

Diocese of Biloxi



State of the Diocese Report *for Fiscal Year Ending June 2024*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in our Lord,

As I have traveled throughout the Diocese of Biloxi this past year, I have been heartened by the communities of faith I have encountered in our parishes, schools, and ministries. The Spirit of our Lord, Jesus Christ, is very much present and alive in our midst.

I am especially encouraged by the parishes and schools that are leading the way in our efforts to follow the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Matthew 28:19-20 to *“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”* We are all called to be disciples of Jesus.

Due to your generosity and faithful support, this past year we were able to begin new ministries that allow us to reach out to even more people to share the love of God, including the new Mercy Cross Center for the homeless.

In the midst of our ever-changing world, our faith and our Church continue to be a visible sign of hope, charity, and comfort to us, and to those we are called to serve in the name of Jesus. Together, united in the love of Christ, we continue to meet the challenges of our present moment and move closer to full discipleship in Christ Jesus.

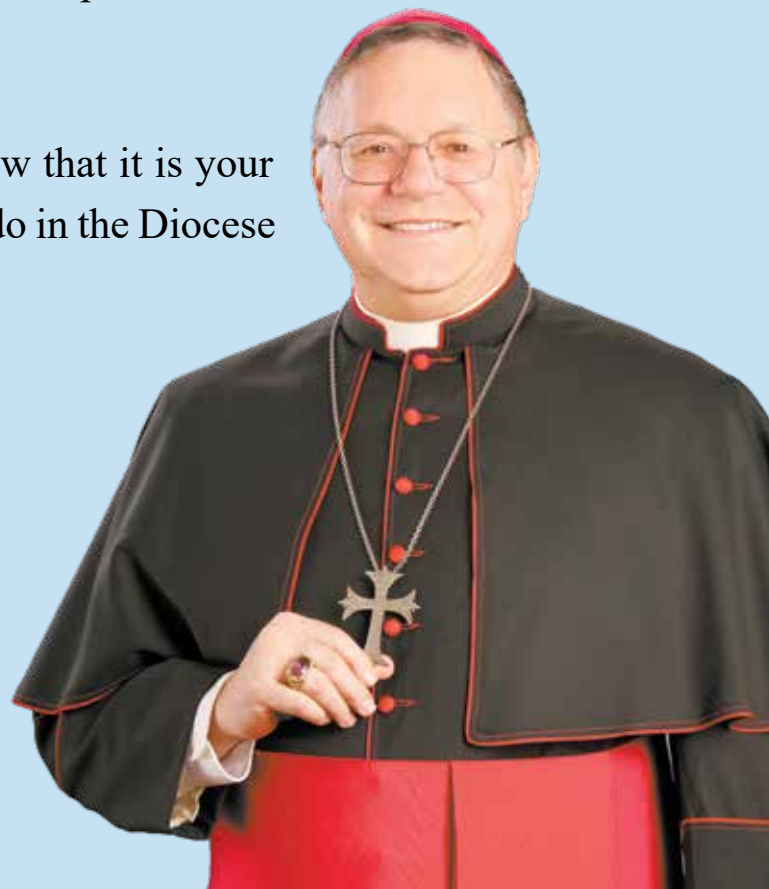
As you read this State of the Diocese Report, please know that it is your kindness and loving generosity that make everything we do in the Diocese of Biloxi possible.

Be assured of my prayers for you and your loved ones.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend
Louis F. Kihneman, III
Bishop of Biloxi



