.S. learn from the witness of the teens’ encounter with Christ in the Eucharist at this conference?

A: “It’s part of what we’re trying to do in the eucharistic revival. Those of us who have been doing youth ministry for the past two decades have seen this reality. Young people love to be with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Many of them actually come to understand the Mass through adoration.

“They come to encounter Jesus in his presence in adoration, and that gives them into the Mass. So, they start to go to Mass more.

“It’s a beautiful thing, too, that teens come to know the love of Jesus and want to express their emotion and their devotion toward him. It can have an impact on their whole life. It’s also the reason why we as a Church have to be involved with young people. It’s when people are young that they make their most important decisions in their life.

“The Church has a responsibility to be there to present Christ to them so that, as they’re making those vocational choices and deciding what they’re going to do for the rest of their life, they know Christ and can be a part of it. That’s the beauty of NCYC and other youth events in the Church. We can accompany youths at those important moments.”

Q: How might what happens at NCYC be a way for Catholics in the U.S. to anticipate what will happen in Indianapolis next July in the National Eucharistic Congress?

A: “Since I landed in Indianapolis before NCYC, I was filled with a desire to pray and an enthusiasm for what Indianapolis means for the Church right now because of the coming eucharistic congress. We’re going to have a huge impact on the Church here.

“These kinds of events can be life-transforming. Look at the event of World Youth Day in Denver and what that did for the Church in the United States. So, NCYC is kind of a forerunner of that. It’s why I love coming. This event is a rare opportunity for our young people to have an experience of Christ and his Church that they can’t have elsewhere.

“The eucharistic congress is going to be like that. It’s going to be a rare opportunity to have an experience of Christ and his Church that you can’t have elsewhere and that we haven’t had in the United States in decades. It’s going to be an event centered on the heart of our Church, which is the Eucharist, where the Church herself in all her cultures and races, her beautiful diversity, gathers together to celebrate this gift that makes us one.

“Seeing the power of this event certainly helps me to remember the power of the event that we’re planning.”

Q: What can the organizers of the eucharistic congress learn from NCYC to make it more effective in drawing Catholics from across the country into a deeper relationship with Christ and each other through the Eucharist?

A: “There are members of our team who are here this weekend. They’re scouting everything and watching everything. NCYC has been great to give us full-access passes for our team so they can learn from what’s happening here and how they do it and what they do. That’s been a huge help.

“One of the reasons why we chose Indianapolis is because of the positive experience of NCYC. Even in the bishops’ meetings, there’s been something here for this kind of event. They know that this is a good city for events. We’re significantly larger than NCYC, so we have challenges that they probably don’t have. But there certainly is a lot that we can learn from how they do what they do. We just have to multiply it.”

(For more information on the National Eucharistic Congress, including on how to purchase tickets for it, visit eucharisticcongress.org.)

Become the man or woman that God made you to be, NCYC speaker says

By Mike Krokos

God sees us, he knows us and he is strengthening each of us to become more of the man or woman he made us to be, NCYC speaker says.

Our Creator is helping all humanity to grow “more deeply into the masculinity or your femininity that God has given to you, and becoming more and more of the gift that you already are, in all your uniqueness,” noted Brian Butler, executive director and co-founder of Echo Community, which cultivates chastity and authentic masculinity and femininity with teenagers, young adults and families through the lens of St. John Paul II’s Theology of the Body.

“Each one of you, all you men in the house, are refracting the light of God in a way that none of these women do,” he continued, “and all of you women in the house are refracting the light of God in a way that none of these men do. That’s good. In fact, it’s very good.”

A member of Echo, Butler said the trust that children develop for their parents from a young age leads them to more freedom, allowing them “to become more and more fully alive.”

“This is what God wants for each one of us, but not to stay distracted in the shallows, but to go to find, to go to his Word, to find the truth about who he says you are,” he continued, “the gift of your dignity and your call to a destiny that’s far beyond what you can imagine.”

We must remember that God is always inviting us into a closer relationship, Butler noted.

“Even though you don’t always feel it, the grace is not always affective, it is always effective. It’s always working, to help us to be more fully known, to help us to be more fully grown, that we might be able to be more free.”

While life’s challenges may pull us away from our faith, we must not become distracted in our relationship with our Creator, Butler said. God sees our pains and he knows what we’re going through, he added.

Reflecting on a memory of playing hide-and-seek with two of his children, Butler recounted how his daughter Lauren always ran into his arms whenever he found her, saying, “Daddy, hold me for a long, long time.” That’s what God wants from us, he said.

“For her, the whole point of the game was not to run away. The whole point of the game was to be found and to be reunited with her good father, to be at home in my arms,” Butler said.

Citing Scripture, Butler said adults need to remember the Bible verse “Unless you become like children, you will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Mt 18:3).

“At the very end, we’re going to cross the threshold of eternity, and we pray that, by his grace . . . [he will call] us toward our eternal home, where we’ll be fully known, we’ll be fully grown, we’ll be fully free” (St. John Paul II says that ‘freedom exists for the sake of love,’ to be fully in the love that you were made for, and that’s when you’ll be fully alive. And we’ll all throw our arms around God the Father’s neck and say, ‘Daddy, hold me for a long, long time.’)”

