



SEEK24: BE A LIGHT

FOCUS LEADERS SAY SYNODALITY, LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE GUIDED MISSION OF SEEK24



SEEK24—Attendees prayed during the SEEK24 conference at America's Center Convention Complex in St. Louis Jan. 3, 2024. Hosted by the Fellowship of Catholic University Students in St. Louis for the second consecutive year, the conference drew more than 23,000 attendees, including 111 from the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau Jan. 1-5, 2024. (OSV News photo/courtesy FOCUS)

St. Louis, MO

OSV News

A record number of attendees gathered at the Jan. 1-5 SEEK24 conference in downtown St. Louis, with excitement already mounting for the 2025 conference to be held in Salt Lake City, UT, under the theme of "Follow me." Hosted by the Fellowship of Catholic University Students in this Missouri city for the second consecutive year, the conference drew more than 23,000 attendees, including 111 from the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau. SEEK attendees participated in presentations and discussions about the Catholic faith led by globally-recognized speakers, along with opportunities for Mass, confession, and Eucharistic adoration.

Edward Sri, FOCUS's senior vice president of apostolic outreach, recounted the humble beginnings of FOCUS in 1998 at a Jan. 4 press conference.

"Curtis Martin and I were graduate students together ... we did a retreat in January of 1998," he said, describing how a small group of 24 students gathered in "nowhere Kansas" and sparked a movement that now touches thousands nationwide.

"I remember driving on I-25 from downtown Denver and seeing what at the time was called the Pepsi Center," Sri said. "I remember saying to Curtis that one day we're going to be in the Pepsi Center." At SEEK24, liturgies were held in The Dome at America's Center, the former home of the NFL's St. Louis Rams.

"It's very moving to see," Sri said, describing the impact of students falling to their knees during Eucharistic adoration.

P.J. Cronin, a student at University College Cork, Ireland, said he heard about the SEEK conference while hanging out in a Dominican-run cafe with some friends.

"I really love Scott Hahn," Cronin said. "He really opened up Scripture for me in ways that I hadn't seen before." Hahn is a professor of biblical theology at Franciscan University of Steubenville, OH.

Cronin said he recognized a few other

speakers too, but the biggest draw was seeing other young people practicing the Catholic faith, which is not something he sees in Ireland.

"I'm there in my local parish at Mass on a Sunday; I look around and there might be one other person my age, and it's demoralizing sometimes. ... You're on your own," he said. "And I come here and there's 20,000 young college students all practicing the faith and trying to live a good life."

Father Mike Schmitz, director of youth and young adult ministry for the Diocese of Duluth, MN, and chaplain at the University of Minnesota Duluth Catholic Center, spoke about his engagement with FOCUS and its impact on campus ministry. He highlighted the tremendous growth in student involvement, noting his campus now hosts 75 regular Bible studies.

"It's just amazing stuff," Fr. Schmitz said.

CONNECTIONS

Sri admitted this growth comes with challenges. In response to concerns about the organization being perceived as "cultish" or "clicky," Sri emphasized the importance of inclusivity in training and outreach.

"What the Church is calling us to—and what FOCUS is calling all of our staff, all of our missionaries to do—is to be like Jesus, who goes out," he said. Sri noted

it's a perennial temptation for Catholic ministries to become "insular." He called for "courage and charity" to drive outreach to people of all backgrounds and to accompany them.

Father Schmitz agreed. He described conversations he's had challenging leaders in his ministry to continue to go beyond a small circle as a "family meeting." He said that it's human nature to be comfortable with a group of friends, but it's essential to continue to encourage students to reach out.

"Every community is going to have some dysfunction," Fr. Schmitz said, "but when you can point out that dysfunction without fear of recrimination, that's a sign of health."

Asked about the polarization visible in the Church today and the impact of the Synod on Synodality, Fr. Schmitz responded by contrasting his experience growing up with what he sees among young people today.

"The anger, the bitterness, the resentment, the need to change the Church that was present when I was in college. ... I grew to love Jesus and hate the Church," he said. But Fr. Schmitz finds students today come with a new openness. "I find our students saying when they encounter Jesus, 'I love the Church.'"

CONTINUED // Page 12



▲ SEMO SEEKERS—Roughly 60 strong, Deacon Tom Schumer (center, back), Director of Catholic Campus Ministry at St. John Henry Newman Center, Cape Girardeau, posed for a photo with friends from the University of Missouri and students of Southeast Missouri State University during SEEK24 in St. Louis, held Jan. 1-5, 2024. (The Mirror)

111 attended SEEK24 from Springfield-Cape Girardeau and all received a \$200 grant from the diocesan Youth Endowment Fund to help cover the cost of registration for SEEK24: **Thank you donors!**

The next issue of **The Mirror** will be **February 2, 2024**. Sign up to receive the diocesan newspaper via Email in digital format: Contact Debbie Thompson at (417) 866-0841, or Email: dthompson@dioscg.org.





COME, AND
YOU WILL SEE

Bp. Edward M. Rice

A call to action: DECLINE TO SIGN

January 22 is the **Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children**, marking the 1973 Supreme Court decision that struck down a Texas statute banning abortion, and thus legalizing the procedure across the United States. All of us are aware of the 2022 Dobbs Decision by the Supreme Court which reversed the 1973 ruling, stating that the right to an abortion is not a constitutional right. That decision returned to the state level the issue of legalizing abortion.

So where does that leave us today? Powerful abortion forces with unlimited finances and influence are targeting states like Missouri to try to overturn our laws protecting human life. Through a ballot initiative and signature collection, they are attempting to codify the right to abortion in our State Constitution. I ask that you **DECLINE TO SIGN**.

In a letter dated Dec. 11, 2023, the Missouri Bishops stated, "Though several initiatives are being contemplated and none have yet to be finalized for the November 2024 ballot, we encourage all Catholics and people of goodwill to safeguard as much as possible the fundamental principle of the right to life. We also support efforts that seek to reduce or eliminate the underlying social causes for abortion by expanding care and resources available

to mothers. Even with legal protections for the unborn, as we have in our state today, more can still be done to build a culture of life."



If these petition initiatives do materialize, they could have different titles, all trying to get you to support abortion under such jargon as "women's rights," or "women's health care," or "women's reproductive rights," while avoiding the use of the word "abortion." Whatever title the proposals may take, the end goal is the same – to legalize abortion. Remember, simply put – **DECLINE TO SIGN**.

Some of these proposals include the elimination of Parental Consent laws, allowances for partial-birth and late-term abortions on demand, the elimination of health and safety standards so that anyone could perform abortions without a healthcare license and taxpayer-funded abortion would become legal. These national efforts have been successful in Minnesota, Ohio, and Kansas, and are now amping up in Missouri. In the coming days,

I will be meeting with the Vitae Foundation, Missouri Right to Life, and others to outline an appropriate strategy to counter the efforts of these out-of-state influences with their financial resources. One thing we can do – **DECLINE TO SIGN**.

JAN. 22 DAY OF PRAYER

To mark the January 22 Day of Prayer, I will offer Holy Mass and the Rosary in St. Agnes Cathedral, 5:30 p.m., on Mon., January 22.

Similarly, I will celebrate Holy Mass and the Rosary in St. Mary Cathedral, 5:15 p.m., on Fri., January 26. Pope St. John Paul II said so eloquently, "A great prayer for life is urgently needed, a prayer which will rise up throughout the world. Through special initiatives and in daily prayer, may an impassioned plea rise to God, the creator and lover of life, from every Christian community, from every group and association, from every family, and from the heart of every

believer" (*"Evangelium Vitae,"* ["The Gospel of Life,"]). I invite everyone to attend and help pray for the conversion of those in the abortion industry and for a true realization of a culture of life!

