

— Great Lakes Bay — CATHOLIC

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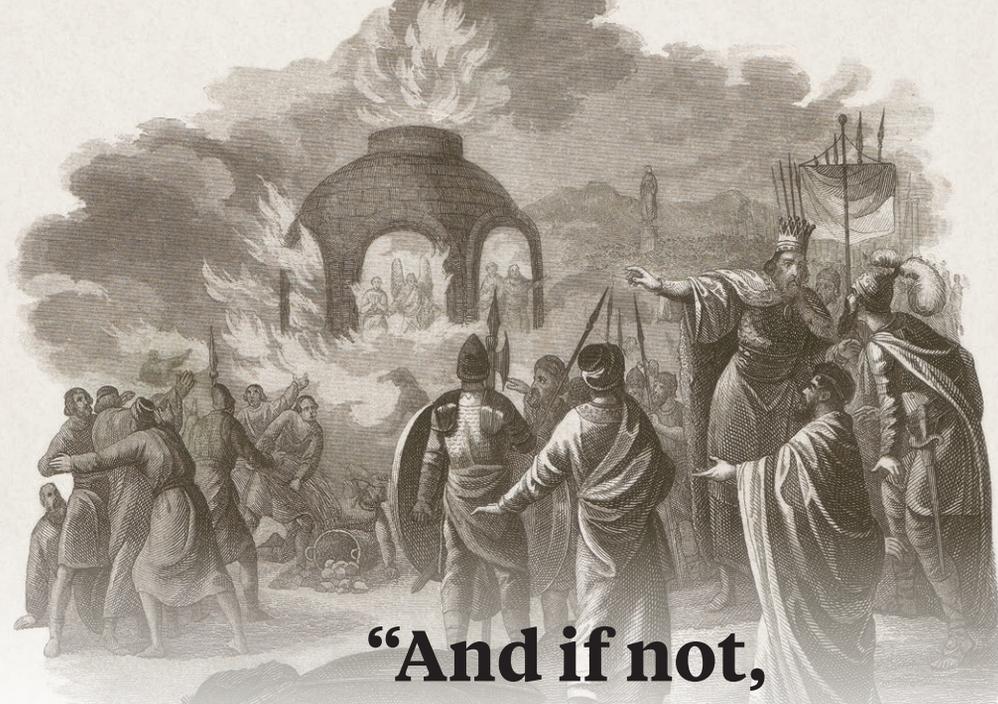
They Never Walk Alone

WITH OTHER PARENTS AND JESUS, EMMAUS RETREATS OFFER HELP AND HOPE TO GRIEVING PARENTS

FROM THE BISHOP
From AI to immigration

YOUR FAITH
War took their home. Faith carried them forward.

SPECIAL REPORT
Pope Leo's First Apostolic Exhortation: *Dilexi Te*



“And if not, he is still good.”

FROM THE EDITOR

A few years ago, God seemingly didn't answer a prayer I had begged for. Or, more precisely, he did not intervene in the way I had hoped.

I wept my way through prayers and journaling, finally finding a verse that was like a balm to my soul.

“And if not, he is still good.”

This is a loose interpretation of Daniel 3:18, in which Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego declare to King Nebuchadnezzar their confidence that God would save them from the fiery furnace. This was to be their punishment for worshipping God and refusing to bow to the king's statue. But, they said, even if God did not save them, they would never worship the statue.

These three faithful Israelites stared down this terrible situation and proclaimed that even if God didn't answer their prayer in the way they wanted, he was still good and worthy of all worship.

That inspired me to keep going. God didn't answer my prayer as I had hoped — but he is still good. It's become something of a mantra to help me remember that God's faithfulness means something greater than granting my prayers. Even when it is almost unbearably painful, the Lord doesn't abandon me. Often, he sends others to accompany us in the “fiery furnaces” we may encounter, just as the angel of the Lord did for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

In this issue of *Great Lakes Bay Catholic*, you'll meet many other families who are holding fast to the hope and promise of God's goodness despite tragic circumstances. Parents who have lost children are sharing their pain and healing through the Emmaus Retreat (page 16). The Chorny family, who fled Ukraine when the war began four years ago, have had a long and trying journey that isn't over yet. Still, they are quick to praise the Lord (see page 20). I pray that you find their stories to be reminders of God's faithfulness through life's storms.

Thank you for reading *Great Lakes Bay Catholic*.

To Jesus through Mary,

Danielle



DANIELLE MCGREW TENBUSCH serves as editor of *Great Lakes Bay Catholic* magazine and is the marketing and admissions coordinator for the Office of Catholic Schools.

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Danielle McGrew Tenbusch
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Jenny Cromie
John Gonzalez
Father Andy LaFramboise
Julia Morgansai
Dr. Dan Osborn
Taylor Piotrkowski
Danielle McGrew Tenbusch
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Jeff Schrier
Danielle McGrew Tenbusch
CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS

Mark Prindiville
CONTRIBUTING RESEARCHER

FAITH Catholic



Abby Feldpausch
GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Pete Burak
Maria Cintorino
Rachel Espinoza
Father Michael Schmitz
Sheri Wolhfert
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Madalaine Elhabbal/CNA
CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

WWW.FAITHCATHOLIC.COM

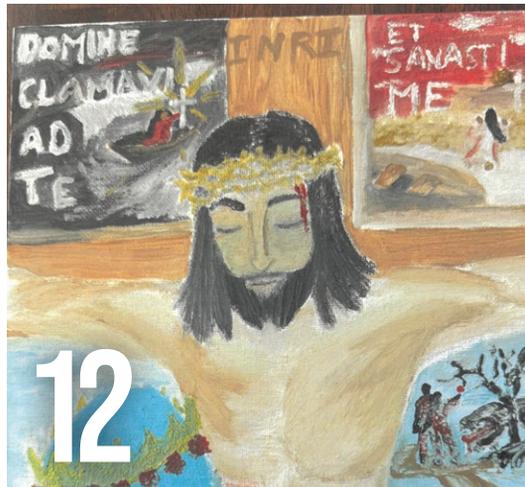
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United States
Conference of
Catholic Bishops

PLENARY ASSEMBLY

SCAN

to view the remarks
and Special Message
referenced in this column.



FROM AI TO IMMIGRATION, bishops' assembly includes dialogue and decision-making

DO YOU EVER WONDER WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS (USCCB) GATHERS EVERY YEAR FOR THEIR ASSEMBLIES?

Every November and June, the bishops of the United States gather for a few days for prayer, fraternal dialogue and meetings. Allow me to share some of the highlights of the recent Fall Plenary Assembly in Baltimore that took place from Nov. 10 through 13.

The first day of our gathering always begins with a morning of prayer and retreat — communal prayer, Eucharistic Adoration, a reflection given by one of the bishops and the opportunity for the Sacrament of Penance. This allows us to begin our meeting focused on what is most

important: Jesus Christ. We concluded the morning with Mass celebrated at the Basilica of the Assumption, America's first cathedral, constructed between 1806 and 1821, soon after the founding of our country.

At the beginning of the public session on the second day, the body of bishops approved

a message to the Holy Father, assuring him of our prayers and communion, while also acknowledging our mutual concern surrounding the challenges the Church faces in the United States and around the world. The president of the USCCB also gave an address to the bishops. Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, as the outgoing president, spoke of the task of us bishops is to “proclaim the truth in and out of season, to reaffirm the dignity of the human person and find ways to make the Gospel resound in the hearts of believers and

beyond, knowing that it is not easy and it will not become easier. We were challenged “to keep the goal of an encounter with Jesus Christ uppermost in our minds and in those of the people we are privileged to serve.” This address can be found on YouTube by searching “November 2025 Plenary Assembly — Archbishop Broglio Presidential Address.”

Following Archbishop Broglio's address, Cardinal Christophe Pierre, the papal nuncio to the United States, offered his own remarks. He began focusing on two questions for



THE MOST REV.
ROBERT D. GRUSS
is the seventh bishop
of the Catholic
Diocese of Saginaw

discernment in the Church's life today: "Where have we been?" and "Where are we going?" This is an essential part of Christian discernment and is something that, as bishops, we must all do as shepherds of the Catholic Church in the United States today. The guiding light is the teaching and vision of the Second Vatican Council. It is the "key to understanding what kind of Church we are called to be today and the reference point for discerning where we are headed." This is the direction in which Pope Leo XIV is guiding the Church today as he begins his papacy. This address can be found on YouTube in a video titled "November 2025 Plenary Assembly — Cardinal Christophe Pierre".

One of the key highlights was the discussion on the topic of immigration and our government's recent enforcement actions that are causing anxiety and fear in communities across the country. This led to the approval of issuing a *special message* on immigration, exhorting the government to recognize the fundamental dignity of all persons, including immigrants. This is fundamental in our Catholic Social Teaching. We support "meaningful reform of our nation's immigration

laws and procedures. Human dignity and national security are not in conflict. Both are possible if people of good will work together. We recognize that nations have a responsibility to regulate their borders and establish a just and orderly immigration system for the sake of the common good."

Every three years a new president and vice-president of the USCCB are elected. Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City was elected president, and Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville as vice-president. The body of bishops also elected new chairmen of six standing committees.

One of the recent changes to our meetings was the addition of having periods for fraternal dialogue, bringing the bishops into small groups to discuss various aspects of our ministry and the life of the Church. The

"The task of us bishops is to proclaim the truth in and out of season, to reaffirm the dignity of the human person and find ways to make the Gospel resound in the hearts of believers and beyond, knowing that it is not easy and it will not become easier."

bishops have welcomed this because it provides an opportunity for us to get to know each other and to hear what is happening in other dioceses. It is also a way of promoting a synodal approach to the Church through more dialogue and listening sessions.

This takes place during executive sessions that are limited to bishops and are not livestreamed. The fraternal dialogues and other informational sessions included discussions on a variety of topics: the ongoing implementation of the synod; best practices to continue the instruction of *Laudato si'*; the importance of providing post-abortion healing ministry in our dioceses; and *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (the bishops' teaching document on the political responsibility of Catholics).

As the Conference of Bishops, we voted in favor of consecrating the United States to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in June 2026, marking the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence next year.

An updated version of the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, or ERDs, was approved as well. The ERDs — developed in consultation with medical professionals and theologians, and regularly

reviewed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops — articulate ethical standards for health care in light of Church teaching and provide authoritative guidance on moral issues encountered by Catholic health care.

The revisions underscore the role that those involved in the ministry of Catholic health care services have in providing the best medical care, as well as Christ's compassionate accompaniment to all patients, no matter who they may be or from what condition they may be suffering. Revisions in this new document contain explicit prohibitions against so-called gender-affirming care. These ERDs will be promulgated in every diocese.

Finally, among many other items on the agenda, there was a fascinating presentation given by Dr. Paul Scherz of the University of Notre Dame on understanding artificial intelligence (AI) and the ethical implications of AI, especially in the context of the life of the Church.

As leaders in the Church, our two meetings per year allow us to connect with one another as bishops, listen to one another and support one another. Crucial for the Church's mission and governance, these meetings provide us a platform to engage in discussions and address diverse topics pertinent to the life of the Church and our culture.

As the bishops of the United States seek to address and respond to the variety of issues and concerns that affect the life of the Church both within the Church community and within contemporary society, I ask that you please pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit as we discern the Lord's will. Come Holy Spirit! †



The U.S. bishops gather in Baltimore, Md., on Nov. 12, 2024 for their plenary assembly. | Credit: Madalaine Elhabbal/CNA

Feeling like you never do enough and just want to quit?



Q: I serve at my parish all of the time. Whenever my pastor (or really anyone) asks me to help, I usually say yes. On top of that, I feel like I am never doing enough, praying enough or serving enough. I just want to quit. What do I do?

