

# Gratitude & Grace



DIOCESE OF TRENTON

Annual Catholic Appeal — Mission Moments | Spring 2026

## Real Impact: A SONG RENEWED

At St. Rose Parish in Belmar, the impact of the **Annual Catholic Appeal** is felt not only across the Diocese of Trenton, but right at home within the parish community. Under the leadership of Monsignor Edward Arnister, parishioners came together to reach—and exceed—their 2025 Appeal goal, making a meaningful difference both diocesan-wide and locally.

Thanks to the parish rebate received from their success, St. Rose Parish was able to address several important needs. As the parish celebrates the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its church building this year, funds were used to renovate the choir loft, primarily to address safety concerns and ensure a secure space for those involved in music ministry. The parish also repaired water damage caused by coastal winds and heavy rains—an ongoing challenge for a shore community—helping to preserve their sacred space for future generations. In addition, a portion of the rebate was used to upgrade the parish's security system, ensuring a safer environment for all who gather in worship and fellowship.

This is a powerful example of how the **Annual Catholic Appeal** strengthens both the broader mission of the Diocese and the individual parish. Gifts to the Appeal support essential ministries, services, and outreach across the Diocese of Trenton, while also returning tangible benefits to parishes that meet their goals.

At St. Rose, generosity has truly come full circle—supporting the wider Church while directly enriching parish life at home.

**Thank you for supporting the Annual Catholic Appeal. Your generosity strengthens parishes in tangible ways when their goal is exceeded—helping to repair and preserve sacred spaces, improve safety, and ensure every community remains a welcoming place to worship and gather.**

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# ANSWERING THE CALL TO LEAD AND SERVE



Sometimes, the impact of the **Annual Catholic Appeal** comes full circle—and Denise Contino is a beautiful example of that.

Today, as Director of Catechesis for the Diocese of Trenton, Denise leads efforts in Catechist Formation, Leadership Formation, and Christian Initiation, helping to form those who teach, lead, and welcome others into the life of the Church. But her own journey in ministry was shaped in part by the very programs she now helps oversee.

Through the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Scholarship—funded by the **Annual Catholic Appeal**—Denise was able to pursue an M.A. in Theology with a Pastoral Ministry Track from Georgian Court University. That opportunity not only deepened

her own faith, but equipped her to serve the Church in a lasting and meaningful way.

Now, Denise helps ensure others are given that same opportunity. Currently, six individuals are continuing their education through this scholarship, preparing to serve in parishes across the Diocese. In addition, 18 participants are engaged in the Parish Catechetical Leadership Program, a two-year formation process that equips them to lead and inspire within their parish communities.

While this highlight only begins to scratch the surface of the

work being done through her department, it is clear that Denise's story is one of impact that continues to grow. Through her leadership—and the ongoing support of the **Annual Catholic Appeal**—new generations of faithful leaders are being formed for the future of our Church.

**Thank you for supporting the Annual Catholic Appeal. Your gifts help form and educate faithful leaders—equipping individuals like Denise and others to guide, teach, and inspire the next generation of our Church.**

## New Life in Christ



Support from the **Annual Catholic Appeal** helps make transformative ministries like OCIA (Order of Christian Initiation of Adults) possible across the Diocese of Trenton—accompanying individuals as they discover faith, community, and purpose.

This year, 1,095 individuals were expected to receive the Sacraments of Initiation, marking a significant increase from recent years. While some growth followed the pandemic, diocesan leaders also saw a deeper movement at work: a renewed desire for God in a world searching for hope, love, and peace. Many of those entering the Church were young adults who had never been fully catechized, as well as baptized individuals seeking to complete their faith journey.

Although severe weather prevented the traditional diocesan Rite of Election gathering, hundreds of catechumens were welcomed in their local parishes, marking an important step toward receiving the Sacraments at the Easter Vigil. Across the Diocese, these individuals publicly expressed their desire to become Catholic, supported by sponsors and parish communities.

