



2025 Annual Impact Report



DIOCESE OF DES MOINES
CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS IN CHRIST



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CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS IN CHRIST

Dear Friends in Christ,
It is my pleasure to share with you our first Impact Report for the Diocese of Des Moines. In the following pages, you will see how the Diocese and our 80 parishes are embracing our strategic mission and vision of sowing God's Spirit by cultivating connections in Christ through encounter, friendship, and communion.

Our goal in this first year of implementing our Diocese's mission and vision is to advance a common path forward with parish leaders and parishioners alike. Our pastoral priorities – that were formulated after listening to you, our faithful people – focus on establishing and deepening our relationship with Christ in all stages of life.

Through this report, we offer you personal, uplifting examples of how we are cultivating connections by serving and leading parishes, by communicating our message more boldly and clearly, and by transforming the culture and efforts within the Catholic Pastoral Center.

Thank you for your prayerful support. Throughout this Jubilee Year, in our common pilgrimage of hope, we proceed as one diocesan faith community in this adventure of faith by which God in Christ accompanies and guides us. May God's Spirit find fertile ground for the seeds of his Spirit to grow in you throughout central and southwest Iowa!

Faithfully in Christ,



Most Reverend William M. Joensen



Photo by Alexis Ries

2025 by the Numbers...

The Diocese is blessed with staff and volunteers who dedicate their unique gifts and talents to the diocesan mission and vision of sowing God's Spirit by cultivating connections in Christ through encounter, friendship, and communion. The diocesan offices are at the Catholic Pastoral Center, located across the street from St. Ambrose Cathedral in Des Moines. Diocesan staff are supported by volunteers who share their expertise on a variety of consultative committees for the ministries and administration of the Diocese.

- 11** Seminarians studying in minor and major seminary for the priesthood
- 16** Catholic schools educated 6,757 students in elementary through high school
- 45** Staff members who assist the Bishop in serving the Diocese of Des Moines
- 80** Parishes comprise the Diocese of Des Moines
- 95** Active and retired priests who live and worship in the Diocese
- 102** Active and retired permanent deacons who are serving and worshipping in our parishes
- 125** Volunteers from across the Diocese give their time and talent by serving on advisory boards and committees

Living the Faith in Our Parishes

Catholics represent 11-15% of the population in the 23 counties of central and southwest Iowa that comprise the Diocese of Des Moines. While 106,000 Catholics are registered in 80 parishes we estimate that we serve an additional 30,000-40,000 Catholics who are unregistered and in our midst.

- 275** Catholic marriages, including 66 interfaith marriages (between a Catholic and non-Catholic)
- 672** Catholic funerals celebrated in our parishes
- 1,575** Baptisms across the Diocese, including 1,316 infant baptisms, 145 children baptisms, and 114 adult baptisms
- 1,606** First Communion recipients
- 8,821** Students in elementary through high school participating in a religious education program at their parish

How Catholic Charities is Serving Others

The Diocese of Des Moines supports the work of Catholic Charities, whose aim is to empower individuals, helping them regain a sense of dignity and hope, and equipping them to achieve self-sufficiency - all guided by the core principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

- 178** Families stayed at the Emergency Family Shelter in Des Moines
- 281** Refugees were assisted in resettling in Iowa
- 561** Survivors were supported through the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault program
- 21K** People visited the Catholic Charities Food Pantry's monthly market while more than 120,000 bags of food were distributed through the daily window

Understanding The Strategic Visioning Process

From the early days of Bishop William Joensen's installation as shepherd of the Diocese of Des Moines in September 2019, he wanted to listen to the leadership and people of the Diocese to develop and articulate what became the diocesan mission, vision, and priorities.

An extensive listening process was launched in 2021. Through focus groups, interviews, and surveys, the faithful were invited to share their hopes and dreams. What did they want the diocesan faith community to become?

A common mission, vision, and set of priorities for the 80 parishes of the Diocese of Des Moines emerged.

In 2023-2024, parishioners from across the Diocese serving on commissions were tasked with creating tools for parishes to use to enhance their ministries in pastoral priority areas.

In spring of 2024, Bishop Joensen invited parish leadership to consider the needs of their parishes in light of the diocesan priorities, select at least one priority of focus, and begin to employ the toolkits created by the commissions.

In the last year, we've begun to see the fruits of this Spirit-led initiative. The purpose of this Impact Report is to share the good news of how the church of southwest Iowa is encouraging encounter, friendship, and communion as we realize our vision of cultivating connections in Christ.



