



The MESSAGE

Southwestern Indiana's Catholic
Community Newspaper

April 17, 2026

Volume 56, Number 31

www.evdiomessage.org

Watershed moment Indiana bishops release pastoral letter on 'integral ecology'



By VICTORIA ARTHUR
Statehouse Correspondent for
Indiana's Catholic Newspapers

Representing all corners of a state abundant with intricate waterways and varied landscapes, the five bishops of Indiana have released a new pastoral letter highlighting the profound connection between the natural world and human life.

In their new pastoral letter, "Integral Ecology: A Sacramental Vision," these five bishops of the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) also call for a renewed sense of responsibility for protecting God's creation.

"The care for our Common Home affects all people in our beautiful state and tran-

scends political and ideological opinions and controversies," said Bishop Joseph M. Siegel of the Diocese of Evansville. "We and future generations need clean air, clean water and uncontaminated soil to live and thrive. This pastoral letter addresses the need to look at threats to these natural resources and encourages people of good will to seek common sense solutions to preserve the precious gift of God's earth. As recent Popes have reminded us, the Lord has entrusted to us the stewardship of our world, that it might provide for the flourishing of humanity and all His creation. It is a stewardship we must all take seriously."

See [ICC](#), page 8

Simmons wins Outstanding Middle School Educator award

By JOHN ROHLF
The Message
assistant editor

One year after being a finalist for the award, Corpus Christi teacher Stefanie Simmons was named the 2026 Vanderburgh County Outstanding Middle School Teacher of the Year.

Simmons was recognized with the award during a surprise presentation April 8 at Corpus Christi School in Evansville.

"It completely caught me off guard," Simmons said. "I had no idea it was coming, which made the moment even more emotional and special. I don't typically enjoy attention, but I truly appreciated everyone taking time out of their day to celebrate with me."

Corpus Christi Principal Andrea Greaney said it was an honor to

See [AWARD](#), page 5



The Message photo by John Rohlif

Stefanie Simmons, right, is congratulated by Corpus Christi Principal Andrea Greaney after Simmons was named the 2026 Vanderburgh County Outstanding Middle School Teacher of the Year.

To rise to the greater honor and glory of God

By PAMELA NOLAN
Special to The Message

Whenever a rock is placed or is planted in the ground, don't expect flowers, fruit or grains to sprout from a rock. That's not how Mother Nature works. However, when Christ Jesus chooses to place a rock, then that rock most certainly will produce abundant fruit. That's exactly what has happened during the 200 years since the place-

ment of a piece of blessed rock as the cornerstone for today's St. Francis Xavier Basilica in Vincennes.

On March 30, 1826, God planted a special rock which signaled the beginning of the construction of today's basilica. Now, about eight generations later, St. Francis Xavier parishioners are celebrating the great effort made by their forefathers and foremothers.

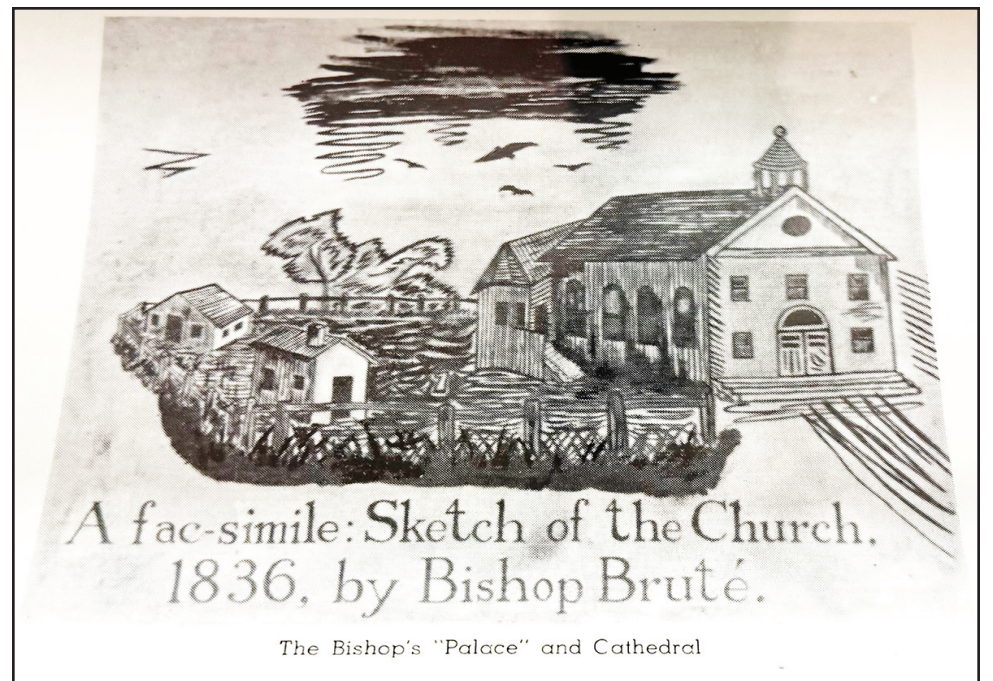
In the May 6, 1826, issue of the "Western Sun and General Advertiser," a reporter described the cornerstone as being "a square, oriental granite, highly polished on one side, and inscribed under three symbols of the cross."

The article presents the entire Latin message which translates as follows. "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build by church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The next sentence is, "Built in honor of St. Francis Xavier. Rev. J.L. Champomier, Parish Priest, 30th March, A.D. 1826."

The article's writer addressed future parishioners by adding a thought about what was being passed on to them. "That stone resting as it now does, some feet in the earth, will give to posterity a brief memorial of the edifice, and the name of the zealous missionary by whose efforts it will be erected."

This exceptionally profound event was to be highlighted with participation from an array of local folks who had a vested interest in the day's once-in-a-lifetime chance to be part of the literal building of one of Christ's physical churches here on earth.

The church bell rang at about noon. Following some remarks by a dignitary



The Bishop's "Palace" and Cathedral

Submitted photo

A sketch of the Old Cathedral in Vincennes by Bishop Bruté is shown. On March 30, St. Francis Xavier Parish celebrated its 200th anniversary of the cornerstone setting of the present church.

or possibly by a few speakers (the article isn't clear on that point), an impressive gathering of folks began to form on Second Street between Church and Vigo streets. Included amongst the "multitude" (as the reporter described the group) were young ladies, matrons, married women, nuns, young men, "aged citizens," visitors, the contractor, the workmen, several choir members and Father Jean L. Champomier. He was surrounded by the committee members who had been appointed by the congregation to superintend and to aid in the building's construction.

The St. Francis Xavier procession

went as far south on Second Street to Nicholas Street and as far north as Perry Street before heading back to the ceremonial site on Church Street. There, Father Champomier oversaw the laying of the cornerstone "according to the ritual of the church, and the multitude dispersed."

Almost as significant as the laying of the cornerstone are some of the statements made by Father Champomier in his address to the public. Those comments were included in the local newspaper's March 4, 1826, issue.

That issue was published 26 days

See [200TH](#), page 5