

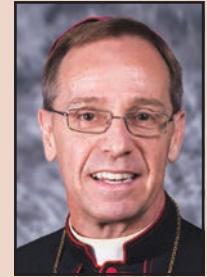


17th-century painting titled "The Madonna and Child" by Sassoferato, II (Giovanni Battista Salvi). (OSV News photo/Bridgeman)

# A Christmas Message from Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

While the narratives of Jesus' birth are found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, it is the beginning of the Gospel of John that we are given to understand the true meaning of Christmas, namely:



*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be.*

*What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (Jn 1:1-5)*

Though the second person of the Holy Trinity, the Son, existed before time, he was born in time for our salvation. The Word became flesh to dispel the darkness of fear and guilt, ignorance and hatred, sin and death. Through him, with him, and in him, as we profess in the doxology at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer of Mass, the divine light is cast on all humanity to bring about mercy, healing, forgiveness and reconciliation between God and us, as well as among ourselves.

May divine grace enable us to echo the response of the Blessed Virgin Mary in saying yes to God's will in all things, especially in receiving Jesus in Word, Sacrament and Neighbor. May we take inspiration from St. Joseph in receiving the Lord Jesus into our homes and our lives, and may we make every effort to give witness to his sacred presence by our words and deeds.

Let us join in the chorus of the angels, the adoration of the shepherds, and the worship of the magi in celebrating the incarnation of the Word of God becoming like us in all things but sin to transform our minds and hearts.

There is no darkness in our world—whether hatred, violence, injustice, pride, deception, greed, lust, infidelity or despair—that the light of Jesus Christ cannot overcome.

Wishing you a blessed Christmas and New Year, with assurance of prayer and remembrance at the altar of our Lord and Savior, I remain

Yours in the Peace and Joy of Jesus Christ,

*+Charles C. Thompson*

**+Charles C. Thompson**  
**Archbishop Charles C. Thompson**

## Mensaje de Navidad del Arzobispo Charles C. Thompson

### Queridos hermanas y hermanos en Cristo:

Aunque las narraciones del nacimiento de Jesús se encuentran en los Evangelios de Mateo y Lucas, es el comienzo del Evangelio de Juan el que nos da a entender el verdadero significado de la Navidad; a saber:

*En el principio ya existía el Verbo, y el Verbo estaba con Dios, y el Verbo era Dios. Él estaba con Dios en el principio. Por medio de él todas las cosas fueron creadas; sin él, nada de lo creado llegó a existir. En él estaba la vida y la vida era la luz de la humanidad. Esta luz resplandece en la oscuridad y la oscuridad no ha podido apagarla. (Jn 1:1-5)*

Aunque la segunda persona de la Santísima Trinidad, el Hijo, existía antes del tiempo, nació a tiempo para nuestra salvación. El Verbo se hizo carne para disipar las tinieblas del miedo y la culpa, la ignorancia y el odio, el pecado y la muerte. Por Él, con Él y en Él, tal y como profesamos en la doxología al final de la plegaria eucarística de la misa, la luz divina se derrama sobre toda la humanidad para traer misericordia, sanación, perdón y reconciliación entre Dios y nosotros, así como entre nosotros mismos.

Que la gracia divina nos permita hacernos eco de la respuesta de la Santísima Virgen María al decir sí a la voluntad de Dios en

todas las cosas, especialmente al recibir a Jesús en la Palabra, los Sacramentos y el prójimo. Que san José nos inspire para recibir al Señor Jesús en nuestros hogares y en nuestras vidas, y que hagamos todo lo posible por dar testimonio de su sagrada presencia con nuestras palabras y nuestras obras.

Unámonos al coro de los ángeles, a la adoración de los pastores y la veneración de los Reyes Magos para celebrar la encarnación del Verbo de Dios, que se hizo como nosotros en todo, excepto en el pecado, para transformar nuestras mentes y nuestros corazones.

No hay oscuridad en nuestro mundo—sea odio, violencia, injusticia, orgullo, engaño, codicia, lujuria, infidelidad o desesperación—que la luz de Jesucristo no pueda vencer.

Deseándoles una Navidad y un Año Nuevo bendecidos, con la certeza de mis oraciones y pensamientos por todos ustedes en el altar de nuestro Señor y Salvador, quedo

de ustedes en la paz y la alegría de Jesucristo,

*+Charles C. Thompson*

**+Charles C. Thompson**  
**Arzobispo Charles C. Thompson**

# 'Enough' of antisemitic violence, say pope, archbishop after horrific attack in Australia

(OSV News)—After two gunmen targeted Jewish beachgoers at an event celebrating the first day of Hanukkah in a terror attack at Sydney's Bondi Beach, Pope Leo XIV said he is "deeply saddened" by the attack he called "horrific."

In a Dec. 15 telegram signed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the pope said he is praying for those recovering and those grieving "the loss of a loved one," hoping that "those tempted to violence will undergo conversion and seek the path of peace and solidarity."

"Enough with these forms of antisemitic violence!" Pope Leo said earlier on Dec. 15, speaking with the groups that donated this year's Vatican Christmas tree and Nativity scene. "We must eliminate hatred from our hearts," he stressed.

In an overnight statement sent to OSV News on Dec. 14, Archbishop Anthony Fisher of Sydney said that "as we follow the horrific news coming from this evening's shooting at Bondi Beach, let us pray for those who have been killed or injured, the many who were forced to run for their lives and our emergency service workers who are right now trying to keep people safe."

Archbishop Fisher asked that "Our Lady, Queen of Peace, intercede for all affected, and for our beloved city at this time."

In a Dec. 15 statement, Archbishop Fisher called for an end to an "atmosphere of antisemitism" in Australia.

"Any attack on individual Jews is an attack on the whole Jewish community and an affront to the Australian way of life," Archbishop Fisher said as he called for an unequivocal condemnation of the attack and swift justice for the victims.

He also said that, as Christians, "an

attack on the Jews is an attack on all of us."

"We all share in profound grief and righteous anger following last night's terrorist attack on Bondi Beach," the archbishop said.

"That a celebration of the Jewish feast of Hanukkah could end in at least 16 dead, including a young child, and many more injured, horrifies ordinary Australians," he added.

Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), expressed the Church's solidarity with the Jewish community in the wake of the attack.

Archbishop Coakley made the comments in a letter to leaders of the Jewish community in the U.S.

"The festival of Hanukkah begins this year for the Jewish community with a moment of profound sorrow," Archbishop Coakley wrote. "The shooting in Sydney, Australia, is a painful reminder that hatred remains a threat to our lives, our communities, and the bonds that unite us."

The text of the archbishop's letter was released by the USCCB late on Dec. 15.

"At the same time, the selfless intervention of a Muslim man who disarmed one of the gunmen stands as a sign of hope that compassionate concern for others can still prevail," the archbishop continued. "On behalf of the Catholic community in the U.S., I promise our prayers and our solidarity at this difficult moment."

Archbishop Coakley was referring to a beachgoer who tackled and disarmed one of two gunmen while the other gunman fired from a nearby bridge. His heroic actions were captured on a video circulating online.

The victims included a 10-year-old girl,



## Public Schedule of Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

December 20, 2025–January 11, 2026

January 6 – 1:15 p.m.

Mass for the students of Roncalli High School at Roncalli High School, Indianapolis

January 7 – 2 p.m.

Virtual Evangelization Summit Planning Team meeting

January 8 – 8:15 a.m.

Virtual Judicaries meeting

January 8 – 10 a.m.

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

January 11 – 9:30 a.m.

Mass at Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary, Indianapolis

a rabbi and two Holocaust survivors.

According to authorities, more than 40 people were wounded.

"Moments like these revive old fears and deepen a sense of vulnerability that no community should have to bear," Archbishop Coakley said. "I wish the Jewish community to know that the Catholic community stands with them in sorrow and in resolve, committed to friendship that does not waver when fear threatens to paralyze us."

Noting Hanukkah coincides "with the season of Advent observed by the Church, Jews and Catholics both share in the promise that light and hope prevail over darkness," he added.

"May these celebrations strengthen our hearts, honor the memory of those killed and injured, and help us to build a world shaped by justice, compassion and peace," Archbishop Coakley wrote. †



A woman cries as she pays her respects at Bondi Pavilion on Dec. 15 to victims of a shooting during a Jewish holiday celebration at the beach in Sydney. (OSV News photo/Hollie Adams, Reuters)

## Archdiocesan statement regarding antisemitic attack in Australia

Hanukkah is a festival marked by rejoicing, the lighting of the menorah each day, the sharing of stories, sweet treats and games. It is a festival of families and neighbors.

With deep sadness, we witness once again our Jewish brothers and sisters enduring yet another act of violence upon

them simply because they are Jews. The most recent antisemitic terrorist attack in Sydney, Australia, not only has taken lives and left many injured, but it has left Jews worldwide suffering fear for their families, fear for their way of life, fear for their future.

The Archdiocese of Indianapolis, in

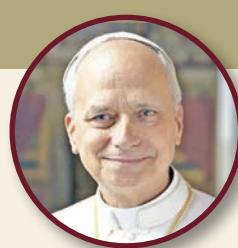
keeping with Jesus' command of love and compassion, asks all Catholics in our archdiocese to follow the example of the Church universal in condemning this senseless act of violence. All Jews who live throughout the archdiocese deserve our respect and goodwill. And they need us to reach out to them in sharing their

loss at this time. They need our prayer.

May the God who created us all, the God who made covenant with Adam, Noah, Jacob, Moses and David—and through Jesus with all humanity—move our hearts and actions to bring an end to antisemitic violence and hatred.

May we as a Church be peace. †

### Pope Leo's prayer intention for January



• **For prayer with the Word of God**—Let us pray that praying with the Word of God be nourishment for our lives and a source of hope in our communities, helping us to build a more fraternal and missionary Church.

See Pope Leo's monthly intentions at [archindy.org/popesintentions](http://archindy.org/popesintentions).

### The Criterion and Catholic Center are closed from Dec. 24 to Jan. 4 for Christmas holiday

This week's issue of *The Criterion*, which is our annual Christmas publication, is the last issue of 2025.

*The Criterion* will be published again on Jan. 9, 2026, and resume its weekly schedule.

The Archbishop O'Meara Catholic Center will be closed from Dec. 24 through Jan. 4 in observance of the holidays.

Archdiocesan agencies will reopen at 8 a.m. on Monday, Jan. 5, 2026. †

# The Criterion

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# Mysterious work of providence brings women religious to Sellersburg parish

By Sean Gallagher

SELLERSBURG—How does a fledgling community of women religious, with less than 10 members and founded only 14 years ago in Boston, come to live and minister at St. John Paul II Parish, nestled in Sellersburg in the hills of southern Indiana?

For Mother Olga of the Sacred Heart, foundress of the Daughters of Mary of Nazareth, it all happened through the mysterious working of divine providence.

Even though Mother Olga's life has been touched by providence from the time she lived in her native war-torn Iraq to coming the U.S. and starting an order in Boston, seeing how God has led her and her community to Sellersburg has moved her soul.

"It's definitely emotional to see God's hand at work," she said. "I came from my country only with a suitcase. I never imagined that I would be a foundress of an order in this country. Then to see God opening all of these doors for his people, I just sit in awe of the goodness of God."

On Dec. 14, Mother Olga didn't sit in awe—she knelt. She and seven other members of the Daughters of Mary of Nazareth knelt in prayer before the sanctuary of St. John Paul II Church during a Mass as Mother Olga prayerfully pledged fidelity to Archbishop Charles C. Thompson and the Church in anticipation of two members of the order beginning to live and serve at St. John Paul II in early 2026.

"As we prepare to begin our mission, we renew our consecration to God and to the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic

An interview with Mother Olga will be published in our Jan. 9, 2026, issue.

Church," Mother Olga said in the pledge she recited. "We promise to be in the Church, with the Church and for the Church.

"... We trust that the hand of God and his divine providence, who has led us to this day, will grant us the grace to carry this mission faithfully, humbly and joyfully to fruition for his greater glory, the love of our Catholic Church and the service of all people that he will lead us to serve and care for."

Moments before Mother Olga made the pledge of fidelity, Archbishop



With Archbishop Charles C. Thompson looking on, Mother Olga of the Sacred Heart reads a pledge of fidelity to him and the Church during a Dec. 14 Mass at St. John Paul II Church in Sellersburg while seven members of the Daughters of Mary of Nazareth, which she founded in 2011 in Boston, kneel beside her. Two members of the religious community will begin ministry at the parish in early 2026. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Thompson, the principal celebrant of the Dec. 14 Mass, described in his homily the religious community as "women of great faith" who "provide a living proclamation of the good news by their very presence among us."

Their presence at St. John Paul II Parish came about through God's providence working in several mysterious steps.

#### 'If it's of God, I can't stop it'

Father Thomas Clegg has been a close witness to this work of providence that has kept him in wonder at every turn.

He has kept his feet firmly on the ground as pastor of St. John Paul II Parish, leading the growing New Albany Deanery faith community in a business-savvy way, successfully overseeing the campaign that led to the construction in 2022 of an \$8 million new church.

So, when a parishioner came to him that same year and told him that God told him in prayer that an old rectory on the parish campus slated for demolition should be saved, Father Clegg was a bit

skeptical—but maybe not as much as he would have been earlier in his life as a priest.

"In my younger days, I would have shut him down," Father Clegg said in an interview with *The Criterion*. "I wouldn't have really listened. Now I'm older and hopefully a little wiser. For me, I think it was, 'Let's let it play out and see. If it's of God, I can't stop it. If it's not of God, it'll die out on its own.' It hasn't died out of its own."

That old rectory, which Father Clegg had sensibly thought should be torn down, has now been renovated and will soon be the home of the two members of the Daughters of Mary of Nazareth who will minister there. Archbishop Thompson blessed it after the Mass.

Other works of providence, marked by tragedy, generosity and wonder, led to the religious sisters pledging their fidelity during the Mass.

#### 'You will want for nothing'

In 2017, 3-day-old Emerson Rose Cristiani, a granddaughter of St. John Paul II parishioners Dan and Anne Cristiani, died of sudden infant death syndrome.

A cousin of Dan lived in Boston and knew Mother Olga. He immediately asked

her and her sisters to pray for the Cristiani family in Indiana. Dan and Anne later met and befriended Mother Olga.

When the possibility that the old rectory at St. John Paul II might be saved, Anne showed Mother Olga photos of it during a visit in the summer of 2022 to the community's convent in Quincy, Mass.

"She looked at it," Cristiani recalled. "She looked up at me ... and said, 'I need to come there.' We were all so excited."

Looking back on her relationship with Mother Olga and how it led her and her religious community to St. John Paul II, Cristiani sees the mysterious nature of God's providence in the midst of a family tragedy.

"Losing our 3-day-old granddaughter was so horrific, but look at the joy and the blessings that have come from this," Cristiani said.

Although intrigued by seeing the photos of the old rectory in the summer of 2022, Mother Olga took her time in discerning the possibility that God might be calling her community to send sisters to Sellersburg.