A: First, let me thank you so much for reaching out. There are times when we are simply at the end of our rope, and we can feel like we have tried everything. These are the times when we are most tempted to flip the table, give up and just be done with all of it. It sounds like this is exactly the kind of moment you find yourself in right now. So, before you abandon ship, let me thank you for asking for help.

Asking for help is always a good sign. In asking for help, you are acknowledging that things aren't "fine." In asking for help, you are giving yourself permission to be struggling and to not have all the answers. In asking for help, you are admitting that you are not perfect. And this is precisely what is necessary.

It can be absolutely exhausting when a person feels like they have to do it all, when they feel like they have to do it perfectly, and when they feel like it is never enough. The fact that you have acknowledged and admitted this means that you are open to hearing the

truth. And the truth is: You don't have to do it all. You don't have to be everything for everyone. And you do not have to be perfect.

But before you do anything, you need to be reminded who you are.

In our culture, our worth is often based on our work. Our value is based on what we can offer. And this is partly true. When it comes to sports or work, those who bring greater benefit to the team or to the company have a more highly valued place. But when it comes to life, this is decidedly untrue. Your worth is not predicated on your output, even when it comes to "church work."

There are so many Christians who will buy into the lie that their place in the Father's heart rises and falls depending on how much they do or how well they perform. That is contrary to the Gospel, and yet so many of us believe it.

We can be tempted to put our mission first. After all, the mission is important, isn't it? If you don't do it, who will?

May daring aid us

In this edition of *Great Lakes Bay Catholic*, there are articles concerning outreach for grieving parents, Pope Leo XIV's *Dilexi Te* and Ukrainian refugees. As we consider our own need to reach out to the poor and marginalized among us, we often need to use the passion or emotion of daring.

Daring helps us to remove obstacles that are keeping us from the good we want. What are some of the obstacles we face in reaching out to those on the fringes right in our midst? Perhaps it is our own apathy, perhaps our lack of confidence that we have something to give, perhaps a lack of generosity on our part? Daring can help us to take appropriate risks to go out of our comfort zone with a kind word, a financial donation, extra prayers and sacrifices or volunteering our time.

Daring characterizes many of the saints who were willing to suffer shame and even death in exercising the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. St. Lucy, whose feast we celebrated on Dec. 13, is one such saint. Known for her generosity to the poor, she was ultimately martyred because of her love for God above all things. Let us call upon this saint to help us to discern those areas in our life where we need to practice daring to do what is right. Perhaps daring is necessary to be kind to someone whom we think has injured us in some way. Daring can be necessary not only with strangers but also with those in our own families.

Daring helps us to practice charity even when it is most difficult and when the cost might be the greatest. Sometimes this is simply through practicing the virtue of humility and being willing to serve our mother, brother, sister, husband or wife. As we are celebrating the Christmas Season, may daring aid us in overcoming all the obstacles to charity in our lives! †

Whole & Holy is written by a member of the Religious Sisters of Mercy of Alma, Michigan. The Sisters were founded in 1973 in the Diocese of Saginaw and are committed to providing comprehensive healthcare. The Sisters contributing to this column are trained in fields such as social work, psychiatry and social work. They strive to provide excellent healthcare through the professional training they receive and are sustained in their work through their common life of prayer.



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THIS RELATIONSHIP GIVES YOU YOUR IDENTITY.

Too often, we take our identity from our mission. But that is a lie. If it were true, what would happen when our mission changes? What would happen when we no longer have anything to offer? What would happen when the mission is over? No. Our identity is a direct result of having been brought into relationship with God. When you were baptized, you were given a new identity; you were made into a child of God. This is what and who you are. And it is not based on your performance. It is based on the relationship you have been brought into with God himself.

LASTLY COMES MISSION.

Our mission (the tasks God has entrusted to us) comes only as a consequence of having been brought into relationship with the Father and having been given our identity by that relationship. When the mission changes (or when we fail at our mission), we experience sadness but not devastation, because our mission or our success does not determine our identity or worth.

When you and I live this truth, we become free. In your case, you will become free to say no when you are invited to serve. You will become free to not pray all of the prayers or all of the devotions that other people might be doing. You will be free, not to quit everything but to quit some things.

In fact, I wonder if that isn't what God is asking you to do in your exhaustion: remember whose you are, remember who you are and simply do less as a beloved child of the Father. †

*Published on May 5, 2022
(bulldogcatholic.org).
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And yet, over the centuries, Christians have discovered that this is a recipe for burnout and disaster. The great saints of the Church have discovered another way of thinking. And this has recently been formulated in three letters (representing three words): R-I-M.

Relationship. Identity. Mission.

If you remember (and keep in order) these three reminders, you will be saved from what you described in your letter.

RELATIONSHIP COMES

FIRST. Always. When we remember that we have been brought into relationship with God the Father, everything changes. We can let go of the endless working for approval. We can abandon the temptation to believe that we are obligated to continuously prove our worth. In baptism, you were given access to the Father through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. You have been brought into relationship with the most Holy Trinity — God himself! This relationship is a pure gift; none of us has ever done anything to deserve it. It simply flows from the fact that God has loved you first.



FATHER MICHAEL SCHMITZ is director of youth and young adult ministry for the Diocese of Duluth and chaplain of the Newman Center at the University of Minnesota Duluth.

The lasting gifts of Catholic education

I REMEMBER MY GRANDMA TELLING ME WHEN OUR OLDEST SON WAS BORN THAT OUR GREATEST RESPONSIBILITY WAS TO RAISE HIM TO BE HOLY AND TO ASK FOR THE GRACE TO HELP HIM GET TO HEAVEN. SENDING OUR KIDS TO CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WAS ONE OF THE THINGS WE DID TO SET HIM ON A PATH TOWARD HOLINESS. CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK IS IN JANUARY EACH YEAR, SO IT'S THE PERFECT TIME TO HIGHLIGHT SOME OF THE FRUITS OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN OUR JOURNEY TO RAISE SAINTS.

► **THE CENTER:** Fostering a relationship with Jesus and learning to live the Gospel is at the center of everything! As students grow in their knowledge of Jesus, they learn to imitate His actions and put His teachings into practice. Amid conflict, discipline, relationships and challenges, students are taught to seek the love and truth of Jesus to form behavior, attitudes and actions.

► **TWO BIG ONES:** Sacraments and prayer are intertwined in daily life. Attending Mass and receiving the Eucharist often is what many saints call the “recipe for heaven,” and many Catholic school students have this opportunity each week. When sacraments are added to intentional prayer pauses throughout the day, students are able to form habits of prayerfulness and faithfulness that will serve them well throughout their lives.

► **THE MISSING LINK:** The messages our culture sends aren't always designed to help us grow in holiness, but a Catholic education steeped in the virtues is the antidote to those mixed messages. The Gospel lays out the virtues and Catholic classrooms bring them to life. Learning discussions, activities and accountability for living the virtues are the foundations for great discipleship. An early emphasis on honesty, humility, generosity, temperance and patience, to list a few, can change lives. Faith instead of fear, humility instead of boasting, and sharing and contentment instead of greed are Gospel-based swaps that make saints.

► **COMMUNITY:** Being a part of a Catholic school, students learn they're part of the Body of Christ. As St. Paul reminds us, every part of the Body has different gifts. (see 1 Cor 12:4-11) Catholic school classrooms are beautiful places to celebrate all the ways God has created us differently and perfectly and that despite our differences, we're all one in the Lord. Rooted in this sense of connectedness to all the other members of the Body, Catholic schools form students to help those who are suffering through outreach and service, drawing students into solidarity with the broader community beyond the walls of their school.

► **LASTING GIFTS:** Words such as “mercy,” “grace” and “forgiveness” are spoken and practiced daily. Students are given the gift of truth — God's truth rooted in Scripture. Students are taught to find their value and their motivation by turning to their Creator, not the world. And the greatest gift of all, in a world that treasures busyness and independence, students in a Catholic school classroom are taught to pause with the Lord to be still and to know He invites us to be dependent on Him for everything we need. †

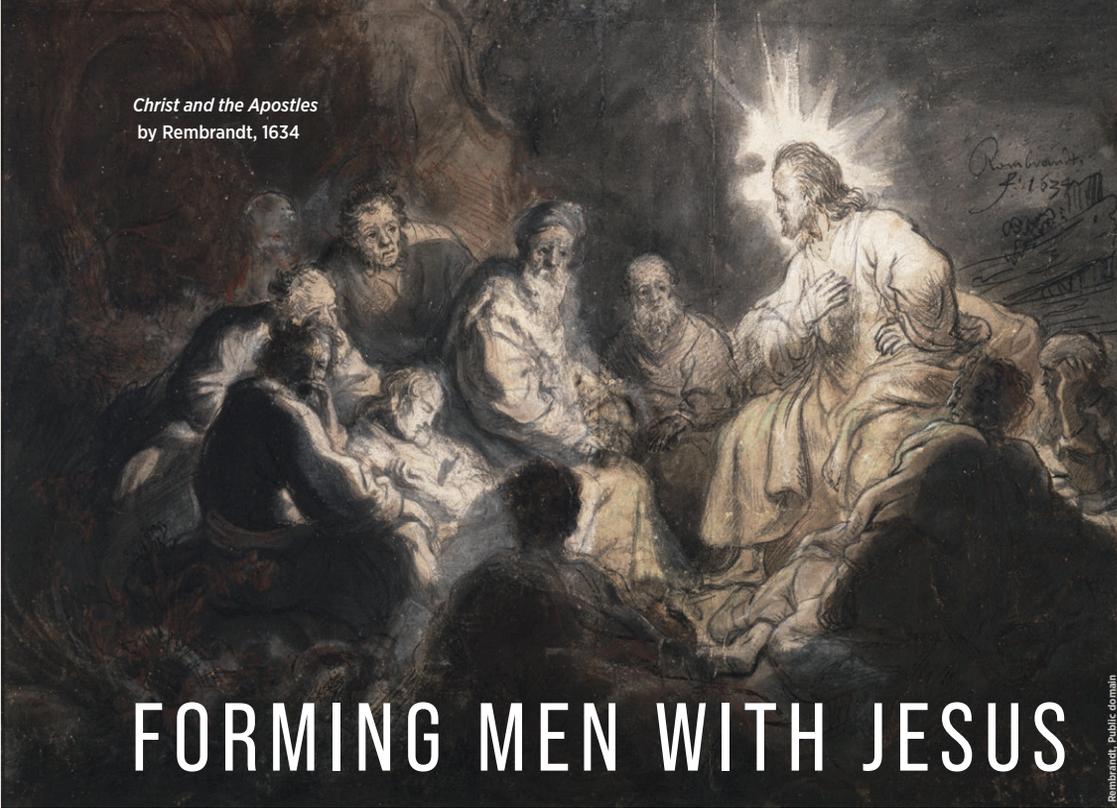


SHERI WOHLFERT is a Catholic wife, mom, grandma, speaker and writer. Catch her blog at www.joyfulwords.org.



CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK IS JAN. 25-JAN. 31, 2026
SCAN TO FIND A CATHOLIC SCHOOL NEAR YOU!





FORMING MEN WITH JESUS

Rembrandt, Public domain

In the Gospels, we are treated to memorable words and actions of Jesus with the Twelve Apostles. The disciples no doubt were amazed, startled, encouraged, attracted and also fearful at times as they journeyed with the One who called them by name. However, what we do not see are the hidden moments in their journey together during Jesus' three-year public ministry. Part of the charm of the streaming series *The Chosen* is how the show artistically enters into these hidden moments. There would have been many meals and stories shared around the campfire. Laughter would have been a common sound heard by any passersby.

These hidden moments were foundational to the Apostles' sense of identity and mission. They knew they were loved by Jesus. They were formed by him in these hidden moments along with the moments that we are blessed to read about in the Word of God.



