

Take Heart! Do Not Lose Heart! Behold the Sacred Heart!



CATHOLIC DIOCESE
— OF YOUNGSTOWN —

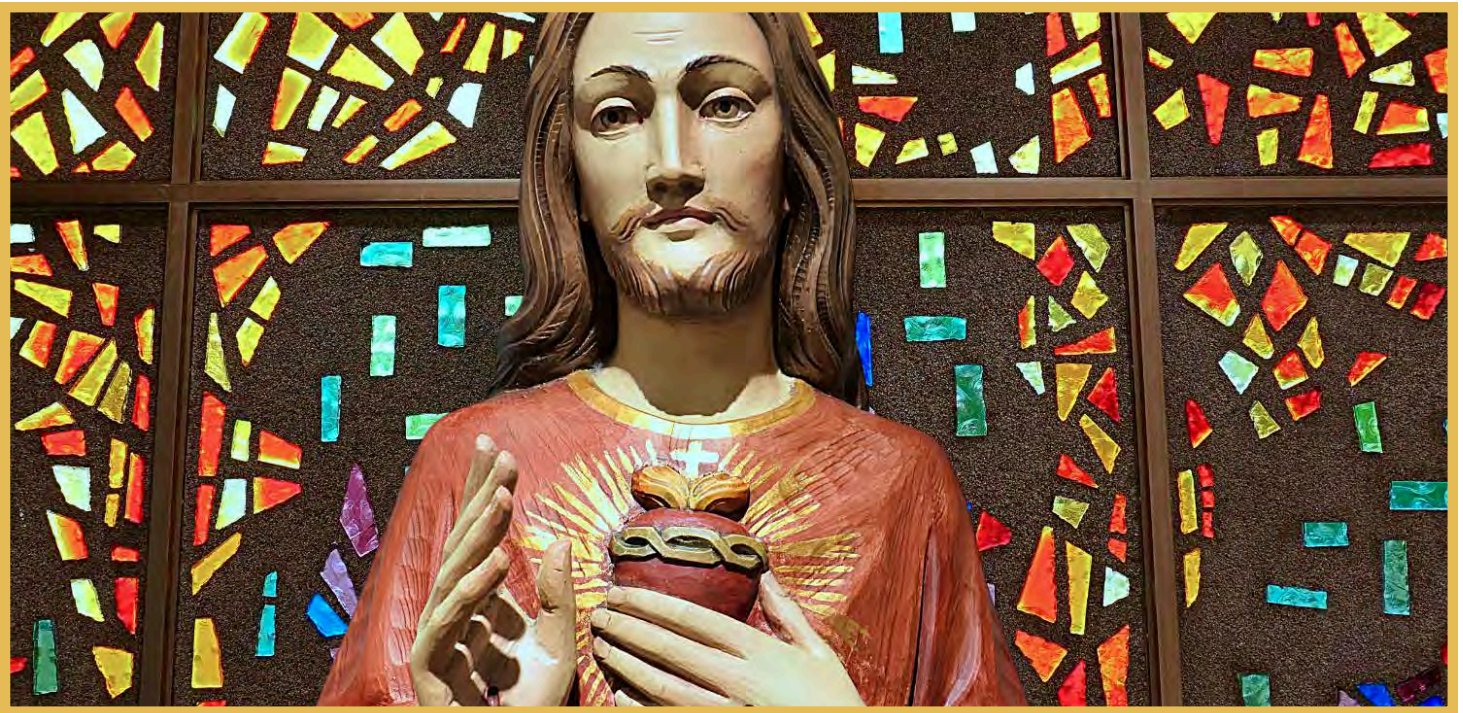
A PASTORAL LETTER BY BISHOP DAVID J. BONNAR

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MOST REVEREND DAVID J. BONNAR
Sixth Bishop of the Diocese of Youngstown



The Most Reverend David J. Bonnar was born on February 5, 1962, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. A graduate of Seton-LaSalle High School and Duquesne University, he studied for the priesthood at the Pontifical North American College in Rome and earned a degree in Sacred Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University. On November 17, 2020, His Holiness Pope Francis appointed him the sixth Bishop of Youngstown. Bishop Bonnar was installed on January 12, 2021. This is the third pastoral letter from Bishop Bonnar.

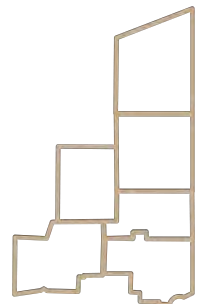


Sacred Heart statue at Saint Patrick Parish (Hubbard). Photo provided by the parish. ♡A

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Youngstown encompasses six counties in northeast Ohio: **Ashtabula**, **Columbiana**, **Mahoning**, **Portage**, **Stark**, and **Trumbull**.

Image Locations

You can find the Sacred Heart pictures used in this pastoral letter by matching the colored heart and corresponding letter, next to the picture's caption, with the map on the inside back cover. ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡



Scripture texts in this work are taken from the New American Bible, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All rights reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

*On the cover: The polychromed wood carving from the Sacred Heart Chapel in Saint Columba Cathedral portrays Jesus revealing his heart to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. The lips of the Savior are slightly parted, as though speaking to the saint. She shows awe and reverence. The surrounding cherubs disclose the heavenly atmosphere of Saint Margaret Mary's vision.