She didn't come to St. John Paul II until the end of December 2023, 18 months after seeing the photos of the old

See SELLERSBURG, page 8

## Fox 59 to broadcast by tape delay Christmas Eve Mass from cathedral

As in years past, Fox 59 in Indianapolis will again broadcast SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral's 10 p.m. Christmas Eve Mass beginning at midnight.

The Mass will be livestreamed at [www.ssppc.org/streaming](http://www.ssppc.org/streaming). †

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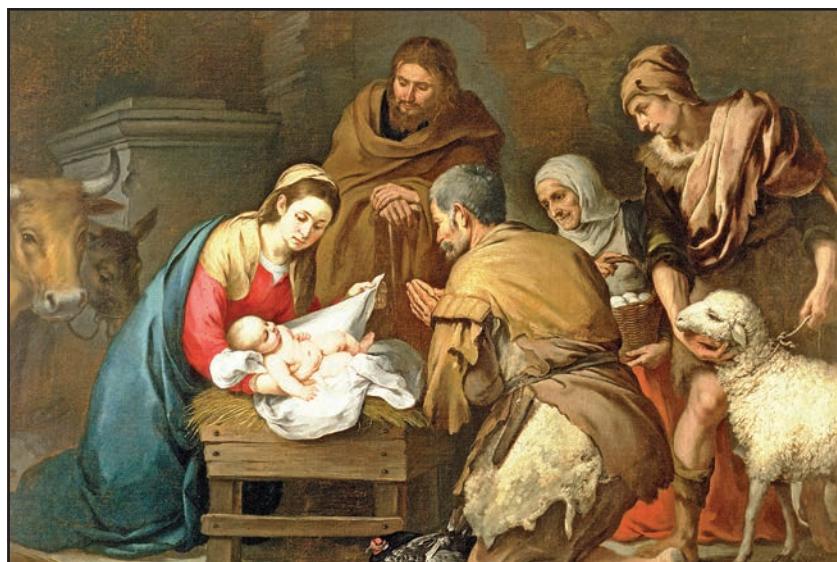
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Archbishop Charles C. Thompson, Publisher  
Mike Krokos, Editor

Sally Krause, Associate Publisher

## Editorial



This is a 17th-century painting titled "The Adoration of the Shepherds" by Murillo Bartolome Esteban. The feast of the Nativity of the Lord, a holy day of obligation, is celebrated on Dec. 25. (OSV News photo/Bridgeman)

# May the gift of Christ's birth inspire us to share the love of God this Christmas and beyond

We all know the story.

We return to Bethlehem this time each year, awaiting the birth of the Christ Child.

In the weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas, we read about Mary's "yes" to become Mother of our Savior. She serves as a model of hope, faithful waiting and preparation for Jesus' arrival. Her unequivocal response in faith is one we are called to follow each day as we live our vocations as disciples of Christ.

We reflect on John the Baptist's role as one of the greatest of the prophets. He is the promised second coming of Elijah, and he sets in motion the coming of the Messiah. John cried out, "Prepare the way of the Lord" (Mk 1:3). Centuries later, we are called during Advent to prepare for Christmas in the same way.

Our faith teaches us that Christmas is one of the most important days of the Church year, second only to Easter itself. Celebrating the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is the culmination of the mystery of the incarnation, the feast of God becoming flesh.

As the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops reminded us on their website in 2023, "It is a uniquely Christian teaching, the divine choosing to become one of us. Because of this belief, God is not only transcendent, but also wholly immanent, Emmanuel [God-with-us]. While remaining transcendent [meaning we must rise above our present condition to reach him], he is at the same time immanent [meaning he is with us as we rise toward him]. Every Eucharist is like Christmas where the bread and wine are transformed into his flesh, his body and blood, and, in a sense, he is born anew on the altar."

Despite some in society's attempts to secularize this holy season, we make time to revisit the manger that is at the heart of the Nativity scene, where the Child and Mary and Joseph are surrounded by animals, and viewed in

awe by shepherds and wise men who pay them homage. The heavens rejoice. The Earth resounds with hope.

How can a scene so simple fill us with such immeasurable joy?

It is because we celebrate the birth of Christ into our world and into our hearts and reflect on the gift of salvation that is born with him, including the fact that he was born to die for us.

It is also because Christ offers a shining light into all the dark corners of our world.

This celebration is so central to our faith as Catholics that we must remember that it doesn't end on Dec. 25. The octave of Christmas continues through Jan. 1, and the Christmas season itself extends until the Baptism of the Lord.

As we examine the calendar, we see that feast days and solemnities mark the period: the Nativity, on Dec. 25; the feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr on Dec. 26; the feast of St. John the Evangelist, Apostle, and author of the fourth Gospel, three letters, and the Book of Revelation, on Dec. 27; the feast of the Holy Innocents, on Dec. 28, the male child victims slaughtered by King Herod; the feast of the Holy Family, on Dec. 29; the feast of St. Sylvester, on Dec. 31, and the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, on Jan. 1. We recite the *Gloria* each day of the Octave. We then continue marking the Christmas season through Epiphany, celebrated on Jan. 4, and officially end it with the feast of the Baptism of the Lord on Jan. 11.

During this special time of year, let us remember that God so loved us that he became one of us, and that he gives us more than we can ever give in return.

May that generosity inspire us to celebrate this holy season—and beyond—with an outpouring of God's unending love.

—Mike Krokos

## Reflection/Ken Ogorek

# A hope-filled past, a hopeful future

As we approach the end of this jubilee year in our Church throughout the world, with a theme of "Pilgrims of Hope," let's pause to thank God for the special blessings of this past year as well as asking for his ongoing gift of hope for 2026 and beyond. From Dec. 21, 2024, to Jan. 6, 2026, it's been quite a journey!



### Name That Year

When jubilee years come around (usually every 25 years) whoever is pope at the time tends to choose a theme. Pope Francis, from the unique perspective that only a pope has, looked out over our world and saw a great need for hope—the hope that faith in Jesus and the experience of his love make available to us all.

Our Holy Father also felt keenly the pilgrim nature of our Church—that we're on a journey through salvation history, moving outward as missionary disciples. Hence the theme for this past jubilee year, again, "Pilgrims of Hope."

### We're on a mission from God

My fondest memories of our jubilee year together include being asked by pastors to facilitate parish missions focusing on the virtue of hope.

These well-attended opportunities for God's people to be reminded of hope's presence and importance were personal blessings for me in that I saw so many parishioners show up and strive to grow in holiness. I was inspired and edified by the witness of God's people.

The content of these missions made its way in part to *The Criterion* in the form of a column addressing two enemies of hope: despair and presumption. An Evangelization Outreach column, titled "Two enemies of hope: know them to have more hope," appeared in the June 27, 2025, issue.

I also had the pleasure of discussing

this topic on a podcast called "Iron Sharpens Iron: Understanding the Enemies of Hope (featuring Ken Ogorek): Despair, Presumption and Pickles by IRON SHARPENS IRON | Podchaser."

### We didn't miss a beat

When Pope Francis passed to his eternal reward (may he rest in peace), Pope Leo XIV quickly resumed a focus on hope-filled and hope-related topics, especially via his emphasis on peace and unity.

Our own shepherd, Archbishop Charles C. Thompson, offered his own pastoral reflection on peace and unity titled "Peace & Unity: A Pastoral Reflection," reminding us that we can and should hope for God's blessings, even if pursuing them is a bit of a process or journey—a pilgrimage, even.

It will be interesting to see if Pope Leo proclaims an extraordinary jubilee year for 2033—the 2,000th anniversary of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection. Time will tell.

### Hope is a journey and a destination

At Mass, we hear the phrase "... your pilgrim Church on Earth." We're also reminded at various junctures of faith formation that we are a pilgrim people.

Like the kingdom of God, our quest for hope won't be fully realized this side of heaven. By God's grace, though, we can receive and grow in the theological virtue of hope throughout our earthly journey, anticipating a full outpouring of divine love when we experience the heavenly banquet in God's holy presence.

In the words of this year's Jubilee prayer, "May the grace of the Jubilee reawaken in us, Pilgrims of Hope, a yearning for the treasures of heaven. May that same grace spread the joy and peace of our Redeemer throughout the Earth. Amen."

(Ken Ogorek is executive director within the archdiocesan Secretariat for Evangelizing Catechesis. He can be reached at [kogorek@archindy.org](mailto:kogorek@archindy.org).) †

## Letter to the Editor

# Reader: With the birth of our Savior, an untouchable love arrives for all

In the hush of winter's longest night, a star remembers what we forget—that love arrived not as thunder but as breath in straw, as pulse in the dark.

The light we string on trees is memory made visible: how the infinite once folded itself small, chose the narrow gate of being born, the poverty of form.

Every gift we wrap in silver paper whispers the secret—that love descends, that what is holy kneels.

Love arrived without noise, wrapped in the poverty of breath. The Infinite learned our smallness, and did not despise it.

In a manger of quiet consent, He rested where fear dissolves. No hands were clenched—only given.

Tonight, eternity leans close, and love becomes touchable.

**Kirth N. Roach**  
Order of Carmelite Discalced Secular Indianapolis

## Letters Policy

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

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

The editors reserve the right to select the letters that will be published and to edit letters from readers as necessary

based on space limitations, pastoral sensitivity and content (including spelling and grammar). In order to encourage opinions from a variety of readers, frequent writers will ordinarily be limited to one letter every three months. Concise letters (usually less than 300 words) are more likely to be printed.

Letters must be signed, but, for serious reasons, names may be withheld.

Send letters to "Letters to the Editor," The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367. Readers with access to e-mail may send letters to [criterion@archindy.org](mailto:criterion@archindy.org). †

ARCHBISHOP/ARZOBISPO CHARLES C. THOMPSON



# Christ the Cornerstone

## St. Joseph, silent partner in the Christmas story

The Gospel reading for the Fourth Sunday of Advent (Mt 1:18-24) tells the Christmas story from St. Matthew's perspective. It is remarkably simple and straightforward.

"This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about," the Evangelist says. "When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit" (Mt 1:18).

The role that St. Joseph plays in the story of Christ's birth is fascinating. He is a silent partner in the drama, but his strength and his acceptance of God's mysterious plan hold everything together.

"Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly" (Mt 1:19), St. Matthew continues.

The betrothed spouse of Mary is placed in an impossible situation. From the beginning, his intentions are to protect Mary and her unborn child. Because he is a righteous man (someone who always does what he thinks is morally right), he decides to do what is best for Mary. A quiet divorce will minimize the

shame surrounding her pregnancy.

But God had a very different plan. "Joseph, son of David," God's messenger says to him. "Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:20-21).

That's a lot to ask of even a righteous, God-fearing man like Joseph. Who could blame him if he sought an easier way out?

But Joseph said "yes" to God's challenging invitation. As St. Matthew tells us, "When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home" (Mt 1:24).

St. Matthew is eager to point out that the strange story he is telling us is not some random occurrence. It is all part of God's plan—formed before the beginning of time in order to save God's people from their selfishness and sin.

*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him*

*Emmanuel, which means "God is with us."* (Mt 1:22-23)

The full meaning of Advent, the coming of the long-awaited Messiah, is expressed in the name "Emmanuel" (God-is-with-us). This is the mystery of the Incarnation. It is God's work, of course, but God does not work alone. He seeks our collaboration, our freely chosen acceptance, and our willingness to abandon our own plans in order to obey his commands.

That is what Mary did when she said to the angel, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:37-38). And it is what St. Joseph silently said when he woke up and did as the angel had commanded him.

Mary's role in the historical drama of our salvation is indispensable. Without her "yes," our Savior would not have been conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. But St. Joseph's part in the Christmas story is also vitally important. He is the guardian or protector who ensures that everything goes according to God's plan.

To play his part successfully, this righteous man must be humble, patient, pure and wholly obedient to God's will. He cannot be full of himself or

self-righteous in ways that look down on others. He must be attentive and open to the will of God, even when he doesn't understand it.

In the second reading for the Fourth Sunday of Advent (Rom 1:1-7), St. Paul describes the mystery of Jesus' Incarnation and what it demands of each of us who seek to be missionary disciples of Christ:

*Descended from David according to the flesh, but established as Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead, [he is] Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him we have received the grace of apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith, for the sake of his name ... (Rom 1:3-5)*

Like St. Joseph, we are called to "the obedience of faith" and to the kind of righteousness that is never self-seeking.

For the sake of the name of Jesus, we are invited, and challenged, to follow the example of the husband of Mary and foster father of Jesus by quietly and unquestioningly doing the will of our Father in heaven.

St. Joseph, Guardian of the Redeemer and Patron of the Church, pray for us. †



# Cristo, la piedra angular

## San José, coprotagonista de la historia de Navidad

*Cuando José se despertó, hizo lo que el ángel del Señor le había mandado y recibió a María por esposa.* (Mt 1:24)

La lectura del Evangelio del cuarto domingo de Adviento (Mt 1:18-24) narra la historia de la Navidad desde la perspectiva de san Mateo, un relato extraordinariamente sencillo y directo.

"El nacimiento de Jesucristo fue así: Su madre, María, estaba comprometida para casarse con José; pero, antes de unirse a él, resultó que estaba embarazada por el poder del Espíritu Santo" (Mt 1:18).

El papel que desempeña san José en la historia del nacimiento de Cristo es fascinante y aunque es un personaje secundario en la trama, su fortaleza y su aceptación del misterioso plan de Dios le dan coherencia a toda la historia.

"Como José, su esposo, era un hombre justo y no quería exponerla a la vergüenza pública, decidió romper en secreto el compromiso" (Mt 1:19), prosigue san Mateo.

El esposo prometido de María se encuentra en una situación imposible. Desde el principio, sus intenciones son proteger a María y a su hijo por nacer. Como es un hombre recto—alguien

que siempre hace lo que considera moralmente correcto—decide hacer lo mejor para María. Romper el compromiso en secreto minimizaría la vergüenza que envuelve a su embarazo, pero Dios tenía otros planes.

"José, hijo de David"—le dice el mensajero de Dios—"no temas recibir a María por esposa, porque ella ha concebido por el poder del Espíritu Santo. Dará a luz un hijo y le pondrás por nombre Jesús, porque él salvará a su pueblo de sus pecados" (Mt 1:20-21).

Eso es mucho pedir, incluso de un hombre justo y temeroso de Dios como José. ¿Quién podría culparlo si buscara una salida más fácil?

Pero José dijo "sí" a la difícil invitación de Dios. San Mateo nos dice que "Cuando José se despertó, hizo lo que el ángel del Señor le había mandado y recibió a María por esposa" (Mt 1:24).

San Mateo se afana en señalar que este extraño relato no es un suceso casual, sino que forma parte del plan de Dios, diseñado antes del principio de los tiempos, para salvar al pueblo de Dios del egoísmo y el pecado.

