

LIFEHOUSE CRISIS MATERNITY HOME



CELEBRATES 10th ANNIVERSARY

Springfield, MO

Catholic Charities of Southern Missouri recently celebrated the 10th anniversary of its *LifeHouse Crisis Maternity Home*. Bishop Edward Rice celebrated a Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, Springfield, for staff, past and present, benefactors, moms and their children, and the community. Attendees then visited St. Anne Monastery, home of LifeHouse, for a reception with Catholic Charities staff. Four of the newest babies, including three-day-old twins, were blessed by Bishop Rice in honor of the special occasion.

LifeHouse in Springfield opened its doors inside the former Carmel of St. Anne Monastery on Dec. 27, 2013. LifeHouse is a residential program for homeless, pregnant women that offers individualized case management along with pre- and post-natal education and parenting and life skills training. LifeHouse has on site social work case managers, a registered nurse, a mental health counselor, and support staff. A mother can stay up to one year after the birth of her baby and may bring one additional child under the age of five.

Since opening, LifeHouse has been home to 218 women and 48 children and



▲ **10th ANNIVERSARY OF LIFEHOUSE**—Bishop Edward M. Rice blessed four of the newest babies and their mothers at LifeHouse Springfield on Jan. 17, including three-day-old twins. LifeHouse recently celebrated its 10th anniversary and happily anticipates the opening of LifeHouse Cape Girardeau on April 19, 2024. Since opening, LifeHouse Crisis Maternity Home has welcomed 138 healthy babies into the Springfield community. *(The Mirror)*



▲ **COMMUNITY SUPPORT**—Slated to open in April, LifeHouse Cape Girardeau has broad community support. The Jackson Knights of Columbus had a fish fry in October benefitting LifeHouse in Cape Girardeau, raising \$3,000. Pictured during the check presentation were Fr. Randy Tochtrop, Pastor of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Jackson, MO; Dany Watkins, current Grand Knight of Jackson Knights of Columbus #6405 in Jackson, MO; Tim Beussink, Jackson Knights of Columbus #6405; Rhonda Cuba, Mitch Miller, and Rick Cuba, LifeHouse committee members. *(The Mirror)*

welcomed 138 healthy babies. There are currently 13 mothers, four toddlers, and 15 babies living at LifeHouse.

“I have seen hundreds of lives impacted for the better because of Catholic Charities of Southern Missouri and the

of the program in Springfield and will bring life-changing services to families along the banks of the Mississippi on the eastern edge of the state. LifeHouse Cape Girardeau will open with a Mass, facility blessing and ribbon-cutting, and open house on Fri., April 19. Learn more at www.ccsomo.org. @TM



▲ **MASS OF THANKSGIVING**—Bishop Edward M. Rice, Bishop Emeritus John J. Leibrecht, area clergy, Catholic Charities staff and benefactors marked the 10th anniversary of LifeHouse Crisis Maternity Home with a Mass of Thanksgiving and open house on Jan. 17, 2024. There are currently 13 mothers, four toddlers, and 15 babies living safely and healthy at LifeHouse Springfield. *(The Mirror)*



COME, AND YOU WILL SEE
Bp. Edward M. Rice

Contemplative communities grace the diocese with prayer & witness

The December issue of *First Things*, contained a poem entitled “Passionate Souls,” by Aaron Belz, giving his poetic insight into the lives of the monks at Assumption Abbey outside Ava, MO. I visit the monastery often, sometimes just to pray in the chapel, other times for Church matters, and although I have been the Bishop in Springfield Cape Girardeau for seven years, I actually took retreats at the monastery long before I was named the Seventh Bishop in southern Missouri.

It is the dream of every bishop to have contemplative monasteries where the monks and sisters pray for the good of the diocese. We are so blessed in the Ava area to have such contemplatives. Assumption Abbey recently transferred from being a Trappist monastery to a Cistercian monastery. I was told the vocations to the abbey hadn’t persevered over the past 60 years and the remaining monks were getting on in years. At the request of Bishop James Johnston, Bishop Emeritus John Leibrecht was charged with forming a group to discern the future of Assumption Abbey. At the same time, the Cistercian monks from Vietnam were invited to experience monastic life in the Ozarks and see if the bakery was a good fit for them. And it was! Officially, Assumption Abbey is now a Cistercian monastery. More important—they continue to bake those delicious fruitcakes! Both Orders are reforms of the Benedictine Rule of Life, centered around the power of deep, contemplative prayer. In relative simplicity, silence, and separation from dominant culture, the monks

balance the practices of prayer, reading, and work. Their deep inner lives and distinct daily rhythms become a continuous prayer of life, to God for the diocese and the world.

Did you know there is also a convent of Benedictine Sisters outside Ava? They are currently building a new monastery. They are a daughter house of the Benedictine Sisters of Mary, Queen of Apostles, in Gower, MO, the Monastery of St. Joseph. Finally, we currently have six hermits living on property donated by the Trappists, Nazareth Hermitage. These hermits, while living on the same property, are not strictly-speaking a “community.” They live their hermit lives separate from one another and come together only for daily Mass and a weekly meal. The rest of their time is spent in their hermitage and work, fulfilling the Benedictine motto, “ora et labora,” pray and work. Finally, we have the parish of St. Leo in the town of Ava that recently

completed some upgrades to the Church.

It is amazing to think that this area, so void of a significant Catholic population, is the sight of a Catholic parish, a hermitage, a monastery of Benedictine Sisters, and the Cistercian/Trappist Assumption Abbey. We could very easily call it our very own Ozark Holy Land! As I mentioned earlier, every bishop desires to have contemplatives in his diocese praying for the people of God and the mission of the Church. How blessed we are to have these groups hidden away in the beauty of the Ozark mountains praying for the needs of the diocese!

I offer below “Passionate Souls,” by Aaron Belz:

Humble quarters calm proud men, and saltless meals compel them to engage real-world potatoes and fish.

Days-old bread becomes bread of days, and early vigil means quiet nights just as being deep in the Missouri hills

seems to fill the heavens with stars; and keeping bees yields honey sweeter than any society.

They discover true drunkenness comes from drinking sobriety and the daily Blood of Eucharist.

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

PASSIONATE SOULS

by Aaron Belz

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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.

October 12, 1990 One minister told another: “When I first began preaching, I decided to talk until I saw someone go to sleep. But I changed my mind. I just couldn’t say everything I wanted to in two minutes.”

October 19, 1990 An auctioneer held up a framed portrait and asked, “How much am I offered for this beautiful image of Robert Burns?” A woman at the auction shouted, “That’s not Burns; it’s William Shakespeare.” The auctioneer shot back quickly, “Sorry! It just goes to show how little I know about the Bible!”

October 26, 1990 Did you hear about the hunter who bragged all the time that he never missed his mark? One day, he was out hunting and a duck flew over. “Watch this!” he said. He fired and the bird flew on. He turned to his friends and said, “I hope you believe in miracles, because there’s a dead duck which flies!”



Join Bishop Rice on the First Friday of each month to pray for an increase in Vocations to the Priesthood and religious life in the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau:

- Fri., Mar. 01 St. Agnes Cathedral
Springfield, 5:30 p.m.
- Fri., April 05 St. John Henry
Newman Center
Cape Girardeau, 12-Noon
- Fri., May 03 St. Agnes School Mass
Springfield, 8:30 a.m.
- Fri., June 07 Mercy Conference
and Retreat Center
St. Louis



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Thu.	Apr. 4, 2024	5:30 p.m.	Willow Springs
Wed.	May 22, 2024	5:30 p.m.	Salem
Sat.	Jun. 8, 2024	4:00 p.m.	Verona
Thu.	Aug. 15, 2024	11:30 a.m.	Thayer
Wed.	Aug. 21, 2024	6:30 p.m.	Conway

THIS LENT, SAY SORRY —and mean it

By Dr. Greg Popcak

Lent is a time of reparation—a season of sorrow for sins committed and expressions of a sincere desire to reform our lives. But what does it mean to be sorry? What are the components of real remorse?

Whether we are expressing sorrow to God, a spouse, family member, or friend, it can be hard to say, “I’m sorry.”