FATHER ANDY LAFRAMBOISE
is pastor of St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Beal City and director of priestly vocations. He holds a licentiate in Sacred Theology in Marriage and Family Studies from the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family.

Jesus invested in them: he gave them his time, attention and energy. The Apostles were led on a journey by Jesus, able to listen to him and to ask him questions, hear his stories and be encouraged by his loving presence.

Many young men are experiencing a crisis of loneliness and isolation, fueled by social media. Some are even turning to artificial intelligence (AI) for virtual friendships. With this crisis of isolation comes a crisis of mission, an uncertainty about the meaning of one's life. Young men are seeking community, accompaniment and formation.

As part of our efforts to live out Pillar 1 of our Diocesan Plan (Love and Support a Uni-

“There was a hidden but powerful formation that took place in those moments, and I believe the same can happen with these groups.”

fied Presbyterate on Mission), we are revamping our efforts to promote vocations to the priesthood. We have developed a new website (saginawvocations.org) where you can learn more. A team of priests has been formed, and one of the foundational elements of the plan is the beginning of discernment groups. These groups meet weekly for six weeks with a priest facilitator to learn about the priesthood and to hear him share his experiences. It is very hard to

discern what you do not know. These help to bridge that gap.

We have only had a few discernment groups so far, but our hope is that these will be a constitutive element of our vocation efforts moving forward. The few we have run have been incredibly fruitful for the lives of the men. The groups are centered around a program called the Melchizedek Project, using Cardinal Timothy Dolan's book, *Priests for the Third Millennium*.

The primary goal is to create a climate where more men can enter seminary and discern the priesthood in a more intentional way and be formed to serve the Church as priests. The secondary goal is to invest in the faith of young men. It is likely that many men who enter these groups will not become seminarians. However, their participation in these groups, being able to speak with priests and be open to God's call in their life, will only lead to blessing in their lives and blessing to the Church. They would benefit any man who is actively practicing his faith, who loves Jesus and who is sincerely open to God's will in his life, whatever that might be. I invite any man who is interested in receiving support in discerning his vocation to reach out to me at alaframboise@diosag.org if he would like to participate in one of these groups.

I see these discernment groups being like the campfire conversations that Jesus had with the apostles. There was a hidden but powerful formation that took place in those moments, and I believe the same can happen with these groups. Jesus is renewing his Church through his love! May he kindle the faith of men in our Diocese! †

A Winter's Tale of Wisdom *from the Womb*



DR. DAN OSBORN
is the Diocesan Theologian
and Coordinator of
Permanent Diaconate
Formation & Ministry for
the Diocese of Saginaw.

Curling up near a fireplace... a cup of hot cocoa in your hands... as you watch, through frosted windows, the spectacle of wind-blown snow. This is likely the most womb-like experience we have as we grow older. While Gordon Lightfoot is well known for his wistful account of “The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald,” another of his ballads, sometimes overlooked, is marvelous to listen to the next time you are enjoying the comfort of your home on a frigid evening. His opening lines in “Song for a Winter’s Night” artfully capture the mood of being in a warm womb-like room, protected from the outside chill:

*The lamp is burnin’ low upon my tabletop /
The snow is softly falling*

*The air is still in the silence of my room /
I hear your voice softly calling*

From December to March, it is striking how much the Catholic liturgical calendar draws our attention to the holiest place on earth (other than the tabernacle and altar in a church): the human womb. Let’s take a look at how some wintertime Catholic feast days whisper, as it were, valuable wisdom from the womb.

DEC. 8: Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

In the womb of St. Anne, Mary is conceived without original sin, an event that marks the beginning of the end of the devil’s pitiless reign over the human race. Although he was not Catholic, the English poet William Wordsworth once called Mary “Our tainted nature’s solitary boast.” She is indeed the one human person in history that the devil never got a hold of through sin, a reality that drives the fallen angel mad. This is why the enemy of God must have a particular loathing of this feast day. However, as captives set free by Christ, the son of Mary, we have great cause to rejoice every Dec. 8, which (usually) is a holy day of obligation in the United States. Mary is the patroness of the U.S. under this unique title.

In a recent interview, Father Francesco Bamonte, president of the International Association of Exorcists, explains how the devil

reacts to the sinless Virgin Mary during the Rite of Exorcism. “When we see the devil raging because Our Lady is invoked, it is because he feels the presence of Our Lady. I am often struck by the experience I have when, during the exorcism, the devil complains that there is too much light. When I order him to tell me where that light comes from, he says, ‘It comes from her.’ Somehow, he is angry precisely because he notices that Our Lady is praying, and she is close to that son who is suffering, to that daughter who is suffering. For us exorcists, this is a great consolation because we see how truly Our Lady is a mother during this ministry.”

So, the next time we are tempted, let’s remember the power of asking the sinless Mother to pray for us. It might be a simple Hail Mary or perhaps this brief prayer given to St. Catherine Labouré by Mary herself during her 1830 Miraculous Medal apparitions in Paris: “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.”





From December to March, it is striking how much the Catholic liturgical calendar draws our attention to the holiest place on earth (other than the tabernacle and altar in a church): the human womb.”

DEC. 12: Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

The womb of Mary is emphasized in a fascinating way in the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which miraculously appeared on the *tilma* (a cactus fiber tunic) of St. Juan Diego in Mexico on Dec. 12, 1531. The apparitions of Mary to this simple peasant and the heaven-made image on his garment, which scientists are still at a loss to explain, led to the conversion of millions of people to the Catholic faith throughout the Americas.

As David Clayton observes in his article on the image, “Our Lady’s hairstyle, with the central parting, was in 16th-century Aztec culture the sign of a maiden, a virgin. The ribbon and bow around her waist signified that she was pregnant. So this is a young woman who is portrayed simultaneously a virgin and pregnant.” To an Aztec society that so embraced what St. John Paul II termed “the culture of death” — even to the point of accepting human sacrifice with Aztec “priests” extracting beating hearts — the symbolism in the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe proclaimed the Gospel of life. It is no wonder that Our Lady of Guadalupe is looked upon not only as the patroness of the Americas but also as a special saint for the pro-life movement in its efforts to stop preborn children from being aborted.

Guadalupe is just one example of how, in the face of evil, there stands not only Christ but also his holy Mother. If you wish to contemplate this reality, spend some time gazing at the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe while prayerfully reading these lines from Scripture, which portray the enmity between the dragon and the Woman who is truly the new ark, not only of the New Covenant but of God himself:

Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant could be seen in the temple.... A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth. Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a huge red dragon... Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth. (Rev. 11:19; 12:1-4)

DEC. 25: The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

Redeemer in the Womb: Jesus Living in Mary is a splendid meditation on Christ *in utero* by John Saward. Jesus in the womb of his mother is at every moment the second person of the Holy Trinity, and perhaps we in the west would do well to contemplate this mystery more deeply. Our eastern Christian brothers and sisters, though — both Byzantine Catholic and Orthodox — pray a lengthy liturgical poem to Mary called the “The Akathist Hymn” in which they refer to her as the “container of the Uncontained God.” At Christmas, the Gospel readings at the Vigil Mass and the “Mass during the Night” both present us with the figure of Mary, who contains in her womb the uncontained and infinite Son of God. Mary is truly Mother of God from the moment the Lord is conceived in her womb through the power of the Holy Spirit, long before she gives birth to him in Bethlehem.

JAN. 1: Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God

How fitting it is that we begin the New Year turning our eyes to the Mother of God, since it was in her womb that a New Era began — the era of Christ the King who, through his death, rescues *us* from death and sin. It was at the third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus in 431 that the Church formally proclaimed the dogma that Mary is the Mother of God. The people of Ephesus rejoiced, and it was providential that this of all ancient cities was the site where this most important of all Marian doctrines was defined. The first bishop of Ephesus was John, to whom Jesus entrusted his mother at the cross (though some modern scholars debate whether John and the Beloved Disciple are the same person). There is even a pious tradition that Mary had a little home in Ephesus after John took her into his care in obedience to Christ.

Of course, more than four centuries before the Council of Ephesus, St. Elizabeth first uttered this Marian title when she was visited by her young pregnant cousin. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth exclaimed: “And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Lk. 1:43) Keep in mind that Jewish people did not say the holy name of God — they said “Lord” instead (in Hebrew, *Adonai*; in Greek, *Kurios* or *Kyrios*). So, Elizabeth was actually calling Mary “the Mother of God.”

Before the matter was settled in Ephesus, some had argued that this title was too exalted for Mary. They claimed that she gave birth only to the human nature of Jesus. But the Council fathers, led by the Spirit, also used common sense in their response. “A mother does not give birth to a nature; she gives birth to a person,” they clarified. In Mary’s case, the person she gives birth to is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity — the eternal Son who is God. Therefore, she is rightly called the Mother of God.

MARCH 25: Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

Winter officially ends a few days before the Annunciation of the Lord on March 25, when the Church celebrates the moment when the Eternal Son of God took on a human soul and a human body in the womb of Mary. All of human history revolves around this moment of the Incarnation, when God entered time to rescue us. Indeed, a new springtime of hope and life and joy and love and salvation begins when, in Mother Mary’s womb, “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) †

1

True, Good and Beautiful Art Contest

SHOWS THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN HOPE

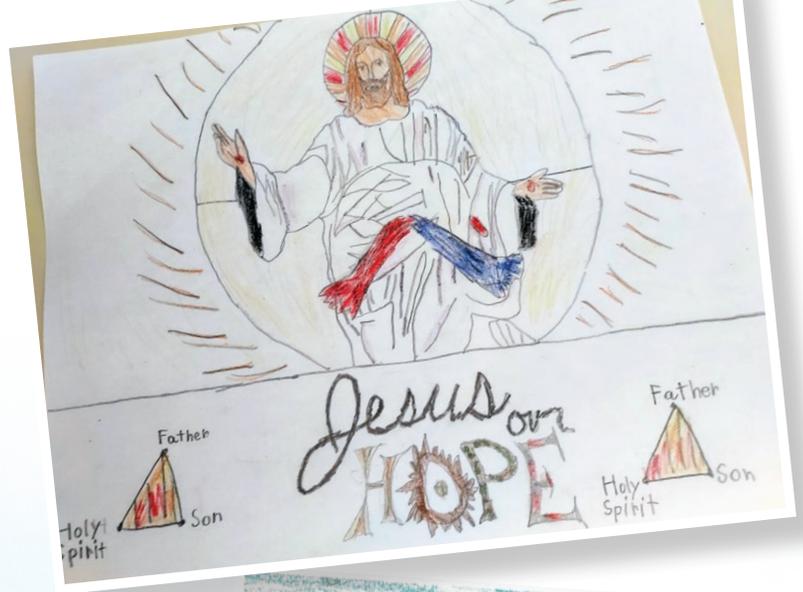
WHEN ASKED, “WHAT DOES CHRISTIAN HOPE MEAN TO YOU?” TALENTED YOUNG ARTISTS FROM ACROSS THE DIOCESE RESPONDED WITH BEAUTIFUL, POIGNANT DRAWINGS, PAINTINGS AND MIXED MEDIA CREATIONS. THE THEME FOR THE 2025 TRUE, GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL ART CONTEST ALIGNED WITH THE JUBILEE YEAR OF HOPE, WHICH SPANNED FROM DEC. 24, 2024 TO JAN. 6, 2026, THE SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD.

Christian hope is different than feeling optimistic about something. Rather, the Catechism defines hope like this:

“Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.” (CCC 1817)

The True, Good and Beautiful Art Contest, presented by the Offices of Catholic Schools, Faith Formation and Youth and Young Adult Ministry, brought entries from Catholic school, public school and homeschool students.