Brian Butler, executive director and co-founder of Echo Community, speaks to young people during the National Catholic Youth Congress' closing Mass on Nov. 18 about next summer's National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis. (Photo by Mike Krokos)
Archdiocesan youths experience ‘a deeper connection with God’ at NCYC

**By Mike Krokos**

Sophomore Lilly Hertel was eager to experience the National Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis for the first time.

Junior Joseph Waterman was looking forward to taking part in an NCYC gathering post-COVID. When he attended in 2021, some of the pandemic’s restrictions—including wearing masks—were still being observed at the conference, and getting to know other participants was challenging.

The teenagers approached the Nov. 16-18 gathering of 12,000 youths with open minds and hearts. A member of St. Gabriel Parish in Connersville, Joseph was looking for a spiritual recharge. Lilly said she was hoping the youth gathering would be an emotional experience. “But that changed after she attended a session that opened her eyes about her Creator,” she continued. “I actually cried through that because I really felt God in my heart, that he loved me. I really felt God’s presence.”

Joseph called his second NCYC experience “awesome,” adding, “I felt fully alive” taking part in this pilgrimage.

Lilly, who plans to attend NCYC in Indianapolis in 2025, encouraged future participants to “keep an open mind. The experience is different for everyone. Whatever God wants to happen to you during this time will happen.”

‘A deeper connection with God’

Freshman Bella Hubert and junior Margeaux Stewart were both first-time NCYC participants who viewed the conference as a way to build their relationship with God. As she prepared to take part in the closing Mass, Bella, a member of St. Joseph Parish in Corydon, said she was leaving NCYC with “a deeper connection with God and my faith, remembering the beauty around me and the knowledge [shared].”

“I will walk away with the relationships that we’ve built,” noted Margeaux, a member of St. Mary Parish in Lanesville, “and knowing that NCYC doesn’t stop here, that we have to take it home with us and share [our faith] with others.”

Following his older brother’s advice, senior Nick Eve jumped at the chance to attend NCYC this year.

As he reflected on his experience, Nick, a member of St. Joseph Parish in Corydon, said he could sense a palpable joy among the participants. He especially felt that connection during eucharistic adoration with all 12,000 NCYC participants on Nov. 17 in Lucas Oil Stadium.

“Everyone was there to praise the Lord… It was an amazing experience.”

Sophomore Hays Ferritell, also a member of St. Joseph, heard about the biennial gathering through a friend. He repeated a phrase first shared by Archbishop Charles C. Thompson during the opening night on Nov. 16 and repeated several times during the weekend: “You’re not a problem to be solved, you are a mystery to be encountered.”

Reflecting on those words, “That was definitely a high point for me,” Hays noted.

‘Getting a front seat for what God is doing’

Katie Warren, the youth minister for both St. Joseph and St. Mary parishes, came to the conference with no expectations. But like so many others who attend NCYC, the three-day pilgrimage of faith “blew that lack of expectations out of the water.”

“Part of the beauty of my experience is getting to see [our teens’] experiences… seeing them experience the Lord in a new way.”

Becoming emotional, she added, “That’s been my favorite part of this conference, getting to accompany them, and watch. Working in youth ministry, the best part of the job is getting a front seat for what God is doing in their lives.”

As she looks beyond NCYC, Warren hopes to help the teenagers nurture the seeds of faith planted.

“How can we cultivate that culture back at home, where God is first and important always?” she asked, “where we can have the same Jesus, here and there?”

Young people, religious embrace devotion to Blessed Mother through the rosary

**By Mike Krokos**

At 6 feet 5 inches tall, Abraham Wolf towered over the majority of the nearly 12,000 young people who participated in the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis. But his height advantage was not as evident as he knelt in prayerful reverence in front of a monstrance inside the chapel at the Indiana Convention Center on Nov. 17 as he took part in a recitation of the rosary.

A high school senior from the Diocese of Erie, Pa., Abraham was among a group that took part in praying a rosary led by members of various religious orders. Like many others there, he made it a point to include prayers to the Blessed Mother during his time at NCYC.

“The rosary is very important to me to ask for the intercession of our Mother Mary, and to truly honor her, and to pray,” Abraham said. “Praying is the biggest thing that we can do, to communicate with God, to communicate with Mary, to communicate with all the saints. It’s a huge thing.”

While Abraham admitted up to that point he did not have any favorite NCYC moment, he said being part of a group praying the rosary together “was truly amazing.”

“It’s been a little while since I’ve done a group rosary that big, and it’s always great to just be in the same moment as everybody else, doing the same prayer.”

When he attends Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pa., next fall, Abraham said he plans to double major in political science and philosophy, then God willing, transition to a seminary to begin formation for the priesthood.

“I know this [NCYC] experience will truly light my faith on fire again, even though it has already been on fire,” he said. “It will be further engulfed in flames, even brighter, better than ever.”

Abraham said he has always felt called to teach. But as he has prayed more and more on his faith journey, he has slowly realized he is “meant to teach the word of God.”