And, as part of the "new initiatives" called for by St. John Paul II, I will celebrate Holy Mass on Fri., April 19, followed by the Dedication and Blessing of the much-anticipated LifeHouse Crisis Maternity Home and AfterCare Program in Cape Girardeau. This will truly make a difference in walking with "moms in need," by increasing support for pregnant and parenting mothers. I often challenge those who criticize the pro-life movement, saying that we only care about the child at birth and do nothing after birth, to visit LifeHouse and see the programs that are offered, accompanying women for up to two years, in Springfield and now in Cape Girardeau. And remember, **DECLINE TO SIGN!**

"O Sacrament Most Holy, O Sacrament Divine, all praise and all thanksgiving, be every moment Thine." ©TM



Another Walk Through: 'Walking Together'

by Bishop Emeritus John J. Leibrecht

Before his retirement in 2008 as the Fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Bishop John Leibrecht wrote a standing column in *The Mirror* entitled, "Walking Together." At the end of each article, Bp. Leibrecht would normally share a funny story referencing his travels to the schools, or time with friends, family, or other bishops. *The Mirror* has decided to share a few of these in an ongoing series entitled, "Another walk through: 'Walking Together.'" We hope you enjoy them.

August 17, 1990 I was recently at St. John Parish in Leopold and St. Teresa Parish in Glennonville. Leopold was celebrating the 100th anniversary of its parish picnic, originally begun to raise funds for building a new church at the turn of the last century. Hundreds of people from all over the state, and from other states, came to join parishioners, including former educators in St. Teresa Catholic School, in Glennonville. The parish honored the 60th anniversary of the Ursuline sisters (Maple Mount, KY) teaching in the school. After the dinner, sisters who had formerly taught in Glennonville and had come back for the occasion were invited to tell stories. One sister told of the little girl who stayed at her desk when school was over. "It's time to leave," Sister told her. "I can't," the girl responded, "my mother told me not to come home until I learned something, and today I didn't learn a thing."

August 31, 1990 It seems that this time of year is when the people that look the most tired and worn out are the ones who just got back from vacation.

September 7, 1990 In an art gallery, two teenage boys found themselves alone in a room of modern sculpture. Staring at some twisted pipes, broken glass, and tangled shapes, one of them said, "Let's get out of here before we get blamed for wrecking this place."



Mass with
Bishop Edward Rice

Sacred Heart Church
Poplar Bluff, MO
Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2024
5:30 p.m.

During the 350th anniversary year of the first revelation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, Bishop Rice will be celebrating Mass in each of the 12 parishes in the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau named in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Everyone is invited
to attend!





VEN Y VERÁS

Obispo Edward M. Rice

Una llamada a la acción: NIÉGATE A FIRMAR

El 22 de enero se celebra el **Día de Oración por la Protección Legal de los Niños por Nacer**, que conmemora la decisión del Tribunal Supremo de 1973 que anuló una ley de Texas que prohibía el aborto y, por tanto, legalizó el procedimiento en todo Estados Unidos. Todos conocemos la Sentencia Dobbs de 2022 del Tribunal Supremo, que revocó la sentencia de 1973, declarando que el derecho al aborto no es un derecho constitucional. Esa decisión devolvió al ámbito estatal la cuestión de la legalización del aborto.

¿En qué situación nos encontramos hoy? Poderosas fuerzas abortistas con finanzas e influencia ilimitadas tienen como objetivo estados como Misuri para intentar anular nuestras leyes que protegen la vida humana. Mediante una iniciativa electoral y la recogida de firmas, intentan codificar el derecho al aborto en la Constitución de nuestro Estado. Te pido que te niegues a firmar **(DECLINE TO SIGN)**.

En una carta fechada el 11 de diciembre de 2023, los obispos de Misuri declararon: “Aunque se están contemplando varias iniciativas y todavía no se ha concretado ninguna para la votación de noviembre de 2024, animamos a todos los católicos y personas de buena voluntad a salvaguardar en la medida de lo posible el principio fundamental del derecho a la vida. También apoyamos los esfuerzos que tratan de reducir o eliminar las causas sociales subyacentes del aborto, ampliando la atención y los recursos disponibles para las madres. Incluso con

protecciones legales para los no nacidos, como las que tenemos hoy en nuestro estado, aún se puede hacer más para construir una cultura de la vida”.

Si estas iniciativas de petición llegan a materializarse, podrían tener diferentes títulos, todos ellos intentando que apoyes el aborto bajo una jerga como “derechos de la mujer”, o “asistencia sanitaria a la mujer”, o “derechos reproductivos de la mujer”, evitando al mismo tiempo el uso de la palabra “aborto”. Sea cual sea el título que adopten las propuestas, el objetivo final es el mismo: legalizar el aborto. Recuerda, en pocas palabras: **niégate a firmar (DECLINE TO SIGN)**.

Algunas de estas propuestas incluyen la eliminación de las leyes de Consentimiento Parental, la autorización de abortos de nacimiento parcial y tardíos a petición, la eliminación de las normas de salud y seguridad, de modo que cualquiera podría practicar abortos sin una licencia sanitaria y el aborto financiado por los contribuyentes pasaría a ser legal. Estos esfuerzos nacionales han tenido éxito en Minnesota, Ohio y Kansas, y ahora se están intensificando en Misuri. En los próximos días, me reuniré con la Sociedad Vitae, Derecho a la Vida de Misuri y otros para perfilar una estrategia adecuada para contrarrestar los esfuerzos de estas influencias de fuera del estado con sus recursos financieros. Una cosa que podemos hacer: **negarnos a firmar (DECLINE TO SIGN)**.

DÍA DE ORACIÓN DEL 22 DE ENERO

Con motivo de la Jornada de Oración del 22 de enero, ofreceré la Santa Misa y el Rosario en la Catedral de Santa Inés, a las 5:30 PM, el lunes 22 de enero. Del mismo modo, celebraré la Santa Misa y el Rosario en la Catedral de Santa María, a las 5:15 PM, el viernes 26 de enero. El Papa San Juan Pablo II lo dijo elocuentemente: “Que desde cada comunidad cristiana, desde cada grupo o asociación, desde cada familia y desde el corazón de cada creyente, con iniciativas extraordinarias y con la oración habitual, se eleve una súplica apasionada a Dios, Creador y amante de la vida. (*“Evangelium Vitae”* [“El Evangelio de la Vida”]). ¡Invito a todos a asistir y ayudar a rezar por la conversión de los que están en la industria del aborto y por una verdadera realización de una cultura de la vida!


Y, como parte de las “nuevas iniciativas” pedidas por San Juan Pablo II, celebraré la Santa Misa el viernes 19 de abril, seguida de la Dedicación y Bendición de la muy esperada Casa de Maternidad en Crisis y Programa de Cuidados Posteriores LifeHouse en Cape Girardeau. Esto marcará realmente la diferencia a la hora de acompañar a las “madres necesitadas”, aumentando el apoyo a las madres embarazadas y que crían a sus hijos. A menudo reto a quienes critican al movimiento provida, diciendo que sólo nos preocupamos del niño en el momento del nacimiento y no

hacemos nada después, a que visiten LifeHouse y vean los programas que se ofrecen, acompañando a las mujeres hasta dos años, en Springfield y ahora en Cape Girardeau. Y recuerda: **iniégate a firmar (DECLINE TO SIGN)!**

“Oh Sacramento Santísimo, Oh Sacramento Divino, toda la alabanza y toda la acción de gracias sean en cada momento tuyos”. ©TM

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Catholic Schools Week 2024 Catholic Schools - United in Faith and Community

Since 1974, National Catholic Schools Week (CSW) is the annual celebration of Catholic education in the United States. It starts the last Sunday in January and runs all week. This year it is Jan. 28- Feb. 3. Schools typically observe the annual celebration week with Masses, open houses, gifts of service, and other activities for students, families, parishioners, clergy, religious sisters, and the community. Let us give thanks for our diocesan Catholic schools, their leaders, administrators, faculties, and families.

All are welcome as Bishop Rice celebrates Mass to commemorate Catholic Schools Week:

Tuesday, January 30, 1 p.m.
Joplin—St. Mary Church, All School Mass

Wednesday, January 31, 9 a.m.
Springfield Catholic High School

Friday, February 2, 10:15 a.m.
Cape Girardeau—Notre Dame Regional High School



CATHOLIC SCHOOLS—Known for bringing hope and light in the darkness, students in St. Agnes Cathedral Catholic School, Springfield, celebrated the Memorial of St. Lucy, Virgin & Martyr, on Wed., Dec. 13, 2023. The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau is blessed with 23 Catholic elementary schools, including one St. Peter Middle School, in Joplin, and three Catholic high schools. *(Submitted photo)*

GLAD YOU ASKED!



a new column by Fr. Belken

- Why do we do that?
- What does the Church teach on this subject?
- Transubstanti...what?

