

THE

Bridge

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A Spiritual Awakening
at St. Moses the Black



“Ever ancient, ever new.”

There’s a reason why this oft-quoted phrase from St. Augustine’s Confessions seems to resonate so well with respect to the Catholic tradition throughout the centuries. The Holy Spirit enlivens the Church in myriad places and times, drawing varied cultures and generations into relationship with Jesus Christ. Those relationships are revealed on parishioners’ faces and chiseled into church facades.

In the following pages you’ll see examples of how that revitalization is being encountered and engaged by our students and alumni.

Chicago seminarians Matt Duff and Ben Anderson share how they have discovered new ways of envisioning their future lives as parish priests. Matt found a depth of faith, worship, and community life he had never experienced before when he began his Tolton Teaching Parish assignment at St. Moses the Black on Chicago’s south side. St. Moses itself represents a parochial phoenix of sorts, having grown up out of the integration of multiple previous parishes.

Ben is pursuing formation for providing ministry to the deaf, of which there is a great need throughout the universal Church. He is taking on extensive training, above and beyond the rigorous preparation required of all priesthood candidates, to follow this unique vocation-within-a-vocation to which he has been called.

Through processes that are both challenging and joyful, the Spirit is building grace-filled communities that now provide invaluable formation for our students (both seminarians and lay ministry candidates) that could not be duplicated anywhere else.

Our School of Parish Leadership and Evangelization (SPLE) is enjoying the fruits of new leadership under Dean Rita George-Tvrtković. Her many gifts are helping us to realize our vision of bringing accessible formation in parish ministry and administrative leadership to as wide a population as possible. Masters of Arts in Liturgical Studies candidate Haley Henry, from the Diocese of San Bernardino, bears powerful witness to this dynamic as she prepares to bring new liturgical formation to her home parish and diocese.

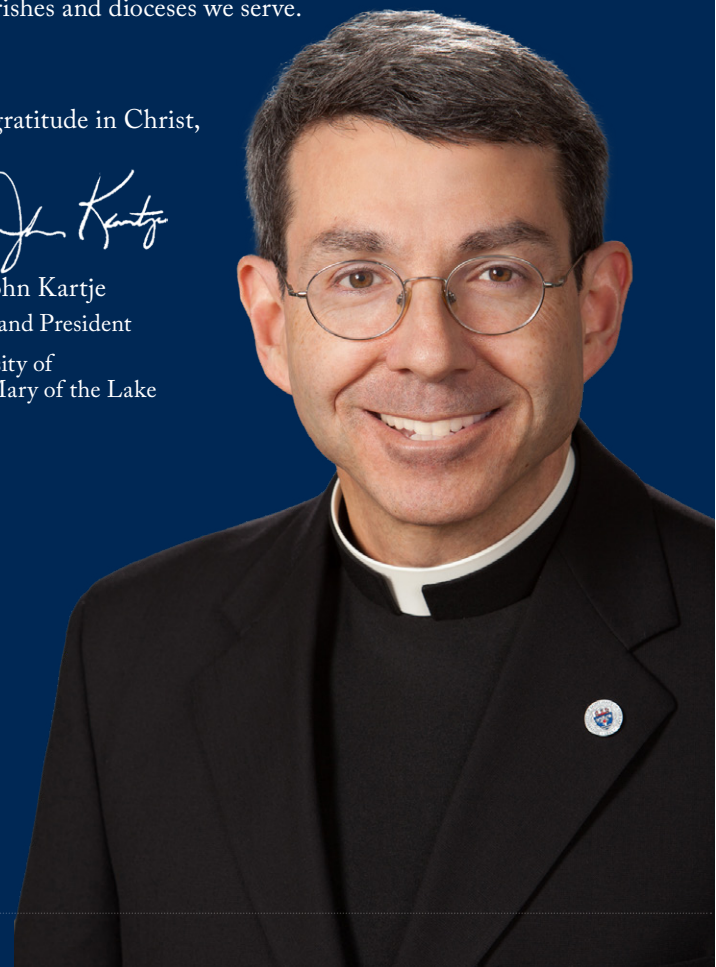
At the level of episcopal shepherding, Mundelein Seminary is proud to acknowledge several of our alumni now serving as recently-installed or ordained bishops and archbishops across the country. These include Archbishop Michael McGovern in the Archdiocese of Omaha, Bishop Dennis Spies in the Diocese of Joliet, and Archbishop Ronald Hicks in the Archdiocese of New York. I have had the privilege of serving with both Bishop Spies and Archbishop Hicks on the Mundelein faculty and I know how well served the people of Joliet and New York will be by these outstanding pastors. You will learn more about their journeys in the following pages.

The Church has never ceased to validate the enduring insight of Augustine’s simple phrase. The eternal “newness” of Christ’s love is strikingly evident today at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake—not only on our campus, but especially within the parishes and dioceses we serve.

With gratitude in Christ,

Fr. John Kartje

Rev. John Kartje
Rector and President
University of
Saint Mary of the Lake



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A Spiritual Awakening at St. Moses the Black

BY MATTHEW DUFF III | DISCIPLESHIP 2 | ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

In January of 2024 I went on my poverty immersion during my spirituality year. I was sent to Washington D.C. to stay with the Missionaries of Charity at a hospice and end of life care home they run. The work consisted of cleaning, showering, clothing, feeding, praying and being with the poorest of the poor. These were men who could not care for themselves.

What I witnessed there was that many of the men who entered that house were irreligious and after months or years of being there they would convert almost to a man. The sisters were not forcing the faith on them, but rather their love and care for men who had not received love from the society around them transformed their lives. All this is to say that this experience began to change me. I left with a strong love of the poor, which had not been there previously, and my new love caused me to have many burning questions.

I, a native Chicagoan, looked at the south and west sides of the city: Neighborhoods that had never recovered from white flight and subsequent neglect 75 years later. I wondered to myself and to God: If I wandered in there, and like the Missionaries of Charity, loved them and preached the Gospel what would happen?

Would I be laughed out of there for not offering social service? Would anyone even listen?

My own family had attended church at Presentation just south of the Eisenhower between Independence and Pulaski until the mid-50s when they moved to Westchester. That area had been all Irish but with changing demographics and lower attendance the church closed in the 80s. Now there is no Catholic church in that area to speak of. Why did the Church not make a greater effort to stay? Why was a concentrated effort not continued to convert the new African American residents of that area? And this same narrative played itself out across the south and rest of the west side. I had more questions than answers!

These questions and a deeper desire to go to the areas of our diocese that seemed to me as underserved and under loved continued to grow. In discussing with priests familiar with the areas and explaining my growing desire, they told me that if I felt the pull to explore this there is but one place to go, St. Moses the Black.

After the poverty immersion with the Missionaries of Charity, I also came back with a desire to experience an authentically African American parish in Chicago. I had never been to one growing up and, ashamedly, I could not even name or direct you to one. As a result of my request, we went one Sunday to St. Moses the Black Parish on 71st and Calumet in the Park Manor neighborhood of Chicago for Mass and I was blown away. What I felt was that every single person there participated in

the liturgy, from the greeter welcoming us and explaining the readings we would hear, to the excellent choir which led us in worship, to the OCIA candidates in the front of the church eager to be welcomed into such a vibrant community. I really felt that the Holy Spirit was present in the Mass. Something about the reckless abandon with which everyone seemed to give themselves to the Mass left me feeling like I had never really celebrated the Mass fully. Not in this way anyway. I left the church onto the streets of what I knew to be a dangerous neighborhood, but in light of the Mass we just celebrated, I felt like nothing bad could ever happen on that block.

Fast forward another year: my priest friends finally convinced me that St. Moses the Black was the place to answer the Holy Spirit's invitation to serve in the diocese's underserved areas. I emailed the pastor, Fr. Matt O'Donnell, explained my situation and desire. He said he had felt a similar pull in his own time in seminary and a summer at the Black Catholic parish of St. Albie's convinced him that God was calling him to serve in the Black Catholic community. He welcomed me to stay the summer at the parish with open arms.

Just after the 2025 ordinations, I moved into the parish on May 21st. I was excited for this next new adventure and to test the Spirit. Was God calling me to see something for the summer and be enriched by the experience or to stay with some level of permanence? My only desire was to be with the people, learn as much as I could, and in my own small way let them know by my presence that

I, a Chicago seminarian representing the archdiocese in my own little way, loved them.

