

THE WESTERN  
KENTUCKY



Catholic

CATÓLICO DE KENTUCKY OCCIDENTAL

January 2026 ● Volume 53 Issue 1 ● A Publication of the Diocese of Owensboro ● [westernkycatholic.com](http://westernkycatholic.com)



A path forward

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Girls smile while attending the National Catholic Youth Conference in downtown Indianapolis. A total of 260 attended from the Diocese of Owensboro. [Page 18](#)

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Fellow youths pray over Wesley Padgett, a parishioner of St. Stephen Cathedral in Owensboro, during the National Catholic Youth Conference in November 2025. (Riley Greif photo) [Page 18](#)

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Front page main photo by Riley Greif, *The Western Kentucky Catholic*.

## Submissions

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THE WESTERN KENTUCKY  **Catholic**

Official newspaper of the Diocese of Owensboro  
600 Locust Street, Owensboro, KY 42301

**Telephone** (270) 683-1545

**Email** [wkc.editor@pastoral.org](mailto:wkc.editor@pastoral.org)

**Publisher** Bishop William F. Medley

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**Layout** Rachel Hall

**USPS Publication Number:** 25732

**Publication Title:** THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

**ISSN:** 2996-8445 (Print edition)

**ISSN:** 2996-8453 (Online edition)

**Postage paid at Owensboro, KY 42301**

Published monthly, excluding summer break, 11 times a year.

**Postmaster, send changes to:** 600 Locust Street, Owensboro, KY 42301 phone: 270-683-1545

Member of the Catholic Media Association.

The Western Kentucky Catholic comes to your home as a direct use of your parish assessment dollars:



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# A Word From Bishop Medley: *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity an opportunity to rediscover our common ground*

*“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling.” – Ephesians 4:4*

Many Christian churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, have observed a time of reflection and prayer to consider Christ’s call that all may be one. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is Jan. 18-25 each year. First observed in 1908, it was ahead of its time, as the early twentieth century is not generally regarded as a time of significant ecumenical dialogue.

The mid-century however saw the Catholic Church undertake the Second Vatican Council to reassess the “signs of the times,” to include a broader outreach and embrace of multiple Christian denominations. There were Protestant leaders who were invited as observers to the Council. Thus a new era of ecumenism was inaugurated. That is not to say that the divisions within the Body of Christ have been healed. In fact, among many there is still hostility and mistrust.

The week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an annual occasion to remind the followers of Christ that it is his will that we be one, which may not mean everyone being in the same church and praying the same prayers every Sunday. The theme for this year from the letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians tells us, “there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling.”

Christian unity can have many manifestations. In November, Pope Leo made his first apostolic journey of his papacy to Turkey to visit Nicaea to observe the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. It

was at this council that early Church communities defined their common ground in the Nicene Creed. To this day, the dogmas and theology common of the many early churches were defined and for the most part to this day still bind us together.

The rupture of unity defines churches, but also society and culture. Moses had to address the divisions and disunity of the Israelites that he led through the desert to the Promised Land. Jesus with his 12 apostles had to confront their arguing and jealousies among themselves.

The ancient churches of East and West are fractured yet strive even to this day to identify their common ground in Jesus Christ. The era of the Reformation saw the churches of the West, traditionally seeing their focal point to be the pope as the successor to St. Peter, created divisions that still defy healing.

When as a pastor I engaged in marriage preparation for couples preparing to be married, I was particularly attentive to couples coming from different Christian traditions. I would ask their core religious beliefs and also ask what they thought were the main divisions between their churches. Often that may have centered on the sacraments, the meaning of the Holy Eucharist or reconciliation.

What I hoped they might grasp is that the beliefs and practices we share in common are more encompassing than those things that separate us. Now, this is not to say that our differences are not consequential. But I challenged these couples to model for our churches unity in Christ and to strive to live the heart of the Gospel and to show their



CNS PHOTO/VATICAN MEDIA  
Pope Leo XIV sits next to Cardinal Kurt Koch, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, as he poses for a photo with participants attending a conference on the ecumenical implications of the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in the Clementine Hall at the Vatican June 7, 2025.

children and the world what unity can look like.

In 2026 let us emphasize the “prayer” of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Most of us are not in a position to heal the divisions of East and West or the conflicts of Catholics and Protestants, but we can model charity and tolerance – and we can all pray that Christ’s prayer that all may be one will someday be fulfilled.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads “+ William F. Medley”.

**Most Reverend William F. Medley**  
**Diocese of Owensboro**

*Bishop Medley's calendar on following page*

BISHOP MEDLEY'S JANUARY 2026 CALENDAR	
Jan 2-4	SEEK – Columbus, Ohio
Jan 10	9 AM   Institution as Lector for Permanent Deacon Candidates – Brescia University, Owensboro
Jan 11-15	Region V Bishops' Retreat – New Orleans
Jan 18	8:30 AM   Confirmation – St. Edward Parish, Fulton
Jan 19	10 AM   Priest Personnel Meeting – McRaith Catholic Center (MCC), Owensboro
	1:30 PM   Priests' Council Meeting – MCC
Jan 20	8 AM   School Mass – St. Mary of the Woods Parish, Whitesville
Jan 21	Diocesan Staff Retreat Day
Jan 26	8 AM   School Mass – John Paul II School, Morganfield
	5 PM   Diocesan Finance Council Meeting – MCC
Jan 27	8 AM   School Mass – Sts. Peter and Paul School, Hopkinsville
Jan 28	9:45 AM   School Mass – St. Joseph School, Bowling Green
Jan 29	9 AM   School Mass – St. Romuald School, Hardinsburg

## Parish staff and pastors encouraged to hold on in Christ at Dec. 3 gathering



**RILEY GREIF**  
Parishioners of St. Michael Parish in Sebree visit booths in the lobby of The Bruce in Hopkinsville before the diocese's annual evangelization gathering, which was held Dec. 3.



**RILEY GREIF**  
Acclaimed Catholic speaker Mike Patin leads a presentation at The Bruce in Hopkinsville on Dec. 3, while participating in the Diocese of Owensboro's annual evangelization gathering for parishes.

BY ELIZABETH WONG BARNSTEAD, THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

On Dec. 3, 2025, the Diocese of Owensboro hosted its ninth annual evangelization gathering for pastors, parish staff, and volunteers at The Bruce Convention Center in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. The gathering featured acclaimed Catholic speaker, Mike Patin, who spoke on “Hope, Health, and Holding on in Christ.” Simultaneous Spanish translation was provided for those who requested it. The day also included morning prayer, led by the diocese’s newest priest, Fr. Conrad Jaconette; opportunities for fellowship and sharing; and lunch. New this year was an expo area in the lobby, where diocesan offices were set up to greet guests and advertise their various ministries. The six parish locations that served as Jubilee of Hope pilgrimage sites in 2025 were also honored and presented with commemorative plaques. This year, 275 people registered, with 52 priests and deacons and six religious sisters. Fifty-one parishes were represented, as well as the staff of Brescia University, Holy Name of Jesus School in Henderson, the Newman Centers at Murray State University and Western Kentucky University, and Gasper River Catholic Youth Camp and Retreat Center. ■



ELIZABETH WONG BARNSTEAD | WKC  
Bishop William F. Medley speaks on Dec. 3, 2025 at The Bruce in Hopkinsville, during the Diocese of Owensboro's annual evangelization gathering.




ELIZABETH WONG BARNSTEAD | WKC

Fr. Basilio Az Cuc, parochial vicar of St. Thomas More Parish in Paducah, participates in morning prayer on Dec. 3, 2025, during the Diocese of Owensboro's annual evangelization gathering.

Catholic Men's Conference  
of Western Kentucky

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Fr. Larry McIndoe

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& HOLINESS**  
*women's retreat*  
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DOORS OPEN 8:00AM  
PROGRAM 9:00-2:30  
**ST. ANN PARISH HALL  
MORGANFIELD KY**



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\$30  
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## Happy anniversary to the following priests:

**Fr. J. Patrick Reynolds**

**Ordained 1/12/1980**

Pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Owensboro

**Fr. Brad Whistle**

**Ordained 1/10/1981**

Pastor of St. Paul Parish in Princeton, and St. Mark Parish in Eddyville

**Fr. Tony Stevenson**

**Ordained 1/10/1981**

Retired

**Fr. Ken Mikulcik**

**Ordained 1/10/1998**

Pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Russellville, and Sacramental Minister for St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Todd County

**Fr. Anthoni Ottagan**

**Ordained 1/8/2003**

Pastor of St. Edward Parish in Fulton, St. Jude Parish in Clinton, and Sacred Heart Parish in Hickman

**Fr. Shijo Vadakumkara**

**Ordained 1/17/2004**

Pastor of St. William Parish in Knottsville, and St. Lawrence Parish in St. Lawrence/Philpot

**Fr. Suneesh Mathew**

**Ordained 1/2/2008**

Pastor of St. Paul Parish in Leitchfield, and St. Elizabeth Parish in Clarkson

**Fr. Sinoj Pynadath, HGN**

**Ordained 1/6/2008**

Pastor of St. Denis Parish in Fancy Farm and St. Charles Parish in Bardwell

# Catholic dioceses and schools confront \$800 million pension fund shortfall:

*Christian Brothers Services is asking Catholic institutions to sharply increase their pension contributions to cover the shortfall – a cost some say they cannot absorb*

BY MATTHEW MCDONALD, THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC REGISTER

Several U.S. dioceses and scores of other Catholic employers have hard choices to make amid an \$800 million shortfall in a pension fund, managed by a Catholic financial services firm, for thousands of their employees and retirees.

The firm, Christian Brothers Services, a nonprofit company sponsored by the De La Salle Christian Brothers, has asked its clients to dramatically boost their contributions to the fund to make up the difference – a major added expense some employers say they can't absorb.

“Christian Brothers Services is requiring the diocese to contribute over \$2 million annually for the next 25 years – an amount that is not feasible for the diocese,” the Diocese of New Ulm, Minnesota, said in a statement Nov. 12.

Christian Brothers Services, based in Romeoville, Illinois, provides what it calls “retirement services” for about 40,000 employees, according to the company's website. The pension shortfall affects “more than 180 member organizations,” according to a memo from the Diocese of St. Cloud, Minnesota, one of the firm's clients.

New Ulm Bishop Chad Zielinski echoed the grave concerns of other dioceses, Catholic employers, and their current and past employees.

“These dedicated individuals have devoted their lives to serving the Church,” Bishop Zielinski said in the written statement. “We are committed to achieving the best possible resolution in this very serious matter.”

As of July 1, 2025, Christian Brothers Services reported an \$800 million gap between assets on hand (about \$1.55 billion) and the liability for pension payments (about \$2.35 billion), according to a company brochure. The firm blames the shortfall on changes in the financial climate and an increase in the ratio of retirees to active employees. The underfunding means the pension fund has only about 66% of the assets needed to cover projected payments. That's well below the 80% benchmark often cited as a minimum for a healthy pension fund – a threshold some experts challenge, arguing that 100% or more is a better standard.

Sam Hartmann, a partner of Quantum Pensions Solutions, a Florida-based company, told the Register he is advising more than a dozen Catholic schools that currently have or recently had pension funds managed by Christian Brothers Services. Most of them are in Minnesota, where he is, but others are in the Southeast, Midwest and West Coast.

The demographics problem that Christian Brothers Services cited is real, Hartmann said – the pension plan has far more participants drawing on it or otherwise covered by it than it does active

employees contributing to it.