Introduction

In the Gospel of John, Jesus delivers a farewell discourse in which he prepares his disciples for the next phase of their journey, when more will be asked of them. His words are laced with both brutal honesty and calming reassurance. He says, “I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world” (John 16:33). It is worth noting that in some biblical translations, the imperative to “take courage” is translated as “take heart.” Jesus’ command is a call to embrace his confidence and courage from the depths of our hearts especially in facing the inevitable tribulations and troubles of life. This call was poignant for his followers then. And it is so today.

One of the inevitable realities of life is loss. Sooner or later, we all must deal with it. Loss can manifest itself in many ways, from misplacing a precious object to losing a job or a loved one. There also exists the reality of losing one’s youth or health. The story of life is about how we as human beings confront this painful, and at times, tragic reality that engenders sadness, grief, anger and powerlessness. Every loss yields an end of sorts. For the person of faith, however, the moment of loss can become an opportunity to grow as a person and to renew our relationship with Jesus Christ who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). In other words, these moments can be an opportunity to “take heart.”

Losing Heart

But not all human losses are tangible or even visible. Nowhere is this perhaps truer than when it comes to the human heart. Even though our hearts may beat regularly and keep us alive, the circumstances of life can discourage us to the point that we lose heart, potentially falling into a state of mere existence. By losing heart, I mean that any sense of hope, strength, confidence or peace is increasingly diminished or, worse yet, taken from us. This loss is usually the result of an event, something cumulative over time, or the effect of something desired that did not happen. Next to dividing us as human beings, there is probably nothing that the Evil One enjoys more than seeing us lose heart. When we lose our hearts, we face the prospect of losing our faith.



Sacred Heart statue in Saint Mary Church at Divine Mercy Parish (Massillon). Photo provided by the parish. ❤️A



Sacred Heart statue at Immaculate Conception Parish (Ravenna)
Photo provided by the parish. ❤️A

A Biblical Perspective

The Chosen People in the Hebrew Scriptures struggled at times with life and their relationship with God, especially as they journeyed through the wilderness. Even as God was in the process of delivering them from the Egyptians, they began to lose heart. While Pharaoh pursued them, they said to Moses,

“Were there no burial places in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Did we not tell you this in Egypt, when we said, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?’ Far better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

But Moses responds to the dispirited people,

“Do not fear! Stand your ground and see the victory the Lord will win for you today. For these Egyptians whom you see today, you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you have only to keep still” (Exodus 14: 11-14).



Sacred Heart statue at Saint Ambrose Parish (Garrettsville).
Photo provided by the parish. ❤️B

Moses challenges the people to “take heart” and have courage. In the end, the Lord God prevails, and the Israelites come to believe in God and their leader Moses.

However, even Moses was not exempt from the experience of losing heart. As he listened to the people complain incessantly, Moses cries out to God in despair with a series of questions from the depths of his discouraged heart.

“Why do you treat your servant so badly? Why are you so displeased with me that you burden me with all this people? Was it I who conceived all this people? Or was it I who gave them birth, that you tell me to carry them at my breast, like a nurse carrying an infant, to the land you have promised under oath to their fathers? Where can I get meat to give to all these people? For they are crying to me, ‘Give us meat for our food.’ I cannot carry all this people by myself, for they are too heavy for me. If this is the way you will deal with me, then please do me the favor of killing me at once, so that I need no longer face my distress” (Numbers 11:11-15).

The New Testament also addresses this human reality of losing heart. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus speaks to his disciples about prayer. He tells a parable described as "the necessity to pray always without becoming weary" (Luke 18:1). In some interpretations, the translation reads "without losing heart," instead of "becoming weary."

Jesus knew so well the human condition and the tendency to lose heart, especially when prayers seemingly go unanswered. As part of his Last Supper Discourse, Jesus addresses the human heart. He says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me" (John 14:1). He later reiterates this same command. "Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid" (John 14:27).



Stained glass window depicting The Last Supper at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, Saint Pope John XXIII Parish (Niles). Photo taken by Brian Keith. 💜B

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus invites those who are weary to come to him, for he has much to teach them, particularly when it comes to the heart. He says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves" (Matthew 11:29).

Following the Resurrection, the Gospel of Luke recounts the story of the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus who encounter a stranger. This stranger accompanies them in their disillusionment and begins to unpack the mystery. The disciples are so struck by the words of this stranger that they invite him into their abode. In the breaking of the bread, their eyes are opened, and they come to see that this stranger is none other than the Risen Lord. This prompts them to exclaim, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32) The heart of Jesus brings comfort and peace to the hearts of the saddened disciples.



Stained glass window of Saint Paul in Holy Trinity Parish (East Liverpool). Photo taken by Jimmy Joe Savage. ♥A

In his preaching, Saint Paul acknowledges this temptation to lose heart on a handful of occasions. In his Letter to the Galatians he writes, “Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap eternal life from the spirit” (Galatians 6:9). To the Ephesians, Saint Paul states, “So I ask you not to lose heart over my afflictions for you; this is your glory” (Ephesians 3:13). To the Church in Corinth, Saint Paul speaks about his battle with trying not to lose heart and fending off discouragement. He says,

“We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body” (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

Finally, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews encourages us to fix our eyes on Jesus, “the leader and perfecter of faith.” He writes, “Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:3). As we face the reality of losing heart, Jesus offers a way.