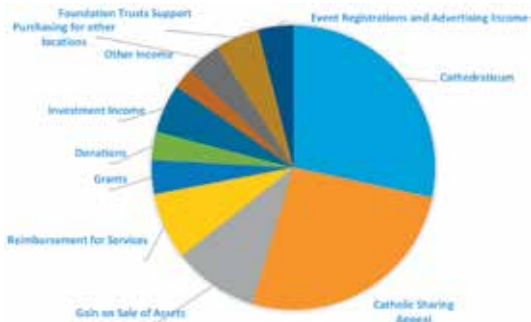


The Administrative Offices of the Diocese of Biloxi

Total Assets of the Administrative Offices \$10,698,648

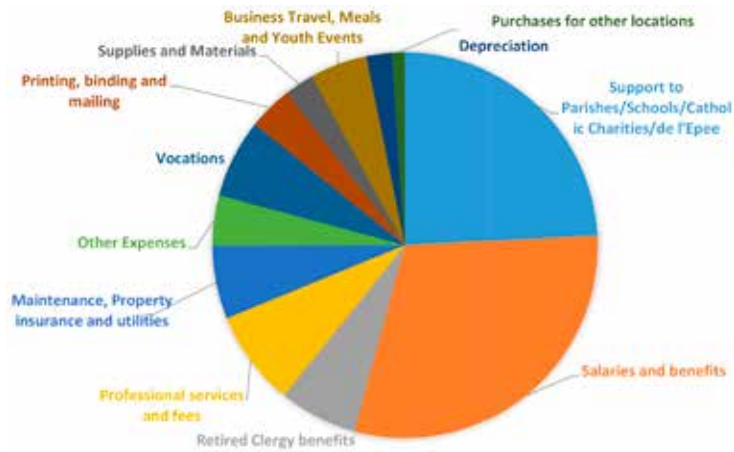
REVENUES 2023 - 2024

Cathedraticum	\$1,609,131.87	26%
Catholic Sharing Appeal	\$1,490,531.75	24%
Gain on Sale of Assets	\$549,895.10	09%
Reimbursement for Services	\$430,304.46	07%
Grants	\$220,974.97	04%
Donations	\$182,772.40	03%
Investment Income	\$313,251.08	05%
Other Income	\$136,326.23	02%
Purchasing for other locations	\$221,974.12	03%
Foundation Trusts Support	\$284,516.76	04%
Event Registrations and Advertising Income	\$229,223.53	04%
Change in Association of Priest Retirement Plan	\$578,461.00	09%
Total Revenues	\$6,247,363.00	100%

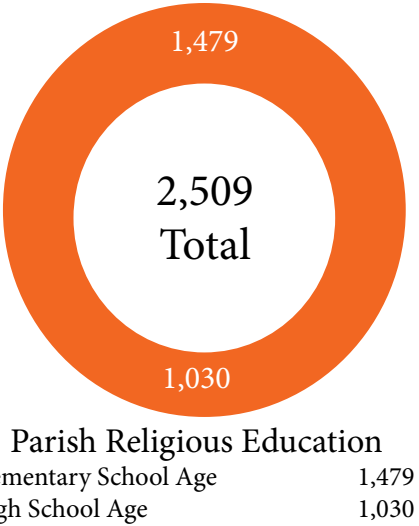
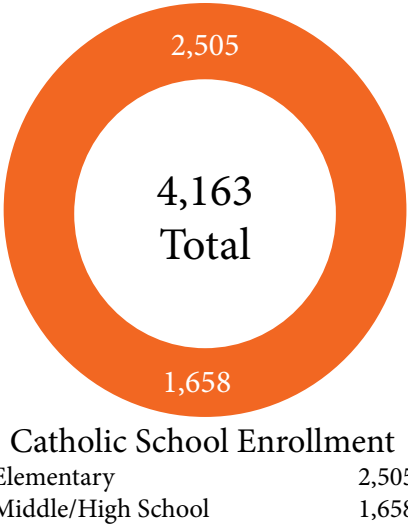


EXPENSES 2023 - 2024

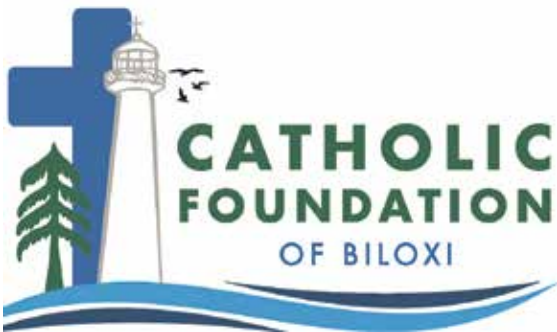
Support to Parishes/Schools/Catholic Charities/de l'Epee	\$1,335,433.16	24%	Printing, binding and mailing	\$204,668.12	04%
Salaries and benefits	\$1,662,455.72	29%	Supplies and Materials	\$137,550.42	02%
Retired Clergy benefits*	\$364,661.69	07%	Business Travel, Meals and Youth Events	\$265,221.97	05%
Professional services and fees	\$441,538.69	09%	Depreciation	\$118,664.21	02%
Maintenance, property insurance and utilities	\$340,894.66	06%	Purchases for Other Locations	\$59,800.00	02%
Other Expenses	\$232,588.92	04%			
Vocations	\$365,603.74	06%	Total Expenses	\$5, 529,081.30	100%



Finance is helping our parishes and schools in observing best practices for faithful stewardship of the temporal goods in their care.



Catholic Foundation Report of Assets



2023-2024 Fiscal Year

Current Investments

Endowed Funds	\$26,167,997
Non-Endowed Funds	\$6,510,418
Total Funds Under Management	\$32,678,415

Return on Investments

Perpetual Funds	14.37%
Non- Perpetual Funds	3.54%

Ministries of the Catholic Diocese of Biloxi

In the Gospel of Matthew, as the Lord Jesus was about to ascend to the Father, He gave the Great Commission to the Apostles, commanding them to **“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.* And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (Mt. 28:19-20).** Jesus established the Catholic Church to evangelize, and He gives us His Great Commission in Matthew’s gospel to make disciples of all nations, to baptize them, to teach all He commands us,

Office of Vocations

Director: Father Braxton Necaise



The Diocese of Biloxi **Vocations Office** has seen significant growth within the past year. For the 2024-2025 academic year, we accepted three new seminarians. This brings our current total number of seminarians to nine men. In 2023, Vocation Ministry, which is based in Houston, TX, produced a report which showed that in order for us to sustain the current levels of priest within the Diocese of Biloxi, we are in need of fourteen seminarians. Since the issuance of this report and with the retirement of priests, we now need sixteen seminarians. We are currently at 56% of our seminarian goal.