It can be even harder to say it well. Sometimes, when people say that they are sorry to us, we can feel like there is something missing. Often, it’s because there is. But what?

As we express our sorrow to God this Lent for the ways that our lives do not reflect his plan for us, it can be important to make sure our “I’m sorrys” have all the components of sincere remorse. Researchers note that **good apologies** involve three ingredients: **empathy, restitution, and objective criteria.**

When people offer a sincere apology rooted not in obligation but genuine remorse, they tend to express a real emotional understanding of how their actions hurt us: “I am so sorry for doing that. I never meant to treat you that way. I know how badly you were hurt. Please forgive me.”

The truly remorseful person doesn’t make excuses or tell the person they hurt that they were “just kidding,” or that the wounded party needs to get a thicker skin, just “get over it,” or a better sense of humor. They understand the impact of their actions and they let you know that they feel your pain.

When we express our sorrow to God this Lent, are we going through the motions of repentance, or are we

allowing ourselves to express genuine sorrow for the pain God feels when we reject his attempts to love us and make us whole?

When people offer a sincere apology, they don’t just “say the magic words.” They offer a plan for making things right again. Or, if they don’t know what to do to make it right, they ask you what you need them to do to heal the hurt their actions caused. They say things like,

“The next time I feel that angry about something, I’m going to do this instead of that,” or, “I really want to make this right. What can I do to earn your trust again?”

Restitution isn’t about asking people to jump

through hoops for the sake of watching them dance. It is about committing to the process of reconciliation—healing the wounds our actions caused.

GRACE OF ABSOLUTION

When we confess our sins this Lent, have we put some time into how we would handle similar problem situations differently in the future? Hearing

the words “I absolve you” is just the beginning. How will we let the grace of that absolution compel us to heal the wounds our actions have caused those we love, and how can we make sure to avoid those problem behaviors the next time we are tempted to go down a similar path?

Truly sorrowful people don’t hide out behind the belief that “the real problem” is that others are expecting too much of them. If we are truly sorry, we recognize that the person we hurt had an objective right to expect more from us.

How often do others apologize to us in ways that make us feel strangely ashamed for daring to expect them to be faithful, trustworthy, or respectful? How often do the apologies others offer sound like, “I’m sorry, but don’t you think you’re being a little controlling/sensitive/judgmental/needly/demanding/unfair?”

The person offering a sincere apology acknowledges that anyone in a similar situation would be reasonable to expect what you are asking of them. “You’re absolutely right to expect more of me. I’m really sorry I let you down.”

In our relationship with God, how often do we think that the real problem is that he is just asking for entirely too much. Sure, we’re sorry for what we did, but the real problem is that he expects

us to be saints. **Saints, I tell you! Can you believe it?? How ridiculous is that???**

As we conclude Lent, will we continue to pay lip-service to the idea that God wants great things for us, or will we embrace the fact that every day he is calling us into deeper union with him and greater perfection in his grace?

Whether we are expressing remorse to God or others, being sorry isn’t, ultimately, about making ourselves seem pitiful enough or appearing pathetic enough to make the other person feel bad and let us off the hook.

Apologizing is about picking up our cross and embracing the hard work that comes with changing our behavior—not so that we can jump through some spiritual hoop but so that we can participate more effectively in the healing process that allows us to achieve our ultimate destiny: loving union with God. ©TM

Dr. Greg Popcak is an author and the director of www.CatholicCounselors.com.

“Will we continue to pay lip-service to the idea that God wants great things for us, or embrace that he calls us into deeper union with him and greater perfection?”

A GRATEFUL CHURCH celebrates and recognizes the following *ordination anniversaries* in MARCH:

PRIESTS:

The Most Rev. John J. Leibrecht, Bishop Emeritus, Mar. 17, 68 yrs.

Rev. Rick Jones, Mar. 24, 34 yrs.

Rev. Alberic Maisog, OCist, Mar. 25, 24 yrs.

Fr. Daniel Hirtz, Mar. 31, 51 yrs.

DEACON:

Deacon Joseph Kurtenbach, Mar. 21, 26 yrs.

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By
Fr. Joshua
J. Whitfield

WHAT WE BELIEVE, PART 37:

Anointed and Sealed in Confirmation

How do we understand the meaning of the sacramental ritual of confirmation? In St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, we see vocabulary emerge, describing what happens at Confirmation when the Holy Spirit descends upon the Christian: "But the one who gives us security with you in Christ and who anointed us is God; he has also put his seal upon us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment" (2 Cor 1:21-22). The words "anointed" and "seal" are used to describe the work of the Holy Spirit upon and in the soul of the individual baptized believer. That's what the Spirit does: anoints and seals.

The word "anointed" itself contains even more meaning and insight. The Greek verb for anointed, *χρίσας*, is, of course, similar to the word "Christ" (the phrase in 2 Cor 1:21 actually reads: *Χριστόν και χρίσας*). This gives us an even more profound sense of what confirmation does: by the gift of the Holy Spirit we are anointed, or in a sense "Christ-ed." Remember early Christians saw Christ's baptism and Spirit-driven desert experience as a pattern of their own experience? This is why. Because the Anointed is the pattern for the anointed.

We find this terminology in other passages of the New Testament, too. For example, in Ephesians we read about believers "sealed with the promised holy Spirit" (Eph 1:13). That's why, as it says later in Ephesians, believers shouldn't use foul language so as not to "grieve the holy Spirit of God" by which they were "sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph 4:29-30). That Christians were "sealed" by the Holy Spirit evoked the image of being owned by Christ. Soldiers, for instance, were marked by their generals, then enslaved by their masters. So, for the Holy Spirit to "seal" the believer meant that he or she was owned by the Holy Spirit to be, as Paul said of himself, "a slave of Christ Jesus" (Rom 1:1) — a Lord, certainly, whose yoke is easy and burden light, but who is Lord all the same (Mt 11:30).

Beyond the Scripture, we find the same pattern and vocabulary in the tradition. The Apostolic Tradition — an ancient Church manual from the third century — describes confirmation this way:

"And the bishop shall lay his hand upon them invoking them and saying: 'O Lord God, Who did count these worthy of deserving the forgiveness of sins by the laver of regeneration, make them worthy to be filled with Your Holy Spirit

and send upon them thy grace, that they may serve You according to your will.' ... After this, pouring the consecrated oil and laying his hand on his head, he shall say: 'I anoint thee in the name of Christ'" (The Apostolic Tradition, No. 21).

Recall that a typical baptismal ceremony in the early Church saw catechumens baptized in the nude



(CNS photo/Bob Roller)

(men and women baptized separately). Stepping down into a large font, they were immersed in water three times. Coming out the other side, they were dressed in white robes. Sometimes they were given honey and milk, symbols of entering the Promised Land. And then immediately, the newly baptized would go into another room and there meet the bishop where he would lay hands on the newly baptized and anoint them with chrism, a perfumed oil used at ordinations and coronations, symbolizing the new Christian's share in the kingship of Christ. St. Cyprian, who lived in North Africa, describes this: "They who are baptized in the Church are brought to the prelates of the Church, and by our prayers and by the imposition of the hand obtain the Holy Spirit, and are perfected with the Lord's seal" (Letter 73).

We see the same from St. Ambrose; but from him, we learn even more. "For after the font," he wrote, "it remains for the perfecting to take place." He too calls confirmation a "spiritual seal."

But he links the gift of the Holy Spirit to the gifts mentioned in Isaiah 11:2-3: "a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord." The Catechism of the Catholic Church calls these the "gifts of the Holy Spirit" (No. 1303). These gifts Isaiah described were interpreted in early

Christian tradition to be gifts belonging to Christ, as a prophecy about Jesus. So, when St. Ambrose said that, at confirmation, these gifts were now given to the Christian, he was describing the intimate moral and charismatic union made between believers and the Lord in the Sacrament of Confirmation. The newly baptized now possessed these prophetic and Christ-like gifts. These Messianic gifts are now given to the Christian through the Holy Spirit. Again, the anointed become like the Anointed.