What I was not ready for was how loved I would be in return. Upon arriving at the parish, I learned that Father Matt had put a little blurb in the bulletin announcing my arrival: that I was a native Chicagoan seminarian who desired to have the Black Catholic experience, and to that effect, I would be staying the whole summer at the parish in the rectory. Right off the bat people were ecstatic I was there and very welcoming. One of the parish's espoused tenets is radical hospitality, and I felt it immediately. People flooded up to me after Mass and thanked me for coming and were so happy I was there. I joked with them that they were over-enthused. I could be a dud after all! They expressed how few Chicagoans voluntarily came to the parish from the Archdiocese and what a difference it made to them that I wanted to be there. I was family already as far as they were concerned. And the hospitality didn't end with me. Every Mass has multiple "name-tagged" ushers welcoming you in, providing bulletins and thanking you for coming. But even the rank-and-file parishioners are the same. Anytime someone new would come, including if I brought friends to see where I was for the summer, they would face a smiling queue of parishioners eager to meet the newcomers. People who have found a home at a parish are always happy to invite and welcome others to join them.

The hospitality ministry is of course one of many ministries at St. Moses the Black. There is Balm in Gilead (BIG)

which is a bereavement and suffering support group, there is the food pantry serving hundreds of families two times each week, the athletic center employing 30 local highschoolers and allowing hundreds of kids to play in the basketball and volleyball leagues year round, Alpha, summer scripture school, Bible studies, Knights of Peter Claver, the Lady's Auxiliary of the Knights of Peter Claver and on and on. If you want to be a part of something, this parish has it, and the results speak for themselves. Many parishioners take part in multiple ministries to the point that they are at the parish most days.

but also the various ministries. They found their hearts softened and allowing their wounds to be healed, and professed they came to love their new parish. A common refrain was "I was angry but there is too much good here to ignore and now it's home!"

Yes, Moses the Black has many ministries, yes it has created a culture of hospitality, but ultimately what makes this parish special is the people itself. What I have learned is that Black Catholics, in an extraordinary way, are open to Christ in every aspect and every moment of their life—more than I have found in any other group, parish,

agreed the seventh-grade girl didn't need us on the panel. She spoke with such conviction about how her love of Christ ordered her whole life and was able to extol adults 3 times her age to continue to pursue sanctity. With a little Teresa of Avila speaking next to me I wondered why they thought I was needed on the panel ha!

Black Catholics are warm, inviting, good natured, ready to joke, deeply faithful, and as forgiving as Christ. I thought many times about how I wish I could bottle up whatever the Black Catholic experience consisted of and ship it to the universal church en masse. I can

The Holy Spirit was present in the Mass!

The ministries have done more than just keep people engaged at the parish, but also have been a source of healing. St. Moses the Black like many other parishes in the Archdiocese of Chicago is a combination of former parishes St. Clotilde, St. Dorothy, and St. Columbanus. When the former parishes merged and closed to form St. Moses the Black, many people were hurt by the process and or its results. Many people I talked to vowed that when the merger happened, they would never go to the "new" parish that closed theirs. They'd either go to a different Catholic church or stop going altogether. Yet through the many ministries and hospitality of the parishioners they not only found themselves attending Mass at St. Moses

or cultural context as a generalization. If you want to pray about anything at anytime they are ready. If you want to sing, praise, and worship, now is as good a time as any. If you want someone to witness to their faith and what Christ has done in their life even the grade school children are ready to do so. In one instance I was asked to be on a panel for a Sunday family faith formation afternoon. This is where whole families come down to Wilson Hall (the school hall), share a meal, and then receive ongoing faith formation. They asked me to discuss the priestly vocation, a religious sister to discuss hers, a married woman for marriage, and then a seventh-grade girl showcasing starting out on choosing a vocation. By the end of the talk we all

confidently say that I have never been to a more Catholic parish in my life. After only 3 weeks there I felt like I had found a home. I wasted no time in asking the seminary to make it my teaching parish so I could continue to return on a regular basis to which they quickly assented. When the end of the summer approached multiple parishioners asked when I would be leaving. I told them that I would not as I had made it my teaching parish. Many of them said the same thing. "Good, you belong here". I couldn't think of a better compliment such a good, loving, and holy people could give me. Would that all our parishes had even a little of what St. Moses the Black exhibits.





In Communion with Leo, Our Pope

A Pope from Chicago, a Pope for the World

BY KARLO LEONOR | DISCIPLESHIP 1 | ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

On May 8, 2025, I was sitting in the classroom of the Bishop Quarter House next to Chicago's Holy Name Cathedral, taking my usual Thursday class on Sacred Scripture. Along with the rest of the Catholic world, my nine seminarian brothers and I were on "Pope Watch," awaiting the results of the ongoing conclave to elect the new leader of the Catholic Church. Unlike everyone else, we had no access to phones, computers, or television – a feature of the Propaedeutic Stage of seminary, the first year of formation – so there was no opportunity for a minute-by-minute refresh of news sites or social media apps to satisfy our impatience and curiosity.

At the start of class, our teacher propped up his iPhone before him and assured us that he would tell us if white smoke appeared from the Sistine Chapel. During class, each glance he took toward the phone was a tension-filled moment as we anticipated the news. Studying the Word of God is its own adventure, but doing so at such a moment in the life of the Church was unparalleled. I felt like we were living a bit of what the apostles experienced in the Upper Room as they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. As Providence would have it, partway through the lecture a glance and our teacher's face said it all and class was dismissed. Thousands of miles away in Rome, white smoke wafted from a chimney; from a basement classroom in downtown Chicago, we rejoiced that God had given us a new Holy Father.

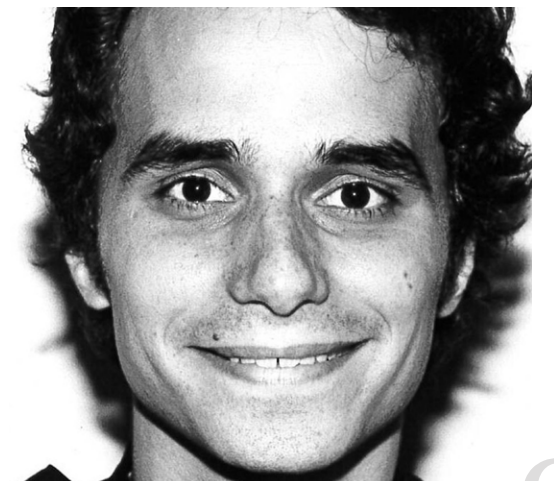
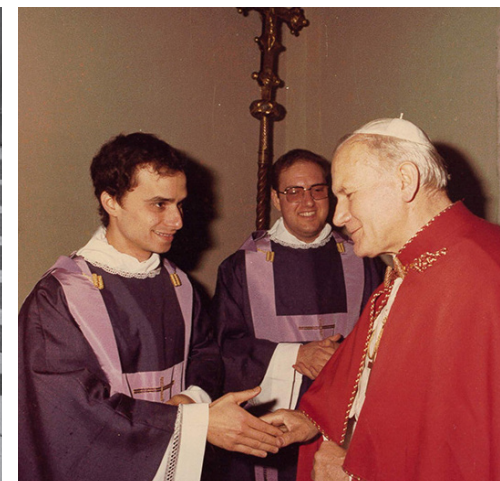
Upon news of the new pope, the "tech fast" was lifted, and television privileges were restored. We promptly left the classroom and turned on the news coverage in the living room. Other priest residents of the house joined us, and the excitement mounted as we speculated about the pope's identity. Days prior a list of cardinal electors was posted in the hallway of our house, and like everyone else, we prayed and wondered at the names. Who is he? Where is he from? What is he like? Why him?

Apparently, the Holy Spirit wanted us to grow in the virtue of patience, as his name had not been announced by the time we needed to leave for Mass at the Cathedral next door. We left the television and headed to church knowing we had a pope but not who he was. The wait continued well into Mass. The Word of God was proclaimed, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist was offered. The celebrant asked the Lord in the Eucharistic Prayer that the Church throughout the world might be brought "to the fullness of charity, together with our Pope," nameless as he was to us at the moment.

In due time, we heard his name, saw his face, and listened to his voice from the loggia of the Vatican Basilica. Before the conclave, he was considered a lesser known papabile, the term for a likely or possible candidate to be elected pope. But to us Americans – and to us Chicagoans specifically – he is eminently familiar, even if we have never met him.

