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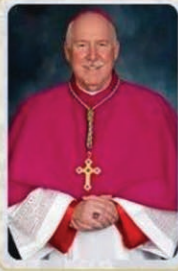
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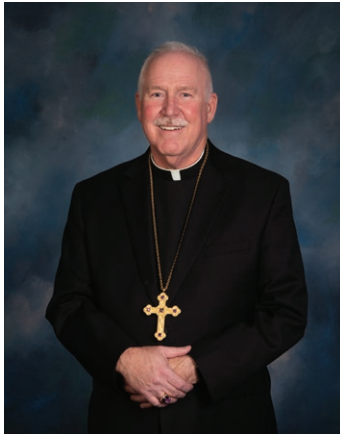
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Serving in Faith and Charity

BISHOP MARK ECKMAN

This April, I had the opportunity to lead a pilgrimage to Ireland with a group from the Diocese of Pittsburgh. One of the places we visited was the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock in County Mayo. As we arrived, the heavens welcomed us with hail. While that may not sound ideal, it seemed fitting. The apparition at Knock took place on a rainy August evening in 1879.

Many Catholics are familiar with Lourdes and Fatima, but fewer know the story of Knock. On August 21, 1879, 15 people outside the parish church witnessed an apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph and St. John the Evangelist. Nearby, an altar with a lamb and a cross was surrounded by angels. The witnesses, who ranged in age from young children to older adults, remained there in the rain for nearly two hours, praying and gazing on the miraculous sight.

The apparition at Knock is unique because no words were spoken. Yet the image conveyed a clear message. Mary, St. Joseph and St. John were all present, but at the center of the vision was the Lamb upon the altar. That is a powerful image of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Like every authentic Marian apparition, Knock points us to Christ. Mary does not draw attention to herself. She directs our attention to her Son. The image of the Lamb upon the altar reminds us of Christ's sacrifice and of his continuing presence

among us in the Eucharist. In a simple but profound way, Knock calls us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

As I reflected on Knock, I was struck both by what happened there and to whom it happened.

The witnesses were ordinary people, not celebrities. They were not theologians or Church leaders. They were neighbors, family members, workers and children going about their daily lives. Yet God chose to reveal something extraordinary to them.

That should give all of us hope.

Sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking that holiness is for someone else. We admire the saints, but fail to see how God is working in our own lives. The apparition at Knock shows that God works through ordinary people who are simply trying to be faithful.

Such faithfulness is manifest throughout our diocese. I see it in parents raising children in the faith. I see it in grandparents who pray daily for their families. I see it in parish volunteers, catechists, teachers, deacons, priests and religious. I see it in people who quietly serve others without recognition.

Most of us will never witness an apparition. But all of us are called to recognize God's presence and respond to his grace.

The Church in Ireland celebrates the Feast of Our Lady of Knock on August 17. As we honor the Blessed Mother under this title, let us ask for grace to remain faithful in the ordinary moments of life. May Mary always lead us closer to her Son, and may we never lose sight of Christ, who continues to be present among us and for us.

Our Lady of Knock, pray for us. †



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FROM THE EDITOR



Dear Reader,
***Have you ever looked back
and realized that faith led you
somewhere you never expected to go?***

Sometimes the path is clear. Other times, we take one step, then another, trusting that God sees farther ahead than we do. Along the way, He works through our gifts, our questions, our relationships and all the changes we experience.

That idea runs throughout this August/September issue of *Pittsburgh Catholic*. Our theme, “Where Faith Leads,” invites us to notice the many ways God guides His people and what can happen when we are willing to follow.

You see five wonderful examples on our cover. On June 27, Bishop Mark ordained five new priests for the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Their stories are as different as the men themselves. One was building a successful career as a civil engineer. Another first began thinking about priesthood as a youth. Each encountered God’s call and followed a path shaped by prayer, people and experiences that helped him listen more closely. They show us that God is patient, persistent and very good at working through the details of our lives.

Faith can also lead us toward one another.

That is part of the vision for FestPGH, coming to F.N.B. Stadium on September 19. Thousands of people will gather for a day of faith, fellowship, service and music, with Grammy Award-winning band Switchfoot headlining the evening concert. In advance of FestPGH, lead singer Jon Foreman talked about the purpose and the hope that has echoed through the band’s songs for nearly three decades.

His reflections offer a preview of what promises to be a joyful day for our diocesan family. Visit FestPGH.org to register and claim your free ticket. We hope you’ll join us.

As summer winds down, our teachers, adminis-

trators and staff are prayerfully preparing to lead thousands of young people back to our Catholic schools. In this issue, we celebrate a new school year, and the many opportunities students have to discover their interests, develop confidence and recognize their God-given talents. From LitFest and Math 24 to the Invention Convention, Spelling Bee and Academic Quiz Bowl, students are learning, creating, collaborating and finding places where their gifts can grow.

This is also a time to celebrate a Catholic communicator whose influence continues decades after his microphone was turned off. As the Church anticipates the beatification of Venerable Fulton J. Sheen, we explore Pittsburgh’s connection to his remarkable story and the lesson of his ministry: sharing the Gospel means meeting people where they are and helping them encounter Jesus.

Bishop Mark takes us to another place where faith has led generations of pilgrims: the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock in Ireland. Reflecting on the silent apparition witnessed by ordinary people in 1879, he reminds us that holiness is not reserved for someone else. God works through faithful people in ordinary moments.

We don’t know where faith will lead. The path may take us into a new vocation, a new school year, a stadium where faith is celebrated, a conversation that changes our perspective, or a simple opportunity to use our gifts for someone else.

What matters is that we keep our eyes fixed on Christ and remain open to the next faithful step.

We hope the stories in this issue encourage you to look at your own path with fresh eyes. You may be surprised to see how far God has already led you, and eager to discover where He may be leading you next. †

With gratitude,
Jennifer Antkowiak
Editor-in-Chief
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ALLEGHENY COUNTY

■ St. Joseph the Worker Parish celebrated first Holy Communion for seven children, the first significant milestone for a new generation of parishioners since the closing of seven churches in February. St. Maurice in Forest Hills now is the only church in the parish.

"We pray that they continue to grow in faith, love and be filled with joy and blessings," said Patricia Plakosh, who volunteers as a first Communion and Vacation Bible School teacher.



▲ Father Michael Stumpf, Deacon Herb Riley, Father Nick Clinton, Deacon Tom Berna stand behind the first Communion class. At far left is Patricia Plakosh, the teacher.

BEAVER COUNTY

■ Our Lady of the Valley Parish has a 20x50-foot in-ground garden with six 4x8-foot raised beds that produce 600 to 800 pounds of fresh vegetables each year. These include green and yellow beans, beets, broccoli, cabbage, cucumbers, garlic, onions, bell peppers, tomatoes, and squash. Four volunteers work in the garden on their schedules but gather for planting and weekly harvesting. Most of the produce goes to the 12 Loaves Soup Kitchen, New Brighton; The Women's Shelter, Beaver; and the St. Vincent de Paul food pantry, Beaver. "Anyone is welcome to join the ministry—no gardening experience required," said group leader Joe Matsko.



▲ Volunteers Joe Matsko, Doris Grivna and Mike Durham who along with Linda Evans (not pictured), make the garden grow.

BUTLER COUNTY

■ For five years, the parishes of St. Francis and St. Clare have pursued unity by moving to one clergy team, one pastoral council and pastoral plan, one staff and one bulletin. As Bishop Eckman's May 2026 letter confirming the merger noted, "the only missing piece is streamlining daily operations," which was made possible on July 1, 2026, by the creation of Ss. Francis and Clare Parish. For the 250th anniversary of the United States, the new parish contributed about 325 hours of eucharistic adoration and 4,500 works of mercy.