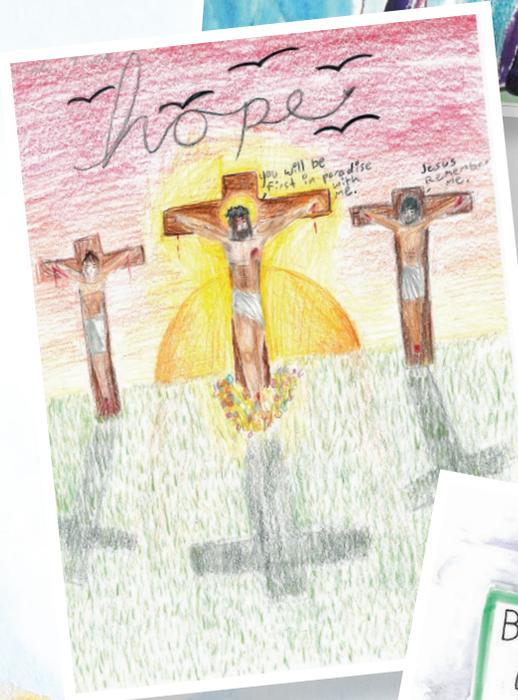
“It was such an honor to help judge the student submissions for the True, Good and Beautiful Art Contest. I was certainly struck by how talented the artists are, but even more so by how deeply prayerful many of the pieces were. They beautifully portrayed deep reflection on the inspiration of what Christian hope means to each of them,” said Laura Schiebert, coordinator of faith formation.



2



3



4





5

The division winners and runners-up received a cash prize from Knights of Columbus Councils #414, #2740, #4102, #12423, Father Labory Council #2724 and the Bishop Murphy Assembly #0491 Fourth Degree.

Grades K-4

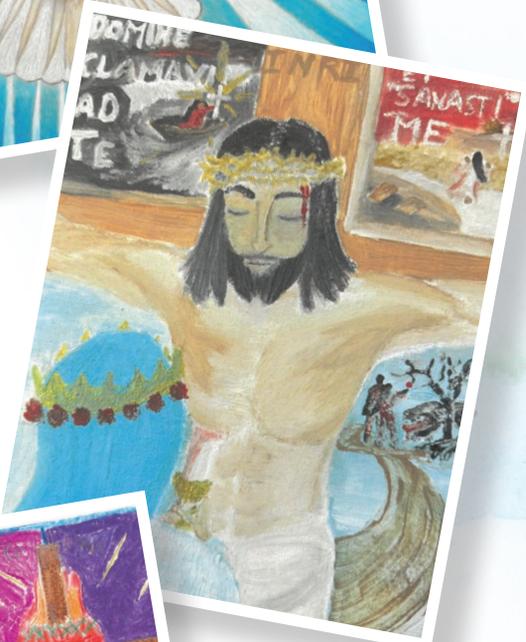
1. First place: Sam Lewis

Grade 2, Homeschool
Our Lady of Czestochowa Parish, Bay City

Runner-Up:

2. Caroline Leszczynski

Grade 1, Nouvel Catholic Central
Elementary School, Saginaw
St. Dominic Parish, Saginaw



6

Grades 5-8:

3. First Place: Farrah Merk

Grade 7, St. Brigid Catholic School, Midland
St. Brigid of Kildare Parish, Midland

4. Runner-Up: Sonya Rasmussen

Grade 8, Nouvel Catholic Central
High School & Junior High, Saginaw
Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption Parish, Saginaw

Grades 9-12:

5. First Place: Charlotte Ferguson

Grade 12, Peck High School
Holy Family Parish, Sandusky

6. Runner-Up: Agnes Fojas

Grade 9, Homeschool/Mother of Divine Grace School
Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption Parish, Saginaw

People's Choice Award

7. First Place: Everly Saenz

Grade 5, St. Brigid Catholic School, Midland

8. Runner-Up: Faith Crosdale

Grade 8, Nouvel Catholic Central
High School & Junior High, Saginaw †



7



8

+ SCAN TO VIEW ALL ENTRIES

K-4



5-12





Tyler Provow, safe environment coordinator, and Ilene Dowling, the chair of the Bishop's Review Board, were part of the team that updated the Safe Environment Training.

Updated Safe Environment training aims to protect the vulnerable and empower the faithful

BY JULIA MORGANSAI

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIELLE MCGREW TENBUSCH

When a parish volunteer signs up to chaperone a field trip or serve at a youth event, Safe Environment training can seem like another box to check. However, the recently updated training, now expanded far beyond its original focus on child sexual abuse, has a much deeper purpose. It aims to equip ordinary Catholics to recognize warning signs, intervene early and help protect children, teens and vulnerable adults in every part of their lives.

“All adults are protectors of children, youth and vulnerable adults,” said Tyler Provow, safe environment coordinator for the Diocese of Saginaw. “You can take the things that you see in this training and apply them in your public life as well.”

The Diocese of Saginaw remains committed to prevention, vigilance and transparency. With more than 3,350 trained employees and volunteers active in the Diocese, the effort reaches deep into parish and school communities.

A needed update for changing times

Participation in the Diocesan Safe Environment program is required every five years, meaning many volunteers who last trained in 2020 were due for recertification.

“We didn’t want them to sit through the exact same material again,” Tyler said.

A team of VIRTUS facilitators and the Diocesan Review Board, a consultative body that advises the Bishop on safe environment matters, worked to reshape the course. They kept the national VIRTUS framework while adding diocesan-specific content and expanding sections on online safety, guided in part by Pope

Francis’ 2018 directive on safeguarding all vulnerable adults.

“Often we think of vulnerable adults as the elderly or those with disabilities,” Tyler said. “But anyone can be vulnerable at different times in their life.”

Not to scare, but to inform

The new edition includes expanded material on peer-to-peer abuse, online exploitation, emotional neglect and financial abuse — problems that can appear in homes, schools and community spaces as well as in church settings.

Ilene Dowling, a Safe Environment training facilitator, said the team wanted partici-

pants to recognize that abuse and online grooming are not distant or abstract problems. To underscore that these issues affect local families, the training now includes a video interview with Saginaw County Sheriff William Federspiel.

The Diocese offers all training in person, something many participants appreciate.

“Participants have shared that the training is so much better than they received years ago,” Ilene said. “They see its intent is to share information, not scare them. They have shared that it is positive in nature and provides hope for change.”

Participants consistently say the in-person format helps them ask questions, understand diocesan policies and connect the material to their ministry roles.

Layers of protection

The Diocese uses background checks, fingerprinting, VIRTUS bulletins and adherence to the Code of Conduct to create layered protection. Tyler explained that while no single measure is flawless, the different layers of protection complement each other, creating an effective overall safeguarding system.

Ilene emphasized the Review Board’s role in shaping these safeguards:

“The Review Board exists

to advise our bishop with honesty and care, ensuring that allegations of clergy abuse are handled with integrity and that our policies remain strong and effective,” she said. “Most importantly, it helps cultivate a culture of hope. We want every parish, school and ministry to be places where children and adults alike feel safe, respected and loved.”

Safeguards are working

Although national and diocesan reports continue to surface allegations from decades past, current cases are rare.

Tyler said that his first few years overseeing the program have been successful. While minor complaints or issues occasionally arise, such as a Code of Conduct violation, all matters are handled appropriately and swiftly. If a criminal complaint were to be made, the Diocese would immediately alert law enforcement and connect the individual with the victim assistant coordinator for counseling and other resources.

Most reports involve incidents from many years ago, including those that have been filed recently. He suggested that the training may help empower individuals to come forward with older cases, providing them with guidance and resources they might not have known were available.

Review Board Members:

Ilene Dowling, Chair — Retired, former special education/transition coordinator for Saginaw Public Schools and former adjunct professor at Saginaw Valley State University

Nicole Boyd, Vice Chair — School Social Worker for Saginaw Township Community Schools

Nayatt Castelein — Lead Agent, Sex Offender Management Unit for the Michigan Department of Corrections

Father Andy Booms — Pastor of Sacred Heart Parish of Mount Pleasant and St. Mary University Parish at Central Michigan University; Regional Vicar for Vicariate 5

Tom McIntyre — Retired, former Saginaw County Sheriff and former Director of Saginaw County 911

Every volunteer matters

Volunteers can apply the training to recognize warning signs of abuse or neglect in everyday life.

“Even if you’re only helping once, you can take this information and apply it to a child or a vulnerable adult you encounter in daily life,” Tyler said.

The training reinforces the responsibility of all Catholics to advocate for those who may be at risk, ensuring that vigilance and care extend beyond parish walls.

For Ilene, this work is deeply connected to discipleship.

“Safe environment work is ministry,” she said. “It is about living out our faith by ensuring

that every child and adult entrusted to our care experiences safety, dignity and love.”

A call to awareness and courage

At the close of each training session, Bishop Robert Gruss’s message echoes: “We must believe that we can make a difference.” That difference starts with informed, vigilant and compassionate adults — ordinary Catholics who take the training seriously and refuse to look the other way.

Tyler said that creating safe environments is everyone’s responsibility, and the more people who recognize the signs of abuse, the safer parishes, schools and communities will be. †



Safe Environment training sessions are offered regularly throughout the Diocese, and you can register at saginaw.org/events. If you are a victim or survivor of clergy abuse or know of someone who is, you are urged to make direct contact with local law enforcement and the Michigan attorney general’s investigation hotline at 844-324-3374. You are also welcome to contact the victim assistance coordinator at 989-797-6682 or victim.assistance@diosag.org. The victim assistance coordinator can assist victims in obtaining counseling services.

Ilene Dowling and Suzanne Guttowsky present a Safe Environment Training to new Catholic school teachers, staff and coaches at the Center for Ministry.



They Never Walk Alone

WITH OTHER PARENTS AND JESUS, EMMAUS RETREATS OFFER HELP AND HOPE TO GRIEVING PARENTS

BY JENNY CROMIE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF SCHRIER

EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS STORY DISCUSSES TERMINAL ILLNESS, CHILD LOSS AND SUICIDE.
IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW HAS THOUGHTS OF SELF-HARM OR SUICIDE, CALL OR TEXT 988.

On an ordinary Sunday morning, in the middle of Mass, 15-year-old Liam Gillespie stepped out of the pew. A short time later when a group of young people went up to receive Communion, his mother, Julie, noticed he was not with them. When the final hymn ended, Liam was nowhere to be found.

Julie and her daughter began calling and texting Liam after Mass ended, but he never responded. Her husband was out of town, taking classes to become a deacon. After returning home, Julie stood in the kitchen for a couple of minutes. And then she heard her daughter screaming.

Liam had taken his life.

It happened on Sunday, Oct. 25, 2015 – more than a decade ago now – yet the loss of her son is still difficult, especially on anniversaries.





Liam was a server at church, a teen leader at his parish, on the honor roll, ran on the cross-country team. He had everything to live for — there were no signs that anything was amiss, Julie said. It didn't make sense. It still doesn't. It never will.

"With suicide, it's just sudden," Julie said. "The rug is just pulled out from underneath you."

The December after Liam died, Julie checked herself into the hospital. Overwhelmed by the loss of her son, she felt suicidal herself.

Julie's husband, David, now a permanent deacon and director of parish life at Our Lady Consolata of Cass City, was very supportive and helped Julie come up with a plan after her release from the hospital. People from the parish would come pick her up for daily Mass, but she didn't want to go. She was depressed, her faith was shaken and she was mad at God. Julie never thought she would survive the first year.

"The pain was so great and so immense," she said.

Today, her pain and grief have become the foundation of a ministry of compassion. Julie now walks with other grieving parents through the Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents. Along with Mary Greyerbiehl, who lost her 21-year-old son, Matthew, in 2009, Julie serves as a parent witness at Emmaus Retreats, sharing her story to help others cope with loss.