Now, what are the gifts of the Holy Spirit? St. Thomas Aquinas described them perfectly, saying such gifts give the believer an "ardent desire" for virtue and make the person who possesses them hungry for virtue (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II 69, Answer 3). For example, we all have an innate sense of justice since it's written into the natural law. If I paid one person \$100 and another person \$50 for doing the same job, the person who was underpaid would undoubtedly feel the injustice of it and likely complain because, of course, his or her sense

of justice is innate. And the person who was paid \$100 will also sense the injustice of it too, and he or she may even ask that the other person is paid more, or he or she may share the extra money. Now Aquinas says the gifts of the Holy Spirit make a person desire justice more. That is, the person possessing the gifts of the Spirit would not consent to such iniquity but would passionately want to do something about it. That's what these gifts do. Everyone has a sense of justice, but the gifts of the Holy Spirit enhance a Christian's natural moral sense with desire.

And so, biblically speaking, we understand confirmation in terms of being anointed and sealed. These two images give us a sense of the Christological reality of confirmation, how confirmation perfects our union in Christ beginning in baptism. These images and this pattern continued throughout the tradition. They are the basic elements of Catholic theology and the practice of baptism and confirmation. But confirmation is part of the single twofold event of baptism and confirmation, which for much of Christian history was celebrated within a single ceremony. Baptism and confirmation belong to the same spiritual reality, forming us into one Christ. But these eventually became separated as we know today.

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 37: Anointed and Sealed in Confirmation" 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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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Aurora—Holy Trinity Parish will have its annual **Indoor Rummage & Bake Sale**, Sat., Mar. 2, 7 a.m.-12-Noon, in the parish gymnasium, located at the corner of Hwy. 60 & Carnation Dr.

Belleville, IL—The National Shrine of Our Lady of Snows will offer a day of reflection, **"Grace and Gratitude—In the Grief of Our Everyday Lives,"** on Mon., March 18, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., with presenter Sr. Madeleine Lane. The cost is \$50 and includes lunch. For more information, visit www.snows.org/grief or call (618) 397-0584.

Glennon—St. Anthony Mission Church will have a **Parish Mission**, Mon., Mar. 4, 6-9 p.m. The evening will include Holy Mass, Praise & Worship, Preaching from the Word of God, and Adoration with Healing Service. Let this Lenten Mission be a time away from our busy schedules and make our relationship with Jesus a priority.

Jackson—The Knights of Columbus Ladies Auxiliary will host a **Bunco Bash**, Sun., Mar. 17 in the Upper KC Hall, 2205 N High St. Doors open at 12:30 p.m.; game at 1 p.m. No pre-registration required. Entry fee is \$10/ player. Snacks provided, drinks available for purchase. Proceeds to fund scholarship program and other organizations such as Birthright, Options for Women, and Special Olympics. For more information, contact Donna at jacksonkcaux@gmail.com or call (573) 243-5464.

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

Leopold—St. John Parish will have a **Parish Mission**, Tue., Mar. 5; Wed., Mar. 6 & Thu., Mar. 7, 6-9 p.m. Each evening will include Holy Mass, Praise & Worship, Preaching from the Word of God and Adoration with Healing Service. Let this Lenten Mission be a time away from our busy schedules and make our relationship with Jesus a priority.

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

Sikeston—St. Francis Xavier School will have its 30th annual **Dinner Auction**, Sat., March 9, under the theme of "Monopoly." If you would like to donate an item, a service, or become a sponsor, please contact the school office at (573) 471-0841 or Email secretary@stfxsikeston.org or cookbarber@yahoo.com. Most importantly, we need attendees! Tickets are \$40 per person and include dinner, beverages, and everything you need for an exceptional evening out. Tickets are available for purchase, make plans to attend!

Springfield—The Knights of Columbus Council #698 will sponsor an **American Red Cross Blood Drive** Wed., Mar. 13, 1:30-5:30 p.m., at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish Hall, located at 2200 W. Republic Rd. Appointments recommended, please call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or visit RedCrossBlood.org and enter: stelizabethspringfield

VU Scholarship Assembly

Wed., Feb. 21, 2024

McAuley Catholic High School
930 S. Pearl Ave., Joplin, MO

2:00 pm | McAuley C.H.S. Gymnasium



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By Rev.
Daniel
Belken

How should clergy & the faithful respond to ‘Fiducia Supplicans’?

On December 18, 2023, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith released a new declaration titled, “*Fiducia Supplicans*,” largely, an address on the pastoral meaning of blessings. The promulgation of this document has yielded no lack of dispute and discussion, some of which seemed to eclipse the beauty and joy of the Christmas season that immediately followed the decree.

The way that I first heard of this decree was like many others: someone had sent me a link to an article purporting, “Pope Francis Allows Blessing of Same Sex Couples.” Naturally, the press was celebrating this as the Church “heading in the right direction,” or “finally getting with the times,” and alarm bells have been sounding ever since in the ranks of the Catholic faithful. Therein lies an important question: **does this declaration break with the teaching of the Church?** Is the popular media right in saying that this is the Church “getting with the times,” and dramatically shifting what it has said for generation after generation?

In short, the answer is ‘no.’

We must assess and understand what exactly the document says and what it doesn’t say.

The two main thrusts of this declaration are to a) discuss the pastoral meaning behind blessings, and b) to consider whether there could be such a blessing extended to those in what the document calls, “irregular situations and of couples of the same sex.” It is important to understand both points together, so that, when we read the document in its entirety and in communion with our constant tradition, we can better understand what is happening, in the midst of legitimate concerns.

The first part, which deals with the pastoral nature of blessings, emphasizes how they serve as an important reminder of our need for God’s presence and help in this life—especially in the

form of blessings. In section 21, “*Fiducia Supplicans*” states, “when one asks for a blessing, one is expressing a petition for God’s assistance, a plea to live better, and confidence in a Father who can help us to live better” (FS, 21). This emphasizes something important in **the Church’s distribution of grace—it is for those who are striving to live a life of holiness—and who seek help from God.** It is not a prize for the “perfect,” nor is it something reserved for the spiritual elite. Grace is for those in the midst of the struggles of this life. These struggles themselves are not bad, but the fact one is fighting them indicates an innate desire to win the battle against the darkness of error and vice! These struggles do not make us ineligible recipients of blessings, but rather they indicate the necessity of them, if we have the right disposition to receive them, and to thus receive God’s grace. The best way to think about this may perhaps be in the opening dialogue of the Rite of Penance. During the sign of the Cross, the penitent is instructed to say, “Bless me Father, for I have sinned.” This petition is simple—a person recognizes that they have done wrong, and are pleading with God for mercy, reconciliation, and the grace to live in a better way. **The priest, in the person of Christ, hears that petition and does not refuse it, but because of the sincerity of the request and the desire to amend one’s life, he extends that blessing in the form of absolution.**

Blessings: ‘to live better’

If we dive into each and every blessing, we can actually think of all sorts of ways that blessings work to aid us to live better. A blessing of a home is a plea to God to make this dwelling place holy, and to live in virtue of that. It isn’t a church, but the home is a place of formation for the faithful. A blessing of a car is a petition for aid as we travel and to do so with the Lord. This doesn’t mean that we instantly drive perfectly—but we strive to drive better, so to speak, along the journey home to the Lord. The

blessing of a mother before childbirth can be a plea for calm in the midst of anxiety. A blessing for a couple after miscarriage is a petition for comfort in the midst of grief. So much of what is offered in the form of a blessing is in asking the Lord for his help to live better, in the various circumstances and difficulties of life.

So, where does that leave us with the second point of the document? To state it simply, from the context of what we know and how the document builds this up, if one were to give a blessing for the individuals in a same-sex relationship, or even those in an “irregular” situation, there must be the prerequisite to this in the form of sincerely to ask the Lord for healing, for strength, for the ability to conform more fully to God’s desire for men and women to live rightly (and it falls to the duty of the priest or bishop to make this determination of sincerity beforehand). It is not a blessing extended upon the couple and not blessing a union. The blessing referred to in this document is something spontaneous, and not formalized by ritual or rite, but specifically addresses an individual and their specific need.