Sacred Heart mosaic at Saint Benedict Church,
Saint Francis of Assisi Parish (Canton).
Photo provided by the parish. ♥B

Papal Perspectives

Pope Leo XIII, in 1899, pointed to the way of Jesus in the Sacred Heart with his encyclical letter, *Annum Sacrum*, in which he consecrated humanity to this fount of divine love. Pope Leo XIII declares, “And since there is in the Sacred Heart a symbol and sensible image of the infinite love of Jesus Christ which moves us to love one another, therefore is it fit and proper that we should consecrate ourselves to His most Sacred Heart—an act which is nothing else than an offering and a binding of oneself to Jesus Christ, seeing that whatever honor, veneration and love is given to this Divine Heart is really and truly given to Christ Himself” (AS #8). Other succeeding popes echo this teaching.



Coat of arms of Pope Leo XIII

More recently, Pope Francis, before his death, in his final encyclical letter, *Dilexit Nos (He Loved Us): On the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ*, shows us the way of Jesus in the Sacred Heart, reflecting on the human and divine love of the heart of Jesus Christ. Amid the frenzy of life, Pope Francis calls for a rediscovery of the heart. He writes,



Pope Francis greets visitors from the popemobile as he rides around Saint Peter's Square at the Vatican before his weekly general audience Nov. 8, 2023. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

“The symbol of the heart has often been used to express the love of Jesus Christ. Some have questioned whether this symbol is still meaningful today. Yet, living as we do in an age of superficiality, rushing frenetically from one thing to another without really knowing why, and ending up as insatiable consumers and slaves to the mechanisms of a market unconcerned about the deeper meaning of our lives, all of us need to rediscover the importance of the heart” (DN #2).

Not only can we as human beings lose heart, but we can also dismiss any awareness or reflection on the fact that it is happening in our own lives. This ignorance can have dire consequences. Pope Francis states,

“If we devalue the heart, we also devalue what it means to speak from the heart, to act with the heart, to cultivate and heal the heart. If we fail to appreciate the specificity of the heart, we miss the messages that the mind alone cannot communicate; we miss out on the richness of our encounters with others; we miss out on poetry. We also lose track of history and our own past, since our real personal history is built with the heart. At the end of our lives, that alone will matter” (DN #11).

The heart is the place in which we encounter ourselves and others. Pope Francis writes, “We see, then, that in the heart of each person there is a mysterious connection between self-knowledge and openness to others, between the encounter with one’s personal uniqueness and the willingness to give oneself to others” (DN #18).

Rediscovering the Heart

The call to rediscover the heart is even more urgent given the reality of Artificial Intelligence—an emerging threat to the loss of heart. While we can certainly celebrate the accomplishments of technology, we can never allow these innovations to rob us of our hearts and the emotions and dreams that flow from it. As Pope Francis states, “Everything finds its unity in the heart, which can be the dwelling place of love in all its spiritual, psychic, and even physical dimensions” (DN #21). How sad when a loss of heart translates into a loss of faith, hope, and love.



Sacred Heart statue at Sacred Heart Church, Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque Parish (Rock Creek).
Photo provided by the parish. ❤️A

There are wonderful opportunities that come when we behold both the individual and collective power of the heart bonded with the heart of Christ. Pope Francis comments,

“It is only by starting from the heart that our communities will succeed in uniting and reconciling differing minds and wills, so that the Spirit can guide us in unity as brothers and sisters. Reconciliation and peace are also born of the heart. The heart of Christ is ‘ecstasy,’ openness, gift, and encounter. In that heart, we learn to relate to one another in wholesome and happy ways, and to build up in this world God’s kingdom of love and justice. Our hearts, united with the heart of Christ, are capable of working this social miracle” (DN #28).

The Present Moment

When we look at the current state of our world marked by war, terrorism, famine, loneliness, prejudice, racism, and many other social realities, it may be tempting to lose heart. The battles we are facing in our country alone regarding human dignity and the treatment of refugees and immigrants may also be a trigger to lose heart. The struggles that manifest themselves in the Church around ideology, ecclesiology, liturgy, and outreach may also be a cause to lose heart. Closer to home, in this portion of the Lord’s vineyard, there is the reality of parish mergers, closing of church buildings, and fewer priests, not to mention fewer people worshipping on Sundays. All these realities impinge upon the heart.



Bishop Bonnar celebrating Mass with all religious who served in the Diocese of Youngstown at Saint Jude Parish. Photo Taken by Brian Keith. ♥B

The conflicts and wounds that unfold within our families may also, over time, lead to a loss of heart. And then, there are the stories from our own personal lives of discouragement and despair that can result in us losing our heart. What can we do when we find ourselves in this lonely and empty state of losing confidence and hope? How can we reclaim our heart—this treasure of memories, seat of emotions, and seedbed of dreams? How can we “take heart?”

Moving Forward: Turn to the Sacred Heart

The best strategy to address that state of a lost heart is to look to Jesus and his heart. Pope Francis notes,

“Let us turn, then, to the heart of Christ, that core of his being, which is a blazing furnace of divine and human love and the most sublime fulfillment to which humanity can aspire. There, in that heart, we truly come at last to know ourselves and learn how to love” (DN #30).

Traditionally, in our churches there exists an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Are you familiar with where the Sacred Heart image is in your parish church? I encourage you to intentionally turn to it. Recently, I celebrated Holy Mass in the oldest church building of our diocese, Saint Philip Neri Church, Dungannon. As I entered the sanctuary, I immediately noticed the Sacred Heart image emblazoned on the stained-glass window behind the altar. What struck me was how at various parts of the day, depending on the location of the sun, the window would filter the light to produce different colors, shades, and degrees of brightness. Then it dawned on me that the Sacred Heart and the force of its love cannot be determined or influenced by external forces. Any image of the Sacred Heart consistently pours forth steady and powerful streams of love.