Ask me anything...

submit questions to:
frbelken@dioscg.org

The Mirror



(Adobe Stock)



By
Fr. Joshua
J. Whitfield

WHAT WE BELIEVE, PART 35:

What About Infant Baptism?

For all our talk about baptism previously, infant baptism remains, for some, a controversial practice. Why do Catholics and some other denominations baptize babies? Why not wait for the child to choose baptism for him or herself? Here is what the tradition of the Church teaches us.

First, in the New Testament, there are references to entire “households” receiving baptism. When Lydia was baptized, for instance, Luke says “her household” was baptized too (Acts 16:15). Or, in Corinth, Paul said he baptized the “household of Stephanas” (1 Cor 1:16). This was thought, by many in the early Church, to include all people — those enslaved, children, parents. Now that, by no means, clinches the argument, nor was it the most important argument for the practice in the early Church. But it is significant.

In many parts of the early Church, adult baptism was clearly the norm, a practice also typically associated with intense moral rigor. Only after achieving a level of moral perfection would a person dare to receive baptism, which is why so many put it off until old age or just before death. Early Church Father Tertullian — a thoroughly rigorist Christian — represents this thinking: “If any understand the weighty import of baptism, they will fear its reception more than its delay” (“On Baptism,” No.18).

Yet it’s clear that in many parts of the Christian world, the practice of infant baptism was accepted and even, in some places, the norm. “The Apostolic

Tradition,” a manual of Church worship and practice like the Didache, but from the third century, lists both adults and children as candidates for baptism. “The children shall be baptized first. All of the children who can answer for themselves, let them answer. If there are any children who cannot answer for themselves, let their parents answer for them, or someone else from their family,” it says (“The Apostolic Tradition,” No. 21.2-4). The growth of the practice of infant baptism likely had some connection to the idea that baptism was necessary for salvation — a theological claim that, whatever we may think of it now, would have been taken seriously in earlier eras of serious faith and high infant mortality.

But aside from evidence found in the tradition, what theological defense is there? Enter here, St. Augustine. He offers a theological defense for infant baptism, saying basically that a child becomes a believer through the sacrament. “Therefore an infant, although he is not yet a believer in the sense of having faith which includes the consenting will of those who exercise it, nevertheless becomes a believer through the sacrament of that faith. For as it is answered that he believes, so also he is called a believer, not because he assents to the truth by an act of his own judgment, but because he receives the sacrament of that truth” (Epistle, No. 98.10). Now what does this mean?

Let’s use an analogy. Think of parents determined to give their children the best education possible.

And understandably, they decide that the best school for, say, their teenage daughter, is the Catholic high school down the road. Thus, they make their daughter apply; they pay; they make her go to the Catholic school. Now, their daughter may not understand the value of the gift of such an education. She may not understand the good things her parents have done for her. She may even hate the school at first. But in time, she will have the opportunity to grow into the school and into all the benefits that the school offers. Of course, it’s up to her whether she succeeds or fails, but it was up to her parents to give her the opportunity. And why did they give her the opportunity? Because they knew it was the best thing for their daughter well before their daughter did. If they had waited for her to choose on her own, she may have not made a choice at all, or she may have made a bad choice.

This same sort of thinking is what’s behind the practice of infant baptism. That’s what St. Augustine meant, saying the infant becomes a believer through the sacrament of his or her parents’ faith. It doesn’t at all take away the freedom of the child to live his or her life any more than the parents sending their child to the school they know is best takes away their child’s freedom either to succeed or fail as a student. But that’s why parents have their infant children baptized because, by faith, they know the gift of the sacrament is what’s best for them.

Now we should be clear this is not uniquely Catholic thinking. John Calvin,

for example, advocated infant baptism. His argument was in fact quite biblical. He pointed to Noah and to the covenant he made with God on behalf of the whole of creation. Calvin’s reasoning was that if Noah could enter all the dumb animals of creation into a covenant with God, then surely parents could enter their children into a covenant with God. “From this the ignorance of the Anabaptists may be refuted,” Calvin confidently asserted (“Commentary on Genesis,” No. 9:10). Only some Protestant groups reject infant baptism, we should remember, so this isn’t exclusively Catholic belief and practice.

There is, of course, much more that can be said or argued about infant baptism, but this brief look into the tradition is a start. What we believe about baptism — that it’s a sacrament of God’s desire for us — is clear; thus, why wouldn’t we baptize infants? For Christ bids the little ones come to him, too (Mk 10:13-16).

NEXT EDITION: WHAT WE BELIEVE, PART 36

Confirmation Completes Baptism

Father Joshua J. Whitfield is pastor of St. Rita Catholic Community in Dallas and author of *The Crisis of Bad Preaching* (Ave Maria Press, \$17.95), and other books.

“What We Believe, Part 35: What About Infant Baptism?” by Fr. Whitfield is from *simplycatholic.com*, copyright © Our Sunday Visitor; all rights reserved, no other use of this material is authorized.

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A GRATEFUL CHURCH

celebrates and recognizes the following *ordination anniversary* in February:

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Rev. John M. Harth, Feb. 27, 37 yrs.



—SPRINGFIELD—
CATHOLIC
—HIGH SCHOOL—

OPEN HOUSE

SCHS offers a well-rounded curriculum. We offer a variety of clubs and activities, as well as many athletic opportunities for boys and girls. Learn about our program and all that your child can discover.



See for yourself the great benefits of a Catholic school education! Springfield Catholic High School will be hosting an Open House on **Wednesday, February 7, 2024, 3:30-5:00 PM.**

Prospective students and their families are invited to meet teachers and students, discover our classrooms, and learn more about what makes SCHS the best!

CONTACT US

2340 S. Eastgate | (417) 887-8817

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ava—St Leo Parish will have a **Fish Fry**, Fri., Feb. 23, 4:30-6:30 p.m. Cost is \$10, dine in or carry out available.

Billings—The St. Joseph Men's Club **Lenten Fish Frys** will be held from 5-7 p.m., in the parish hall, on Feb. 16, March 1, and March 15, located at 320 NW Washington Ave. Menu includes fried fish, grilled cheese, french fries, coleslaw, vegetables, brown beans, cornbread, dessert, and drink. Entertainment provided. All proceeds go to the charities of choice of the St. Joseph Men's Club. Stations of the Cross will be prayed every Friday evening during Lent at 7 p.m. All are welcome. If you have any questions, please contact the parish office at (417) 744-2490, Mon.-Thu., from 8:30-4 p.m., or Email anytime to stjosephbillinmo@aol.com.

Gainesville—St. William Parish will have a Lenten Fish Fry Supper on Fri., Feb. 16; Fri., March 01; and Fri., March 15, 4-6 p.m. Menu includes two fried fillets of Swai, French fries, green beans, green salad, dessert, tea or coffee—cost is \$10.

Sikeston—St. Francis Xavier Parish will begin a **Eucharistic seven-week study**, "Jesus and the Eucharist," beginning the week of Jan. 21, 2024. Sessions will be offered Sunday, 4-6 p.m. and Thursday, 1:30-3:30 p.m., or 6:30-8:30 p.m. For questions or additional information, contact Toni Grojean, (573) 258-1172.

Sikeston—Grandparents, godparents, aunts, uncles, and anyone who offers prayers for children are invited to join the **Grandparents Association of St. Francis Xavier Parish**. Meetings are held the Third Thursday of each month at 9:30 a.m., in the St. Joseph Room.

Sikeston—The Women of St. Francis Xavier is holding a **fundraiser for an Underground Railroad Quilt**. This beautiful quilt was designed and pieced by parishioners. Tickets are \$1 each, or six for \$5, and are available at the parish center or at the school office. Proceeds benefit the school.