▲ Hours of adoration and works of mercy were collected and offered as spiritual bouquets for the renewal and blessing of America.

GREENE COUNTY

■ Edge, a new youth ministry program at St. Matthias Parish, encourages teens to discover and follow their call from God.

To launch a core group the confirmation class received personal letters from Father Tom Lewandowski, inviting them to "Live on the Edge with Jesus."

"Edge is about empowering youth to discover more fully their call to discipleship, formation as persons created in the image and likeness of God and help them to discover their God-given gifts and talents through service," said youth evangelization director Mary Sampey.



▲ 2026 confirmation class at St. Matthias, invited to be the foundation for the new Edge youth ministry program.

LAWRENCE COUNTY

■ Holy Spirit Parish's Men of Faith Ministry focuses on promoting spiritual growth and service opportunities, but recently took more than 100 parishioners to PNC Park's Faith Night.

At parish social gatherings God brings together "people of different ages, backgrounds, journeys and sufferings that are right in the midst of personal spiritual growth. God has an amazing way of using any experience - even fun events - to touch lives at the perfect time," said Matt Puntureri, the group's social committee chairperson.



▲ Father Aaron Kriss, former senior parochial vicar of Holy Spirit Parish, poses with some of the youngest attendees of PNC Park's Faith Night.

WASHINGTON COUNTY

■ Eat'n Pray in the Park returned to two Washington County parishes this summer. Each monthly gathering opened with a scriptural Rosary, followed by a spiritual talk. "They've all been so spectacular thus far I can't imagine how the staff can top the previous ones, but I can't wait to see," said one returning parishioner.

The evenings conclude with a cookout hosted by a parish ministry team. "I guess it would be more accurate to say pray and eat," said ministerial events coordinator Shannon Soucy, "just like we always say grace before meals at home."



▲ Parishioner Jerry Florian smiled and waved as Eat'n Pray participants enjoyed food and fellowship.



The People God Sends

BY JENNIFER ANTKOWIAK

If someone asked you who helped you find God, whose name would come to mind?

Perhaps it was a parent who taught you to pray; a grandparent whose faith shaped your own or a teacher, priest, religious sister, spouse, friend, coach, or neighbor. Maybe it was someone who listened when you needed encouragement or offered wisdom at just the right moment.

Most of us can identify people who helped us recognize God's presence in our lives. What strikes me is that many of them may never fully know the impact they had.

We often think of faith as something deeply personal, and in many ways it is. Each of us is called into a personal relationship with God. Yet God doesn't ask us to walk that journey alone. Throughout Scripture, we see God working through people. He sends prophets, disciples, mentors, friends,

and companions. He places people in our lives to encourage us, challenge us, and help us grow closer to Him.

When I look back on my own faith journey, I can see those people clearly. Some offered guidance through their words. Others taught by example. Some demonstrated extraordinary faith during difficult times. Others showed me what everyday faithfulness looks like through simple acts of kindness, generosity, and service.

These experiences have taught me something important: one of the most common ways we encounter God's presence is through other people.

In a world that often feels busy and distracted, it can be easy to overlook this truth. We rush from one responsibility to the next. We focus on our schedules, tasks, and obligations. We may find ourselves looking for God in dramatic moments while missing the many ways He is already present in our daily lives.

Sometimes God's presence appears in a conversation that gives us clarity.

Sometimes it comes through a friend who reaches out unexpectedly. Sometimes it is found in the person who remembers our name, offers a prayer, or simply shows up when we need support.

As summer gives way to fall, many of our parish communities begin a new season of activity. Catechists prepare lessons. Choirs return to rehearsal. Volunteers step forward to serve. Parish groups gather once again. Much of this work happens without recognition. Yet these ordinary acts of faith often become the very moments through which others encounter Christ.

Maybe that is worth remembering as we begin a new season. The people who have helped us find God did not necessarily set out to change our lives. They simply chose to live their faith with sincerity and consistency. Through their example, God worked.

Take a moment this month to thank God for someone who has helped you grow in faith. Then consider how God may be calling you to do the same for someone else. A kind word, a listening ear, an invitation, a prayer, or an act of service may seem small, but God often uses small things in powerful ways.

We may never know the full impact of our faithfulness. We may never see all the ways God is working through us. Yet each day offers opportunities to reflect His love and make His presence known. †

A Prayer

Lord, thank You for the people who have helped me grow in faith and recognize Your presence in my life. Help me to be a source of encouragement, kindness, and hope for others. Use me to share Your love in the ordinary moments of each day.

AMEN.



JENNIFER ANTKOWIAK
is the Chief Communications Officer
and Diocesan Spokesperson.

FIRE UP YOUR FAITH

“No one in the world can change Truth. What we can do and should do is to **SEEK TRUTH and to **SERVE IT** when we have found it.”**

– ST. MAXIMILLIAN KOLBE (1894-1941)

► A priest in Poland during World War II, he was sent to Auschwitz for sheltering 2,000 Jews along with many additional refugees in his Franciscan monastery. In the concentration camp, he volunteered to replace a family man who had been selected for death by starvation in reprisal for an escape. Father Kolbe sang and prayed aloud for two weeks in the punishment bunker, where he was finally executed by lethal injection on August 14.

The Southwest Pennsylvania Creation Care Teams will hold a Season of Creation Prayer Service

with the with a focus on concern for the world's water, Saturday September 12, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. in the garden of the St. Paul of the Cross Retreat Center, South Side Slopes. The Creation Care Teams work in local parishes to carry out the mission of *Laudato si'*.

For six decades among the poorest of the poor in Chimbote, Peru, the Diocese of Pittsburgh has supported a medical mission founded by two of our diocesan priests. What began as a simple maternity clinic is now a state-of-the-art healthcare and social service center. A major fundraising event, the annual Chimbote Dinner, will be held October 15, 2026, in the Sheraton Pittsburgh Hotel at Station Square, with inspirational testimonies about the life-saving work that Pittsburghers have made possible. For details, including the registration deadline and costs, visit <https://chimbotefoundation.org/events/annual-peru-dinner>.



You can help local children attend Catholic schools in the Diocese of Pittsburgh by contributing to the collection for the Bishop's Education Fund on the weekend of September 12-13, 2026. Your gifts provide tuition for families who would not otherwise be able to afford a Catholic education for their children. Supporting children in Catholic schools is one of the best ways to build a new generation of Catholic leaders for the Church and our world.

St. Andrew the Apostle Parish in Washington County is organizing a bus trip to the Malvern Retreat Center near Philadelphia, for the Holy Spirit 2026 Fire in the Spirit Rally and Retreat September 18-20. The retreat is sponsored by Pentecost Today USA (formerly the National Service Committee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the U.S.). The featured speakers are Father Boniface Hicks and Neal Lozano. General information about the retreat is at <https://www.pentecosttodayusa.org/hs26/>. For details about the bus trip, food and lodging contact 724-379-4777 or send an email with the subject line "Holy Spirit 2026" to dkooser@saintandrewmidmon.org.





Hope Is Larger Than Our Fears

Ahead of FestPGH, Switchfoot's Jon Foreman reflects on music, purpose and finding light in darkness

BY JENNIFER ANTKOWIAK

The band Switchfoot will headline FestPGH, when thousands of people are expected to gather at F.N.B. Stadium on September 19 for a day of faith, fellowship, service and music.

Switchfoot lead singer Jon Foreman looks forward to contributing to that experience of community.

"I love seeing and hearing

thousands of people coming together to sing one song," Jon said. "Different voices, different stories, different perspectives converging to lift

up one melody."

