

THE MAGAZINE OF THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF CROOKSTON



# NORTHLAND CATHOLIC

August 2025

BEYOND COFFEE AND DONUTS:

Small groups foster prayer,  
connection, and holiness





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Small groups foster prayer, connection, and holiness



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Most Rev.  
Andrew H. Cozzens  
Eighth Bishop of the  
Diocese of Crookston

# Lend Us Your Heart



## Living authentic community to support authentic discipleship

**I** grew up in a faithful Catholic family and am deeply grateful for my parents' witness. They not only brought me to Mass regularly and taught me the faith, but they also helped me experience the Lord's love in real, personal ways.

However, when I went to college, I struggled. I lacked friends who were intentionally living their faith and, as a result, I drifted spiritually.

That began to change in my sophomore year when my sister, serving on a NET (National Evangelization Teams) mission, came to Kansas for a youth retreat. Watching her team — young adults my age joyfully giving a year to share the Gospel — deeply moved me.

I thought, "I'm not living like that, but I should be." That moment sparked a lasting conversion.

We are not meant to live the Catholic faith alone. Jesus himself lived in a small community. He invited people to be with him and to share life with him. Following Jesus meant joining a community of brothers and sisters. When he sent out his disciples, he sent them two by two.

Jesus called us his friends and commanded us to be friends with each other: *"This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you."* (Jn 15:12-14)

Jesus modeled and encouraged the kind of love where one lays down one's life for one's friend. To live this kind of love, we must be in committed Christian relationships.

Some years ago, I read a book about how people living behind the Iron Curtain of Communism in the mid-20th century kept their faith alive. In Eastern Europe and Russia, people were persecuted for practicing their faith. The atheist Communist governments made life difficult for churchgoers.

Yet many people remained strong in their faith, even losing jobs or homes as a result. How did they do it? They belonged to small faith communities.

If you think about it, we don't truly know how strong our faith is until it is tested. Only when it costs us something do we discover how deeply we believe.

In times of hardship, all of us can be tempted to give up. That's why we need friends in the faith — people with whom we can share our struggles and who encourage us to persevere.

Friends who care even when we fail. Friends who keep us accountable to living an intentional Christian life. A small group of committed Christian friends can make all the difference.

We need good friends who know us, love us, and speak the truth to us. We need people to inspire us, pray with us, and strengthen us in difficult times.

If we want to raise children who will stand strong in today's culture, we need help forming and teaching them. We need friends — a small group who really knows us, and who will help us follow Christ even when it's hard. This kind of support has always been essential to authentic discipleship; today, it is essential simply to remain in the Church.

Thanks be to God, many of these kinds of groups already exist in the Diocese of Crookston — Bible study groups, Cursillo groups or Teams of Our Lady. For over 30 years, I've belonged to a group like this that meets monthly — first as a priest, now as a bishop.

Many of our priests also meet regularly in similar groups for fraternal support and encouragement. I'd like to invite every Catholic in the diocese to belong to such a group.

These groups are formed specifically around our shared faith. They come in many forms: some are for couples, some for men or women, some are multi-generational and others are for people with shared interests. But they all include the essential elements of authentic Christian friendship:

- **Accountability** to a shared goal of discipleship — we want to follow Christ and help each other do so.
- **Communal prayer** — inviting God into the group by praying together regularly.
- **Honest sharing of life** — a willingness to be vulnerable, to ask for help, and to support each other in life's struggles.
- **A real commitment of time** — not something we do only when it's convenient, but a regular gathering we prioritize.

What would happen if we all did this? We would be stronger in our faith. I encourage you to pray, to look around your parish and to take steps to form this kind of group.

If you want help, talk to your priest or consider making a Cursillo. There, you'll find the support you need to build the kind of Christian community that can make a lasting difference in your daily walk as a disciple. †





▲ Pastoral Center Staff faith sharing group pictured left to right: Tracy Swanson, Carol Gwin, Anna Kliner, Sharon Dufault, Renee Tate, and Beth Schauer.