Photo by Anne Marie Cox

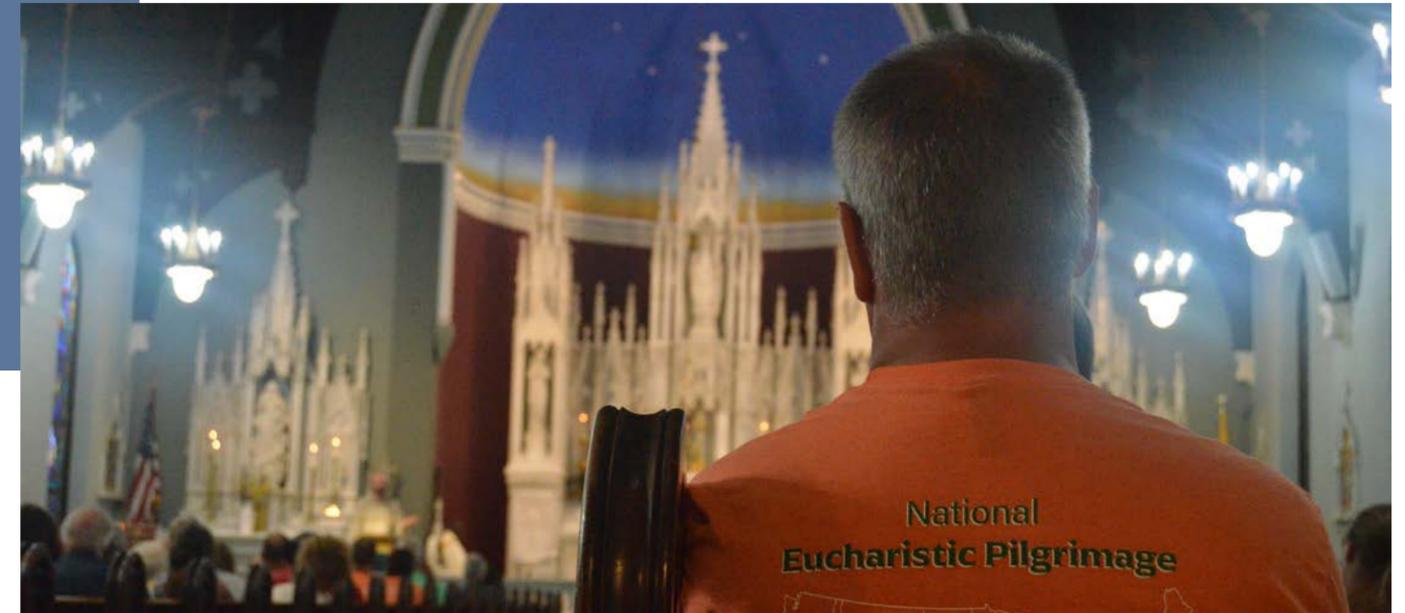


Photo by Alexis Ries

As we Sow God's Spirit in the world, we lean into our vision of cultivating connections in Christ. The seeds of love that we sow yield fruit as we discover Jesus. We are grafted by grace in relationships with Jesus and with one another, like a vine and branches. We form intimate bonds with Christ through the personal and collective experiences of encounter, friendship and communion. Cultivating these connections in Christ is central to our vision as a people after God's own heart.

Following extensive listening sessions across the Diocese, the following six areas were identified as opportunities for growth within our parishes. Each of these priorities focuses upon different spiritual and human "fields" among our people.

- Creating a Culture of Welcome & Care
- Inviting People to an Encounter with Jesus
- Accompanying Youth in Discipleship
- Engaging Young Adults in the Faith
- Preparing Disciples for the Domestic Church
- Communicating the Gospel Boldly & Clearly

Learn more about each pastoral priority and download the parish toolkits at dmdiocese.org/about-us

Cultivating Connections in Christ through *Encounter, Friendship, & Communion*

Creating a Culture of *Welcome & Care*

A welcoming parish is a reflection of Christian hospitality. Once we are welcomed, it is important to know we are cared for and that we matter to the life of the parish.

AT A GLANCE

- 8 parish advocates recruited and trained to support persons with disabilities and their families in their parishes.
- 2 Night to Shine events held, a prom event for people special needs, with 235 participants and 290 volunteers.
- The launch of a Mental Health Ministry initiative with a new page on the diocesan website and several events including a St. Dymphna Retreat, Suicide Remembrance Mass, and Blue Christmas Prayer service.
- A virtual retreat was hosted by the Emmaus House to support Catholic School counselors and Diocesan vetted counselors in the community.