*Todo esto sucedió para que se cumpliera lo que el Señor había dicho por medio del profeta: "La virgen concebirá y dará a luz un hijo y lo*

*llamarán Emanuel."* (Mt 1:22-23)

El significado pleno del Adviento, la venida del Mesías largamente esperado, se expresa en el nombre "Emmanuel" ("Dios está con nosotros"). Este es el misterio de la encarnación. Es obra de Dios, por supuesto, pero Dios no trabaja solo, sino que busca nuestra colaboración, nuestra aceptación libremente elegida y nuestra disposición a abandonar nuestros propios planes para obedecer sus mandatos.

Eso es lo que hizo María cuando dijo al ángel: "He aquí la esclava del Señor. Hágase en mí según tu palabra" (Lc 1:37-38). Lo mismo que dijo san José en silencio cuando se despertó e hizo lo que el ángel le había ordenado.

El papel de María en la trama histórica de nuestra salvación es indispensable, pues sin su "sí," nuestro Salvador no habría sido concebido por el poder del Espíritu Santo. Pero el papel de san José en la historia de la Navidad es también de vital importancia, ya que es el guardián o protector que se asegura de que todo ocurra según el plan de Dios.

Para desempeñar su papel con éxito, este hombre justo debe ser humilde, paciente, puro y totalmente obediente a la voluntad de Dios; no puede ser engreído ni sentirse

superior a los demás. Al contrario, debe estar atento y abierto a la voluntad de Dios, aunque no la comprenda.

En la segunda lectura del cuarto domingo de Adviento (Rom 1:1-7), san Pablo describe el misterio de la encarnación de Jesús y lo que exige de cada uno de nosotros que queremos ser discípulos misioneros de Cristo:

*Este mensaje habla de su Hijo, quien según la naturaleza humana era descendiente de David, pero según el Espíritu de santidad, fue designado con poder Hijo de Dios por la resurrección. Él es Jesucristo nuestro Señor. Por medio de él y en honor a su nombre, recibimos la gracia y el llamado a ser apóstol para persuadir a todas las naciones que obedezcan a la fe.* (Rom 1:3-5)

Al igual que san José, estamos llamados a "la obediencia de la fe" y a la clase de justicia que nunca es egoísta.

Por el bien del nombre de Jesús, se nos invita, y se nos desafía, a seguir el ejemplo del esposo de María y padre adoptivo de Jesús, obrando en silencio y sin cuestionar la voluntad de nuestro Padre que está en los cielos.

San José, custodio del Redentor y patrón de la Iglesia, ora por nosotros. †

# Events Calendar

For a list of events for the next four weeks as reported to The Criterion, log on to [www.archindy.org/events](http://www.archindy.org/events).

## December 19

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross Church, 23345 Gavin Lane, Bright. **Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra concert**, 6:30 p.m., freewill donations accepted. Information: [brightlightsindiana.com](http://brightlightsindiana.com), 812-537-3992.

St. Mary Parish, 415 E. Eighth St., New Albany. **Commonwealth Brass Band Christmas Concert**, 7-9 p.m., free will donation accepted for the band and historic church pipe organ restoration. Information: 812-944-0417, ext. 107, [ryan@stmarysna.org](mailto:ryan@stmarysna.org).

## December 28

SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, 1347 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis. **Filipino Mass**, Divine Mercy 3 p.m., rosary 3:10 p.m., Mass 3:30 p.m. with homily in English, every fourth Sunday. Information: [mariasolito@yahoo.com](mailto:mariasolito@yahoo.com).

## 2026

### January 7-April 22

St. Jude Parish, Guerin Room, 5353 McFarland Road, Indianapolis. **Surviving Divorce Program**, 6:30-9 p.m., three Wednesdays a month for a total of 12

sessions (Jan. 7, 14, 28, Feb. 4, 11, 25, March 4, 11, 25, April 8, 15, 22), \$30, scholarships available. Registration, information: [tinyurl.com/survivingdivorce2026](http://tinyurl.com/survivingdivorce2026), 317-786-4371, [pccollins@stjudeindy.org](mailto:pccollins@stjudeindy.org).

### January 9-11

Beavercreek, Ohio. **Retrouvaille Retreat**, for those in a struggling marriage, location disclosed upon registering, \$400 per couple, register by Jan. 2. Information, registration: 513-486-6222, [3030r@helpourmarriage.org](mailto:3030r@helpourmarriage.org), [helpourmarriage.org](http://helpourmarriage.org).

### January 10

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish Social Hall, 10655 Haverstick Road, Carmel (Diocese of Lafayette). **Brain Health: A Focus on Alzheimer's Disease Conference**, 9:45 a.m.-

12:45 p.m., enter doors 4 or 6, free, register by Jan. 7. Information, registration: [bit.ly/2026brainhealth](http://bit.ly/2026brainhealth), 317-846-3190, [liz.escoffery@setoncarmel.org](mailto:liz.escoffery@setoncarmel.org).

### January 11

St. Anthony of Padua Parish, 316 N. Sherwood Ave., Clarksville. **175th Anniversary Kickoff Mass**, 9 a.m., launches a full

year of anniversary events. Information: 812-282-2290, [a.macaluso@stanthony-clarksville.org](mailto:a.macaluso@stanthony-clarksville.org).

### January 22

Indiana Convention Center, Sagamore Ballroom, 100 S. Capitol Ave., Indianapolis. **Indiana Youth Rally for Life**, 9-11 a.m., for youths in grades eight-12, Daughters of Mary of Nazareth foundress Mother Olga of the Sacred Heart, music by Nico Cabrera, confession available, free, youth group leaders must register by Jan. 15 at [archindyy.com/youth-rally-for-life](http://archindyy.com/youth-rally-for-life), sponsored by archdiocesan Office of Youth Ministry. Information: 317-456-7076, [rgilman@archindy.org](mailto:rgilman@archindy.org).

Indiana Convention Center, Hall J, 100 S. Capitol Ave., Indianapolis. **Mass for Life with Indiana bishops**, 11:30 a.m., all welcome, sponsored by archdiocesan Office of Human Life and Dignity. Information: 317-236-1543, [bvarick@archindy.org](mailto:bvarick@archindy.org).

**Indiana March for Life**, Indianapolis: 1:45-2:30 p.m.

march from Georgia and Illinois streets to Indiana Statehouse, 200 W. Washington St.; post-rally at south Statehouse steps, 2:30-3 p.m.; all welcome, sponsored by Right to Life of Indianapolis. Information: 317-582-1526, [info@rtli.org](mailto:info@rtli.org).

### January 24

Sisters of Providence, 1 Sisters of Providence, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, St. Mary-of-the-Woods. **Teen Volunteering Opportunity**, 9 a.m.-2 p.m., ages 12-18, visit with elder sisters and help them with activities such as Bingo, exercise, baking and more. Information, registration: [teenvolunteer.sistersofprovidence.org](http://teenvolunteer.sistersofprovidence.org), [jluna@spsmw.org](mailto:jluna@spsmw.org), 361-500-9505.

St. Teresa Life Center, 23345 Gavin Lane, Lawrenceburg. **Rooted in Truth: Day of Renewal**, 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m., women's day of reflection; includes breakfast, lunch, snacks, T-shirt and gifts; sponsored by Dearborn County Catholics, \$20, register by Jan. 10. Information, registration: 513-255-0782, [tinyurl.com/rootedintruth26](http://tinyurl.com/rootedintruth26).

### January 28

St. Nicholas School, 6459 E. St. Nicholas Dr., Sunman. **Open House**, 5:30-7 p.m., free. Information: 812-623-2348, [schooloffice@stnicholas-sunman.org](mailto:schooloffice@stnicholas-sunman.org).

### February 7

Mount Saint Francis Center for Spirituality, 101 Saint Anthony Dr., Mt. St. Francis. **Pre-Cana Retreat**, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m., includes materials, continental breakfast, lunch, \$125 per couple, register by Jan. 29. Information, registration: [catalystcatholic.org/precana](http://catalystcatholic.org/precana), [michelle@catalystcatholic.org](mailto:michelle@catalystcatholic.org), 812-923-8355, ext. 201.

Sisters of Providence, 1 Sisters of Providence, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, St. Mary-of-the-Woods. **Teen Volunteering Opportunity**, 9 a.m.-2 p.m., ages 12-18, visit with elder sisters and help them with activities such as Bingo, exercise, baking and more. Information, registration: [teenvolunteer.sistersofprovidence.org](http://teenvolunteer.sistersofprovidence.org), [jluna@spsmw.org](mailto:jluna@spsmw.org), 361-500-9505.

### February 12

St. Mary Parish, 1331 E. Hunter Robbins Way, Greensburg. **Miracles of the Eucharist Exhibit**, 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m., exhibition on the Eucharistic Miracles of the World created by St. Carlo Acutis, freewill offerings accepted. Information: 812-663-8427, ext. 204, [anavarra@stmarysgreensburg.com](mailto:anavarra@stmarysgreensburg.com).

created by St. Carlo Acutis, presentation by International Marian Catechist coordinator and national coordinator for the Real Presence Association Patrick Brueggen, freewill donations accepted. Information: 812-663-8427, ext. 204, [anavarra@stmarysgreensburg.com](mailto:anavarra@stmarysgreensburg.com).

### February 15, 16

St. Mary Parish, 1331 E. Hunter Robbins Way, Greensburg. **Miracles of the Eucharist Exhibit**, 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m., exhibition on the Eucharistic Miracles of the World created by St. Carlo Acutis, freewill offerings accepted. Information: 812-663-8427, ext. 204, [anavarra@stmarysgreensburg.com](mailto:anavarra@stmarysgreensburg.com).

### February 28

Pike Performing Arts Center, 6701 Zionsville Road, Indianapolis. **Holy Fire Youth Retreat**, 9 a.m.-5:30 p.m., for students in grades 6-8; cost through Jan. 12: \$64.50 with lunch or \$54.50 without lunch; cost after Jan. 12: \$74.50 with lunch or \$64.50 without lunch; register by Feb. 8, sponsored by archdiocesan Office of Youth Ministry. Information, registration: [archindyy.com/holy-fire](http://archindyy.com/holy-fire), 317-456-7076, [rgilman@archindy.org](mailto:rgilman@archindy.org). †

## Retreats and Programs

For a complete list of retreats as reported to The Criterion, log on to [www.archindy.org/retreats](http://www.archindy.org/retreats).

## 2026

### January 9

Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22143 Main St., Oldenburg. **A Day of Quiet Renewal**, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., \$20, \$80 with spiritual direction. Information, registration: 812-933-6437, [oldenburgfranciscancenter.org](http://oldenburgfranciscancenter.org).

### January 9-11

Saint Meinrad Archabbey Guesthouse, 200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad. **Young Adult Retreat**, for

ages 18-35, Benedictine Father Simon Herrmann presenting, \$50 single, \$100 double. Registration: 812-357-6611, [saintmeinrad.org/retreats](http://saintmeinrad.org/retreats).

### January 10

Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22143 Main St., Oldenburg. **Mend Your Heart with Gratitude**, 9:30-11:30 a.m., Jesuit Father Ed Kinerk presenting, \$30. Information, registration: 812-933-6437, [oldenburgfranciscancenter.org](http://oldenburgfranciscancenter.org).

### January 15

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. **Day of Silence**, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., \$55, includes room, lunch, Mass and use of common areas and grounds, overnight stay available for additional \$42, dinner additional \$14.40. Registration: [ftm.retreatportal.com/events/317-545-7681](http://ftm.retreatportal.com/events/317-545-7681), [lcoons@archindy.org](mailto:lcoons@archindy.org).

### January 16-18

Saint Meinrad Archabbey Guesthouse, 200 Hill Dr.,

St. Meinrad. **Biblical Mercy: Matthew's Gospel as an Encounter with Jesus' Love**, Father Zachary Samples, Diocese of Springfield, Ill., presenting, \$350 single, \$550 double. Registration: 812-357-6611, [saintmeinrad.org/retreats](http://saintmeinrad.org/retreats).

Mother of the Redeemer Retreat Center, 8220 W. State Road 48, Bloomington. **The Beauty of the Sacraments Retreat**, 6 p.m. Fri.-10 a.m. Sun., Catholic Answers apologist Karlo Broussard presenting,

\$290 for single, \$480 double, \$670 triple, \$860 quadruple, commuter \$90, includes four meals and room for two nights, commuters \$50.70 includes lunch and dinner on Sat. Information, registration: 812-825-4642, ext. 1, [motheroftheredeemer.com](http://motheroftheredeemer.com). †

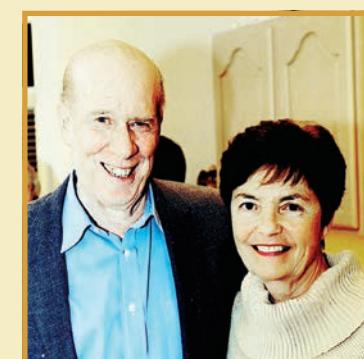
## Wedding Anniversaries

**Richard and Jane (Mahoney) Remien**, members of St. Pius X Parish in Indianapolis, will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on Dec. 28.

The couple was married in St. Francis Xavier Church in Wilmette, Ill., on Dec. 28, 1965.

They have three children: Leslie Hallett, Joseph and R. J. Remien.

The couple also has six grandchildren.



**Gary and Eloisa (Nunez) Sheets**, members of St. Joseph Parish in Shelbyville, will celebrate their 55th wedding anniversary on Dec. 26.

The couple was married in Prince of Peace Church in Altus, Okla., on Dec. 26, 1970.

They have four children: Kimberly Lewis, Leslea Sandlin, Anthony and Gary Sheets.

The couple also has nine grandchildren.



**Charles and Judith (Brinkmann) Hagedorn**, members of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish in Aurora, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on Dec. 20.

The couple was married in St. Aloysius Church in Cincinnati on Dec. 20, 1975.

They have four children, Gina Balzer, Anna Hagedorn, Katie Kiefer and Sara Murrell.

The couple also has four grandchildren.



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

## College students sought to teach Totus Tuus summer youth program

Totus Tuus is seeking college students to teach its 2026 summer program for youths in first through 12th grade at six archdiocesan parishes from June 7-July 25. The deadline to apply is April 15.

Totus Tuus is a summer Catholic youth program dedicated to sharing the Gospel and promoting the Catholic faith through evangelization, catechesis, Christian witness and eucharistic worship. Its weeklong Parish Summer Catechetical Program assists parents and parishes in evangelizing and catechizing their youths by supplementing the work that parents and parishes are currently doing.

The methodology, structure and content of Totus Tuus are concerned not only with teaching the faith, but also with igniting the hearts of the team members and the young people they encounter. The result has been the formation of young adults who continue to dedicate themselves to the Church's mission of evangelization, along with many vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

Applicants for this paid position must be a college student, a practicing

Catholic, have received the sacrament of confirmation, have a reasonably good knowledge of the Catholic faith (training is provided) and have a desire to work with youths.