# The bonds of Christ

## PASTORAL CENTER STAFF SMALL GROUP DEEPENS FAITH

BY CAROL GWIN

*“WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED  
IN MY NAME, THERE AM I IN THE MIDST  
OF THEM.” (MT 18:20)*

Working for the diocese at the Pastoral Center in Crookston, our days are filled with telephone calls, emails, calendaring, paperwork, meetings, more meetings and the endless cycle of office work. We serve the Diocese of

Crookston and all its beautiful and wonderful needs.

We view serving the Church as a part of our mission, but pretty quickly we can become focused on “the job” and forget to feed ourselves spiritually with the amazing love of Jesus.

Bishop Cozzens encourages us, as the Church, to get involved in small groups.

We have heard him speak of the fruits that come from forming small groups in our parishes, so the staff decided if we want to see growth of small groups in our diocese, we should model this activity ourselves.

On April 30, 2024, we started our first faith sharing small group at the Pastoral Center using the book *Awaken*

*My Heart* by Emily Wilson Hussem. Emily’s book centers around giving thanks and loving abundantly.

Although this is a yearly devotional for women, it can also be used by men and couples. Emily shares her personal experiences in short, practical readings, focusing her readers on the wisdom, compassion, and love of Jesus.

We use this same book in my small group from my parish in Ada with mixed



“

WE HAVE SEEN THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT FROM OUR SMALL GROUP AT THE PASTORAL CENTER. THE TIME TOGETHER HAS DEEPEDED OUR FAITH, COMMUNITY, FELLOWSHIP, TRUST, SPIRITUAL GROWTH, AND FRIENDSHIPS.

”



◀ Sharing a passage from the book.



▲ Faith sharing group shares laughter together.

couples and have found it to be fruitful in both their personal lives and in community building.

We have seen the fruits of the Holy Spirit from our small group at the Pastoral Center. The time together has deepened our faith, community, fellowship, trust, spiritual growth and friendships.

Open to all employees, we love how this is a safe place to share. It doesn't matter what position we hold or where we are in our faith journeys.

Through sharing our stories, we have learned so much about each other. We meet one day a week at lunchtime. During this time,

we share Scripture, prayer and the weekly devotion. Our discussions are filled with much laughter and sometimes even tears.

Through our small group, we listen to our co-workers and know they are listening to us. We affirm and encourage each other in the faith and our spiritual lives.

We look forward to our weekly gathering and are open to what the Holy Spirit will bring to the discussion. We do not take our time together for granted. We are grateful for the freedom and the opportunity given to us to share our faith with one another in the place where we work. †



▲ Faith sharing group gathers to dive deeper into their faith together.

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◀ Middle school girls with their group leader at the kickoff to the start of BLAZE this summer. Pictured left to right are Layla, Anna, Emmagail, Charlee and Hope.

# BE THE SPARK:

## BLAZE BUILDS COMMUNITY FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRLS

BY SYDNEY HAUS

**T**he world can be overwhelming for adults and especially young people. Everyone navigating through a sea of mixed messages about how people in society should look, act, and live can be difficult.

This is especially hard for young people who are just beginning to discover who they are and how they fit into the world. For middle school girls in Crookston, BLAZE Bible Study offers a refuge from these societal pressures.

BLAZE is rooted in the wisdom of St. Catherine of Siena's quote, *"Be who you are meant to be, and you will set the world on fire."* BLAZE helps young women discover their worth through the lens of Scripture.

Hope Bach, a religious education teacher, launched BLAZE in the summer of 2022 to fill a void created during the isolation

of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hope had heard of the BLAZE program from a fellow religious education teacher and decided to try it.

Despite its modest beginnings — only one girl attended the first summer — Hope and her co-leader decided to continue the program after seeing the profound impact on that single participant. When evaluating the program's impact, Hope said, "At first, it looked like all signs point to no, since only one student showed up. But then it was like this one student had such a good time and was just so impacted. So, we thought let's run it one more time."



▲ BLAZE member beams during a session.



Since then, BLAZE has grown steadily. By the summer of 2024, the program welcomed nine regular attendees and 23 participants overall. Hope attributes this success to the intimate, supportive environment BLAZE fosters.

Students want to come to BLAZE because it is nothing like their religious education classes, where classes are structured, strict and filled with 40 other students. BLAZE is just five to seven people sitting around in conversation.