Springfield—Come and be present before our Lord in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and participate in Springfield Area's **Perpetual Adoration**. Held in Holy Trinity Chapel, there is an **urgent need** of Adorers on Wednesdays, 3 a.m.; Saturday, 8 a.m. and 9 a.m.; and Sunday, 11 p.m. Substitutes are needed for all hours. For more information or to sign up, please contact Marilyn Gibson at (417) 224-4043.

Springfield—Praise & Worship Prayer Group offers a great opportunity to come together in praise, fellowship, inspired teaching, and Adoration, and to learn more about our faith. This group meets every Thursday, 6:30-8 p.m., in St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, located at 2200 W. Republic Rd. All are welcome – Please join us! For more information, contact Shelly Pichler at (417) 838-2730.

Parishes and organizations are invited to submit notices of future events to be printed on a space-available basis. There is no fee.

REGISTER NOW

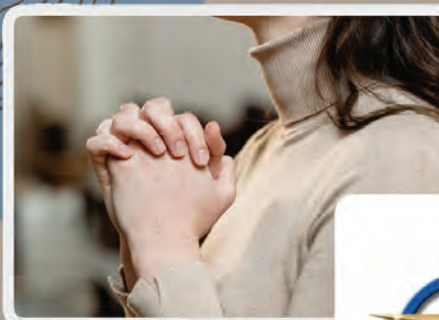
NOTRE DAME REGISTRATION OPEN!

2024-2025

Registration is officially open for the 2024-2025 school year!

All incoming freshmen and transfer students are able to register online at:

www.notredamehighschool.org/enrollment



Cursillo Weekends

Women's Weekends
Feb. 29-March 03, 2024, Fredericktown
April 11-14, 2024, Carthage

Men's Weekend
February 22-25, 2024, Fredericktown

Sign up online to attend at <https://dioscg.org/cursillo/>



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Friday abstinence: Getting to the meat of the matter

By Emily Stimpson Chapman OSV News

Long ago, in the days before the Second Vatican Council, those who felt a certain distaste for the Catholic faith were wont to speak of their papist neighbors as “mackerel snappers.”

The silly term was rooted in the centuries-old discipline of Catholics abstaining from meat on Fridays. As that discipline disappeared, so did the insult. Yet “mackerel snappers” just might make a comeback in anti-Catholic circles, or at least in England and Wales, where, since Sept. 16, 2011, all Catholics have been obligated once again to forgo steaks on Fridays, and instead dine on less fleshy fare.

In May 2011, the bishops of England and Wales, wrote: “In accordance with the whole Church, the Bishops’ Conference wishes to remind all Catholics in England and Wales of the obligation of Friday Penance. The bishops have decided to re-establish the practice that this should be fulfilled by abstaining from meat. Those who cannot or choose not to eat meat as part of their normal diet should abstain from some other food of which they normally partake.”

In 2022, they reiterated that commitment, writing, “In this way we dedicate to God the pressing need for us all to live more simply.”

Why the change? And why should Catholics in America be concerned with what British Catholics eat on Fridays?

Meaningful acts of Penance

The answer starts with a brief history of Friday abstinence, the first mention of which comes in the *Didache*, a first-century compilation of Christian teachings. There, Christians are enjoined to fast on Wednesday and Fridays. The Wednesday fast soon fell out of fashion, but the Friday fast continued for nearly two millennia, with Christians commemorating the day of the Lord’s death through prayer, fasting, and abstinence from meat and fowl.

The reason for that, said Rob Corzine, vice president for academic

programs at the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology, is that “the Church has always understood that every week is a microcosm of the liturgical year. Every Friday is a little Lent, and every Sunday a little Easter. The two are inseparably linked.”

The Church’s teaching on that point hasn’t altered. It has never changed its insistence upon Friday as a day of penance any more than it has changed its insistence upon Sunday as a day of worship. What it has changed, however, is its insistence upon what form that penance should take.

In 1966, Pope St. Paul VI issued the apostolic constitution “*Paenitemini*” (“On Fast and Abstinence”). There, he reiterated that “by divine law all the faithful are required to do penance,” and that “abstinence is to be observed on every Friday which does not fall on a day of obligation.”

He went on, however, to grant national episcopal conferences the authority to “substitute abstinence and fast wholly or in part with other forms of penance and especially works of charity and the exercises of piety.”

The reasoning behind the change was that while abstaining from meat was a penitential act in wealthy nations, it was a way of life in poorer countries. Giving bishops the freedom to adapt the required penance to best suit the circumstances of their own flock was a concession to the changing realities of the Catholic world. It also reaffirmed the penitential nature of Friday, underlining the importance of the faithful uniting themselves with Christ in his passion through meaningful acts of penance.

That was the theory. In practice, it didn’t quite work that way.

Instead of insisting upon abstinence as an act of solidarity with the poor, many affluent nations’ bishops conferences, including those in Britain and the United States, made the traditional practice of meatless Fridays optional, allowing Catholics to choose their own penance instead. Catholics in those countries took that freedom



MEATLESS FRIDAY, MEATLESS MEAL—A photo of a scallop-and-asparagus “burger” illustrates a meatless meal. Bishops in England and Wales reintroduced the penance in 2011 and refreshed their commitment to it in 2022. (OSV News photo/Bernadette Wurzinger, Pixabay)

a step further, interpreting the change not simply as an abrogation of meatless Fridays, but as an abrogation of any Friday penance.

The ambiguous language of the US bishops’ 1966 document on the topic didn’t help matters. Nor did the timing. The 1983 Code of Canon Law attempted to clear up the confusion over Friday penance, stating in Canons 1250 and 1251, that “The penitential days and times in the universal Church are every Friday of the whole year and the season of Lent. Abstinence from meat, or from some other food as determined by the Episcopal Conference, is to be observed on all Fridays, unless a solemnity should fall on a Friday.”

By that point, however, the proverbial die was cast. Although a pious

few continued to forgo meat or perform some other act of prayer or sacrifice on Friday, the majority of Catholics in the West treated the day just like any other.

Times, however, are changing

In 2009, then-ordinary of Steubenville, OH, Bishop Daniel Conlon, issued a pastoral letter requesting all Catholics in the diocese resume abstinence from meat on Fridays. Two years later, the Bishops of England and Wales did likewise. And they did so, for similar reasons.

First, both issued their letters as a reminder to Catholics that Fridays should be observed as days of penance. At the time, Bishop Conlon told Our Sunday Visitor, “Despite Pope Paul VI’s



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How do we fast?

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Am I excused from fasting and abstinence?

Those that are excused from fast and abstinence outside the age limits include the physically or mentally ill including individuals suffering from chronic illnesses such as diabetes. Also excluded are pregnant or nursing women.

For more information on fasting and abstinence, visit usccb.org.



Friday Abstinence // Continued

injunction that Catholics substitute another penitential practice for abstaining from meat on Fridays, most Catholics were not doing anything.”

Second, both wanted to stress the importance of ascetic practices. “It seems to me that the call to asceticism is even greater for those who live in a materialistic society. It’s good for the soul, and it’s good for the body,” said Bishop Conlon, who in 2011 was assigned to lead the Diocese of Joliet, Illinois, and who resigned in 2020 after taking medical leave.

Third, they wanted to revive Friday abstinence as a means by which Catholics bear common witness to the culture. Wrote Britain’s bishops, “By the practice of penance every Catholic identifies with Christ in his death on the cross. ... When this is visible in the public arena, then it is also an important act of witness.”

Finally, at least in England and Wales, the bishops reinstated the practice as a means of strengthening Catholic identity. From the bishops’ letter: “The bishops wish to re-establish the practice of Friday penance in the lives of the faithful as a clear and distinctive mark of their own Catholic identity. They recognize that the best habits are those acquired as part of a common resolve and common witness.”

Since then, other US bishops, including Bishop Edward Weisenburger of Tucson, AZ (while bishop of Salena, KS), and Bishop Glen John Provost of Lake Charles, LA, have encouraged their faithful to return to year-round Friday abstinence.

Which brings us back to the question—what does this have to do with the rest of us?

Simply put, all those reasons for abstaining from meat on Fridays are as valid for Catholics in Sacramento as they are for Catholics in

Sussex.