They must be willing to learn and experience the faith, work with a team, respect team dynamics, strive for a stronger prayer life, teach children and travel by car to six archdiocesan parishes throughout the summer.

Missionaries are chosen based upon their desire to teach the faith, love of children, energy, enthusiasm and for their individual leadership skills. To run a week of the Totus Tuus Summer Program smoothly, missionaries adhere to a well-defined schedule rooted in a structured prayer life.

Training starts on May 27, and a short break will take place in early July. For more information about Totus Tuus in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, go to [www.archindy.org/totustuus](http://www.archindy.org/totustuus) or contact Anita Bardo at 317-236-1466 or [abardo@archindy.org](mailto:abardo@archindy.org). To apply, go to [totustuus.church/be-missionary](http://totustuus.church/be-missionary), scroll down and click on the photo for "New Missionary" or "Returning Missionary." †



One in Christ/Daniel Conway

## Blessed Virgin Mary brings a homely warmth to our pursuit of justice

During the holy season of Advent, the Church calls our attention to the Blessed Virgin Mary and her indispensable role in the history of salvation.

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception on Dec. 8, and the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Dec. 12, are two prominent examples of this season's special focus on Mary, but there are many others including, of course, the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas) on Dec. 25, the Feast of the Holy Family on Dec. 28 and the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God on Jan. 1.

In his homily for the Jubilee of Marian Spirituality on Oct. 12, Pope Leo XIV offered a powerful reflection on the Blessed Virgin Mary.

It has been clear from the first moments of his pontificate that our new Holy Father joins his immediate predecessors in professing a strong devotion to Mary, the Mother of God and Mother of the Church.

"Marian spirituality is at the service of the Gospel," the pope says. "It reveals its simplicity" and "leads us to join her in becoming disciples of Jesus."

By gazing at Mary, the Mother of our Redeemer, we see the divine justice through her eyes. As Pope Leo says:

*[Marian spirituality] teaches us to return to [Jesus] and to meditate and ponder the events of our lives in which the Risen One still comes to us and calls us. Marian spirituality immerses us in the history upon which heaven opened. It helps us to see the proud being scattered in their conceit, the mighty being cast down from their thrones and the rich being sent away empty-handed. It impels us to fill the hungry with good things, to lift up the lowly, to remember God's mercy and to trust in the power of his arm. (cf. Lk 1:51-54)*

By paying close attention to Mary, and especially her "fiat" which declares: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38), we discover that we, too, have been invited to say "yes" to God's will for us.

We, too, have been called to follow Jesus and to be his missionary disciples in a world that either does not know

him or that has forgotten how much it depends on his grace and mercy.

Pope Leo will not let us forget who we are or what our mission is. He points us to Mary and says:

*Mary's path follows that of Jesus, which leads us to encounter every human being, especially the poor, the wounded and sinners. Because of this, authentic Marian spirituality brings God's tenderness, his way of "being a mother" to light in the Church. As we read in the apostolic exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium," "whenever we look to Mary, we come to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her, we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves. Contemplating Mary, we realize that she who praised God for 'bringing down the mighty from their thrones' and 'sending the rich away empty' [Lk 1:52-53] is also the one who brings a homely warmth to our pursuit of justice" (#288).*

We are challenged to be strong like Mary, not in a harsh or indifferent way, but with the strength of humility and tenderness. Pope Leo calls this a "homely warmth," an uncommon expression, especially in a meditation on divine justice.

But, of course, God's justice is one with his mercy. The image that too many of us have of a stern and unforgiving God is simply false. It is true that God holds us accountable for what we do (or fail to do) with the gifts we have been given and the freedom that we enjoy. But the God who created us, redeemed us and calls us to be holy is a loving and forgiving God. His justice is merciful, and his gentleness is his strength.

Mary shows us the way to her Son, Jesus, who is the face of God incarnate. In Mary, we discover the path that we are called to follow, the Way that leads us to Gospel joy. And, as Pope Leo says, "whenever we look to Mary, we come to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness."

*(Daniel Conway is a member of The Criterion's editorial committee.) †*

Uno en Cristo/Daniel Conway

## La Santísima Virgen María aporta calor de hogar a nuestra búsqueda de la justicia

Durante la santa temporada del Adviento, la Iglesia destaca a la Santísima Virgen María y su papel indispensable en la historia de la salvación.

La solemnidad de la Inmaculada Concepción, celebrada el 8 de diciembre, y la fiesta de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, celebrada el 12 de diciembre, son dos ejemplos claros de la importancia que se le da a María en esta época del año, pero hay muchos otros, como, por supuesto, la Natividad del Señor (Navidad), celebrada el 25 de diciembre, y la fiesta de la Sagrada Familia, celebrada el 28 de diciembre, y la Solemnidad de María, Madre de Dios, el 1 de enero.

En su homilía por el Jubileo de la Espiritualidad Mariana, pronunciada el 12 de octubre, el papa León XIV ofreció una poderosa reflexión sobre la Santísima Virgen María.

Desde los primeros momentos de su pontificado, ha quedado claro que nuestro nuevo Santo Padre se une a sus predecesores inmediatos en la profesión de una fuerte devoción a María, Madre de Dios y Madre de la Iglesia.

"La espiritualidad mariana está al servicio del Evangelio: revela su sencillez —afirma el Papa, y prosigue—

[...] nos hace, junto con ella, discípulos de Jesús."

Al contemplar a María, la Madre de nuestro Redentor, vemos la justicia divina a través de sus ojos. Tal como nos lo explica el papa León:

*[La espiritualidad mariana] nos hace, junto con ella, discípulos de Jesús, nos educa a volver a Él, a meditar y a relacionar los acontecimientos de la vida en los que el Resucitado continúa a visitarnos y llamarnos. La espiritualidad mariana nos sumerge en la historia sobre la que se abrió el cielo, nos ayuda a ver a los soberbios dispersos en los pensamientos de su corazón, a los poderosos derribados de sus tronos, a los ricos despedidos con las manos vacías. Nos compromete a colmar de bienes a los hambrientos, a enaltecer a los humildes, a recordar la misericordia de Dios y a confiar en el poder de su brazo. (cf. Lc 1:51-54).*

Prestando mucha atención a María, y especialmente a su *fiat* que declara: "He aquí la esclava del Señor. Hágase en mí según tu palabra" (Lc 1:38), descubrimos que también nosotros hemos sido invitados a decir "sí" a la voluntad de Dios sobre nosotros.

También nosotros hemos sido

llamados a seguir a Jesús y a ser sus discípulos misioneros en un mundo que o no lo conoce o que ha olvidado cuánto depende de su gracia y de su misericordia.

El papa León no nos dejará olvidar quiénes somos ni cuál es nuestra misión. Nos señala a María y dice:

*El camino de María va tras el de Jesús, y el de Jesús es hacia cada ser humano, especialmente hacia los pobres, los heridos, los pecadores. Por eso, la auténtica espiritualidad mariana hace actual en la Iglesia la ternura de Dios, su maternidad. "Porque—como leemos en la Exhortación apostólica "Evangelii Gaudium"—cada vez que miramos a María volvemos a creer en lo revolucionario de la ternura y del cariño. En ella vemos que la humildad y la ternura no son virtudes de los débiles sino de los fuertes, que no necesitan maltratar a otros para sentirse importantes. Mirándola descubrimos que la misma que alababa a Dios porque 'derribó de su trono a los poderosos' y 'despidió vacíos a los ricos' (Lc 1:52-53) es la que pone calidez de hogar en nuestra búsqueda de justicia" (#288).*

Se nos desafía a ser fuertes como María, no de un modo duro o indiferente,

sino con la fuerza de la humildad y la ternura. El papa León llama a esto "calidez de hogar," una expresión poco común, especialmente en una meditación sobre la justicia divina.

Pero, por supuesto, la justicia de Dios es una con su misericordia. Y la imagen que demasiados de nosotros tenemos de un Dios severo e implacable es sencillamente falsa. Es cierto que Dios nos hace responsables de lo que hacemos (o dejamos de hacer) con los dones que se nos han concedido y la libertad de la que disfrutamos. Pero el Dios que nos creó, nos redimió y nos llama a ser santos es un Dios amoroso y de perdón. Su justicia es misericordiosa y su mansedumbre es su fuerza.

María nos muestra el camino hacia su Hijo, Jesús, que es el rostro de Dios encarnado. En María descubrimos la senda que estamos llamados a seguir, el Camino que nos conduce a la alegría del Evangelio. Y, como nos lo explica el papa León "cada vez que miramos a María volvemos a creer en lo revolucionario de la ternura y del cariño."

*(Daniel Conway es integrante del comité editorial de The Criterion.) †*

# SELLERSBURG

continued from page 3

rectory. That was, in part, because of Mother Olga's tentative approach to discerning God's will.

"The only way I know that it's God's will is if he opens a door that I didn't knock at," she said. "This is how I know that this is him, not me, not anybody else."

As it turned out, God indeed was opening a door in the old rectory at St. John Paul II, and meeting her at it was parishioner Ray Weisenbach.

"He said to me, 'Will you come here one day?'" recalled Mother Olga in an interview with *The Criterion*. "I said, 'If God wills it.' And he replied, 'I want you to know, if you come here, you will want for nothing.'"

Three months later, Weisenbach unexpectedly died at 71 and left most of his \$3 million estate to the parish with the stipulation that funds from it be used to renovate the old rectory.

Mother Olga returned to the parish, met with Weisenbach's family and learned about his life.

"He was never married, never had children," she said. "He always lived on his own with his dog. Nobody really knew him very well."

Mother Olga also prayed at Weisenbach's grave, marked by a tombstone which has an image of the old rectory on it. This is something she's done in every visit to Sellersburg.

When she thinks of Weisenbach now, Mother Olga imagines him as a kind of biblical figure.

"It almost reminds me of so many passages in the Scriptures," she said. "In the eyes of so many people in

that area, Ray was nobody. Yet God used him."

## 'They radiate the very essence of hope'

Father Clegg and Mother Olga met in the summer of 2024 with Archbishop Thompson, who gave his approval for the parish to move forward in renovating the old rectory and having members of the Daughters of Mary of Nazareth live there and serve in the parish.

Earlier that summer, Mother Olga came to Indianapolis and was a keynote speaker at the National Eucharistic Congress, keeping tens of thousands of listeners in Lucas Oil Stadium rapt with attention as she told of her difficult life in her native war-torn Iraq, and how God led her eventually to the U.S. and to start a religious order there at the invitation of Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley, now the archbishop emeritus of Boston.

In his homily at the Dec. 14 Mass, Archbishop Thompson prayed for the ministry of the Daughters of Mary of Nazareth in the archdiocese.

"During these last days of the Jubilee Year of Hope, they radiate the very essence of hope in their witness to all they encounter, Catholic and non-Catholic, rich and poor, strong and weak, healthy and vulnerable," he said. "May they radiate the love of God, the mission of Jesus, and the grace of the Spirit as they strive to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."

After the Mass, Archbishop Thompson blessed the old rectory that will now serve as the convent for the two members of the Daughters of Mary of Nazareth who will live there. Father Clegg sees great possibilities in having the religious order in his faith community.

"For the parish and the area, the sign value of seeing women religious is going to be more powerful than any of us even realize, because it's been so long since that's been a presence in our area," said Father Clegg. "The last time we had [religious sisters] in our parish was in 1989."

Cristiani agreed.

"It's overwhelming and humbling,"

**GODBLESSOURHOME**



Archbishop Charles C. Thompson, right, blesses the St. Joseph Convent at St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg on Dec. 14. Assisting Archbishop Thompson are Father Thomas Clegg, pastor of St. John Paul II, left, and Father James Brockmeier, archdiocesan director of worship, second from right. Mother Olga of the Sacred Heart, second from left, looks on. She is the foundress of the Daughters of Mary of Nazareth. (Submitted photo by George Martell)

she said. "I think it's going to open a door for so many children to realize how important their faith is and to see these women who are happy and joyful, but also so faithful in how they act."

Dan Cristiani, an excavation contractor, parishioner Bob Day, a general contractor, and other members of St. John Paul II have given of themselves to make the old rectory ready for the sisters.

"It's just brought people together," Cristiani said. "I can tell how it has brought the parish community together. It's just so beautiful."

Father Clegg sees beauty in the effect that getting to know Mother Olga has had on his priestly life and ministry.

"She makes me want to be a better priest," he said. "I don't get starstruck, you know? But I really believe when I've walked with her and talked with her that I'm in the presence of a saint. There's just a joy that radiates from her. There is a prayerfulness that radiates from her. She has an ability that when you're talking to her, you're the only person in the world. And it's genuine."

Father Clegg also sees the work of God's providence in bringing the Daughters of Mary of Nazareth to his parish at this particular time.

"Last year, we added 90 families and had 60 infant baptisms," he said. "We've got a core of young people. I think getting a couple of young [religious] sisters here who have some life in them ... is going to help our families quite a bit."

(To view a gallery of photos from the Dec. 14 Mass at St. John Paul II Church in Sellersburg and the blessing of the convent that followed it, go to [www.CriterionOnline.com](http://www.CriterionOnline.com). For more information on the Daughters of Mary of Nazareth, go to [dmnazareth.org](http://dmnazareth.org).) †



Mother Olga of the Sacred Heart poses on Dec. 30, 2023, with Ray Weisenbach, a member of St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg, during a visit she made to the New Albany Deanery faith community. (Submitted photo)

## Join all Indiana dioceses for the annual state March for Life on Jan. 22

By Natalie Hoefer

The annual Indiana March for Life and associated events will take place on Jan. 22 in Indianapolis.

Youths and pro-life advocates from all five of Indiana's dioceses will

participate in the event, which solemnly commemorates the date in 1973 when the U.S. Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision legalized abortion across the country.

The Supreme Court's June 2022 decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's*

*Health Organization* returned the legal issue of abortion back to individual states. On Aug. 1, 2023, a law abolishing most abortions went into effect in Indiana.

But the battle for the sacredness of life in the womb is far from over in the state.

On Dec. 5, the Indiana Court of Appeals upheld an order preventing the Indiana Department of Health from releasing terminated pregnancy reports, rendering it impossible to confirm the state's laws restricting abortion are being adhered to.

Former Planned Parenthood abortion centers still provide referrals for out-of-state abortions and offer services that disrespect the dignity of life.

And while Marc Tuttle, president of Right to Life of Indianapolis, noted at the organization's Celebrate Life Dinner on Sept. 25 that the number of abortions reported in Indiana in 2024 was 145—down from 8,000 the year before the *Dobbs* decision—that still leaves 8,000 women in a crisis pregnancy who need help.

### Schedule of events

The day starts with a rally for youths in grades eight through 12 from throughout the state. It is organized by

the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, with involvement and financial support from the state's four other dioceses.

The rally will take place from 9-11 a.m. in the Indiana Convention Center, 100 S. Capitol Ave., in Indianapolis. This year's keynote address will be given by Mother Olga of the Sacred Heart, foundress of the Daughters of Mary of Nazareth, with praise and worship music by the Nico Cabrera Band. The sacrament of reconciliation will also be available.