As we approach the first anniversary of the election of Robert Francis Prevost as Pope Leo XIV and the 267th shepherd of the Catholic Church, we can marvel at our communion with him, not only as his spiritual children but as fellow humans who share so much with him. We are struck by his Midwestern accent and see in his face the immigrant nature of our nation. He wears an Apple Watch and speaks English publicly more than any other pope in history. Thanks to interviews with his brothers, parishioners, and colleagues, we know about his upbringing on the southside of Chicago, his college days at Villanova, missionary work around the world, and life as an Augustinian and bishop. He enjoys Peeps marshmallows. His favorite Thanksgiving dish is stuffing. Just months before his election, parishioners ran into him at a Lowe's hardware store. By now, his allegiance to the White Sox is well known, as well as his devotion to the southside Chicago establishment Aurelio's Pizza. In a general audience in Rome, a newly married couple approached the pope to receive a blessing. The groom said to him, "Holy Father, you've had more hotdogs than any pope in history." And without missing a beat Leo replied, "Only with mustard!"

Moments after Leo was introduced to the world from a balcony in Rome, the bells of Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago rang with joy. A successor of Saint Peter was chosen from our midst, from our neighborhood, from our streets. A son of Chicago had become a father for us all. Indeed, we were glad.





Faith & Bamboo: A Mission to Piura

BY GREGORY WILK | CONFIGURATION 1 |
ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

During my visit to Piura, Peru, January 2025, I reunited with the Santos Ruiz family, whom I had met the year before when I first traveled there as part of the annual seminary mission trip.

This family has five children: three of their own and two adopted girls. When the mother of the two girls passed away, they were adopted by their mother's sister and welcomed into the family's home.

One of the seminarians and I drove a van to the home, located 30 minutes outside Piura's city center in the poor Monte Castillo neighborhood. As we approached their home, the children saw us and became excited, waving to us and running alongside the van. They remembered me because I had delivered Christmas gifts to them when I met them last year.

We stopped just outside the house and were greeted by the children and their parents. I was happy to see that the five children were healthy, happy and noticeably taller after one year. The family lives in a two-room bamboo home built by seminarians during a previous mission trip. A sign above the entrance shows the name of the American family who sponsored the construction. We prayed with the family, thanking God for the blessings in their lives, including the generous donors they remember every day.

Exceeding our Goal

Our mission team included 16 seminarians, focused on housing and supporting a local girls' orphanage. Through letters sent to family, friends, and parishioners, the team raised \$32,000—far exceeding our \$8,000 goal.

With these funds, Santísimo Sacramento Parish built 38 bamboo houses, like Santos Ruiz's home. We personally constructed seven of these houses during our trip, and the remaining houses were built by parish staff and subsequent volunteer groups.

The generous donations made this work possible, and I am extremely blessed to have shared in the joy and gratitude of the Peruvian families as they moved into their new homes. I wish others could have been there to experience their joy and hear their expressions of gratitude. I hope that what I write about our trip will touch other hearts and souls. I have so many new thoughts to share about the circumstances of the poor, the beauty in their lives, and the Beatitudes.

A Miraculous Answer

Part of the proceeds from donations, \$6,600, was gifted to the girls' home, which is managed and directed by the nuns, Hogar Madre del Redentor. The funds will support the home in providing care and educational materials for the girls who are there because they otherwise would be at risk for abuse and human trafficking.

During both of our visits, last year and this year, we've all had a lot of fun meeting with the young students. They performed traditional Peruvian theater and invited us to participate in their group dances. We also enjoyed meeting their talking parrot named 'Pepe' that yells, "HOLA PEPE" when it's not receiving enough attention.

This year, however, we had a more serious purpose for our visit to the orphanage, as we would offer financial support from your donations. I was honored to present the check to the Mother Superior following Mass. She told us that the nuns had been praying for two months for a large donation, and exclaimed, "This donation is a miraculous answer to our prayers!"

When I returned to my pew, a girl named Angela was sitting near me, in tears, saying how thankful she was. Although they are only teenagers, these girls understand how much they need this support for their subsistence. In this situation, the Church is a father to these girls, and I am sharing with you a sense of fatherly pride and happiness that I felt when visiting the orphanage.

Vibrant Community

We spent many days in poor neighborhoods while building homes. I was shocked by my first impressions. The two-room houses, dirt roads, litter, and the absence of plumbing seemed more like a refugee camp than a community. I wondered how anyone could live here and be happy.

I said to myself, "It must change!"

However, as I spent more time there, I noticed the vibrancy of a thriving neighborhood, despite its appearance. Kids were playing together at the corner parks with simple see-saws. Seniors gathered on their porches playing cards. Every afternoon, someone on the block would start playing music, and adults would gather at their house for fellowship. This was not a neighborhood that needed wholesale change; it was a community of happy people with some individuals who needed help from their global Church.

There is little material wealth or material beauty in these neighborhoods. The house roofs are corrugated metal over dusty floors with thatch walls. Only the front wall is wood laminate. Yet, despite the absence of material beauty, another subliminal beauty can be seen: the human person and the Church.

The children are clean and dressed nicely, and they happily run around. They are the pride of their parents. Many parents marry young, at age 15 or 16, and consequently have many children.

I remember one day we brought donated clothes to the local chapel, driving around the neighborhood shouting, "Ropa en la Capilla, ropa en la Capilla..." to let people know of the clothes drop-off.

Over the next two hours, about 75 mothers formed a line to receive the clothing while their children played soccer. We hosted art classes and inflated balloons for the children while the moms chatted in line. Some of my balloons popped close to the faces of the children waiting nearby as I blew them up. Many moms laughed, but some were impatient, and some pulled their children away, concerned that their children

might become frightened or get hurt by exploding balloons. I was a bit humbled but also amused by the full spectrum of human emotion in its reaction to a foreigner, namely me.

Two nights later, we returned to their area to celebrate Mass in their chapel. This is an infrequent occurrence because there are about 25 chapels throughout the area that belong to the parish, and the parish has only two priests. Fortunately, two Mundelein seminary priests came with us on this trip, so the celebration of Mass in the neighborhood's chapel was feasible. We were met with welcome signs and much fanfare. In front of me sat two teenage mothers who were friends, each with their first child, singing loudly and clearly thrilled with their new babies. Neither had aspirations for increasing their prosperity, but they had joy and hope in abundance.

Looking across the horizon of the neighborhoods, you see that they are devoid of beauty. Rusted roofs, clothes hung out to dry, and persistent dust tempered the equatorial sun. But then your eyes settle on the local chapel. It is the tallest structure around and is significantly distinct from the surrounding beige homes with its pastel colors and classical architecture. Father Joe Uhen has been building similar chapels in these poor neighborhoods for over 30 years, each for about \$100,000.

I wondered if the money would be better spent on upgrading the people's houses? However, the people's pride in these chapels convinced me that denying them their place of worship would be a greater injustice. St. Peter, our first pope, says, "Our faith is more precious than gold." [1 Peter 1:7]

Jesus says, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." [Luke 6:20] I think the poor are blessed because it is so much easier for them to give their attention to God and to see his providence. When you live in some of these poor parts of Peru, there is less material beauty to compete with the beauty of God and family. Thus, family bonds are precious, and people worship God from the depths of their souls because they have learned to depend on Him and to see His beauty.



From Formation to Fullness of the Priesthood: A Conversation with Bishop Spies



BY BLAKE RIFFEL | CONFIGURATION 3 | DIOCESE OF DAVENPORT

Bishop Dennis Spies' connections to our community run deep. He graduated from Mundelein Seminary in 2002, and he served as both a formator and the Director of Pre-Theology and Internship between 2016 and 2024. While at Mundelein, seminarians would affectionately refer to then-Father Spies as "John Deere Vianney" because of his blue-collar, down-to-earth disposition—a nickname which he held fondly. However, his time at Mundelein came to an end in the fall of 2024 when he was appointed as auxiliary Bishop of Joliet. Over Christmas break, Bishop Spies shared some highlights and memories from his first year serving in the episcopacy.

What was it like to get the appointment call from the Nuncio?

Thursday morning, I was getting ready for my morning exercise when the phone rang... It was the Apostolic Nuncio asking, 'Is this Father Dennis Spies?' I said, 'Yes, it is.' Then he said, 'Congratulations, you have been appointed to be the Auxiliary Bishop.'

After a couple of comments, he indicated that I could not tell anyone until further notice. Imagine telling an outgoing person like me life-changing information and then holding them to silence until further notice.