Sacred Heart stained glass window at Saint Philip Neri Parish (Dungannon). Photo taken by Jimmy Joe Savage. ♥C



Polychromed wood carving from the Sacred Heart Chapel in Saint Columba Cathedral (Youngstown). ♥A

Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque

During the 1700's a French nun and mystic, Margaret Mary Alacoque, fostered devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This devotion was inspired in large part by apparitions of our Lord to this saintly woman. Jesus made twelve promises to Saint Margaret Mary regarding those who honor his Sacred Heart.

In a letter which serves as the second reading for the Office of Reading on October 16th, the Memorial of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque identifies the three streams that flow from the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She writes,

“From this divine heart three streams flow endlessly. The first is the stream of mercy for sinners; it pours into their hearts sentiments of contrition and repentance. The second is the stream of charity which helps all in need and especially aids those seeking perfection to find the means of surmounting their difficulties. From the third stream flow love and light for the benefit of his friends who have attained perfection; these he wishes to unite himself so that they may share his knowledge and commandments and, in their individual ways, devote themselves wholly in advancing his glory” (Letter by Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, Virgin, Second Reading, The Liturgy of the Hours, October 18th, Vol. IV).

Saint Margaret Mary views the Sacred Heart as an oasis. She writes,

“This divine heart is an abyss of all blessings, and into it the poor should submerge all their needs. It is an abyss of joy in which all of us can immerse our sorrows. It is an abyss of lowliness to counteract our foolishness, an abyss of mercy for the wretched, an abyss of love to meet our every need” (Letter by Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, Virgin, Second Reading, The Liturgy of the Hours, October 18th, Vol. IV).

Saint Margaret Mary reflects on one of the apparitions in which Jesus speaks to her about how his heart is so inflamed with love that it could “no longer contain within itself the flames of its burning Charity” (Vision to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, December 27, 1673). Jesus then invites this woman, in her unworthiness, to extend this love which is essential for salvation. Following this, Jesus asks Saint Margaret Mary for her heart, which she had asked him to receive.



Sacred Heart statue in Our Lady of Peace Parish (Ashtabula).
Photo provided by the parish. ♥B

What a poignant moment to behold—the unification of the human heart with the divine heart! Jesus places her heart inside his own, which she perceived as a divine furnace. She watched as her heart became inflamed. Jesus then takes and places her now burning heart within her, which would remain there until her death.

The heart of Jesus with its love and mercy now engulfs the heart of this lowly, human nun. Saint Margaret Mary’s heart caught fire from the fire of the Sacred Heart. She came to know in a real way the power and heat of the flaming heart of Jesus. The embers of that fire continue to smolder into our time through the beautiful devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus that promises love, mercy, hope, accompaniment, and so much more. And this burning love is made ever so real in the Holy Eucharist.

Jubilee for the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Pope Francis’ encyclical letter, *Dilexit Nos*, coincides with the 350th Jubilee for the Sacred Heart of Jesus, marking the apparitions of Jesus to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. This celebration began on December 27, 2023, and concludes on June 27, 2025.

Pope Francis points to the power of the Sacred Heart. He writes,

“The venerable image portraying Christ holding out his loving heart also shows him looking directly at us, inviting us to encounter, dialogue and trust; it shows his strong hands capable of supporting us and his lips that speak personally to each of us” (DN #54).

The late Pope speaks about what happens when we immerse ourselves into the heart of Christ.

“Entering into the heart of Christ, we feel loved by a human heart filled with affections and emotions like our own. Jesus’ human will freely choose to love us, and that spiritual love is flooded with grace and charity. When we plunge into the depths of his heart, we find ourselves overwhelmed by the immense glory of his infinite love as the eternal Son, which we can no longer separate from his human love. It is precisely in his human love, and not apart from it, that we encounter his divine love. We discover ‘the infinite in the finite’” (DN #67).

For broken, torn, tattered, and lost hearts, the Sacred Heart of Jesus demonstrates a saving and lifegiving way forward. The Sacred Heart exudes a divine presence of love that is always awaiting us no matter our condition or state. He loves us! Always! Anywhere! Forever! May God forgive us for the times when we dismiss this eternal love or look for it in all the wrong places.



Sacred Heart stained glass in the Immaculate Heart of Mary Chapel at University Parish Newman Center (Kent). Photo taken by Dr. John Roebke. ❤️C

The Contribution of Saint Augustine



Long before the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was established, Saint Augustine became enamored with the human heart. In his “Confessions,” Augustine acknowledges the restlessness of the human heart that can only be fulfilled through union with the heart of God himself. He writes, “O God, you made us for yourself. Our hearts are restless until they rest in you” (“Confessions,” Book 1, Chapter I). Augustine knew so well the restlessness of the human heart before his conversion and thereafter. But, he also came to know to behold the Divine Heart.

It is interesting to note that in some artistic depictions, Saint Augustine is holding a flaming heart. This does not refer to the Sacred Heart but rather points to Augustine’s flaming love for God and, no doubt, is reflective of the nature of his own heart following his conversion. Saint Augustine came to see that the human heart could indeed be pierced, touched, and forever changed by the Divine Heart marked by complete and contagious love. To this day, the Order of Saint Augustine otherwise known as the Augustinians, embrace this same belief through their emblem which manifests an arrow piercing a heart.

