



Chemical abortion, death penalty among key life issues for ICC

By Victoria Arthur

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As thousands joined the annual March for Life at both the state and national levels, the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) was tracking bills related to the dignity of human life in this year's rapidly moving legislative session.

A bill related to the regulation of chemical abortion, as well as two measures aimed at introducing new death penalty methods, are of prime concern for the ICC as the 2026 Indiana General Assembly reaches its halfway point.

"Upholding the profound dignity of the human person from conception to natural death is of critical importance to the Catholic Church, and that principle also guides the ICC in our policy work," said Alexander Mingus, ICC executive director, the official public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana. "Although we

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Westside Catholic home to Design and Innovation Studio

By JOHN ROHLF

The Message assistant editor

Westside Catholic School in Evansville is one of the latest diocesan schools to open a Design and Innovation Studio.

Back in 2024, Washington Catholic Elementary School in Washington and Flaget Elementary School in Vincennes both opened Design and Innovation Studios for early education. Earlier this school year, Westside Catholic School's St. Boniface campus, which houses students in grades 5-8, received their equipment and held a ribbon cutting for their Innovation and Design Studio.

In March 2025, Westside Catholic Schools received a notice of award from Vincennes University (VU) and Purdue Indiana Next Generation Manufacturing Competitiveness Center (IN-MaC) for the Design and Innovation Studio funding. The notice says they supported a VU and IN-MaC Design and Innovation Studio at the level of \$30,000 for VU and IN-MaC approved equipment from STEM Education Works located in Lafayette. Funding for the Design and Innovation Studio was made possible by grant funding from VU through the Lilly Endowment.

"We believe that when students are given the tools and the freedom to imagine, they don't just design projects — they design possibilities," Westside Catholic Principal Sister Catherine Stewart said.

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Submitted photo

Parker Bateman utilizes the Design and Innovation Studio at Westside Catholic School's St. Boniface campus.

First-year seminarians take pilgrimage to northeast US, Canada

By JOHN ROHLF

The Message assistant editor

At the start of 2026, seminarians in the Diocese of Evansville's House of Formation made a pilgrimage to Canada and the northeastern United States.

Diocesan Director of Vocations Father Tyler Tenbarge and first-year seminarians Jeff Helfrich, Landon Mayer, Sam Naas and Austin Wolf took a pilgrimage to Catholic shrines

and saints of Canada and the northeastern United States.

Father Tenbarge said with the recommendation from The Program for Priestly Formation for seminarians to form devotions to American saints and learn about the history of the church in the United States, the diocese began an annual pilgrimage to the shrines of the North American martyrs in 2023 with first-year seminarians in the House of Formation. He said visiting the tombs and walking in their footsteps "captures a pilgrim imagination far more deeply than reading a book can."

"We added stops at other saint sites, as well, and the men have been inspired to imitate and share what they have learned every year," Father Tenbarge said. "Going back to the roots of Catholicism in the United States guides them as they move forward to discern and prepare for priestly ministry in our own diocese."

Among the many places the seminarians visited were Our Lady of Victory Shrine in Buffalo, New York; the National Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg, Maryland; Martyr's Shrine in Midland Ontario, Canada; and the Notre-Dame Basilica of Montreal in Canada.

Helfrich said his favorite location they visited was the Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. The museum with her accompaniments portraying her path to sainthood was very inspiring, he said.

Naas said one thing that surprised him was the relationship of Servant of God Bishop Simon Bruté, who is buried in the St. Francis Xavier Proto-Cathedral in Vincennes, and St.



Submitted photo

First-year seminarians Jeff Helfrich, from left, Landon Mayer, Sam Naas and Austin Wolf take part in a pilgrimage in January.

Elizabeth Ann Seton.

"Before visiting St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's shrine, I knew they were close, but I didn't realize how intertwined their lives were," Naas said. "Simon Bruté wasn't just a priest or spiritual director of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. He was her close friend and guided her through the loss of her two children."

Naas was also surprised by the simplicity in the lives of the saints. He noted St. André Bessette, who grew up in a poor family, was illiterate and sickly, and only could become a porter within his religious community.

"I was reminded many times that I don't have to be someone great to

become a saint," Naas said. "Sainthood is possible and achievable as long as you are willing to fully rely on God with complete trust."

Naas said the trip was beneficial to him in particular as he discerns the priesthood by showing him how ordinary people did extraordinary things. The saints he saw showed him what it truly means to live out his vocation, he said.

"My vocation, no matter if it is to priesthood or to something else, will always push me to love God and those who God has put in my life. This pilgrimage showed me that trusting com-

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