But that ratio isn't the only problem, he said.

“You can't just blame it on demographics now, as this issue has not just emerged overnight,” Hartmann said. “There's been a sustained downward trend in the active participants' share of the liability.

He said some of the schools he is advising are being asked by Christian Brothers Services to contribute two to three times their current payments over the next 25 years, just to make up the unfunded liability.

One school, he said, is facing a 178% jump in its contribution to the pension fund this year, followed by steady yearly increases through July 1, 2028, when the increase over last year's pension payments will total 250%.

“We've talked to schools where they're being blindsided by significant contribution increases,” Hartmann said. “That's not something a lot of these schools are equipped to handle, and so they're facing some very difficult decisions right now.”

The schools' options are limited to contributing much more to the pension plan than they do now, hoping for large unanticipated increases in investment returns, or reducing pension benefit payouts to retirees.

He said three of his clients have spun off their own pension plans, and two others are considering

*Continues on page 7*

## **Shortfall continued from page 6**

doing so — even though that’s not something most schools see themselves as equipped to do.

### **How did it happen?**

Christian Brothers Services, founded in 1960 by a De La Salle Christian Brother and headquartered about 30 miles southwest of Chicago, has been providing pension plans for Catholic institutions for more than 60 years. The company also provides health plans, risk management and consulting.

Through 2007, the year before the financial crisis, the firm’s pension plan was more than 100% funded, company officials said in a video released earlier this year. At one point, the plan even increased payments to retirees.

But since then, a gap has developed between assets and liabilities.

“In 2007, the plan was overfunded. We did what most plans in that situation did — we increased benefits. Shortly after that, the market conspired against us,” said David Enenbach, a member of the Employer Retirement Plan Board of Christian Brothers Services, in the company video.

When the value of the Standard & Poor’s 500 stock market index dropped 37% in 2008, it hit the pension fund hard.

“That took our funded status from over a hundred, combined with an increase in benefits, to something in the low 70s. We bounced around in the years since then, but have never fully recovered from that setback,” Enenbach said.

Christian Brothers Services has also said that its pension plan lost about \$149 million in early 2020 because of what it described as reckless investments by a German investment management firm, Allianz Global Investors, which led the Christian Brothers Employee Retirement Plan to sue Allianz Global in federal court in September 2021. The lawsuit was

settled in February 2022 with undisclosed terms, so it is unclear how much of its losses Christian Brothers recouped.

But in a recent statement to the Register, the company didn’t cite the investment losses of five and a half years ago as a factor in the current funding shortfall, instead pointing to the 2008 financial crisis and upside-down demographics, with far fewer active employee contributors to the pension plan than retirees drawing on it.

An actuarial report provided to employers by Christian Brothers Services says that as of July 1, 2024, the pension plan had 15,111 active employees, 7,717 participants separated from the company or disabled, and 17,244 retirees or beneficiaries, for a total of 40,072 participants. That means only about 38% of the plan’s participants are active employees contributing to the fund.

Promised future pension payments to active employees make up only about 27% of the pension fund’s liability — meaning the total value of projected monthly pension payments to all participants during retirement. Employers are currently contributing to the fund only for active employees, based on a percentage of payroll.

Earlier this year, the company informed members with so-called defined benefit plans — which provide a lifetime monthly pension to retirees — that the fund the company manages is not on track to provide the previously projected payments into the future.

Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, one of the affected clients, says it received a notification on July 3, followed by more detailed information in midsummer and a meeting with Christian Brothers Services in mid-August.

Contacted by the Register recently about the pension fund shortfall, Christian Brothers Services

provided a written statement citing what it called “significant headwinds” beyond the company’s control, including “the Great Recession of 2008” and “shifting demographic trends,” and said the firm has kept employers informed about the situation.

“The Pension Board has consistently responded with thoughtful modifications, taking responsible action with both employers and participants in mind,” said Terry Arya, chief marketing officer of Christian Brothers Services, by email, referring to the body that oversees the pension fund the firm manages.

The statement says the significant increases in employer contributions are necessary to meet projected pension liabilities.

“This represents a significant change to the funding levels required for our pension members — however, it is a necessary step to strengthen the financial health of the pension fund and is designed to bring the plan to full funding in 25 years. Christian Brothers Services is committed to working with pension member organizations to work through this transition and identify the pension plan options that best meet their needs moving forward,” the company’s statement says.

Hartmann, a pension risk actuary who is advising some of the affected Catholic schools, told the Register that the Christian Brothers Services pension fund didn’t make much headway in reducing the funding shortfall between July 1, 2022, and July 1, 2024. The fund went from 67% funded to 66% funded during those two years — a period when the value of the Standard & Poor’s 500 stock market index jumped more than 40%.

“It was kind of staggering to see that there was very little progress made in the funded position,” Hartmann said.

### **Shortfall coming**

*Continues on page 8*

## *Shortfall continued from page 7*

The pension funding problem is not immediately affecting retirees at Catholic institutions such as Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, where officials say no benefits are currently affected. But the long-term outlook is concerning, because the school's pension plan is only 58% funded.

A 1,500-word document addressing questions about the school's pension plan that Saint Mary's provided to the Register outlines three options, none of them ideal. One is to remain in the Christian Brothers Services pension plan, "which requires significantly increased contributions from the school to reduce the underfunding," the document says. Another is to withdraw from the plan, "which entails a significant fee," according to the document. A third is to spin off an individual pension plan that the school would operate.

Saint Mary's University officials say they won't decide until midwinter or early spring. The deadline for deciding is May 2026, Hartmann told the Register.

"At this time, no decision has been made to reduce benefits, and we do not have plans to cut benefits while our review is underway. We also don't yet have an independent basis to state whether any group (retirees, terminated-vested, or active employees) is at risk of not receiving full benefits," the Saint Mary's document states.

"Before reaching conclusions, we've engaged an external firm to assess the plan using primary data (actuarial valuations, plan design provisions, contribution history, and investment performance versus policy benchmarks and peers). Until that analysis is complete, it would be premature to speculate," the document continues.

Saint Mary's University of Minnesota is associated with the De La Salle Brothers, as is Lewis University in suburban Chicago, which is encountering a similar

problem and has hired a consulting firm to make recommendations. Question-and-answer sessions, both in person and online, have been offered for employees, said Kathrynne Skonicki, executive director for public relations and communications, by email.

### **What can employees do?**

The legal options for employees of Catholic institutions worried about their pensions are limited.

Norman Stein, a law professor at Drexel University who serves as a legal and policy consultant at the Pension Rights Center, explained to the Register that participants in church pension plans, such as the one offered by Christian Brothers, do not have the same kinds of federal protections that private pension plans have.

According to Stein, the only recourse for participants in church pension plans that fail to pay promised benefits is to sue their employer — a diocese or religious organization — under state law.

When Congress passed the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (also known as ERISA), an exemption was made for religious organizations, so they are not subject to federal pension laws unless they elect to be covered. That means participants in a church pension fund are not protected by the federal pension insurance program and may see their pension disbursements stopped altogether if the plan is underfunded.

Private pension plans are required to pay premiums to the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC), which pays benefits when a covered pension plan fails to pay its promised benefits. Religious organizations with church plans do not pay premiums to the PBGC. With private pension plans, the PBGC can take over terminated pension plans when they are underfunded and seek to recover assets from the

companies that sponsored them.

The PBGC can also take over as trustee of a private pension plan covered by ERISA and make pension payments directly if the private plan has failed. But pension plans of religious institutions aren't covered.

"Church plans are not subject to ERISA, which means that there are no funding standards. It means that the plan could cut benefits basically whenever it wants under federal law," Stein said.

When a church pension plan fails to pay out its promised benefits, the only legal recourse participants might have, he said, would be to sue under state law.

Stein explained that suing a church pension plan — or the diocese or religious organization that sponsors it — under state law is far more difficult than seeking redress against a private pension plan that is covered under ERISA. Some plans, he said, may include a stipulation that the sponsor is not legally liable if the fund is inadequately funded.

Christian Brothers Services did not immediately respond Tuesday to a request by the Register for a copy of a pension plan the company manages.

The costs of waging such a legal challenge would also be prohibitively expensive, he said. And even if the plaintiffs were successful, it would not necessarily result in a payout.

"When you are talking about underfunding that's this large, even if you could make a case against the appropriate parties, you still have the problem that a judgment is only as good as the resources of the people that you've sued and have found liable," Stein said. ■

*Register senior writer Zelda Caldwell contributed to this story.*

*This story originally ran in The National Catholic Register and has been reprinted with permission.*

## Prioritizing retirees and employees, diocese discusses path forward

■ As the Diocese of Owensboro confronts the serious shortfall in funding for its lay employees' pension fund, Bishop William F. Medley said, "Our number one priority is to assure that the commitment made to our retirees and present and future employees will be honored. This might include consideration of other pension models in the future, but for now we have to repair what is presently before us."

■ Christian Brothers Services notified their clients this year that the longstanding pension plan has continued to be underfunded since the 2008 economic crisis, resulting in a \$800 million shortfall in Christian Brothers' pension fund. Out of that \$800 million, the Diocese of Owensboro's pension plan is experiencing a \$30 million shortfall. As a result, additional funding over and above the normal year-to-year contributions will need to be made.

■ Bishop Medley and diocesan leadership are exploring other dioceses' responses to restore funding over a 25-year period to continue honoring and maintaining diocesan commitment to its lay workers.

■ "Our diocesan administration, with professional consultation, is devising several strategies to accomplish our goal of remedying this problem," said the bishop. "The one common feature of these proposals is that any of them will require sacrifice."



ELIZABETH WONG BARNSTEAD | WKC  
Raymond T. Purk (left) and Bishop William F. Medley speak to a gathering of priests, diocesan and parish staff, parishioners and others during a Dec. 11, 2025 regional meeting held at St. Pius X Parish in Owensboro on the topic of Christian Brothers Services' financial shortfall impacting the Diocese of Owensboro. This meeting was the last of a series of meetings held at different locations to inform the people of the diocese of the situation.

■ Diocesan employees have participated in the pension plan since 1985, and diocesan priests – who are less impacted by these shortfalls – were brought into the plan in 2012. The plan covers over 1,500 diocesan participants (retirees, beneficiaries, terminated vested, disabled and actives). Nationwide, the Christian Brothers plan covers some 180 employers (other dioceses, religious orders, independent schools) and 40,000 participants.

■ Bishop Medley and diocesan leadership, with guidance from the diocesan finance council and the priests' council, held a series of synodal listening sessions across the diocese to discuss the underfunding situation and to gain input from school principals, priests, parishioners, parish staff, and parish finance councils.

■ The bishop emphasized that a final decision has not been made and conversations will continue. It is hoped that a plan can be enacted within the first quarter of 2026 as parishes and schools are planning their budgets for the upcoming year.

## A prayer for those who work

BY WKC STAFF

*Editor's note: In the evening of Dec. 4, 2025, Fr. Anthony Shonis, a priest of the Diocese of Owensboro, offered the prayer before the Christmas dinner for the Tri-County Council of Labor, AFL-CIO, in Henderson, Kentucky. Below is the text of his prayer.*

Dear God, as we look back over this past year, we are grateful for all the ways you have blessed the Tri-County Labor Council with good leadership and a spirit of solidarity. The struggles of organized labor never end, but we pause this evening to thank you for our jobs and to be mindful of all our union brothers and sisters who have been killed at their on the job. Bless the food you have given us this evening, those who have harvested it, those who have transported it and those who have served it to us. We pray for the nation as for our president and we pray for all workers in our country especially the most vulnerable. Help us never to falter in the struggle for worker justice. Amen. ■



COURTESY OF KEVIN WALTON  
Fr. Anthony Shonis offers the prayer before the Christmas dinner for the Tri-County Council of Labor, AFL-CIO, in Henderson, Kentucky, on Dec. 4, 2025.