We have five men currently at Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans, LA. We have three men at St. Joseph Seminary College in St. Benedict, LA. We have one transitional Deacon who is currently in a parish assignment. We recently accepted as a candidate, a young woman for Consecrated Virginity Living in the World.

Our Diocesan Vocations Team helped our seminarians to begin the process of consecrating themselves to Mary. We currently have seven of our nine seminarians who have consecrated themselves to Mary. The Vocations Office was consecrated to Mary on July 31 at our annual convocation. We consecrated the office to Mary in her image as Rosa Mystica. There is a promise from Mary to those who have a devotion to her in this image that vocations will prosper. This image of Mary was incorporated into our annual Vocations Poster.

We currently have five parishes with active Vocation Ministry Teams.

In April, the Vocations Office was present at the Diocese of Biloxi Youth Conference. We had forty-four individuals who submitted their names indicating that they are interested in either the priesthood or religious life.

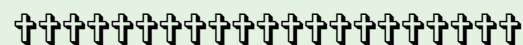
and to trust that He is with us always. The reason we exist as a Church is to evangelize. To evangelize is to welcome people into a personal relationship with God that will transform them completely inside and out. Living out the Great Commission of Jesus is both personal and communal. Each of us is called personally not only to witness to our faith but also to accompany others in faith. Each of our parishes, schools, and ministries have the same mission, and it should be fostered each time the community comes together.

A number of our youth groups within the Diocese attended Steubenville Youth Conferences over the summer. We had a total of nineteen of our young people express interest and openness to discerning a priesthood or religious vocation during these conferences.

We launched our new Vocations website: biloxivocations.org. Young men now have the opportunity to sign up for weekly personalized discernment texts or email messages from the Vocations Office, providing them with helpful advice as they discern God's will in their lives.

In our Catholic schools, we launched this fall the Traveling Vocation Crucifix. This crucifix travels from classroom to classroom within our schools and encourages our students to pray for Vocations. Each school is forming a Vocation Ministry Team, which will help to assist students as they discern. We will be launching a Vocations curriculum for our Catholic schools within the next month.

Please join us in praying for a fresh outpouring of Vocations here in the Diocese of Biloxi. We pray for those whose hearts may be stirred by the Holy Spirit, that they may have the courage to discern and that their families may be supportive. If you are interested in forming a parish Vocation Team, please feel free to reach out to Father Braxton Necaise, the Director of Vocations here in the Diocese of Biloxi, at (228) 863-1610.



Office of the Permanent Diaconate

Director: Deacon Mike Harris



The Office of the Permanent Diaconate fosters the ministry of our ordained deacons and guides the formation of new deacons. Currently we have 39 active deacons, 10 retired deacons and 33 men in formation.

We conduct retreats and provide continuing education for our ordained deacons. During this past year the office organized a special retreat/convocation with the *Catherine of Siena Institute* to help us identify and better understand the charisms God has given us. Understanding these graces helps us better know how God uses us in ministry to serve those around us. Additionally, we have quarterly “Post Ordination” sessions to help prepare us to better serve our parishes and the diocese.

Formation of men for the diaconate is now a 5-year process. There is a focus on the Human, Spiritual, Intellectual and Pastoral dimensions of the individual. We currently have 15 men in the Class of 2025 and 18 men in the Class of 2028 for a total of 33 men in formation. The Senior Class meets once a month at the Kelly Retreat Center in Bay St. Louis. Class starts Friday night and ends around noon on Sundays. The Junior Class meets once a month at the Chancery all day Saturday. Both classes have “End of Year” Retreats over a weekend to reflect on their calling.

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Ministries of the Catholic Diocese of Biloxi

MINISTRIES

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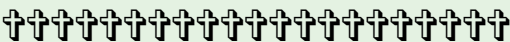
Instructors come from Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans, St. Joseph Abby Seminary in Covington, along with a few of our local priests and deacons. The deacon candidates receive instruction from many of the same instructors our seminarians. The first part of training is in “Spiritual Discernment,” learning to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, being introduced to Spirituality, prayer and the norms of the diaconate. The last 3 years of formation concentrate on academics to give our candidates more training to aid in their duties once ordained. Candidates’ curriculum includes 6 scripture courses, 8 theology courses, introduction to Philosophy, 2 courses in Church History, 5 elective courses in Patristics -- Canon Law -- Multicultural Ministry -- etc., 4 courses in Homiletics and 4 Practicum courses in Liturgies, counseling and apologetics.

One recent and exciting aspect of Diaconate Formation is an effort to expand the number of our Hispanic deacons. The number of Hispanics in our diocese has tripled over the past 20 years. In an effort to minister to this strongly Catholic community we have added a special emphasis to increase the number of deacons to serve this community. We currently have nine Hispanics in formation.

With the wonderful help of the USCCB’s SouthEast Pastoral Institute (SEPI) in Miami we have been able to add a Spanish track in addition to our English track of formation. SEPI’s mission is to facilitate the full participation of Hispanics in the mission of the Church and society as authentic missionary disciples.

