



REFLECTIONS

WINTER 2025

Recognizing our gifts of time, talent and treasure

A Growing Sanctuary: New Prayer Spaces Bloom at Two Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Austin

By Misty Poe and Kelly Laster, Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of Catholic Schools

Across the Diocese of Austin, two Catholic schools are celebrating something profoundly beautiful, new sacred spaces that invite students to encounter Christ more intimately during the school day. At St. Mary's Catholic School in Temple and Holy Family Catholic School in Austin, the creation of dedicated prayer chapels reflects the heart of Catholic education: forming students not only in knowledge, but in holiness.

At St. Mary's Catholic School, the newly established St. José Sánchez del Río Chapel stands as a testament



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to courage, faith, and the school's commitment to nurturing young disciples. The vision for this chapel grew from a desire to provide students with a quiet place to pray, reflect, and encounter Jesus, inspired by the heroic witness of St. José Sánchez del Río.

"This chapel is a sanctuary for reflection, worship, and community prayer," shared Sean Warfield, principal at St. Mary's Catholic School in Temple,

"and a reminder that our students are called, like St. José, to live their faith with love and conviction." What began as a hope soon became a reality through the leadership of Father Will Rooney, pastor of St. Mary's Catholic Church and School in Temple, and the generosity of supporters who believed that providing students with access to the sacraments and sacred silence is essential to their formation.

Faculty and students use the chapel for daily prayer, class visits, moments of quiet before exams, and communal devotions. In a world filled with noise and distraction, this sacred space invites students to pause, breathe, and remember who they are in Christ.

Meanwhile, a few miles south, another celebration recently filled the halls of Holy Family Catholic School with joy and reverence. At the end of October of this year, the school community gathered for a moment long awaited: the blessing of the Oratory of the Holy Angels.

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From the earliest hours of that morning, excitement overflowed as Holy Family students, faculty, and families came together for a historic first Mass inside the completed Oratory. Father Tom Reitmeyer, pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Parish, presided at the liturgy, marking the beginning of a new chapter in the school's spiritual life.

After Mass, the community participated in Adoration and a Eucharistic Procession led by the entire student body that carried Jesus into the Oratory for the very first time. "Jesus is on the Holy Family campus!" said Holy Family's Principal, Erin Vu, who shared her joy which echoed in the hearts of parents, teachers, and students who witnessed the moment.

The Oratory had been a dream for several years, driven by the school's desire to offer a permanent place for

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daily prayer, class visits, quiet reflection, and Eucharistic devotion. Its completion was made possible through generous families, the leadership of the School Board and Parent Association, and the spiritual guidance of pastors and chaplains who have accompanied the school community through each step.

Together, these two new prayer spaces reflect something deeply unique to Catholic schools: the integration of faith and daily life. Students not only learn about prayer, but they also live it. They pause

during the school day to step into the presence of Christ. They grow in wisdom, compassion, and clarity of purpose because they are rooted in Christ.

For members of these communities, these chapels serve as powerful reminders of what is made possible through collective efforts. Together, they create environments where children encounter God, grow as disciples, and carry Christ's love into the world. In these sacred spaces, the seeds of faith take root, and now, they have room to flourish.

COMMUNITY

Building *Faithful Brotherhood:*

The Central Texas Fellowship of Catholic Men By Susana J. Garza

Across Central Texas, men are responding to a profound call — a call to live boldly in faith, strengthen their families, and serve their parishes with renewed conviction. At the heart of this growing movement stands the Central Texas Fellowship of Catholic Men (CTFCM), founded by Robert Tunmire. Through his vision and commitment, CTFCM has grown into a dynamic evangelization ministry dedicated to forming men as disciples of Christ, guided by the principle "No Man Left Behind."

Since 2006, CTFCM has focused on establishing Dynamic Men's Groups throughout the Diocese of

Austin. Today, more than 46 parishes host active groups, most benefiting from the support and guidance of the CTFCM. These groups provide men with consistent opportunities for spiritual growth, prayer, Scripture reflection, fraternity, and accountability — equipping them to live out their faith intentionally in their homes, workplaces, and communities.

CTFCM's mission is rooted in a simple yet profound belief: strengthen the man, strengthen the family; strengthen the family, strengthen the Church, and transform the culture. This vision fuels every initiative, forming men who strive to lead with virtue, humility, and purpose.

A vital component of CTFCM's outreach is its Deanery Leads — dedicated volunteers who serve as missionary disciples within their geographic boundaries. They help launch and sustain Dynamic Men's Groups, promote CTFCM's annual events, and support local initiatives, ensuring the ministry's reach extends to every corner of the diocese. If you feel called to deepen your faith and make a lasting impact in your parish, consider becoming a Deanery Lead — help build brotherhood, mentor other men, and bring Christ's love to your community.