Hope explained this discussion format allows students to ask questions without the fear of being judged with answers provided to their questions. The BLAZE format allows students to be seen, feel supported, and feel they belong to a community.

“It means to them just a place to come and belong,” she said. “The number one thing we want to get across as leaders is that you belong here, that you are good and that you are seen. I think the girls really pick up on that, because it’s more laid back and not super formal like a religious education class would be.”

This sense of belonging has tangible results. Hope has witnessed increased participation in parish activities, including youth events, religious education classes, and Mass. The girls’ faith is flourishing, and they are finding ways to feed the faith. Not only has their faith been deepened by BLAZE, but they have also begun evangelizing others by inviting their friends to attend BLAZE with them.

Be who  
you are  
meant to  
be, and  
you will  
set the  
world on  
*FIRE.*



◀ BLAZE member reads part of the bible.



Girls ask questions about the topic of the day. ▶

“The craziest part is these girls are inviting friends who aren’t even Catholic,” Hope said. “Last year, out of 23 participants, eight weren’t Catholic.”

One memorable moment happened on Halloween while Hope was giving out candy. One of the girls who came regularly to BLAZE appeared trick-or-treating with her friends. Hope then witnessed the girl turn to her eight friends and invite them to BLAZE, saying it was fun and they got to talk about Jesus.

There is a clear need for small groups in our parishes, including providing young people the opportunity to create their own communities. Hope emphasized the need to follow the model of how Jesus created the Church.


It isn’t necessary to reach 1,000 people immediately. It is better to first create a genuine connection with one person.

Once that connection is made, the two reach out and create the same connection with another person. This process is repeated until a community is created.

“It’s community,” explained Hope. “When people feel like they belong to a community that’s what makes them return. This community is the visible expression of the invisible community that we experience with Jesus in the Eucharist.”

BLAZE offers more than a Bible study — it’s a lifeline for young girls seeking connection and truth. It equips them with the knowledge and understanding to block out the lies of the world, focus on God’s love, deepen their faith, and find joy in a supportive community. Through programs like BLAZE, we’re reminded that even small groups can light a fire that spreads far and wide. †





Teams of Our Lady gather to catch up with one another's lives. ▼

# BEYOND COFFEE AND DONUTS: Small groups foster prayer, connection, and holiness

BY KATRINA GENEREUX | PHOTOGRAPHY BY COURTNEY MEYER

**S**mall groups gather in many different forms throughout the Diocese of Crookston. They can support men, women, youth, married couples and families.

Some follow a structure, others are more fluid in what they focus on; some have standards members set and hold each other accountable to. One thing they have in common is the power to help people grow in holiness, build

relationships, deepen their prayer and learn to share Christ with others.

## **Encouraged to gather together**

Last spring, in the pastoral vision — *New Life Through the Tender Compassion*

*of Our God* — Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens wrote about the important role of small groups. He asked what would happen if 10 to 20% of people in the pews, equalling about 1,000 to 2,000 people, took part in a small group.

“We need people who have committed to grow in love together, to learn to love as Christ loves. Christian community needs to go deeper than coffee and donuts after Mass. It needs to be an experience of sharing of faith, support in





struggles and laying down our lives for each other in real love,” Bishop Cozzens wrote. “My experience is that most of the time this happens in some kind of intentional small faith sharing group.”

### Praying with the guys

Mike Olson, of St. Andrew, Hawley, returned from a Cursillo weekend in February feeling called to begin a men’s small group. Cursillo provides a three-day course in Christianity.

He prayed about who to invite, and began by following a simple format: opening prayer, discussion focused on the coming Sunday’s Gospel and where they saw Christ over the past week. They also share prayer requests and close by praying together.

“Praying through the Sunday Gospel readings using *Lectio Divina* has opened my eyes and heart in a new way,” Olson said. “I’ve found that the Gospel message sticks with me longer and pops back into my mind more often. This has helped me see continuity of the Gospel readings from one Sunday to the next, and that has been impactful.”

Olson said building deeper relationships among men in the parish has been helpful.

“Many of our struggles and joys are the same, and I think we would all agree that the small group has allowed us to encourage, support and pray for each other,” Olson said.

Kelly Bisek of St. Andrew, Hawley, was apprehensive to join the men’s group when Olson invited him.