The youth rally is free, but registration is required by Jan. 15, 2026, at [archindym.com/youth-rally-for-life](http://archindym.com/youth-rally-for-life).

Following the rally, all are invited to worship at a Mass for Life at 11:30 a.m. in the convention center, concelebrated by the bishops of Indiana. No registration is required to worship at the Mass.

Right to Life of Indianapolis is coordinating the remaining events of the day—the Indiana March for Life and a post-march rally.

The Indiana March for Life will begin at 1:45 p.m. at the corner of Georgia and Illinois streets. It will conclude with a rally on the south steps of the Statehouse from 2:30-3 p.m.

For more information, go to [tinyurl.com/INMFL2026](http://tinyurl.com/INMFL2026). †



Participants promote the sanctity of life during the Indiana March for Life in Indianapolis on Jan. 22. (File photo by Natalie Hoefer)

# Fifteen members of the Oldenburg Franciscans celebrate jubilees

## Criterion staff report

Fifteen members of the Sisters of St. Francis in Oldenburg celebrated significant anniversaries of their time in religious life in 2025.

The anniversaries are marked by the year in which the sisters entered religious life with the Franciscans. Some who entered in February celebrated their jubilees this year in anticipation of the actual anniversary of their entering religious life.

### 75-year jubilarians

**Sister Lorraine Geis** is a native of Connersville, where she grew up as a member of St. Gabriel Parish. She entered the community on Sept. 8, 1950, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1956. She earned a bachelor's degree at Marian University in Indianapolis.

She served as a missionary in Papua New Guinea for 40 years and also taught in Missouri and Ohio. Sister Lorraine now does ministry at the motherhouse, where she resides.

**Sister Madonna Bishop** was a student at the former St. Mary Academy in Indianapolis from 1947-50 before entering the community on Sept. 8, 1950. She professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1956. Sister Madonna earned a bachelor's degree at Marian University and a master's degree at Xavier University in Cincinnati.

In the archdiocese, she served at Our Lady of Perpetual Help School in New Albany from 1961-63, and in Indianapolis at the former St. Bernadette School from 1963-64, Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School from 1968-70 and 1973-84, at the former St. Mary Academy from 1970-73, and at Father Thomas Scicca Memorial High School from 1984-87.

Sister Madonna also ministered in the Evansville Diocese and in Ohio.

She now is a resident of the St. Clare Healthcare Facility at the motherhouse and ministers in prayer and presence.

### 70-year jubilarians

**Sister Jane Frey** (formerly Sister Mary Kevin) is a native of Cincinnati. She entered the community on Sept. 8, 1955, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1961.

Sister Jane earned a bachelor's degree at Marian University, a master's degree at St. Louis University in St. Louis and a master's degree at Loyola University Maryland in Baltimore.

In the archdiocese, she served at the Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception in Oldenburg from 1960-67 and in Indianapolis at the former St. Mary Academy from 1967-73, at Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School from 1973-84 and at the former Shalom Community from 1981-84.

Sister Jane also ministered in Ohio. She now resides in Cincinnati and serves through pastoral presence.

**Sister Davida Lund** is a native of Indianapolis. She entered the community on Sept. 8, 1955, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1961. Sister Davida earned a bachelor's degree at Marian University and a master's degree at

the University of Dayton in Dayton, Ohio.

In the archdiocese, she served in Indianapolis at St. Christopher School from 1959-60 and St. Therese of the Infant Jesus (Little Flower) School from 1981-84, at St. Gabriel School in Connersville from 1960-63 and 1984-92, and at St. Nicholas School in Ripley County from 1964-68.

Sister Davida also ministered in the Evansville Diocese, and in Missouri and Ohio. She now lives at the motherhouse and serves in ministry there.

### Sister Evelyn Lindenmaier

(formerly Sister Ellen Mary) was born in Indianapolis, where she grew up as a member of St. Roch Parish. She entered the community on Sept. 8, 1955, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1961. Sister Evelyn earned a bachelor's degree at Marian University.

In the archdiocese, she served at Holy Name of Jesus School in Beech Grove from 1959-60 and at the former St. Michael School in Charlestown from 1960-67. She ministered at the motherhouse in its communications office from 2003-13.

Sister Evelyn also ministered in the Evansville Diocese and in Ohio.

She currently resides at the motherhouse and is active in ministry there.

**Sister Carol Slinger** (formerly Sister Emilie) is a native of Dayton, Ohio. She entered the community on Feb. 2, 1956, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1961.

In the archdiocese, Sister Carol served at the Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception in Oldenburg and in Indianapolis at the former St. Mary Academy and Marian University. She also ministered in Ohio.

Sister Carol is currently a resident of St. Clare Healthcare at the motherhouse and ministers by prayer and presence.

### 60-year jubilarians

**Sister Annette Grisley** (formerly Sister Rita Mary) is a native of Indianapolis, where she was a member of the former St. Bernadette Parish. She entered the community on Sept. 8, 1965, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1973. She earned a bachelor's degree at Marian University and master's degrees at Xavier University in Cincinnati and

Saint Mary's University of Minnesota in Winona, Minn.

In the archdiocese, Sister Annette served at the former Sacred Heart School in Clinton from 1967-71, Holy Family School (now Seton Catholic School) in Richmond from 1974-84 and the former St. Michael School in Charlestown from 1984-90.

She also ministered in California and Ohio.

From 2018-24, Sister Annette served on the community's leadership team at the motherhouse. She currently serves as the motherhouse's liturgy coordinator.

**Sister Joanita Koors** is a native of Greensburg, where she grew up as a member of St. Mary Parish.

She joined the community on Sept. 8, 1965, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1973. She earned a bachelor's degree at Marian University and a master's degree at Clarke University in Dubuque, Iowa.

In the archdiocese, Sister Joanita served in New Albany at Our Lady of Perpetual Help School from 1969-73 and the former St. Mary School from 1986-97, in Indianapolis at St. Michael the Archangel School from 1976-78 and at St. Gabriel the Archangel School from 1973-76 (now together as St. Michael-St. Gabriel Archangels School), Seton Catholic School in Richmond from 1978-83, St. Mary School in North Vernon from 1997-2012 and the former St. Mary School in Lanesville from 1983-86.

From 2012-18, she ministered at the motherhouse as a member of the community's leadership team. She currently serves in ministry at the motherhouse.

**Sister Christa Franzer** is a native of Dayton, Ohio. She entered the community on Feb. 2, 1966, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1973. She earned a bachelor's degree at Marian University and a master's degree at the University of Notre Dame in northern Indiana.

In the archdiocese, Sister Christa served at the former St. Mary School in Aurora from 1967-68, in Indianapolis at the former St. Mary Academy from 1970-74 and Marian University from 2001-06, and at the Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception in Oldenburg 1974-90. She also ministered in Ohio.

Sister Christa served at the motherhouse on the community's leadership team from 1994-2000 and 2006-12. She led the community as its congregational minister from 2018-24.

She currently ministers at the motherhouse as financial assistant to the chief financial officer.

**Sister Maureen Irvin** (formerly Sister Collene) is a native of Bloomington, Ill. She entered the community on Feb. 2, 1966, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1973. She earned a bachelor's degree at Marian University and a master's degree at St. Louis University in St. Louis.

Sister Maureen served as the community's vocations director from 1986-1994, on its leadership team from 1994-2000 and from 2018-24 in its development office. She led the community as its congregational minister from 2012-18 and began another five-year term in that ministry in July 2024.

Sister Maureen has also ministered in Ohio and Illinois.

**Sister Marjorie English** (formerly Sister Janese) is a native of Indianapolis, where she grew up as a member of St. Lawrence Parish. She entered the

community on Feb. 2, 1966, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1973.

Sister Marjorie earned a bachelor's degree at Marian University and a master's degree at the University of Dayton in Dayton, Ohio.

In the archdiocese, she served in Indianapolis at St. Mark the Evangelist School and St. Monica School and as a spiritual director and retreat facilitator. At the motherhouse, Sister Marjorie ministered as director of postulants from 1983-88 and on the community's leadership team from 1994-2000.

She has also served in the Evansville Diocese, in Illinois, Iowa and Ohio.

Sister Marjorie currently lives at the motherhouse, where she ministers as a spiritual director.

**Sister Charity Kraeszig** is a native of Indianapolis. She entered the community on Feb. 4, 1966, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1973.

In the archdiocese, Sister Charity served in Indianapolis at the former St. Mary Academy from 1974-75 and as librarian at Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School from 1988-2007. She was also the librarian at the Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception in Oldenburg from 1975-76 and 1980-88 and at the Batesville Memorial Library in Batesville from 2008-20.

She also ministered in the Evansville Diocese and in Illinois, Michigan and Ohio.

Sister Charity currently resides at the motherhouse and serves in ministry there.

**Sister Melanie Bair** is a native of Richmond, where she grew up as a member of St. Andrew Parish (now a part of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish). She entered the community on Feb. 3, 1956, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1961.

Sister Melanie earned a bachelor's degree at Marian University and a master's degree at Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, and a bachelor's degree and master's degree at St. Paul University in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

She taught in schools in Indiana, Michigan and Missouri before withdrawing from the community from 1972-81. She has since ministered at the motherhouse, in Ohio and in South Korea.

Sister Melanie currently resides in Cincinnati and ministers at a retirement community there.

### 25-year jubilarians

**Sister Kathleen Branham** is a native of Indianapolis, where she grew up as a member of the former St. Francis de Sales Parish and the former St. Bernadette Parish. She entered the community on Aug. 26, 2000, and professed final vows on Aug. 11, 2007.

Sister Kathleen earned a bachelor's degree at Marian University.

She worked as a child protective services investigator for the Department of Child Services in Indiana. At the motherhouse, Sister Kathleen ministered as vocations director. She also served in Evansville and Ohio. She currently ministers for the National Religious Vocation Conference.

**Sister Jannette Pruitt** is a native of Bay St. Louis, Miss. She entered the community on Aug. 26, 2000, and professed final vows on Aug. 11, 2007. Sister Jannette earned a certificate in pastoral leadership at Marian University and a master's degree at Xavier University in Cincinnati.

In the archdiocese, she served in Indianapolis as pastoral associate and director of religious education at St. Rita Parish and as coordinator of Black Catholic Ministry for the archdiocese. She also ministered in Louisiana and Texas.

Sister Jannette currently lives at the motherhouse and serves as a seamstress. †



**Sr. Joanita Koors, O.S.F.**

She joined the community on Sept. 8, 1965, and professed final vows on Aug. 12, 1973. She earned a bachelor's degree at Marian University and a master's degree at Clarke University in Dubuque, Iowa.



**Sr. Jannette Pruitt, O.S.F.**

she served in Indianapolis as pastoral associate and director of religious education at St. Rita Parish and as coordinator of Black Catholic Ministry for the archdiocese. She also ministered in Louisiana and Texas.

Sister Jannette currently lives at the motherhouse and serves as a seamstress. †

# Parish motto beckons: 'Come to Nativity, where it's always Christmas'

By Natalie Hoefer

When the archdiocese purchased a farm in the southeast corner of Indianapolis in 1947 to develop a parish, it was decided the livestock barn would be converted for use as the church.

Christ would become present at Mass where animals used to shelter. What better name for the parish than Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, an homage to the Savior's birth in a Bethlehem stable.

A fire destroyed the structure in November 1965. Masses were celebrated in the cafeteria of the parish school—built in 1955—until a new, round church was completed in May 1969.

Since the structure's 2019 renovation and expansion, parish pastor Father Eric Augenstein says he likes to point out the three 14-pointed stars in the church. "They are there to call to mind the three sets of 14 generations in the genealogy of Jesus from Matthew's Gospel," he says.

"Also, if you visit the [cave] in Bethlehem where Jesus was born, at the place of his birth there's a 14-pointed star on the ground. And there are 14 steps to go down into the cave and 14 to come out.

"It's a little bit of symbolism that connects us to the Nativity story."

The church also includes stained-glass windows with angels recalling the angelic choir proclaiming Christ's birth.

"And we have a painting of the Madonna and Child in our gathering space done by Father Donald Walpole, a monk from Saint Meinrad [Archabbey in St. Meinrad]," Father Augenstein notes. The late Benedictine priest's obituary calls him a "master artist" with works found "from South Bend to the Bahamas."

## More young families 'and lots of baptisms'

About 60 families comprised the parish's original congregation.

But Franklin Township, which makes up the majority of the Indianapolis South Deanery faith community, has grown

exponentially in the last 78 years. U.S. census records show the township exploded by 70% between 2000 and 2010 alone.

Nativity has likewise grown. Father Augenstein calls the faith community—now numbering more than 1,000 families—"young and diverse."

"We have a good number of older parishioners, including a handful who've been here more or less since the beginning," he says.

"But as Franklin Township has grown in population and housing communities, we've got a lot of young families and a growing diversity also," Father Augenstein adds, including Latinos, Nigerians and more.

The increasing number of young families has led to "lots and lots of baptisms," he says with a smile. It has also led to more family outreach.

For instance, several times a year the parish offers eucharistic adoration designed for families with small children.

"We expect the kids to be a little squirrelly, and that's OK," Father Augenstein remarks with a grin. "There is time for families to adore together, and then we have time for activities that bring the kids out of the church so parents have time on their own to pray with the Eucharist."

Nativity also has "family days" during Advent and Lent, offering family-based catechetical formation and prayer experiences.

"The school, of course, is our biggest ministry," Father Augenstein says. The pre-K through eighth-grade school has grown through the years in number of students, grades and physical size.

And thanks to Indiana's school voucher program, the more than 380 students enrolled include "a rising number of non-Catholic kids, increasing our impact on the community," he adds.



local churches, and it's the only food pantry in Franklin Township," Father Augenstein explains. "We're the largest of the participating churches in terms of funds that we give, volunteers and support."

The parish also offers a unique community outreach—three free, public concerts a year during the spring, fall and Advent.

The concerts, held in the church, started about five years ago when a member of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra (ISO) approached the parish's music director "and said, 'We're looking for a place where a small group of us could come and play. Would you be open to that?' And that's how it started," Father Augenstein recalls.

The music is "sometimes religious-based, sometimes it's classical-based, sometimes something a little bit different or in between," he says.

"And the quality we're able to get—we have some really good connections in the local arts scene."

Talent has included ISO members, a string quartet, the archdiocese's *schola cantorum* Vox Sacra, local high school choirs and more. Members of the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir will perform in the church on April 19.

Those not so interested in concerts might prefer Augustravaganza, Nativity's largest annual fundraiser. The two-day event usually takes place on the second weekend of August.

"It's your typical parish festival—rides, games, music, food," says Father Augenstein. "It's really a community festival."

As a nod to the area's young families, the last few festivals have included a "baby crawl" race, with the winner receiving a onesie.

Tours of the church are also offered during the festival. They provide an opportunity for Father Augenstein and other tour guides to point out the 14-pointed stars.