Thankfully, it was only eight days. On Friday morning, announcement day, I called Fr. Kartje at 6:30 in the morning and, out of love for my seminary students, asked if

he could have this news announced to the community at morning Mass. As you would expect, my phone was receiving many messages all day long. People were kind enough to cheer me on. Personally, I felt like I was in shock trying to realize this was actually happening and true.

How did you prepare for your ordination into the episcopacy?

As you may know, any time someone gets ordained, there is a required week-long retreat. I scheduled a retreat with a retired Bishop and found the retreat to be powerful. I remember on Tuesday, I grieved the reality of never being a parish pastor ever again. Detachment is very real. I also remember a powerful prayer time as my retreat director gave me a picture of the Crucifixion from Jesus' point of view, looking out over the people there. The invitation was to minister from Jesus' perspective as much as possible from now on. This has frequently provided great personal prayer time.

I had the honor of going to what is affectionately called 'Baby Bishop School' for all the new bishops from the entire world. A ten-day school in September, which overlapped this year with the Canonization Mass of St. Carlo and Georgio—a great experience. The Pope was kind enough to give us three hours of his time, which included a photo opportunity. I have noticed that every bishop's office I have been in includes a picture with the Pope.

The diocesan staff and I had a month to prepare for the Ordination, and it was a good team-building exercise for the staff at the diocese. The actual celebration was extraordinary. To have a room full of people representing the Church, both universal and the diocese, praying for me and cheering me on was both powerful and humbling.

What have been some surprises or favorite memories as you've transitioned into your role as bishop?

People do not realize how differently they treat me now. Good friends of many years asking, 'What do I call you now?' or people being nervous that a bishop is standing right there. It sure is an honor to be a bishop, to serve the priests of the diocese.

Recently, I have had the privilege of ordaining three men to the Diaconate, a very powerful experience. It was good for my heart to participate in ordaining them. I also had the first-time experience of presiding and preaching a funeral Mass for a dear priest friend, which was also a real privilege to share that time with his family. Presiding at Confirmation Masses is a privilege—trying to inspire people to receive the Holy Spirit to guide their lives.

Being a bishop, laying your life down the 'rest of the way,' helps to be in union with Jesus, as we are called to lead others to Christ, just as when we were priests.



As Bishop Spies settles into his new role in Joliet, his journey serves as a powerful reminder to our community of what it means to remain open to the Holy Spirit's call. Recently appointed by the Vatican as the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Joliet, effective February 6, 2026, he now serves in place of the ordinary.

While he remains a frequent and welcome presence here at Mundelein, his transition from formator to diocesan shepherd is a testament to the "John Deere Vianney" spirit of service he instilled in so many of us. We remain united with him in prayer as he continues to lead others to Christ with the same down-to-earth heart he shared during his years on campus.



Becoming the Archbishop of America's Parish Church;

How Mundelein formed and shaped Archbishop Ron Hicks

BY BETSY ACKERSON, PH.D., VICE PRESIDENT OF DEVELOPMENT

If any one person best embodies all that the University of Saint Mary of the Lake and Mundelein Seminary offer, it is Archbishop Ron Hicks. From age 14 to the present day, Mundelein has been front and center in his vocation, his formation, his education, his priestly ministry, his professional experience, and his episcopal ministry. I sat down with my friend and former bishop, Archbishop Ron Hicks, to talk about how his lifelong relationship with Mundelein prepared him to be the 11th Archbishop of New York and head of “America’s Parish Church.”

How would you describe your relationship with Mundelein?

It all started in Mundelein. My formation in this system, Quigley South, Niles College; I’m one of the last of the lifers out there. To have this system I entered at age 14, I’m nothing but grateful for it.

I was formed and educated, then returned to continue forming and educating the next generation. And the whole process has been one...the only word I can really come up with strong enough is one of love. I love Mundelein Seminary! The formation and the education that I received was world-class. I felt like I went into ministry as a priest, prepared and humble enough to know that I need God and I need to surround myself with good people. I have to humbly ask questions when I don’t know what I’m doing and I was prepared at Mundelein on all of those levels to hit the ground running and to love my priesthood.

Is there a specific place on the USML campus that inspires you?

The main chapel, which is literally in the center of the campus, Christ in the center of our lives, it’s magnificent, it’s beautiful. During my five years as Dean of Formation, I would be one of the first ones to arrive before our morning prayer and our morning Mass. I made sure I walked through the main door instead of one of the side doors. I’d go up the stairs to the main door, turn around, look at the lake, and every day the sun was in a slightly different position. The clouds, the colors. It just reminded me of God, God’s creation; it was always a magnificent moment, just reminding myself that God is the creator of the universe. God is the creator of my life. God is the creator of everything. God is life. Given all this as a gift to us and from there to look at his beauty and then to walk into the church and enter into this beautiful place as a prayer.

Mundelein taught me how to be a man of prayer that has grown along the way.

What are those aspects of Mundelein formation that you believe make it most effective in preparing men to be priests in today’s world?

When I went on faculty at Mundelein Seminary, I came in with this love of priesthood. I came in with a joy for priesthood and was just eager to share that with the future generation. It’s a world-class seminary that focuses well on the pillars of formation: on human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral formation. They still do it very well, and they’re producing the future priests, and I want to be a part of a system that really does that.

What words of encouragement would you share with those who feel overwhelmed by the enormity and complexity of the Church’s mission today?

Don’t go in as the know-it-all. Don’t go in as the Superman, the all-knowing, the all-powerful, I have all the answers, I’m going to save you. We only have one Savior and that’s Jesus. My real piece of advice is to completely surrender and trust the Lord. It’s a constant call in prayer each day to say Lord, I trust you. You called me here. I have said yes. You see me in what I do, you hear me in what I say, and you know what the issues are. Guide me with your Holy Spirit so that I can do your will. Without that, I think I’d feel crushed, and that’s the piece of advice I’d give others. Go in with that spirit of surrender to the Lord, trusting him and uniting your heart to his, so that you can do the will of the Father. Do it all, but make sure you’re doing it all, not on your own island. Surround yourself with good, faithful people. There are so many people who want to make sure that the mission of the church thrives, and they need to be invited in.

What are you looking forward to as you begin serving in New York?

I look forward to many things, Betsy, about going to New York, but I think you’ve seen over the years I enjoy the ministry of preaching a lot. I like it. I think it’s a great opportunity to take the faith and the scripture and everything that’s been given to us and then try to make it relatable and somehow alive. So, to have the opportunity to preach every Sunday in the Parish of America where everyone comes, I’m looking forward to it. And then there’s an excitement of going to the new place. Who am I going to encounter? Who am I going to meet? Who is going to be my next friend along the way? And I look forward to that possibility. And God has never let me down, wherever I’ve been sent. He provides good people with good hearts, who also love the mission of Christ and who really want to live that out in the world. I’ve experienced people like that everywhere I’ve gone, so I look forward to meeting them soon in New York.

The Six New Dioceses of Mundelein Seminary

This school year, the University of Saint Mary of the Lake has been blessed to welcome six new dioceses to its growing list. The dioceses new to the seminary are Nashville, Pensacola-Tallahassee, Fresno, St. Thomas, Tucson, and Winona-Rochester. Aside from the propaedeutic year at the Bishop Quarter House in Downtown Chicago, eleven new seminarians from these six dioceses are now studying at Mundelein Seminary.



BY GREG KASSEN, PRE-THEOLOGY I, DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE

Initially, reactions among the new men were mixed. Some expressed great enthusiasm about attending Mundelein—with one seminarian even proposing the move directly to his vocation director—while others felt a natural hesitation that comes with change.

“When my bishop, Bishop Barron, decided to send us here, I was pretty stoked,” said John Paul Philips, a seminarian for Winona-Rochester. “I honestly didn’t know much beyond its reputation for strong formation and beautiful grounds. Once I arrived, I was struck by how peaceful the campus was, how amazing the formators were, and the immense knowledge, quite frankly, ‘emanating’ from the professors who teach us.”

Some who hesitated about the change felt sadness at leaving their previous seminaries. Nevertheless, after settling in on campus, the new seminarians unanimously conveyed great joy at being here. For example, Giuseppe Njuaem, studying from the Diocese of St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands, noted how smooth the transition has been.

“All my teachers have been very helpful in making sure I fit right in,” said Njuaem. “Mundelein has been great! The guys are super friendly, and the atmosphere around is just one of joy and authenticity. There couldn’t be a better place to discern for the priesthood!”