The Grammy Award-winning rock band's music has connected with audiences around the world for nearly three decades.

Formed in San Diego in 1996, Switchfoot is known for songs including "Meant to Live," "Dare You to Move," "Stars" and "This Is Your Life." Through years of touring, recording and performing, the band has built a following that spans generations and has earned recognition in both mainstream and Christian music circles.

Switchfoot strives to bring people together.

"In a world where we are increasingly distanced by digital media and tribal rhetoric, it's all too easy to forget the shared humanity

that we all have in common," he said. "Music is a beautiful reminder of that which we hold in common."

Themes of hope, purpose and longing permeate Switchfoot's music. When asked why hope continues to resonate with listeners, Jon reflected on his songwriting process.

"When I write a song, I usually start with the darkness and aim for the light," he said. "I know what it's like to feel depressed in the moment. To feel deep shame and regret about the past and fear for the future."

Music helps people move through those experiences, he said.

"Music is the scaffolding for the soul, helping me to reach places that words alone can't

quite get to.”

He draws on scriptural concepts, with allusions to faith, hope and love running through his lyrics.

“I think hope, faith, and love resonate deeply with people because these are the places where light needs to penetrate most,” he said.

Jon described faith as “a remembering of all the past miracles that have brought us to the present moment,” love as “the ability to participate in this present moment with that holy attribute that God uses to define himself,” and hope as “a reminder of a future that is larger than our fears.”

**“MUSIC IS THE
SCAFFOLDING FOR
THE SOUL, HELPING
ME TO REACH PLACES
THAT WORDS ALONE
CAN’T QUITE GET TO.”**

Asked what it means to say that people are made for something more, he said that there is always something beyond whatever we have done.



“This yearning and longing still resonates within me,” he said. “I’ve learned a lot on my journey, and still, I feel like a beginner, a novice, even a complete failure from time to time.”

Longing is part of human experience, he said.

“Yes, we live in the present, tense, bounded by the constraints of physicality and time,” he said. “But

eternity has been etched into the hearts of humankind, longing for the horizon. Longing for absolution. Longing for the One who transcends time and space.”

After nearly 30 years of touring and performing, he has found that some of his most meaningful moments come from hearing about the influence of songs on listeners.

“I love hearing stories of how

our songs have impacted people around the world,” he said.

He recalled hearing from people who were inspired by a song to follow a difficult or uncomfortable path to serve others or to pursue creative callings of their own.

“It’s incredible to see the connection and the spark that one song can have on the world,” he said.

That’s true to his own experience.

“Certainly, I was that kid. Music moved me in ways that nothing else could,” he said. “So to be that band for somebody else is such an incredible honor.”

The stories he hears from fans leave an impression in return.

“The stories we get to hear on a nightly basis are so inspiring,” he said. “These incredible humans are living stories so much bigger than these songs could ever be.”

As FestPGH approaches, Jon hopes those who attend will leave encouraged.

“Life is short,” he said. “Live it well.” †



SWITCHFOOT



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GOOD SHEPHERDS

When a Shepherd Walks Beside You

BY JENNIFER ANTKOWIAK

A priest's impact is rarely measured by a single moment, but by years of faithful presence through life's joys and sorrows.

That is what Michael and Kiersten Marks have experienced with Father David Poecking.

Michael was a youth when Father Dave arrived at St. Malachy in Kennedy (now part of Archangel Gabriel Parish).

"I didn't think much about him then, and I certainly didn't think we would have the relationship we eventually developed," Michael said.

Years later, Michael and his then-fiancée reconnected with Father Dave while preparing for marriage. Because of delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, their wedding was postponed until 2021, when Father Dave celebrated the couple's marriage.

Michael especially remembered Father Dave's encouragement during marriage preparation: husband and wife should serve one another as they would serve Christ.

Michael had no idea how deeply those words would shape the years ahead.

As a young married couple, they experienced the heartbreak of miscarriage. Later, they lost their daughter, Aurora, late in pregnancy.

In the midst of grief and unanswered questions, they called on



▲ Left to Right Stephanie DeLuca (Godmother), Father Poecking, Kiersten and Theodore Marks, Michael Marks

Father Dave.

He prayed with them, offered comfort and guided them through some of the most difficult days of their lives.

"My memory of those days is very much of a blur," Michael said, "but I recall during Aurora's funeral how Father Dave referenced his words from our marriage ceremony."

Even after leaving their parish, Father Dave remained a trusted source of encouragement and spiritual support, walking alongside the family through grief, uncertainty and hope.

That hope was realized with the birth of their son, Theodore, in 2025. Father Dave baptized him.

"Our relationship with Father Dave grew from just the priest who married us to the shepherd who answered our call, met our needs and helped lead us out of the darkness," Michael said.

Do you have a Good Shepherd story to share?

► We invite you to send stories of appreciation highlighting the good work of our clergy to communications@diopitt.org as we continue to celebrate the faithful shepherds serving throughout the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

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QUESTION:

I am a Catholic, living a single life. I understand and agree with the need to speak about the vocation of married life, but I wonder if the Catholic Church also affirms the vocation of the single life in all its forms?

ANSWER:

Clearly, marriage is a critical focus of our faith, beginning in the Old Testament. There, the directive for each generation was to “go forth to secure the land and bring forth children.” This expectation was presumed at the time of Jesus and throughout the New Testament. However, Scripture indicates many ways in which disciples of Jesus could live out their lives.

For example, in the post-Apostolic church, we can discern two major trends in church leadership: married leaders who served one local community; and the single (celibate) itinerant preachers

of the Word who traveled widely. During extensive discussions at the Second Vatican Council, great care was taken to teach on the married vocation (including how it is lived out among married priests in the Eastern Churches) as well as on the celibate priesthood in the Western Church. A proclamation on the consecrated life of religious men and women became one of the 16 final documents of the Council. The Council also cited many foundational elements of the single life lived in the world.

The Church greatly values single men and women, a value rooted, first, in a vision of the fundamental worth and dignity of every human being who comes into the world as the image and likeness of God. It is amplified in the baptismal call to holiness. In the New Testament, when St. Paul teaches that every member of the Body of Christ has a part to play, and that we are all living stones in the building up of the Church, single people have equal standing with everyone else.

The single life was always important in the Church. In the early Church, some Christians remained single and lived apart from the community as hermits. Many Christian missionaries were unmarried so they would be free to preach the Gospel

in distant places. Others remained single to care for elderly parents. All were seen as living productive, single lives in the Church and society.

In contemporary life (and church law) the “consecrated virgin in the world” holds a unique and honored place. The consecrated virgin is an ancient lifestyle that still lives and enriches the Church today.

Under Canon 604 of the Code of Canon Law, consecrated virgins are “... chaste, never-married women who are seen as betrothed to Christ and dedicated to the Church.” They are not members of the traditional religious orders but rather live in the world, supporting themselves financially while living under the direction of their local diocesan bishop. They enter into this lifestyle by means of a liturgical rite. They profess perpetual virginity but do not take the traditional religious vows of poverty and obedience. They are, however, called to a life of prayer and service to the Church. Small numbers of consecrated virgins may live together for mutual support in their vocations. The vocation of a consecrated virgin is a gift to the entire Church.

Christian discipleship takes many forms today, as it has over the centuries. Whether a Catholic makes an intentional decision to follow a call to singleness through the priesthood, religious life or consecrated virginity; or whether they are single by apparent circumstance, they have much to offer the Church and the world. As in the early Church, single persons often have more freedom to assist the Church, or their neighbors near and far. Even if they hope not to remain single, they have received a gift that should be treasured, as they ask God what He wants of them. †



FATHER CHARLES BOBER

is the former pastor of Saint Mark the Evangelist Parish. He has written his column for the *Pittsburgh Catholic* newspaper and online since 1983.