The parish welcomes visitors anytime, he adds.

"At Nativity, we like to say, 'Come to Nativity, where it's always Christmas,'" he proclaims. "We always welcome those who, like the shepherds and the magi, want to come visit Christ."

(For more information about Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ Parish in Indianapolis, go to [nativityindy.org](http://nativityindy.org) or call 317-357-1200. Mass Excursions is a periodic feature highlighting archdiocesan parishes. View past features at [www.archindy.org/excursions](http://www.archindy.org/excursions).) †

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# SIMPLY CATHOLIC



A detail of a Nativity scene displayed in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican is seen in an exhibit on Dec. 17, 2024. Christmas celebrates both the birth of Christ and the wedding of God and humanity. (CNS photo/Justin McLellan)

## The Nativity of the Lord celebrates both a birth and a wedding

By Timothy P. O'Malley

(OSV News)—On the feast of the Nativity of the Lord, we celebrate a birth and a wedding at the very same time.

The birth is something everyone on Earth today knows about. Yet, long ago not everyone knew that the Savior of the world was to appear in a humble manger.

The angels knew, singing to the gathered shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest and on Earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (Lk 2:14). The shepherds, from whom the kings of Israel once came forth, now hidden alone in a field, knew: “They went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger” (Lk 2:16).

The animals gathered around the infant King knew: “O great mystery, and wonderful sacrament, that animals should see the newborn Lord, lying in a manger” (a responsorial chant for Matins of Christmas). His mother knew, keeping “all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” (Lk 2:19).

But the powerful of the world did not know. Caesar Augustus, Herod, the powers and principalities—they did not know. For the powerful would never expect a king

to be born in a manger. The strong would never expect salvation to take place in weakness.

Still, we do not close our businesses and give gifts simply to celebrate the birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ thousands of years ago. We celebrate the wedding that took place that night when humanity and divinity were forever wed.

For as the Gospel reading for Mass on Christmas Day announces: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). God’s Word, which is itself God, which gave shape to all of creation, now assumes flesh: “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14).

In that infant born in Bethlehem, humanity and divinity kiss. In that child born in the poverty of a stable, the Son enters into solidarity with men and women. In the child wrapped in swaddling clothes, we encounter the glory of God among us. It is for this reason that we can sing on Christmas night: Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord (cf. Lk 2:11). For what took place on Christmas has never ended. The Son revealed the depths of his love in taking on the humility of human flesh forever.

And now, we too can share in the divine life given to us by the Son. In the birth of Jesus, the Son assumed everything about what it means to be human except sin. He experienced the fragility of birth. He knew what it was like to tenderly hold his mother’s or his father’s hand. He suffered through the death of his father, Joseph. He hungered and thirsted in the desert.

He was rejected by the unjust. He died upon a cross. And he was raised again. This is the fullness of a human life. And thus, on the feast of Christmas, we celebrate that it is precisely through the human condition that God will save us.

So, rejoice this day. For the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ is the beginning of the wedding feast of the Lamb. And we are guests to both. In our feasts, in our opening of gifts and in our time spent with family, let us remember that on this day: The glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see the salvation of our God (cf. Is 40:5).

(Timothy P. O’Malley is a theology professor at the University of Notre Dame in northern Indiana, director of education at Notre Dame’s McGrath Institute for Church Life and academic director of the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy.) †

## Amid the busyness of Christmas, enter into the loving contemplation of Mary

By Catherine Cavadini

(OSV News)—The scriptural scene for Christmas is familiar to us all. We encounter it in most Nativity scenes. But there, the scene is calm—they are but statues. But in Scripture, the scene is a busy one: Angels come and go, shepherds come and go. Stories of a newborn King and God’s love-appeared are told and many are amazed by the marvelous goings-on, for Christ has come. He is born today.

At the center of this activity, there is a contemplative, love-filled stillness. There is the stillness of a swaddled, sleeping babe: Peace on Earth. And the stillness of his mother, reflecting in her heart on the whole scene unfolding around her son.

Have you ever wondered what the course of Mary’s thoughts were on that first Christmas day? How her heart reflected on the swaddled, sleeping babe before her? Just what did her contemplation reveal?

On the one hand, we may know something of Mary’s ponderings. For example, perhaps we have held and wondered at a newborn child. Or maybe, we have tried each Christmas, standing before a manger, to understand the marvelous goings-on of the Incarnation, reflecting on them in our hearts.

On the other hand, we are not privy to the content of Mary’s heart, so pure and free, beholding the fruit of her *fiat*. As the 20th-century English Catholic artist and writer Caryll Houselander once put it in her book, *The Reed of God*, “so little is recorded of [Our Lady’s] personality, so few of her words, so few deeds, that we can form no picture of her, and there is nothing that we can lay hold of to imitate.”

Still, we are drawn to her, especially today; drawn toward the contemplative stillness of her love-struck heart. Perhaps, with Our Lady, then, it is most simply this scene of contemplative adoration that we most need. Her love-struck heart suffices.

Looking to her stillness on Christmas morning, “it is Our Lady—and no other saint,” writes Houselander, “whom we can really imitate.”

“Our Lady had to include in her vocation, in her life’s work, the essential thing that was to be hidden in every other vocation, in every life, [ours included]. … The one thing that she did and does is the one thing that we all have to do, namely, to bear Christ into the world.”

And so, there is something we can lay hold of and imitate: Mary’s pondering. The more deeply we reflect on the wonder of the incarnation, the more deeply we understand Christ as “the kindness and generous love of God our Savior appeared” (Ti 3:4); the mercy of God “richly poured out” upon us (Ti 3:6). The more intimately we know Christ, the more we love him, and the more we readily bear him into the world in word and deed. This is to imitate Mary’s ponderous, love-struck heart, each of us in our own vocation and in our own lives.

“Christ,” writes Houselander, “must be born from every soul, formed in every life. … In contemplating [Mary], we find intimacy with God … the one irresistible love.”

And so, having followed Mary through the weeks of Advent, we arrive at the manger on Christmas morning. We arrive at this scene of angels and shepherds, coming in adoration, and making the joyful news known. We arrive at the intimate scene of a mother beholding her newborn child.

And not only do we rejoice at the news of the angels and shepherds: This child is our God become flesh, but we are also drawn into the stillness of Mary’s contemplative heart. We sit and ponder God’s “irresistible love.”

(Catherine Cavadini, Ph.D., is the assistant chair of the department of theology and director of the master’s program in theology at the University of Notre Dame in northern Indiana.) †

## Journey of the Heart/Jennifer Burger

## Advent renews our hope that Christ will come again in his glory

I look forward each year to retrieving our Christmas decorations from their hiding places and setting them out for all to see: our large gilded Nativity scene adorned with white lights displayed in our front dining room window, the needlepoint stockings with each family member's name hung on the mantle, token items that have been part of our family

tradition since our adult children were very young, to name just a few. These visible signs have meaning and capture the essence of the season in our home.

There is one "decoration" though that I do not have to pull out of the closet nor do I need to do anything to set it up, and that is our Christmas cactus plant. My mother-in-law gave it to us maybe 20 years ago, and it ranks among my favorites as I get to watch the buds start to appear, grow and then burst into life with vibrant red flowers!

It didn't always bloom, however. Throughout the years I managed to keep it alive but without a single bud. Then in 2022, I was captivated by the beautiful



display on a friend's Christmas cactus, and I thought how nice it would be if our cactus bloomed, too.

So, I did a little bit of research and set out to give it a try. I transferred our cactus to a new pot with the proper soil, carefully watered and placed it in the proper light and temperature according to what was recommended ... and waited.

Mind you this was not idle waiting. Throughout that year, I tended to it, checking the soil and moving the pot as needed for just the right light and temperature conditions.

It quickly started looking healthier so I was hopeful, but it would not be until late November or early December before I would know the fate of my efforts. The buds did appear and although not all of them bloomed, I was overjoyed with the few blooms that came!

I have continued to care for my cactus in the same way with renewed hope each year for what will come. This year, the blooms are more bountiful than last year! I have learned that more frequent watering is needed when flowering, so I'm watching and spending more time with it each day.

It is a marvel to consider how it knows when to "wake up" and burst into color

this time of the year! The line "... heaven and nature sings" rises in my heart, as if the cactus is singing its own version of "Joy to the World" just for me!

Not only does this cactus bring me joy, but it reminds me how the soil of my own heart needs regular and proper care, nourishment through the sacraments and the life of the Church and, of course, the light of God's grace to prepare for the arrival of Jesus, not just this time of the year, but year-round.

Living and growing in our faith this way, we are in a perpetual Advent. But we are given this particular liturgical season to intentionally spend more time in preparation to welcome the new bloom of the infant Christ in the manger of our hearts and to renew our hope that he will come again in the fullness of time. This is not only a marvel, but a great wonder of his love!

May this time of waiting be a joyful anticipation as the buds of new life make themselves known to us and adorn our hearts and our homes with visible signs of his glory!

(Jennifer Burger is a spiritual director and a member of St. Simon the Apostle Parish in Indianapolis.) †

## That All May Be One/Fr. Rick Ginther

## Week of Prayer for Christian Unity allows us to be one in Christ

As we approach the Christmas season, we do so with so many Christians throughout the world.

What we celebrate during Christmas is a reminder of our unity in Christ. And yet, we are not united in communion—that oneness which Jesus mandated for us in John 17:20-21.

On Jan. 17-25, we will celebrate our longing for unity: our annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

This year's annual prayer service was prepared by the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church.

What follows is a slightly revised self-description penned by this community of Eastern Orthodox believers.

*It is an honor for the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church to be highlighted during this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. We are happy to share with our Christian brothers and sisters around the world an ecumenical service that comes from the heart of our Church's ancient Christian witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*'Light from Light for Light' is the title of the service. It's inspired by the naming of Christ in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, crafted 1,700 years ago in Nicaea.*

*Christ is 'Light from the Light.' The Anointed One was sent into this world with a mission. He was and is to shine God's Light into this troubled world. He was and is to bring us into loving communion with each other and with God. Thus, 'Light from Light for Light.'*

## Evangelization Outreach/Brie Anne Varick

## 'Lord, what do you want to do through me today?' Remember, let God lead

You may know my office for programs like the Indiana March for Life, Project Rachel retreats or healing Masses. My role also allows me to accompany, form and pray with parish leaders—both staff and volunteers—across the archdiocese.

As I prayed about what to write for this week's column in *The Criterion*, I felt called to share a reflection I gave at a parish recently.

Last fall, I was preparing a talk for ministry leaders and thought I could reuse a previous one with minor tweaks. But as I worked, it felt stale and uninspired. I realized I had fallen into a common trap: relying on autopilot. With good intentions, we often repeat programs, talks and events without pausing to let God reveal something new. The temptation is to not take the time to ask: *God, is this what you want? What do you want to say?*

Re-using content isn't wrong—our



efforts can bear fruit for years—but we work in vain when we work outside of relationship with God. My problem wasn't that the old talk was bad; it was that I forgot to invite God into the process. Ironically, the talk was about bringing God into our ministry and letting him be a part of the conversation! It's easy to exclude him, especially when something worked well before.

Psalm 127 reminds us: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain, unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep" (Ps 127:1-2).

God used this moment to remind me that he wants to be part of everything. I've experienced his healing and know he speaks to me, yet I still forget. Pride and self-reliance creep in, and I try to do it all myself. But God doesn't want that—he wants to take care of everything. After all, it's his Church, it's his mission, and we are blessed to be part of it.

As I struggled, I sensed him asking,

"Are you ready to listen to me?"

Frustrated, I asked if I could use any of the old talk. His reply: "The prayer." Exasperated, I said, "So I have to rewrite the whole thing?" He answered, "Yes. Keep it simple. Don't overthink it. Let them know they belong to me."

God let me wrestle so I could share this with you: He wants your mission to flow from your relationship with him. It's God's ministry—let him lead. His message for you is the same: Bring everything to him. Nothing is too small. God wants to work through you, but his greatest work will be in you. You are his beloved child, and you belong to him.

So, in the big and small tasks, the complicated and simple decisions, invite God into it all. "Lord, what do you want to do through me today?"

That simple question can change everything.

(Brie Anne Varick is the director of archdiocesan Office of Human Life and Dignity. She can be reached at [bvarick@archindy.org](mailto:bvarick@archindy.org).) †

## Faith and Family/Sean Gallagher

## The magnetism of babies and Christ's birth in Bethlehem

The birth of our Savior at Christmas is a profound mystery that is ultimately impossible for our minds to take in.

How is that God, who is infinite and all-powerful, who is being itself pervading and undergirding all time and space, the source of all that was, is and ever will be, could be born as a tiny baby in a stable in a small backwater town of the Roman Empire?

Faithful Catholics—from simple lay men and women to deep-thinking theologians—have wrestled with this mystery for 2,000 years.

It was expressed beautifully in a responsory composed about 1,000 years ago and used for centuries in the Church's Liturgy of the Hours for Christmas: "O great mystery and wonderful sacrament, that animals should see the newborn Lord lying in a manger. O blessed virgin, whose womb was worthy to bear the Lord Jesus Christ. Alleluia."

At the same time, the birth of the Son of God in Bethlehem can seem entirely familiar—and perhaps even should be.

St. Josemaría Escrivá, a 20th-century Spanish priest, shared these words on this in his book of spiritual maxims, *The Way*: "He has become so small—you see, a child—so that you can approach him with confidence."

As a father of five boys, I have many fond memories of my wife Cindy and I taking them to church as little babies and having friends and strangers alike come up to us without hesitation after Mass. These people, often a good bit older than Cindy and me, didn't come because of us. It was the baby that drew these people, often likely parents or grandparents themselves. Nothing would keep them from fawning all over them. There's just something magnetic about babies.

And I can say that with confidence because I'm at the age where I'm now the older person who can't keep away from babies when I see them at church and other social settings. That's especially the case with the baby daughter of a niece of mine, who was a baby herself at the time of the wedding of Cindy and me almost 25 years ago.

There is a multitude of mysterious reasons why the Word of God took on human flesh and was born in Bethlehem.

But I will echo St. Josemaría and say that the incarnation and birth of Christ is a dramatic way that God used to encourage us to feel confident in approaching him, like strangers coming up to see a baby after Mass.

Jesus continued inspiring us to be confident in approaching him throughout his public ministry in his relationship with his disciples, in his preaching and in his miracles.

One of these miracles that continues today is the Eucharist. He chose to give us confidence to approach him through coming to us under the appearance of simple bread and wine.

Yet the profound mystery of the incarnation remains alongside the familiarity of Christ's birth in Bethlehem. How many of us sit rapt in awe before the Blessed Sacrament in adoration chapels or during times of adoration in our parish churches?

The grace God offers at Christmas can help us at one and the same time both plunge into the mystery of the infinite God becoming an ordinary baby and taking simple joy in him becoming just—that—an ordinary baby like any other that we might fawn over in our parish churches.