## New beginnings: Time to reflect and pray

BY DR. JEFF ANDRINI, EVANGELIZATION & DISCIPLESHIP

Happy New Year! We are so blessed as Catholics that we have a way of life that works. Seriously, we know we can trust in God for everything and that as we look over our lives, we can see the hand of God leading and guiding our every step.

Have you ever been to a flea market? I worked at the Midwest's largest flea market in St. Charles, Ill., and wow, the stuff you see from kitchen sinks to socks. This is a true story of man in California who went to a flea market. He purchased a stone the size of a baseball for \$10. He was a rock collector and took it home to polish it. Turns out, what he bought for \$10 was worth \$6 million about 30 years ago. It was the world's largest blue star sapphire at the time. What a tragedy! The poor guy selling rocks at a flea market could have retired right on the spot.

A greater tragedy is that many Catholics and former Catholics (if there is such a thing), never found a living relationship with God in the Catholic Church. Many have drifted away, because they did not realize where God was in their life and they may not have felt close to God. In fact, many active Catholics go to Mass, but cannot articulate a personal relationship with God.

God is closer to you than the air you breathe. God is present in our lives in so many ways and longs for us to experience his love and leading every minute of every day. While we move away from God as we allow sin to separate us, we can go to the sacrament of reconciliation and be absolved of our sins and brought back into right relationship.

Here's the invitation: reflect and pray. Where is God

in your life today? What do you need from the Lord? How do you see God working around you? As Americans, our greatest failure is our busyness. We keep going on the treadmill of life from one activity to the next. If we slow down, we may even feel guilty, but being human we must have time to rest, rejuvenate and pray.

Do not let prayer be another thing you do. Don't just go to Mass or say your prayers and check the boxes. Rather, slow down, and, as is attributed to Native American philosophy, "let your soul catch up with your body." Take some quiet time and listen to God. In the silence of our hearts God speaks.

I am going on retreat to the Cedars of Peace in Loretto, Kentucky, from Jan. 3-6, as a special time to listen – but every day I do my best to have time with the Lord. I invite you to do the same in 2026! If you are looking for a retreat, small group or adult faith formation opportunity, email me at [jeff.andrini@pastoral.org](mailto:jeff.andrini@pastoral.org). ■

Peace in Christ,

Jeff

*Dr. Jeff Andrini is the director of the Office of Evangelization and Discipleship.*



ELIZABETH WONG BARNSTEAD | WKC

The Blessed Sacrament is seen in a monstrance during Adoration at Gasper River Catholic Youth Camp and Retreat Center in Bowling Green in the evening of June 11, 2025.

### Tribunal Explains

#### Do You Have Questions About the Declaration of Invalidity (Annulment) Process?

In an effort to minister to the people of western Kentucky, the Marriage Tribunal is giving you an opportunity to submit any questions you may have about the declaration of invalidity (annulment) process directly to their office. Questions will be answered in upcoming issues of The Western Kentucky Catholic.

Please submit your questions either by email to [tribunal@pastoral.org](mailto:tribunal@pastoral.org) or in writing and mailed to Louanne Seibert, Tribunal, Diocese of Owensboro, 600 Locust Street, Owensboro, KY 42301.

# Called to something better

BY DCN. JAY W. VANHOOSIER, OFFICE OF FAITH FORMATION

As a new year begins, I find myself reflecting – perhaps more than I’d like – on the state of political discourse in our country. Like many, I’ve spent a significant amount of time watching debates, reading commentary, and listening to conversations that seem to grow sharper and more divisive with each passing week. The anger, suspicion, and harshness that have settled into our national vocabulary leave me saddened. They weigh on the heart.

But as Christians, we are never left without hope, nor without a clear calling. If anything, the strained climate around us is a reminder of what discipleship truly asks of us. The tone of our nation may rise and fall, but Christ’s standard remains the same: “Love one another as I have loved you.” This command is not suspended during election seasons, nor weakened by disagreement. It stands as a steady light in a time of confusion.

Our faith teaches us that every human being – regardless of political position, ideology, or affiliation – is made in the image and likeness of God. When we forget this, it becomes easy to reduce others to labels or opponents. But when we remember it, our vision clears. We see the person before us not as an obstacle, but as a brother or sister whom Christ loves, for whom Christ died, and in whom Christ is present.

This does not mean ignoring real differences. Nor does it require silence on issues that matter deeply. But it does call us to a different way of engaging. Our conversations, whether around a dinner table, in a parish hallway, or online, are meant to be marked by patience, truthfulness, gentleness, and humility. These virtues do not weaken our witness; they strengthen it. They make our convictions credible.

St. Paul urges us to “speak the truth in love.” Both elements are essential. Truth without love becomes harshness. Love without truth becomes sentimentality. But together, they reveal the face of Christ. And the face of Christ always brings peace, always restores dignity, always calls forth the best in us.

As we enter this new year, perhaps this is a grace worth praying for: that our responses – especially when tensions rise – might reflect the One we follow. That we might resist the temptation to mirror the hostility around us, and instead become instruments of unity, compassion, and hope.

The world does not need more noise. It needs more witnesses – ordinary disciples who choose the narrow path of charity even when it is difficult. This is not beyond our reach. The Holy Spirit equips us for it. Our parishes can model it. Our homes can nurture it. And our personal choices, small as they may seem, can gradually transform the atmosphere around us.

So, as another election year unfolds, let us remember who we are. Let us speak and act as people claimed by Christ. Let us treat others with the love, respect, and dignity that He shows to each of us.

In doing so, we do more than elevate political discourse. We proclaim the Gospel. ■

*Dcn. Jay W. VanHoosier is the director of faith formation for the Diocese of Owensboro.*




CNS PHOTO/LOLA GOMEZ  
Pope Leo XIV passes an American flag as he greets visitors and pilgrims from the popemobile while riding around St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican before his weekly general audience Sept. 17, 2025.

**MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.  
DAY  
COMMUNITY MARCH & CELEBRATION**



**Monday, January 19, 2026**

8:00 AM gather for ceremonial march in north parking lot at OHS. March will begin at 8:30 AM. Program begins at 9:00 AM Brescia University



**Theme: Strength In Unity:  
Human Rights  
in the Present**

**Speaker:  
Dr. Roger Cleveland,  
President  
Millennium Learning  
Concepts**

# Owensboro Catholic High School celebrates dedication of Our Lady of the Assumption Chapel

## PRESS RELEASE

Owensboro, KY – On Dec. 12, 2025, Owensboro Catholic High School gathered for a dedication service led by Bishop Medley to officially open the new Our Lady of the Assumption Chapel.

Thanks to the incredible generosity of its community, the school is proud to announce the completion of this transformative project. The second part of this project, the practice facility, is also nearing completion. While serving different purposes, both projects share a common goal—to support the growth and development of every student in mind, body, and spirit.

### **Our Lady of the Assumption Chapel**

What was once a small gymnasium has been beautifully transformed into a sacred, permanent space for worship. Every student now visits the chapel at least once per week, with many returning multiple times. The chapel provides a peaceful setting for prayer, reflection, and the celebration of the sacraments, placing faith at the heart of the school's mission to form disciples of Christ. Principal George Powell says, "We are very excited to have our chapel project completed. This space will allow us to dive deeper into sacramental life and let students become closer to God. The chapel will now allow us to have mass in a more reverent space

and have students more engaged as we celebrate the Eucharist."

### **New practice facility**

To support extracurricular programs displaced during the chapel renovation, the school is finishing

Natalie Hayden. When funding for the chapel initially fell short, a group of dedicated donors stepped forward to assist the advancement office, raising the remaining \$1 million in just one month.

Honoring its heritage, Owensboro Catholic High School, originally named Assumption High School in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, entrusted the project to Our Lady, praying a nine-day novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Following this, parents offered a second nine-day novena to St. Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows, the patron saint of students. The fundraising goal was met on the Feast Day of St. Gabriel, Feb. 27, marking a moment of gratitude and celebration for the school community.

Together, these two projects represent a \$2.4 million investment in the future of Owensboro Catholic High School. Our Lady of the Assumption Chapel nurtures the soul through worship and the sacraments, while the new practice facility supports physical growth, discipline, and

teamwork—both essential to forming well-rounded students.

### **A heartfelt thank you**

Owensboro Catholic High School thanks its community for helping build a strong foundation for the next generation. These spaces will serve students for decades to come. ■



COURTESY OF CLARE CLARK

Bishop William F. Medley pours chrisam on the altar of the new Our Lady of the Assumption Chapel at Owensboro Catholic High School on Dec. 12, 2026, while consecrating the worship space.

up construction of a steel prefabricated practice facility. The facility will primarily serve the band, along with athletics and student programs that enrich life beyond the classroom.

### **Community support and prayerful effort**

The projects were made possible through a focused fundraising campaign led by Director of Advancement



COURTESY OF CLARE CLARK

Students, faculty and staff fill Our Lady of the Assumption Chapel at Owensboro Catholic High School on Dec. 12, 2026, for the dedication of the brand-new chapel.

## BUILDING A FAMILY OF FAITH

Workshops brought to you by the Diocese of Owensboro

- Tools for every age & stage
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## Catholic Schools Week

Catholic Schools  
United in Faith and Community

January 25 - 31

***Excellence in education.***

***Rooted in faith.***

***Forming future leaders.***



Catholic Schools  
DIOCESE OF OWENSBORO

## Trinity and St. Mary of the Woods break ground on new school facility



RILEY GREIF | WKC

The groundbreaking for the new school facility for Trinity High School and St. Mary of the Woods School in Whitesville takes place on Dec. 5, 2025.

BY JOHN KIRKPATRICK, THE OWENSBORO TIMES

Hundreds of students, staff members, community leaders, and elected officials gathered Friday morning to celebrate the groundbreaking of a new joint facility that will house both Trinity High School and St. Mary of the Woods School.

The event marked a significant milestone in a years-long capital campaign, with faith leaders calling it both a bold step toward the future and a testament to the sacrifices of generations past.

“It was in the year 2022 that we began our capital campaign, ‘Together We Can!’ to raise the funds necessary to build a new school,” said Rev. Brian Roby, pastor of St. Mary of the Woods Church. “Our present school buildings were built in the 1950s and 1960s. While they have served us well, we recognized that it was time to invest in the future.”

To date, more than \$12.3 million has been pledged, and approximately \$8 million is already in hand. Roby said another \$5 million is still needed to fully complete the \$17 million project.

The new school will be located on a 10-acre site across Franklin Street from the current campus. Phase 1 of construction, set to begin in early 2026, will focus on the full buildout of the St. Mary of the Woods wing, administrative spaces, and shared areas such as a media center, cafeteria, and gym. Phase 2 will include additional gym space, the Trinity High School wing, and an auditorium.

“This is our moment, our opportunity to make an eternal difference in the lives of children, youth, and adults as we build on the hopes and dreams of previous generations,” Roby said. “They sacrificed much to give our children, and many of you who are now adults, the opportunity of forming your faith and preparing educationally for the future you enjoy

today. Now it’s our turn.”

