



As we take time this day to worship this God of new life, looking forward to possibilities and opportunities galore in 2026, knowing full well there will be some mishaps and setbacks and curveballs thrown in for good measure, just to make life just as interesting as every other year on this earthly journey. As much as we are called to look forward to see what God can do ahead, and what God is more than capable of doing to inspire and empower us for the next 360-some days, it is also

more than fitting to look back at this...interesting 2025 in the church, in our home communities, and throughout the world, for that matter. As with any other set of 12 months, following the line of thinking from Ecclesiastes, there were certainly times for joy, as well as times for fear, times for awe and times for uncertainty, times for sighs of relief and times for wondering if there was no end in sight at all.

So, I want to take you back to one particular instance this past year when I wonder if all those emotions and then some were packed to the brim in a relatively short period of time. I want to take you back to February 27, which was supposed to be a relatively normal Thursday winter morning in Cleveland Heights, where a bus driver named Dorian Pace was going about his route in picking up young adolescents on his way to Monticello Middle School. Each stop would begin with Dorian's usual greeting the youth with a little bit of kindness, because he believes that no matter what they're walking away from in their home life that day, his smile and appreciation of them might just change their day for the better. But, he had absolutely no idea what he would have to do those early morning hours to ensure they would have more days to experience new life at all.

Amidst the usual noises of the children's laughter and random conversations, arose a resounding boom from underneath the bus. Dorian started to wonder if it was about to explode. He noticed smoke emerging from the right rear tire, and then flames soared soon thereafter. With his constant safety training that many workers often disdain to have to sit through, but also hope beyond hope to never have to use any year of their time on the job, Dorian put it all into action in calmly but quickly getting those precious souls off the bus, before it was engulfed altogether.

Yes, there is time to be scared, there is time to naturally worry about your own safety and life, but for some, there is the constant time about desperately worrying about other people you care about, some of whom aren't your own family or close friends you've known since childhood. For Dorian, he took and still takes time every day to pray before he starts picking up children to take them to school. Because, in that relatively short period of time, those precious souls are entrusted to his care, sometimes for the family without even thinking about it, not ever wondering if something like that is ever going to happen. Those times that could happen at any instance in life, and yet, they're not supposed to happen for any of our years of life. But for those children, it did. For Dorian, it happened. If there was time for more hesitation or for fear to take over entirely, who knows what would have happened to all of them. Dorian said his prayers were answered that day, but it might just be that God empowered Dorian to be the answer to the prayers of those children and their families.

There was something rather interesting that he said amidst all the press conferences and interviews and award ceremonies. He said, "we have to be proactive with prayer, because I believe that's why no one was harmed in this situation." And perhaps that's all the more fitting to hear again 10 months later, at a time of year, when people will lift up prayers to God in hopes that the Divine will do this and that for them for the upcoming 2026 and beyond. All well and good, but I wonder if

during those precious times of prayer, God isn't just sitting back and taking it all in, but that the Holy Spirit is inspiring us to do our part in being the answer to prayers, too, not only in caring for ourselves, but for others, as well, even the precious young souls around us. Granted, there are numerous times when we feel as if we cannot do anything at all in the face of disease and physical hardship not to mention family strife and issues affecting our neighboring communities and throughout the world. But in no year throughout history has the Holy Spirit rested, and it never will in you, as if in this upcoming year, not only will God be more than active, but that God will insist on being active in you, too, through times of fear and worry, to be sure, but also to usher in times of joy and laughter and love and compassion, and the very glimpse of the God brought to life in Jesus Christ for you and all the world. So, for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!