Mary Greyerbiehl of Bad Axe shares her testimony during an Emmaus Retreat in Marquette on Nov. 1. She and her husband George, pictured on the cover, have shared their story at several retreats to help other parents. They lost their son Matthew in 2009. *Courtesy photo.*

"My ministry is grief," said Mary, a lay minister and parishioner at St. Hubert Parish in Bad Axe. "I don't mind sharing my story.... It's part of my healing."

The Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents, founded in 2009 by Diane and Charley Monaghan in Boston, Massachusetts, began as a Franciscan-inspired response to their own unimaginable loss after their son died by suicide. Today, it has grown into a national ministry accompanying parents through the heartbreak of losing a child from any cause. The Diocese of Saginaw joined this mission in 2022, hosting its first Emmaus Retreat at St. Agnes Parish in Freeland. It is now one of more than a dozen dioceses across the country offering these retreats, with some locations also providing extended weekend experiences.

In the Diocese of Saginaw, Deacon Gary Patelski and his wife Arlene lead daylong retreats. They lost their 48-year-old son Brian to ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) almost seven years ago. Brian, who left behind a wife and five children, was diagnosed in September 2018. Eight months later, on May 11, 2019, he succumbed to the disease.

Deacon Gary and Arlene, married for 60 years in June, searched for support to handle the grief. But they discovered most grief support groups dealt with the loss of a spouse or a parent, not the loss of a child. They also needed support through a Catholic lens. It wasn't until 2023, when they attended their first Emmaus Retreat at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in Midland, that they finally found the support they needed.

"MY MINISTRY IS GRIEF. I DON'T MIND SHARING MY STORY ... IT'S PART OF MY HEALING."

— MARY GREYERBIEHL



Deacon Gary and Arlene Patelski of Saginaw Township lost their adult son Brian to ALS and now are coordinators for the Emmaus Retreat in the Diocese of Saginaw and other dioceses in Michigan.

Wanting to share the healing they received, Deacon Gary and Arlene began leading the retreats for the Diocese. The retreats, Deacon Gary said, are a “spiritual one-day retreat for parents who have experienced the death of a child of any age, by any cause, no matter how long ago.” As of October 2025, they had led six retreats. A seventh is scheduled for March 29 at St. Catherine of Siena in Bay City. And in addition to retreats in the Diocese of Saginaw, the couple also led a retreat in the Diocese of Marquette in November 2025.

Each time they lead a retreat, Deacon Gary said, they experience all the emotions they did in the days after losing Brian. A permanent deacon at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church in Saginaw, Deacon Gary describes himself as an emotional person. But somehow, he managed to preach at Brian’s funeral in Texas and at the family’s former parish in Bridgeport.

You never get over the loss of a child, said Arlene, a lay minister. “It still hurts to this

day. But how we get through this is to help other people.”

The format of each daylong retreat is the same. The day begins at 9:30 a.m. with an opening prayer. Each attendee receives a prayer shawl and time to share their child’s name and cause of death. Everyone receives a candle with a picture of their child on it that burns throughout the retreat. And then Deacon Gary talks about what the Catholic Church teaches about death.

After lunch, there’s a parent witness who shares their story—what happened, their walk through the grief process, and what it’s like for them today. There is group sharing in both small and large groups. Everyone is encouraged to write a letter either to their child or someone else. Parents never have to share it, but Deacon Gary tells them the letter is sacred and suggests they burn or bury it if they decide to dispose of it.

Central to each retreat is the Emmaus Walk where parents are paired randomly and encouraged to walk together

outside for about 45 minutes and share their stories, experiences and anything they need to discuss on their grief journey.

At the end of the day, everyone attends Mass and eats dinner together. Then there’s a closing ceremony around 7 p.m. when everyone extinguishes their candle and receives a blessing.

People do not have to be Catholic to attend the retreat, Deacon Gary said. There’s a free will offering, but the retreats generally are paid for by previous attendees. There’s also no limit on how many times people can attend the retreats.

“Our retreats are supported by several parents who have been on past retreats,” Arlene said. “The overall experience of the retreat would not be possible without their support.”

Louraine Latty of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Saginaw helps with greeting participants and provides snacks throughout the day. Tony and Karen Dybas and Joy McKeon, all of Holy Trinity Parish in Pinconning, donate and prepare the food for lunch and dinner.

“It’s vitally important for the Diocese to offer this type

of support ministry when parents are experiencing the tragedy of losing a child,” said Kellie Deming, director of parish life and evangelization for the Diocese of Saginaw. Losing a child is not in the natural order of things. “Most people do not experience this type of tragedy.”

Parents who attend the retreats receive support from each other, Kellie said. And the retreats are aptly named. On the Road to Emmaus, two disciples eventually realize they are walking with Jesus. During the retreats, parents also discover they are not alone; they are walking with other grieving parents and with Jesus. “Jesus is walking with each and every one of these people ... he’s also walking with them forever.”

Even if someone believes they have worked through their grieving process, Emily Glaza of St. Agnes, Freeland, said she would still encourage them to go to one of the retreats.

At the urging of her parents — who lead the grief program at St. Christopher Parish in Caro — Emily attended an Emmaus retreat at the beginning of October 2025,



Deacon David and Julie Gillespie of Cass City lost their teenage son Liam to suicide in 2015.

“Jesus is walking with each and every one of these people ...”

only three months after losing her 14-year-old son, Aiden, after battling spontaneous hydrocephalus, a disease that causes cerebral spinal fluid to build up on the brain. Aiden, who suffered his first stroke at 5, passed away from his sixth stroke in July 2025.

Emily said the experience helped her realize she was not alone. After losing someone, everyone is there to support you at first, she said. But two weeks later, “the rest of the world is turning, and you feel like you’re standing still.” At the retreat, though, Emily experienced a glimmer of hope. She was randomly placed in the same group as another mother who also had lost a son. And like Emily, she was a mother of twins, one living and one who had passed.

“God works in mysterious ways ... let him work in you,” she said.

Over a period of years, Emily saw her son lose his ability to swallow, walk and breathe on his own. After emerging from a coma in 2019, Aiden miraculously learned how to walk, talk and swallow again after six months.

But Aiden never had the chance to drive or graduate from high school, Emily said through tears. The disease eventually took everything away.

“I’ve been grieving for 10 years,” she said.

Grief can be an isolating experience—especially after losing a child, Emily said. Everyone eventually loses their parents, many lose spouses, but not everyone loses a child. “It’s not supposed to happen.”

Emily also faces challenges that most other parents who have lost children do not



The Glaza family — father Chris, brother Noah, mother Emily, Aiden with his service dog Reef and twin Ethan — is pictured at St. Agnes Parish in Freeland on Easter 2024.

face—how to navigate the grief process with a surviving twin. On top of her own grief, Emily said, she is helping Aiden’s twin, Ethan, and her 16-year-old son, Noah, through their grieving process by taking them to the Children’s Grief Center (Great Lakes Bay Region) in Midland. “I needed to understand what they were going through.” Emily’s husband, Christopher, also is going through his own grief process.

Everyone processes grief differently, she said. “We just don’t understand grief, and we don’t talk about grief.”

Sometimes, even in a marriage, people feel like they’re walking through the grief process by themselves. Men and women process grief differently, said Deacon Gary, the

Emmaus Retreat leader. Once he and his wife Arlene realized this, they grew closer.

Mary, the lay minister from Bad Axe, also struggled for a long time after losing her son Matthew, who died by suicide in 2009.

“It was an absolute shock to us,” she said. He was popular, well-liked, and had a contagious laugh. He broke every soccer record at school, he could play any instrument by ear, he was artistic and he knew how to work on almost any car engine. One day after work, Mary stopped at

home before going to a dental appointment. That’s when she discovered Matthew.

After years of therapy and retreats with her husband George, Mary said the loss still is overwhelming at times. People say the most insensitive things, especially when suicide is involved. Today, Mary believes Matthew is with God. And during the retreats, she has found great comfort talking to other parents. Since their sons’ deaths, Julie, Mary and Emily said they have drawn closer to the Blessed Mother, who also lost her son.

“My faith has grown so much since Matthew’s death,” Mary said. “But you never ever get over the loss of your child. It just becomes a part of you.” †



Each family attending an Emmaus Retreat receives a candle with their child’s photo. The candle burns throughout the retreat.



For more information about the retreats in the Diocese of Saginaw, please contact Deacon Gary or Arlene Patelski at gapatelski@aol.com. The next retreat will be March 29 at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Bay City. Details are in the events section on page 29. For more information about the Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents, as well as national resources, visit emfgp.org.

he’s also walking with them forever.”

War TOOK THEIR HOME. Faith CARRIED THEM FORWARD.

**Ukrainian family recounts
their journey as refugees — and
their faith in God’s providence
that has kept them going**

BY DANIELLE MCGREW TENBUSCH
COURTESY PHOTOS



In November the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) released a Special Message at their recent plenary assembly (see page 4) regarding immigration in the U.S., in which they defend the God-given human dignity of all persons, including immigrants.

“The priority of the Lord, as the Prophets remind us, is for those who are most vulnerable: the widow, the orphan, the poor and the stranger (Zec. 7:10),” the message reads.

Editor’s note: Some quotes have been slightly edited for clarity.

“**HONEY, WAKE UP. WE HAVE WAR.**”
H Oksana Chornyy remembers her husband Yuriy waking her up at 5 a.m. with a kiss

on her head. Just the night before, they had been celebrating the birthday of their friend’s daughter. There was chatter that something bad might happen in Ukraine, but they didn’t believe it.

“It’s impossible, because the world will judge if it happens, you know,” Oksana recalled thinking.

On Feb. 24, 2022, that changed when Russia launched a full-scale invasion.

“**WE HAD DREAMS**”

In their hometown in western Ukraine, the Chornyy family was “like every normal family.”

“We had our life at our home; we had dreams,” said Oksana, who taught Ukrainian language and literature and holds two master’s degrees, including one in Catholic theology.

When Oksana was young, a group of Catholic missionaries worked to create a home for underprivileged children in her village. In that group were Dr. Dan Osborn, who now serves as the Diocese of Saginaw theologian, and her future husband, Yuriy.

Dan and Yuriy stayed in touch throughout the years, and with their spouses and children continued their friendship.

Before the global pandemic began in 2020, the family got visas to visit the Osborns and other friends in the United States, a decision that helped them just two years later.

Yuriy worked in customer support for Austrian Airlines, which enabled them to travel with their three children. The experience also motivated their children to learn English.



They also had big plans: Oksana was in the process of establishing a children's center in their village, where youth could come to play, socialize, have catechism classes and make crafts.

But everything changed when the airstrikes began.

Oksana recalled the noise and smoke as Russian missiles struck nearby.

"The kids started crying, especially our daughter," she said. The couple had three children, including a five-month-old.

On the news, journalists explained how to protect yourself from the strikes: hide in a bathtub and cover yourself with pillows.

"That day was very long," Oksana recalled. "And that night was terrible."

They kept their lights off and avoided windows, due to news reports of spy drones. The next morning, they decided they needed to leave "probably for a couple of days, for two weeks maximum." They packed some important items and documents and headed for the Polish border.

They haven't been home since.

It took them 72 hours to cross into Poland, a trip that usually takes 45 minutes. The flood of people trying to leave Ukraine came in cars, on buses and on foot.

"We saw some people walking in pajamas, without shoes," she recalled, noting the cold and snow.

Some had backpacks, others struggled to carry babies bundled in blankets. People from nearby houses would hand out coffee, food and warm clothes.

"It was something that you will never forget.... It was really painful," Oksana said. "We were blessed that we were in the car. Yes, it was hard, but you could start the engine from time to time so it's warmer."

When they finally reached the border, they were amazed at the concern. The Poles ran to their car, asking them what they needed and encouraging them.

"We were so afraid, but we were so happy that we were with good people," she said.

They stayed in Poland for about two weeks, and then Yuriy's boss asked them to relocate to Austria for a few months as it became clear the war would not end soon. Their children tried to continue their lessons online, as their school would stream their classes.