Principal Emily Hernandez said the new campus will carry on a 147-year legacy of Catholic education in Whitesville. She said the journey to get to this point has not been easy, but the support of the community made it possible.

“This community has always understood the importance of these schools in shaping the future of our Church and our community,” she said. “You have shown once again that nothing is impossible with God.”

Hernandez said the schools have long since outgrown their current buildings, citing outdated classrooms and limited space as key challenges.

“There was a time when 54 first-grade students were packed into one room with one teacher,” she said. “We’re committed to providing a better learning environment for our students.”

The new facility will feature preschool classrooms

*Continues on page 15*

Groundbreaking continued from page 14



RILEY GREIF | WKC

Students and teachers attend the Dec. 5, 2025 groundbreaking for the new facility that will house Trinity High School and St. Mary of the Woods School in Whitesville.

that meet 21st-century learning standards, as well as expanded spaces for music, drama, agriculture, and science. Outdoor amenities will include playgrounds, gathering areas, and a greenhouse for the growing FFA program.

Hernandez encouraged the crowd to continue supporting the campaign financially and spiritually.

“Let us remain committed to doing our part,” she said. “Let us continue to pray. Let us continue to give. Let us continue to go all in for Christ by investing in the spiritual, academic, and personal growth of our young people, both those here now and those who will walk these halls in generations to come.”

Friday’s event featured songs from students and remarks from several leaders in the Diocese of Owensboro, as well as local officials. A long list of Steering Committee members was thanked for their efforts in getting the project off the ground. ■

*This story originally ran in Owensboro Times and has been reprinted with permission.*

## Paducah parishioner earns Eagle Scout Award

BY SHERI BABBS, SPECIAL TO THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

Andrew “Drew” Byrne was awarded his Eagle Scout Award on Nov. 11, 2025, at St. Thomas More Parish in Paducah, Kentucky.

Drew served as the chaplain’s aid of Scouting America Troop 2007 and organized religious activities for the troop including the annual Stations of the Cross walk during Lent, a rosary during October, and Mass on campouts.

Drew has earned all the Catholic Religious Emblems offered by the National Catholic Committee of Scouting from Cub Scouting through Scouting America including the prestigious Pope Pius XII. He earned 3 bronze, 2 silver, and 3 gold palms for a total of 64 merit badges.

Drew is a member of St. Thomas More Parish and is the son of Paul and Shelley Byrne. Drew’s Eagle Project was constructing, installing, and stocking a “Little Library” for Ballard Memorial Preschool in LaCenter, Kentucky. ■



COURTESY OF ST. THOMAS MORE  
Andrew “Drew” Byrne recites the Scout’s Promise while receiving his Eagle Scout Award on Nov. 11, 2025. Byrne is a member of St. Thomas More Parish in Paducah, Kentucky.



**Lent 2026 Program:**

### Deepening Our Prayer Life: Advice from the Four Saint Teresas

All are invited to join Ursuline Sister Cheryl Clemons, Ph.D., for a Day of Prayer and Reflection during Lent. She will offer insights on prayer from Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), and Saint Teresa of Calcutta. The day will include quiet prayer and reflection and small group sharing. Lunch will be provided. The fee is \$60. Sister Cheryl has extensive training in theology, Scripture, spirituality and spiritual direction.

**Saturday, March 28**

**9:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m.**

**Maple Hall, Mount Saint Joseph**

**Sign up online:**

[ursulinesmsj.org/calendar](https://ursulinesmsj.org/calendar)



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of Mount Saint Joseph

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COURTESY OF AMY ROACH

On Nov. 23, the middle schoolers of St. Mary of the Woods Parish in Whitesville gather to watch the recording of Pope Leo XIV's virtual conversation with the National Catholic Youth Conference, which had taken place a few days earlier in Indianapolis.

## Middle school youth gather to learn about Pope Leo's message for young people

BY WKC STAFF

The middle school youth of St. Mary of the Woods Parish in Whitesville were not old enough to attend the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis this past November, but that did not stop them from having a meaningful experience together.

The young people gathered on Nov. 23, a few days after the pope's virtual conversation with NCYC attendees held in the morning of Nov. 21, to watch the recorded livestream.

"We still tuned in, soaked it up, and wow – Pope Leo XIV came in strong with a message for every young person in the USA and the world," said Amy Roach, the parish's coordinator of youth ministry.

She cited some of the pope's most impactful statements that he shared during his virtual conversation: "You are not only the future of the church – you are the present," and "If you want to help the Church prepare for the future, start by being involved today. Stay connected to your parish, attend Sunday Mass, join youth activities and say yes to opportunities ... where your faith can grow." ■

## ‘We don’t have to wait to be great’

*A conversation with Therese Watson, present during Pope Leo XIV’s virtual encounter*



COURTESY OF THERESE WATSON

Youth and adult leaders from St. Francis de Sales Parish in Paducah pose with a cardboard cutout of Pope Leo XIV and form the “Y” letter for “NCYC” at the Indiana Convention Center. Therese Watson is second from the left.

BY ELIZABETH WONG BARNSTEAD, THE  
WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

*Note: Therese Watson, a 12th-grade homeschool youth who belongs to St. Francis de Sales Parish in Paducah, was one of the teens selected to be present for the live, digital encounter with Pope Leo XIV during the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis in November 2025. Below, Therese shares about her experience. This interview has been edited for space and clarity.*

**Q: Was this your first NCYC (National Catholic Youth Conference)?**

A: This was not my first NCYC; I also had the opportunity to attend during my sophomore year in 2023.

**Q: What was the process of your being selected to be one of the youth in the NCYC audience with the pope?**

A: Although I am uncertain exactly how the selection process worked, I can tell you the extent of my knowledge. I believe Robin Tomes (the Diocese of Owensboro’s administrative assistant for youth ministry) contacted my parish’s family life minister, Ben Teer, asking if there was a youth who would like to participate in the papal dialogue. He chose to ask me, and I said yes.

**Q: What was that morning like, leading up to the virtual call with Pope Leo?**

A: It started very early in the morning, and I am grateful to the chaperones for getting me there on time. Upon meeting the other participants, the air was filled with anticipation and excitement. We became quick friends, bonded by our mutual awe at this amazing opportunity. Furthermore, I enjoyed sharing how we each came to be selected. Soon, it was time for us to find our seats, and the excitement rose to a

roar when Pope Leo finally appeared on screen. It was an incredible experience that I will cherish for the rest of my life.

**Q: What thoughts were going through your head during the virtual conversation with Pope Leo?**

A: The main thought running through my brain was how grateful and astounded I was to be chosen to play such a big role in Pope Leo’s first dialogue and in representing all the youth of the United States of America. I was also struck by how human and American Pope Leo sounded. The title “Successor of Peter” can be daunting and can cause me to forget the humanity of the Church’s head.

**Q: Did you have any other big highlights of your NCYC experience this year?**

A: Honestly, the top highlight would be how many kids were at NCYC. Seeing so many youth from around the nation reminded me of how the Church is united, not separated by state or country borders.

**Q: How did this experience with Pope Leo strengthen your faith? How do you plan to live out your faith more vibrantly in your parish, family, and community?**

A: What stuck with me most was Pope Leo saying that the youth is not the future Church, but the present Church. While the youth will grow into our next generation of priests, religious, leaders, mothers, fathers, and saints, we are also the Church now. In only 45 minutes, Pope Leo helped over 16,000 people realize that they don’t have to wait to be great, and that number doesn’t even include the at-home viewers. The power that he gave to everyone in the stadium was incredible and pushed me forward to lead with love. While I may not know specifically what I plan to do to live my faith more fully in my community, I do know that I will do my best to daily follow God’s will, and give more of myself to others. ■



RILEY GREIF | WKC

The group from St. Joseph Parish in Bowling Green attending the November 2025 National Catholic Youth Conference wear silly hats while sitting inside Lucas Oil Stadium. Funny hats are a beloved tradition at NCYC and are often traded among participants.



RILEY GREIF | WKC

Youth and adult leaders from St. Joseph Parish in Central City smile for a photo with Bishop William F. Medley while attending the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis in November 2025. This year, Pope Leo XIV, the first U.S.-born pope, spoke with the participants via a unique digital meeting livestreamed in Lucas Oil Stadium.

## Youth embrace Pope Leo’s message of hope following unique digital meeting

BY LAURETTA BROWN AND GINA CHRISTIAN, OSV NEWS

INDIANAPOLIS (OSV News) – Pope Leo XIV encouraged American youth in a unique digital discussion Nov. 21, telling them that they were not only the “future of the Church,” but “the present,” saying “your voices, your ideas, your faith matter right now.”

He spoke in response to questions from students in a 45-minute virtual dialogue at the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis with an estimated crowd of 16,000 young people ages 14-18.

Katie Prejean McGrady, host of the “Katie McGrady Show” on SiriusXM’s The Catholic Channel, moderated the discussion at Lucas Oil Stadium in which Pope Leo fielded questions from five high school students: Mia Smothers from the Archdiocese of Baltimore; Ezequiel Ponce from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles; Christopher Pantelakis from the Archdiocese of Las Vegas; Micah Alcisto from the Diocese of Honolulu; and Elise Wing from the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa.

The questions touched on themes of technology use, artificial intelligence, forgiveness, hope and the Church’s future. The students developed them in meetings with other students and organizers and they were sent to the pope in advance.

Elise Wing, who had asked the Holy Father about the future of the Church, told reporters following the event that “walking up on that stage felt like history.” Wing said it was an honor that the pope “said our names,” and she found his response to her “personable and so profound.”

*Continues on page 19*

## YOUTH

NCYC continued from page 18



COURTESY OF CHARLIE HARDESTY

During the National Catholic Youth Conference, Bishop William F. Medley had the opportunity to visit with two women from the Diocese of Owensboro who are now in formation with the Salesian Sisters of St. John Bosco. On the left is Amber Payne, who grew up at Immaculate Parish in Owensboro and attended Owensboro Catholic Schools and Brescia University; to the right is Aislinn Domantay, who is originally from the Archdiocese of Atlanta but who served as a theology teacher at Owensboro Catholic Middle School for several years.



RILEY GREIF | WKC

Pope Leo XIV grins while talking with youth during a live virtual encounter at NCYC on Nov. 21, 2025, inside Lucas Oil Stadium.

“He gave us so much hope for the future and for the church and the coming ages,” she said.

Ezequiel Ponce, who asked Pope Leo for advice about perseverance in prayer amid difficult times, said he thought the pope “gave an incredible answer” like “he was speaking directly to me.” He said he was sure the pope’s response “definitely resonated” with others.

The pope told Ponce, “Jesus does not just understand our struggles from a distance. He actually wants us to hand them to him, because he loves us. And that kind of trust starts when we have a real relationship.” The Holy Father encouraged Eucharistic adoration and daily prayer, saying Jesus “often speaks to us gently in stillness.”

“Scripture says that faithful friends are like a strong shelter and a treasure,” he added, “I hope you are forming friendships like that, even during this conference, friendships rooted in faith, rooted in love for Jesus; whether it is a trusted adult or close friend, it’s important to speak honestly about what you feel, what you think, what you experience.”

Pope Leo started things off light by responding to a comment from McGrady that she had given the pope a pair of socks some time ago and also wanted to know what he used as an opening word when he played Wordle each day.

“I just want to say I only wear white socks, and I use a different word for Wordle every day, so there’s no set starting word,” he said with a laugh. Pope Leo is well-known to be a fan of the Chicago White Sox baseball team.