Other new seminarians shared similar sentiments, noting how welcome they felt by the community. Thomas Ellsworth from the Diocese of Fresno was pleasantly surprised by how quickly he noticed everyone’s friendliness at Mundelein. “Everything is about community,” he said as he remembered his first moments on campus after his long drive from California. “The hospitality was phenomenal. They greeted me in the parking lot, and seminarians helped me unload my car and bring my items to my room.”

Ellsworth continues to enjoy being part of Mundelein, mentioning that he dedicates several nights a week to group fraternity.

The new seminarians are also very active in campus events. Garrett Peters, a new seminarian from Florida’s Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, recalled the time he and a group of seminarians went camping by the lake on the eve of the canonization of St. Pier Giorgio Frassati.

“While I was out there, I was thinking about how thankful I am to be at Mundelein,” Peters said. “I was reflecting on how the environment and culture are masculine, fun, and free. I know that not every seminary is like this, and so we are especially loved by God to be at Mundelein. I want to help maintain and foster this positive culture during my time here.”

Garrett also shared his joy at finding a group of musicians with whom he can play classic rock in his free time. “Hopefully,” he said, “we’ll be able to put together a little set and play for the campus in the near future.”

Beyond the social events, many of the new seminarians have expressed how impressed they are with Mundelein’s faculty and

formators. Michael Falcone from the Diocese of Nashville briefly shared his experience with formation.

“I have experienced much grace from giving myself over to the process of formation and seeing how the Holy Spirit has continued to heal and guide me through my formators here,” said Falcone. “I have found that we are blessed with priests who truly care about the work of forming holy, well-rounded men for the priesthood.”

While five of the six new dioceses are entirely new, Tucson has previously sent men to Mundelein. Josue Limon, from the Diocese of Tucson, fondly recalled exploring the Deacon Building and seeing photos of past graduating classes, which included priests from his own diocese and his current vocation director. “It was like walking down memory lane,” he said.

The people at Mundelein are very happy to have these six new dioceses with us, and we are excited that they all have integrated so quickly into the community. We look forward to our future with them all here.



Signs of the Spirit

A Summer of Reflection

BY BEN ANDERSON | CONFIGURATION 1 | ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

“God’s presence is not perceived with the ears, but with faith.”

Those were the words of Pope Francis in 2019, speaking to the Deaf Catholic community, and it was something I learned this past summer.

For many seminarians, summer assignments are a time to step away from academics and learn new ways to serve God. For me, this past summer was no different. Last school year, as I was discussing with the director of Chicago seminarians, Fr. Pat Gorman, what my summer assignment was, Fr. Pat gave me the option to either go to Guatemala for a Spanish immersion or to have an American Sign Language (ASL) immersion. I took this decision to prayer, asking God where He wanted me to go. After considerable discernment, I felt that God was calling me to learn ASL. For eight weeks during the summer, I attended tutoring at Chicago Hearing Society for two hours a day.

In addition, I would go back to the rectory I was staying at, after tutoring, and spend around six more hours a day to self-study, whether that would be watching ASL YouTube videos, watching interpreted movies, reading about Deaf history or culture, learning new words, practicing ASL grammar, or reviewing what I learned in tutoring that day. I tried to immerse myself as much as possible in Deaf culture by attending various Deaf gatherings, such as Friday coffee, interpreted plays, and other events in Chicago.

However, my favorite aspect of the summer was attending Sunday Mass at the St. Francis Borgia Deaf Center. It was there that I truly fell deeply in love with ASL, Deaf culture, and the community. During the summer, I gradually began praying the Rosary, the Liturgy of the Hours, and even some of my private prayers in ASL. Now, back at the seminary, I have continued doing that because it not only gives me an opportunity to practice and improve my ASL skills, but also because I have found that, through signing those prayers, I can better express my emotions and myself in prayer.

The first time I walked into St. Francis Borgia Deaf Center, I was filled with nerves and excitement. I did not know what to expect. At this point, I had been studying ASL for about two weeks. I arrived early to pray prior to Mass.

While I was praying, a woman grabbed my attention and signed to me, “Are you deaf?”

I responded, “No. I am hearing.”

She then signed, “Oh, so you are a seminarian, right?”

It was after that brief conversation that I started to feel comfortable at the church. During Mass, I was captivated by the beauty of an ASL Liturgy. Following Mass, I began walking to my car but was quickly stopped in the parking lot and invited back inside for fellowship, which happens every week. I stayed in the hall for a while, meeting people, and it touched my heart to feel the joy in the room. It was so beautiful to see this Christ-centered community. Then I started to look forward to going to St. Francis Borgia every Sunday for Mass.

Following my eight weeks of tutoring, I was blessed with the opportunity to attend the National Eucharist Congress in Indianapolis. For the majority of the liturgies and talks, I sat in the section for the Deaf. Meeting and interacting with the Deaf community from across the United States was a blessing. I was in awe at the beauty of the Deaf community during Adoration. While the whole stadium of 50,000 Catholics was praying the Divine Praises, I was struck by the small community of around thirty Deaf Catholics praying the Divine Praises. It was an incredibly beautiful sight. That was my first time praying the Divine Praises in ASL.

As I prayed about it later in the day, I found myself struck by the beauty of pointing to the Eucharist as a reference to Jesus. In ASL, it is common to point to a person when referring to them. So, when the line, “Blessed by Jesus Christ, true God and true man,” was signed, it showed an explicit reference to the True Presence rather than simply saying His name. It helped me to see the beautiful faith of the Deaf community. It was truly a great affirmation in prayer for learning ASL.

Throughout the Congress, I would meet and talk to many of the Deaf Catholics who attended. It was special to learn about their faith journey and to start slowly introducing myself to the broader Deaf Catholic community.

Now, I continue to work on my sign language. My teaching parish is St. Francis Borgia Deaf Center. I am learning under Fr. Joe Mulcrone, the long-time priest for the Deaf community in the Archdiocese of Chicago, how to work and serve the Deaf community. Every Sunday, I go there to teach religious education classes for Confirmation, serve at Mass, participate

in Bible studies when they happen, bring the Eucharist to the sick and homebound, and interact with the community members, all in sign language.

It has been such a blessing and something that I look forward to every week. The faith and devotion of the Deaf community have so inspired me. Seeing their faith has helped me grow in my spiritual life.





Meet the Dean

Profile of Dr. Rita George-Tvrtković

Dean and Professor of Theology at the School of Parish Leadership & Evangelization

BY STEPHANE BELCHER | USML MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Nearly two decades ago, Dr. Rita George-Tvrtković walked the University of Saint Mary of the Lake campus as an instructor, teaching a course on ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. She returns today as Dean and Professor of Theology at the School of Parish Leadership & Evangelization (SPLE). Over the years, her experience has grown from the classrooms to the halls of the Vatican.

With sixteen years at Benedictine University and an appointment as a consultor to the Vatican Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, Dr. Rita George-Tvrtković brings academic expertise, ministerial experience, and a global perspective to her new role.

She was drawn back to USML at this stage of her journey for the opportunity to apply her academic background directly to the life of the Church.

“It feels like a homecoming,” she said, recalling her time teaching on campus and collaborating with the late Father Tom Baima from the Archdiocese’s ecumenical office. “This role focuses on lay ministry, diaconal leadership, and the contribution of women to the Church—areas I am deeply passionate about. It’s an opportunity to apply my academic background directly to the life of the Church.”

This year, Dr. George-Tvrtković will step back into the classroom to teach an interreligious course and Church history, both central to her role as dean.

“To lead effectively, I need to know our students and faculty,” she added. “Teaching allows me to connect with them as a colleague and mentor, not just as an administrator.”

Synodality was a focus for Pope Francis, and Dr. George-Tvrtković envisions its impact at SPLE. She brings her knowledge of Catholic-Muslim relations to those preparing for parish leadership in diverse communities. Her interest in interreligious relations began as a student in Jordan, where she moved after 9/11 while working for the Archdiocese.

“Dialogue is about building relationships before a crisis hits,” added Dr. Rita

George-Tvrtković. “It’s no longer a side interest—it is the context of all ministry. No minister today serves in a 100% Catholic bubble. We serve interfaith families in our parishes, schools, and hospitals.”

Dr. George-Tvrtković connects SPLE to the global Church. She is one of only six women worldwide serving as a consultor for the Vatican Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue. In 2023, she helped launch the Vatican Women’s Interreligious Network, which brought together women from 26 countries and 12 religions.

This role focuses on lay ministry, diaconal leadership, and the contribution of women to the Church—areas I am deeply passionate about.”

“It reinforces the idea that the Church needs women’s leadership—not just for women’s sake, but because the Church is a better resource when it utilizes the gifts of the entire Body of Christ,” she added.