With SEPI’s help, our Hispanic candidates are taught in Spanish. The multicultural aspect of the formation program has enhanced both the English AND Hispanic formation. It also teaches our men in formation how to effectively integrate different cultures to achieve something better than either alone. This multicultural experience can be directly applied to the parishes they are assigned.

Finally, the Diaconate Program is supported through our diocese’s Catholic Sharing Appeal (CSA) and some grants. However, the lion’s share of funding comes from the CSA. We could not conduct the program without the generous support provided across our diocese through the CSA. GOD BLESS YOU and THANK YOU for supporting the Ministry of the Diaconate!



Office of Finance Director: Tammy DiLorenzo



Being mindful of God’s blessings and gifts to His Church, the **Finance Office** is called to demonstrate discipleship and good stewardship of the financial assets of God’s Church in the Diocese of Biloxi. This year brought about several changes within the Department of Finance. Diocesan software upgrades to the cloud were a main focus during the year, bringing safer data storage to our financial records. We will continue to examine options to streamline the financial management process in the Finance Office as well as working toward options for improving financial reporting at the parishes and schools.

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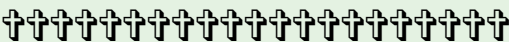
Office of Faith Formation Associate Director: Amber Buckley



The Office of Faith Formation has been active in forming intentional disciples of Jesus Christ who are prepared, purposeful, and eager to spread the Gospel Proclamation throughout the world as commissioned by Christ Himself in Matthew 28:19-20. To

achieve this mission, faith formation has taken on a twofold task: to teach our young Church the Catechism as well as to grow their personal relationship with Christ. To better support our parishes in teaching the Catechism, religious education standards have been published for all catechists to use as a guideline for their grade-level curriculum. Religious education standards for our Catholic schools are in review and are projected to be published for the 2025-2026 school year. To guide catechists in accompanying the young Church in forming a relationship with God, faith formation plans have been implemented. These plans focus on an individual’s personal faith life and provide commitments so that they can actively grow in faith. Our goal is to include faith formation plans throughout our Diocese to help all parishioners grow in relationship with Christ.

The Office of Faith Formation has also readily assisted in protecting our young Church through an update of our Safe Environment policies and procedures. With the use of a new program, known as *Virtus*, priests, employees, and volunteers take on responsibility for protecting our minors and vulnerable adults. Safety is of utmost importance regarding minors and vulnerable adults, and we are confident that this new program will serve our Diocese well in educating both adults and minors and in vetting all who are in contact with minors and vulnerable adults.



Office of Evangelization Director: Ray Lacy



This has been a very busy year for the **Office of Evangelization**, in efforts to establish Path-ways to Discipleship, Parish Leadership Teams, Parish Eucharistic Revival Teams, a Eucharistic Evangelization Team,

and the Diocesan Eucharistic Revival Project Team, to list a few. We have been participating in a three-year-long Eucharistic Revival. We have established teams in each of our parishes, some more active than others. The Diocesan Eucharistic Revival Committee set out planning many events throughout the year, happening all over our diocese. We have also seen the Rescue Project from ACTS XXIX be a very powerful experience. The Rescue Project has been viewed by hundreds around our diocese, in our parishes, some of our schools, the Housing facilities, and Catholic Charities. This experience has been a blessing to see, bringing so many to healing and a deeper encounter with Jesus in the Eucharistic.

Ministries of the Catholic Diocese of Biloxi

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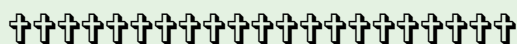
In June of this past year, we had one of the most powerful week-long experiences of the Eucharistic Revival Pilgrimage, here in the Diocese of Biloxi. This week had so many different prayer experiences and encounter moments. A few of the events included walking along Hwy 90 in Eucharistic procession with hundreds of parishioners from our diocese and many others. We started in Bay St. Louis and by the end of the week ended our journey at the Cathedral of the BVM. The pilgrims from the National Eucharistic Revival joined us after starting their journey in South Texas. We walked just over 24 miles with the Blessed Sacrament being carried the entire way for the world to see.

In July we traveled to Indianapolis, to Lucas Oil Stadium, to join 60,000 other Catholics for the Nation Eucharistic Congress. This was an incredible event. We set out over a year ago to bring people from all over our diocese to experience this once in a lifetime event. I am excited to say we were able to take over 240 people from our diocese. We are still hearing about the incredible experiences being shared in our parishes. This is the beginning of the year "On Mission." Our mission has many different efforts, but the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist still remains front and center.

In August we set out on a year-long effort for formation on Discipleship, for our teachers and staff at our schools. We have four days set out for encounter and training with the *Apostolate Missio*, to work with all our staff, on working in teams and creating healthy structures to be most effective in evangelizing the students in our schools.

In October, for our Priest Convocation, we had the apostolate *Catherine of Sienna Institute* speak to our priests on their Charisms and Governance. Many of our priests took the charism inventory and completed the interview. Following the week-long convocation with the priests, Katherine Coolidge presented the topic of charisms and governance to our deacons.