St. Boniface, Waukeez

“Be open to receiving the call to hear people where they are, ask what else can we do to make sure people feel like they are involved here too. Jesus gave us his example ... He showed what it means to be inclusive.”

- MARY CLARKE, PARISH ADVOCATE

Photo provided by Stephanie Geraghty

Connections start with meeting and welcoming one another. We learn each other's needs so we can care for one another.

In a first for the Diocese, we held a Blue Christmas prayer service, led by Bishop William Joensen, at St. Ambrose Cathedral last December. Blue Christmas is a contemplative church service of peace, healing, and hope for anyone who is mourning a lost loved one or experiencing hurt of any kind. Hymns were sung, Scripture readings were shared, candles were lit, and quiet reflection time offered a peaceful environment for individuals to process feelings that the holidays may make difficult to bear. The Blue Christmas prayer service unites us so that we may support one another as we express the fullness of God's goodness, faithfulness, and love.

The Diocese also participated in Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. In September 2024, the Diocese remembered those who have been lost to suicide during a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass at St. Ambrose Cathedral. We pray for all who have been lost to suicide, for survivors of suicide, and for all who have lost a family member, friend, or colleague. We also pray that, as Church and as individuals, we can help prevent suicide by raising awareness and knowing how to help those in need. A second special Suicide Remembrance Mass was slated for Sept. 21, 2025.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, contact the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline by calling or texting 988.



Photo provided by Patty Origer



Photo by Alexis Ries

In the summer of 2024, the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage came to the west end of the Diocese of Des Moines, bringing guests from across the country. The procession brought pilgrims to Corpus Christi Parish in Council Bluffs, Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Parish in Glenwood, St. Patrick Parish in Imogene, and St. Mary Parish in Shenandoah.

Local Catholics offered cold water on those hot days, plentiful options for meals, cool places to rest and pray, and camaraderie to the cross-country pilgrims making their way to the historic National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis. The parishioners went out of their way to welcome visitors and pilgrims to their faith communities.

We all matter to the life of the parish.

Inviting People to an *Encounter with Jesus*

Jesus invites all of us to have a personal relationship with Him. The work of evangelization is an invitation into an encounter with Jesus which transforms us.

AT A GLANCE

- Sponsored a pilgrimage to the 2024 National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis, which included around 300 pilgrims from the Diocese of Des Moines.
- Hosted hundreds of pilgrims across the 3-day 2024 National Eucharistic Pilgrimage.
- Welcomed the 2025 National Eucharistic Pilgrimage to St. Ambrose Cathedral for a Holy Hour.
- Hosted an all-day OCIA workshop for clergy and lay ministers to prepare for the new transition on Becoming Catholic.
- Developed two cohorts for the Hispanic Lay Ministry Formation with 38 participants in Des Moines and Council Bluffs.



St. Ambrose Cathedral, Des Moines

“The youth themselves are evangelizing by bringing their family members and friends in the parish. They talk a lot about the impact of the faith experience at CYC; adoration, Mass, and reconciliation. It’s totally the Holy Spirit. I don’t think anyone could have predicted in 2017 what it would evolve into.”

- CATHERINE SWOBODA, YOUTH MINISTRY DIRECTOR

Photo from the 2025 National Eucharistic Pilgrimage

Inviting people to grow confident in their ability to sow God's spirit in their parish.

Thirty eight Spanish speaking people from across the Diocese of Des Moines are deepening their faith so they can help their pastors minister to others.

The current Hispanic Lay Formation Program is the largest since the program began in 2013. Through the program, students discover their gifts and talents, the needs of their parishes, and then collaborate with their pastors on a project to help fill a need.

Many of the needs are in hospitality, faith formation, pastoral care, and liturgy, all of which align with the pastoral priorities of the Diocese. Over two years, participants learn to work with their pastors and parish leadership to help people know and love God more deeply, said Mayra Moriel de Bañuelos, diocesan coordinator of Hispanic Ministry.

Then, Bishop William Joensen formally sends them into ministry with a concluding Mass.

Since the program began, 150 Spanish-speaking Catholics have grown confident in their ability to sow God's spirit in the hearts and minds of others. They have become evangelizers seeking to make disciples within their faith communities.



Photo by Mayra Moriel de Bañuelos



Photo supplied by Catherine Swoboda

Parishioners at St. Ambrose Cathedral Parish in Des Moines are providing ways for their youth to encounter Christ by raising funds to send their kids to Catholic Youth Camp.

In the process, parishioners create friendships and communion among themselves.