The Election of Pope Leo XIV

On May 8, 2025, American Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost was elected Pope, taking the name Leo XIV. His predecessor in name, Pope Leo XIII, as mentioned previously, not only wrote an encyclical letter on the Sacred Heart but cared deeply about the human heart and the plight of workers and those in need. Pope Leo XIV is a member of the Augustinian Order that defines itself with the image of the flaming heart. The new Holy Father’s episcopal motto clearly suggests the unification of our hearts with the heart of God, namely, “In illo Uno unum,” that is, “In the One, we are one.” It is also worth noting that his coat of arms contains the image of the arrow piercing the heart which speaks of God’s fiery encounter with humanity and the restlessness of the human heart.



Photograph of Pope Leo XIV released by the Vatican. | Credit: Vatican Media

In his May 28, 2025 General Audience, in speaking about the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Pope Leo XIV concluded the reflection by saying, “Let us turn, then, to the Sacred Heart, model of true humanity, and ask him to make our heart ever more like his.” Pope Leo XIV demonstrates continuity with his predecessors, most notably Pope Leo XIII and Pope Francis, calling the world to embrace and be embraced by the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The Sacred Heart in Our Diocese

The Sacred Heart image is found in our churches and in many charisms beyond. From the inception of this diocese and thanks to the invitation of our first bishop, the Most Reverend James A. McFadden, we have been blessed by the life and ministry of the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is integral to their mission and identity. Their charism is to support the diocesan priesthood in large part through prayer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is also present in a religious community of men vowed to consecrated life, whom I recently invited to our diocese to assume ministry at Guardian Angels

Parish, Canton, namely the Rogationist Fathers of the Heart of Jesus. This religious congregation of priests and brothers in addition to the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, take as a fourth vow the pledge to pray for vocations worldwide with an intentional focus on the Sacred Heart, who brings life and love to the world.

Corpus Christi Parish, Conneaut and its Church of Saint Francis Xavier Cabrini maintain a link to the Sacred Heart. Their patroness founded the Institute of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with the purpose of being “bearers of the love of Christ to the world” (Constitution of the Missionary Sisters).

Little Flower Parish, Canton has as its patroness Saint Therese of Lisieux who wrote in her 1895 poem “To the Sacred Heart of Jesus,” “O Heart of Jesus, treasure of tenderness, You Yourself are my happiness, my only hope.... I hide myself in your Sacred Heart, Jesus” (<https://www.catholicspiritualdirection.org/poemstherese.pdf>).

During this past year, it was my honor to name a newly merged parish after the French nun who spent her life inviting devotion to the Sacred Heart. Saint Mary, Rock Creek and Sacred Heart, Orwell merged under the title of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. This new parish enjoys this beloved saint with her deep devotion to the Sacred Heart as their patroness. She herself accepted as her “soul’s guide” Saint Francis of Assisi, patron of our Canton parish and of the men and women of the Franciscan religious communities who serve in Canton and Youngstown.

Finally, as we continue to pray for the beatification of Servant of God Rhoda Wise, I penned a prayer some time ago beholding how she accepted the painful stigmata and offered it graciously for priests and all consecrated religious. The same prayer seeks God’s blessing on the faithful as well with these words that acknowledge the presence of the Sacred Heart, “Confirm the strength of all the faithful of your Son and keep them enclosed in His Sacred Heart. May they be true and have the courage to follow in Jesus’ footsteps.”



The chapel tabernacle of the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at Villa Maria Teresa (Hubbard). Photo taken by Michael Houy. ♡C

An Invitation to Renew Devotion to the Sacred Heart

In this Jubilee Year of Hope, as well as this time of Jubilee honoring the Sacred Heart, I am inviting us all, the clergy, religious, and laity, to turn to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I pray that this might be a time to rediscover and renew our devotion to the heart of Jesus. When we enter our parish church, let us be intentional in our prayer about acknowledging and praying to the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Let us also extend this same focus to the images of the Sacred Heart in our homes. At this year's Chrism Mass, the Diocese of Youngstown gifted her priests with an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to display in their prayer space especially as they answer God's call to serve with a shepherd's heart.

Let us also reverence and regard the charism of devotion to the Sacred Heart lived out by our brothers and sisters, most notably, the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Rogationist Fathers of the Heart of Jesus, the Franciscan Friars, the Sisters of Saint Francis, and the clergy and faithful of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque Parish, Rock Creek and Orwell, as well as the faithful of Corpus Christi Parish, Conneaut; Little Flower Parish, Middlebranch; and Saint Francis of Assisi Parish, Canton. And in our prayer for the beatification of Servant of God Rhoda Wise, let us continue to pray that the faithful may be "enclosed in His Sacred Heart."



(OSV News photo/Sam Lucero)

Enthronement of the Sacred Heart

During our upcoming Clergy Convocation, I will celebrate with our priests an enthronement of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Together as a presbyterate, we will pray to the Sacred Heart for strength and grace as we teach, sanctify, and lead the people of God in our portion of the Lord's vineyard always with a shepherd's heart. I pray that our collective gaze at this most beautiful and life-giving heart will be a source of inspiration and renewal in our life and ministry rippling throughout our diocese.