We continue to make Disciples and Disciple-makers here in the Office of Evangelization. Our vision is to help pastors create leadership teams to help them with visioning discipleship and evangelization in their parish. Our hope is to have all pastors, with their leadership teams, forming other ministry teams to continue to be intentional about making disciples.



Office of Youth Ministry
Director: Marianne Schmidt



The Office of Youth Ministry serves youth, young adults, and campus ministry and this past year we were full of events, programs, formation, and much more.

2023-2024

For youth ministry we started the year with our dodgeball kick-off held at St. Vincent de Paul. We had many of our parishes show up with the middle schoolers and high schoolers to compete in a classic dodgeball bracket. After that, we gathered outside to hear about the events coming up, revealed the coming up DBYC theme, and took time to pray in community during a time of Eucharistic Adoration outside. Our kick off was planned by our Diocesan Spirit Movers. Spirit Movers are a group of students 10th-12th grade who

apply and put on our diocesan events. They meet monthly and we work to form them to be leaders in their youth group. They also planned the middle school retreat. The middle school retreat was held at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Long Beach and we talked about what it means to love and be loved. We had students from Southern Mississippi come and give the talks while the Spirit Movers led games, small groups, and gave testimonies. The Spirit Movers also helped prepare the Rosary Rally and Walk for Life held in January. We started with a Rosary and Mass at the Cathedral and then made our way to the Lighthouse Park in Biloxi where we heard from the different pro-life ministries in our Diocese and had a time of Eucharistic Adoration to pray for the end to abortion.

And of course, our Spirit Movers are vital to planning and executing our Diocesan-wide Youth Conference held in March. The Spirit Movers came up with the theme, sessions, games, small groups, and the overall environment of the weekend. We had Katie Prejean McGrady and Kelly Colangelo as keynote speakers and the theme was *Belong*. Friday, almost 30 parishes came together (in costume) to start the conference. Upon being called up by the Bishop, they presented him a gift that had to do with their theme. On Saturday during the conference, we had the main hallway lined with universities, *EWTN*, eucharistic miracle posters, religious sisters, and all of our seminarians. They had freebies for the teens and were overall a great resource to the teens on vocations, how to stay Catholic in college, and more. Saturday night was a night full of prayer and reconciliation with several priests there to offer the Sacraments. We closed the conference on Sunday with Mass and awards and then quickly got ready to do a day rally for the middle schoolers.

Our SEARCH team began meeting in August with a team retreat and then weekly meetings on Thursday evenings. We had a team of 14 with nine girls and five boys, all seniors in high school, representing ten different parishes in our diocese. Each week we would dive deeper into the retreat, practice giving talks, shared a meal, and ended in prayer led by the team. All of these meetings led to two different SEARCH weekends held at the beginning of the year. Both weekends were full and our team perfectly balanced prayer, play, and fellowship in order to make space for their peers to encounter Christ.

Campus ministry leaders attended a bootcamp at the beginning of August to prepare for what it means to be a leader on their campus. Throughout the year they planned class retreats, school prayer services, and even help when the Bishop makes his school visits.

2024-2025

For youth ministry, once again, we started the year with our dodgeball kick-off held at St. Vincent de Paul. We had many of our parishes show up with the middle schoolers and high schoolers to compete in a classic dodgeball bracket. After that, we gathered outside to hear about the events coming up, revealed the coming up DBYC theme, and took time to pray in community during a time of Eucharistic Adoration outside. Our kick-off is planned by our Diocesan Spirit Movers. Spirit Movers are a group of students 10-12th grade who apply and put on our Diocesan events. They meet monthly and we work to form them to be leaders in their youth group. They also planned the middle school retreat. The middle school retreat was held at St. Vincent de Paul and the theme was *Look Up*. We had the adult team give the talks while the Spirit Movers led games, small groups, and gave testimonies.

Our SEARCH team began meeting in August with a team retreat and then weekly meetings on Thursday evenings. We had a team of 14 with eight girls and six boys, all seniors in high school, representing nine different parishes in our diocese. Each week we dove deeper into retreat prep, practice giving talks, share a meal, and end in prayer led by the team.

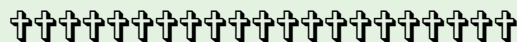
Campus ministry leaders attended a bootcamp at the beginning of August to prepare for what it means to be a leader on their campus. This retreat was led by Kelly Colangelo who was one of the keynote speakers for DBYC 2024.

Ministries of the Catholic Diocese of Biloxi

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Young adult ministry also known as our *Frassati Fellowship* has continued to grow this year. At the beginning of the year, we had a group of young adults go through the nine-week series, *Rescue Project*. From there and other parish leaders, a leadership team of six young adults came together to plan and vision what young adult ministry looks like in the Diocese of Biloxi. We had a praise and worship night in October followed up with a time of fellowship all held at St. Michaels in Biloxi. We have gathered bonfires, pumpkin painting, and most recently just had a sunset retreat in Pass Christian. We had talks, reflection time, discussion and closed the night with Eucharistic Adoration outside at sunset.