“I knew most of the men in the group, but did not know them well and felt pretty intimidated,” Bisek said. “It was a new experience for me. I have never been a part of a prayer group or Bible study; I wasn’t sure what to expect. Everyone has been very kind, and there are a lot of insightful reflections and interesting personal experiences.”

Bisek appreciates the group’s sharing of difficulties and joys.

“When we share our prayer requests it helps me remember that my neighbors oftentimes are dealing with their burdens in silence and prompts me to be more considerate of them,” Bisek said. “It also reminds me that the men in the group are dealing with their own life challenges and we all need God’s grace and strength. It’s also nice when we get to share some of the successful things that are going on in each other’s lives.”

Building connections and community while growing in holiness are some of the benefits of small groups.

“If you and I seek every day to live as authentic disciples growing in holiness; if we begin to surround ourselves with friends who are doing the same; if we begin in small groups to focus on what we can do to invite others to join us; and if we have the courage to reach out to those drifting from God or far from his Church, beautiful things will happen,”

Bishop Cozzens wrote in *New Life*.

Tom Schaefer of St. Bernard, Thief River Falls, has experienced this through involvement in a Cursillo men’s group for about 10 years. He began with a group that met at St. Joseph, Red Lake Falls, then helped build a group in Thief River Falls that has now split into two groups.

“It really started with Cursillo. We invite anyone who would want to come in and group, but once they start the group and hear about Cursillo and what Cursillo is all about, I would say there might be a couple guys who didn’t go to Cursillo, but almost all, about 95% do,” said Schaefer. “When guys



St. Andrew, Hawley Bible Study. Pictured (l to r): Matt Cook, Cody Aldinger, Mikel Olson, and Kelly Bisek. ▼



come out of the three-day short course in Christianity, they're usually on fire with the Holy Spirit and they look forward to group."

He said Cursillo attendees are usually advised to find a small group to meet with and continue the prayer and growth they've experienced during the weekend.

"I'm so blessed that in both groups there are some great holy men there that I have deep friendships with and I would trust them with anything," Schaefer said. "Often if I need prayers, I can drop a text to the group of 16 guys and within minutes I'll have four, five, six guys responding that they're praying for me."

Schaefer said 10 years ago he was searching for more.

"I was starting to listen to Real Presence Radio and just knew that I needed to turn toward the Lord. I was looking for something more than I could find out there in the secular world," he said.

He was born and raised Catholic by parents who had great faith, but had slipped away.

"I knew that I just needed to turn back to the Lord," Schaefer said.

About that time he was invited to join the men's group.

"It was tough; it was a little strange for me. I didn't know these guys that well. It didn't take long, though; after two or



▲ Teams of Our Lady, gathered around in prayer. Pictured (l-r): Rob and Pat Vanyo, Lynn and Eric Glatt, Terese and Steve Schaefer, and Loren and Dana Haagenson.

three group sessions with them I felt very comfortable," he said.

The groups follow a Cursillo reunion format. They talk about what steps they took toward spiritual growth, when they were aware of Christ's presence, what they've been reading or studying, the actions they've taken to bring Christ to family and the community around them and what

they are planning to do the next week. They also pray together.

The accountability from and examples of the other men have been key to Schaefer's growth in faith.

"One of the things we ask each other each week is when is the last time you've been to confession," Schaefer said. "When you have five or six other men around you that said they've been in the last week or two, and it's been a month or two for me, I say to myself, 'You better get there.' We hold each other accountable. You rise up to a different level."

He said this accountability is based on trust.

"I had one of the guys in the group look at me and say, 'You know what, Tom? You need to get to confession.' We have that much respect for each other that we can say that to each other and no one gets offended," Schaefer said. "I know when he said that to me, he meant it. He wanted me to get to confession to maybe help me get through some of the issues I was having."

Discipleship and accountability are key benefits of meeting in small groups and building relationships on trust and a mutual desire for closeness to Christ.

In *New Life*, Bishop Cozzens wrote, "Discipleship is sustained and supported through intentional relationships, often



Teams of Our Lady members prepare for dinner. ▼





▲ Teams of Our Lady members join in silent prayer.

in the accompaniment that happens through small groups. The Christian life was never meant to be lived alone.”