“It’s become an overwhelming feeling upon me, that that’s my call, to teach the word of God, to spread the love of God to everybody, to bring people closer to God,” Sister Emily Beata, a member of the Daughters of St. Paul, led the first decade of the sorrowful mysteries that day for vocations.

“I thought it was beautiful the number of people that came, and the variety of people, too,” she said. “There were some religious there to pray with us, and a number of young people. There were also chaplains and priests who are here [attending NCYC].”

Like so many others who recited the rosary that day, Sister Emily said she and the members of her order have a special devotion to the Blessed Mother.

“For us, Mary is the model of our mission… to give Jesus to the world through the media,” she noted. “Her whole life was about giving Jesus to the world, so we look to her a lot for that, and for how to be close to Jesus.”

When asked about the message she wants young people attending NCYC to take home, Sister Emily said, “It’s a big, exciting weekend with a lot going on, and you’re here with your family and friends. … I really hope they take it home with them in their daily life, that he’s not separate from what they’re going through, from what they’re living, that he’s right next to them, that he’s walking with them.”

Teens and chaplains from St. Gabriel Parish in Connersville and St. Bridget of Ireland Parish in Liberty pose in the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis on Nov. 17 with their pastor, Father Dustin Beetham. (Photo by Mike Krokos)
Teens describe NCYC as ‘amazing’ and so much more

Compiled by Natalie Hoefer

The National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) can have a deep impact on high school teens.

For three days—this year on Nov. 16-18 in Indianapolis—their faith is enriched through speakers, uplifting music, eucharistic adoration, group or quiet prayer, the opportunity for the sacrament of penance and daily Mass.

Their faith is also emboldened in witnessing and worshiping with thousands of their Catholic peers, leaving the youths encouraged by the fact that they are not alone in following Christ in the one true Church. The Criterion spoke with five teenagers in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis after the closing Mass there on Nov. 18—and one youth earlier that day—about their overall NCYC experience.

(Photos by Natalie Hoefer)

“It’s amazing,” said Sabrina Howard of the Diocese of Covington, Ky., shown here second from left. “There was a point where our entire diocese that came, like 275 kids and adults, were in one really tiny room where we were having Mass, and it was fantastic. We were all singing and having fun. And just the fact that everybody is here for the same thing, for our faith. It really is awesome!”

This was the second NCYC for Alexa Fox, left, and Kaylen Snovak, both of the Diocese of Orlando, Fla. “This one was just so moving,” said Kaylen. She noted the freedom from COVID-19 restrictions in place at the last NCYC in Indianapolis in 2021. “So, it was a lot more powerful and just absolutely wonderful.

My favorite moment was adoration. It was just amazing.” Kaylen said she walked away from the conference with a desire “to be fully present with the Lord and fully embrace him in my life and what he wants to do through me.”

Jacob Lamoureux of the Omaha, Neb., Archdiocese, was unable to speak immediately after the closing Mass on Nov. 18. But he did share with The Criterion earlier that day about his experience. “It really clicked for me in the talk on ‘I Believe It But I Don’t Feel It’,” said the teen, shown here second from right praying the rosary with other NCYC participants from his archdiocese on Nov. 16.

“The speaker said faith isn’t about emotions. It’s about surrender. And [opening session speaker] Father [John] Kartje was talking about how faith isn’t just about what you see—’it’s called faith because it’s believing in something even if you don’t see physical evidence. God has taught me that even if I don’t feel that sense of another presence with me, even if I feel like I’m just sitting there and there’s no one else in the room and I’m just all alone and wasting my time—God is telling me just to remember I’m not alone, he’s there.’

I’ve realized that fully alive also means not just being alive when you’re feeling it, but being fully alive in all ways of your life, in all situations, knowing God is there even if you might not feel him.

—Jacob Lamoureux, St. Francis Borgia Parish, Diocese of Omaha, Neb.

To be fully alive is to completely give yourself to Christ in a way where you will live your life for Christ completely.

—Olivia Murray, St. Thomas More Parish, Mooresville, Archdiocese of Indianapolis

Fully alive to me means no boundaries, hiding nothing from God, no phoniness, no lies, just me being completely, hearing my soul completely to my Lord.

—Alexa Fox, Diocese of Orlando, Fla.

It means to not be scared of what others think, to be able to be yourself and to express your faith. It’s a big part of just living yourself in Christ and expressing your love for him.

—Avery Drury, Holy Family Parish, New Albany, Archdiocese of Indianapolis

It means to stop living the way I’m living, which is kind of hiding in the shadows. To be myself, show my religion, be proud of who I am and who I believe in.

—Davis Coppel, Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa

It means to not miss an opportunity to celebrate God.

—Claire Welsh, Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, Mont. (posing with Father Samuel Spering, a chaplain priest from the diocese)

I want to try to live out my faith more and not just keep it in my church or around my youth group.

—Samuel Spiering, a chaperone priest from the Diocese of Covington, Ky., shown here second from left. “There was a point where our entire diocese that came, like 275 kids and adults, were in one really tiny room where we were having Mass, and it was fantastic. We were all singing and having fun. And just the fact that everybody is here for the same thing, for our faith. It really is awesome!”