When the name of the game is “Choose Your Own Penance,” many of us will end up not choosing anything at all. When it’s a settled question, however, that Friday penance means abstaining from meat, the penance is much more likely to be observed. Also, because it’s observed at every meal, it keeps one conscious of the day’s particular charism.

Then, there remains the fact that abstinence is good for us.

“In a fully integrated human being, the soul is in charge of the body,” said Fr. Edward Connolly, a priest of the Diocese of Allentown, PA. “Abstaining from meat and other foods reminds us of that.”

Likewise, abstinence enables all Catholics to become public witnesses to the faith.

“Like our Jewish brothers who keep a kosher diet, it’s a visible, tangible way we can testify to the fact that our Lord died for us on a Friday,” said Fr. Connolly.

Last, but not least, abstaining from meat is still the US bishops’ stated preference for how Catholics should observe Fridays.

As they wrote in 1966: “Even though we hereby terminate the traditional law of abstinence binding under pain of sin as the sole prescribed means of observing Friday, we give first place to abstinence from flesh meat. We do so in the hope that the Catholic community will ordinarily continue to abstain from meat by free choice as formerly we did in obedience to Church law.”

Perhaps it’s time to take them up on their invitation. ©OSV News

Emily Stimpson Chapman is a bestselling Catholic author of nearly a dozen books, and a former contributing editor to Our Sunday Visitor. Her writing can be found at substack.com/@emilystimpsonchapman.

CCSOMO announces Social Services Program Changes



Joplin, MO

Pregnancy and parenting support to expectant families are coming to the Joplin area. A full-time case manager has been hired for the family-focused Healthy Moms, Healthy Babies Program (HMHB), which works with families experiencing pregnancy to promote self-sufficiency within the family unit.

“I am excited to bring HMHB to Joplin,” said Cindi Kopel, Chief Programs Officer. “HMHB is a financially sound, grant-funded program that allows case managers to meet a family’s needs where they are.”

HMHB gives personalized attention through home visits and brings wrap-around services, including resources such as pre- and post-natal education, parenting and life skills training, and referrals to clients.

“Our Healthy Moms, Healthy Babies program provides direct assistance to families in need, of

any faith, leading to better maternal and infant health outcomes,” said Ken Palermo, CEO.

Any questions about HMHB should be directed to Nikohl McKee, Maternal and Family Programs Administrator at nmckee@ccsomo.org.

Other program changes involve the closure of the agency’s Joplin-based, social enterprise endeavor, Purpose Home Repair.

“While challenging to traditional construction companies, higher materials and labor costs pose even greater hurdles as a social enterprise,” said Ken Palermo, CEO. “When considering available resources and our capacity to ensure the program remains viable into the future, it became apparent this change was required.”

CCSOMO extends its gratitude to its dedicated staff, community partners, and clients for their support over the last five years of its social enterprise effort.

Agency construction services, to serve those in need, will continue at CCSOMO through both the

HERO Grant and the Senior and Developmental Disability Build Programs. Questions about such programs can be directed to bwuerdeman@ccsomo.org. ©TM



PREGNANCY & PARENTING SUPPORT—Expectant families in the Joplin area will benefit from expanding pregnancy & parenting support: A full-time case manager has been hired for the Healthy Moms, Healthy Babies Program (HMHB) program of Catholic Charities of Southern Missouri. HMHB works with families experiencing pregnancy to promote self-sufficiency within the family unit. (Getty)

Blessed & Anointed: new altar consecrated in Bolivar

By Debbie Thompson

Bolivar, MO

Bishop Edward Rice presided at Mass on Fri, Dec. 15, 2023, where he blessed and dedicated a new locally-crafted altar at Sacred Heart Parish, in Bolivar.

The new altar was a project that began two years ago with a successful parish Giving Tuesday iGiveCatholic fundraiser. With the oversight of The Very Rev. Fr. Scott Sunnenberg, pastor, the new altar was designed by Deacon James Farrar, and crafted and brought to life with assistance of OP Hardwoods, in Springfield.

At the beginning of the Mass, Bishop Rice sprinkled the altar—and the congregation—with holy water. After his homily, the consecration would continue with the placing of the relics in the altar. The altar was then anointed with the sacred chrism oil by Bishop Rice. With the burning Incense placed on the altar, the altar was then wiped clean and “dressed” with the altar cloth.

This ritual was followed by the lighting of the candles so that the full Celebration of the Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist might commence. During his homily, Bishop Rice shared that the altar is the focus when the parish gathers to celebrate the Eucharist and has a twofold meaning:

“The altar is the focal point of the sacrifice of Christ, offered to the Father, and it is the ‘table of the Lord,’ where we receive food for the journey. In both meanings, what is highlighted is that the Christian altar is the symbol of Christ Himself, the altar in the midst of the assembly of the faithful, it is the place where the Victim is offered for our reconciliation and where the food from heaven is given to us. The altar is not just an empty table until it is used at the offertory: it will be baptized, as we will sprinkle it with [holy] water, and then with the sacred chrism, it will be anointed, similar to [what happen to each one of us during confirmation.

“St. Ambrose said, ‘For what is

the altar of Christ if not the image of the Body of Christ?’ He goes on to say, ‘The altar represents the Body of Christ and the Body of Christ is on the altar.’ On the altar, which is the center of the church, the sacrifice of the cross is made present under sacramental signs. And, at the table of the Lord, we are invited to be nourished.”

Unless one has been present at the founding of a church or dedication of a new altar for use in



OIL OF CHRISM—Deacon Jim Farrar looks on as Bishop Edward M. Rice consecrates the new altar designed and crafted by Deacon Farrar with the assistance of OP Hardwoods in Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Bolivar. Bishop Rice blessed and anointed the altar with sacred chrism on Dec. 15. The altar was made possible because of a successful iGiveCatholic Giving Tuesday initiative undertaken two years ago. (Photo by Debbie Thompson/The Mirror)



INCENSE—Incense is the symbol of prayer and rises like the Gloria at the end of a psalm in adoration and thanksgiving to God for his great glory.* Incense is burned atop new altars as they are undergoing the process of consecration prior to their first use. Additionally, grains of incense are placed into the sepulcher of newly-consecrated altars along with the relics of saints to represent the burial rite of the ancient martyrs and to symbolize the prayers of the saint to whom the relic belongs. (*Sacred Signs). (Photo by Debbie Thompson/The Mirror)



ALTAR CLOTH PLACED—Deacon James Farrar is assisted by parishioner Ben Divin in “dressing” the new altar in Sacred Heart Catholic Church after its consecration on Dec. 15 by Bishop Edward M. Rice. Samuel Wick was the altar’s server. (Photo by Debbie Thompson/The Mirror)

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For more information, please contact the Office of Child and Youth Protection, childandyouthprotection@dioscg.org; or Bill Holtmeyer, billholtmeyer@dioscg.org; or Shelly Ferry, sferry@dioscg.org, (417) 866-0841.

a parish, not many people have the opportunity to witness a consecration of an altar, which is a very engaging, symbolic, and beautiful ceremony. In fact, Bishop Rice himself has only done this twice now: The first being in 2021 at the consecration of the new altar during the dedication of the St. John Henry Newman Center on the campus of Southeast Missouri State University, in Cape Girardeau.

“St. Leo the Great refers to “the altar of the heart,” said Bishop Rice, concluding his homily, “that beautiful moment at the offertory of the Mass with the dialogue when the priest says, ‘The Lord be with you,’ and you respond, ‘And with your spirit.’ Then, all are invited to ‘Lift up your hearts,’ and you respond, ‘We lift them up to the Lord.’ At that moment, you are invited to unite your heart to the sacrifice of Christ on the altar, to be raised up to the Father.

“Each heart present here today, some filled with sadness for some reason, struggling for some reason, maybe hearts filled with happy anticipation of the celebration of Christmas: hearts filled with joy or sorrow, suffering or happiness,” Bishop Rice said. “Those hearts will now be united with the sacrifice of Christ, that we all belong to the Body of Christ.” ©TM

THE 5TH ANNUAL CATHOLIC MEN'S CONFERENCE, FEB. 24

Springfield

Join hundreds for a day of life-changing inspiration at the 5th annual Catholic Men's Conference on Sat., Feb. 24, 2024, at the Springfield Catholic High School. Open to all men, regardless of church affiliation, this year's free event will feature a new, fun, interactive session.