McGrady told reporters the pope’s digital encounter started off a moment of connection with young people right at the beginning “when he laughed right when we got started, and then just started to ease into his answers.” She saw that

the pontiff was truly being a spiritual father in the encounter.

Bishop William F. Medley of the Diocese of Owensboro has attended NCYC for many years. This year, his diocese, through the efforts of the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, saw 260 registrations from parishes across western Kentucky, which included youth, adult leaders and priests.

The bishop told The Western Kentucky Catholic that in the past, NCYC provided a time and space for visiting bishops to be available for meeting and greeting attendees at the Indiana Convention Center. Bishop Medley always made sure to attend this session, so that he could meet his diocesan youth and even other participants who happened to pass through.

While the “bishops’ corner” session was phased out in recent years, Bishop Medley still coordinates with diocesan youth ministry director Charlie Hardesty to meet with the different groups attending from his diocese during free time.

“How often, other than at your Confirmation, are you likely to meet your bishop?” asked Bishop Medley, pointing out the convenience of this tradition. “Charlie flags down (his diocesan groups that pass by) and Riley takes photos of us together,” he said of the diocese’s digital media specialist, Riley Greif, who regularly attends NCYC as well.

He appreciated how much of an impression Pope Leo made upon the youth during the virtual conversation: “It’s like they felt like they’d seen him in person,” said the bishop.

“That cheer – ‘Leo, Leo, we love Leo’ – was authentic,” said Bishop Medley of a chant that erupted in Lucas Oil Stadium at the end of the pope’s virtual encounter. ■

*Elizabeth Wong Barnstead contributed to this story.*

## You're invited to become a Friend of Gasper River

BY BEN WARRELL, SPECIAL TO THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

Hello Diocese of Owensboro! We need your help! Each year, we try our hardest to keep camp affordable for our camp families and for our retreat guests at Gasper River Catholic Youth Camp and Retreat Center in Bowling Green. Each year, this gets more and more difficult with rising operating costs and the fact that camp continues to grow and grow each summer and retreat season. We are a rural mission diocese and our costs for camp are less than half the national average for a weeklong camp experience. Even with lower camp fees, many families struggle to pay, and each year our camper scholarship fund is almost completely depleted. As a result, we have created the Friends of Gasper River program to help us defray our operating costs.

The Friends of Gasper River program is simply asking you to prayerfully consider a monthly donation to camp. We ask that if you are able, please go to our website, [www.gasperriverretreat-center.org](http://www.gasperriverretreat-center.org) and click on the donate button, and give \$30 a month to camp. If you are able to give more, please know that is welcome as well. If you can only afford a few dollars a month, please feel free to give what you can as each and every dollar will help us continue to offer young people the opportunity to encounter the risen Jesus Christ and go out into the world to make a difference for God!

In 19 years of summer camp and 20 years of retreats, the Holy Spirit has changed the lives of

countless people here at Gasper River. Vocations to the priesthood and religious life happen almost every year. Marriages and stronger families are also the result of the ministry at camp.

In fact, since we've reopened after Covid, we have had at least one family join the Catholic Church because of their child's experience at camp! Many teachers in our Catholic schools are former summer staffers and campers as are several youth ministers and directors of religious education in our parishes. It's not just the Diocese of Owensboro but surrounding dioceses and all throughout the country. Several former staffers are working at Catholic camps around the country while others are working for national Catholic organizations such as FOCUS and NET. The fruit from this holy place has been abundant and it continues to grow each year!

Please prayerfully consider joining the Friends of Gasper River program to support the wonderful and life-changing ministry that is happening here at camp.

Every gift given will have an immense impact on a young person. Thank you all so much for all your prayers and support of Gasper River Catholic Youth Camp and Retreat Center over the years and for all that you will do for us in the future.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call the office at (270) 781-2466. In this New Year, let us give generously and allow the Holy Spirit to work through your kindness! ■

*Ben Warrell is the director of Gasper River Catholic Youth Camp and Retreat Center in Bowling Green.*



COURTESY OF BETH GRIFFIN

Cardinal Timothy Dolan of the Archdiocese of New York (left) distributes Holy Communion during the Dec. 13 St. Lucy Day Mass sponsored by the Xavier Society for the Blind; Fr. Jamie Dennis, pastor of St. Mary Magdalene Parish in Sorgho, distributes Communion on the right, assisted by his parishioner and altar server Elijah Royalty.

## Xavier Society celebrates 125 years of service

BY WKC STAFF

On Dec. 13, 2025, Fr. Jamie Dennis and 36 of his parishioners from St. Mary Magdalene Parish in Sorgho participated in a significant anniversary with the Xavier Society for the Blind in New York City.

That day, on the feast of St. Lucy, they gathered at St. Patrick's Cathedral with clients and other friends of the Xavier Society to celebrate Mass with Cardinal Timothy Dolan to celebrate the society's 125th anniversary. The Xavier Society provides free spiritual and inspirational books in braille, audio, and large print worldwide.

Fr. Dennis, who is blind, travels to New York City every Dec. 13 to celebrate the annual St. Lucy Mass with the Xavier Society. ■



COURTESY OF MISTY PERKINS

Parishioners from St. Joseph in Central City visit and participate in a jubilee tour at St. Stephen Cathedral in Owensboro on Nov. 9, 2025.

## Central City parishioners conclude jubilee pilgrimage journey at cathedral

BY ELIZABETH WONG BARNSTEAD, THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

On Nov. 9, 2025, members of St. Joseph Parish in Central City, Kentucky, concluded the final leg of their Jubilee of Hope pilgrimage series of visits that took place across the region.

Their last visit took them to St. Stephen Cathedral in Owensboro, one of the Diocese of Owensboro's six pilgrimage sites designated by Bishop William F. Medley. There, the cathedral staff welcomed the Central City pilgrims and provided an extensive tour that taught them about the history of the cathedral and the diocese.

St. Joseph's previous pilgrimage site trips that year took them to Holy Redeemer Parish in Beaver Dam in August; St. Joseph Parish in Bowling Green and St. Leo Parish in September; the Cathedral Basilica of St. Peter in Chains in Cincinnati, Ohio, in October; and the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption in Covington,

Kentucky, also in October.

A St. Joseph's parishioner who had participated in the pilgrimage, Lisa Day, shared that she learned "so much" traveling to the different churches and that "the historical information was the most interesting."

She said visiting St. Peter in Chains in Cincinnati, and encountering a relic of the True Cross, was "the most humbling experience of my life."

"There are no words to describe the feeling I had when I walked up to the relic and was able to touch the sliver of the cross upon which our Savior died," said Day. "Touching that tiny sliver of wood felt so much bigger than I can ever express. Just thinking that Jesus had been nailed, crucified, bled, and died upon millions of those tiny slivers broke my heart."

"As we traveled and prayed together, I could feel the Holy Spirit with us," she added. "Each one of us was touched in a different way, but I think we all felt God's influence that we brought back home with us." ■

*Misty Perkins contributed to this story.*

## Pilgrims find Christ in Branson's Advent journey

*Diocesan travelers discover faith, fellowship, and renewal through Ozarks pilgrimage*

BY MARIANNA ROMERO, SPECIAL TO THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

Twenty-nine pilgrims from the Diocese of Owensboro traveled to Branson, Miss., Dec. 4-7 for an Advent pilgrimage of prayer, reflection, and fellowship.

Led by Fr. Carl McCarthy, pastor of Precious Blood Parish in Owensboro, the journey offered time to pause, prepare for Christ's coming, and strengthen faith together.

The itinerary blended prayer with uplifting entertainment highlighting faith and family. Pilgrims attended Branson's renowned musical shows, including "David" at Sight & Sound Theatre and performances by local family ensembles. The group also toured the College of the Ozarks and enjoyed a cruise on the Showboat Branson Belle.

A moving moment came at the Uptown Café when a performer invited the pilgrims to sing "How Great Thou Art." The restaurant fell quiet as their voices joined in heartfelt praise.

For veteran Sgt. Rex A. Voorhies of St. Augustine Parish in Clarkson, Tenn., the experience held deep meaning.

"I was surprised by the people we met in Branson and the welcome they gave to veterans. Young and old all shook our hands and thanked us. A young

*Continues on page 22*

## AROUND THE DIOCESE

Advent pilgrims continued from page 21



COURTESY OF MARIANNA ROMERO  
The Advent pilgrimage group from the Diocese of Owensboro, which visited Branson, Miss., in December, smile for a group photo.

lady even paid for our snack! The entertainers had us stand and be recognized. It really makes all the sacrifices we made well worth it," he said.

Phyllis Barker of Rosary Chapel in Paducah said the trip renewed her spirit: "I really enjoyed this trip and hope more journeys like this can be planned. I believe I am better prepared for Christ's coming because of this gathering of the faithful."

Anne Alexander of Precious Blood Parish in Owensboro called her decision to join an act of faith: "I felt a tug that would not go away. I prayed and decided the Lord was leading me to go back to Branson, even though I had gone the month before. His spirit was felt by everyone on this trip! It was an awakening and a deepening of my faith beyond

anything I have ever experienced."

Arsha Battah from Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Hopkinsville added, "Faith in Travel, under the leadership of RoseMary Trowbridge, organized the trip in association with the diocese and the spiritual direction of Fr. Carl McCarthy. The planning was done with care and thoughtfulness. We had a wonderful, faith-filled experience full of joy, fellowship, and prayer preparing us for the coming of our Lord."

The pilgrimage concluded with Sunday Mass at Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church, where Fr. Carl presided – an uplifting close to a meaningful journey. The diocese and Faith in Travel look forward to offering more pilgrimages that inspire faith and fellowship. ■

To learn more about pilgrimages like this, call (270) 683-1545.

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## Bringing Bethlehem ‘closer to home’ in Hopkinsville

BY DAWN C. LIGIBEL, SPECIAL TO THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

“It feels like I’m really in Bethlehem.”

“It’s not just telling the story; it’s a visual presentation,” explained parishioner Melanie Meek who attended the “Nativity on Ninth” event which was hosted by Sts. Peter and Paul in Hopkinsville on Friday, Dec. 5, and Saturday, Dec. 6, 2025.

“It introduces the Christmas season and helps us reflect on what it means,” added Meek. Both Meek and her husband, Seth, enjoy visiting the “little town of Bethlehem” because they believe it helps teach their daughter the true significance of Christmas.

Caroline Young, a non-parishioner and first-time visitor, also appreciates how the live nativity educates her children. “This really helps keep the kids focused on what Christmas should be,” she said.

The parishioners of Sts. Peter and Paul have been hosting this event for four years, and it has attracted many people from the community because it is a recreation of the town.

“Most churches only do a manger scene,” explained Mary Ann Miller, a visitor from the community. “It takes a lot of dedication to host this event.”

“I love that the characters come and talk to us,” observed Young. “I didn’t expect it to be so interactive. It feels like I’m really in Bethlehem!”



DAWN C. LIGIBEL

Fr. Conrad Jaconette, associate pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Hopkinsville, and Lillian Zigelhoffer, parishioner, portray St. Joseph and Mary during the “Nativity on Ninth” live nativity hosted by the parish.

Another reason why the “Nativity on Ninth” event seems so real is the inclusion of live animals.

“The animals are always fun to see,” commented parishioner Bonnie Haney. This year the animals included a five-day-old calf, a donkey named Diego, a Jacob’s sheep, a rabbit, two bantam chickens, two fan-tailed doves, a Jacob’s ram, and Calvin the camel.