“Synodality is about listening to everyone—priests, deacons, laypeople, and women. I am modeling that in my first year. I don’t claim to have all the answers yet; instead, I am visiting parishes and archdiocesan offices. We need to ensure USML meets the needs of our diverse communities—whether Latino, Polish, African American, Vietnamese, or Filipino—and whether they are right here on campus or in the South and West Sides of Chicago.”

Although her career is global, Dr. George-Tvrtković’s personal life centers on family. She met her husband, Zoran, a nurse practitioner and former refugee from Bosnia, while volunteering for Catholic Charities. Now empty nesters, they enjoy the peaceful beauty of the lake.

She walks her dog by the lake and swims to recharge, and stays active in academic research, currently co-editing a volume on medieval interreligious relations.

“It’s all about finding that balance I hope to model for our students,” she added.

Dr. Rita George-Tvrtković earned her PhD in the History of Christianity from the University of Notre Dame and a Master of Theological Studies from the Weston Jesuit School of Theology. Her research focuses on the theology of historical Christian-Muslim-Jewish relations and contemporary interreligious dialogue. She has authored and co-edited various works, including *Christians, Muslims, and Mary: A History* (2018) and *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq* (2012), and has recently contributed to the *Oxford Handbook of Deification and the Studies in Interreligious Dialogue Journal*.

In 2020, she was appointed by **Pope Francis**—and re-appointed by **Pope Leo XIV** in 2025— as a Consultor for the Vatican’s Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue. She contributes to the Vatican Women’s Interreligious Network.

Formerly, she was the Associate Director of the Archdiocese of Chicago’s Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. She’s an active member of the Catholic Theological Society of America, the USCCB National Catholic-Muslim Dialogue, and other scholarly and interfaith organizations.

“I finally listened to the Holy Spirit; I made a choice,” she added. “I said yes to the invitation to learn and work in a place where God reigns, where humility, encouragement, and love overflow, where I witness, day after day, the many genuine individuals at the hands and feet of Christ! What a blessing, indeed!”

Diane Hettinger (bottom right) and family join Fr. John Kartje, Rector/President of USML, for the ribbon-cutting ceremony of the new Michael and Diane Hettinger Technology Room



Forward-Thinking/Faith

Honoring a Legacy of Innovation by Equipping Future Generations

Meet Diane Hettinger, who, along with her late husband Michael, generously funded the Michael and Diane Hettinger Technology Room out of a deep belief that investing in technology is essential for the future growth and development of faith leaders at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary.

The Hettingers' relationship with Mundelein Seminary began at their home parish, St. Joseph, with Father John Kartje. Diane recalls that Michael was particularly drawn to the seminary's role as the central point for the development of future priests.

"Both my husband and I felt strongly that whatever we can do to encourage participation in the seminary is important," she shares. "We considered supplying the necessary items to enhance their experience at USML."

When deciding how best to support the university, choosing a technology-focused gift was deeply personal. Michael was a professional in the math and science fields, an early adopter of technology, and saw its growth potential.

"My husband recognized technology as an essential part of the future," says Hettinger. "We can't keep thinking only about the past and remain stagnant. For things to develop, there has to be an idea."

After collaborating with university leadership and Father Kartje, the concept for the Technology Room emerged. For Diane Hettinger, it was the "perfect fit" to honor Michael's memory—bridging faith and technology, a marriage of his professional passions and their shared Catholic faith.



At St. Joe's, we talk about giving time, talent, and treasure. We are all connected as one family, and you support your family.

As a career educator, she knows that new facilities are only as good as the people who use them. When she saw the completed room, she wasn't just impressed by the hardware; she was moved by the enthusiasm of the faculty and seminarians, and by seeing the technology in use with her own eyes.

"I saw genuine interest and an acknowledgement that this was useful and practical for them. The people at the seminary had really done their research to come up with something useful and valuable. When you see something in action, it's apparent that this is an asset to the programs."

It was a deliberate decision to name the space the Michael and Diane Hettinger Technology Room. Diane wanted Michael's name first, honoring his lifelong commitment to innovation and his desire to support the seminary.

"I would not be surprised if he gave me some guidance in sifting through ideas until we found the answer," Diane says. "I believe it would have been something he would have been proud of."

While Diane initially hesitated to step into the spotlight, she agreed to share her story to remind the USML community of our shared responsibility as the Body of Christ. Her philosophy on philanthropy is simple: we are one family, and we support our own.

"We've been blessed. God has been good to us, and it's important for us to share that," she concludes. "At St. Joe's, we talk about giving time, talent, and treasure. We are all connected as one family, and you support your family."

The George Cardinal Mundelein Scholarship Legacy

Equipping Leaders for Our Sending Dioceses

BY STEPHANE BELCHER | USML MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

“It’s not about what we want, but what the Church asks of us.”

This core lesson is being carried back to the Diocese of San Bernardino by Haley Henry from her studies in the Master of Arts in Liturgy program at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake (USML).

As a liturgy coordinator in Southern California, Henry sought the highest level of liturgical formation. The George Cardinal Mundelein Scholarship made it possible for her to attend USML.

This scholarship is more than just financial aid; it’s a direct investment in the future of the Church. Named in honor of the re-founder of USML, the scholarship supports graduate students from the School of Parish Leadership and Evangelization (SPLE) who actively serve in ministry at one of Mundelein Seminary’s sending dioceses.

Henry’s story shows how SPLE formation is shaping dedicated leaders who are renewing worship and ministry in our sending dioceses.

Haley Henry is the liturgy coordinator at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in the Diocese of San Bernardino, a role she has held for nearly six years. Her parish is among the

largest in the diocese and hosts major diocesan liturgies, such as the Chrism Mass and ordinations. This allows her to work closely with the Office of Divine Worship.

Like many, her decision to pursue a master’s degree was driven by a lifelong passion for liturgy and a desire for more focused, advanced liturgical formation. “This was the only school that had a degree program specifically for liturgy. Something I’ve been searching for, for some time,” she explained.

Already connected to the university through seminarians from her diocese, Henry was drawn to the school by its reputation and mission.

“We send some of our seminarians here, and they’re my very good friends. So, I was already familiar with the school and its program, and I had heard incredible things about it. The more I researched it, the more I saw that this was what I had been looking for, and it could answer my prayers!”

Henry discovered the scholarship after she had applied and been accepted. She learned about it through the Student Service Coordinator at SPLE.

As someone dedicated to serving the Church, she works for her parish and shared her concerns about how she would pay for school.

“All I could do was pray and trust that if the Lord wanted me to be there, He would make way,” she said. “And he did.”

The financial support has been a blessing, allowing her to focus on her studies and formation without constant financial worries.

As a student from a sending diocese, Henry feels both a sense of responsibility and privilege in representing the Diocese of San Bernardino. She’s already applying what she’s learned by sharing insights with her friends in the diocesan Office of Divine Worship.

“I’ve only been [at SPLE] for almost a year, but it has entirely changed the trajectory of the way that I serve as a liturgist and the things I implement into the community. It really impacts you, not just because it’s your career, but how you live your life every day, you know.”

She actively encourages others in her diocese to explore the program, telling “everybody that will listen” about her positive experience. “I hope that by my going to the school, it helps open more doors for others,” She added.

Reflecting on the honor of receiving the scholarship, Henry said that having it named after George Cardinal Mundelein, the re-founder of USML, made her feel more connected to the school’s identity and history. “My formation here would not be possible without the support of this scholarship. It has played a crucial role in allowing me to pursue my studies at this school.”



George Cardinal Mundelein Scholarship

The School of Parish Leadership and Evangelization awards the George Cardinal Mundelein Scholarship as a sign of our commitment to sending dioceses.

Named in honor of the third Archbishop of Chicago and re-founder of the University of Saint Mary of the Lake, this scholarship celebrates the legacy of Mundelein.

It is exclusive to students enrolled in graduate programs at SPLE. Eligibility requires affiliation with a diocese that sends seminarians to Mundelein and active involvement in work, worship, or ministry within that diocese. The scholarship covers up to one-third of tuition each semester and is renewable throughout the program.





THE UNIVERSITY OF SAINT MARY OF THE LAKE operates a comprehensive online learning platform through its School of Parish Leadership and Evangelization, accessible at courses.usml.edu.

This platform offers a range of educational resources, primarily engaging online short courses designed to deepen the Catholic faith for individuals, enhance professional skills for lay ministers, and provide essential formation for various roles within the Church. The course catalog is extensive, covering critical areas of Catholic theology, practice, and ministry.