Each person's path was unique, often shaped by relationships, life experiences, or a personal encounter with God. For some, it began with the example of a loved one; for others, a moment of prayer or a search for deeper meaning. Through OCIA, they discovered God's mercy, forgiveness, and abiding presence.

Their journeys were a powerful reminder that faith is alive and growing—bringing new life to the Church and hope to the world.

**Because of your support, individuals are discovering and deepening their faith through OCIA—encountering God's presence and being welcomed into the life of the Church with guidance, formation, and community.**

# Young Hearts on Fire

Support from the **Annual Catholic Appeal** helps make impactful experiences like the Diocesan Youth Conference possible—bringing young people together to grow in faith, build community, and live out the Gospel in meaningful ways.

Nearly 900 teenagers and their adult leaders from more than 45 parishes gathered Feb. 7 at St. Joseph Parish and Donovan High School in Toms River for this year's conference, themed "Powerful." Throughout the day, participants engaged in vibrant praise and worship, listened to inspiring speakers, and spent time in quiet prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. The energy continued as they connected with one another, explored ministry displays, and celebrated mass together with Bishop David M. O'Connell, C.M.

A highlight of the day was the conference's hands-on service project, which invited young people to put their faith into action. Participants assembled more than 500 first aid kits for families in Haiti, learning firsthand about the severe poverty many communities face. Through a moving presentation



from mission leaders, the teens gained a deeper understanding of the daily challenges others endure—often living on minimal resources.

Simple items like bandages and wipes took on new meaning as the students recognized the difference their efforts could make. By the end of the day, they not only met their goal but also experienced the power of service rooted in compassion.

The conference served as a powerful reminder that even small acts, done with great love, can make a lasting impact.

**Your generosity brings young people together to grow in faith, serve others, and experience the Church in a meaningful way—forming connections that inspire a lifelong commitment to Christ.**



## A PRAYER OF Gratitude

We are deeply grateful to all who have shared their prayer intentions through the Annual Catholic Appeal. Your trust in allowing us to carry your needs, hopes, and loved ones in prayer is a true gift.

Please know that each intention received is remembered in a special way. Each month throughout the year, we lift up you and your loved ones up in prayer, and each month these intentions are included in our monthly Development mass held in the Chapel at the Chancery. In this sacred space, your prayers are united with the prayers of the Church, entrusted to God's loving care.

As a diocesan community, we are honored to walk alongside you in faith—supporting one another not only through our gifts, but through the power of prayer.

May God bless you abundantly, strengthen you in times of need, and fill your heart with His peace.





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To learn more about the **Annual Catholic Appeal**  
scan QR code or visit [giveaca.org](http://giveaca.org)



## A Living Faith

Thanks to your generous support, ministries across our Diocese are able to bring people together in faith, service, and community. Because of you, events like these are just one of the many ways a gift to the Annual Catholic Appeal makes a lasting impact.

### **Diaconate ordination**

Date: May 16, 2026  
Location: St. Mary of the Assumption  
Cathedral, Trenton

### **Catholic Youth Rally**

Date: May 17, 2026  
Location: Six Flags Great Adventure

### **Parish Catechetical Leadership Convocation**

Date: September 10, 2026  
Location: Co-Cathedral of  
St. Robert Bellarmine, Freehold

As we continue this year's journey, we are reminded that the impact of the Annual Catholic Appeal is both immediate and enduring. In parishes strengthened, leaders formed, young people inspired, and hearts drawn closer to Christ, your generosity becomes something far greater than a gift—it becomes a source of lasting joy.

This joy is found in lives renewed, in faith discovered, and in the quiet moments where God is at work through His people. Because of you, our Church is not only supported for today, but sustained for the future.

Thank you for the role you play in strengthening our faith and sharing Christ's love across our Diocese.



With Gratitude,

*Christine Prete*

Christine Prete  
Director of Development

**LOVE** that  
**Strengthens**

**JOY** that  
**Sustains**



Reminder: This year we have started to go green! This helps reduce mail costs so more resources can support diocesan priorities. If printed mail is best for you, simply let us know.