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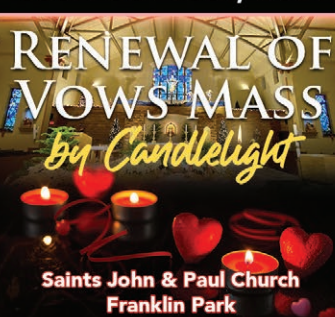
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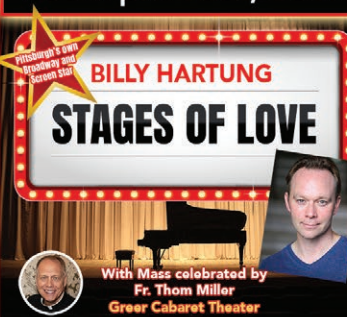
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▲ Father Brian Myler

FINDING THEIR VOCATIONS

How our newest priests heard and responded to God's call

BY ANN RODGERS

On June 27, Bishop Mark Eckman ordained five new priests in Saint Paul Cathedral. They bring a wide range of skills and experiences to the diocese. Here are their stories:

Father Brian Myler

Assignment: Parochial vicar, St. Paul Cathedral Parish, Pittsburgh

Father Brian, 41, was happily following his dream of working as a civil engineer when he

was surprised by a call to the priesthood.

The youngest of five children of Jack and Bonnie Myler, he grew up in what is now Christ the Divine Shepherd Parish, graduating from Penn

Hills High School in 2004, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering from Penn State University in 2008 and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Pittsburgh in 2013. He was enjoying a successful career as a civil engineer for PennDOT when God intervened.

His parents were always very active in their parish, and he stayed involved with Church through college. "But my understanding of the Mass was very basic. I never really had a love for the Eucharist," he said.

What he did have was his own plan for his life - to establish his career, earn a graduate degree in the evenings, build a house and find a wife. When it was time to pursue the final step of his plan, his parish

was undergoing a change in demographics and had few young people, so he joined what is now Holy Family Parish.

He mistakenly thought he would find single, young adults when he signed up for ChristLife, a ministry series designed to draw people into a relationship with Christ.

"I didn't end up falling in love with a girl there, but I did fall in love with Jesus," he said.

"I had met all these people who knew so much about the faith, and they were on fire. I didn't know how to articulate it, but whatever they had, I wanted it."

He became more active in his parish, discovering eucharistic adoration and contemplative prayer. That Holy Thursday, as he prayed after Mass, he heard God speak to him for the first time.

"I never knew that God wanted to speak to us or that it was even possible," he said. "I began going to confession more, trying to take ownership of my sins, and regularly attending adoration."

His pastor, Father Tom Galvin - who died last year - asked if he had ever thought about becoming a priest.

"I quickly turned him down," Father Myler said.

He conceded that he might become a permanent deacon someday, after he had a family.

"He didn't push. He simply smiled and said 'Okay' and never mentioned it again."

That Lent he challenged himself to attend daily Mass every day. Many of the other faithful were older women, who didn't hesitate to ask him if he was a seminarian or thinking about becoming a priest – or even tell him he should be a priest.

"I said no, no, no. But as time went on, the question started to get stuck in my head. It wasn't as easy to dismiss as it used to be."

He eventually returned to the confessional and told his pastor that he thought he might possibly be thinking about priesthood.

Father Tom was transferred soon after. His new pastor, Father Kevin Poecking, connected him with a spiritual director to help him discern. "He was very holy and wise," he said of the spiritual director. Yet over the next two years he built up many reasons to not become a priest, such as having to abandon his successful career, his house and his dreams of a family.

On a silent retreat, he hoped that God would show him whether or not he should enter seminary.

"I didn't receive a clear answer as I had hoped but God revealed to me that I would be happy in both vocations," he said. "What got me to finally apply to the seminary was that I could sort of see myself in the future as a father with a big family, but a part of me would look back and regret not giving seminary a chance."

He entered St. Paul Seminary hesitantly "just to give it a chance."

His first semester was extremely difficult. He had given up much of his freedom,

he was away from his close-knit family and was studying topics utterly alien to engineering. Over Christmas, he went to see his spiritual director.

After sharing a meal, "He asked me, 'Are you happy? Are you at peace?'"

He had been too busy and overwhelmed to ask himself such questions.

"I said, 'I think I am?' and it was almost like a question," Father Myler said.

His spiritual director told him that when he had walked in that day, he appeared "the most happy and at peace I've ever seen you."

From then on, "Every semester, every year, I just grew more and more at peace and joyful," he said.

At the end of his first year, he was reasonably confident that he was called to the priesthood.

"Looking back, I can see how much God has been working in my life. I can clearly see that before I was in the seminary I was very unfulfilled in life. I think it was because I wasn't fully being myself, or who God made me to be."

Today, "I can definitely say that I'm living out the life that God has planned for me. And with that comes great joy and great peace. I'm really excited to see where God leads me next in my ministry as a priest."



▲ Father Erik Pintar

Father Erik Pintar

Assignment: Parochial vicar, Corpus Christi Parish, Allegheny and Washington counties

Father Erik, 33, experienced a call to the priesthood before he became Catholic.

The youngest of three children of Frank and Angela Pintar, he grew up in Wauwatosa, Wis., where his parents were active in

an evangelical Protestant congregation. That background, he said, gave him a deep grounding in Scripture, prayer and building Christian community.

Shortly after he enrolled at Carnegie Mellon University, where he double-majored in electrical and computer engineering and human-computer interaction, his sister became Catholic. He asked her about it and read books she recommended.

"I started getting scared because they made a lot of sense."

Six months after graduation, while launching a career at Google, he decided to follow her into the Catholic Church. As he began those conversations, a priest at the Pittsburgh Oratory invited him to the ordination of a new Oratorian priest, Father Peter Gruber.

"I didn't really know what a priest was," Father Erik said, because in evangelicalism the pastor was primarily a preacher.

At that ordination it struck





▲ Father Matthew Selzer

him that a priest was a spiritual father. He had always longed to be the father of a large family. Now he realized that “An hour from now there will be thousands of people calling him ‘Father.’”

Suddenly “other aspects of my life started to make sense,” he said.

The activities that most fulfilled him didn’t involve computer code, but guiding other young people as a Christian camp counselor and university resident assistant did.

When he told the priest at the Oratory he was not yet a Catholic, “He said, ‘Well you’re going to have to wait two years after becoming Catholic’ before pursuing seminary” – a requirement of canon law.

During those two years, his faith grew. He realized his call was to diocesan priesthood: “Being with people in the front lines, walking with them all through life.”

In seminary he did pastoral assignments at Divine Grace Parish, where he helped to launch a regional young adult ministry called Faith on Fire and organized eucharistic visits

to the homebound.

Father Pintar was born with severe hearing loss and always had a sign language interpreter in grade school and high school. Receiving a cochlear implant when he was 17 allowed him to hear.

As a deacon he gave homilies in American Sign Language to Pittsburgh’s Deaf Catholic Community and he expects to continue to work with them.

“I love the Deaf community so much, and they’ve been so supportive,” he said.

Throughout his seminary years he witnessed God at work, even in situations that seemed hopeless.

It showed him that “If your ministry isn’t supernatural, it’s nothing,” he said. “You have to go beyond your natural powers. It’s a greater adventure than I ever expected.”