On Sunday, September 28, 2025, we as a diocese will celebrate an enthronement of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in every church. Together, as a community of believers, we will behold the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I pray that the life and love that flows from the Sacred Heart will empower us to be a more loving and unified Church. It is my hope that this long, intentional gaze at Jesus and his Sacred Heart will engender more vocations to the priesthood, consecrated life and married life. I also pray that our commitment to the Sacred Heart of Jesus will enliven us to open our hearts more to one another in a spirit of empathy, compassion, and forgiveness so that we ourselves embody the heart of Jesus. May this prayerful act, which will soon be ritualized throughout our diocese, help us to take heart and resist the temptation to lose our heart as individuals, and or, as a faith community.

One of my favorite lines in Sacred Scripture that always offers reassurance amid discouragement and disillusionment, especially in those moments when we can so easily lose heart, comes from the Psalms. The psalmist cries out, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted, saves those whose spirit is crushed” (Ps. 34:19). Indeed, Jesus is ever close to us when we lose heart. We need only to behold his image in the Sacred Heart and in the lives of those who embody in word and deed the streams of that heart. As “pilgrims of hope,” in this Jubilee Year of Hope, let us be more intentional in allowing ourselves, personally and communally, to be embraced by this loving heart.

Boldly Sharing our Relationship with Jesus

At the same time, let us not be afraid to tell the world about our experience with this most precious heart and the life-giving friendship we share with Jesus. In his final encyclical letter, Pope Francis challenges us to be bold in this regard. He writes,

“Christ asks you never to be ashamed to tell others, with all due discretion and respect, about your friendship with him. He asks that you dare to tell others how good and beautiful it is that you found him. ‘Everyone who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven’ (Mt. 10:32). For a heart that loves, this is not a duty but an irrepressible need: ‘Woe to me, if I do not proclaim the Gospel’ (1 Cor. 9:16) (DN #211)!”

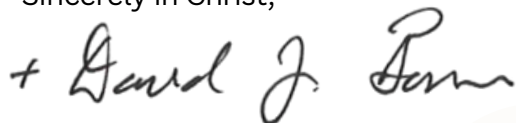
Pope Leo XIV encourages us in his very first address to the world as Pope from the loggia of Saint Peter’s Basilica on May 8, 2025, “God loves us, God loves you all, and evil will not prevail! We are all in God’s hands. Therefore, without fear, united hand in hand with God and each other—let us go forward.” Together, let us go forward, turning to Jesus and His Sacred Heart so that no matter what, with his loving gaze and streams of grace, we will never lose heart.

The Immaculate Heart of Mary

To assist us in life and help us on our journey, Jesus gave to us, the first disciple, his Mother, and her Immaculate Heart. One of our newly merged parishes, Saint Blaise, Austintown has a church under the patronage of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Of Mary, Luke says, “And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). As a mother and a woman of faith, Mary demonstrates how to be a pilgrim of hope. Mary embodies what it means to Take Heart! Do Not Lose Heart! Behold the Sacred Heart! In this moment, we seek her grace and intercession to do the same.

Take Heart! Do Not Lose Heart! Behold the Sacred Heart!

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Reverend David J. Bonnar
Bishop of Youngstown



Sacred Heart stained glass window in Saint Angela Merici Parish (Youngstown). Photo provided by the parish. ❤️B

Appendix



Sacred Heart statue at Little Flower Parish (Canton).
Photo provided by the parish. ❤️C

Prayers and Promises

A. The Morning Offering

O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer to You my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world. I offer them for all the intentions of Your Sacred Heart: the salvation of souls, reparation for sins, and the reunion of all Christians.

B. Act of Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus—Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690)

I give myself and consecrate to the Sacred Heart of our Lord Jesus Christ, my person and my life, my actions, pains and sufferings, so that I may be unwilling to make use of any part of my being other than to honor, love and glorify the Sacred Heart. This is my unchanging purpose, namely, to be all His, and to do all things for the love of Him, at the same time renouncing with all my heart whatever is displeasing to Him. I therefore take you, O Sacred Heart, to be the only object of my love, the guardian of my life, my assurance of salvation, the remedy of my weakness and inconstancy, the atonement for all my faults of my life and my sure refuge at the hour of death. Be then, O Heart of Goodness, my justification before God the Father, and turn away from me the strokes of His righteous anger. O Heart of Love, I put all my confidence in you, for I fear everything from my own wickedness and frailty, but I hope for all things from your goodness and bounty. Remove from me all that can displease you or resist your holy will: let your pure love imprint your image so deeply upon my heart, that I shall never be able to forget you or to be separated from you. May I obtain from all your loving kindness the grace of having my name written in your heart, for in you I desire to place all my happiness and glory, living and dying in bondage to you.



Sacred Heart statue at
Saint Michael Parish (Canfield).
Photo provided by the parish. ❤️C



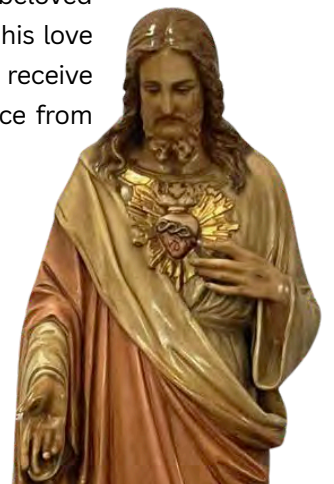
C. Litany of the Sacred Heart

Lord, have mercy ... Lord, have mercy
 Christ, have mercy ... Christ, have mercy
 Lord, have mercy ... Lord, have mercy