What this blessing must not be, however, is something directed at accepting something illicit as being permissible, nor can it cause grave scandal to the faithful as they see it as a “step” toward accepting something that has never been celebrated nor allowed from the times as early as the Old Testament. It cannot and must never be a perceived declaration of the Church’s assent to a situation, for example: to a same-sex couple’s union. It cannot be done in circumstances that simulate or mimic the sacred rites of matrimony in any way. It should not be done on a stage for all to see as an



ALL TO CONVERSION—“*Fiducia Supplicans*” states, “when one asks for a blessing, one is expressing a petition for God’s assistance, a plea to live better, and confidence in a Father who can help us to live better” (FS, 21). Priests and bishops are to practice pastoral prudence and affirm the sincerity of the blessing’s recipient and avoid scandal.

(Getty)

affirmation of something that is against teaching. Thus, **it should be very clear that this is very, very distinct from what some might call a marriage validation**, “blessing a marriage,” when one contracts marriage outside of the Church’s sacramental form and is so bound, and the couple seeks to contract it validly within the Church.

To further understand the disposition of the recipient of these blessings, these particular blessings must be properly discerned by those who are charged with administering blessings, and affirmed that these blessings are **extended to individuals committed to the call to conversion.** This is all done with the presumed hope to accompany one on their journey as they work to step out of the darkness of any error, and the struggle of sin, and into Christ’s unfading light. Thus, **there is no need for concern about a rupture from tradition.**

Pastoral courage & prudence

I will still admit, though, that there now may be a very real danger of scandal



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present, and an opportunity that could feel to clergy and faithful alike as if this document and these blessings may be easily misused to contradict Church teaching. If “*Fiducia Supplicans*” is taken as an opportunity to contradict, even implicitly, the Church’s unchanged teaching on marriage and family life by those charged with the duty of bestowing blessings and safeguarding Church teaching, this would clearly represent an abuse, and not something for what the document asks or allows. These situations are very much a moment where priests and bishops must exercise great pastoral prudence and safeguard against the possibility of scandal in every way they can. This further emphasizes the very real necessity for priests and bishops to very well understand their role in shepherding souls, and what their sacred duties can (and can’t) do. In the right circumstance, if a blessing will help to correct a soul in error, as they are asking for God’s grace to do what is right and to live chastely, and this blessing will not cause grave scandal nor any apparent or explicit rupture from Church teaching, who are we to prevent that?

However, if this same blessing hinders the soul from obtaining grace by confusing them, or even contributes to a false sense of security in living contrary to Church teaching, as difficult as it may be: priests and bishops are **absolutely bound to exercise the role of a shepherd that corrects his sheep**, and leads them away from thorns and thickets that might ensnare them and prevent them from living in concert with God’s design. It is no stretch to say that liberties have already been taken by some who are supposed to safeguard the role blessings serve, which has already resulted in shock and disappointment in the faithful. One can conjecture by what has already been occurring that, if this particular blessing, bestowed upon an individual struggling to live the Church’s vision of marriage, is treated as a “photo opportunity,” to be circulated in social or mass media, the real intention is not reconciliation with Church teaching, but rather is to portray a false narrative where it is blessing something that it cannot—for example, an illicit union. We do not treat the sacrament of reconciliation as a photo opportunity, or a “gotcha” moment. **Sincere reconciliation is a vulnerable encounter with our Lord**, who tells us to “go and sin no more.” Thus, if this is done correctly and with the right intention, these blessings should be a very private and powerful moment, as someone cries out to God for help. The unfortunate misuse and even willful ignorance of what the document actually says by some members of the clergy does not negate, however, that those who genuinely struggle to leave such a

lifestyle may need an extra bestowal of God’s grace to help them along the way.

This is absolutely why bishops and priests need your prayers—as they have to do very exacting and important work and discern how to best help each soul that they encounter (and to contradict any external appearance that the Church is back-pedaling or compromising her teaching). There are many souls that each priest will minister to that struggle with Church teaching, especially with regard to marriage and family life. Priests and bishops cannot run from their duty to come to the aid of such souls, nor can they relegate that to anyone else.

Rash judgments, a weakened faith?

In the midst of the questions that may still arise, we can still rest knowing that it is not necessary to see this as a break from tradition. Even in the plethora of questions about the application or pastoral implications of this declaration, **Church teaching stands firm, and is not changed.** Despite what the headlines may insinuate: we need not fear that the Church is on the brink of “folding” on teaching that has been since the time of the Israelites. It isn’t, and by the grace of God, it never will.

As a concluding thought, though, this may lead us to explore a deeper need in our faith. In these present days and the proliferation of mass media, why are we so inclined to instantly jump into rash judgment and conclusions, especially whenever the secular media so often misspeaks on matters of faith? Perhaps we are too often quick to grab our “torches and pitchforks” in trying to find fault in whatever documents and statements may come our way. Could it be that we accidentally become too focused on the waves out on the sea, that endeavor to cause us to forget that Our Lord is still with us? Do we have faith to know that Christ is with his ship—the Church—and is still with each of us?

May each of us have the courage in our brokenness and struggles to plea for God’s blessing when we need it. May we seek the divine help and aid necessary in order to “live better,” for it is only then that we can be recipients of graceful and fruitful blessings from our Lord in his mercy. May we each truly receive the greatest blessing that God bestows upon us: **His Son, Jesus Christ**, and may we be faithful in encouraging others to receive that blessing as well—living in communion with the Church and her teaching, living lives of conversion and growing in holiness—all by God’s grace and blessing. ©TM

Fr. Belken serves the Diocese as Associate Director of Worship & Liturgy. He is the Parochial Administrator of St. Denis Parish, in Benton, and St. Lawrence Parish, New Hamburg.

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CELEBRATED IN 23 DIOCESAN CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND THREE HIGH SCHOOLS

Since 1974, National Catholic Schools Week is the annual celebration of Catholic education in the United States. It starts the last Sunday in January and runs all week, which in 2024 was Jan. 28 – Feb. 3.

Highlights of Catholic Schools Week across the diocese included alumni events, a lot of food, Masses, service projects, pajama days (crazy hair days, etc.), field trips, community recognitions, assemblies, and more with parents, staff, grandparents, and local supporting businesses, civic leadership, and first responders. Here is a photo sampling of some of the festivities throughout the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau.

GUARDIAN ANGEL CATHOLIC SCHOOL, ORAN



ORAN, MO—'Celebrate Catholic Schools' was a wonderful backdrop for these second graders, as they celebrated Catholic Schools Week at Guardian Angel Catholic School, Oran, in their pajamas on Mon., Jan. 29. Pictured were Kinsley Dunivan, Amelia Kyle, Aubrey Graviett, Maverick Seabaugh, and Tripp McClard. *(The Mirror)*



ORAN, MO—The 5th and 6th grade students of Guardian Angel Catholic School posed for a picture in their pajamas, as they celebrated Catholic Schools Week on Mon., Jan. 29. Pictured were: Veronica Seyer, Kyla Rains, Ashtyn Pobst, Elaina Hahn, Harper Gadberry, Cora Houchins, Everett David, and Dylan Levan. *(The Mirror)*



JACS CELEBRATES EDUCATORS OF THE YEAR, BENEFACTOR OF THE YEAR

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK—(Front row) Sr. Joan Margaret Schwager, RSM, was awarded the Joplin Area Catholic Schools (JACS) Benefactor of the Year during the all-school Catholic Schools Week Mass held in St. Mary Catholic Church, Joplin, on Tue., Jan. 30; Lorrie Hibbs-Estrada was awarded the JACS Educator of the Year for St. Mary Catholic School on Jan. 30; and Mike Howard was awarded the JACS Educator of the Year for St. Peter Middle School/McAuley Catholic High School on Jan. 30. Area clergy were on hand for the liturgy as well: (second row) Fr. Paco Gordillo, Fr. Andrew Williams, Bishop Edward M. Rice, Fr. Brian Straus, and Fr. Joe Weidenbenner; (back row) Deacon Rob Huff, diocesan Superintendent of Catholic Schools & Chancellor; Deacon James Walter, St. Ann Catholic Church, Carthage. *(Photo by Margie Black/The Mirror)*