Father Matthew Selzer

Assignment: Parochial vicar, Ss. Francis and Clare Parish, Butler County

Father Matthew, 29, the oldest of two children of Stephen and Linda Selzer, grew up attending Mass faithfully at

what is now Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in the North Hills. His first tangible spark of real faith came through two young priests assigned there when he was in his teens, Father Mike Zavage and Father Chris Mannerino.

“I could see that they were living for something different,” he said.

Their visible desire to serve the people of God and be holy men “was very attractive to me and the first step in trying to take my faith seriously.”

However, “when I got into high school I decided to do my own thing, take my life into my own hands and pursue a career in education.”

After graduating from North Hills High School in 2015, he enrolled in the University of Pittsburgh intending to become a teacher. About two years in, he began feeling “very lost and kind of empty inside, like something deeper was missing,” he said. “It became increasingly clear that God was trying to get my attention.”

He began an urgent spiritual search, asking deeper questions of God, attending daily Mass and asking for

Mary’s help, especially through the Rosary.

“I now see that, before anything else, He was inviting me to simple friendship, from which discernment of a vocation or a path in life can take place,” he said.

He tracked down the two priests who had inspired him years earlier. Their conversations, Scripture and prayer about what God wanted of him led to discernment of a call to the priesthood.

“The message that kept coming back to me was the call to serve others, to lay down my life in a radical way and share with others the gift that had been given to me,” he said.

He contacted the diocesan vocations director, then Father Mike Ackerman. “I told him, ‘I’m not really sure, but I want to discern going into the seminary. I don’t think I can move forward with my life without at least stepping into the seminary and seeing where God leads me.’”

Following a discernment retreat, he felt confident that he would enter seminary after graduation. He stayed in touch with priest mentors, continued to pray and began work on his seminary application in the fall of his senior year.

“My first year was a whirlwind. I was tempted to compare myself to other men in the chapel and doubt what

I had been discerning for two years. But God simply asked me to trust, and trust radically," he said.

Over seven years, "Days turned into weeks, turned into months, turned into years of formation."

In that time, he has learned that Jesus "is someone who listens, someone who heals, someone who guides, and someone who teaches," Father Matthew said. He wants to help others come to understand and experience that also.

"God was never going to reveal the full call at once. Instead, He asks for little steps along the way. The seminary journey is full of little steps," he said. "These little steps, taken with love, friendship, and trust, build up to ordination, to the priesthood. I never would have been ready to receive the gift of the priesthood on day one."

He saw that his earlier preparation for teaching wasn't a detour.

"I'm able to use the same gifts that he gave me, to use everything about me that He made me to be – to use them as

a priest."

He often returns to the words of Saint Irenaeus of Lyons: "The glory of God is man fully alive."

"In one sense, I see that 'man fully alive' is man making full, beautiful use of the gifts God has given him," he said. "But these words also refer to Jesus Christ. So to make full use of our gifts and to look more and more like Christ Himself is the greatest vocation and the greatest sign of our friendship with him, no matter what path we take in life."

Father Loc Tran

Assignment: Parochial vicar, St. Isidore the Farmer Parish, Allegheny and Washington counties

Growing up in a rural village in Vietnam, Father Loc Tran, 36, attended daily Mass at 4:30 a.m. with his parents and five siblings before the adults went to work in the searing heat. When he was 10 his father died and his mother fell seriously ill. Suddenly impoverished, the family was often without food.

His call to the priesthood

was rooted in that time.

"I would wake up around midnight and see my mom looking at a picture of my father with a rosary in her hand," he said. "That left a mark in my mind, that this small woman stood up for everything with a rosary in her hand, never complaining but with strong faith and belief in God, that he will lead us through the darkness. And He did."

Others, including the priests, assisted his family, even enabling Loc and his two younger brothers to graduate from college when that was rare. He has a degree in food technology – and his youngest brother is a seminarian in their home diocese.

"I can always see how God gradually led us, helped us and poured out His grace on our family through other people," he said. "So my call didn't come like a lightning strike but grew gradually since I was a very little kid."

He wanted to share that message with the poorest of the poor and joined a Capuchin missionary team that had worked for years in a remote Indigenous village. They baptized all 150 residents when he was with them. Determined to become a missionary, he signed up for a silent Franciscan discernment retreat – where the spiritual director helped him discern that his gifts were for diocesan priesthood.

He was among 410 applicants to his diocesan seminary, which accepted 40. He was not among them. He was questioning his vocation when his godfather, who was also a priest, reminded him that "they need missionaries in America."

Loc protested. "I'm 28, I don't speak English and I want



▲ Father Loc Tran

to serve the poor, not the rich."

His godfather persuaded him to apply for a hard-to-get visa and see what happened.

"I don't know how it happened, because I don't speak English, but I got the visa. Men plan, God laughs," Father Loc said.

An organization that supports priestly vocations among the Vietnamese matched him with the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

"I know nothing about America. I can't even speak English, but I said, 'God has led me to that point. I will trust the Holy Spirit.'"

He was unable to read the welcome letters that he received from the rector, Father Thomas Sparacino, and other seminarians. His first year was spent studying English as a Second Language at Duquesne University.

Both his studies and adapting to a radically different culture were very difficult, but his brother seminarians and professors supported him. Perhaps the hardest challenge was to see Americans dismissive and cynical about the faith.

When he told his vocations director how discouraging that was, he replied, "You said you wanted to serve the poor in the jungle. Well now you are in the jungle of spiritual poverty, and you are in the right place."



The family of one of his fellow seminarians, now-Father Nick Clinton, welcomed him into their home for weekends, holidays and breaks.

“They adopted me as their son and helped me a lot. They showed me what an American family looks like,” he said. “His mom is incredible. She loved me as her own son. So, the most difficult thing has become the most incredible thing that has strengthened my faith.”

Through everything, “my message has never changed, either for the materially poor people or for the spiritually poor,” he said. “God loves us to the end. He loved me and led me through all my life, he led me through everything and he will do the same for everyone.”

Because God loved us first, “we have the capacity to love – to love God and to love others.”



▲ Father Nicholas Wytiaz

Father Nicholas Wytiaz

Assignment: Parochial vicar,
Resurrection Parish, South Hills

Father Nick, 38, the eldest of three children of Nick and Phyllis Wytiaz, was a pharmacist at West Penn Hospital before entering Saint Paul Seminary in 2019.

Faith had been important in their family; his parents sent him to St. Elizabeth of Hungary grade school in Pleasant Hills and he worked odd jobs around the parish in the summers.



However, he was taken aback when the pastor, Father Roy Conley, asked him if he had ever thought about priesthood.

“It was the furthest thing from my mind,” said Father Nick, who considers the late Father Conley a role model. At the time, he stammered a more polite version of “no.”

“Father Conley was just too kind to reject outright,” he said. The priest asked him to keep the idea in the back of his mind.

“I could do that. And the back of my mind was as far back as I could put it, with cobwebs. It lay dormant there for a very long time.”

In pharmacy school at Pitt he was active in Catholic campus ministry. He planned to get good grades, become involved in student and professional organizations, land a good job, pay off his debt, and buy a house. The house was walking distance from what was then St. Maria Goretti Parish in Bloomfield where he quickly became active in multiple ministries. The next step was to find a wife.

He joined the Young Adult Ministry at St. Paul Cathedral, which he saw as a good opportunity to build

relationships, make friends — and meet faithful Catholic women.

He loved his work at the hospital and enjoyed teaching faith formation at his parish. But “I just had this idea that something was missing,” he said.

He began attending daily Mass.

His spiritual restlessness grew. “When I thought about where I found joy and fulfillment it was less in my career than in the ministry and the involvement that I had with the Church.”