Office of Education

Director: Jennifer Broadus



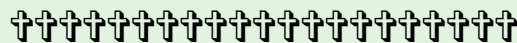
Over the past year, the fourteen Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Biloxi have experienced remarkable growth and achievements. Our schools serve over 4,000 students, supported by a dedicated team of more than 500 faculty and staff.

Last school year, we held three retreats for our faculty and staff, focusing on building leadership teams and unified, mission-centered Catholic schools. These retreats provided valuable time for prayer, reflection, collaboration, and shared vision-building. We continue focusing on our core mission: forming intentional disciples of Jesus Christ.

The academic achievements of our students reflect the dedication of our families, students, faculty, and staff, with test scores consistently surpassing both state and national averages. Diocese of Biloxi students achieved an impressive average ACT score of 23.9, well above the national average of 19.5 and the state average of 17.6.

Our diocesan schools recently completed a comprehensive five-year accreditation review with *Cognia*, a global nonprofit that accredits schools meeting rigorous standards in learning environments, resource management, and leadership. With this achievement, all schools in the Diocese of Biloxi are now accredited by *Cognia*, in addition to the Mississippi Department of Education.

Our continued goal is for our students to leave our schools as empowered scholars and committed disciples, ready to follow Jesus and make a positive impact on the world.



Catholic Charities of South Mississippi

Diocesan Director: Jennifer Williams



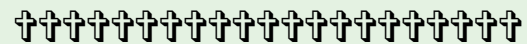
I am pleased to present the **Catholic Charities of South Mississippi** Community Impact Report for January 2024 through September 2024. In all Catholic Charities of South Mississippi served a total of 481,501 individuals and distributed \$458,740.15 in assistance.

Here is a breakdown of what we

accomplished:

- 162 people received document translation to assist with obtaining work
- 1,754,837 pounds of food distributed, feeding 567,498 people
- 464 infants received items to keep them healthy and safe
- 4 women received confidential pregnancy testing
- 429 Seniors received social service coordination
- 6 families received adoption services, including adoption searches and home studies
- 90 families received disaster case management; \$6,932 in disaster assistance provide
- 2,213 households received case management, goal setting, and budgeting education
- 31 people continued to live independently through our Representative Payee Program
- 529 individual, marriage, and family counseling sessions provided
- 105 families remained housed and 1,333 families' utilities remained on due to \$444,885 in direct assistance
- Finally, Mercy Cross Day Center opened in Biloxi on May 28. 316 guests registered, 45 onsite lots assigned, 589 showers provided, 315 loads of laundry. We are happy to say that 70 individuals moved out of homelessness. We also purchased 13 bus tickets and assisted with 7 deposits.

If you or someone you know needs assistance, please call (228) 701-0555. For more information, to volunteer or donate, please see visit catholiccharitiesofsouthms.org. Tax deductible donations may also be mailed to 1450 North Street, Gulfport, MS 39507.



de l'Epée Deaf Center

Director: Greg Crapo



de l'Epée Deaf Center continues as the quiet jewel in the Diocese of Biloxi. Honoring our founder, Sr. Dolores Coleman D.C., we continue the mission to provide spiritual well-being, promotion of independence and inclusion in the

community for the deaf, hard of hearing and disabled.

de l'Epée provides qualified interpreters to bridge the gap between the deaf and hearing communities. This past year, we provided over 3,700 hours of communication and over 4,500 hours of service, giving equal access in medical, educational, legal, work and religious settings 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Teaching sign language on a quarterly basis and one-on-one tutoring provided new opportunities to over 100 individuals and families for interaction with feaf family, friends, and co-workers.

As a national testing sight for interpreters, hosting CEU workshops, and providing intern work opportunities for interpreting students, de l'Epée leads the way in promoting the need for more and better skilled interpreters.

Supported by volunteers, de l'Epée hosted three summer youth camps for both deaf and hearing children, ages 5-16. Camps benefited 75 plus families with learning and association opportunities.

Our Faith Formation continues to thrive with monthly events including: Signed Way of the Cross, creative prayer workshops and signed Mass in our chapel. Interpreters are available at several churches within the Diocese and not just Catholic.

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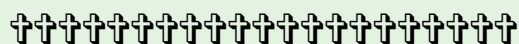
Ministries of the Catholic Diocese of Biloxi

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We are proud to promote St. Francis de Sales, the patron saint of the deaf, with his medal and prayer card, available at the Deaf Center. The 1/8th mile Stations of the Cross walking path is available weekdays for anyone wishing to experience. Father James Smith, our chaplain, is available for counseling and reconciliation in both sign and voice.

Our digital ministry has grown and promotes all the happenings at de l'Epée, but most importantly contributes to the journey for Intentional Discipleship. Our mailing list is over 825 strong and growing each day. To receive communications, please drop a note to delepee@deafcenter.org to subscribe.



The Tabitha Project

Director: Greg Crapo



The Tabitha Project is the newest ministry devoted to Good Works and Acts of Mercy. To provide spiritual well-being, promotion of independence and inclusion in the community for all God's children with special needs.