ST. FRANCIS XAVIER CATHOLIC SCHOOL, SIKESTON

LOOK OUT—Everyone had fun and remained uninjured during a festive game of Dodgeball one day of Catholic Schools Week celebrated in St. Francis Xavier Catholic School, Sikeston. *(The Mirror)*



BOWLING AT ST. AMBROSE CATHOLIC SCHOOL, CHAFFEE

FIELD TRIP—Littles honed their bowling prowess one afternoon of Catholic Schools Week at St. Ambrose Catholic School, Chaffee. *(The Mirror)*

ST. HENRY CATHOLIC SCHOOL, CHARLESTON



SAINTS OF OUR FAITH—5th-8th graders gave Saint presentations for their families, parish, and community on Monday of Catholic Schools Week in the church. *(The Mirror)*



MAD SCIENCE—Students were surprised with a Mad Science Assembly for Student Appreciation Day on Tuesday. *(The Mirror)*

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CATHOLIC SCHOOL, JACKSON



FAVORITE BIBLE CHARACTER/NOAH'S ARK—On Tuesday of National Catholic Schools Week, pastor Fr. Randy Tochtrop of Immaculate Conception Catholic School, Jackson, dressed as "Noah," and gathered "animals for the Ark," among faculty and staff to the delight of students. *(The Mirror)*



DRESS UP—Students in Immaculate Conception Catholic School, Jackson, MO, dressed as 'Soccer Moms & BBQ Dads,' one day during Catholic Schools Week 2024. *(The Mirror)*

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CATHOLIC SCHOOL, SPRINGFIELD



VOCATIONS DAY—Director of Springfield Catholic School Sr. Cecilia Ann Rezac, MS; Bishop Emeritus John J. Leibrecht, and Sr. Martina Benny, FSSE, took part in a Vocations Day Question & Answer session held during Catholic Schools Week in Immaculate Conception Catholic School, Springfield. *(The Mirror)*

SERVICE PART OF OUR MISSION



SERVICE PROJECTS—Service is always a part of Catholic Schools Week in the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau. Whether it's crafting cards for veterans, canned goods drives, baby showers for pregnancy care centers, or visiting shut-ins, our Catholic students give back throughout the academic year. Here students in Joplin of McAuley Catholic High School and St. Peter Middle School prepared food donations for the community. *(The Mirror)*



BISHOP CELEBRATED MASS IN NOTRE DAME REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

SACRAMENTS—Principal Tim Garner is surrounded by students in Notre Dame Regional High School during Catholic Schools Week (CSW) 2024. Bishop Edward Rice celebrated Mass with students and faculty on Fri., Feb. 2. The liturgy doubled as a First Friday Mass for Vocations and in honor of CSW, and was followed by a staff luncheon. *(The Mirror)*

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CATHOLIC SCHOOLS 'BEACONS OF LIGHT'

Washington

Calling Catholic schools “beacons of light in times of confusion,” Bishop Thomas A. Daly of Spokane expressed gratitude to Senator Marco Rubio of Florida and Congressman Darin LaHood of Illinois for introducing congressional resolutions in their respective chambers (Senate / House) commending Catholic schools and celebrating National Catholic Schools Week.

“Catholic schools serve diverse populations, believe that education is an integral formation in wisdom and virtue, and cultivate a love for all that is true, good, and beautiful. They are beacons of light in a

time of confusion,” said Bishop Daly. “It is gratifying to receive the recognition of the historic contributions of Catholic schools to the health and vitality of the republic, especially during Catholic Schools Week. It is also a testament to our Catholic school leaders and staff for their dedication to the Church’s mission.”

Bishop Daly is chairman of the USCCB Committee on Catholic Education. This year’s celebration Jan. 28-Feb. 3 marked the 50th anniversary of Catholic Schools Week, an annual celebration during which parish and school communities celebrate the history and contributions of Catholic education in the US in their local communities. ©TM

OBITUARY // Fr. Robert Fisher, SVD



Rev. Robert Fisher RSVD, 87, a missionary priest who was raised in Caruthersville, MO, died Feb. 9 in Techny, IL. May he rest in peace.

Born in 1937 to Lawrence Bruce and Georgia Margarite (nee Paris) Fisher in Paragould, AR, he was the eldest of his father’s three sons and

his mother’s six children. His father died when he was age nine. A few years later, his mother married Herman Leo Kasper.

After graduating in 1951 from Sacred Heart Catholic School in Caruthersville, the young Bob Fisher entered Divine Word Seminary in East Troy, WI.

He professed vows in 1957 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1965. Recognizing his academic abilities, the Society of the Divine Word sent him to Rome, where he earned a licentiate in sacred theology from Gregorian University and a doctorate in liturgy from the Pontifical Anteneo of Saint Anselmo. Upon completion of his dissertation, he was sent to teach at St. Augustine Seminary, in Bay St. Louis, MS, while he waited for his first overseas assignment.

Wherever he traveled, Fr. Fisher relished learning about the local culture. While in Rome, he mastered the art of Italian cooking. When in London, he frequented the British Museum. In Ghana, he spoke the Akan and Twi languages. In the Philippines, he wore a polo barong, an embroidered shirt made of natural fibers.

His first assignment abroad took him to the Philippines, where he taught theology and liturgy at Divine Word College in Tagaytay and the Archdiocesan Major Seminary in Vigan, Ilocos, Sur.

While in the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia in Vigan, he served as co-chair of the Commission on Worship. During his tenure, the commission developed a program on the liturgy for priests and a course in catechetics for laypeople to help implement the changes brought about from the Second Vatican Council.

After three years in the Philippines, Fr. Fisher was assigned to the Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana. There, he and three other missionaries attended to the pastoral and administrative needs of 20 mission outstations and several schools.

He lived and worked in rural areas, known as bush country, where the territory lacked telephone service, electricity, and running water.

He taught at St. Peter Seminary in Cape Coast, Ghana, and fulfilled pastoral roles at Good Shepherd Church in Tema; St. Peter in Nkwatia-Kwahu; Blessed Sacrament Church in Ntronang, and St. John Church in Akim Ofoase, where he built a chapel and a convent, converting the old convent into a maternity ward. He also built a medical clinic in Oshima.

While in Ghana, he was appointed dean of the Western Akim District in the Diocese of Accra. Additionally, he served as administrative attaché at the nunciature of the Holy See in Accra. In 1981, he was chosen as a liturgical advisor and master of ceremonies for Pope St. John Paul II’s visit to the African nation.

In 1983, an estimated million people, “returnees,” descended upon Ghanaian cities with little more than the clothes on their backs. They had gone to Nigeria in search of better economic conditions, but were expelled by the Nigerian government. As chairman of the Accra-Tema Ecclesiastical District Committee of Catholic Pastors and Pastoral Workers, Fr. Fisher helped to organize meal programs for tens of thousands of returnees.

In 1984, Fr. Fisher returned to the US. He was professor of theology and philosophy at Xavier University in New Orleans, and later taught ethics and served as Catholic chaplain at Prairie View A&M University in Prairie View, TX.

While in Prairie View, he was pastor of St. Martin de Porres Church. He also served three mission parishes in the Diocese of Victoria (TX).

In 2005, he became director of St. Augustine Retreat Center in Bay St. Louis. When Hurricane Katrina flooded the property in autumn that year, Fr. Fisher was forced to swim for his life.

Bay St. Louis had taken a direct hit, so while the building was being restored, Fr. Fisher was again assigned to the Diocese of Victoria to serve St. Philip the Apostle Catholic Church in El Campo, TX.

In addition to his pastoral and academic accomplishments, Fr. Fisher wrote, *West African Religious Traditions: Focus on the Akan of Ghana* (Orbis Books, 1998) and co-translated, *The Church at Prayer: Introduction to the Liturgy* (Desclée Co., 1968).

He moved to Techny in retirement in 2017.

Father Fisher’s parents and sister-in-law Anne Fisher preceded him in death. He is survived by five siblings: James L. Fisher; John (Don Streb) Fisher; Kay (Mike) King; JoAnn (Charles) VanPelt, and Frank Kasper.