SCHOOL OF
PARISH
LEADERSHIP
AND
EVANGELIZATION

DEEPEN YOUR FAITH ANYTIME, ANYWHERE

One Mission, One Program: Aligning Spanish and English Deacon Formation in Chicago

BY DEACON DANIEL MOORE,
SENIOR COORDINATOR FOR
PERMANENT DEACON FORMATION



It is my pleasure to write this article for you about the Permanent Deacon Formation Program in the Archdiocese of Chicago. I started my role as Director in September 2024. I view the immense responsibility of the role primarily as a steward of forming men for ordained ministry configured to Christ the Servant. We carry on the great work of our predecessors, make course changes necessary to meet current needs of the Church in Chicago, and pass on the best formation program to future leadership. All our good work is guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Currently, the most important message to convey about deacon formation is our initiative underway to unify Spanish

and English language formation as ONE Deacon Formation Program. All formation is guided by Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons and The National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States. With the guiding wisdom of these resources, we also hold up our mission statement:

The mission of the Archdiocese of Chicago Deacon Formation Program is to prepare men to be deacons, icons of Christ the Servant, emissaries of the bishop, and servant-leaders through a distinctive formation process for ordained ministry. It does so by offering a comprehensive program that specifically addresses the mission and identity of diaconal ministry through the four pillars of formation: the Human, Intellectual, Spiritual, and Pastoral while forming men for the three-fold ministry of service to the Word, Liturgy, and Charity.

Together with Deacon Franco Foti, the Associate Director of Formation, we are poring over the details of both formation tracks to align courses and formation events. Those details include alignment of scope and sequence and assessing fundamental requirements of pre-ordination formation of a permanent deacon.

It is important to be realistic about what alignment will look like. The aligned program cannot retain every element of original English and Spanish formation. Successful alignment will not come from more formation. We are building together one program based on the greatest needs of the Church today and guiding principles of formation norms. For example, our people clearly need strong preaching and evangelization, all of which animates service to the marginalized. We align on these principles and best practices, so our men understand they are being prepared for ordained ministry in service to the whole Church in Chicago. Alignment is underway and will take a few years to fully implement in a phased approach. There will be bumps and we will feel stretched into some discomfort, but I pray and trust we are moving together in the best direction for the people of God, all of whom we serve.

As the aphorism goes: a rising tide raises all ships. I envision the results of successful alignment as a rising tide. The best outcome is solid formation for each individual candidate, well-equipped to rise and move forward together, as in a flotilla.

Chicago Studies Enters a New Season of Growth

BY JULIANA V. VAZQUEZ, PH.D., ASSISTANT
PROFESSOR OF DOGMATIC THEOLOGY

Endeavors inspired by USML's mission all seem to have one thing in common—they all come with an interesting story from the past, and a hopeful dream for the future. *Chicago Studies*, a journal of pastoral theology housed by the University and edited by its faculty, is no exception. *Chicago Studies* is a digital, peer-reviewed journal that is written from many different theological lenses, with articles germane to many different areas of service in the Church. It aims to bridge the gap that is often perceived between the “ivory tower” of professional, academic theology and the “real-life” frontlines of actual, lived discipleship and service in the Church. *Chicago Studies* brings the most creative and faithful theology to bear on the questions and concerns of Catholics today, especially those who serve in parish ministry, leadership, and evangelization.

Why Chicago?

It is no accident that the journal's very first issue was published in the spring of 1962, right before the opening of Vatican II. The council's call to speak the values of the Kingdom of God into the changing conditions of knowledge and culture found resonance with a group of priests from the Archdiocese of Chicago, several faculty members at USML, and a foundation called Civitas Dei. Founded in 1962 by Fr. George Dyer (+2017), a priest from the Archdiocese of Chicago and a long-term seminary faculty member, the journal was intertwined with the mission of the University and of the Church universal from the very beginning. Over the years, many other faculty members followed suit, acting as main or assistant editors, serving on the editorial board, or contributing articles of their own. Fr. Thomas Baima (+2022), Fr. Martin Zielinski (+2023), Fr. Lawrence Hennessy, Fr. Michael Fuller, and Dr. Melanie Barrett were instrumental in the journal's continued success. The journal has consistently spotlighted the prestigious interdisciplinary series of Paluch and Meyer Lectures that the University puts on yearly.

Who Reads Chicago Studies, and Who Writes for Us?

We are rooted in the Roman Catholic tradition, with an expansive scope of viewpoints, areas of expertise, and confessional commitments. We have featured some of the most significant voices in theology from the last century, including Jean Danielou, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Avery Dulles, and Yves Congar. More recent authors include Matthew Levering, Kevin Irwin, Angela Franks, Elisabeth Kincaid, Elizabeth Sung, Sr. Sara Butler, Sr. Agnes Cunningham, N.T. Wright, David Fagerberg, and Bishop Barron. We have also published articles on ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, including the 2021 Meyer Lectures on the interrelationship between Catholicism and Judaism by Fr. David Neuhaus, S.J. There has been a good deal of interest in our publication of Bishop Barron's 2022 Meyer

Lectures, which explored ways that the Church can better reach the religiously unaffiliated through the enduring beauty of truth and goodness. Our readership is as varied and vibrant as the Church itself, including priests, deacons, lay ecclesial ministers, directors of religious education, pastoral associates, chaplains, professional theologians, educators, and beyond.

Why Now?

There seems to be a real need in the Church for research by people of faith who have both theological knowledge and familiarity with the difficulties of discipleship & the concerns of real-life ministry. Plus, the role of the laity in bringing the message of Christ to the world has grown exponentially for over fifty years now. From apostolates on social media to prayer apps to YouTube series on dogmas of the faith, both clergy and laity find themselves with an immense number of resources at their fingertips, but they don't always have the time or energy to investigate how the latest theological research might apply to their respective ministries.

Why USML?

The journal is now entering into a new season of growth, and USML is one of the best scholarly homes imaginable for such a publication. We draw continuously on the expertise of each department within the faculty, many of whom serve on our editorial board. There are new avenues of collaboration and outreach for the journal, particularly with the new **School for Parish Leadership & Evangelization**. Given the aim of integral formation and methods of encounter-based pedagogy that already inform various facets of the University's mission, it is an exciting time for *Chicago Studies* to renew its own purpose.

The Path Forward

As *Chicago Studies* continues to grow, we hope to offer something to everyone. We want to garner more voices from those with expertise and experience in pastoral theology and service at the parish level, who can write in an accessible manner on relatable topics. Perhaps a priest is looking for ways to increase appreciation for the liturgy or a director of religious education wants to increase participation from families; perhaps a deacon needs resources for deepening his own Eucharistic spirituality or a coordinator for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults needs help connecting the social doctrine of the Church to its teachings on sexuality. For the ecclesial minister who wants to reach out to the religiously unaffiliated in the wider community, for the priest who wants to learn the history of the vow of obedience, or for the parish coordinator who wants to reflect on how to handle conflict constructively, *Chicago Studies* will be a helpful resource for ongoing intellectual formation. The faithful deserve a publication that is responsive to the contemporary joys and challenges of serving Christ and His Church, as we all strive to “consecrate the world to God.” (Lumen Gentium 34) *Chicago Studies* is eager to fulfill that call.

Renewing Contemporary Catechetical Leadership

BY HAROLD D. (BUD) HORELL
WITH PEGGY BRADLEY

Forming catechetical leaders has been part of the University of Saint Mary of the Lake's mission since the founding of the lay programs in the 1970s, in an initiative led by Monsignor Wayne Prist. While our programs have continued to evolve, the pressures we face today (such as changing demographics and parish reorganizations) and the renewed call to become an evangelizing, synodal church present opportunities to reimagine catechetical leadership and other lay-formation programs. How do we achieve this?

A Thriving Congregations Initiative (TCI) grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. is enabling the University's School of Parish Leadership and Evangelization (SPLE) to address these present-day formation needs by bringing together diocesan-wide resources to review catechetical leadership programs. The \$1.285 million grant is funding SPLE's Catechetical Leadership for Renewal Project (CLR), a five-year collaborative venture with the Archdiocese's Offices of Lifelong Formation and Catholic Schools. TCI grant recipients are encouraged to form learning communities as the most effective way to sustain thriving local faith communities.