One of CTFCM's largest efforts is its annual diocesan-wide conference.

The 14th annual Central Texas Catholic Men's Conference will take place Feb. 21, 2026, at Emmaus Parish in Lakeway. Centered on the theme "Heroic Virtues – Justice and Temperance," the gathering will invite men to embrace the cardinal and theological virtues — faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance — as foundations for authentic Christian leadership.

The conference will feature nationally recognized presenters, including Father Leo Patalinghug, founder of Grace Before Meals, and Bart Schuchts, founder of the ministry Church on Fire. Father Jared Cooke will serve as emcee throughout the day. The conference will also offer Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, the sacrament of reconciliation, a variety of vendors, and time for fellowship.

CTFCM's work is made possible through the generosity of donors. Contributions help support parish-based groups, expand diocesan-wide programs, provide spiritual resources, and ensure that no man journeys in faith alone. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, all donations are fully tax-deductible.

Through the leadership of CTFCM Board of Directors and its vital collaboration of clergy, volunteers and families, CTFCM has become a trusted partner in Catholic men's ministry.

To attend or help fund the conference visit www.centexcatholic.com or click on the QR Code.



CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



Congratulations

to our CSA Scholarship Winners!

PREK-1ST GRADE WINNERS (\$1,000 EACH)

Brynlee Gidali - *Bishop Louis Reicher Catholic School, Waco*
 Teagan Jones - *Santa Cruz Catholic School, Buda*
 Evelyn Ognibenei - *St. Mary's Catholic School, Temple*

2ND-5TH WINNERS (\$1,000 EACH)

Clare Rodriguez - *St. Mary's Catholic School, Taylor*
 Alex Tavares - *St. Theresa Catholic School, Austin*
 Emerson Knapek - *St. Helen Catholic School, Georgetown*

6TH-8TH WINNERS (\$1,000 EACH)

Diego Perez - *Bishop Louis Reicher Catholic School, Waco*
 David Diaz - *St. Joseph Catholic School, Bryan*
 Maxine Drew - *St. Louis Catholic School, Austin*

9TH-12TH WINNERS (\$2,000 EACH)

Daniel Esparza - *St. Dominic Savio Catholic High School, Austin*
 Gustavo Rodriguez - *San Juan Diego Catholic High School, Austin*
 Shannon Raasch - *St. Dominic Savio Catholic High School, Austin*

To see the winning submissions,
 visit <https://csdatx.org/csascholarship>

Saints & Scholars

A Celebration of Mission and Access

By Juliana Rueda

The annual Saints & Scholars Gala will once again highlight the transformative power of Catholic education across the Diocese of Austin. On January 17, 2026, educators, families, community leaders, and benefactors will gather to celebrate mission, honor service, and strengthen access to Catholic schools throughout Central Texas.

More than a celebration, Saints & Scholars is one of the most significant events supporting tuition assistance for families across our 19 Catholic schools. Catholic education forms students intellectually, spiritually, and morally, shaping young leaders rooted in faith. Yet providing this education requires sacrifice. This year alone, our schools awarded \$7.6 million in tuition assistance to 1,835 students, representing 35% of the student body, while the total reported financial need exceeded \$11 million. These numbers reflect a familiar reality: families are stretching themselves and making difficult financial decisions to give their children a faith-filled education. Tuition assistance helps bridge the gap, but the need remains substantial.

The Saints & Scholars Gala is one of the efforts that addresses this need. As Superintendent Misty Poe shared, "Every child deserves the opportunity to flourish in a Catholic environment, academically, morally, and spiritually. While new programs may open additional doors, it is the generosity of our community, especially through events like the Saints & Scholars Gala, that truly sustains accessibility for families."

This year's event also coincides with the launch of the Texas Education Freedom Accounts (TEFA) program. TEFA will expand educational options for many, and Catholic schools welcome

this support. However, TEFA will not replace the need for philanthropy. Some families may not qualify, funding will be limited in early years, and the program cannot fully bridge the difference between tuition and the actual cost of educating a child. Charitable giving will remain essential for ensuring equity, sustainability, and access to a Catholic education for all who desire it.

The Gala is also a moment of gratitude. Each year, we honor "unsung heroes" from each of our Catholic schools, individuals whose dedication strengthens their communities and

reflects the heart of our mission. Their service reminds us that Catholic schools thrive because of people who give generously of their time, talent, and witness.