The visitation for Fr. Fisher will be held on Feb. 16 in the Divine Word Residence Chapel at Techny, followed by the Mass of the Resurrection. He will be buried in St. Mary Cemetery at Techny. His funeral will be live-streamed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nC_w66hZiFE.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations in the name of Fr. Fisher can be made for the care of elderly and infirm missionaries and sent to The Rector, Divine Word Residence, 1901 Waukegan Road, PO Box 6000, Techny, IL 60082-6000. ©TM

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Harris named Principal of Immaculate Conception School

Springfield, MO

Springfield Catholic School System is pleased to announce Ashley Harris as the new principal at Immaculate Conception School for the 2024-2025 school year.

For the past two years, Harris has served Immaculate Conception as the assistant principal and has enjoyed getting to know the faculty/staff and families of Immaculate Conception School. She has taken on many roles to support and advance the educational programs provided. Harris excels in the areas of organization and communication.

Mrs. Harris is married to Peter Harris and together they have two children – Emry, who presently is in 4th grade, and Sam, who is in 1st grade, both attend Immaculate Conception School. They are active parishioners at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church. The family loves to travel and they spend as much time outdoors as possible, hiking, biking, fishing, and camping.

Harris begins her duties as Principal on July 1, 2024. ©TM



HARRIS



Immaculate Conception seeks ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

Immaculate Conception is seeking an Assistant Principal for the 2024-2025 school year.

Immaculate Conception is one of four schools in the Springfield Catholic School System and offers classes from Preschool through 8th grade, with a current enrollment of approximately 475 students.

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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—St. Joseph Men's Club **Lenten Fish Fry Fridays**: Feb. 16, March 1, and March 15, 5-7 p.m., in the parish hall, located at 320 NW Washington Ave. Dinners include fried fish, grilled cheese, French fries, coleslaw, vegetables, brown beans, cornbread, dessert & drink.

Cape Girardeau—The St. Vincent de Paul Men's Association will sponsor a **Catfish Dinner** each Friday during Lent, 4:30-7:30 p.m. The family-friendly meal includes fresh American pond raised catfish, "Todt secret recipe coleslaw," "Koehler famous hush puppies," side dishes, dessert & drink. Cost: \$13-adults, \$7-students. Carry-out available.

Cape Girardeau—The Knights of Columbus Council #1111 will have a **Fish Fry Dinner** each Friday during Lent, 4-8 p.m., at the K of C Hall.

Fredericktown—St. Michael the Archangel Parish, located at 400 W. Main St., will have a **Fish Fry**, Fri., Feb. 16, March 01, and March 15, 4-7 p.m. Catfish, fries, slaw, potato salad, baked beans, dessert & drink. Dine in or carry-out available. Cost: \$15-adults; \$7-ages 5-12; under age 5-free.

Gainesville—St. William Parish will have its **Lenten Fish Suppers** on Fri., Feb. 16, March 01, and March 15, 4-6 p.m. Two filet of swai, French fries, green beans, green salad, dessert & drink. Cost: \$10.

Glennonville—The Knights of Columbus will have its Fish Dinners on Fri., Feb. 16, and continuing every Friday through March 22, 4:30-8:30 p.m., in the KC Hall.

Jackson—The Knights of Columbus #6405 will have a **Fish & Chicken Dinner** on Fri., Feb 16, and continuing every Friday through March 22, 4:30-7:30 p.m., in the lower KC Hall. Dine-in or carry-out.

Joplin—The Knights of Columbus at St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church will have **Fish Fry Fridays**, beginning Fri., Feb. 16, and continuing every Friday through March 22, 5-7 p.m., in Our Lady's Hall, located below St. Peter the Apostle Church. Fried Fish, French fries, grilled cheese, mac & cheese, green beans & coleslaw. Cost: \$10-adult; \$5-child over age 4; \$30 family.

Joplin—The Knights of Columbus will have a **Lenten Dinner** on Fri., Feb. 16 and Fri., Mar. 08; 5-7 p.m., at St. Mary Catholic Church, located at 3035 South Central Rd. Baked tilapia, grilled cheese, vegetable stew, cheesy potatoes, green beans, coleslaw, dessert & drink. Cost: \$10-adults; \$8-children; \$30-family; under age 5 eat-free.

Lebanon—The Knights of Columbus Council #6871 will have a **Fish Fry** on Fri., Feb. 23; Fri., March 8, and

Fri., March 22, 5-7 p.m., at the St. Francis DeSales Parish Family Center, located at 345 Grand Ave. Fried fish, fries, coleslaw, hush puppies, dessert & drink.

Marshfield—The Knights of Columbus will have a **Fish Fry Fundraiser**, Fri., Feb. 23; Fri., March 8; and Fri., March 22, 5-7 p.m., at Holy Trinity Catholic Church, located at 515 E. Washington St. Enjoy a great meal of fried or baked fish, French fries, hush puppies, green beans, coleslaw, and tasty desserts. Cost: \$10-adults; \$6-ages 5-12; under age 5-free.

Nixa—The Knights of Columbus will have its **Lenten Fish Fry** beginning Fri. 16, and every Friday through March 22, 4:30 -7 p.m., at St. Francis of Assisi Parish, located at 844 S. Gregg Rd. Fried or baked fish, French fries, hush puppies, coleslaw, potato salad, pea salad & dessert. Cost: \$12-adults; ages 5 and under-free, \$40-family of 4. For more information, call (417) 551-1135.

Ozark—The Knights of Columbus **Fish Fry-Days** begins Fri., Feb. 16, 4:30-7 p.m., and continues all the Fridays of Lent at St. Joseph the Worker Parish. Fried catfish or cod, served with hush puppies, fresh potato chips, green beans, mac and cheese, okra, coleslaw, dessert & drink. Cost: \$13-adults, \$10-ages 6-12 yrs. A spaghetti plate is available for \$6.

Sikeston—The Knights of Columbus will have its **Annual Lenten Fish Fry**, Fri., March 22, 11 a.m.-1 p.m. and 4-7 p.m., drive-thru only, at the Knights Hall located on E. Tanner St. US Catfish, all the trimmings & dessert. Cost: \$15 meal.

Springfield—Immaculate Conception Parish will have **Lenten Fish Fries** beginning Fri., Feb. 23, and continuing every Friday through March 22, 4:30-6:30 p.m. The Knights of Columbus will be frying fish and fries and other IC church groups will co-host each week.

Springfield—St. Elizabeth Ann Seton will have **Friday Night Fish Fries** each Friday in Lent, beginning Fri., Feb. 16, 3:30-7 p.m. Menu will vary each week, depending on which group is hosting. There is no cost, but free-will donations are accepted!

Springfield—The Knights of Columbus will have its annual **Fish Fry**, Fri., Feb. 16, 5-7 p.m., in the St. Agnes Cathedral School cafeteria. Fried & baked fish, hush puppies, coleslaw, mac & cheese, desserts, and more much. Cost: \$10-adult; \$5-child; or \$25-family.

Willow Springs—The Knights of Columbus Council #7442 will have **Fish & Fellowship** Fri. Feb. 16; Fri., Feb. 23; Fri., March 8, and Fri., March 15, 4-6 p.m., in Sacred Heart Parish Hall, located at 1050 W. Bus. 60-63. Fish or shrimp, baked beans, home-made French fries, coleslaw, dessert & drink. Cost: \$12. The Ladies Guild will be taking orders for Butter Braids to be delivered before Easter.

MESSENGER

February 2024

MISSOURI
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE



A quarterly publication by the Missouri Catholic Conference - The public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Missouri.

DID YOU READ IT OR...

just sign it?

Missouri and Initiative Petitions

The initiative petition process gives Missouri citizens the opportunity to directly participate in government. Citizens have the opportunity to propose legislation as either a state law or a constitutional amendment. In recent years, citizens have used the initiative petition process to pass Medicaid expansion, medical and recreational marijuana, and "Clean Missouri," which was a campaign finance and redistricting amendment.

Over the last year, more than 170 proposals have been filed for the 2024 election cycle. Among the proposals are 17 that would seek to add abortion rights to the State Constitution in some form. There continue to be questions from Catholics as to what these proposals would do, along with concerns that one will ultimately end up on the November 2024 ballot. In this issue of *Messenger*, we will provide an overview of the initiative process, a description of what each abortion initiative will do, and an update on where the initiatives are in the process.