A turning point came when he joined the leadership team for the Young Adult Ministry. During a team-building retreat he took an assessment of his strengths for leadership – and the woman who helped him interpret the results asked him about seminary.

“She asked if I had ever been in the seminary. Then, if I had ever considered the seminary, Then, point-blank, she said ‘I think you should go to the seminary,’” he recalled.

“The blinders were off,” he said. “I’m an analytical data person. Now I’m looking at the data of how God made me and having somebody help



me interpret this data. And from the evidence presented, it seems that I might have been created to be a priest.”

When he entered St. Paul Seminary in 2019 “I didn’t know if I was called to be a priest, but I knew that God wanted me in the seminary,” he said. “Every year I would ask, do you still want me here? And every year the answer became clearer and clearer.”

Toward the end of his seminary studies, his perspective on priesthood changed.

“Until maybe the last year I would have said I was most looking forward to serving the people of God, helping bring them closer to Christ, encouraging the corporal works of mercy, pastoral counseling, serving the poor,” he said.

“All of that’s still true. But as ordination drew closer, I realized what I most eagerly anticipated was celebrating the Mass. The ultimate servant is Christ. The ultimate sacrifice that is re-presented in every Mass is His sacrifice on Calvary. How blessed and privileged the priest is to make that eternal sacrifice present on the altar, to bring Christ to the people in the Eucharist.” †



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A Voice That Still Echoes:

FULTON SHEEN AND PITTSBURGH'S PLACE IN THE STORY OF A HERO OF FAITH

BY NATHAN SUDIE

Some voices remain recognizable long after the microphone is turned off. For generations of Catholics, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen was one of those voices.

Long before podcasts, livestreams, YouTube channels, and social media evangelization, Archbishop Sheen understood something profound: communication is more than the transmission of information, but is the sharing of a person. For him, that person was always Jesus Christ.

As the Church anticipates the beatification of Venerable Fulton J. Sheen, Catholics have an opportunity both to remember his remarkable ministry and reflect on the meaning of his witness for Catholic communications today.

He became famous for his television program, *Life is Worth Living*, which debuted in 1951, and remains one of the most influential religious broadcasts in American history. Each week, millions tuned in to watch a bishop in a cassock stand before a chalkboard and speak – not with spectacle or production values – but with clarity, conviction, humor, and faith. His broadcasts earned national recognition and even an Emmy Award, making him one of the most recognizable Catholic voices of the 20th century.



Beatification Mass
of Archbishop
Fulton J. Sheen -
September 24, 2026
- St. Louis, Missouri.

▲ Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen on the set of his regular television program, *Life is Worth Living*.

Yet what made Archbishop Sheen extraordinary was not technology. It was his understanding that media exists to create encounters. He never spoke *at* people. He spoke *to* them. His words were intellectually rich, deeply pastoral, and always directed toward conversion of heart. He demonstrated that Catholic communications should never be reduced to announcements and headlines. At its best, communication becomes ministry.

That lesson is increasingly relevant in our own time. Here in Pittsburgh, we have seen that same understanding embodied in diverse ways across generations. Many Catholics remember

then-Bishop Donald Wuerl and his weekly television program, *The Teaching of Christ*. Long before digital ministry became commonplace, Bishop Wuerl entered homes through local television with a similar conviction: the Gospel belongs wherever people gather, including in front of a screen.

Though different in style and era, both men recognized something essential: people are searching for meaning, and the Church cannot wait for them to come through the doors. We must go where they are.

The Diocese of Pittsburgh has direct connections to Archbishop Sheen as



▲ Dr. Andrea Apostoli, postulator for the cause, with Father Brian Welding, Monsignor Lawrence DiNardo, and Father James McDonough, who completed documents that were notarized by Phyllis Geinzer (right).

well. He preached numerous times in Pittsburgh, including multiple preaching and teaching engagements between 1928 and 1972 at Sacred Heart Parish in Shadyside, where his friend Father Thomas J. Coakley was pastor.

In 1952 he was scheduled to preach in St. Paul Cathedral at the same time that the renowned evangelical Protestant evangelist Billy Graham was conducting his first Pittsburgh crusade. Whoever set up the dueling dates may not have known that the two had been friends since 1944, when they prayed together while traveling on a train, and that each respected the other's gift for communicating the Gospel.

When Archbishop Sheen died in 1979, the Rev. Graham told the *New York Times* that, "He was one of the greatest preachers of this century." The Baptist continued that Archbishop Sheen's "great gifts of intellectual insight and oratory helped millions to understand their world and their faith better."

Archbishop Sheen became a candidate for sainthood and, in 2006, members of the canon and civil law department of the Diocese of Pittsburgh investigated a reported miracle attributed to his intercession. A five-month investigation produced 1,000 pages of records and testimony by witnesses and medical experts. The final report was wrapped, imprinted with the seal of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, and prepared for delivery to Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints, responsible for reviewing all information and authenticating purported miracles.

The Pittsburgh investigation was unusual from several aspects: Because the family that reported the miracle was Ukrainian Catholic, the diocese assisted the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saint Josaphat, based in Parma, Ohio. The Pittsburgh diocese offered to do this because the Ukrainian eparchy lacked the personnel to carry out the investigation.

Thus Pittsburgh quietly became part of the story, playing a role in the discernment that continues to bring

Archbishop Sheen closer to sainthood.

That connection should make us pause. Holiness is often hidden. We think of sainthood as something distant, belonging to Rome, great cathedrals, or famous names. Yet repeatedly, God chooses ordinary places and ordinary people to carry forward extraordinary grace. Our local Church became part of preserving and examining the witness of a man who brought Christ into living rooms around the world.

Today, communicators face a world Archbishop Sheen could scarcely have imagined: algorithms, endless content, shrinking attention spans, and constant noise. Yet his advice would likely remain unchanged:

Be authentic. Be joyful. Speak the truth. And above all, remember that every camera, microphone, publication, social post, and conversation exists for one purpose – to bring people to Christ. Archbishop Sheen once said, "The greatest love story of all time is contained in a tiny white host." That was always the center of his message. And that is why his voice still echoes. †



▲ Phyllis Geinzer holds the red ribbon on the package of documents, records, and testimony that would be sent to Rome, while Bill Hill imprints the wax seal of the diocese.

CELEBRATING A NEW CHAPTER FOR

Catholic Education in the Diocese of Pittsburgh

By Lauren E. Martin, *Superintendent of Catholic Schools*



Something remarkable is happening in Catholic education across the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Over the past year, our Catholic school community has united around the belief that every family who desires a Catholic education for their child should have an opportunity to access one.

That vision gained extraordinary momentum through a transformative anonymous gift made in honor of Bishop Mark Eckman and dedicated to strengthening the future of Catholic education in our diocese. Combined with the commitment of our pastors, principals, teachers, donors, parish communities, and thousands of participating families, this historic investment has helped usher in a new era of affordability and long-term sustainability for our schools.

The 2026 Catholic Schools Report includes exciting data that reflects the impact of these efforts.

As of June 30, diocesan schools have awarded financial aid to 5,133 students. These efforts have significantly expanded support for families while also positioning our schools for future growth. By reaching more than 95% participation in our Aid for Every Family initiative, we have also unlocked new opportunities through Pennsylvania's Economically Disadvantaged Schools (EDS) program. As a result, eligibility is expected to expand from just four schools to as many as 19 elementary schools across our diocesan system, bringing access to funding that was previously unavailable.

More than numbers, these milestones represent families who can now choose Catholic education because cost is no longer an insurmountable barrier. They represent stronger schools, increased enrollment opportunities, and a more sustainable future.