With Bishop Daniel E. Garcia as this year's keynote speaker, we invite you to join us for an evening that celebrates our shared responsibility of forming the next generation of saints and scholars. Your participation, through attending, sponsoring, or giving, directly impacts families and helps keep Catholic education accessible and life-changing across Central Texas.



Congratulations to the 2025 Catholic Education Service Award Recipients:

Bishop Louis Reicher Catholic School
Debbie Svrcek

Cathedral School of Saint Mary
Leslie Suffoletta

Holy Family Catholic School
Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist

Holy Trinity Catholic High School
Suzi Rockwood

Sacred Heart Catholic School
Karen Janda

San Juan Diego Catholic High School
Nola Flores

Santa Cruz Catholic School
Rene Rodriguez

St. Austin Catholic School
Pat Garcia and Sarah Sarrat

St. Dominic Savio Catholic High School
Doug Kuentler

St. Helen Catholic School
Donna Martin

St. Ignatius Martyr Catholic School
Julie Vondrak

St. Joseph Catholic Academy
Glenn and Sheila Trinidad

St. Joseph Catholic School
Thad and Marie Hoffpauir

St. Louis Catholic School
Heidi Pickerill

St. Mary's Catholic School, Taylor
Jamie Lynn Fox

St. Mary's Catholic School, Temple
Ryan Colburn

St. Mary's Catholic School, West
Mary Kolar

St. Michael's Catholic Preparatory School
Linda Piefer

St. Theresa Catholic School, Austin
Debbie Spurlin



New Tax Law What's Staying, What's Changing, and What it Means for You

As you think about your plans for year-end giving and beyond, we want to pass along some news that may be useful. According to a recent article published by the Stelter Company, new tax legislation has preserved many current provisions and added others that could affect charitable giving in the years ahead. Here are seven important elements of the new law, which takes effect Jan. 1, 2026:

What's staying

- **Tax brackets:** The new law permanently extends the current tax rates of 10%, 12%, 22%, 24%, 32%, 35% and 37%.
- **Standard deduction:** Most taxpayers will continue to use the elevated standard deduction—\$15,750 for individuals and \$31,500 for married couples in 2025. It will be indexed for inflation thereafter.
- **Deduction limits for cash gifts:** You can continue to deduct cash gifts to public charities up to 60% of your adjusted gross income (AGI) if you itemize.
- **Estate tax exemption:** The federal estate and gift tax exemption will remain high and increase to \$15 million per individual (indexed annually).

What's new in 2026

- **Tax break for non-itemizers:** You can deduct up to \$1,000 (individuals) or \$2,000 (married couples) for charitable gifts, even if you don't itemize.

- **If you do itemize, there's a new floor on your charitable deduction:** The new law adds a minimum charitable contribution rate if you itemize your deductions. The law requires taxpayers to give at least 0.5% of their AGI to receive a tax benefit for their charitable giving.
- **If you are in the top tax bracket, there's a new charitable contribution limitation:** Under current law, top earners get a 37-cent tax benefit for every \$1 deducted. Starting in 2026, that benefit will be capped at 35 cents per dollar.

We encourage you to consult with your tax advisor to understand how these changes may affect your giving in 2025 and beyond.

We are so grateful for your generosity, which touches—and impacts—so many lives. To learn more about how your gifts can make a lasting impact to the Diocese of Austin, your parish, a Catholic school, or your favorite ministry, contact Dan Wierzbowski at (512) 949-2496 or dan-wierzbowski@austindiocese.org. We are here to help!

Please note: This content is for informational purposes only and does not constitute tax, financial, or legal advice. Consult with your professional advisor before making decisions.



Diocese of Austin

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Women's Giving Circle

Catholic women coming together to give with purpose!

OUR PURPOSE

To create a community of philanthropically minded Catholic women dedicated to raising awareness and funds for Catholic aligned community organizations within the Diocese of Austin. We leverage pooled membership fees to have a greater impact on organizations in need. Our mission is to educate women in philanthropic giving and to reach out to younger women to invite them to be future leaders of the Church in giving back.

OUR MISSION

The Women's Giving Circle supports nonprofit organizations that benefit those in need in our local community.

WAYS TO JOIN

Online at www.austindiocese.org/womens-giving-circle
(click Join Now button)

Mail check to: **Diocese of Austin-Women's Giving Circle**
6225 E Highway 290, Austin, TX 78723-1025

For more information contact

Lisa Rosenberger @ (512) 949-2450 | lisa-rosenberger@austindiocese.org
or **Margaret Kappel** @ (512) 949-2444 | margaret-kappel@austindiocese.org



St. Elizabeth Ann Seton