GET READY - God wants to do something amazing in your life!

Keynote speaker Justin Fatica's powerful message will be a wake-up call to embrace new possibilities, break out of mediocrity, and live a life of authentic joy.

"If you want to be an encouragement and inspiration and bring hope to the world, save this date of February 24th, 2024, and come to the Catholic Men's Conference," Fatica said. "I can't wait to see the amazing things God's got in store for you and for me. Let's do it! We're a team! Register now!"

For over 20 years, Justin Fatica has impacted over two million people, at over 1,500 live events, in four countries and 46 states. He has been featured on numerous media outlets such as Good Morning America, ABC Nightline, TBN, Our Daily Bread, and was the subject of an HBO film called "Hard as Nails." Fatica is also featured in a 10-episode television series on EWTN called "You're Amazing with Justin Fatica," the focus of which is the impact that he has made while traveling on the road.

'We're building a culture of men who will transform our families and communities.'

"At the 2024 Catholics Men's Conference this February, we'll be talking about greatness. We're called to be great—not just good," Fatica said.

"We're called to be men who take risks; to take chances. To inspire young people to get back into their faith. To get out of mediocrity, and the only way to get young people out of mediocrity: We need to be people that aren't mediocre."

"[We're called to be men] who will



CATHOLIC MEN'S CONFERENCE—Now in its fifth year, registration is open to all men ages 18 and older for the annual Catholic Men's Conference to be held Sat., Feb. 24, in Springfield Catholic High School. (Photo by Matthew Henderson/The Mirror)

inspire every young person all over the world to say, 'God has a call for me to be great. Because I see my dad, my grandfather, I see my uncle, my cousin—they're striving to be great. So I want to be great.'"

HEAVEN'S MENTALITY

The married father of five lives in Syracuse, NY, with his wife, Mary Elizabeth., and is the author of five books: including 2 best sellers, *Hard as Nails: A Mission to Awaken Youth to the Power of God's Love* and *Win it All: The Way to Heaven for Catholic Teens*. He is the Founder and Executive Director of "You're Amazing Fitness" and "Hard as Nails."

"Right now, in our country, kids are hurting. They need you," said Fatica. "They need us. To make a decision—a definite decision—to be a disciple. So that they will want more out of life than just what this Earth has to give them."

"To be a man of greatness, we have to have a 'Heaven's mentality,' to push forward and persevere when times get tough. To be inspiring. To be encouraging. To be a person that transforms the world because our life is on fire. Luke 12:49 says: 'I have come to

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- Lunch will be provided during breakout sessions.
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- The conference ends by 3:30 p.m.

set this Earth on fire, and how I wish it was already blazing."

Fatica encourages, "Let's be like Christ, men. Let's be not just good but great."

All men 18 years and older may register, regardless of church affiliation. Admission is free. Register by visiting www.CatholicConference.men. ©TM

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'FIDUCIA SUPPLICANS': A Pastor's View

COMMENTARY: *The pastoral concessions the Vatican's latest document gives for the blessing of people in same-sex relationships and other irregular marriages is imprudent and does not reflect reality 'on the ground.'*

By Father Jeffrey Kirby

The great joy of a parish priest is to be with the people of God, elbow deep in the midst of their joys, sorrows and sufferings. The fatherly vocation of the parish priest is to teach, govern and sanctify his parishioners in Christ's name. This is done by teaching and shepherding, exhorting and consoling, absolving and admonishing, guiding his parishioners to greater conviction in their discipleship, encouraging them, accompanying them, crying and laughing with them, and — in all things Christian — to love them as a reflection of Christ's own love for the Church.

The corridors of the Vatican dicasteries are very different from the trenches of parish life. Magisterial declarations can be promulgated (perhaps even with good intentions) and explained within a series of theological gymnastics to the satisfaction of high Churchmen, but parish priests and the people under their pastoral care are left scratching their heads trying to figure out what was just declared, what it all means, and how we're supposed to make sense of it.

In a healthy Church, the various structures — including Vatican dicasteries — would support and champion the grassroots reality of parish life, since that is where the vast majority of believers hear the Gospel, sacramentally encounter the Lord, and experience the life of the Church.

The recent declaration *Fiducia Supplicans*, however, is not a reflection of a healthy Church. The pastoral concessions it gives for the blessing of people in same-sex relationships and other irregular marriages is imprudent and does not reflect reality "on the ground." In fact, this declaration — however well-intentioned it might be — causes unnecessary confusion, moral ambiguity, anger, pastoral hurt, and a regrettable, needless tension between the baptized and their appointed shepherds.

The reality, at the parish level, is that there are no droves of divorced-and-remarried people or gay couples aspiring to receive the Church's blessing, liturgical or pastoral.

While it might seem bourgeois to some, most people (who do not classify themselves as activists and reformers) have a basic and compelling moral sense of right and wrong. When they find themselves in a state of sin, rather than a sinful act, they tend to make one of two decisions: repent and reconcile with the Lord, or remain obstinate and walk away. In these instances, the



PASTORAL BLESSINGS TO THOSE IN IRREGULAR RELATIONSHIPS—

"The reality, at the parish level, is that there are no droves of divorced-and-remarried people or gay couples aspiring to receive the Church's blessing, liturgical or pastoral," says author Fr. Jeffrey Kirby. "While it might seem *bourgeois* to some, most people ... have a basic and compelling moral sense of right and wrong. When they find themselves in a state of sin, rather than a sinful act, they tend to make one of two decisions: repent and reconcile with the Lord, or remain obstinate and walk away. In these instances, the Church welcomes and encourages all people to repent. There is no harsh judgment or dismissal of the person. There is an invitation that can be accepted or rejected. ... Sadly, there are no references to repentance, the sacrament of confession or conversion in "*Fiducia Supplicans*." (Photo by Mart Productions/Pexels)

Church welcomes and encourages all people to repent. There is no harsh judgment or dismissal of the person. There is an invitation that can be accepted or rejected.

The people I encounter in active parish life are the ones who have repented, or who want to repent, or who want to want to repent. They understand the need to seek the graces of conversion, to repent, confess their sins in prayer and in sacramental confession, remedy their state of sin, reconcile with the Lord Jesus and the Church, do acts of penance, and seek the ongoing help of God's grace to persevere in the way of the Lord Jesus.

Such a process of conversion is

displayed for us in the public ministry of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel. We see it throughout the Acts of the Apostles, and, more recently, such a process was confirmed and elevated by the Second Vatican Council in *Ad Gentes*, its decree on missionary activity, and by Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. It is a process that is also known by every Christian believer, as we are all constantly called to undergo such a process so that we can draw closer to the Lord Jesus every day.

Sadly, there are no references to repentance, the sacrament of confession or conversion in *Fiducia Supplicans*. There is only one passing reference (in a quote) to penitential practices. The declaration's references to grace are overly passive and do not call for a change of one's life. The limp references to grace in the declaration do not withstand the "sniff test" of the real fight between sin and holiness.

This is one of many foundational problems associated with what many see as a blind jump to give pastoral blessings to those in irregular relationships.

The people in active parish life are very different from the activists in social movements. This can be hard for high Churchmen to understand since they might need or choose to deal more with societal movements rather than with grassroots communities of Christian believers.

In average parish life, it's extremely rare that I have a gay couple wanting a blessing from the Church. It's more common that I'll have people who have been emotionally and spiritually beaten up by the gay lifestyle who want to change their lives and receive the mercy of God. In parish life, it's very uncommon that a divorced-and-remarried couple will seek a blessing from the Church. It's more common that they will want to rectify their irregular marriage and will need guidance and encouragement in the annulment process.

Active parish life serves as a strainer. Leaders of social movements do not commit themselves to a real, stable Eucharistic community. They are rarely active members of parishes since the ordinary living out of the Christian way of life seems offensive and belittling to them. The people in parish life have already made



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some initial decision for conversion, and it's the best starting point to lead someone to deeper discipleship.