This work has also strengthened our transition to a transparent cost-per-student funding model, a nationally recognized best practice that promotes responsible stewardship while supporting the outstanding academic and faith formation programs our students deserve. At the same time, the financial aid process has provided valuable insights that help us better understand and serve the needs of our school families.

While we celebrate these accomplishments, our work continues. Families who are still considering Catholic education should know that it is not too late to apply for enrollment or financial aid. Our Aid for Every Family initiative reflects our commitment to ensuring that every family has the opportunity to be considered for assistance.

I also want to recognize our Financial Aid Department for its dedication throughout this process. Their commitment to serving families with compassion, fairness, and care has been an inspiring witness to faithful stewardship.

In the months ahead, we look forward to sharing a more comprehensive report on the lasting impact of Aid for Every Family. Until then, thank you for your prayers, generosity, and belief in the mission of Catholic education. Together, we are building a stronger future for the students and families we are privileged to serve.



AID for EVERY FAMILY

Affordable. Accessible. Sustainable.

Our Data Tells a Story

Together, we have achieved the most important goal of this campaign: ensuring that aid is available for every family who wishes to be part of our Catholic schools community.

95% of our families completed a financial aid application which has surpassed our campaign goals and helps us serve our families with greater accuracy.

Last year, only 44% of our diocesan families applied for financial aid.

We estimate an expansion of our EDS tax credit eligibility from just 4 of our schools to **19 schools** across our diocesan system.

As of June 30, our eligibility rate for EITC funding has **increased to 48%**, compared to 35% during the 2025-2026 cycle, a remarkable shift.

As of June 30, **5,133 financial aid packages** have been awarded to students for the 2026-2027 school year.

Shifting to our cost-per-student funding model supports **PEOPLE** - we are a community of 1,067 Catholic elementary school employees who are delivering high quality Catholic education in 33 regional schools.

Several families touched our hearts with personal notes expressing their gratitude, noting that they would not be able to send their children to Catholic school without the aid they have received, many receiving aid for the first time.

MORE AID is available for NEW families. Connect today to secure your place in one of our Catholic schools for the 2026-2027 school year!

These are just a few of the goals our Aid for Every Family initiative has been designed to achieve.

Editorial note: all aspects of reported data are based on available information at the time of publication and will be available as a complete report after October 2026 when school year enrollment is official and finalized.

Learning Beyond the Classroom

CATHOLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS LEARN AND GROW THROUGH REGIONAL SHOWCASES, COMPETITIONS AND EVENTS

BY PAM SURANO

Imagine a young reader spending months immersed in classical and faith-based novels before gathering with hundreds of other book lovers at LitFest; or a budding inventor presenting an idea that could solve a real-world problem.

That's what happens at "bridging events" for students in diocesan grade schools. The Department of Catholic Schools has taken a handful of academic competitions and created a series of experiences that encourage students in their interests and help them grow intellectually, socially and spiritually through interaction with others.

"Our goal is to foster a culture of academic excellence while providing opportunities for students to develop confidence, character, and a sense of belonging," said Suzie Liebscher, director of curriculum and assessment for the Department of Catholic Schools, who had a leading role in designing and guiding the bridging events.

"These experiences help form strong learners and, more importantly, young people of faith and character."

The events focus on subject areas ranging from reading and mathematics to engineering, geography and the arts, all integrated with faith. They bring together students and experts who may be engaged in different dimensions of each topic. For instance, a math event also teaches virtues such as sportsmanship and perseverance while an arts event includes many kinds of visual and performance arts.

Suzie calls such programs "bridging events" because they bring students together from schools across the diocese, to discover new interests, make friends and experience the broader Catholic school community.

"These are the experiences that help students see themselves not simply as learners, but as leaders, creators and innovators," she said.



▲ Suzie Liebscher, Director of Curriculum and Assessment for the Diocese of Pittsburgh

Many of the programs began modestly before expanding across the diocese. Math 24 grew from a single-school competition into a regional event, while LitFest was created to foster a love of reading through author visits, peer collaboration and academic activities.

Other programs, including the Spelling Bee, Invention Convention and Academic Quiz Bowl, encourage curiosity, creativity, perseverance and excellence.

By hosting events on Catholic high school campuses, younger students become familiar with those communities and begin to see themselves as part of a larger Catholic educational journey, she said.

"I hope every student has the opportunity to discover an area where they can shine," she said.

For Suzie, the experiences are about much more than competition. "They're opportunities to build community, inspire excellence and remind students that their talents are gifts from God meant to be developed and shared with others."

Talk with your student's teacher about how your child can participate in these bridging events:

LitFest

Created to encourage students to engage with high-quality novels that reflect Catholic values, LitFest also connects elementary and middle school students with diocesan Catholic high schools. In just three years, participation has grown to more than 900 students from 24 schools in grades 4–8, making LitFest one of the diocese's largest student enrichment experiences.

Students spend the year reading novels selected by a team of teachers and administrators, then gather for literary games, discussions, and activities. A highlight is the opportunity to meet Catholic authors who share both their writing journey and their faith. This year, students welcomed Stephanie Engelman, author of *A Single Bead*, at Bishop Canevin High School and Janeen Zaio, author of *Treasure With a Face*, at Seton LaSalle High School and St. Joseph High School.



Math 24

Math 24 is a fast-paced mental math competition that challenges students to use addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division



to arrive at the number 24. Beyond competition, Math 24 helps students build confidence, perseverance, and a deeper appreciation for problem-solving.

What began as a local competition has grown into one of the Diocese of Pittsburgh's premier academic enrichment events. Regional competitions are hosted at Bishop Canevin High School, St. Joseph High School, and Serra Catholic High School. Students in grades 3–8 showcase their math skills while practicing the virtues of sportsmanship, perseverance, respect, and humility.

Invention Convention

The Invention Convention challenges students to identify real-world problems and develop innovative solutions through the engineering design process. Students in grades 4–6 research an issue, design and refine a prototype, and present their invention to judges, gaining valuable experience in critical thinking, creativity, communication, and problem-solving. The event is hosted at Seton LaSalle High School. Participants are encouraged to see themselves as creators, innovators, and leaders while applying science, technology, engineering, and mathematics skills to challenges. Students learn that their creativity can be a powerful tool for serving others and improving the world around them.



Academic Quiz Bowl

The Academic Quiz Bowl brings together teams of students from across the diocese for a fast-paced competition that challenges their knowledge of literature, history, science, math, religion, and current events.

Hosted at Bishop Canevin High School, the event encourages students to think critically, work collaboratively, and demonstrate academic excellence in a spirit of friendly competition.



Faith & Fine Arts Showcase

New for 2026–2027, the Faith & Fine Arts Showcase will celebrate the artistic talents of students throughout the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Through visual art, choir, instrumental music, and other creative performances, students will have the

opportunity to share their gifts while expressing the beauty, creativity, and faith at the heart of Catholic education.

The showcase will provide students with a meaningful opportunity to use their artistic gifts to glorify God while sharing their talents with the wider diocesan community.