This is my first NCYC, and it’s been a really life-changing experience,” said Davis Coppel of the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa. “Being able to be around so many faithful Catholic people is something that I may never get to experience again. Being able to be in the small groups and talk with people, hearing people’s testimonies—it’s an amazing, amazing experience.”

Davis, center, smiles with Gabriel Matson, left, and Caleb Perkins, also of the Dubuque Archdiocese.

Six teens shared with The Criterion the knowledge they gained from this NCYC on what living fully alive means.

—Jacob Lamoureux, St. Francis Borgia Parish, Diocese of Omaha, Neb.

Compiled by Natalie Hoefer

The theme of this year’s National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) was “Fully Alive.”

Throughout the three-day conference in Indianapolis on Nov. 16-18, youths heard from Scripture passages and speakers on what it means to be “fully alive.”

Six teens shared with The Criterion the knowledge they gained from this NCYC on what living fully alive means.

I’ve realized that fully alive also means not just being alive when you’re feeling it, but being fully alive in all ways of your life, in all situations, knowing God is there even if you might not feel him.

—Jacob Lamoureux, St. Francis Borgia Parish, Diocese of Omaha, Neb.

To be fully alive is to completely give yourself to Christ in a way where you will live your life for Christ completely.

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It means to not be scared of what others think, to be able to be yourself and to express your faith. It’s a big part of just living yourself in Christ and expressing your love for him.

—Avery Drury, Holy Family Parish, New Albany, Archdiocese of Indianapolis

It means to stop living the way I’m living, which is kind of hiding in the shadows. To be myself, show my religion, be proud of who I am and who I believe in.

—Davis Coppel, Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa

It means to not miss an opportunity to celebrate God.

—Claire Welsh, Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, Mont. (posing with Father Samuel Spering, a chaplain priest from the diocese)
(OSV News)—The state or condition called “unity of life” isn’t a virtue in itself. It can even serve bad ends. So, what’s it doing as the subject of an article on virtues for people trying to lead good lives out in the secular world? That needs explaining.

One thing that’s obvious is that a life without unity is a sorry spectacle, a kind of existential blob that lacks focus. People with this life typically flit from one activity or one relationship to another, waste time, get on others’ nerves, never accomplish much. Of such a person it’s often said, “Nice guy, but . . .”

Still, the opposite error can be even worse. The pages of history, to say nothing of everyday life, are full of people who manifest unity of life by their fanatical concentration on the pursuit of power, wealth or pleasure, regardless of the cost to themselves and others. Lots of unity there, but put to bad use.

Evidently, then, we need to know the difference between unity that’s good and unity that’s bad. An example may help.

The most moving display of unity of life I’ve personally witnessed was an incident years ago in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican. It was a cold, raw Sunday morning in February, the kind of day when most people would rather stay indoors. A small crowd had assembled in the square to wait for St. John Paul II’s weekly Angelus address—or, more precisely, to see whether there would be an Angelus that week.

The pope had recently been hospitalized for what Vatican officials described as bronchitis. His Parkinson’s disease was getting worse. Everybody knew he was a sick man in failing health. Would he brave the damp chill this particular Sunday to come to his window and speak?

The answer was yes. Promptly at noon, Pope John Paul II appeared at an open window high above the square and began. It was agonizing to hear him struggle for each syllable—each breath. As he did, I asked myself, “Is it really a good idea for him to be doing this at an open window on such a miserable day?”

In one sense, it pretty clearly wasn’t. A few days later, he was rushed to the hospital again. A tracheotomy was performed so that he could breathe. He died on April 2 at the Vatican.

As far as I can tell, that Sunday morning in February marked the beginning of the end. So, why did he do it? Why would a man in weakened health expose himself to the elements for the sake of conducting a routine ceremony?

The answer, I believe, can be found in St. John Paul II’s strong sense of personal vocation. For several years, he’d been making use of his illness—exploiting it, if you will—as a catechetical tool for showing others how a Christian should handle sickness and the approach of death.

That had become part of his special ministry as pope, and the Sunday Angelus was one element of it. He was determined to go on teaching, praying and giving public witness to faith just as long as he could. In light of his vocation as supreme pastor of the Church and vicar of Christ, he believed he could do no less.

That was unity of life as St. John Paul II lived it. Personal vocation was the key to it. But it’s necessary to understand that this is something vastly different from the lust for power, wealth or pleasure that drives some people.

Rooted in the commitment of faith, personal vocation embodies an individual’s determination to serve God in whatever way God is calling him or her. Several recent popes have taught that every life is a vocation. Pope St. John Paul II had his personal vocation. Each of us has his or her own. And no two personal vocations—or lives—are exactly alike.

Personal vocations are discerned—generally, with the help of a reliable spiritual advisor—through study, investigation and prayer centered on the Eucharist and the sacramental life of the Church. The discernment of the vocation is followed by a special kind of choice—a commitment—to walk the life God intends for oneself.

