



## FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR

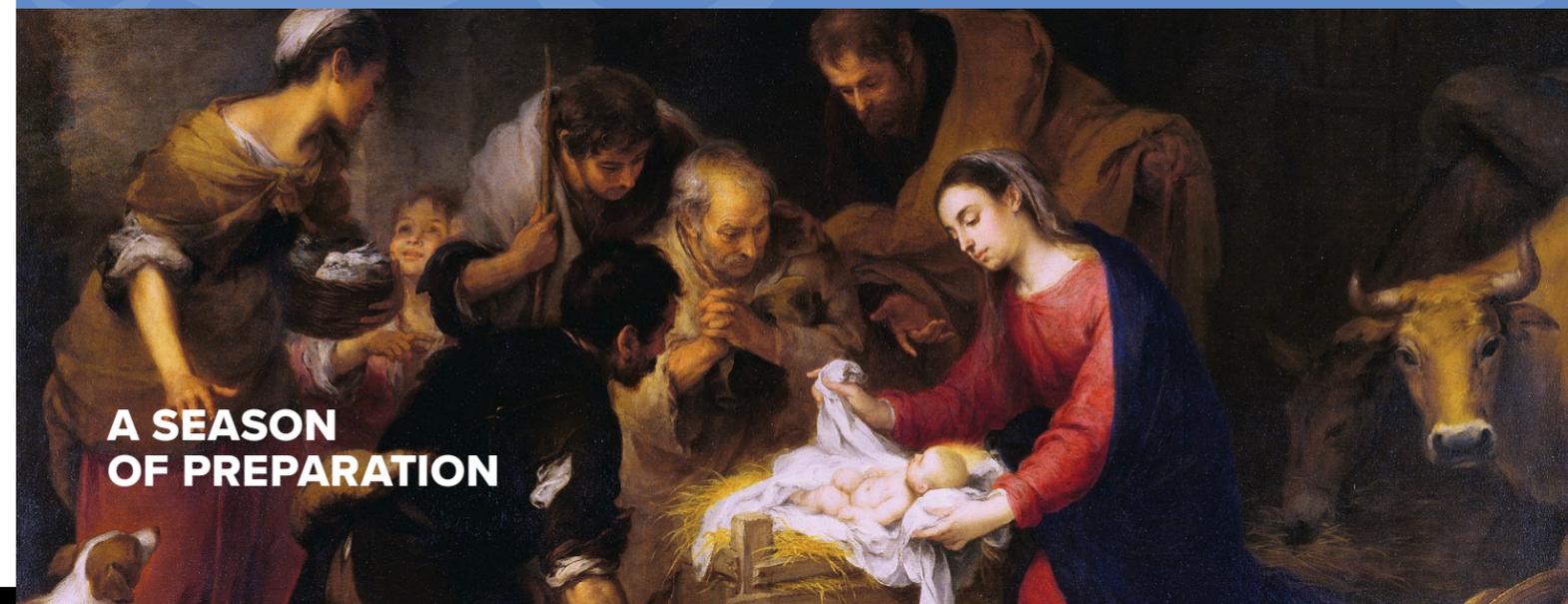
Dr. Ben Akers

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November is the month creation signals to us that time is fleeting. The leaves change and fall off the trees, the weather gets colder, and the light of day is waning. Following these natural clues, the Church reminds us this month to reflect on death and our preparation for it. It is also the time most of us begin to think of what needs to get done to prepare for Thanksgiving and Christmas. To help make it easier for you to help your parishioners prepare for the coming of the Christ Child, the FORMED team has developed an Advent and Christmas plan. Among other things, you will find short daily reflections on the liturgical readings by Dr. Gray. For the kids, the animated Brother Francis offers daily reflections in Spanish and English. Sign up at [daily.formed.org](http://daily.formed.org). Dr. Barber will be discussing the origins of our wonderful Christmas traditions through his video series and new book entitled *The True Meaning of Christmas*. To access all the Advent resources, please go to <http://leaders.formed.org/advent-2021>. For your own enrichment, I invite you to attend the free virtual summit on November 12 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. hosted by the Augustine Institute Graduate School of Theology. Hear talks entitled “St. Therese of Lisieux in Post-Revolutionary France,” by Dr. Bronwen McShea; “The Cosmic Temple in the Old Testament,” by Dr. Mark Giszczak; “The New Evangelization: Renewal and Mission,” by Prof. Lucas Pollice; and many more. Register here: <https://virtualsummit2021.augustine.edu/>.

# INFORMED

THE FORMED NEWSLETTER FOR PASTORS AND PARISH LEADERS



## A SEASON OF PREPARATION

The yuletide decorations already saturating the stores would have us believe that it is not too early to be thinking about Christmas. Viewed with the eyes of faith, it's none too soon to consider how we'll prepare our hearts during Advent for Christ's coming.

In addition to its other Advent resources, FORMED is offering two video reflections to help your parishioners focus on the season of Advent as a time of spiritual preparation to understand the true meaning of Christmas this year, rather than weeks crowded with plans of attack for decorating, shopping, baking, and entertaining.

### FORMED Daily: Advent with Dr. Tim Gray

In daily five-minute videos, Dr. Tim Gray develops the theme that Advent is a time to cultivate and deepen our faith and

our hope to ready ourselves for the joy and love of Christmas. The first reflection suggests that viewers fill the house with Advent—not Christmas—decorations; that each of us make a resolution to add a daily spiritual practice to our lives; and that we give something up, creating a space in our hearts for the Christ child, who had no room at the inn.