In addition to these types of parishioners, there are the circle of loved ones and friends – so praised and esteemed throughout the life of the Lord Jesus – who have been praying, doing penances, inviting, receiving scorn, trying to explain moral truth, and inviting their loved ones again and again back to the way of the Lord Jesus. The return of their loved ones to the faith is a cause for rejoicing since it was brought forth by a true conversion to Christ and a desire for something more than what they previously possessed.

With this perspective in mind, the recent Vatican declaration appears destined to cause spiritual stress and uncertainty to parish priests and the people of God in the trenches of life. The blessing of couples in a state of sin only confounds and causes bewilderment among the faithful. The blessing of sin, with no call to conversion, is a scandal. The intricacies of the Vatican's theological explanation for the new declaration will cause confusion, since it sounds like equivocation to sin. It will anger and frustrate many of those in irregular marriages who are trying to reform their lives and follow the Gospel and who now feel unsupported by the higher shepherds of the Church.

Among the general body of believers there is further anger since leadership is now authorizing the blessing of what God will not bless. They are fighting to hold the line in their own lives and in the lives of their families. Imagine the sense of betrayal in the parents who have fought to keep their adult child out of a gay lifestyle and who now have to explain what the Vatican has just done

The Vatican declaration has also caused perplexity among priests, who are already fighting the effects of secularism and relativism among their people and will now have to explain

the difference between doctrine and the new understanding of supposed pastoral outreach.

For example, imagine the pastor who now has to emphasize the need for a divorced-and-remarried couple to continue the annulment process even if they now think it's unnecessary.

Imagine the pastor who must stress again and again in his preaching that homosexual activity is grave sin, though we are now blessing those engaged in it.

Lastly, imagine the people hurt by the gay lifestyle who no longer see the Catholic Church as the field hospital and path to a renewed life since we're blessing gay couples and appear to have compromised on this point.

The list of conditions and provisions for the blessing of couples in irregular marriages are excessive and will all be ignored by the more progressive clergy among us. Such dismissiveness of the conditions will be overlooked by leadership. There will be no accountability. As such, tensions will increase among the clergy and further divisions will be introduced over those who will bless according to the current mind of the Church, those who will bless however they prefer, and those who will refuse to give blessings in this way.

Rather than serving the lifeline of the Church on the parish level, the declaration *Fiducia Supplicans* has only made the Christian way of life and the process of conversion a thousand times harder to preach, teach, apply, enforce and live. ©NCR

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THE ANNUAL DIOCESAN WEDDING ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

SUNDAY, FEB. 4, 2024, 1:00 P.M. ST. MARY'S CATHEDRAL, CAPE GIRARDEAU
SATURDAY, FEB. 10, 2024, 1:00 P.M. ST. AGNES CATHEDRAL, SPRINGFIELD

Couples celebrating their 1st, 5th, 10th, 15th, 20th, 25th, 30th, 35th, 40th, 45th, 50th, or 50+ anniversary anytime during 2024, please pre-register for one of the two Diocesan Wedding Anniversary Celebrations and receive a Marriage Anniversary Certificate from Bishop Rice. In addition, those celebrating their 25th or 50th anniversaries will receive an Episcopal Blessing and a special gift from Bishop Rice.

Join us for Mass with Bishop Edward M. Rice, followed by a reception with light Hors D'oeuvres, cake, and punch. These occasions enable all of us to celebrate and affirm the great gift of marriage within our communities.
Please make plans to attend!

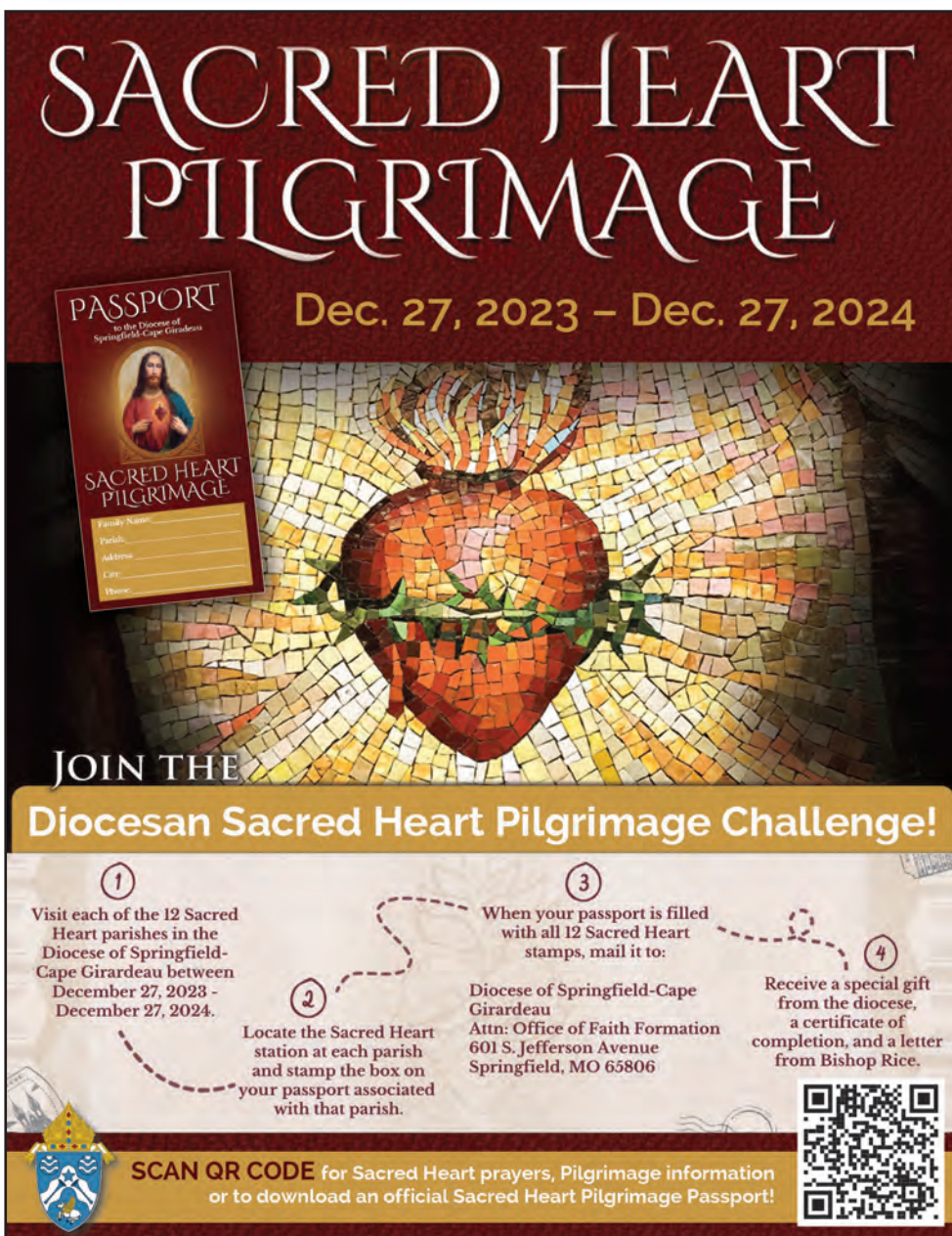
For us to properly prepare, we ask that couples RSVP by January 19, 2024. Register by scanning the QR code, or go to the Family Life page at dioscg.org

SCAN QR CODE TO REGISTER



LEARN ABOUT THE MANY
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES
AROUND THE **DIOCESE!**

Scan QR code or go to DioSCG.org/employment



SACRED HEART PILGRIMAGE
Dec. 27, 2023 – Dec. 27, 2024

JOIN THE
Diocesan Sacred Heart Pilgrimage Challenge!

- Visit each of the 12 Sacred Heart parishes in the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau between December 27, 2023 - December 27, 2024.
- Locate the Sacred Heart station at each parish and stamp the box on your passport associated with that parish.
- When your passport is filled with all 12 Sacred Heart stamps, mail it to:
Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau
Attn: Office of Faith Formation
601 S. Jefferson Avenue
Springfield, MO 65806
- Receive a special gift from the diocese, a certificate of completion, and a letter from Bishop Rice.

SCAN QR CODE for Sacred Heart prayers, Pilgrimage information or to download an official Sacred Heart Pilgrimage Passport!