Even though the discernment is sound and the commitment is sincere, living out a personal vocation is a complex, sometimes difficult task. Our inner conflicts and divisions guarantee that. St. Paul expresses the universal human plight in a famous passage in his Letter to the Romans: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. . . . If of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin” (Rom 7:15, 18, 25).

Fortunately, there’s a solution to that, and Paul speaks of it, too: “Hence, now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ has freed you from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:1-2).

St. Augustine is another case of a divided mind and divided heart working against unity of life. Even after experiencing conversion (up to a point), this great doctor of the Church famously prayed, “Lord, make me chaste, but not just yet.”

True unity of life grounded in personal vocation comes to those who not only would like to have it but who labor, with the help of grace, to achieve it. It is God’s gift, but given to those who desire it and choose to cooperate with it.

“The calling to a personal vocation doesn’t occur only once. It’s a repeated, lifelong process. St. John Henry Newman underlined that in a homily, “Divine Calls,” on the reality of vocation: “All through our life, Christ is calling us. He called us first in baptism; but afterward also, whether we obey his voice or not, he graciously calls us still . . . He calls us again and again, in order to justify us again and again—and again and again, and more and more, to sanctify and glorify us.”

Yet, many good people organize their lives more or less loosely around a shifting group of purposes and goals: “I’m doing this for my wife, I’m doing that for my children, I’m doing other things for the sake of my career, my parish . . . and so forth. That isn’t wrong exactly, but it does fall a bit short of the ideal of unity of life.

In other cases, people have a high degree of unity derived from devotion to an activity requiring intense discipline together with skillful performance. That’s how it is, for instance, with professional athletes, concert musicians, strongly motivated doctors and lawyers and others. Nothing wrong with that either, yet it also is something less than the ideal.

For a serious Christian, real unity of life comes above all from the commitment of faith—the determination to make love of God and love of neighbor as part of it, the organizing principle of their lives, and to carry out that decision consistently within the framework of personal vocation.

That doesn’t mean becoming a religious fanatic. It means that everything one does—family and professional duties, friendships, along with specifically religious activities—is situated within the fundamental commitment to love and serve God and neighbor. The specifics of personal vocation then supply the form and content for living out this commitment of faith.

Several things are essential to the successful carrying on of this struggle. They include not only the continuing grace of conversion but also self-examination, prayer and spiritual direction. In the end, however, the only key to success is not our efforts but God’s healing grace.

As with everything else in Christian living, Jesus is our model of unity of life. Reading about his life in the New Testament, we are impressed by his single-minded focus on doing the Father’s will. Everything else must either be related to that or else be discarded. “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me,” Jesus says (Jn 4:34). That same determination to do the Father’s will, come what may, undergirds the unity of life of a committed Christian living in the world.

(Russell Shaw is a contributing editor of Our Sunday Visitor Catholic news weekly.)
Barry was able to move into a nice, clean, assisted living apartment, with empathetic management and neighbors surrounding him. Dan accompanied Barry to three apartment places to investigate, followed by phone calls together to set appointments to meet with potential renters and living assistance agencies. Dan explained that Barry’s demeanor and attitude have completely changed. He has been connecting with fellow neighbors and has attended community social events. He also has organized an apartment, and is taking better care of his environment. He recently was able to save some of his money to attend a Beach Boys concert with Dan. Recently, Dan was happy that Barry had been able to pay for lunch for them both.

Dan’s consistent, long-term love and support for Barry during some tough times through the years have primarily brought about this change. It has not been easy, but Barry has told Dan that he is the “only person who has stuck with him.” Those words have been reward enough for Dan, who truly has a servant, a heart. As Dan puts it, “It is time I addressed the issue of love for a brother.”

Please consider becoming a volunteer mentor to someone who could use a friend. Call me at 317-590-6970 or go to www.trustedmentors.org for more information.

Gina Christian is a national reporter for OSV News. Follow her on X, formerly Twitter, at @GinaJesseeReina.†https://www.trustedmentors.org

Barry’s recent apartment was filthy. His rent was increasing so much that he likely wouldn’t be able to afford it anymore. Barry had confrontations with some of his neighbors. Dan consistently talks with him about this and how he might avoid them in the future. He had tried several approaches to help Dan avoid these conflicts to little or no avail.

Recently, however, Dan decided to see what and how Barry could do to find him an affordable, safe and friendly apartment. During a two-month period, Dan helped him find places to investigate, followed by phone calls together to set appointments to meet with potential renters and living assistance agencies.

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The Sunday Readings
Sunday, November 26, 2023

- Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17
- 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28
- Matthew 25:31-46

This weekend, the Church concludes its liturgical year of 2023. Next week, a new year will begin with the First Sunday of Advent. The Church closes the year with an excited and fervent proclamation of Christ as the king of the universe. The first reading comes from the ancient Book of Ezekiel. In this reading, God speaks in the first person, promising protection of the flock—in other words, the people of God. He is the shepherd, seeking the lost, caring for the injured, rescuing the imperiled. God will also distinguish between the sheep and others who assume other identities because of their unfaithfulness.