In addition to the live animals, visitors to “Bethlehem” also enjoy hot chocolate and home-baked cookies provided by parishioners. Baking and donating cookies is a way for many parishioners to assist with the project when they are physically unable to attend.

Parishioners who do physically participate in the live nativity find the experience rewarding.

“There’s so much excitement leading up to it for our participants,” observed Kasey Lansford, a parishioner who dressed in costume for the first time. “It’s a wonderful opportunity for parishioners of all ages to spread the light of Christ to the rest of our community.”



DAWN C. LIGIBEL

Calvin the camel, accompanied by Ivan Viall, is one of the main attractions at the “Nativity on Ninth” live nativity event hosted by Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Hopkinsville. This year’s event was held Dec. 5-6, 2025.

Fr. Emmanuel Udoh, pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul, agrees with Lansford’s assessment.

“This event helps us share who Christ is to the community, and it brings the town of Bethlehem closer to home,” said Fr. Udoh.

Mike and Martha Steil, parishioners, also agree with the importance of reaching out to the community.

“It’s important, not just to show awareness of our church in the community, but also awareness of the season,” commented Martha. “This brings it to life.”

Even with frigid temperatures this year, the live animals, people in costume, hot chocolate and home-baked cookies brought many parishioners and people from the community out to visit the little town of Bethlehem.

“It’s a really wonderful way to prepare for Christmas,” concluded Haney. ■

*Dawn C. Ligibel is a parishioner of Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Hopkinsville.*

# January Wedding Anniversaries

## 5, 10, 25, 40, 50 and More Than 50 Years of Marriage

**A note from the WKC: Make sure your anniversary is listed!** The WKC recognizes 5<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup> and over 50 anniversaries being celebrated for the month printed (for instance, this issue shows the milestone anniversaries for January). In order to appear in the WKC's monthly anniversaries, you must be listed by your parish. Please contact your parish directly to make sure your anniversary is on file with them.

**Blessed Mother, Owensboro**  
Terry & Jan Storm, 58

**Blessed Sacrament, Owensboro**

Steven & Meredith Fain, 10

**Christ the King, Madisonville**  
Billy & Patty Folk, 57

Greg & Becky McCabe, 40

**Holy Guardian Angels, Irvington**

Ted & Barbara Brown, 68

**Holy Name of Jesus, Henderson**

Guy & Frances Hogan, 64  
Ira & Ellese Hay, 54

Jack & JoAnn Jacobs, 54  
John & Kathy Jenkins, 54  
John & Phyllis Brown, 55  
Joseph & Carolynn Kelley, 50  
Matthew & Haley Hudson, 5  
Steve & Patsy Tweddell, 55

**Holy Redeemer, Beaver Dam**  
Keith & Huggetta Dale, 54

**Holy Spirit, Bowling Green**

Basil & Joann Jones, 65  
Don & Rachel Schmidt, 51  
George & Barbara Powers, 66  
Harry & Constance Lergen, 66  
Jerry & Joanne Wallace, 54  
Kenneth & Tamara Vogler, 40  
Thomas & Evelyn Pettigrew, 53  
Tom & Rita Parrott, 58

**Immaculate, Owensboro**  
Gary & Carol Jackson, 62

**Our Lady of Lourdes, Owensboro**

Francis & Cecilia Aud, 63  
Ken & Charlene Ackerman, 67  
Larry & Charlotte Moore, 56  
Larry & Rosemary O'Brien, 25  
William & Suzanne Blandford, 63

**Precious Blood, Owensboro**  
Michael & Susan Johnson, 52

**St. Agnes, Uniontown**

Marty & Marilyn Greenwell, 59  
Tommy & Joycelyn Hagan, 58

**St. Alphonsus, St. Joseph**

Gary & Imelda Cecil, 52  
Mike & Audrey Clouse, 53

**St. Ann, Morganfield**

Damian & Diane Alvey, 54  
Jimmy & Carolyn Wedding, 54  
Kenny & Teresa Lee Thomas, 60

**St. Anthony, Browns Valley**  
Austin & Morgan Howard, 5

**St. Benedict, Wax**

Michael & Patsy Campiglia, 55

**St. Francis Borgia, Sturgis**

Don Ed & Miki Wright, 58  
Jerry & Brenda Stevens, 60

**St. Henry, Aurora**

Paul & Sally Memmer, 10

**St. Jerome, Fancy Farm**

Bobby Joe & Lea Ann  
Hobbs, 40  
Ronald & Sue Cook, 50

**St. John the Evangelist, Sunfish**

Estil & Paula Wilson, 54

**St. Joseph, Bowling Green**

Frank & Patricia Royal, 58  
Robert & Sandra Gasperetti, 60

**St. Joseph, Leitchfield**

Johnnie & Nina Justis, 57

**St. Lawrence, Philpot**

Larry & Betty Johnson, 57  
Michael & Patricia Wright, 56

**St. Leo, Murray**

Glen & Alma Nunn, 51  
Lawrence & Ida Ortega, 61

**St. Martin, Rome**

Mary Lucy Hines, 53

**St. Mary Magdalene, Sorgho**

John & Mary Ann Ebelhar, 58

**St. Mary of the Woods, Whitesville**

Allen & Debbie Bickett, 50

Charlie & Ina Mattingly, 57

Dan & Sue Howard, 67  
Tony & Vickie Morris, 53  
William & Carol Boarman, 56

**St. Mary, Franklin**

Larry & Michelle Anderson, 57

**St. Mary, LaCenter**

David & Gloria Henderson, 57

**St. Paul, Leitchfield**

Rodric & Earline Brady, 56

**St. Peter of Alcantara, Stanley**

Eddie & Jeanette Smith, 58  
James & Mary Keller, 69  
James & Patty Settles, 66

**St. Peter of Antioch, Waverly**

Dan & Cathy Wolfe, 50

**St. Pius X, Owensboro**

Carl & Shelia Moore, 52  
Danny & Sue Castlen, 54  
James & Cheryl Gerteisen, 53  
James & Connie Nalley, 55  
Matt & Caty Knight, 10  
Michael & Valerie Thomas, 40  
Russell & Judy Payne, 50

**St. Romuald, Hardinsburg**

Jerry & Pam Raymer, 53  
Logan & Judy Tivitt, 61  
Sammy & Brenda Duggins, 55

**St. Rose of Lima, Cloverport**

Randy & Gerry Brown, 58

**St. Stephen Cathedral, Owensboro**

Audie & Sue Cooper, 61  
Don & Carol Ralph, 60  
Jim & Janet Murphy, 54  
Steve & Judy Carrico, 50

**St. Thomas More, Paducah**

Rick & Gail Otte, 51  
Robert & Carolyn Murphey, 53

**St. William, Knottsville**

David & Patricia Payne, 57  
Donald & Martha Morris, 56  
Patrick & Rose Meserve, 60  
Vince & Irene Nealen, 54

**Sts. Joseph & Paul, Owensboro**

Steve & Delores Brown, 50

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## JANUARY 2026 BULLETIN BOARD

### Mass and confession times in the Diocese of Owensboro

Did you know you can view Mass times on the diocese's website? Visit <https://owensborodiocese.org/find-a-parish/> for a list of parishes, Mass times and more. As confession times are subject to change, visitors are encouraged to contact the parishes directly for their most up-to-date confession schedule.

### A message from the Office of Stewardship and Development

Where there is a will, there is a way to become an enduring blessing to the Church. A simple sentence in your will can help ensure that your parish continues to flourish for generations to come. For more information on how to remember your parish in your estate plans, contact Valeria Vessels, Director of Development, Diocese of Owensboro, at (270) 852-8348 or [valeria.vessels@pastoral.org](mailto:valeria.vessels@pastoral.org).

### Help the Ursuline Sisters make God's love complete during annual appeal

"If we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." – 1 John 4:12. St. Angela Merici, who founded the Ursuline Sisters, told her daughters to respond to the signs of the times. While the signs of our times are filled with uncertainty, we can respond by sharing God's love and giving hope to those in need. The Ursuline Sisters of Mount Saint Joseph (Maple Mount, Ky.) have brought hope, joy and love to those they have served for 151 years. They remind us how God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us. There are many ways the Ursuline Sisters continue to serve the people they meet. Your financial support makes it possible for their mission to continue to be the beacon of hope for those they serve. When we each do our part to love one another, we will leave the world a little better than we found it. God's love is made complete in us. To donate online, visit <https://ursulinesmsj.org/donate/> If you would like more information or if you have questions, contact Director of Development Carol Braden-Clarke by calling 270-229-2008 or emailing [carol.braden-clark@maplemount.org](mailto:carol.braden-clark@maplemount.org). Thank you for your support.

### Jan. 25 Owensboro prayer service for Christian unity

Some people experience a heart attack without

knowing it. Is it possible to experience a spiritual change of heart without knowing it? Further: what is conversion and how do I measure it, not only in the lives of others but in my own life as well? These are questions we will explore on Sunday, Jan. 25, the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, at the Prayer Service for the Week of Christian Unity, sponsored by the Diocesan Office of Ecumenism. We will reflect on the conversion of Saul/Paul and hear people speak about their own conversion experiences. The service will be held at Third Baptist Church in Owensboro. A meal follows. You are cordially invited. For questions you may contact Fr. Ray Clark at (270) 231-1705.

### Save the dates for 2026 Cursillo weekends

Blessed and happy New Year to all! Now is Cursillo season! Our weekends are coming and the team is preparing. If you are thinking of someone you would like to invite, bring them to your group reunion! Let them see the changes the weekend has made in our lives! Men's weekend is Feb. 26-March 1. Women's weekend is March 5-8. The forms are now on our website at [www.cursillo-owensboro.org](http://www.cursillo-owensboro.org)! De Colores!

### Need a meeting space? Maple Hall is available at Mount Saint Joseph

Need a meeting space for up to 200 people? Or this site can seat up to 395 people if you don't need to use tables. Maple Hall (formerly known as Mount Saint Joseph Auditorium/Gym) is available for rent. It is located on the Ursuline Sisters of Mount Saint Joseph campus, 8001 Cummings Road, Maple Mount, Ky., 12 miles west of Owensboro on Hwy. 56, across from the park. Maple Hall is an open space with a kitchen equipped for catering. There is a stage and a basketball court on site. It's perfect for hosting receptions, parties, reunions, etc. The fee for a full day rental is \$300, which includes access to Maple Hall the day prior to the event. The use of 6-foot tables and chairs is included in the rental fee (user is responsible for setup, or this can be done for you for an additional fee). To reserve Maple Hall, contact the Mount Saint Joseph Finance Office by email: [ap@maplemount.org](mailto:ap@maplemount.org) or call 270-229-4170 from Monday through Friday 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. You can find out more on this webpage: <https://ursulinesmsj.org/renting-maple-hall/>.

### Join Ursuline Sisters for Adoration on Fridays and first Sundays

The Ursuline Sisters of Mount Saint Joseph invite the

public to join them for Eucharistic Adoration on the first Sunday of the month from 1 p.m.-5 p.m. at the Motherhouse Chapel, 8001 Cummings Road, Maple Mount, Ky. (12 miles west of Owensboro on Hwy. 56). The Ursuline Sisters also have Eucharistic Adoration on Fridays from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m., and the public is welcome to attend. Adoration on the second Friday of each month is dedicated to praying for vocations. The Adoration concludes with evening prayer. To see Adoration and Mass times for the Ursuline Sisters, visit <https://ursulinesmsj.org/mass-prayer-times/>.