### Teams of Our Lady supports married couples

Dana and Loren Haagenson of St. Joseph, Moorhead, have found support as a married couple by belonging to a Teams of Our Lady group. They have been married 34 years and said they became more involved in the parish as their three daughters grew, while helping with faith formation and Mass ministries.

Their first experience of small groups was through family faith sharing groups when their children were little. They met with other families during Advent and Lent, sharing meals and fellowship.

“As our kids got older, we got to a stage of life where those family faith sharing groups weren’t feasible for us anymore,” Dana said.

Ten years ago, they were invited to learn about Teams of Our Lady, what the expectations and responsibilities are, and how the groups operate. They decided to join a team and were placed with other couples from St. Joseph parish.

“Teams of Our Lady started in France in 1947 with four couples who wanted to work on their marriage and grow in faith in their marriage. It’s worldwide

now,” Dana said. “There’s over 10,000 teams in the world and 700 in the United States, and so the mission is to bring together Christian couples and help us grow deeper in our faith through the Sacrament of Matrimony.”

Their team of six couples meets monthly for about three hours, rotating host homes among group members. Each team has a priest, deacon or religious as a spiritual director. Father Vincent Miller is part of the Haagenson’s team.

Each gathering follows a structure of socializing and a pot luck meal that includes a prayer and a topic introduced by a group member, giving everyone a chance to share. Then there is a time of prayer and Scripture, chances to discuss any struggles people are having, reporting on endeavors and prayer petitions. There is also time for discussion of spiritual reading the group does before each meeting. They close their gatherings by praying the Magnificat.

Each couple agrees to work on what are called endeavors together throughout the month.

“Endeavors are things as a couple we endeavor to incorporate into our lives, so there’s daily personal prayer, but also daily conjugal prayer as a couple,” said Dana.

She said praying together as a couple was not something they were used to doing.

“We both had our own personal prayer time but not as a couple. We weren’t as comfortable with that. That was new,” she said.

“We weren’t really good at conjugal prayer other than at meals and things like that,” said Loren. “That has really been a powerful takeaway for me, being able to share prayer with my wife and connect with her on a different level than I did before.”

As part of Teams of Our Lady, they also endeavor to do regular reading and reflection on Scripture, follow a personal rule of life, attend an annual retreat as a couple and do a monthly sit down to discuss where they are spiritually.

Teams of Our Lady has strengthened their marriage and faith.

“Both of us have been to Cursillo and grouping with Cursillo, so both of us have had that individual opportunity for

faith sharing and growing, but we hadn’t really had that opportunity as a couple to grow in our faith as a couple,” Dana said. “That’s what we really see as the value of Teams is taking that experience of growing in our faith together to strengthen our marriage.”

Dana and Loren also see Teams of Our Lady as a way to evangelize.

“Our kids see this because it is in our home. A few times a year we’re the host. There’s a priest always with us and these other couples, and we’re sitting around our living room talking about our faith and praying,” Dana said.

She said her oldest daughter is married and she and her husband are making it a priority to gather with other Catholic couples.

“We’re much more comfortable talking about our faith,” Dana said. “The more we share in groups, the more confident and comfortable we feel sharing our own witness with others.”

“It supports spiritual growth in others because they see what’s happening. We’ve had other friends that have joined teams after we did,” Loren said. “They joined another team and met parishioners from across the area.”

Dana said other friends were considering Teams of Our Lady, but they moved to Detroit Lakes before becoming involved in Moorhead. She said they were part of getting it started at Holy Rosary in Detroit Lakes, which now has two teams. †



◀ For more information about Cursillo, go to [crookstoncursillo.weebly.com](http://crookstoncursillo.weebly.com).



◀ For more information about Teams of Our Lady, visit [www.teamsofourlady.org](http://www.teamsofourlady.org).



◀ Do you have a small group in the Diocese of Crookston? We’d love to hear about it. Scan the QR code to let us know.



# Walking the road of discernment *together*

BY SARAH EFFHAUSER



▲ Westin Gourneau, a Diocese of Crookston seminarian, speaks at a Melchizedek group meeting.