St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians provides the second reading. This selection is a proclamation of the resurrection and of the role of the Lord as Redeemer of humanity. He is the risen Lord, the first of those who will rise to everlasting life. Those who will follow Jesus in being raised from the dead are “those who belong” to Christ, in other words, those who have admitted God, through Jesus, into their lives and who have received from the Lord the gift of grace, eternal life and strength.

For its final reading on this great feast, the Church reflects a passage from St. Matthew’s Gospel. It is a glance forward, to the day when Jesus will return with all his power and majesty. The reading repeats the description given in Ezekiel. God, the shepherd, separates the sheep from the goats, the good from the unfaithful. In this reading from Matthew, Jesus promises a final judgment to separate the faithful from the sinful.

In this reading, the Lord defines who will be judged as faithful, those who love God completely, without question. The faithful will not be those who only give lip-service to their belief in God, those who, in the model of Jesus, give themselves totally to the will of God.

Reflection
Although Americans cannot understand modern monarchies, they are obsessed with stories of British royalty, some edifying, some not. But Britain is not the only monarchy in the world today. The Netherlands is happy to be a monarchy.

A monarch holds a country together, is its defender and example.

Germany ruthlessly overran Holland in the Second World War. For the Dutch, the great heroines of that fearful time was Queen Wilhelmina, grand-mother of the present King Willem-Alexander. Defying Hitler, she risked everything to champion her people.

Wilhelmina came to the throne as a young girl, succeeding her father. Under Dutch law, her mother, the widowed Queen Emma, was regent until Wilhelmina was an adult.

Emma wanted to rear Wilhelmina in conditions as ordinary and with as little fanfare as possible. But when thousands of cheering Dutch citizens appeared before the palace on a national holiday, demanding to see Wilhelmina, her mother had to oblige. The regent let the little queen onto the balcony, and the crowd was ecstatic.

Thrilled by the sight, knowing that she was queen of The Netherlands, Wilhelmina said, “Mommy, do all these people belong to me?” Queen Emma replied, “No, dear. You do not belong to them.”

Christ the King, forever young in the resurrection, belongs to us. He died for us, our brother, our Redeemer, the Son of God, of the Lord of life, who gives us strength, mercy and guidance. He never forsakes us.

Church requires precious metals to be used in vessels used at Mass

Q My parish recently returned to Communion under the second species. An extraordinary minister of holy Communion holds one cup and one cloth and wipes after each serve. Most people are still not receiving the precious blood for fear of COVID or other illnesses.

Why can’t the Church simply use disposable plastic cups with the wine already in it? The priest could say the same blessing and an extraordinary minister of holy Communion could still distribute, but holding a tray instead of a cup. The empty cup could be disposed of with the passing of the chalice and any germs reduced to almost nothing.

A What you describe—with the elements of communion pre-portioned in individual disposable packaging—is not approved by non-Catholic Christian communities. However, there are several reasons why this would be inappropriate for Catholic worship.

For context, we need to recall that the Catholic theology of the Eucharist is radically different from the vast majority of Protestant understandings of holy Communion. Many Protestant communities occasionally distribute bread and wine (or even grape juice) as a way of simply recalling and remembering Jesus’ last meal and the fellowship he shared with his disciples.

In contrast, a core central teaching of the Catholic faith is the doctrine of the “real presence,” meaning that bread and wine literally become the true body and blood of Christ at Mass when the priest prays the prayer of consecration. A centuries-old theological and philosophical term for this is “transubstantiation.” Because of this belief, the prayer of consecration is much more radical and impactful than a simple blessing would be.

But if we believe that Jesus is physically, bodily present in the “sacred species” (our term for the bread and wine), we cannot have been in the body and blood of Christ, we have several laws and customs pertaining to the handling of vessels which ensure a sufficient degree of protection and reverence for Jesus’ presence in the Blessed Sacrament.

For instance, it is required that the vessels used during the Eucharist such as the chalice, paten and chalice (the “plates” and cup) be made from worthy and suitable materials.

The “General Instruction of the Roman Missal” tells us that “sacred vessels should be made from precious metal. If they are made from metal that rusts or from a metal less precious than gold, they should generally be gilded on the inside” (#128). Clearly, this directive is incompatible with the use of disposable communion cups.

During Holy Thursday the Mass the priest must take care that every particle of the host and every last drop of the precious blood are consumed. This is why, at the end of Communion, the priest “purifies” the chalice, rinsing it with water that he then drinks himself. Even if disposable materials were allowed, there would be no way to be sure that absolutely all of the precious blood was actually consumed.

As a result, it would be impossible not to have some of the precious blood wind up in the trash. This would be at least de facto sacrilege.

It is certainly understandable that some Catholics might long for the fuller symbolic value of receiving Communion under both kinds, while still having legitimate concerns about germs and the spread of illness. Still, it’s good to keep in mind that few things worth doing are ever 100% risk-free. Most things in this life involve some sort of tradeoff of risks versus benefits.

Catholics who piously desire to receive the precious blood should prayerfully consider whether, in light of their own personal health status and spiritual needs, it might make sense for them in their own circumstances. Staying on top of the possibility of catching a bug in order to receive from the chalice.