### Support groups for victims/survivors of clergy abuse

The Diocese of Owensboro would like to share some support group opportunities made available through the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. These groups are open to all victims/survivors in the United States. Learn more at <https://owensborodiocese.org/support-group/> and <https://owensborodiocese.org/safe/>. You are also invited to visit <https://www.awakecommunity.org/>, a community of abuse survivors, concerned Catholics, and allies responding to the wounds of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

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## A New Year's message from Fr. Maurice Teill



COURTESY OF ARCHIVES  
Fr. Maurice Teill is seen at Mass in an undated photo.

BY EDWARD WILSON, ARCHIVES

Fr. Maurice Teill is a name that many of you have not heard in quite some time, but I'm sure remember quite well.

When you look at Fr. Teill's accomplishments, you would think that he was a horseback priest from the 1800s. The good priest was also a tireless servant of God. In his nearly 60 years of active service, he was assigned to more than 13 parishes, was a primary figure in the establishment of Precious Blood Parish in Owensboro, oversaw the building of Mary Carrico Catholic School in Knottsville, restored multiple churches and established St. Mark Parish in Eddyville. Even after he retired from active ministry after 56 years, he became a priest in residence at St. Joseph Parish Bowling Green, until the year before his passing at 88 years old.

On New Year's Day 1995, Fr. Teill delivered a message to his flock at St. Mark in Eddyville. It is a

timeless message that we can meditate on, even today more than 30 years after he delivered it. Preparing them for the year to come, on the first day of the new year – the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God – Fr. Teill reminded his parishioners that we must “keep our eyes on Mother Mary.” He praised her initial “yes” to bear the Son of God but reminded them that this was just the first of a lifetime of “yeses” to God. He shared:

“Yes to God as she lays Jesus in the manger  
Yes to God as she nurses him at her breast  
Yes to God as she and Joseph take Him to the temple  
Yes to God as she and Joseph search for Jesus...  
Yes to God as she stands beneath the Cross.”

He noted that many, even in that room, were afraid to say “yes” to God. He admitted it was understandable “because they do not know where it will take them.” But he reminded them their hesitancy was keeping them from peace. Noting that only their “yes” would stop the pursuit of God, or, as Francis Thompson dubbed him, The Hound of Heaven.

So, on that first day of the new year, Fr. Teill told his flock to say “yes” to God. He reminded them that their “yeses” echo Mary's as they are a part of the same mission. God uses this faithful obedience, just like he did with the Blessed Mother's, “to complete the saving of all mankind.”

Fr. Teill challenged them, just as he would challenge us today, to say yes to God this New Year. Even 31 years later, his words remind us that to have peace in this life, and the next, means a lifetime of obedience to God. ■



COURTESY OF STACEY MENSER  
Catholic Charities case manager Karina Gonzalez speaks with several children during the Dec. 10, 2025 dedication of a new home for their family, who lost theirs exactly four years ago in the 2021 tornadoes.

## Four years later: Catholic Charities marks tornado anniversary with new home dedication for survivors

BY STACEY MENSER AND WKC STAFF

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Owensboro marked the four-year anniversary of the deadly Dec. 10, 2021 tornado by dedicating a new home for survivors in Mayfield, Kentucky.

*Continues on page 27*

## ***Tornado anniversary continued from page 26***

Fr. Basilio Az Cuc of St. Thomas More Parish in Paducah offered a blessing over the home of Petrona Perez Pelico and her young family. The home was built through a partnership with Catholic Charities and Christian Public Service, an organization that allows young men of the Mennonite faith to give six months of their lives serving others.

Catholic Charities director Susan Montalvo-Gesser led the home dedication ceremony on Dec. 10, 2025, surrounded by her staff and the volunteers from Christian Public Service.

According to Carmen Alvarez, Pelico's former ESL tutor, Pelico was badly injured when her home was destroyed by the 2021 tornado. Her injuries prevented her from returning to work for nearly a year.

"I thank every one of you that have made it possible for Petrona and her family to receive this house," said Alvarez. "They are very deserving of it and I am sure that she and her children will make many, many wonderful memories in it. To all of you that made this possible, thank you for your generosity and dedication and for leaving a memorable part of your life here in Mayfield, may God bless you tenfold."

Catholic Charities continues to serve families across western Kentucky impacted by the Dec. 10, 2021 tornado as they rebuild their lives and homes. The partnership with Christian Public Service will continue into the new year with new homes to be complete by June. ■

## **Dawson Springs bluegrass fest breaks new record with life-affirming fundraising efforts**

BY JEFF SMITH, SPECIAL TO THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

The Pickin' Life Project hosted its annual "Bluegrass on (Lake) Beshear" charity event on Oct. 11, featuring live music from five bands. The event was both a celebration and a call to action for life.

Attendees were treated to a dynamic lineup of bluegrass, country, gospel and rock/blues bands. The festival featured standout performances by Cutter and Cash and the Kentucky Grass, South Union Bluegrass Band, Grand Harmony, Chris Rogers and the Kentucky Troubadours, and Eddie and Alonzo Pennington. Knights of Columbus councils offered food, featuring Doctor Donley's lemon shakeups. A popular raffle produced 15 winners, including UK-Louisville football tickets and a \$1,000 grand prize.

This year, the event raised \$62,352, a new record. The Pickin' Life Project worked with 10 Knights of Columbus councils and one 4th Degree Assembly in the Owensboro diocese, as well as with the State Council to organize the event. The exceptional results allowed the organizers to

donate \$15,588 each to four life-affirming pregnancy care centers in western Kentucky. The K of C Supreme Office will donate an additional \$12,400 through its Aid and Support After Pregnancy (ASAP) program - which makes the total benefit in 2025 almost \$75,000.

At its heart, "Bluegrass on (Lake) Beshear - Pickin' Life" is more than a music festival - it is a tool to help build a culture of life in western Kentucky. Every dollar raised during the event's 12 years, \$345,057, has gone to Alpha PCC (Hopkinsville), Door of Hope (Madisonville), H.O.P.E. Clinic (Benton and Eddyville) and newly added Pathway of Hope (Greenville). Each of these life-affirming pregnancy care centers provides essential healthcare, including 4-D ultrasound imagery, parenting education, counseling and material resources in a faith-based setting at no cost to women and men facing crisis pregnancies. Studies show that at least 88% of abortion-minded women who see their baby and hear its heartbeat through an ultrasound choose life. Also, this year Alpha PCC provided abortion pill reversal treatments that saved four babies, including a set of twins!

With the momentum of this year's record-breaking



COURTESY OF PICKIN' LIFE

On Nov. 18, Door of Hope Pregnancy Care Center receives a \$15,588 donation from The Pickin' Life Project, one-fourth of the funds raised during October's "Bluegrass on (Lake) Beshear" pro-life musical fundraiser.

fundraiser, organizers are making plans for next year's event, aiming to reach even more families. "Bluegrass on (Lake) Beshear" has become a cherished annual tradition, blending the joy of music with the meaningful work of supporting life for the most vulnerable members of the community. By coming together through song and a passion for life, western Kentucky communities prove that even small towns can have big impacts. To find out more about "Bluegrass on (Lake) Beshear" and the Pickin' Life Project foundation, visit [www.bluegrassonbeshear.com](http://www.bluegrassonbeshear.com). ■

## Un Mensaje del Obispo Medley: Semana de Oración por la Unidad de los Cristianos: una oportunidad para redescubrir nuestros puntos en común

“Hay un solo Cuerpo y un solo Espíritu, así como hay una misma esperanza, a la que ustedes han sido llamados, de acuerdo con la vocación recibida”. – Efesios 4, 4

Muchas iglesias cristianas, incluyendo la Iglesia católica romana, han observado un tiempo de reflexión y oración para considerar el llamado de Cristo a que todos seamos uno. La Semana de Oración por la Unidad de los Cristianos se celebra del 18 al 25 de enero de cada año. Observada por primera vez en 1908, fue algo avanzado para su tiempo, ya que el comienzo del siglo XX no suele considerarse una época de diálogo ecuménico significativo.

Sin embargo, a mediados del siglo XX la Iglesia católica emprendió el Concilio Vaticano II para reevaluar los “signos de los tiempos” e incluir un alcance más amplio y la aceptación de múltiples denominaciones cristianas. Hubo líderes protestantes que fueron invitados como observadores al Concilio. Se inauguró así una nueva era del ecumenismo. Esto no quiere decir que las divisiones dentro del Cuerpo de Cristo hayan sido sanadas. De hecho, entre muchos todavía hay hostilidad y desconfianza.

La Semana de Oración por la Unidad Cristiana es una ocasión anual para recordar a los seguidores de Cristo que es su voluntad que seamos uno, lo que a lo mejor no significa que todos estén en la misma iglesia y recen las mismas oraciones todos los domingos. El lema para este año de la carta de San Pablo a los Efesios nos dice: “Uno solo es el cuerpo y uno solo el Espíritu, como una es la esperanza a la que habéis sido llamados”.

La unidad cristiana puede tener muchas manifestaciones. En noviembre, el Papa León realizó su



FOTO DEL CNS/MEDIOS DEL VATICANO

El Papa León XIV sentado junto al Cardenal Kurt Koch, prefecto del Dicasterio para la Promoción de la Unidad de los Cristianos, mientras posa para una foto con los participantes que asisten a una conferencia sobre las implicaciones ecuménicas del 1700° aniversario del Concilio de Nicea en la Sala Clementina del Vaticano el 7 de junio de 2025.

primer viaje apostólico de su papado a Turquía para visitar Nicea y conmemorar el 1700° aniversario del Concilio de Nicea. Fue en este concilio donde las primeras comunidades de la Iglesia definieron sus puntos en común en el Credo Niceno. Hasta el día de hoy, los dogmas y la teología comunes de las muchas iglesias primitivas fueron definidos y en su mayor parte todavía nos unen hasta el día de hoy.

La ruptura de la unidad define a las iglesias, pero también a la sociedad y a la cultura. Moisés tuvo que abordar las divisiones y la desunión de los israelitas a quienes condujo a través del desierto hacia la Tierra Prometida. Jesús con sus 12 apóstoles tuvo que enfrentarse a sus disputas y celos entre ellos.

Las antiguas iglesias del Oriente y Occidente están fracturadas, pero aún hoy se esfuerzan por identificar sus puntos en común en Jesucristo. En el ti-

### CALENDARIO DEL OBISPO MEDLEY ENERO 2026

2-4 de enero	SEEK – Columbus, Ohio
10 de enero	9:00 a. m.   Institución como lectores para candidatos al diaconado permanente – Universidad de Brescia, Owensboro
11-15 de enero	Retiro de obispos de la Región V – Nueva Orleans
18 de enero	8:30 a. m.   Confirmación – Parroquia San Eduardo, Fulton
19 de enero	10 a.m.   Reunión del Consejo de Personal Sacerdotal – Centro Católico McRaith (MCC), Owensboro
	1:30 p.m.   Reunión del Consejo Sacerdotal – MCC
20 de enero	8 a.m.   Misa escolar – Parroquia Santa María del Bosque, Whitesville
21 de enero	Día de retiro del personal diocesano
26 de enero	8 a.m.   Misa escolar – Escuela Juan Pablo II, Morganfield
	5 p.m.   Reunión del Consejo Diocesano de Finanzas – MCC
27 de enero	8 a.m.   Misa escolar – Escuela San Pedro & San Pablo, Hopkinsville
28 de enero	9:45 a.m.   Misa escolar – Escuela San José, Bowling Green
29 de enero	9 a.m.   Misa escolar – Escuela San Romualdo, Hardinsburg

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*Continuado de la página 28*

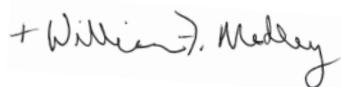
empo de la Reforma, las iglesias del Occidente, que tradicionalmente veían al Papa como su punto focal como sucesor de San Pedro, crearon divisiones que todavía desafían la sanación.