Maybe you should do just that if you see a baby at Christmas Mass here in a few days. †

Fourth Sunday of Advent/Msgr. Owen F. Campion

# The Sunday Readings

Sunday, December 21, 2025

- Isaiah 7:10-14
- Romans 1:1-7
- Matthew 1:18-24

This weekend the Church celebrates the fourth and last Sunday of Advent 2025.



For its first reading, this weekend offers a reading from the first section of the Book of Isaiah. This reading refers to King Ahaz of the southern Hebrew kingdom of Judah.

Ahaz reigned in the last third of the eighth century before Christ. To be kind, he is not regarded as having been a remarkably successful king. Prompting Isaiah's interest in Ahaz, or in any king, was not necessarily the monarch's obvious power and renown, but rather the fact that the king first and foremost was, or should be, the servant of God.

Urged to be loyal and devoted, Ahaz was promised a sign of God's favor. It was the birth of a son, whose mother was Ahaz's young bride, a virgin.

St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans provides the second reading. Introducing himself, Paul firmly states that he is an Apostle, called by the Lord to proclaim the Gospel. Above and beyond everything, he insisted, he was God's servant.

For its last reading, the Church presents a section from the Gospel of St. Matthew. Only two of the four Gospels (both synoptics) recount the birth of Jesus. Matthew is one of these Gospels. Luke is the other.

This weekend's reading recalls the conception of Jesus. It says clearly, as Luke states that while Jesus had no earthly father, he was the son of Mary, a human being.

In this passage, Joseph is concerned, to say the least. He first, understandably, wonders if his betrothed has been unfaithful to him. How else could Mary have become pregnant? The angel Gabriel relieves Joseph's mind by revealing that the unborn child is in fact the Son of God.

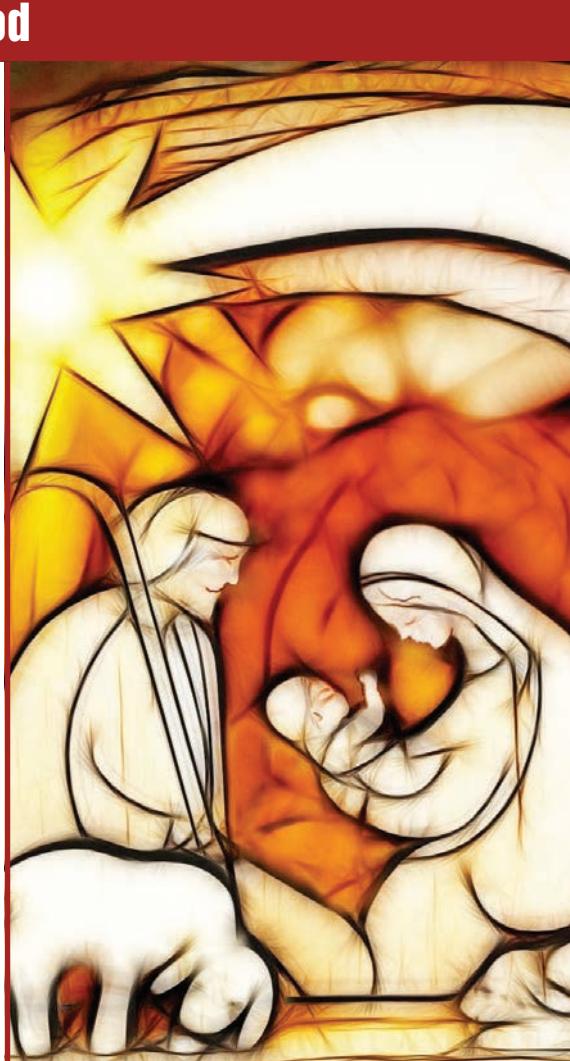
## My Journey to God

### Prepare the Way

By Sandy Bierly

Looking, longing, yearning,  
My heart is burning,  
For Jesus to come anew,  
As Advent prepares the way,  
And Mary shows the way,  
To keep my heart pure,  
To welcome Baby Jesus,  
On Christmas Day.

(Sandy Bierly is a member of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in New Albany.)  
(Photo by OSV News/Sister Mary Jutta, Pixabay)



## Daily Readings

### Monday, December 22

1 Samuel 1:24-28  
(Response) 1 Samuel 2:1, 4-8d  
Luke 1:46-56

Psalm 97:1, 6, 11-12  
Titus 3:4-7  
Luke 2:15-20

Day  
Isaiah 52:7-10  
Psalm 98:1-6  
Hebrews 1:1-6  
John 1:1-18  
or John 1:1-5, 9-14

### Tuesday, December 23

St. John of Kanty, priest  
Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24  
Psalm 25:4-5b, 8-10, 14  
Luke 1:57-66

Day  
Isaiah 52:7-10  
Psalm 98:1-6  
Hebrews 1:1-6  
John 1:1-18  
or John 1:1-5, 9-14

### Wednesday, December 24

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16  
Psalm 89:2-5, 27, 29  
Luke 1:67-79

### Vigil of the Nativity of the Lord

Isaiah 62:1-5  
Psalm 89:4-5, 16-17, 27, 29  
Acts 13:16-17, 22-25  
Matthew 1:1-25  
or Matthew 1:18-25

### Friday, December 26

St. Stephen, the first martyr  
Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59  
Psalm 31:3cd-4, 6, 8ab, 16bc-17  
Matthew 10:17-22

### Saturday, December 27

St. John, Apostle and Evangelist  
1 John 1:1-4  
Psalm 97:1-2, 5-6, 11-12  
John 20:1a, 2-8

### Sunday, December 28

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph  
Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14  
Psalm 128:1-5  
Colossians 3:12-21  
or Colossians 3:12-17  
Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

See READINGS, page 15

Question Corner/Jenna Marie Cooper

## Beloved Advent hymn rooted in antiphons from early Middle Ages

Q My favorite Advent hymn is "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." I'm used to singing it all through Advent, but the new choir director at my parish says we're not allowed to sing it now until the fourth Sunday of Advent. Where is he getting this rule from, and why do we need to wait so long?

A The Church does not have any explicit rule about when the hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" can be sung. In principle, it's perfectly allowed to sing this throughout Advent. However, I think I can guess why your choir director wants to hold off on using this hymn until later in the season.

As you may already be aware, the Advent season is not static in its spirituality, but rather represents a journey toward the coming of Christ as the incarnate word of God into our world—and this is especially evident in our liturgical celebrations.

For example, in the readings at Mass, we begin the season of Advent with a call to be mindful of Christ's eventual second coming in glory at the end of time. Then we move gradually toward readings that focus on his first coming in his nativity in Bethlehem. The progressive lighting of the candles on the Advent wreath is another visual reminder of this spiritual journey.

But what can be easy to miss for those who don't attend daily Mass is that the Church's liturgy takes a sharp turn on Dec. 17, seven days before the start of the liturgical celebration of Christmas. At this point, the prayers of the Church focus on Christ's coming in a much more intense, focused and immediate way.

We do see this reflected in the daily Mass readings used from Dec. 17-23. At this point, the Gospel readings shift from Jesus' teaching and episodes from his adult life and ministry and move toward the infancy narratives, that is, the stories related to Jesus' birth.

But one of the most noteworthy expressions of this liturgical time of heightened anticipation is the appearance of what are called the "O antiphons."

They are verses dating back to the early Middle Ages that are sung or recited twice a day on Dec. 17-23 every year: once as the Gospel acclamation, or "alleluia verse" before the proclamation of the Gospel at Mass; and then again before the "Magnificat" or "Canticle of Mary" during Evening Prayer (Vespers) in the Liturgy of the Hours.

The seven different "O antiphons" each directly call out to Jesus as the coming Messiah using anticipatory imagery from the Old Testament. Christ is first addressed as "O, Wisdom" on Dec. 17. The following titles are used in the days afterward through Dec. 23: "O leader of the house of Israel"; "O root of Jesse"; "O key of David"; "O rising sun"; "O king of the nations," and finally "O Emmanuel."

If these titles sound familiar to you, that's no coincidence. The hymn "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" was directly inspired by these antiphons. Because of this, many feel that this hymn is most fittingly reserved for the period just before Christmas when the Church is actually in the midst of praying the "O antiphons."

The reason why your choir director probably named the fourth Sunday of Advent as the time when you would start using this hymn is because this is the Sunday Mass that falls within the Dec. 17-23 timeframe. Sunday Masses typically have greater attention to music than a simple weekday Mass would. Although in places where it is custom of the parish for the congregation to sing a simple hymn at daily Masses, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" is naturally often sung then.

In any case, although your pastor and choir director have the responsibility of planning the music for parish Masses, there is nothing to stop you from incorporating this hymn into your own personal or family prayer routine throughout Advent if you so choose. Meditation on the various "O antiphons" can be a beautiful way to enter more deeply into the Advent season.

(Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News. Send your questions to [CatholicQA@osv.com](mailto:CatholicQA@osv.com).)



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

**BARRETT, Granville**, 73, St. Gabriel, Connersville, Nov. 14. Husband of Deborah Barrett. Father of Corinne, Chad and Todd Barrett. Brother of Sharon Burdick, Catherine George, Caroline Moeller, Ernest, Jr., Preston and Richard Barrett. Grandfather of 10.

**BASHAM, Michael**, 70, St. Anthony of Padua, Clarksville, Nov. 30. Husband of Robin Basham. Father of Amanda Johnson, Christopher and Michael Basham, Jr. Brother of Rose Austin, Nancy Westerfield, Larry, Richard III and Timothy Basham. Grandfather of 10. Great-grandfather of one.

**BECHT, Louise C.**, 90, St. Mary-of-the-Knobs, Floyd County, Nov. 26. Mother of Barbara Allen, Sharon Harvey, Melissa

Mathews, Cindy, Eric, John, Kevin and Steven Becht. Grandmother of four. Great-grandmother of three.

**BLANDFORD, Earl**, 99, St. Paul, Tell City, Dec. 6. Father of Susan Bear, Denise Day and Dean Blandford. Brother of Donna Labhart. Grandfather of seven. Great-grandfather of two.

**CLENDENIN, James P.**, 67, Immaculate Heart of Mary, Indianapolis, Nov. 3. Husband of Carolyn Coffelt-Clendenin. Father of Cynthia, Laura, Rebekah, Dave E. and Dave W. Grandfather of four.

**EVANS, Daniel**, 60, St. Gabriel, Connersville, Nov. 12. Husband of Eugena Evans. Father of Rita Evans. Brother of Cindy Barrett, Joan McDivitt, Pam Northern, Cathy Whitcotton and Michael Evans. Grandfather of three.

**HARTMANN, Suzanne L.**, 92, St. Pius X, Indianapolis, Nov. 14. Mother of Diane, Kathleen, Mary Beth, Peggy, Joseph and Michael Desautels. Grandmother of six. Great-grandmother of one.

**HEINES, Mary C.**, 93, Holy Spirit, Indianapolis, Dec. 2. Mother of Diane Tyree, Shirley Wright, Patricia and Stephen Heines. Grandmother of two.

**HOEING, Don**, 70, St. Mary, Rushville, Dec. 6. Husband of Maryalice Hoeing. Father of Brittany Bowers, Courtney Hill and Mandy Reisman. Brother of David, Kenneth, Kevin, Mark, Mike and

Richard Hoeing. Grandfather of five.

**JOHNSON, Robert L.**, 88, St. Anne, New Castle, Nov. 30. Husband of Edith Johnson. Father of Christina Covey, Kathleen and Robert Johnson. Brother of Ann Kendall. Grandfather of five. Great-grandfather of 12.

**JONES, Charles**, 80, St. Gabriel, Connersville, Nov. 27. Husband of Theresa Jones. Father of Michelle Jones and Jacqueline Thoman. Brother of Virginia Fry. Grandfather of eight. Great-grandfather of 14.

**KRUER, Roy C.**, 90, St. Michael, Bradford, Dec. 3. Husband of Kathleen Kruer. Father of Karen Harbeson and Brian Kruer. Brother of Jerry Kruer. Grandfather of five. Great-grandfather of seven.

**LEFFEL, Kollyns W.**, infant, St. Mary, Greensburg, Dec. 2. Son of Quintin and Hannah Leffel. Brother of Kacye and Kayde Leffel. Grandson of Tom and Denise Leffel and Calvin Daughterty and April Lefker. Great-grandson of Martha Lefker and Joann Haunert.

**MCLEOD, Richard**, 80, St. Mary, North Vernon, Dec. 5. Father of Erika Downs and Andy McLeod. Brother of Jay and Mike McLeod. Grandfather of five.

**O'SULLIVAN, Pamela M.**, 61, St. Mary, Greensburg, Dec. 3. Wife of Robert O'Sullivan. Mother of Lauren Larson, Benjamin, Marcus and Matthew O'Sullivan. Sister

## Our Lady of Guadalupe



People wearing native costumes kneel in prayer before an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Dec. 12, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, at Holy Spirit Church in Indianapolis.

(Submitted photo)

## Little Sisters of the Poor again appeal for protection from contraceptive rule

**WASHINGTON** (OSV News)—The Little Sisters of the Poor appealed an August ruling from a federal district court that struck down a religious conscience rule, their legal representatives said on Dec. 15.

The rule, implemented by the first Trump administration, exempted employers with religious or moral concerns from having to provide their employees with insurance coverage for contraceptives and other drugs or procedures to which they have an objection.

The appeal was filed on Dec. 12 with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 3rd Circuit by Becket, the religious liberty law firm representing the Little Sisters of the Poor in their ongoing legal efforts over their objections to paying for abortifacient drugs, sterilizations and contraceptives in their employee health plans. Becket noted that the Little Sisters won protection against the federal government at the Supreme Court in 2016.

Oral argument in the case is expected in early 2026.

“The 14-year legal crusade against the Little Sisters has been needless, grotesque, and un-American,” Mark Rienzi, president of Becket and lead attorney for the Little Sisters, said in a statement. “The states have no business trying to take away the Little Sisters’ federal civil rights. The Third Circuit should toss the states’ lawsuit into the dustbin of history and uphold the protection the Little Sisters already won at the Supreme Court ... twice.”

In 2011, the Department of Health and Human Services issued a federal mandate requiring most employers to provide contraceptive drugs in their health insurance plans. The mandate included

a narrow religious exemption for entities such as churches, but did not include religious nonprofits.

After requesting and being denied an exemption due to the Catholic Church’s teaching against drugs such as the morning-after pill, the Little Sisters filed a lawsuit. Their effort ultimately became part of the consolidated case *Zubik v. Burwell*, a 2016 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court, which sent the case back to lower courts, but effectively was in the Little Sisters’ favor.

The federal government later finalized new exceptions that would include entities like the Little Sisters. However, Pennsylvania and New Jersey challenged those rules, arguing they were improperly expanded. In 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a narrow procedural ruling siding with the Little Sisters, but their suit has continued.

In August, U.S. District Judge Wendy Beetlestone in Philadelphia found the Trump administration’s rule, which expanded the parameters for the types of nonprofits that could use the exception, was not necessary to protect the conscience rights of religious employers. Beetlestone struck down the rule.