## Melchizedek

“Melchizedek provided a place where I could share my experiences with others going through those same experiences,” reflected Will Zavoral, a student from the Sacred Heart School Class of 2025, as he looks back on his time walking together in discernment and brotherhood with young men from his school.

Father John Wilebski, associate pastor and chaplain for Sacred Heart School, East Grand Forks, leads this group of young men in discernment and fraternity, using The Melchizedek Project as a guide. The group meets monthly during the school day and has been doing so for eight years.

While the groups have changed over the years, the premise remains the same: brothers gathering together to walk with each other on their faith journey.

“Melchizedek brings together young men from different social groups that might not normally hang out,” Father John explained. “Our time spent together allows them to grow in fraternity and see other young men who are open to discerning vocations. This gives them the courage and security to be open as well.”

Zavoral continued, “This group helped me grow in my relationship with God in so many ways. It also helped me learn more about what a priest does and what that road looks like. This group has helped me keep my faith strong and given me a support group that helped me during all the ups and downs of life.”

When asked what he feels is the most impactful part of the Melchizedek small group, Father John said, “One of the beautiful parts of Melchizedek is checking in with one another. Having each young man share a high, low, and



Will Zavoral ▶



grace from their last month allows the group to see how the Lord has been working in their lives since we've last met. Sharing that among the brothers is inspiring."

Accompaniment is a key part of this group gathering. "Because the group is gathering year over year, there is a level of accompaniment happening among the brothers, and they've been able to see how others have grown in their faith," Father John said.

"Father Matt Schmitz and Father John, from Sacred Heart, East Grand Forks, reached out to me and asked if I would join the girls in an Avow group," Johnson explained. "It feels so beautiful just watching the Lord work on my heart and how he has brought me to where I am today. One of the joys in my life is really being able to kind of sit and talk with these girls about what God has planned for them."

Bella Effhauser, a recent graduate of Sacred Heart School, East Grand Forks, is the oldest of six children in an active Catholic family.

Even though she always had an idea of what discernment was, Avow helped her understand more fully.

"I've always grown up with an idea of discernment, like what it is and how to discern your vocation and follow the Lord's plan for you," Effhauser shared.

"But it wasn't until I got into Avow that I really understood how the Lord works and how his plan is what is best. Next year, I'm going to the University of Mary to study theology and Catholic studies. So, we'll see where that takes me after I graduate."

Meeting monthly during the school year, the Sacred Heart Avow group consists of 16 young women, from freshmen to seniors in high school, who desire to dive deeper into discernment and support one another in that journey.

## Avow

Originally from Moorhead, Cassandra Johnson has worked for the Diocese of Crookston for three years. The University of Mary alumna with a degree in psychology grew up in a Catholic family and was inspired by the Lord to work for his church, specifically in relational ministry, after college.

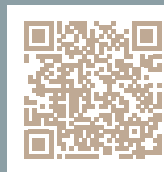
◀ Bella Effhauser



▲ Avow



▲ The Melchizedek Project



◀ Interview on Real Presence Live with Cassandra Johnson and Bella Effhauser

"Sister Claire Mathias, from the Community of the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal, wrote a book about discerning religious life. The group is meant to use the book as a guide, but Avow isn't a program to convince young women to become religious sisters," Johnson clarified. "I think that's a real misconception. Really Avow, the group that Bella and I are part of, exists to help women seek happiness in pursuing God's perfect will for them. Through Avow, we are able to give these girls a safe space to discern where the Lord is calling their hearts."

Although Effhauser attended Catholic school for the entirety of her schooling years, she still did not have much exposure to religious life.

"I have been raised Catholic my entire life, but I have not had a lot of exposure to religious life," she admitted. "I know who they are, but I don't know them personally. Through our Avow group, we're just able to openly talk about religious life and discuss what it truly is, because there are a lot of unknowns. You don't always

know the process or how it works, and it can vary from order to order. Avow helps make the idea of religious life more of a mainstream idea and getting it out there to just be open to talking about it."

## Building community through discernment

Both the Melchizedek and Avow groups offer young people an opportunity to dive deeper into the idea of discerning their vocation, but it is more than that. These small groups offer youth a chance to build community with one another — a community that supports and encourages each person to be a disciple of Jesus.