After setting that tone, Gray explores the season's Scripture and traditional Church practices to give viewers a fuller understanding of Advent.

### Dr. Michael Barber's video reflections on his book *The True Meaning of Christmas*

Struck by people's love for Christmas and the Christmas season, Dr. Michael Barber wrote *The True Meaning of Christmas* to unpack the Gospel stories of Jesus' birth, particularly Luke's infancy narrative. He also explores the history behind common Christmas traditions, uncovering their deeper religious significance.

Beginning the first weekend of Advent and continuing through Epiphany, Dr. Barber offers five-minute reflections on the Scripture stories of Jesus' birth and on the meaning of Christmas trees, lights, and Santa Claus.



# HIGHLIGHTS ON FORMED

## *The Elements of the Catholic Mass*

This month, as congregations settle into the habit of attending Mass in person again, FORMED offers a video series to help the faithful better appreciate the depths and the beauty of the gift that is the Sacrament of the Eucharist.



Father Douglas Martis, former director of the Liturgical Institute, explains each element of the Mass in 31 three-to-five-minute

videos. What is a sacramental? What is the role of music during Mass? When and why do we bow during the reciting of the Creed?

Each episode comes with a discussion guide that includes references, making *The Elements of the Catholic Mass* ideal for personal faith formation or group discussion.

## *Into the Breach*

As a special outreach to men of the parish, consider offering a series that seeks to answer what it means to be a Catholic man in today's world.



Diocese of Phoenix Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted's apostolic exhortation to Catholic men inspired this 12-episode video series from

the Knights of Columbus. *Into the Breach* tells men they are made for greatness and challenges them to achieve it by founding their lives on God and pursuing heroic virtue. Each episode explores a different aspect of authentic Catholic masculinity and features well-known Catholic speakers, as well as the personal story of a man who has deeply experienced the episode's topic in his own life. Speakers include Dr. Scott Hahn, Father Mike Schmitz, and Jason Evert.

# LITURGICAL CALENDAR

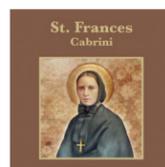
To enrich your parishioners' knowledge of and devotion to prominent saints with November feast days, check out these resources on [formed.org](https://formed.org):



## November 4

### **St. Charles Borromeo:** **The Good Shepherd**

Christopher Blum hosts episode 4 of the *True Reformers* series, which focuses on St. Charles Borromeo. When the Protestant Reformation was spreading throughout Europe, Charles was appointed archbishop of Milan and began to reform the corrupt archdiocese. He spent his own money to feed the people of Milan during a famine and plague. Exhausted from his service to the Church, Charles Borromeo died in 1584 at the age of 46.

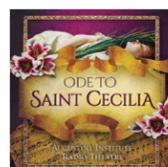


## November 13

### **Truth to Inspire: St. Frances Cabrini**

This series brings Mary Fabyan Windeatt's stories of the saints to life in an audiobook format.

No one expected that a small, sickly girl from Codogno, Italy, would be accepted into a convent or travel far from home. Yet out of love for Jesus, Frances Cabrini made 24 transatlantic crossings during her missionary work in the United States, establishing 67 institutions— orphanages, schools, and hospitals—before her death at age 67 in 1917.



## November 22

### **Ode to St. Cecilia**

In honor of the patron saint of music and musicians, the Augustine Institute Radio Theatre presents a dramatization of the story of the third-century martyr St. Cecilia, whose life has influenced many.

Employing cinematic sound, original music, and the talents of highly acclaimed British actors, *Ode to St. Cecilia* celebrates the role of art in showing us the love of God.

# AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Michael Barber, professor at the Augustine Institute, believes that you cannot have too many lights on a Christmas tree.

In October, Barber appeared on the Augustine Institute's Parish Leaders Webinar, discussing his new book, *The True Meaning of Christmas*.

Barber loves Christmas. This does not make him unique. Even non-religious people know "Silent Night" and "Away in a Manger," he said.

So why do people who might go to Mass just once a year, long for a meaningful Christmas?

"You can't have Christmas without Christ and his Eucharist," Barber said.

Barber, doing serious scholarship, researched Jesus' birth and the roots of Christmas traditions, resulting in a book intended for general audiences.

"We can use Christmas to help people better know the Christian faith," Barber said. Studying the Christmas stories and roots of Christmas traditions "helps your faith come alive."



Each chapter of *The True Meaning of Christmas* begins with a line from an Advent or Christmas song. For instance, Barber disputes the long-held belief that Christmas trees came from a pagan feast known as "Yule." Instead, Barber said, Christmas trees arose from Christianity in medieval Europe. The tree

simultaneously represented the Fall and the salvation from sin that Jesus procured on the Cross.

*The True Meaning of Christmas* is available in English and Spanish in hardcover for gift giving and paperback by the case for ministries or for parish gifts. Additionally, Barber is recording a series of short videos using material from his book that will be available on FORMED from Advent to Epiphany.

You can find Dr. Barber's video reflections on FORMED by searching *The True Meaning of Christmas*.



## VIRTUAL SUMMIT for Prospective Students Theology: The Renewal of the Mind



Register by visiting [virtuallsummit2021.augustine.edu](https://virtuallsummit2021.augustine.edu)