But Mother Loraine Marie Maguire of the Little Sisters of the Poor said in a statement, “For nearly 200 years, our order has welcomed the elderly poor and dying into our homes as we would welcome Christ himself.

“It is painful that we have spent more than a decade defending that mission in court. We simply want to continue our work without being forced to violate our faith, and we pray Pennsylvania and New Jersey will end this needless harassment,” she said. †

of Joanna Weber and Larry Porter, Grandmother of three.

Great-grandmother of five.

and Hasanah Malik. Great-grandson of Betty Cooper.

**ORSCHELL, Carol**, 85, St. Gabriel, Connersville, Nov. 12. Mother of Cathy Burdoerfer, Stacey Lorek, David, Eric and Mark Orschell. Grandmother of 13.

**STILLER, Mary L.**, 97, St. Mary-of-the-Knobs, Floyd County, Nov. 28. Mother of Karen Nethery and Robert Stiller. Grandmother of four. Great-grandmother of three. †

## Providence Sister Rosemary Rafter served in Catholic schools and parishes

Providence Sister Rosemary Rafter (formerly Sister Rose Clare), a member of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in St. Mary-of-the-Woods, died on Dec. 1 at Providence Healthcare at the motherhouse. She was 93.

The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on Dec. 11 at the Church of the Immaculate Conception at the motherhouse in St. Mary-of-the-Woods. Burial followed at the sisters’ cemetery.

Sister Rosemary was born on May 1, 1932, in Bloomington, Ill. She entered the Sisters of Providence on Feb. 2, 1951, and professed final vows on Aug. 15, 1958.

Sister Margaret earned a bachelor’s degree in education at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, a master’s degree in education at Indiana State University in Terre Haute and a master’s degree in counseling psychology at

the former George Williams College of Aurora University in Chicago.

During her 74 years as a member of the Sisters of Providence, Sister Rosemary served as an educator in Catholic schools for 22 years in Illinois, Indiana and New Hampshire. She also served in administration with the Sisters of Providence and in parish ministry.

In the archdiocese, Sister Rosemary served at the former St. Ann School in Terre Haute from 1957-58 and in different roles in the administration of the congregation from 1972-77.

Surviving are two sisters, Sue Rafter and Joan Whitehouse, both of Terre Haute, and a brother, Eugene Rafter of Lady Lake, Fla.

Memorial gifts may be sent to the Sisters of Providence, 1 Sisters of Providence Road, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, St. Mary-of-the-Woods, IN 47876. †

## GINTHER

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*May the Holy Spirit open our hearts wide to perceive more vividly the radiant light of Almighty God’s love for his children, the grim disgrace of our division, and the blazing urgency for us to rekindle the light of Christian reconciliation.*

*May we thank God always for the boundless compassion and mercy of the ‘Light from Light.’*

Please join the Indiana Christian

denominational leaders at 7 p.m. on Jan. 20 at Lawrence United Methodist Church, 5200 Shadeland Ave., in Indianapolis, to pray through the words and traditions of our Armenian brothers and sisters.

May we become truly one, as Jesus mandated.

(Father Rick Ginther is director of the archdiocesan Office of Ecumenism and Interreligious Affairs. He is retired from full-time pastoral ministry but is still active as a priest of the archdiocese.) †

## Investing with Faith/Chris Hirschfeld

# A 'thank you' to donors and all who help the CCF in its mission of charitable giving

As president of the advisory board to the archdiocese's Catholic Community Foundation (CCF), I have had the benefit of seeing firsthand the enormous generosity, service and leadership among our faithful community.

During this season of giving, I wanted to take a moment to express a heartfelt "thank you" to the entire Catholic community within the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

For more than 35 years, CCF has been dedicated to helping the faithful maximize the impact of their sacrificial gifts within our communities. These generous gifts create lasting legacies that benefit our Catholic parishes, schools and ministries for generations to come.

The foundation would not be successful without the generous donors, foundation leadership, staff and volunteers who willingly serve this



organization and the entire Catholic community of our archdiocese.

Because of the generosity of our donors, many of whom go unrecognized, CCF manages approximately \$285 million in investments that are used to provide annual, restricted distributions for parishes, schools and ministries.

In fiscal year 2025 alone, the foundation was able to distribute more than \$10 million in proceeds to various parishes, schools and ministries within our archdiocese. None of this would have been possible without you and your generous gifts. Thank you!

The task of managing the CCF is to ensure every donor's intent is met with the strictest fiduciary standards and, according to Church teaching, cannot be done by any one individual.

Instead, a team is in place, allowing donors to give with confidence, knowing that their legacy gifts will be used exclusively for the purposes for which they were intended. With this in mind, I also want to thank the countless individuals who make the work of the CCF possible.

Thank you to the staff at the foundation that operates efficiently and stands ready to assist donors and ultimately converts a donor's intent into reality. Thank you to past and current volunteer leadership teams that have served as advisors to the foundation. Your experiences and insights bring a wealth of ideas to ensure the long-term success of the foundation and its ability to meet the needs of its beneficiaries.

Thank you to the staff and volunteers at every Catholic parish, school and ministry throughout the archdiocese. The critical service you provide is a fundamental example of our role as Christian stewards and serves as a daily reminder of why the CCF exists.

Finally, I would like to thank Archbishop Charles C. Thompson, who continues to provide his leadership, guidance and unwavering commitment to the needs of our Catholic community.

If you have not done so, please use this holiday season as a reminder to make a gift of security and peace of mind to your family and loved ones by

creating a will.

Understanding that the needs within our communities continue to grow, if you would like to have a multi-generational impact on your community, please consider a legacy gift in your estate plan.

On behalf of all the foundation leadership, staff and volunteers, we are honored to be able to assist in the mission of charitable giving that serves our Catholic communities throughout central and southern Indiana. Please call the archdiocesan Office of Stewardship and Development to learn more about planned giving opportunities at 317-236-1482 or e-mail [ccf@archindy.org](mailto:ccf@archindy.org).

(Chris Hirschfeld is a member of Christ the King Parish in Indianapolis, and currently serves as the co-chair for the endowment committee and president of the advisory board for the Catholic Community Foundation. 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.) †

## READINGS

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### Monday, December 29

Fifth Day within the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord  
*1 John 2:3-11*  
*Psalm 96:1-3, 5b-6*  
*Luke 2:22-35*

### Tuesday, December 30

Sixth Day within the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord  
*1 John 2:12-17*  
*Psalm 96:7-10*  
*Luke 2:36-40*

### Wednesday, December 31

Seventh Day within the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord  
 St. Sylvester I, pope  
*1 John 2:18-21*  
*Psalm 96:1-2, 11-13*  
*John 1:1-18*

### Thursday, January 1

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

*Numbers 6:22-27*  
*Psalm 67:2-3, 5-6, 8*  
*Galatians 4:4-7*  
*Luke 2:16-21*

### Friday, January 2

St. Basil the Great, bishop and doctor of the Church  
 St. Gregory Nazianzen, bishop and doctor of the Church  
*1 John 2:22-28*  
*Psalm 98:1-4*  
*John 1:19-28*

### Saturday, January 3

The Most Holy Name of Jesus  
*1 John 2:29-3:6*  
*Psalm 98:1, 3c-6*  
*John 1:29-34*

### Sunday, January 4

The Epiphany of the Lord  
*Isaiah 60:1-6*  
*Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13*  
*Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6*  
*Matthew 2:1-12*

### Monday, January 5

St. John Neumann, bishop

*1 John 3:22-4:6*  
*Psalm 2:7b-8, 10-12a*  
*Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25*

### Tuesday, January 6

St. André Bessette, religious  
*1 John 4:7-10*  
*Psalm 72:1-4, 7-8*  
*Mark 6:34-44*

### Wednesday, January 7

St. Raymond of Peñafort, priest  
*1 John 4:11-18*  
*Psalm 72:1-2, 10, 12-13*  
*Mark 6:45-52*

### Thursday, January 8

*1 John 4:19-5:4*

*Psalm 72:1-2, 14, 15bc, 17*  
*Luke 4:14-22a*

### Friday, January 9

*1 John 5:5-13*  
*Psalm 147:12-15, 19-20*  
*Luke 5:12-16*

### Saturday, January 10

*1 John 5:14-21*  
*Psalm 149:1-6a, 9b*  
*John 3:22-30*

### Sunday, January 11

The Baptism of the Lord  
*Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7*  
*Psalm 29:1-4, 3, 9-10*  
*Acts 10:34-38*  
*Matthew 3:13-17*

## Employment

### Archdiocese of Indianapolis Maintenance Technician

This full-time, hourly, position is responsible for the maintenance of several buildings.

Duties include:

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- Responding, in a timely manner, to internal equipment repair needs.
- A verifiable background in building maintenance.
- A working knowledge of all building systems and components.
- The ability to evaluate and repair existing equipment.
- The ability to work with contractors, subcontractors, and suppliers.
- An ability to work with the Archdiocesan staff.
- Basic computer skills.
- Good organizational and communication skills.

If you are interested in this position, please send your resume to: [bburkert@archindy.org](mailto:bburkert@archindy.org).

## Medicare Insurance



## Classified Directory

### For Sale

**SINGLE NICHE**, (room for 2 allowed by cemetery) **OUR LADY OF PEACE CEMETERY**, 9001 Haverstick Road, Indianapolis. Located in the Chapel, lower level, limited space available. \$4,900. Call 317-374-0392.

### Employment

### Principal

#### Our Lady of the Greenwood Elementary School

Our Lady of the Greenwood Elementary School, a Blue Ribbon Award winner, is seeking faith-driven, academically oriented candidates for Principal to start the 2026-27 academic year. This 71-year-old school of 320 students is located in south suburban Indianapolis. OLG has one of the most ethnically diverse Pre-K through 8th grade student populations in the archdiocese.

Candidate must be a practicing Catholic in good standing. Bachelor's and master's degrees required, ideally in Education or related field. Valid Indiana administrator's license (or the ability to get) is required. A minimum of five (5) years of teaching experience is required. A minimum of three (3) years of administrative experience at the Principal or Assistant Principal level is strongly preferred. Demonstrated leadership and interpersonal skills are essential. Bi-lingual is preferred.

Compensation is competitive with experience. Applications will be accepted through 1/16/2026. Resumes and supporting documents should be directed to:

Anne Krieger ([akrieger@archindy.org](mailto:akrieger@archindy.org))  
 Office Manager, Administrative and Teacher Personnel  
 Office of Catholic Schools  
 317-236-1444

# Speech by Heisman winner Fernando Mendoza of Indiana University touches hearts, including a priest's

By John Shaughnessy

As he waited for the announcement of who would win the Heisman Trophy—awarded to the best college football player of the year—Dominican Father Patrick Hyde turned to one of his fellow friars and said, “I have never been so invested in the outcome of an award.”

After all, Father Patrick has become a big fan of Fernando Mendoza, the star quarterback of the football team at Indiana University in Bloomington, where the priest serves as pastor of St. Paul Catholic Center adjacent to the school's campus and where Mendoza has attended Mass.

Father Patrick not only celebrates the football player that Mendoza is, he also appreciates the person Mendoza is and the way the quarterback embraces his faith in God.

So, when Mendoza was announced as the winner of the Heisman on Dec. 13 in a ceremony in New York City, Father Patrick rejoiced with the other friars watching the event on television.

“Watching Fernando win was so wonderful,” Father Patrick said. “When good things happen to good people, it's a win for everyone. His speech was a testament to his hope and determination.”

His speech was also an all-inclusive thank-you to all the people who have made a difference in his life, starting with the way he has begun nearly every post-game interview this season.

“First, I want to thank God for giving me an opportunity that once felt a world away,” Mendoza said.

Seconds later, he added, “This moment is an honor. It's bigger than me. It's a product of a family, team, community and a whole lot of people who believed in me long before anybody knew my name.”

Getting more emotional with each thank-you, he spoke with love about his teammates and shared praise for the fans who have supported him in his one year at Indiana.

Then his expressions of love turned toward his brother, the back-up quarterback at Indiana.

“And to my lifelong teammate, Alberto, my brother and closest confidante, the one I trust more than anybody to get through a tough day, tough play. I love you, bro,” he said. “I love you and thank you for always giving it to me straight, no matter the circumstance.”

His thoughts then turned to his teammates and coaches at Christopher Columbus High School in Miami, a private Catholic college-preparatory high school run by the Marist Brothers.

“Thank you to coach Dunn and Christopher Columbus High School for giving me a home, a dream to follow and more importantly a brotherhood.”

After thanking his coaches, including head coach Curt Cignetti, Mendoza focused on his parents and grandparents.

“My family's unconditional love and belief kept me going and pushed me forward,” he said. “These are people who [believed in] me long before football did.”

The emotion poured from him as he talked about his mother, who has endured multiple sclerosis.

“Mami, this is your trophy as much as it is mine,” he said. “You've always been my biggest fan. You're my light, you're my why and biggest supporter. Courage, love—those have been my first playbook and the playbook that I carry at my side through my entire life. You tell me toughness doesn't need to be loud, it can be quiet and strong. It's choosing hope. It's believing in yourself when the world doesn't give you much reason to. Together, you and I, are defying what people think is possible. I love you.”

He next offered heartfelt words to his father.

“Papi, thank you for grounding me. Thank you for holding me accountable when it was tough. Thank you for reminding me that talent means nothing without discipline, without consistency. ... You personified commitment. You picked all of us up whenever we needed it most.”

Mendoza then shared a touching salute in Spanish to his parents and grandparents, who all came to the United States from Cuba.

“Por el amor y sacrificio de mis padres y abuelos, los quiero mucho. De toda mi corazon, de toda gracias.” (“For the love and sacrifice of my parents and grandparents, I love you. With all my heart, thank you.”)

All the thank-yous led to one last message that Mendoza wanted to share, a message about belief, dreams and the path to making a dream come true.

“This is an important one,” Mendoza said. “I want



Fernando Mendoza, quarterback for the Indiana Hoosiers, smiles after winning the Heisman Trophy at Lincoln Center in New York City on Dec. 13. Mendoza, a Catholic who frequently credits his faith in God and Jesus Christ for his success, incorporates daily Mass and Bible studies into his routine and gives glory to God in post-game interviews, as he did in his Heisman acceptance speech. (OSV News photo/Todd Van Emst, Heisman Trust, Pool via USA TODAY Sports, Reuters)

every kid out there who feels overlooked and underestimated, I was you. I was that kid, too. I was in your shoes.

“The truth is, you don't need the most stars, hype or rankings. You just need discipline, heart and people who believe in you and your own abilities. I hope this moment shows you that chasing your dreams are worth it, no matter how big or impossible they seem.”

Father Patrick was moved by it all.

“My favorite part was the overall message of hope, joy and humility,” the priest said. “In particular, the way he spoke to and about his mother—and his message of encouragement and hope to those who are overlooked.” †

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