In any case, we should always remember that in receiving the Eucharist under only one species, bread or wine, we nevertheless receive the entirety of Christ.

Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at CNS News. Send your questions to CatholicQ&A@osv.com.

Daily Readings
Monday, November 27
Daniel 5:1-6, 8-20
(Responsorial) Daniel 3:52-56
Luke 21:1-4

Tuesday, November 28
Daniel 2:31-45
(Responsorial) Daniel 3:57-61
Luke 21:5-11

Wednesday, November 29
Daniel 5:1-6, 8-20
(Responsorial) Daniel 3:62-67

Thursday, November 30
St. Andrew, Apostle
Romans 10:9-11
Psalm 19:8-11
Matthew 4:18-22

Question Corner/Jenna Marie Cooper

Church requires precious metals to be used in vessels used at Mass

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Day, weekend passes now options for Eucharistic Congress

(OWS News)–Attendees of the National Eucharistic Congress on July 17-21, 2024, in Indianapolis now have the option of purchasing single-day and weekend passes in order to make attendance more affordable and flexible, the bishop overseeing the congress announced on Nov. 15.

Speaking at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) fall plenary assembly in Baltimore, Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minn., also said scholarship funds may help ease the costs for some attendees via the bishops’ Solidarity Fund.

“We have heard well the concerns of some, that they find the length or the cost [of the congress] difficult, and we’ve worked hard over the last year to find ways to make it affordable and accessible, so that it can be a gathering of the whole Church, so that we can literally open wide the doors to Christ for people to come,” Bishop Cozzens, chairman of the National Eucharistic Congress Inc. (NEC) and chairman of the USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, told the assembly of bishops.

Standard passes for the five-day congress are $299-$375 for adults and $149-$185 for some attendees, via the bishops’ Solidarity Fund.

Parishes throughout the archdiocese have scheduled communal penance services for Advent. The following is a list of services that have been reported to The Criterion.

Batesville Deanery
Dec. 1, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. at All Saints, St. Martin Campus, Dearborn County
Dec. 5, 7 p.m. at St. Mary, Greensburg
Dec. 6, 6:30 p.m. at St. Vincent de Paul, Shelby County
Dec. 12, 6:30 p.m. at St. Catherine of Siena, St. John the Evangelist Campus
Dec. 12, 6:30-7:30 p.m. at St. Michael, Brookville
Dec. 13, 6-8 p.m. at Immaculate Conception, Millhousen
Dec. 14, 7 p.m. at St. Louis, Batesville
Dec. 14, 7 p.m. at Holy Family, Oldenburg
Dec. 15, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. at St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Aurora
Dec. 15, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. at St. Joseph, Shelbyville
Dec. 19, 6:30-7:30 p.m. at St. John the Baptist, Osgood
Dec. 20, 6-8 p.m. at St. John the Baptist, Osgood
Additionally, recurring opportunities for reconciliation in the Batesville Deanery are as follows:
Weekends of Dec. 9-10, 16-17 and 23-24 before and after weekend Masses at St. Maurice, Napoleon

Bloomington Deanery
Dec. 6, 6 p.m. for St. Charles Borromeo, St. John the Apostle and St. Paul Catholic Center, Bloomington
Dec. 12, 6:30 p.m. at St. Martin of Tours, Martinsville
Dec. 12, 6:30 p.m. at St. Vincent de Paul, Bedford
Dec. 13, 6:30 p.m. at St. Jude the Apostle, Spencer
Dec. 14, 7 p.m. at St. Agnes, Nashville

Connersville Deanery
Dec. 1, 1:530 p.m. at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Holy Family Church, Richmond
Dec. 13, 6:30 p.m. at St. Gabriel, Connersville
Dec. 14, 6 p.m. at St. Mary, Rushville

Indianapolis East Deanery
Dec. 11, 9 a.m.-7 p.m. at Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., no appointment needed

Indianapolis North Deanery
Dec. 17, 2 p.m. at St. Thomas Aquinas
Dec. 18, 7 p.m. at St. Matthew the Apostle
Dec. 19, 7 p.m. at St. Lawrence

Indianapolis South Deanery
Dec. 5, 5-6 p.m. for St. Ann and St. Joseph (West Deanery) at St. Ann
Dec. 6, 7 p.m. for St. Jude, Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ and St. Mark the Apostle at St. Jude
Dec. 13, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. at Our Lady of the Greenwood, Greenwood
Dec. 14, 6:30 p.m. for Holy Name of Jesus, Beech Grove, and Good Shepherd at Holy Name of Jesus
Dec. 16, 8:30-10 a.m. at SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi, Greenwood

Indianapolis West Deanery
Dec. 3, 5-8 p.m. at St. Ann (South Deanery) and St. Joseph at St. Ann