"It was very hard," Oksana said, because with every siren signaling an air strike, everyone in the class had to go to the bomb shelters.

The teacher would call back from the basement, trying to explain the material during airstrikes with variable electricity and Internet signal. It simply wasn't a long-term solution. Homeschooling is not generally considered an option in the region, and the children needed to take intensive language classes to attend in-person schools, which was a struggle. They spent several months moving between different countries and regions. While the Chorny family was thankful for, as Oksana put it, "miracle after miracle" of having places to live for short times, they needed stability.

The Chorny family, including wife Oksana and husband Yuriy, fled Ukraine in February 2022 with three children. Their fourth child was born in the United States after they relocated with Temporary Protection Status. The Chorny family received prayerful and financial assistance from the St. Brigid Catholic School community in Midland.



A group of friends, including the Chorny and Osborn families, got together last summer.

A NEW CHAPTER

One day, Yuriy was speaking with a friend who lives in the United States. He recommended they try relocating to the U.S., where they already spoke the language and had friends. It would give them the chance to relax after months of being in survival mode. They already had tourist visas from their canceled trip in 2020. Their friend suggested they look into the U.S.'s refugee program.

"One person called us from the USA and said, 'There is a program called Uniting for Ukraine', I want to be your sponsor. Are you ready to move to the USA?" Oksana said.

Uniting for Ukraine was created in April 2022, offering a pathway for Ukrainian citizens displaced by the war to live and work in the U.S. on a temporary basis. This initiative required each Ukrainian family to have a sponsor and to meet certain eligibility requirements.

"After one week, we received acceptance and the 'Uniting for Ukraine' documents we needed to leave Europe," Oksana recalled.

Thanks to Yuriy's job with Austrian Airlines, they were able to book affordable tickets to fly to the U.S. Their friend helped them find a house they shared with another family, and they began a new life.

But because Yuriy's employer did not have a labor agreement with the U.S., he had to sacrifice his job and now works in construction.

The Chorny family is grateful their children are in school and participating in Boy Scouts of America, but they miss their family, too, especially during holidays and birthdays.

"It's very painful, because in Ukraine, we were together with family all the time and could visit grandparents," Oksana said.

The most painful point came about six months after they moved to the U.S., when Oksana's father passed away. She could not attend his funeral because their refugee status would be revoked if they left the U.S. for even a short time.

Yet that is a sacrifice they are willing to make if they can stay.

A BOND WITH MID-MICHIGAN

One of the many ways God's goodness is evident is through the support they've received from others, including St. Brigid of Kildare Catholic School in Midland, where LeAnne Osborn teaches. (LeAnne is the wife of Dr. Dan Osborn, who worked with Yuriy in the '90s.)

The Chorny family has a stack of cards made by St. Brigid students, which was given to them along with a donation to help them start their new life in the United States.

"We will save all of that forever. It's our memory," Oksana said.

YOUR FAITH

On a video call, Oksana and Yuriy read some of the cards.

"Dearest Yuriy and Oksana, you have all my sympathy because of this war. We hope our donations will help you in New York. We hope for peace in your home country. You will be in our prayers, and we will stand with Ukraine. Let God be among us and help you through your hard times of need. Sincerely, Ian."

"Dear Yuriy and Oksana, it's hard to understand what you're going through right now, but you have gotten this far. I hope you enjoy living in the United States, and I hope our donation helps you stay strong. Loving thoughts and prayers, Izzy."

Many cards have the American and Ukrainian flags; the Chornyy family were excited to see the students learned the colors of their flag.

"It was a really big, really pleasant surprise," Yuriy said. He recalled it being especially hard in the beginning, when they had very little. "Donations like that just really helped us."

They were able to visit Midland and the Osborns a few years ago, and the two families get together annually. Yuriy's mother was able to visit on a tourist visa when their youngest child was born.

They have a few items from home, too. A Ukrainian flag, traditionally embroidered garments and a table runner, some photos and religious icons — including one that was a gift to their toddler from his godfather, who is fighting on the front lines. They miss big family gatherings and traditions, especially around the holidays.

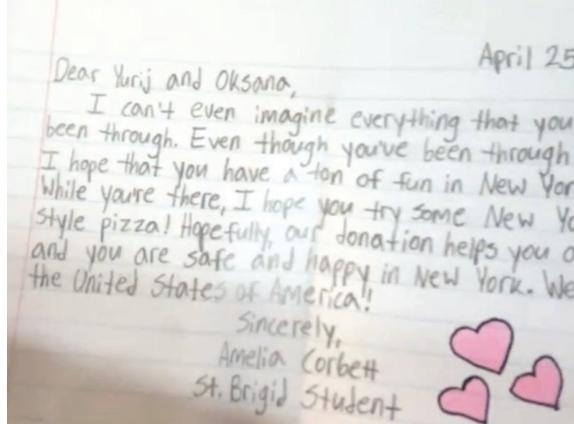
As Christmas neared, the Chornyy family was keeping busy with work, school and kids' activities, but the uncertainty of their temporary protection status (TPS) was never far from their mind.

"We're asking for prayers. We really need stability — and it's not about us adults, but about our kids," Oksana said, adding in the same breath, "Thanks be to God, we have the same work, the same schools, the same house we are renting. We are healthy and have food."

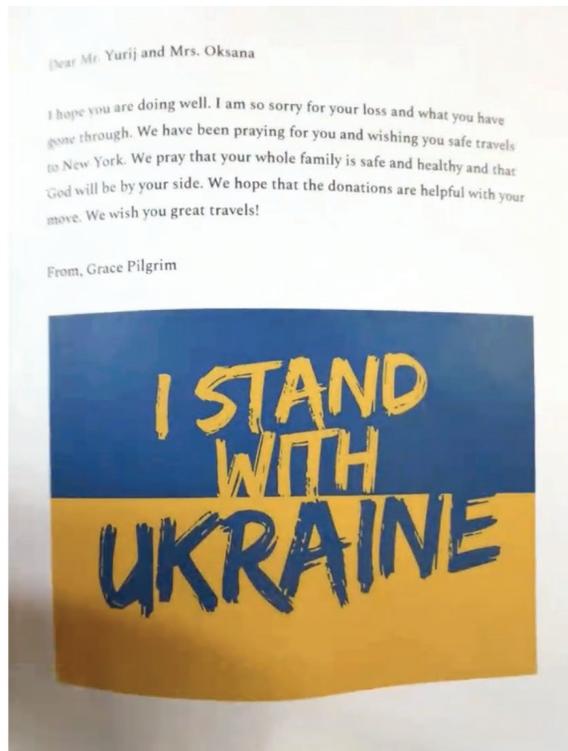
Holding firmly to the faith that has seen her family through so much, Oksana simply asks for prayers, following Jesus' command in Matthew 5:44: "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."

"Pray for our situation with the papers ... pray for our soldiers, for our people there and for Russia.... As our Blessed Mother said, we have to pray for Russia, for their conversion."

During the Virgin Mary's 1917 apparitions in Fatima, she re-



Students from St. Brigid Catholic School in Midland sent the Chornyy family uplifting cards and donations to help them begin a new chapter in the U.S.



quested that Russia be consecrated to her Immaculate Heart. Bishop Robert Gruss joined with Pope Francis and bishops around the world in consecrating Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on March 25, 2022.

"Yuriy and Oksana come from the western part of Ukraine, where the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (fully united with the Pope) suffered much persecution in the Soviet era," explained Dan Osborn. "As a lay missionary there in the early 1990s, I learned how priests of this underground Church had to celebrate the liturgy in forests and how millions of Ukrainians were put to death under Stalin."

"Ukraine has been and remains a land of martyrs and of heroic Christians who preserve their faith even in the midst of fierce persecution," he said. "Yuriy and Oksana continue

this powerful witness of the Ukrainian people."

Yuriy is quick to point out they like living in the U.S. and are careful to follow the law and ensure they are going about the immigration process properly.

"Because we don't know what will happen, it's kind of hard to plan. We had our plans, and we had our dreams and —"

Oksana interjected. "You're really afraid to have dreams, because in one moment, policemen can come and say, 'O.K., you need to move from here.'"

"We love this country, but for us, it's very hard all the time to be without any stability," Yuriy said.

The family's current immigration papers expire in June. The Chornyy family applied for a TPS extension, but their status — or when they will learn more — remains unclear.

"Oh, man, it's so complicated. And we had the baby here," Oksana said. "I cried for probably two months because we didn't have a house, we didn't have a car — nothing — and God sent me another baby.... But now, we have a house to rent, we have transportation and the kids are happy. So, with the baby, God blessed us more. But ... our baby is American. We are Ukrainians with TPS. Our baby can stay here, but maybe we cannot."

"Still," she added, "God is very good." †

St. Michael Young Adult Group

grows in faith and friendship



TAYLOR PIOTRKOWSKI is the coordinator for youth and young adult ministry for the Diocese of Saginaw and serves as the Vicariate 3 liaison.



DURING HIS TIME AT SAGINAW VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY, DOMINIC POLETTI EXPERIENCED THE VALUE OF FAITH-FILLED FRIENDSHIPS THROUGH ST. JOHN PAUL II CATHOLIC MINISTRIES, EVEN SERVING AS ITS PRESIDENT IN 2024-25.

The year culminated with a Testimony Night, where 50 young adults from three groups came together for a night of worship, Eucharistic adoration and sharing of testimonies.

“After this event, I received a text from Kelly Knieper asking

if once I graduated, I would be willing to take on a new challenge: building a [young adult group] from the ground up, instead of a preexisting group like JP2,” said the New Lothrop native who returned to the area after graduation.

With a core leadership team, including Cole Yaros and Kohen Andres, a young adult group formed at St. Michael Parish in Maple Grove. At first, the group was planned to bridge the gap for college ministry over the summer, but it soon became clear that the Holy Spirit had no intention of slowing down.

“I couldn’t be more grateful

for the opportunity here and those who have stepped up and came to make it a reality! Thank you to the Holy Spirit for truly showing up!” Dominic said. “This group has been a powerful testament to me. I know my faith has grown to see people ... show up with the same drive, the same hunger, to learn more about whatever we may be talking about.”

Landon Miller describes their gatherings as “a laid-back evening where friends and strangers get together to discuss their faith and learn about the Lord and the Bible, but also get to know each other.”

Raised in a Protestant denomination, Landon began coming when Dominic invited him, though he wasn’t sure what to believe. One week, the group studied the Rosary, which interested Landon. Dominic gave him an extra rosary to take home.

“The next day, I called him and was told that I was interrupting his Rosary,” he said. He used what we talked about and prayed the day before and decided to try it the next day!”

Landon said that he has started learning traditional Catholic prayers and he always leaves feeling fulfilled.

“This group has grown my interest and faith in the Lord,” he said. “Throughout the week, I find myself pondering the topics we discuss.”

One young couple, Seth and Austin Wendling, find the group to be a helpful follow-up to the Order of

Christian Initiation for Adults (OCIA) classes, which Austin recently completed with Seth as her sponsor.

For Seth, it has given him the opportunity to learn about the faith in which he was raised, a hunger that began while he went through OCIA classes.

Austin agrees they have grown in knowledge, but also in fellowship.

“I’ve learned more about the Faith as well as deepening my relationship with God, and [realized] that there are other people my age who have the same values and beliefs, as well as the same worries and struggles, too,” she said. “I’ve also strengthened relationships with good friends and made new friendships that I am unbelievably grateful for.”

Dominic expressed gratitude for St. Michael Parish of Maple Grove, which supports them by offering space and helping to set up a fundraiser. As the group continues to grow both in faith and size, the leaders hope they can add pilgrimages and service projects to their calendar.

“We hope to go wherever we are led to go by the Holy Spirit!” Dominic said.