"Learning more about your faith and being able to bring that to the other areas of my life has been so impactful," Effhauser reflected. "The community that we've built with the other girls in the group is so beautiful; it's so faithful, and you're able to lean on each other with ideas. Discernment is a long winding road, but it is important that you have people to walk that road with, and the girls in Avow have become those people for me." †



# POPE LEO XIV

**FIRST  
AMERICAN  
POPE AND  
FIRST  
AUGUSTINIAN  
FRIAR**



CNS photo/Vatican Media



**C**ardinal Robert Francis Prevost was elected as the 267th head of the Catholic Church on May 8, 2025. He took the name Leo XIV, which is a reference to Leo XIII and the social doctrine of the Church. Pope Leo XIII issued his *Rerum Novarum* encyclical in 1891; focused on the dignity of work and dignity of the worker, it is considered the first social encyclical of the Church.

His first words to the world were: “Peace be with all of you!”

He went on to say: “Peace be with you! Dearest brothers and sisters, this was the first greeting of the risen Christ, the Good Shepherd who gave his life for the flock of God. I, too, would like this greeting of peace to enter your hearts, to reach your families and all people, wherever they are; and all the peoples, and all the earth: Peace be with you.”

His blessing to those watching from St. Peter’s Square and around the world ended with the recitation of the Hail Mary.

The largest-ever conclave which elected Pope Leo lasted just over 24 hours and consisted of 133 cardinals. Only members of the College of Cardinals under the age of 80 are allowed to vote. The College of Cardinals now includes men from countries who never before had a voice in a papal election. Diversity in the Church was important to Pope Francis, and he ensured this was reflected in the men he appointed as cardinals during the 12 years of his pontificate.



## DID YOU KNOW?

- For most of the first century, popes used their given names.
- In the 6th century Roman Mercurius chose the name John II because he had been named for a pagan god.
- In the 11th century, the practice of adopting a new name became standard after a series of German popes chose the names of early Church bishops in an expression of unity with the Universal Church.
- For many centuries popes chose the name of the pope who had elevated them to cardinal, with John being the most popular (23 popes) followed by Benedict and Gregory (16 each).
- Beginning in the mid-20th century, new popes began to choose names indicating the focus of their papacy.

Source: France 24 with AP



▲ Pope Leo XIV, the former Cardinal Robert F. Prevost, waves to the crowds in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican after his election as pope May 8, 2025. The new pope was born in Chicago. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

## THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT POPE LEO XIV

- ▶ Robert Francis Prevost was born in 1955 in Chicago. He has two brothers. His father was a World War II Navy veteran and school superintendent and his mother was a librarian.
- ▶ He earned a BS degree in mathematics from Villanova University in 1977 before pursuing his religious vocation.
- ▶ He finished secondary studies at the minor seminary of the Augustinians in Michigan in 1973. In 1977 he became a member of the Order of St. Augustine and took his solemn vows in 1981.
- ▶ He completed a master of divinity at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and earned a licentiate and doctorate in canon law from the Pontifical College of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome.
- ▶ He served in Peru from 1985 to 1998, working as a parish pastor, seminary teacher and diocesan official. He was also part of the leadership of Caritas Peru, the Church’s charitable organization.
- ▶ After being elected the head of the Augustinian Province of Chicago, he returned to the U.S. in 1999. He was elected prior general of the Augustinians in 2001 and then reelected in 2007, serving as head of the order until 2013.
- ▶ Pope Francis appointed him apostolic administrator and then bishop of the Diocese of Chiclayo, Peru, in 2014 and 2015.
- ▶ He was made a cardinal by Pope Francis on Sept. 30, 2023.
- ▶ While serving the Church in Peru, Francis made him a member of the Dicastery for the Clergy in 2019 and then a member of the Dicastery for Bishops in 2020. In 2023, Francis made him prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops.
- ▶ He speaks multiple languages, including English, Spanish, Italian, French, and Portuguese.
- ▶ His episcopal motto is *In illo uno unum*, which means “In the one Christ we are one.”

▼  
**He was  
ordained  
a priest  
in 1982.**

Source: CNA/Francesca Pollio Fenton, May 9, 2025





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