THE INITIATIVE PETITION PROCESS IN MISSOURI

Citizens wishing to propose a constitutional amendment must first submit their proposals to the Missouri secretary of state's office. The office approves the petitioner's form and prepares ballot summary language while the state auditor prepares a fiscal note and fiscal note summary for the proposal. The secretary of state's office then certifies the official ballot title. After the official ballot title is certified, petitioners can circulate the proposed petitions which must include the full and complete text of the measure and the official ballot title and begin to collect signatures.

Petitioners must deliver signed petitions to the secretary of state's office no less than six months before the next general election. For the November 5, 2024 election, signatures must be submitted by May 5, 2024. Petitions proposing constitutional amendments must be signed by eight percent of legal voters in any six of the eight congressional districts. This means that petitioners must collect a minimum of 171,592 signatures. The secretary of state's office will then distribute copies to local election authorities to verify signatures. Once signatures are verified, the secretary of state will determine whether there are enough valid signatures to place the petition on the ballot for the next general election.

PRO-ABORTION INITIATIVE PETITIONS

On March 8, 2023, Dr. Anna Fitz-James filed eleven initiative petitions with the secretary of state's office to add abortion rights to the state constitution. The proposals, filed by a political action committee called Missourians for Constitutional Freedom, amend the constitution to declare that the government "shall not infringe upon a person's fundamental right to reproductive freedom, which is the right to make and carry out decisions about all matters related to reproductive health care, including but not limited to prenatal care, childbirth, postpartum care, birth control, abortion care, miscarriage

care, and respectful birthing conditions." Each proposal states that there must be "a compelling governmental interest" for abortion restrictions to be put in place; however, each differs as to the specifics of what is allowable.

Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft certified the official ballot titles for the 11 initiatives, all of which included this language:

Do you want to amend the Missouri Constitution to:

- allow for dangerous, unregulated, and unrestricted abortions, from conception to live birth, without requiring a medical license or potentially being subject to medical malpractice;

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- nullify longstanding Missouri law protecting the right to life, including but not limited to partial-birth abortion;
- require the government not to discriminate against persons providing or obtaining an abortion, potentially including taxpayer funding?

Dr. Fitz-James, represented by the ACLU of Missouri, challenged the ballot summary language drafted by the secretary of state's office for six of the initiatives, claiming that the summary was misleading. Assistant Attorney General Jason Krol Lewis, representing Secretary of State Ashcroft, argued that the petitions accurately "convey to voters the massive loopholes in the

initiative petition that would bring access to effectively unregulated and unrestricted abortion in Missouri." In addition, three pro-life advocates—Rep. Hannah Kelly (R-Mountain Grove), Sen. Mary Elizabeth Coleman (R-Arnold), and Kathy Forck—filed suit against the state auditor, claiming that his fiscal summary ignores potential costs, including a possible loss of federal Medicaid funding and future tax revenue.

Cole County Circuit Judge Jon Beetem ruled that certain phrases included in the secretary of state's summary statements were "problematic" because they were "either argumentative or do not fairly describe the purposes or probable effect of the initiative," including:

- "without requiring a medical license"
- "the right to life"
- "unborn child"
- "including a minor"
- "end the life"
- "at any time"

Judge Beetem also ruled that while the proposals would immediately impact abortion, the summaries should have also included references to "reproductive health care beyond abortion." As a result, Beetem rewrote the six summary statements as had been requested by the plaintiff in the case. Judge Beetem also ruled against plaintiffs who had challenged the fiscal note summary of the initiatives. The Western District Court of Appeals upheld Beetem's decision and the Missouri

Supreme Court declined to hear Ashcroft's appeal.

Six new pro-abortion initiative petitions were filed on August 30, 2023 by Jamie Corley, representing the Missouri Women and Family Research Fund. All six petitions add exceptions to the state's abortion ban and, in three versions, explicitly legalize abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. However, all of the versions state that abortion is a "fundamental right" when there is a risk to a woman's "health or safety." While supporters of the proposals claim they offer a middle ground, vague language in the petitions would seemingly allow abortions for any reason and at any time. Specifically "health" and

ABORTION INITIATIVE PETITION LANGUAGE

NOTICE: The proposed amendment revises Article I of the Constitution by adopting one new Section to be known as Article I, Section 36.

Be it resolved by the people of the state of Missouri that the Constitution be amended:

Section A. Article I of the Constitution is revised by adopting one new Section to be known as Article I, Section 36 to read as follows:

Section 36. 1. This Section shall be known as "The Right to Reproductive Freedom Initiative."

2. The Government shall not deny or infringe upon a person's fundamental right to reproductive freedom, which is the right to make and carry out decisions about all matters relating to reproductive health care, including but not limited to prenatal care, childbirth, postpartum care, birth control, abortion care, miscarriage care, and respectful birthing conditions.

3. The right to reproductive freedom shall not be denied, interfered with, delayed, or otherwise restricted unless the Government demonstrates that such action is justified by a compelling governmental interest achieved by the least restrictive means. Any denial, interference, delay, or restriction of the right to reproductive freedom shall be presumed invalid. For purposes of this Section, a governmental interest is compelling only if it is for the limited purpose and has the limited effect of improving or maintaining the health of a person seeking care, is consistent with widely accepted clinical standards of practice and evidence-based medicine, and does not infringe on that person's autonomous decision-making.

4. Notwithstanding subsection 3 of this Section, the general assembly may enact laws that regulate the provision of abortion after Fetal Viability provided that under no circumstance shall the Government deny, interfere

with, delay, or otherwise restrict an abortion that in the good faith judgment of a treating health care professional is needed to protect the life or physical or mental health of the pregnant person.

5. No person shall be penalized, prosecuted, or otherwise subjected to adverse action based on their actual, potential, perceived, or alleged pregnancy outcomes, including but not limited to miscarriage, stillbirth, or abortion. Nor shall any person assisting a person in exercising their right to reproductive freedom with that person's consent be penalized, prosecuted, or otherwise subjected to adverse action for doing so.

6. The Government shall not discriminate against persons providing or obtaining reproductive health care or assisting another person in doing so.

7. If any provision of this Section or the application thereof to anyone or to any circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of those provisions and the application of such provisions to others or other circumstances shall not be affected thereby.

8. For purposes of this Section, the following terms mean:

(1) "Fetal Viability", the point in pregnancy when, in the good faith judgment of a treating health care professional and based on the particular facts of the case, there is a significant likelihood of the fetus's sustained survival outside the uterus without the application of extraordinary medical measures.

(2) "Government".

a. the state of Missouri; or
b. any municipality, city, town, village, township, district, authority, public subdivision or public corporation having the power to tax or regulate, or any portion of two or more such entities within the state of Missouri.

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“safety” are not defined in any proposal, and there is no discussion as to who makes the determination of when either are at risk.

The secretary of state’s office released its summary for the six petitions in October. Corley quickly filed suit, claiming that Ashcroft used false and biased statements in his summaries. That suit is ongoing at the time of publication.

CURRENT STATUS OF ABORTION INITIATIVE PETITIONS

In January, Missourians for Constitutional Freedom announced which of its 11 filed petitions it was seeking to place on the November 2024 ballot. The proposed amendment, 2024-086, states that the government “shall not infringe upon a person’s fundamental right to reproductive freedom, which is the right to make and carry out decisions about all matters related to reproductive health care, including but not limited to prenatal care, childbirth, postpartum care, birth control, abortion care, miscarriage care, and respectful birthing conditions.”

The proposal states that the legislature may regulate abortion after fetal viability. However, it goes on to say that “under no circumstance shall the Government deny, interfere with, delay, or otherwise restrict an abortion that in the good faith judgment of a treating health care professional is needed to protect the life or physical or **mental health** of the pregnant person.” (emphasis added)

This means that a late-term abortion can still occur as long as a health care provider is



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Missouri Bishops Encourage Missourians to Safeguard Sanctity of Human Life

December 11, 2023, JEFFERSON CITY, MO - We, the Catholic Bishops of Missouri, are committed to promoting the sanctity of human life in every circumstance, from conception until natural death. In Missouri, the dignity of life in its earliest stages is being threatened by proposed amendments to the state constitution that would remove legal protections for women and preborn children.