The Tabitha Project is modeled after a faithful Christian woman named Dorcas (or Tabitha, in Aramaic). Her life was one spent in service towards those who were less fortunate. Tabitha was committed to good works and gave alms to the poor.

Service provided is one-on-one support for such issues as teaching communication skills to deaf/blind, training congregations on how to be a welcoming and understanding church, giving families with special needs the support and provisions they require to participate with their spiritual family and providing resources for each individual circumstance that having a special need can create. Using adaptive kits to assist children with special needs for sacrament preparation. Searching for and finding families that don't have a spiritual home and helping them find one where they will thrive.

Counseling is available for families learning about the journey with special needs. Teams are being built within each parish to continue the mission and promote education among the congregation in the best way to support someone that has a special need. If you would like a speaker at your parish Mass to advance this ministry, ask your parish office to contact us at sainttabithaproject@gmail.com or contact us yourself to become a part of this vital ministry.

Our motto continues to: *Never ask a person to 'overcome their disability'. Love them because of the way God made them, not despite it.*

Office of Marriage and Family Life

Director: Deacon Justin Mitchell



One of the most beautiful events you can attend or participate in is the traditional Catholic Marriage ceremony. In order to take the vows, which are so explicitly spelled out in scripture, you must PREPARE appropriately for this most magnificent event. At this

time, if you are considering getting married at any parish in the Catholic Diocese of Biloxi, here are some steps to follow. First, contact the parish that you want to get married in. There are many Churches in the diocese, and if you are not regularly attending one, you should start by finding a church home. Secondly, are you a Catholic in good standing in the Church. Have you at least received the Catholic Sacraments of initiation, Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist? Do you believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist?

The Glorious Beauty of Catholic Marriage is that it allows the married couple to fulfill the promises of Christ and to propagate the society with the strength of a man and a woman living as one. But, in order to understand this Holy Union, marriage preparation is ESSENTIAL. There is no accident that the very first public miracle performed by Jesus was at a wedding feast. Yes, Jesus, His disciples and His mother were at a joyous celebration, and to keep the joy flowing, Jesus performed His first public miracle, the miracle of changing the water into wine. And not only that! The last words uttered by our Blessed Mother in Scripture at the wedding feast were, "Do whatever He tells you."

The best way to know what the procedures are for marriage prep is to go to the parish that you would like to get married in and ask to schedule an appointment with the priest or the deacon. There actually is a Diocesan-wide marriage prep procedure in place. If you would like to see the policy, you can actually go on the website for the Catholic Diocese of Biloxi at biloxidiocese.org and go to the tab for Family life.

Though we have a structure for marriage prep, it is not a "cookie cutter" approach. So it is important to find out what the procedure is for each parish. If you have any other questions, please contact, me, Deacon Justin Mitchell, the Director of Marriage and Family Life at (228) 702-2107.

I am sharing with you some of the "best practices and observations" made by deacons in the diocese to assist with marriage preparation.

Deacon Steve Beckham, who operates from St. Francis in Wiggins, St. Lucy in Lucedale and Holy Trinity in Leaksville States, "We have only about 5-6 marriages in the ten years I have been here. The last few the pastor took full responsibility for and only hands me problem cases. We have so little of sacramental requests around here he takes care of all of it."

Deacon Karl Koberger states, "I have only prepared one couple for marriage in my 11 years as deacon. My priest always likes to do the weddings and we have couples who do the program chosen by our pastor. The only one I did probably 10 years ago was a wedding that I celebrated at St. Thomas Catholic Church in Long Beach. I think the program is "for better forever" that a sponsor couple goes through."

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Ministries of the Catholic Diocese of Biloxi

MINISTRIES

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Deacon Sean Fink indicated this way of handling marriage prep. “We use the *Better Together* program put out by Matthew Kelly. Our priest likes to do his own *Foccus* survey. Then he contacts me and I coordinate a mentor couple for the engaged couple. I have four other couples besides Judy and I that work with the engaged couples. We usually meet five times for two hours each session.

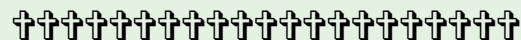
Deacon Rich Hollingsworth also has a thoughtful overview. “Every marriage prep is slightly different and cannot be looked at like a “cookie cutter.” I am in the Northern most part of the Diocese. Catholics are the minority, especially in the English-speaking community. There are many myths and false teachings in the non-Catholic communities. The couples are in “love” now, but as the new love transitions into a mature love, situations will come up where the non-Catholic might fall back on their background in problem solving. The initial interview, and the *Foccus* inventory are very useful tools. The sessions, with a married couple is another important part of Marriage prep. We use the one-on-one couple sessions, as opposed to the group sessions.