At the Thriving Congregations Conference, hosted by Lilly Endowment in Indianapolis last October, over 200

TCI grant recipients from various Christian organizations shared their stories. Peggy Bradley, SPLE's TCI grant coordinator, attended the conference. She observed, "While our TCI projects may be addressing different needs, we are all looking for ways to use learning communities to bring people together, listen deeply, and discern devoutly where the Spirit is leading us. I do, however, believe that our Church has something unique to offer because of the extraordinary work of the Synod of Bishops on synodality, especially its emphasis on Conversations in the Spirit." Synodality involves the members of the Church walking together and sharing responsibility (that is, being co-responsible) for addressing the Church's pressing concerns. Conversations in the Spirit is a synodal method of dialogue that focuses on sharing ideas, deep listening, and communal discernment of the Spirit's guidance.

"Sixty years after the celebration of the Second Vatican Council, the People of God are living a deepening of our reception of that council through the synodal reform of the Church launched by Pope Francis and continued, in his own style, by Pope Leo XIV. The oft-repeated phrase, 'A Synodal Church is a listening Church,' has been at the heart of this reform," said Sister Marie Kolbe-Zamora, OSF, STD, Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, Diocese

of Green Bay, who worked with the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops, Holy See.

In the summer of 2025, the Catechetical Leadership for Renewal leadership team recruited people throughout the Archdiocese of Chicago to serve on Catechetical Learning Communities (CLCs). The CLR leadership team and members of the CLCs gathered for the first time at a retreat held in November 2025, on the USML campus. Over 60 people representing a range of faith formation ministries, cultures, and experiences from all six vicariates of the Archdiocese attended.

The two keynote presenters were Deacon Matthew Halbach, a leading commentator on the new (2020) Directory for Catechesis, and Sister Kolbe-Zamora. They offered complementary perspectives that provide a foundation for the ongoing renewal of catechetical leadership formation.

Deacon Halbach spoke about how all pastoral ministers educate in faith by proclaiming the love of God made known through Christ and the Spirit—this is the primary proclamation of faith or kerygma.

"Rooting the work of evangelization and catechesis in the primary proclamation reminds us that as disciples, our head and our heart must be united, synergistic, and opportunistic. All catechesis must make credible the following

two claims: (1) Jesus Christ loves you, (2) And so do I," said Deacon Halbach, Director of Deacon Formation, Diocese of Des Moines, who also holds a Ph.D. in Catechetics from the Catholic University of America.

He added that catechesis must include, but go beyond, intellectual formation. It must form people to evangelize, to nurture transformative relationships with Christ, and in doing so, empower baptized believers to accompany others with mercy and compassion.

Ultimately, catechesis is a communal activity centered in relationships that contributes to the ongoing renewal of the Church and world. Sister Kolbe-Zamora counseled the grant leadership team and CLC members to be guided by the Church's synodal reforms as they renew catechetical leadership formation. She called the retreatants to listen, converse, and relate to one another, with openness to discerning how the Spirit is calling the Church to the ongoing renewal of mind, heart, and will/action.

Both Deacon Halbach and Sister Kolbe-Zamora, whose perspectives were affirmed by retreat participants, emphasized the importance of grounding ministry in the Church's core teachings. They also reminded attendees that effective faith sharing requires adaptation to new languages, cultures, and technologies.

"At this exciting new moment for the Archdiocese, we have a tremendous opportunity to build a transformative vision in a shared and communal way of the present and future pathways of Jesus Christ alive in our midst. The work of Synodality and the living practice of Conversations in the Spirit are already setting a new foundation for our self-understanding and how we accompany and empower new leaders in faith," said Rick Morena, a parishioner from St. Barnabas Parish, Chicago, and a member of the Vicariate VI Learning Community.

Another participant in the retreat, Celia Munos, who is a parishioner from Most Blessed Trinity Parish in Waukegan and a member of a Spanish-speaking Learning Community, said, "The retreat encouraged dialogue, giving us the opportunity to understand a variety of new methods for leadership formation, evangelization, and catechesis. Such opportunities help form disciples who are in love with God and who desire to continue their formation to serve faithfully."

In Phase 1 of the CLR project, using the Conversation in the Spirit method introduced at the November retreat, the CLCs are meeting throughout the first half of 2026 to continue discerning how the Holy Spirit is guiding the Archdiocese to address the deep need and sacred opportunity to renew the formation of its catechetical leadership. Drawing insights from Phase 1, in Phase 2 (2026-27), we will undertake a curriculum review of SPLE programs, aligned with a similar review of the catechetical programs of the Archdiocesan Office of Lifelong Formation and the Office of Catholic Schools. In Phase 3 (2027-28), we will usher in new and/or revamped in-person, online, and high-flex formation programs that prepare people for ministry and to live their faith in their everyday lives.



Celebration of Mundelein: Honoring Parish Service

Mark your calendars for the 33rd Celebration of Mundelein, taking place at the Lincolnshire Marriott Resort on April 16, 2026. This inspiring event brings our community together to support the University of Saint Mary of the Lake and the next generation of parish priests.

This year, we are proud to honor two individuals who have made a profound impact on parish life:

- **Matt Marcheschi**, Director of Parish Outreach at FOCUS Catholic, will receive the Christo Gloria Award.
- **Father Jason Malave**, Pastor of Queen of Apostles Parish, will be honored with the As Those Who Serve Award.

The Celebration of Mundelein offers a meaningful opportunity for the Catholic community of the Archdiocese of Chicago to join in supporting the men who are answering the call to the holy priesthood.

Guests will enjoy an evening of excellent food and entertainment by the Mundelein Seminarian musicians.

33RD CELEBRATION of
MUNDELEIN
An Evening of Tribute

REGISTER FOR THE CELEBRATION OF
MUNDELEIN AND SUPPORT YOUR FUTURE
PRIESTS BY VISITING
usml.edu/event/celebration-of-mundelein/.

Deacon Conrad Espino is currently in the Vocational Synthesis Stage, the final phase of his priestly formation. Having completed his academic studies, he has transitioned to full-time parish ministry to integrate his human, spiritual, and intellectual formation into a unified priestly identity.

Many people know Deacon Conrad for his service in the Archdiocese of Chicago, but he is also a seasoned long-distance runner. He has completed the Chicago Marathon five times, joining a dedicated cohort of seminarians who run to support the Mission of Our Lady of the Angels. By taking on these grueling 26.2-mile races, Conrad and his fellow seminarians raise vital funds to help the Mission serve thousands of families in need on Chicago's West Side.

Every mile they run helps turn their training into an act of mercy.

Why I Run



BY DEACON CONRAD ESPINO,
CONFIGURATION 4,
ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

I like to get up early in the mornings and run. There's a sweet spot in the year, when August turns into September, and the earth starts to shed the warmth of summer. I get up early enough to chase the sunrise. I have to fight my way there, though, starting with the snooze button. The next enemy is the cold. I'm shivering, and my body says "it's freezing", even though it's probably only like 50-60 degrees.

A blast of cold morning air smother the warmth of the building and makes me want to wrap myself in a blanket and drink coffee.

And after all that, there is still a little bit of anxiety I feel as I strap on my headlamp. The main part of campus is dark, but there are street lights. Until you get to this bridge, cross it, and you enter what I call "the wild." No more street lights-just the light of my headlamp bouncing brightly off of deer eyes.

I get on the trail until it veers off into the neighborhood, and I ride the suburban streets from there. As I go, the sky slowly brightens from black to dark gray, and then the first streaks of dawn appear. The sky starts to turn purple and then pink as I round my way back to the seminary.

My favorite part is what I call "the valley." Between the trail and the start of the suburban streets is a long grassy clearing gouged into civilization by towering power lines. The morning dew is turning into a thick layer of mist over the grass as the deer get their early morning miles in.

Some days the sky is pink. Some days it's a deep blazing orange. Every day it's beautiful.

I also smile to myself when I see this. It's taken me a while to find it, but this is the reason I run.

Other guys have other reasons, maybe more noble than mine. Some guys like to run fast and want to get faster. Some of us want to run far and forever. Some of us want to run a marathon after swimming and biking an equally insane distance. Many of us also run to raise money for the Mission of Our Lady of the Angels, to help them serve families in need on the West Side of Chicago.

I love their community, I love their mission, and I happily try to support them in their service to people in need

I've run the Chicago Marathon five times for the Mission, so once every year during my time at Mundelein. I love their community, I love their mission, and I happily try to support them in their service to people in need. But beyond the financial support and the community, I just like running. Why? A very simple reason.

I like chasing the beauty of the sunrise. That's it.



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