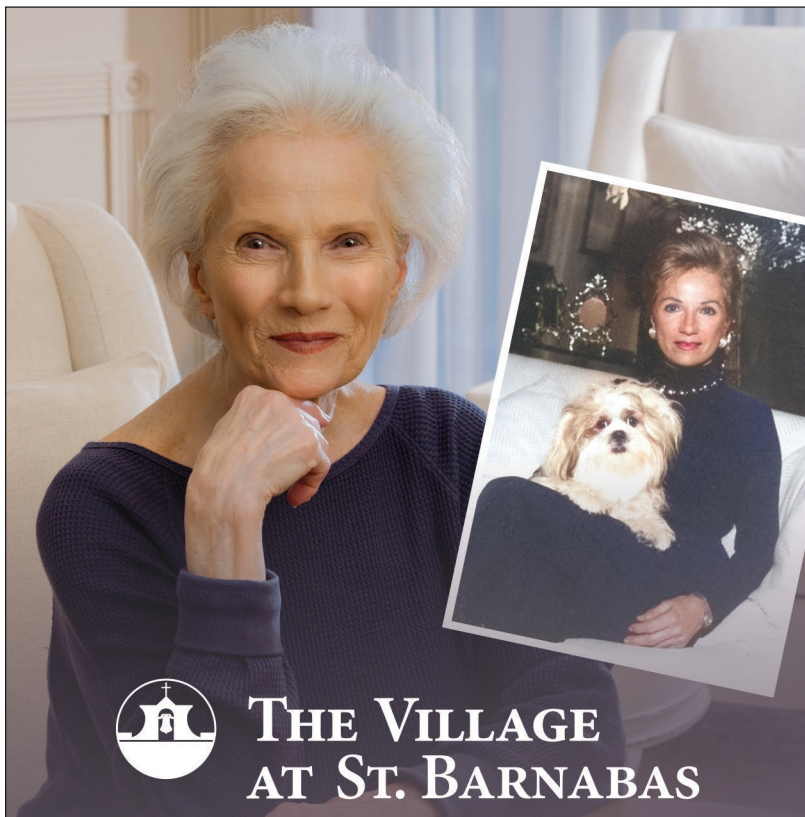
Geography Bee

Also debuting in 2027, the Geography Bee at Oakland Catholic High School will challenge students to expand their knowledge of geography, world cultures and global issues. The event will encourage curiosity about God's world while helping students develop critical-thinking skills and global awareness.

As participation continues to grow and new programs are introduced, these opportunities have become an important part of the diocese's commitment to providing students with meaningful experiences beyond the classroom. †

Diocesan Bridging Events 2026–2027 School Year

- **Math 24**, Bishop Canevin High School - February 24, 2027
- **Math 24**, Serra Catholic High School - February 25, 2027
- **Math 24**, St. Joseph High School - February 26, 2027
- **Quiz Bowl**, Bishop Canevin High School - February 27, 2027
- **Invention Convention**, Seton LaSalle High School - March 18, 2027
- **LitFest**, Bishop Canevin High School - April 29, 2027
- **LitFest**, Seton LaSalle High School - April 29, 2027
- **LitFest**, St. Joseph High School - April 30, 2027
- **Faith and Fine Arts Showcase**, location and date TBD
- **Geography Bee**, Oakland Catholic High School - Date TBD



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INCREASED SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS IN DIOCESAN SCHOOLS

New director hired to weave a student safety net

BY PAM SURANO

Recognizing that parents and students face challenges that were unimaginable a generation ago, the Diocese of Pittsburgh has hired Dr. Stephanie McHugh for a newly-created position as director of student support services.

She will help students and families navigate the difficulties posed by social media, anxiety, academic pressure, physical and emotional security, as well as questions about identity, purpose and the future. Support is provided for academics, career readiness, social-emotional well-being, spiritual growth, and safety.



▲ Dr. Stephanie McHugh, Director of Student Support Services for the Diocese of Pittsburgh

“Support isn’t just responsive, it’s preventative,” Stephanie said. “The system is designed around a simple principle: not every child needs the same support, but every child deserves the support they need to succeed.”

Her path to this role has been decades in the making.

A veteran educator, Stephanie has worked in nearly every educational environment—rural, suburban, urban, cyber, higher education, admissions and workforce development.

Yet what distinguishes her most is something less visible on a résumé.

Faith.

For more than a decade, she taught CCD at St. Benedict the Abbot, now part of St. John XXIII Parish in Peters. She has always felt called to serve students while living her Catholic faith more openly.

“My favorite Scripture verse has always been Matthew 25:40 — ‘Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me,’ she said.

“I found my way to the diocese because I wanted to speak without secular censors and live my faith every day.”

Student support has a long history in diocesan schools. But this enhanced approach responds to evolving needs and new guidance from the Commonwealth bishops through the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference.

At its center is a framework called the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), which helps schools to identify student needs, provide interventions, monitor progress and connect families with resources. Stephanie is helping the diocese to implement new positive behavior programs rooted in Catholic virtues, expanded safety protocols, and a planned speaker series to help families address issues such as social media, stress management, addiction, and healthy relationships.

“Our first priority is keeping our kids safe,” Stephanie said.

“I have never seen so much overwhelming verbal abuse, name-calling, shame, blame and catastrophizing.”

Character matters, she said. “Our Catholic schools put character development front and center as an intentional priority.”

Bolstering a student’s confidence is central to Stephanie’s approach.

“What are the student’s interests, career aspirations, superpowers?” she asked. “How do we leverage those strengths?”

The process starts in grade school and extends throughout high school with mentoring, community connections and career exploration.

“We have so many educational experts in our schools, and the blessing of partnership with our families,” Stephanie said. “When we join together, good things happen for kids.”

PARTNERING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS:

Common questions parents ask

► Dr. Stephanie McHugh, director of student support services for the Diocese of Pittsburgh, answers commonly asked questions from parents.

My child is struggling – what should I do?

Start with your child’s teacher. Teachers, counselors, student support resources, principals and diocesan leaders work together to identify needs, implement strategies, monitor progress and provide additional support. Each school has designated student support personnel and a team lead called an “MVP.” When additional supports are needed, diocesan leaders get involved.

How can I help my child search for a passion or sense of purpose in school?

Our schools use a variety of career readiness and postsecondary planning tools to help students discover their strengths, interests, skills, and values and explore potential career paths. By using career assessments, students can learn more about themselves and identify occupations that align with their unique gifts and talents. Students can use these tools to explore colleges, trade schools, military pathways and other postsecondary opportunities.

What if my child has specialized concerns or needs?

Our Catholic schools provide individualized supports through medical and instructional support plans tailored to a student’s needs.

Supports may include organizational and executive functioning strategies, guided notes, extra time, schedule adjustments, positive behavior supports and sensory regulation tools. The goal is to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and help every child flourish. †



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- Why addiction is a spiritual disease
- The relationship of the mind, body, and spirit in the healing journey
- Pastoral care strategies for serving the addicted and their families
- Spiritual healing through the 12 Steps

The class is led by Keaton Douglas, who is featured in *Unshackled*, a series on Shalom World TV that tackles addiction head-on through faith, hope, and healing. For more information about the class, please contact Addiction Recovery Ministry at 412-378-9290 or rhaasarm@gmail.com.



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*How did your **faith** grow through that experience?*



"A difficult cross strengthened my faith by teaching me to trust God even when I didn't understand the plan. It reminded me that faith isn't only for the easy moments — it's what carries you through the hard ones too."

— LINDSAY KRAMER, ST. ISIDORE THE FARMER PARISH



"When our first daughter died, I was beyond devastated and in so much pain. But it truly taught me what Jesus suffered and even what Mary went through on the way to Calvary. I found that by uniting my suffering to the pain felt by our Blessed Mother during that fateful walk, I found great healing and was able to have a greater trust in God and His Promises. I learned that suffering is never in vain and that it is always used for our purification so we are not only able to be closer to and more united with Jesus on the Cross here on earth but eventually, God willing, we are able to be joyfully united with Him in heaven."

— DANIELLE PRINCE, ST. TERESA OF KOLKATA PARISH



"My health challenges have allowed God's Holy Light to shine through me and be a blessing to others. All thanks and praise to the Lord, God is good!"

— MATT H., ST. RAPHAEL THE ARCHANGEL & CHRIST OUR SAVIOR PARISHES



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