God our Father in heaven
 Have mercy on us.
 God the Son, Redeemer of the world
 Have mercy on us.
 God the Holy Spirit
 Have mercy on us.
 Holy Trinity, One God
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, Son of the eternal Father
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, formed by the Holy Spirit in
 the womb of the Virgin Mother
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, one with the eternal Word
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, infinite in majesty
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, holy temple of God
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, tabernacle of the Most High
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, house of God and gate of heaven
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, aflame with love for us
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, source of justice and love
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, full of goodness and love
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, well-spring of all virtue,
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, worthy of all praise
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, king and center of all hearts,
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, treasure-house of wisdom and knowledge,
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, in whom there dwells the fullness
 of God
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus in whom the Father is well pleased
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, from whose fullness we have all received
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, desire of the eternal hills
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, patient and full of mercy
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, generous to all who turn to you
 Have mercy on us

Heart of Jesus, fountain of life and holiness
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, atonement for our sins
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, overwhelmed with insults
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, broken for our sins
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, obedient even to death
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, pierced by a lance
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, source of all consolation
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, our life and resurrection
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, our peace and reconciliation
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, victim of our sins
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, salvation of all who trust in you
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, hope of all who die in you
 Have mercy on us
 Heart of Jesus, delight of all the saints
 Have mercy on us
 Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world
 Have mercy on us
 Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world
 Have mercy on us
 Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world
 Have mercy on us
 Jesus, gentle and humble of heart
 Touch our hearts and make them like your own

Let us pray,
 Grant, we pray, almighty God, that we,
 who glory in the heart of your beloved
 Son and recall the wonders of his love
 for us may be made worthy to receive
 an overflowing measure of grace from
 that fount of heavenly gifts.
 Through Christ our Lord.
 Amen.



Sacred Heart statue at Saint Joseph Calasancius Parish (Jefferson).
 Photo provided by the parish. ♥C

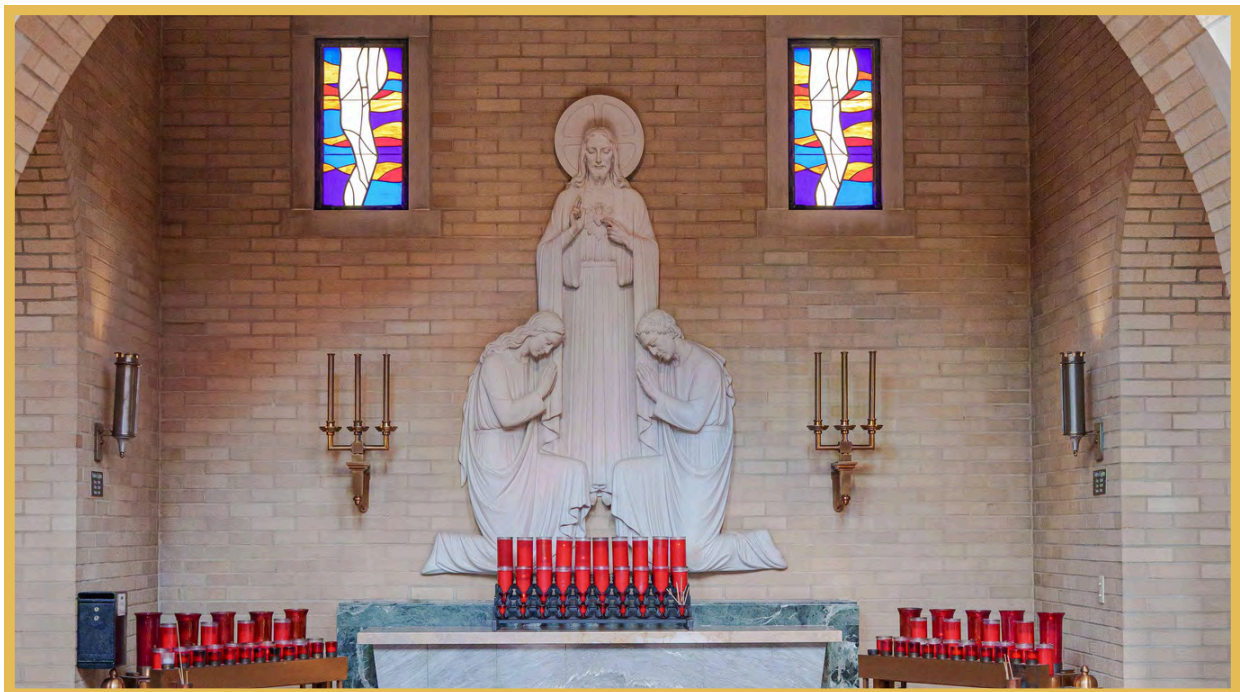
D. Promises of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Made to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque

1. I will give them all the graces necessary for their state of life.
2. I will give peace in their families
3. I will console them in all their troubles
4. I will be their refuge in life and especially in death
5. I will abundantly bless all their undertakings.
6. Sinners shall find in my Heart the source and infinite ocean of mercy.
7. Tepid souls shall become fervent.
8. Fervent souls shall rise speedily to great perfection.
9. I will bless those places wherein the image of My Sacred Heart shall be exposed and venerated.
10. I will give to priests the power to touch the most hardened hearts.