New Albany Deanery
Dec. 5, 6:30 p.m. at St. Michael, Bradford
Dec. 5, 7 p.m. at St. Mary, Lanesville
Dec. 14, 7 p.m. at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, New Albany
Dec. 15, 6:30 p.m. at St. Anthony of Padua, Clarksville
Dec. 15, 6:30 p.m. at St. John Paul II, Sellersburg
Dec. 15, 7 p.m. at St. Mary-of-the-Knobs, Floyd County
Dec. 19, 6:30 p.m. at St. John the Baptist, Starlight
Dec. 20, 7 p.m. at St. Michael, Charlestown (English and Spanish)
Dec. 21, 6:30 p.m. at St. Francis Xavier, Henryville

Seymour Deanery
Dec. 14, 6:30 p.m. at Prince of Peace, Madison
Dec. 20, 6:30-8:30 p.m. at St. Ambrose, Seymour

Tell City Deanery
Dec. 10, 2 p.m. CT at St. Paul, Tell City

Terre Haute Deanery
Dec. 5, 7 p.m. at St. Benedict, Terre Haute
Recurring opportunities for reconciliation in the Terre Haute Deanery are as follows:
Thursdays 6:30-8:30 p.m. and Saturdays 3:30-5 p.m. at St. Joseph University.

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Like those pictured, nearly 25,000 senior sisters, brothers and religious order priests have dedicated their lives to serving others through praying for us, ministering to us, educating the young, caring for those who are sick and more—most for little or no pay, leaving a profound shortage in retirement savings. Your donation will make a real difference by providing essential care, medicine and other necessities. Please give generously.

Please donate at your local parish
December 9-10 or by mail at:
Archdiocese of Indianapolis
Mission Office
1400 North Meridian Street
Indianapolis IN 46202
Make check payable to Mission Office with Religious Retirement on the memo line.

retiredreligious.org

Visit retiredreligious.org to see photos of the religious pictured.
Investing with Faith/Jolinda Moore

Consider available options for your stress-free, year-end giving

Most of us wish we had more time to save the holidays with family and friends. We hope to be busy in all the right ways, but without feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Even more, we want the words of the Christmas carols to ring true for us without having to choose between “Joy to the World” and “All is calm, all is bright.” The good news is that in the chaos we can have the holidays both ways—especially if we check off a few of our end-of-the-year boxes before the chaos gets into full swing.

While we may not be able to wrangle everything under our control, there are some things we can manage in advance and with plenty of time to spare. Year-end giving is a perfect example.

Sooner is always better than later
Planning is key to finding an effective strategy for coordinating tax benefits with a commitment to charitable giving. That why it’s beneficial to anticipate the end of the year now and begin fine-tuning your adjustments to changing tax laws and shifting economic realities.

Completing a gift by Dec. 31 can reduce taxable income or minimize tax on capital gains, and any other significant ways. Remember, however, gifts must be postmarked by Dec. 31, 2023, in order to count for this year. And the Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center in Indianapolis will be closed from Dec. 22, 2023, through Jan. 1, 2024.

Find your best options for giving
Planning a charitable gift is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Determining the right amount to give is only part of the equation. Finding the right vehicle is equally important, and there are more ways to give than there are lords a-leaping or maids a-milking.

—Cash is the simplest and most popular form of charitable gift.
—Appreciated stock gifts or mutual fund shares can bring even greater tax savings.
—Long-term gifts can often be put into place before the end of the year. Including the mission of the Church here in central and southern Indiana in your will is one way to ensure that everyone will have a share in the hope Christ brings to the world. It is also possible to name the archdiocesan Catholic Community Foundation (CCF) as a beneficiary of a life insurance policy, or retirement account which may pose tax problems for loved ones.

Additional tips to consider
—Check or credit card: A check mailed to us and postmarked by Dec. 31 can be deducted this year, even if we don’t cash it until early 2024. A gift by credit card or debit card is possible in the year the charge is made.
—Pledges and letters of intent: Pledges to charity are deducted in the year the pledge is satisfied.
—Stock: A gift of stock can be made by electronic transfer. Ownership is then recorded to the charity.
—Appreciated property: Deduct the full value of what you give but never pay capital gains.
—Loss property: Consider selling property that would generate a tax-deductible loss and donating the proceeds. Then, deduct the loss and the charitable gift.

—Sponsored gifts: If your employer offers to match your charitable gift, you can have even more impact.

And a partridge in a pear tree:
Donors who wish to give stock, or make a gift from their IRA or donor-advised funds, must consult with their financial advisor to identify the best options for coordinating the potential of their impending gift and how to carry through their intentions. These forms of giving tops the list on the right hand side of the CCF website at www.archindy.org.

Create the space you need for a happy and holy Christmas season. Avoid the rush and head out to the Catholic Community Foundation early now at 213-236-1482 or ccf@archindy.org.

(Jolinda Moore is executive director of the archdiocesan Office of Stewardship and Development and the Catholic Community Foundation [CCF]. Tax or legal information provided herein is not intended as tax or legal advice. Always consult with your legal, tax or financial advisors before implementing any gift plan. If you would like to learn more about including your parish in your estate plans, please contact us any time. We exist to exclusively serve you and your parish in planned giving. )
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Catholic Charities & Catholic Schools

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Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary,
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Honorary Chair: Guy Neil Ramsey
Event Emcee: Rafael Sánchez
Entertainment: Music by The Bishops!

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