▲ **SEEK24**—Bishop Edward M. Rice (center, back) caught up with Fr. Bibin Mathew, CMF, Director and Chaplain, and the students of Missouri State University, Drury University, and Ozarks Technical Community College, Springfield, during SEEK24 in St. Louis Jan. 1-5, 2024. (*The Mirror*)

SEEK24 // *Continued from Page 1*

LISTENING IS A TWO-WAY STREET

Listening is a two-way street, Father Schmitz said, requiring the Church to listen to students but also for students to listen to the Church.

Sri noted that a number of FOCUS staff have participated in listening sessions at parishes held in preparation for the synod, and he emphasized a synodal approach is at the heart of FOCUS's evangelical mission.

"So much of what we're doing is going to listen to people downstream," he said. Sri insisted that hearing the questions of young people has driven the way that FOCUS has developed its formation curriculum. And that process will continue, as formation materials are revised and reissued, Sri said.

Emily Wilson Hussem, an author and speaker, described the openness she has seen among students at SEEK24.

"They're so hungry, they're so sick of the culture, they know it's all a lie ... and they're here, and they're ready and open," she said.

THOUSANDS GATHER TO GO ON MISSION

The SEEK24 conference, with its 23,000 participants, marked a significant milestone for FOCUS, which has just concluded celebrations for its 25th anniversary, and served as a beacon of hope and spiritual renewal for tens of thousands of attendees.

"What began in January 1998 with

24 college students has now grown to nearly 1,000 full-time missionaries across more than 200 campuses and dozens of parishes," John Zimmer, FOCUS vice president of apostolic development, referring to FOCUS, which organizes the annual conference. "This growth is a testament to God's desire for the new evangelization and the fruitfulness that comes from fidelity to the Lord."

Recalling St. John Paul II's 1999 visit to St. Louis, located along the Mississippi River, SEEK24 conference has taken up the theme, "Be the light." There, 25 years ago, the Pope told the assembled crowd of young people, "You are children of the light! You belong to Christ, and he has called you by name."

"The most profound and powerful part of the SEEK conference is experiencing Christ himself in the liturgy," Zimmer said.

The highlight, according to Zimmer, was the Jan. 3 evening of Eucharistic adoration and confession, which was open to the entire city of St. Louis.

"That evening—there's something that the Lord is doing in people's hearts that they just desire to be healed by him," Zimmer said.

Many students come to the conference looking to connect with fellow Catholics. Sister Chelsea Bethany Davis, a member of the Daughters of St. Paul, has attended SEEK several times.

"I think it's a really important event,

especially for young people and young adults, to grow in their faith, to help them know that they're not alone," she said.

The conference offers more than liturgy and fellowship, said Julie Cilano, associate director of campus ministry at The Catholic University of America in Washington. SEEK has a powerful impact in forming students to be leaders in ministry on campus.

"After the talks, away from campus, they can have conversations about the faith together, which helps them to bond as friends and as leaders ... and they're able to bring that back to campus," Cilano said.

The conference featured notable Catholic speakers, including Fr. Mike Schmitz, Chika Anyanwu, Fr. Joshua Johnson, Emily Wilson Hussem, Sr. Josephine Garrett of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, and Fr. Mark-Mary Ames of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal. Hundreds of vendors connected students to religious orders, educational and service opportunities, and other Catholic organizations to further their faith formation.

Brian Kusek, director of campus ministry at St. Mary's University of Minnesota in Winona, said he doesn't think there is another Catholic event comparable to SEEK.

"It's incredibly faithful," he said.

WANT TO SEE THE SEEK24 RECAP OR EXPLORE SEEK25, WHICH WILL BE HELD JAN. 1-5, 2025 IN SALT LAKE CITY, UT?

Learn more here:
<https://seek.focus.org>

SEEK24 - by SEMO's Madi Vaughan

Earlier this school year, I was received into full Communion with the Catholic Church. As a new Catholic, SEEK24 was an incredible experience for me. Seeing thousands of students gathered under one roof to worship God, seeking to know and understand him on a deeper level, is something I will never forget. It put things into perspective for me and gave me a greater appreciation for the Christ-loving people that I surround myself with in my everyday life. Plus, the talks given at both the impact sessions and the keynotes were so helpful to me. It truly spurred a desire in me to go even deeper in my relationship with Jesus, and to try to give more of myself to Him. I took pages of notes and I continue to pray with those ideas after SEEK24 to help better myself and my connection to Jesus. Getting to receive the Sacraments at SEEK just put it on a level above everything else. I was overjoyed to receive God's mercy in reconciliation and to participate in the Eucharist with an entire arena full of people. Not to mention, watching the procession of Mass where hundreds of priests along with bishops and cardinals walked in together; this is one of the coolest things to witness, and I got to see it every single morning. I don't have the words to explain how grateful I am that I had the opportunity to go to SEEK this year. It is something that I will continue to learn from for a long time, and I am so excited to see what fruit it bears in my life.

"We encounter all these beautiful religious orders and devotions and Catholic apostolates in a way like you wouldn't on your local campus."

MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP FOR LIFE

"Our aim is to equip students to be missionary disciples for life," Zimmer explained. The organization focuses on training individuals on college campuses, recognizing these as strategic places for shaping the next generation of missionary disciples.

The "Making Missionary Disciples" track at SEEK24 was specially designed to equip ordinary Catholics, diocesan leaders, and parish staff with Jesus' method of evangelization.

"Over the last decade or so, we've realized—both with the number of missionaries and students involved in FOCUS—there's over 50,000 former students and staff now in parishes," Zimmer said. "We wanted to be able to help equip them more effectively now that they're living in that environment to use what they learned on campus and translate it to parish life."

SEEK24 also has seen substantial growth in the seminarian experience. With talks and opportunities tailored to the needs of seminary formation, more than 450 seminarians are participating in SEEK24, up from 250 last year, according to FOCUS.

As FOCUS looks forward to the future, Zimmer expressed gratitude for the Lord's work in the hearts and minds of people worldwide.

"Our annual SEEK conference, held during the Christmas season, is a time for us to show our gratitude to God for sending His Son to save us from our sins," Zimmer said. ©OSV News

SEEK24 - by SEMO's Alex Harold

In the summer of 2019, after my senior year of high school, I was on a bus trip with three friends. We had converted an old school bus into a camper to drive around the country for our senior trip. In northern Michigan, the bus broke down, and in a moment of desperation, we found ourselves in the nearest Catholic Church parking lot. I remember this being one of the first times I specifically asked God for help through the intercession of the Blessed Mother. Only moments later, a packed Honda Accord, carrying five priests, arrived at the scene on their way back from an Ordination. The newly-ordained priest among them offered his first blessing to us and to our bus, and he told us that we could leave the bus parked in the lot for a while. After having dinner, the bus miraculously restarted with no problems and went on to carry us safely for another couple thousand miles. At the time, none of us knew the Lord well on a personal level, although we were raised Catholic and had always been led by the Spirit to where we needed to be.

After two more years of spiritual lukewarmness, the Spirit led me to the St. John Henry Newman Center, in Cape Girardeau, where I was invited to take my faith more seriously and form a personal

relationship with Jesus. That year, with some help of diocesan funding through the Youth Endowment Fund, I decided to attend my first SEEK conference, which was instrumental in my growth as a disciple and instrumental in my gaining a better understanding of our Catholic faith. This year, and again with help from the diocese, I attended my third SEEK conference in St. Louis. It was a week filled with deeply impactful talks and profound communion among young Catholics, all having fun and discussing their own journey with Christ. It truly was a glimpse of the Kingdom of heaven, although food, restrooms, and sleep were a bit scarce, which as I think about it, those probably aren't needed in heaven!

In summation, though many of us young people have been raised Catholic, without the great formation opportunities like SEEK, we are easily tempted to just leave the Church, even if our bus has been miraculously repaired once upon a time. We need regular exposure to the absolute Truth found in the Church and the joy of living with Christ, which was on full display at SEEK24. I sincerely want to thank the diocese and all donors to the Capital Endowment Campaign for enabling me and my friends to experience our great Catholic faith together. It truly is the greatest gift I've been given.