E. Collects for the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Grant, we pray, almighty God, that we who glory in the Heart of your beloved Son and recall the wonders of his love for us, may be made worthy to receive an overflowing measure of grace from that fount of heavenly gifts. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever. Amen

O God, who in the Heart of your Son, wounded by our sins, bestow on us in mercy the boundless treasures of your love, grant, we pray, that, in paying him the homage of our devotion, we may also offer worthy reparation. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever. Amen



Sacred Heart shrine at Saint Dominic Parish (Youngstown). Photo provided by the parish. ♥D

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Youngstown encompasses six counties in northeast Ohio: Ashtabula, Columbiana, Mahoning, Portage, Stark, and Trumbull.

Image Locations

Look for the colored hearts and the letter next to each picture caption. Match them to the same heart and letter on the map to find their location!



Ashtabula County

- A. Sacred Heart statue at Sacred Heart Church, Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque Parish (Rock Creek).
- B. Sacred Heart statue in Our Lady of Peace Parish (Ashtabula).
- C. Sacred Heart statue at Saint Joseph Calasanctius (Jefferson).



Trumbull County

- A. Sacred Heart statue at Saint Patrick Parish (Hubbard).
- B. Stained glass window depicting The Last Supper at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, Saint Pope John XXIII Parish (Niles).
- C. The chapel tabernacle of the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at Villa Maria Teresa (Hubbard).



Mahoning County

- A. Polychromed wood carving from the Sacred Heart Chapel in Saint Columba Cathedral (Youngstown).
- B. Sacred Heart stained glass window in Saint Angela Merici Parish (Youngstown).
- C. Sacred Heart statue at Saint Michael Parish (Canfield).
- D. Sacred Heart shrine at Saint Dominic Parish (Youngstown).



Columbiana County

- A. Stained glass window of Saint Paul in Holy Trinity Parish (East Liverpool).
- B. Bishop Bonnar celebrating Mass with all religious who served in the Diocese of Youngstown at Saint Jude Parish.
- C. Sacred Heart stained glass window at Saint Philip Neri Parish (Dungannon).



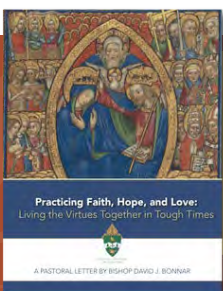
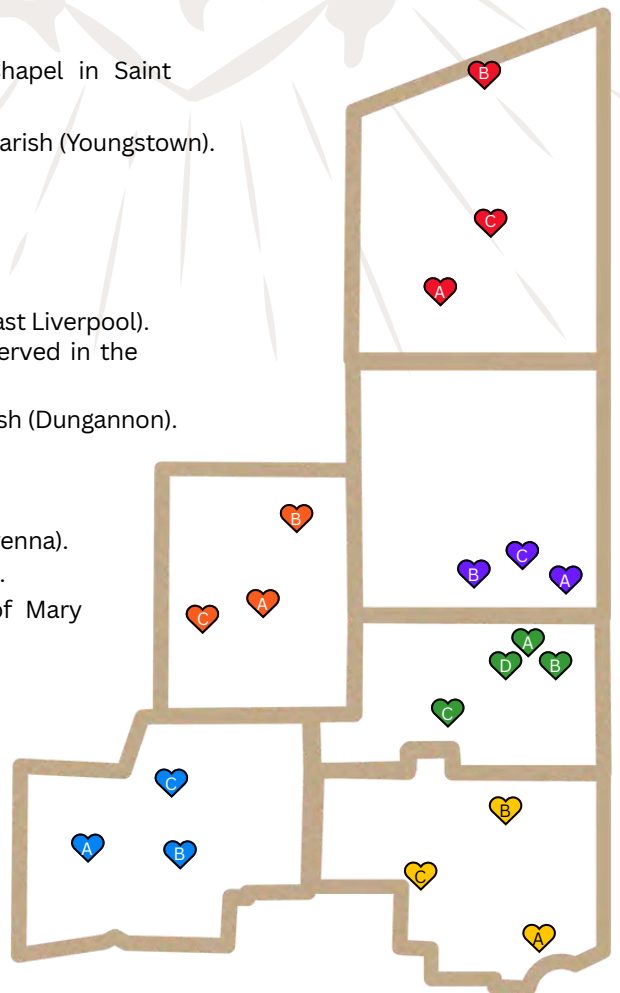
Portage County

- A. Sacred Heart statue at Immaculate Conception Parish (Ravenna).
- B. Sacred Heart statue at Saint Ambrose Parish (Garrettsville).
- C. Sacred Heart stained glass at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Chapel at University Parish Newman Center (Kent).



Stark County

- A. Sacred Heart statue in Saint Mary Church at Divine Mercy Parish (Massillon).
- B. Sacred Heart mosaic at Saint Benedict Church, Saint Francis of Assisi Parish (Canton).
- C. Sacred Heart statue at Little Flower Parish (Canton).



Visit DOY.org to read Bishop Bonnar's first two pastoral letters!

Or scan the QR code:





CATHOLIC DIOCESE
OF YOUNGSTOWN

144 West Wood Street, Youngstown, OH 44503

SACRED HEART PRAYER

O most Sacred Heart of Jesus, fountain of every blessing,
I adore You, I love You, and with a lively sorrow for my sins,
I offer You this poor heart of mine.

Make me humble, patient, pure, and wholly obedient to Your will.
Grant, good Jesus, that I may live in You and for You.

Protect me in the midst of danger; comfort me in my afflictions;
give me health of body, assistance in my temporal needs,
Your blessings on all that I do, and the grace of a holy death.

Amen.