For young adults wondering if they should join, Seth has a simple message: “Come out for a week, and you will want to come back for more!” †



FOLLOW ST. MICHAEL'S YOUNG ADULT GROUP ON INSTAGRAM

@st.michaelyoungadults
or join them on Tuesday nights at 6:30 p.m. at St. Michael Parish in Maple Grove.

Pope Leo's First Apostolic Exhortation: *Dilexi Te*



BY RACHEL ESPINOZA, SENIOR EDITOR, FAITH CATHOLIC

Pope Leo XIV's highly anticipated first apostolic exhortation, *Dilexi Te* (On Love for the Poor), was officially promulgated on the Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi, Oct. 4, 2025, and was released in English on Oct. 9. Often seen as a bellwether of the developing pastoral priorities of the new pontiff, here, Pope Leo calls all Christians to recognize that care for the poor is "the burning heart of the Church's mission." (DT 15)

THE WORK OF TWO POPES

As with *Lumen Fidei* (an encyclical co-authored by Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis), *Dilexi Te* includes the writings of two popes: Francis and Leo. Francis began writing this letter before his passing in April 2025, and Pope Leo completed the letter, adding some reflections of his own.

Notably, the letter draws upon the experiences and perspectives of its two authors. With Pope Francis previously serving as the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and with Pope Leo having served as a missionary in Peru during the 1980s and 1990s and later bishop of Chiclayo from 2015-23, the letter draws upon the rich theological reflection and social teaching found in the documents of the Conferences of Latin American Bishops. Acknowledging this profound influence, Pope Leo speaks to the Latin American Church's "strong sense of the ... need to identify with the poor" and advocate for their needs. (DT 89) With *Dilexi Te*, Leo is extending this same pastoral vision to the wider Church.



APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION
DILEXI TE
OF POPE LEO XIV
ON LOVE FOR THE POOR



**"A CHURCH THAT SETS
NO LIMITS TO LOVE, THAT
KNOWS NO ENEMIES TO
FIGHT BUT ONLY MEN AND
WOMEN TO LOVE, IS THE
CHURCH THAT THE WORLD
NEEDS TODAY."**

—DT 120

MAJOR THEMES

► GOD'S PREFERENTIAL LOVE FOR THE POOR

Dilexi Te is named after the opening words of the apostolic exhortation as it appears in Latin, meaning, "I have loved you." It begins by recalling God's preferential love for the poor, as it is revealed throughout the Scriptures, culminating in the Incarnation of Jesus. "Jesus identified himself 'with the lowest ranks of society' and ... with his love poured out to the end ... confirms the dignity of every human being, especially when 'they are weak, scorned, or suffering.'" (DT 2) Seeing God's complete love for and identification with the poor, we are called to imitate that love.

► ENCOUNTERING CHRIST IN THE POOR

Another theme present throughout *Dilexi Te* is the idea that the poor themselves mediate the very presence of Christ. In the Gospels, we see clearly that Jesus identifies with the poor: "Just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40) ... Contact with those who are lowly and powerless is a fundamental way of encountering the Lord of history. In the poor, he continues to speak to us." (DT 5) Quoting St. Augustine (founder of Pope Leo's Augustinian Order), the Holy Father writes, "For Augustine, the poor are not just people to be helped, but the sacramental presence of Christ." (DT 44)

► THE CENTER OF THE CHURCH'S MISSION

Dilexi Te includes numerous paragraphs recalling myriad saints who bore witness to the Gospel through their care for the poor. Speaking about this, Pope Leo writes, "I have chosen to recall the age-old history of the Church's care for the poor and with the poor in order to make clear that it has always been a central part of her life." (DT 103) "The Church, to be faithful to her vocation, must not only share the condition of the poor, but also stand at their side and work actively for their integral development." (DT 90) This call to raise our voices and to care for the poor is "a mandate that every Christian must daily take to heart." (DT 107)

► TRUE WORSHIP

Dilexi Te reminds us that we cannot authentically worship God while neglecting the poor. God, "the friend and liberator of the poor ... exhorts Israel to renew its worship from within, because one cannot pray and offer sacrifice while oppressing the weakest and poorest." (DT 17) Jesus' teaching shows that "one cannot love God without extending love to the poor. Love for our neighbor is proof of the authenticity of our love for God." (DT 26) Quoting a homily from St. John Chrysostom, we read: "Do not honor Christ's body here in church with silk fabrics, while outside you neglect it when it suffers from cold and nakedness.... Feed the hungry first, and only afterward adorn the altar with what remains." (DT 41) Therefore it follows that "charity is not optional but is a requirement of true worship." (DT 42)

► A CALL TO CONVERSION AND RENEWAL

Dilexi Te is a call to conversion. Far too often, Leo laments, it "becomes normal to ignore the poor and live as if they do not exist." (DT 93) Quoting Pope Francis' reflection on the Good Samaritan in *Fratelli Tutti*, we read, "Let us admit that, for all the progress we have made ... we have become accustomed to looking the other way, passing by, and ignoring situations until they affect us directly." (DT 105) This tendency, he says, is not only found in society, "but also in our Christian communities." (DT 107) For this reason, "Spiritual conversion [is] required of everyone." (DT 98) "I am convinced," Pope Leo writes, "that the preferential choice for the poor is a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society, if we can only set ourselves free from our self-centeredness and open our ears to their cry." (DT 7) †

JOHN D. L. HUMPHREYS HONORED AT RED MASS

Bishop Robert Gruss celebrated the Red Mass with members of the legal profession and their families on Oct. 16, at the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption in Saginaw.

The Edward J. McArdle Memorial Tribute was given to John D. L. Humphreys. The award is given each year to an individual for exceptional service in the legal profession and significant community contributions.

Michael Shovan presented the award. The lawyers and judges present were led by Honorable Noah Hood, Michigan Supreme Court Justice, in the renewal of the Lawyer's Oath.

The Red Mass is a 38-year tradition in the Diocese of Saginaw in collaboration with the Thomas More Society of Saginaw. The Red Mass is named for the red vestments worn by the clergy during this Mass of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the Mass is to call on Divine Guidance for lawyers and judges, to recognize the lawyer's fiduciary duty to client and court, to esteem the likes of St. Thomas More and all lawyers who have sacrificed in order to stand fast on ethical principles and to reaffirm the values of due process, integrity and conflict resolution.



HUNDREDS JOIN MARCH IN SOLIDARITY WITH MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

On Oct. 25, the Diocese of Saginaw, led by the Office of Multicultural Ministry, held a Solemn March and Misa Hispana (Hispanic Mass) in conjunction with the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, which was observed Oct. 4 and 5.

Approximately 200 faithful participants of all ages marched from the Dow Event Center to St. Joseph Parish of Saginaw in solidarity as a visible sign to the community that we as Catholics stand with migrants and refugees, the poor and the vulnerable.

"Everyone was peaceful, prayerful and respectful," said Deacon Larry Gayton, director of multicultural ministry. "Some people opted to pray the Rosary, led by the Damas de Guadalupe, as the march was proceeding. It truly was a moving experience that touched the hearts of many."

Following the march, the faithful gathered for the celebration of Holy Mass with Father Frank Voris, Father Stephen Blaxton and Deacon Bob Sasiela. The Rondalla of St. Joseph, led by Matt Fulgencio, provided the Mass music. This was another time of people being moved to tears. After the Mass, all were invited to a reception catered by Maria's Restaurant and live mariachi music presented by Ballet Folklórico Estudiantil y Mariachi of Flint.



DIOCESAN YOUTH FIND INSPIRATION AND FELLOWSHIP AT NCYC

BY JOHN GONZALEZ

What do you get when approximately 16,000 teenagers descend on Indianapolis for the National Catholic Youth Conference?

Crazy. Chaos. Connections. Communion.

That's what happened Nov. 20-22 at the Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium (home of the Indianapolis Colts) as youth from all over the country participated in the conference meant to foster prayer, community, evangelization and spiritual growth.

Pope Leo XIV even made a special, live appearance from Rome (a "digital encounter," it was called) to the thunderous approval of youth in the stadium and those watching on television and online all over the world.

And the Catholic Diocese of Saginaw was right in the middle of it all as some 114 attendees — including 81 youth and 33 chaplains, priests and deacons — attended seminars, live music performances, Mass,

reconciliation, Eucharistic adoration and more.

Bishop Robert Gruss greeted the youth who arrived on two buses, and he also attended several events and shared a meal with them. He was overall moved by the experience.

"To see young people in large masses praising the Lord inspires faith in others," he said.

"I also think that beautiful encounter with our Holy Father was something that these young people will never forget.... He was right there on the big screen, speaking their language and giving them a message of hope and encouragement."

Father Nate Harburg of Our Lady of Peace in Bay City, who joined the St. Catherine Parish youth group on the trip, said Pope Leo XIV's appearance

The following parishes were represented at the National Catholic Youth Conference:

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Midland; Blessed Trinity, Frankenmuth; Blessed Sacrament, Midland; Mary of the Immaculate Conception, St. Charles; Our Lady of Czestochowa, Bay City; Our Lady of Grace, Sanford; Sacred Heart, Mount Pleasant; Ss. Francis and Clare, Saginaw; St. Agnes, Freeland; St. Brigid, Midland; St. Catherine of Siena, Bay City; St. Dominic, Saginaw; St. Michael, Maple Grove and St. Vincent de Paul, Shepherd.

Clergy attending included

Bishop Robert Gruss, Father Nate Harburg, Father Daniel Christe, Father Christian Tabares, Father Suman Kondaveeti, Father Sunil Pallela, Father Richard John and Deacon Todd Lovas.

brought tears to his eyes, just as it did to the youth.

"One of the [other] highlights [for me] was hearing dozens of confessions of young people, some of whom had not been to confession in a long time," he added.

"Thank you [to] all who helped me and my friends have the opportunity to experience this," said Kaylee Radtke, a senior at Shepherd High School and member of St. Vincent de Paul Parish of Shepherd. "If I could go again, I would, if only to hear the echo of fifteen thousand people all saying 'Amen,' to the Lord Jesus Christ."



Commemorating the 350th anniversary of the region's first Catholic Mass

NOUVEL COMMUNITY CELEBRATES MASS AND RELATES CHEMISTRY PROJECT TO FATHER NOUVEL

On Dec. 3, 1675, a French missionary priest celebrated the first recorded Catholic Mass in the interior of Michigan's lower peninsula on Ojibway Island in what is now Saginaw.

On Dec. 3, 2025, students and staff gathered for Mass, just a few miles away from the site of that first Mass, in the school named for him: Nouvel Catholic Central (NCC) High School and Junior High.

Before the Mass commemorating the 350th anniversary of the first Mass, NCC teacher Meredith Adelman read a brief history of their school's namesake, Father Henri Nouvel, S.J.

"Centuries later, a Catholic school teacher would suggest Father Nouvel's name for Saginaw's unified high school. The first priest to serve our area was the inspiration for the school's name," Mrs. Adelman said. "It is a great sign of the everlasting nature of the Church that we stand here 350 years later offering the same sacrifice of the Mass."

In his homily, Father Pete drew connections between Father Nouvel, St. Francis Xavier (whose feast day is also Dec. 3) and the mission of each Catholic, reminding the students that we are all sent out just like these missionaries.

"We are sent every day into our homes, into this school, into our neighborhood, into our communities. You will draw people to the Lord by living kindness, compassion, mercy and joy every day," he said. "The word 'Mass' comes from the [Latin] word 'misa,' which means 'to be sent.' We gather to be sent every time we celebrate the Eucharist."

Following Mass, the 10th grade honors chemistry students had the opportunity to share a recent project related to Father Nouvel. This project began when teacher Dr. Jennifer Bieszke began working at Nouvel's high school and junior high campus this fall and was inspired to learn more about Father Nouvel and his mission. Dr. Bieszke previously taught STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) at Nouvel Catholic Central Elementary.