Deacon Hollingsworth continues, “Sometimes I will lend out a copy of the “*We Believe, a survey of the Catholic Faith*,” by Oscar Lukefahr, CM, (out of print now), to the non-Catholic. I emphasize that it is not for their conversion, it is so they know more about their spouses’ faith. I don’t know if it helps or not, but it will point out the false teachings about our faith. The interview after the *Foccus* inventory can be used as, not only to talk about differences in their thoughts in married life, but to show the non-Catholic feelings in different situations. Of course I cannot reveal any specifics about the *Foccus* outcome, but every once in a while, I will give the married couple a heads-up or suggest points to open up for discussion. Another thing I do, that can be a little risky, is to hold my interviews in a neutral place, many times in the home of one of them. The initial phone contact is important to help me to discern if that is a good idea, or should I keep it formal at the church office. I have found that the mixed (Catholic-non-Catholic) couple is more comfortable on their turf, so to speak, and the non-Catholic will open up more in the non-formal environment.

Another situation is a cohabitating couple deciding to get married. If they have been cohabitating for five years (with or without children) or less, I send them through the normal process, including the videos on *NFP*. Over five years, I discuss it with the pastor.”

Another great insight comes from Deacon Jerry Dubuisson. He states, “You will probably agree that this beautiful ministry has its share of challenges! At the initial meeting, engaged couples must receive clear information on what is required of them, along with agreed-upon timelines for completing specific elements. Clearly defined policies, along with accurate record-keeping throughout the marriage prep process goes a long way toward eliminating or at least reducing some of the confusion and stress that can occur. Occasionally, priests in our Diocese may (for various reasons) forego some of the marriage prep steps that the Diocese has implemented. I suppose that it is their prerogative, but others are left scrambling to properly record everything after the fact. I don’t know why this all happens, but I think that in their process of being pastoral, things get overlooked or omitted. My limited experience tells me that once the sacrament has been celebrated, getting the necessary information for documentation in parish archives is like pulling teeth. In short, if the policy is being followed and accurate documentation is being done, there’s less stress, less aggravation, less delay, and less room for error. I understand that special circumstances will arise, but even then (especially then!) good documentation must be done. From my perspective, the required steps for marriage prep in our Diocese are pretty easy to access and complete. The challenge is getting everyone on board as to how we must document everything.”

These are a variety of ideas on Marriage preparation and, as Deacon Hollingsworth stated, there is no “cookie cutter” way to get done, but it MUST get done! The deacons for the Diocese of Biloxi are talented and committed. They are very busy with other responsibilities, but the success of effective marriage preparation resides with them. If there are any issues you have questions dealing with, do not hesitate to call the Office of Marriage and Family life and we will assist you. For those non-deacons responsible for Marriage prep, you should reach out as well. God’s work is important, and as we know, the harvest is bountiful, and the laborers are few. So let’s make every moment count. God Bless you all, Deacon Justin



Office of Tribunal

Judicial Vicar: Rev. Msgr. John McGrath, J.C.L.

Director: Father Bartosz Kunat, J.C.L.



Msgr. McGrath



Father Kunat

Ecclesiastical tribunals are courts of law that operate in the name of the Church, basing their judgments on canon law. They have been in existence since the early days of the Church, and the foundations of today’s court procedures were established in the Middle Ages. The current method of operation of these courts was shaped by the reform of

the canon law code in the 20th century.

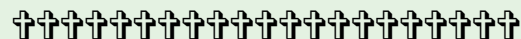
Among Church tribunals, we distinguish diocesan courts, metropolitan courts, and the highest court, the Tribunal of the Roman Rota.

Our diocesan tribunal is the court of first instance, with the bishop acting as the first judge. However, traditionally, each bishop entrusts his judicial authority to a judicial vicar, whom he appoints to ensure the proper administration of justice.

In the Diocese of Biloxi, the tribunal is headed by Msgr. John McGrath, who serves as Judicial Vicar, with Fr. Bartosz Kunat as Adjunct Judicial Vicar. They are assisted by Mrs. Donna Brown, the Moderator of the Tribunal, Deacon Steve Beckham, who serves as the Assessor in marriage nullity cases, and Father Tommy Conaway, who serves as the Defender of the Bond of Marriage.

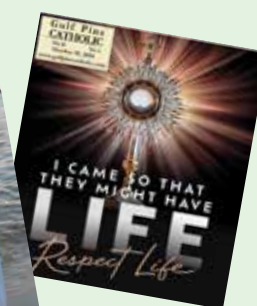
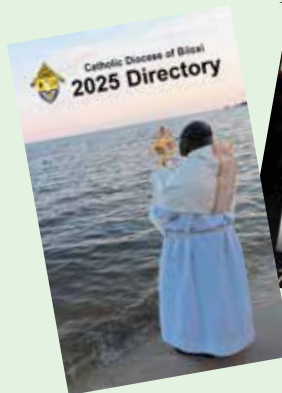
The primary focus of every Church tribunal is to issue a fair judgment grounded in Christian values of justice and mercy.

The cases heard in our diocesan tribunal primarily involve the declaration of the invalidity of a marriage. Our court is tasked with determining whether a marriage was validly or invalidly contracted.



Office of Communications

Director: Terrance P. Dickson



Since 1983, the **Office of Communications** has published the *Gulf Pine Catholic* newspaper, which is mailed to all registered Catholics twice a month. The paper is also available online.

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