Cuando, como párroco, me dedicaba a la preparación matrimonial de parejas que se disponían a casarse, prestaba especial atención a las parejas que provenían de diferentes tradiciones cristianas. Les preguntaba cuáles son sus creencias religiosas fundamentales y también cuáles creen que son las principales divisiones entre sus iglesias. A menudo, esto puede haberse centrado en los sacramentos, el significado de la Sagrada Eucaristía o la reconciliación.

Lo que esperaba que comprendieran es que las creencias y prácticas que compartimos en común abarcan más que aquellas cosas que nos separan. Ahora bien, esto no quiere decir que nuestras diferencias no tengan consecuencias. Pero desafiaba a estas parejas a ser modelo para nuestras iglesias de la unidad en Cristo y a esforzarse por vivir el corazón del Evangelio y mostrar a sus hijos y al mundo cómo puede ser la unidad.

En el año 2026 destaquemos la “oración” de la Semana de Oración por la Unidad de los Cristianos. La mayoría de nosotros no estamos en posición de sanar las divisiones entre el Oriente y el Occidente o los conflictos entre católicos y protestantes, pero podemos ser modelos de caridad y tolerancia, y todos podemos orar para que la oración de Cristo de que todos sean uno algún día se cumpla.

Sinceramente suyo en Cristo,



**Obispo William F. Medley**  
**Diócesis de Owensboro**

## Experimentando el amor incondicional de Dios

POR CIELO EDANY LOPEZ-SOTO, ESPECIAL  
AL CATÓLICO DE KENTUCKY OCCIDENTAL

Me llamo Cielo López-Soto y soy hija de Dios, pero también nací católica, crecí católica y espero morir católica.

Sin embargo, no siempre me he sentido así. De niña, amaba mucho a Dios y disfrutaba todo lo que hacíamos en la iglesia. Al llegar a la adolescencia, dejé de disfrutar ir a la iglesia y participar en las tradiciones que practicábamos. Perdí la fe y el deseo de estar con Dios. Perdí la esperanza y olvidé lo hermosa y maravillosa que es la vida con Dios.

No solo perdí la fe y el amor, sino que también perdí la confianza en la iglesia. Empecé a cuestionar

todo lo que hacíamos, decíamos o celebrábamos. Como adolescentes en este nuevo mundo, estamos expuestos a muchas cosas diferentes: violencia, sexo, adicciones y muchas otras distracciones impías. Lamentablemente, muchos adolescentes caemos en esos malos hábitos y nos distraemos; nos perdemos en nuestro mundo pecaminoso que, lamentablemente, normaliza todas las cosas impías. Olvidamos incluir a Dios en todo lo que hacemos y decimos, lo que lleva a los adolescentes a alejarnos de Dios, de la familia y los amigos, y a involucrarnos demasiado en el mundo.

El privilegio de haber experimentado NCYC cambió mi perspectiva sobre cómo realmente no

*Continúa en la página 30*



RILEY GREIF | WKC

Adolescentes y líderes de la Parroquia Santos José y Pablo en Owensboro y el Obispo William F. Medley asistiendo a la Conferencia Nacional Católica de Jóvenes Adolescentes en Indianápolis, que tuvo lugar en noviembre de 2025. Cielo Edany López-Soto está en la primera fila, cuarta desde la izquierda.

## Continuado de la página 29

estamos solos. Estar en un estadio lleno de más de 16,000 personas de mi edad fue impresionante; me sentí llena de amor y de mucha fe en Dios. Conocer y sentir todo el amor por Dios, Jesús y María, no solo de las personas, sino también de adolescentes y niños que están experimentando la vida que vivimos. Adorar con tantos adolescentes es un momento que guardaré por siempre en mi corazón. Estar en la presencia de nuestro Salvador, el Señor Jesucristo, con adolescentes que comparten la misma fe y experimentan el amor incondicional de Dios es tan impactante y memorable que desearía poder volver solo para tener la oportunidad de experimentarlo de nuevo. Escuchar y ver al Papa León fue increíble y un sueño desconocido se hizo realidad. Sus palabras permanecerán para siempre en mi corazón con la esperanza de que se incorporen a mi vida. Desde esa increíble experiencia y conexión con los adolescentes y, sobre todo, con Dios, me doy cuenta de que puedo experimentarlo tanto como quiera. Adorar a solas o con más de 16,000 personas sigue siendo estar en la presencia de Dios. La confesión se siente igual cada vez porque es Dios mostrándonos su amor incondicional. Asistir a la Misa y alabar a Dios siempre lo glorificará y nos sanará. Sabiendo todo esto ahora, gracias a la experiencia de NCYC y lo que aprendí, lo uso para seguir sintiéndome más cerca de Dios y glorificarlo, para retribuir de alguna manera lo que ha hecho por nosotros.

Me gustaría terminar este artículo sobre mi experiencia y fe después de vivir NCYC con una cita del Papa León que ahora está grabada en mi mente por su importancia y verdad: “No solo son el futuro de la Iglesia, son el presente” (Papa León). ■

*Cielo pertenece a la Parroquia Santos José y Pablo en Owensboro, Kentucky.*

## Se anima al personal parroquial y a los párrocos a perseverar en Cristo en la reunión del 3 de diciembre



POR ELIZABETH WONG BARNSTEAD, EL CATÓLICO DE KENTUCKY OCCIDENTAL

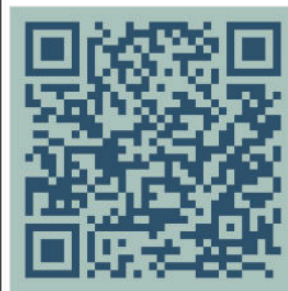
El 3 de diciembre de 2025, la Diócesis de Owensboro organizó su novena reunión anual de evangelización para párrocos, personal parroquial y voluntarios en el Centro de Convenciones The Bruce en Hopkinsville, Kentucky. La reunión contó con la presencia del aclamado presentador católico Mike Patin, quien habló sobre “la esperanza, la salud y la perseverancia en Cristo”. Se proporcionó traducción simultánea al español para quienes lo solicitaron. ■

ELIZABETH WONG BARNSTEAD | WKC  
El Padre Basilio Az Cuc, vicario parroquial de la Parroquia Santo Tomás Moro en Paducah, participa en la oración inicial el 3 de diciembre de 2025, durante la reunión anual de evangelización de la Diócesis de Owensboro.

## CONSTRUYENDO UNA FAMILIA DE FE

Talleres ofrecidos por la Diócesis de Owensboro

- Herramientas para cada edad y etapa
- Construya lazos familiares duraderos
- Aprenda a hablar con sus hijos
- Conéctese con comunidad



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propósito en  
la crianza  
católica**

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## Las parroquias honran a Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe con celebraciones anuales

COMPILADO POR EL PERSONAL DE WKC

Este año, a pesar de las condiciones frías y nevadas en el oeste de Kentucky, muchos fieles de la Diócesis de Owensboro se reunieron para celebrar la fiesta de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe en la noche del 11 de diciembre, dando paso a su festividad al día siguiente. Con Misas, música y comida, los parroquianos y visitantes hispanos/latinos conmemoraron la aparición de Nuestra Señora al catequista indígena San Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin en 1531. ■



**CORTESÍA DE LA PARROQUIA SANTO NOMBRE**  
Los adolescentes que participaron en la Danza de los Viejitos en la Parroquia Santo Nombre de Jesús en Henderson durante las celebraciones de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de 2025. La Danza de los Viejitos es una danza originaria del estado mexicano de Michoacán que es de carácter cómico. Los danzantes, generalmente hombres o adolescentes, actúan como si fueran ancianos que luchan por bailar, pero pronto la música se acelera y ellos la siguen. Esta enérgica danza es un homenaje a la sabiduría de los mayores y a Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe.



**FOTO POR CORTESÍA DE LA PARROQUIA SANTA MARÍA**

Una imagen de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, adornada con rosas en la Parroquia Santa María en Franklin durante la noche del 11 de diciembre de 2025.



**FOTO POR CORTESÍA DE LA PARROQUIA SAN FRANCISCO DE ASÍS**

Los hombres dirigen la música en la Parroquia San Francisco de Asís en el condado de Todd durante las mañanitas en honor a Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe en la noche del 11 de diciembre de 2025



**FOTO POR CORTESÍA DEL DIÁCONO CRISTÓBAL GUTIÉRREZ**

Un altar en honor a Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe en la tarde del 11 de diciembre en la Parroquia Santos José y Pablo en Owensboro, víspera de la fiesta de Nuestra Señora.

*Continúa en la contraportada*

Periodical: 25732  
U.S. Postage  
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Owensboro,  
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ISSN: 2996-8445



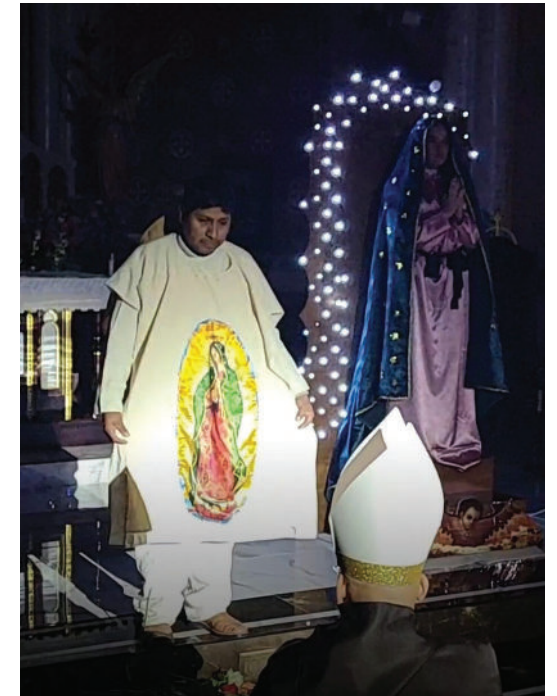
**FOTO POR CORTESÍA DE LA PARROQUIA SANTA MARÍA**

Los fieles de la Parroquia Santa María en Franklin, Kentucky en la tarde del 11 de diciembre de 2025, con su párroco, el Padre Tom Buckman, mientras celebraban la esperada fiesta de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe el 12 de diciembre.



**CORTESÍA DE LA PARROQUIA SANTO NOMBRE**

Los matachines de la Parroquia Santo Nombre de Jesús en Henderson participan en las celebraciones parroquiales de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de 2025. Los matachines son hombres y mujeres que visten trajes nativos del centro de México para bailar danzas en honor a Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. Es parte de la tradición católica mexicana de orar con danza. Al igual que Nuestra Señora incorporó la cultura de San Juan Diego a la fe católica, estos danzantes rezan con sus pasos rítmicos, disfraces e instrumentos.



**FOTO POR CORTESÍA DE LA PARROQUIA SAN JOSÉ**

El 11 de diciembre en la Parroquia San José en Bowling Green, un hombre que representa a San Juan Diego Cuauhtlatotzin muestra su tilma con una imagen de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, contando la historia de la aparición milagrosa de Nuestra Señora cuando visitó a su obispo.