While studying physical properties of matter and density, Dr. Bieszke wanted to explore the topic experimentally.

"I just needed a purpose for their experiment, and so I took from the inspiration I gained from learning more about Father Nouvel," she said.

The students conducted an experiment on four substrates, or materials, to determine which one could be used to sculpt an image of Father Nouvel using a laser.

In this hypothetical sculpture, the density needed to be within a certain

range so that a laser would cut but not melt the substance. Using what they learned from their experiment and research of Father Nouvel, students were then asked to choose and explain which of four substances should represent him.

"It was my hope then that they, too, would learn what I learned about Father Nouvel and use this information for a purpose that is more than meeting a parameter but also had to represent the character of the man that their school was named for," Dr. Bieszke said.

Additionally, some students wrote a dedication and created an image of Father Nouvel for the monument that stands in his honor on Ojibway Island.

"I think the most overwhelming conclusion from this experiment was how most students used the stone substrate to represent Father Nouvel for his strength, faith and establishing a foundation in our community," she said. "It made me happy that my students found the same inspiration that I had."

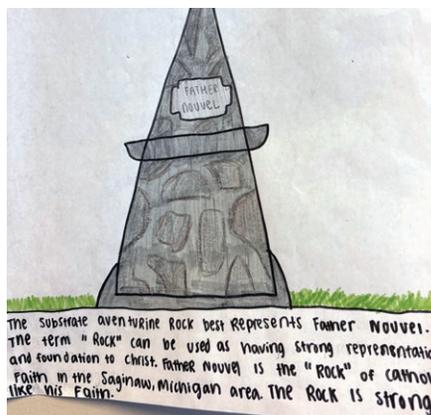
BISHOP GRUSS UNVEILS NEW PLAQUE ON OJIBWAY ISLAND

On Dec. 5, Bishop Robert Gruss gathered with chancery staff to unveil and bless a new plaque on Ojibway Island in Saginaw, commemorating the location of the Mass celebrated by Father Henri Nouvel on Dec. 3, 1675.

Bishop Gruss tied the missionary spirit of the 17th-century Jesuit to the Diocese of Saginaw's current missional values.

"[Father Nouvel and his companions] were ambitious for God and his kingdom. They had unshakable confidence in the lordship of Jesus, and the cross of Jesus was their friend," he said. "The pages of his journal reveal a man of great courage, with a serenity that nothing could disturb and with a remarkable, unworldly mind."

Please save the date for the commemoration of Father Nouvel's ministry on May 16 on Ojibway Island. The festivities will begin at noon and conclude with a 4 p.m. Mass celebrated by Bishop Gruss. Details will be shared in Great Lakes Bay Catholic and saginaw.org, and a feature story about Father Nouvel's missionary travels will be published in the summer.



INFORMATIONAL MEETING FOR MISSION TRIP TO LUKULU, ZAMBIA

Date and time: Jan. 11 at noon

Location: St. Agnes Catholic Church, 300 Johnson St., Freeland

Mission trip date: July 2026

For more information: If you are unable to attend this meeting, please contact Tom Slivinski at (989) 295-4213.

Are you ready to make a difference and share hope with others? We are excited to announce our upcoming mission trip through Love for Lukulu! Whether you're a seasoned traveler or new to missions, we welcome everyone with a heart to serve.

HOLY HOURS FOR VOCATIONS

All are invited to pray for vocations with Bishop Gruss.

Holy Hours are from 7 to 8 p.m.

Jan. 14: Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish, Midland

Jan. 28: St. Joseph Parish, Saginaw

Feb. 10: St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Bay City

Feb. 25: Blessed Trinity Parish, Frankenmuth

FIRST FRIDAYS WITH BISHOP GRUSS

Dates: Feb. 6

Presenter: Bishop Robert Gruss

Location: Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption, 615 Hoyt Ave. in Saginaw

Time: 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

Cost: \$8 for lunch, optional

To register: Online at saginaw.org/1stFridays or call (989) 799-7910. Registration is only needed for those attending the presentation and lunch.

Registration deadline: 4 p.m. the Wednesday before the event

Join Bishop Robert Gruss for Mass and an informal presentation. All are welcome to attend Mass without registering. A meatless lunch and informal presentation will follow at noon in the lower level of the Cathedral. Due to limited seating, please register online if you plan to attend the presentation and lunch.



WOMEN'S SILENT RETREAT

Date and time: 7 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 30, to noon on Sunday, Feb. 1

Location: Center for Ministry

Presenters: Mary Jo Kerlin, Jean Thiele and Stacey Trapani

Cost: \$190 for a private room, \$170 for a semi-private room or \$110 for a commuter. Registration includes five meals, snacks and beverages.

For more information: Contact Amy Dore at 989-797-6654 or adore@diosag.org

To register: Online or contact Amy Dore, above

Registration deadline: Jan. 23. Space is limited; please register early.

In peaceful silence, we hear the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit, inviting us to become the women God made us to be. During this silent retreat, there will be time to journal, express your creativity, experience silent prayer and participate in spiritual direction if you choose. Mostly we will rest in the presence of our loving Creator. New this year: Dinner will be offered Friday at 6 p.m. before the program begins at 7 p.m. If desired, participants may arrive as early as 1 p.m. for quiet time before the retreat begins. There will be an option to attend Mass at the Center for Ministry at 8 a.m.

EMMAUS RETREAT FOR GRIEVING PARENTS

Date: Saturday, March 29

Location: St. Catherine of Siena Parish, 2956 E North Union Road, Bay City

Time: 9:30 a.m.-7 p.m.

Cost: Free

To register: Contact Deacon Gary Patelski at 989-295-5849 or Arlene Patelski at 989-295-9908, or email gapatelski@aol.com

Registration deadline: Monday, March 24

Are you a parent who has lost a child and would appreciate support? Whether it happens through miscarriage, stillbirth or later in life, the death of a child is a deep and tragic loss for parents — and for their hopes and dreams for the future. No matter the age, cause of death or how much time has passed, the grief of losing a child weighs heavily on the hearts of parents. During this spiritual retreat, everyone is free to participate at their comfort level.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Children pose for a photo during Catholic Schools Week at St. Helen Catholic School in Saginaw in January 1978. *Photo courtesy of the Diocese of Saginaw Archives, Catholic Weekly Collection.*

FIVE SAINTLY NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

Considering making some New Year's resolutions? Developing healthy physical habits is always an admirable goal, but perhaps it's time to take it a step further and resolve to acquire a virtue or shed a vice in this new year. It is always helpful to look at the lives of the saints when examining our own faith journey. After all, saints were human beings who experienced the same struggles as we do to live their lives well each day and hear God's call for them. So let's glean some wisdom from our heavenly friends in order to take that first step in deepening our relationship with God.

1 MANAGE TIME WELL

St. Carlo Acutis | Carlo, a millennial saint who died when he was just 15, loved video games. However, he understood their dangers and so limited himself to playing only two hours per week. Instead, he focused on building relationships, spending time with family and friends and developing meaningful hobbies. He even taught himself coding to create a website dedicated to eucharistic miracles! The saintly teenager modeled moderation in the use of technology and can encourage us to consider how to be more intentional about focusing on the people God has placed in our lives.

2 SEE JESUS IN OTHERS

St. Teresa of Calcutta | Mother Teresa rescued the dying and destitute from the streets of Calcutta. She cared for patients suffering from AIDS, leprosy and other diseases with such tenderness that many commented they felt truly loved for the first time with the sisters of the Missionaries of Charity. What was Mother Teresa's secret? She saw Jesus in others. In this new year, let's take some time to reflect upon the people in whom we see Jesus and those in whom we struggle to do so. Let us pray for the grace to see the presence of Jesus in our daily encounters, and remember Mother Teresa's words that whatever we do for others, we do for Christ.

3 BEGIN YOUR DAY WITH GOD

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) |

As a former philosopher and later Carmelite nun, Edith Stein was accustomed to spending time in deep reflection. She once wrote that "the first hour of your day belongs to God." Just as Edith Stein began her day with God, we, too, can kickstart our day by intentionally giving God the day's first 10 or 15 minutes. Pray the morning offering, the Angelus, read the daily Mass readings if you can't make it to Mass, or simply ask God for his grace and help in the upcoming day.

4 PRACTICE ALMSGIVING

St. Martin of Tours | One night the Roman soldier encountered a shivering beggar on the streets of Amies, Gaul. Martin grabbed his sword, halved his cloak and gave it to the homeless man. Later, Martin dreamt of the beggar, who revealed himself to be Christ. Let us prayerfully consider how to be good stewards of our resources, and examine a particular resource each month (clothes, shoes, household items, money) to see how we can share them with the poor.



MARIA CINTORINO holds a degree in theology. Her writings have appeared in several publications including *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, *Our Sunday Visitor* and the *National Catholic Register*.

5 READ A SPIRITUAL BOOK

St. Ignatius of Loyola | A cannonball shattered the young Spanish soldier's leg, leaving him hospitalized for a year and ending his dreams of conquest. While recovering, Ignatius requested books on chivalry, but instead received a book of the Gospels and a book of the lives of the saints. Soon thereafter, his heroes were no longer military victors but rather holy men and women. Upon recovering, he changed his life and dedicated himself to God's service. Our lives, too, can be enhanced and enriched by spiritual reading. Choose a book to read and pray through this year — perhaps on a saint's life, a specific devotion or the Eucharist.

Whatever your new year's resolutions may be, seek the intercession of the saints! Invoke their aid and allow them to lead you closer to God. †

GROW

How is God calling *you*?

KEEP LISTENING

One of my favorite comic strips growing up was *Calvin and Hobbes*. At one point, my mom noticed I had started to act a bit too much like Calvin so she restricted my consumption of his adventures to one day a week. In one exchange, someone asks Calvin the classic question, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Naturally, Calvin rejects a common answer (fireman, astronaut, football player) and instead proudly proclaims, “A caveman!” As God’s children, we know God calls us to be someone “when we grow up,” but sometimes we can be just as confused or misguided as Calvin was.

GROW
as a disciple
of Jesus



PETE BURAK is the vice president of Renewal Ministries. He has a master’s degree in theology, and is a frequent speaker at events for youth and young adults.

Whether we are considering the universal call to holiness and mission, the discernment of our permanent vocations or simply the everyday invitations to follow God’s will, we often wish God would be more direct, obvious or lovingly “in our face.” It can feel as though He’s only teasing us with a glimpse of His will or

remaining silent and hidden.

While the Bible contains many, many examples of God directly communicating to people, one of my favorites is in the First Book of Samuel. (1 Sm 3:4-10) In the middle of the night, while lying in the house of the Lord, Samuel hears God calling his name. He mistakenly assumes it’s Eli because Scripture says Samuel did not yet know the Lord. Eli shoos him back to bed and this repeats itself a few times. Finally, Eli realizes what is happening and instructs Samuel to say these wonderful and eternal words: “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.”

While this may seem far out of reach or irrelevant to our lives today, Samuel’s disposition contains important lessons for those of us who consciously yearn to hear

God’s voice. First, we need to get to know Jesus, spend time with Him and quietly listen for Him to speak. Ironically, we may keep asking Jesus to speak but we don’t stop talking in order to hear Him. We talk *at* him, but don’t allow Him to talk to us. Especially when it comes to big life decisions such as the discernment of our vocation, we must learn to listen patiently, expectantly and without preconceived notions of *how* He should call us.

This month, spend some time intentionally listening for God’s call for your life — in both big and small matters — and begin each time with Samuel’s simple prayer, “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.” Let’s see what the Lord is calling us to be as we “grow up.” (Hint: it’s probably not a caveman!) †



THE MAGAZINE OF THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF SAGINAW
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