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 good will 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.

The Missouri Catholic Conference will continue to collaborate with diocesan pro-life offices and with other pro-life groups to protect the health and safety of women and their children. As we stated after Roe v. Wade was overturned, the Catholic Church stands ready to continue providing spiritual and material support to expectant mothers and their families through our parishes and ministries, and to advocate on their behalf and on behalf of their unborn children at the state and federal levels. We look forward to the day when every child, born and unborn, has the love and support needed to thrive and reach his or her full potential. Let us pray for a greater recognition of the gift of each and every human life in our society.

CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF MISSOURI



+ Mitchell T. Rozanski

Most Reverend Mitchell T. Rozanski
General Chairman
Archbishop of St. Louis



+ James V. Johnston, Jr.

Most Reverend James V. Johnston, Jr.
Vice Chairman
Bishop of Kansas City-St. Joseph



+ Shawn McKnight

Most Reverend W. Shawn McKnight
Executive Chairman
Bishop of Jefferson City



+ Edward M. Rice

Most Reverend Edward M. Rice
Bishop of Springfield-Cape Girardeau

willing to state that the abortion is necessary for the woman’s mental health, which can be defined broadly to include such things as “emotional, psychological, [and] familial” concerns.¹

Missourians for Constitutional Freedom also announced that it has the support of Abortion Action Missouri, the ACLU of Missouri, and Planned Parenthood affiliates in Kansas City and St. Louis. The

group stated that it had already raised more than \$2 million in donations in its first week of launch. The group will begin collecting signatures around the state in early February.

MISSOURI STANDS WITH WOMEN

While pro-abortion groups were announcing their intent to place

abortion rights on the ballot, a pro-life coalition announced its intent to fight these ballot initiatives. The group, called [Missouri Stands with Women](#), was formed to “protect Missouri’s laws respecting the dignity of life, the safety of women and parental rights.”

“Out-of-state extremists pushing Big Abortion’s agenda are intent on using the initiative petition

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process to reverse all the pro-life work our state has undertaken to protect the dignity of life, safety of women and parental rights”, said Stephanie Bell, a spokeswoman for Missouri Stands with Women. “We are united in our efforts to ensure these out-of-state extremists

are not allowed to tear the fabric of our constitution by placing unregulated, taxpayer-funded abortions up to the moment of birth, effectively overriding all Missouri’s pro-life laws.”

The MCC will continue to partner with Missouri Stands with Women

and other pro-life and pro-woman advocates to fight this abortion initiative and will continue to provide updates on the campaign. ***At this time, the MCC is asking individuals to not sign any petition to put this amendment on the ballot.***

The Bishops of Missouri remind the faithful to remain alert and to continue to do what they can to safeguard the fundamental principles of the right to life. This means being active and informed citizens, guided by well-formed consciences.

¹ *Doe v. Bolton*, 410 U.S. 179 (1972)

SUBMITTING A PROPOSED PETITION

Step 1: A petitioner submits a proposed petition, in the form in which it will be circulated, and a petition submission cover sheet to the secretary of state’s office, which issues a receipt to the petitioner. If a person or committee, other than the petitioner, is funding a portion of the drafting or submission of the sample sheet, the petitioner must also attach to the proposed petition a copy of the filed statement of committee organization required under Section 130.021.5, RSMo, showing the date the statement was filed.

Step 2: The secretary of state’s office sends a copy of the proposed petition to the attorney general’s office and the auditor’s office.

Step 3: The proposed petition is posted on the secretary of state’s office website for a public comment period.

Step 4: The attorney general’s office reviews the form and forwards its comments to the secretary of state’s office within 10 days after receiving the proposed petition. The auditor’s office prepares a fiscal note and fiscal note summary and forwards it to the attorney general’s office within 20 days after receiving the proposed petition.

Step 5: The secretary of state’s office approves or rejects the form of the proposed petition within 15 days after receiving the proposed petition from the petitioner. The petitioner is informed of the approval or rejection.

Step 6: The secretary of state’s office prepares a proposed ballot summary statement and forwards it to the attorney general’s office for review within 23 days after the approval of the proposed petition’s form.


Step 7: The attorney general’s office forwards its review to the secretary of state’s office within 10 days after receiving the proposed ballot summary statement.

The attorney general’s office also forwards its approval or rejection of the fiscal note and fiscal note summary to the auditor’s office within 10 days after receiving the proposed fiscal note and fiscal note summary. The auditor’s office then forwards the fiscal

note and fiscal note summary to the secretary of state’s office.

Step 8: Within 3 days after receiving the ballot summary statement, approved fiscal note summary and fiscal note, the

secretary of state’s office certifies the official ballot title, which consists of the ballot summary statement and fiscal note summary. The official ballot title is then posted on the secretary of state’s website.



“This Is My Body”
THE SHOCKING TRUTH

Jesus said, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.” This teaching was so shocking that many of his followers left at that moment! Jesus did not call them back to clarify, because he knew they understood correctly. He was actually telling them to eat his flesh and drink his blood.

As Catholics, we believe Jesus’ words literally, not symbolically. The substance of the bread and wine transform into the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ at every Mass. We call this miracle the Eucharist.

Scan to explore Church teaching on the Eucharist! eucharisticrevival.org

JOIN US TO KEEP MISSOURI PRO-LIFE!



Missouri Right to Life
 "Keep Missouri Pro-Life!"
 Action Day

Tuesday, March 12, 2024

Missouri State Capitol ~ 1st Floor Rotunda

- Come to Jefferson City to voice your opposition to the effort to enshrine a "right" to abortion in our Missouri Constitution.
- Registration begins at 10:00 a.m.
- Encourage your legislators to pass pro-life legislation and join the noon rally with our special guest.

TRANSPORTATION WILL BE AVAILABLE
 FROM MANY AREAS OF THE STATE.

Contact Missouri Right to Life at 573-635-5110 for transportation options.



Special Guest:
 Claire Culwell

Claire Culwell is an International Pro Life Speaker and author of *Survivor: An Abortion Survivor's Surprising Story of Choosing Forgiveness and Finding Redemption*. She is a twin abortion survivor. Claire was adopted into a loving family and says that finding out she survived an abortion that was meant to take her life never changed who she knew she was: wanted, chosen and loved.

She has been featured on Fox News, Focus On The Family, LifeToday and many other media outlets.

Claire lives in Austin, TX with her husband David and their children where she serves on the board of Texas Alliance For Life and her local pregnancy center.

Missouri Right to Life, PO Box 651, Jefferson City, MO 65102 | 573-635-5110 | missourilife.org



DIocese of SPRINGFIELD-CAPE GIRARDEAU

Transforming society to respect and protect all innocent human life.

X FALSE

They claim their amendment to enshrine a "right" to abortion in our Missouri Constitution is needed because they say ectopic and miscarriage procedures are illegal and women will die.

X FALSE

They claim their amendment to enshrine a "right" to abortion in our Missouri Constitution will not allow late-term or partial-birth abortions to occur.

X FALSE

They claim their amendment to enshrine a "right" to abortion in our Missouri Constitution will protect women.

X FALSE

They claim their amendment to enshrine a "right" to abortion in our Missouri Constitution will not take away parental rights.



KNOW
 THE TRUTH!

Pro-abortion
 signature-
 gatherers are
 seeking to
 enshrine a "right"
 to abortion
 in Missouri's
 Constitution
 all 9 months of
 pregnancy.

✓ TRUTH

Missouri law already has a "life of the mother" exception (RSMo 188.030). Ectopic & miscarriage procedures are not considered abortion under Missouri law as there is not a "viable unborn child."

✓ TRUTH

If a "right" to abortion is enshrined in our Missouri Constitution allowing abortion for physical or mental "health" reasons, abortion can occur from conception until live birth.

✓ TRUTH

If the amendment passes, women will be denied the right to sue the abortionist for malpractice.

✓ TRUTH

If a "right" to abortion is enshrined in our Missouri Constitution, it would allow abortions to be performed on pregnant minors without notice to or consent from the minor's parents.

DON'T BE DECEIVED!