They clean ballfields. They work concession stands. They count aluminum cans to turn in for recycling. "It's amazing. When the kids see so many parishioners supporting them, I think they feel very loved," said youth ministry director Catherine Swoboda. "They know their parish loves them and supports them."

It all started in 2017, when parishioner Destiny Welch Teixeira reflected on the wonderful experience she'd had at a summer camp while growing up, and wished that the youth at her parish could also experience summer camp. But for many of the youth at the cathedral parish, particularly those from refugee families, the cost of Catholic Youth Camp is out of reach.

Welch Teixeira contacted the director at CYC and together they found a way to bring some of the parish's youth to camp that summer.

"We've sent St. Ambrose youth every year since then (except for 2020 during the pandemic) and every year it's grown," Swoboda said. Now, younger siblings and cousins of the first few groups are going to camp.

"The youth themselves are evangelizing by bringing their family members and friends in the parish. They talk a lot about the impact of the faith experience at CYC; adoration, Mass, and reconciliation." Swoboda said: "It's totally the Holy Spirit. I don't think anyone could have predicted in 2017 what it would evolve into."

Helping youth encounter Christ at Catholic Youth Camp.

Accompanying *Youth* in *Discipleship*

Walking with youth means meeting them where they are. Our youth are interested in making connections with their peers and forming lasting relationships.

AT A GLANCE

- 2 retreat opportunities were made available for all teens in the Diocese, including a 9th/10th grade retreat and a retreat for high school seniors.
- St. Thomas More Center began working with Teens Encounter Christ to bring TEC retreats back to the Diocese in FY26.
- Collaboration with Serva Fidem leadership at Dowling Catholic High School led to the hiring of a shared parish employee to launch Serva Fidem at the parish level.
- 2 Nun Runs were hosted by St. Albert Catholic and Dowling Catholic to take teenagers to meet with sisters from the School Sisters of Christ the King and the Poor Clares Monastery in Omaha.



St. Bernard, Osceola

"I wanted to learn more about my faith and the mysteries of the Eucharist,"

- ERIC FRANCISCO PEDRO, YOUTH PARISHIONER

Photo supplied by Father Max Carson

Creating opportunities for youth to more deeply encounter Christ through retreats.

During its recent visioning process, parishioners across the Diocese said they wanted more opportunities for young people to grow in faith.

The Diocese is responding by creating a vibrant retreat culture through partnering with parishes and families.

“Giving our leaders, and youth opportunities where they can experience God outside of the parish setting, and along with other peers, is another foundational block to building up community in our Diocese,” said Jessica Pancho, director of diocesan Youth Evangelization. “The leaders that have been involved in building up a retreat culture are very well connected to their community life, and understand the value of a retreat, and the effect it can have even after we live out a retreat.”

To help build a culture for retreats, the Diocese is supporting grassroots efforts to bring back the Teens Encounter Christ retreat, also known as TEC. A retreat was slated for September 2025 at the St. Thomas More Center in Panora.

The Diocese re-tooled the High School Senior Retreat by leaning into deeper Ignatian Spirituality, providing spiritual directors for those on the retreat. 30 high school participants engaged in this retreat.

In addition, the Diocese supported grassroots efforts to bring back the YOUTH 2000 retreat, which had over 300 youth participants and is slated to return in 2026.



Photo by Alexis Ries



Photo from the February 2025 YOUTH 2000 retreat

Deacon Kelly and Maureen Stone fondly remember taking their kids to a YOUTH 2000 retreat. One hadn't been held in the Des Moines Diocese for years and the couple felt today's youth were missing out on an amazing, spiritual experience.

Lamenting with Deacon Eric and Monica Pugh and John and Jane Gaffney about the loss of this faith-inspiring experience for youth, a core group of parishioners decided to do something about it. They began planning for a return of the YOUTH 2000 retreat.

This past February, 325 middle school and high school students enjoyed inspiring talks with Franciscan friars, adoration, Mass and more as they focused on what's working in their lives and areas where they need God's help.

“I wanted to learn more about my faith and the mysteries of the Eucharist,” said Eric Francisco Pedro, of St. Bernard Parish in Osceola.

The retreat was powerful.

“Before their Eucharistic healing procession, the sisters asked everyone to find one thing that they wanted to ask Jesus for or ask healing from when the Eucharist was exposed. I took a moment and searched my own heart trying to find what I needed from Jesus and then I found it,” said Joseph Stone, of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Ames. “The procession started and as the Eucharist got closer to me I suddenly realized in that moment just how much I was loved. I could feel God's love surrounding me.”

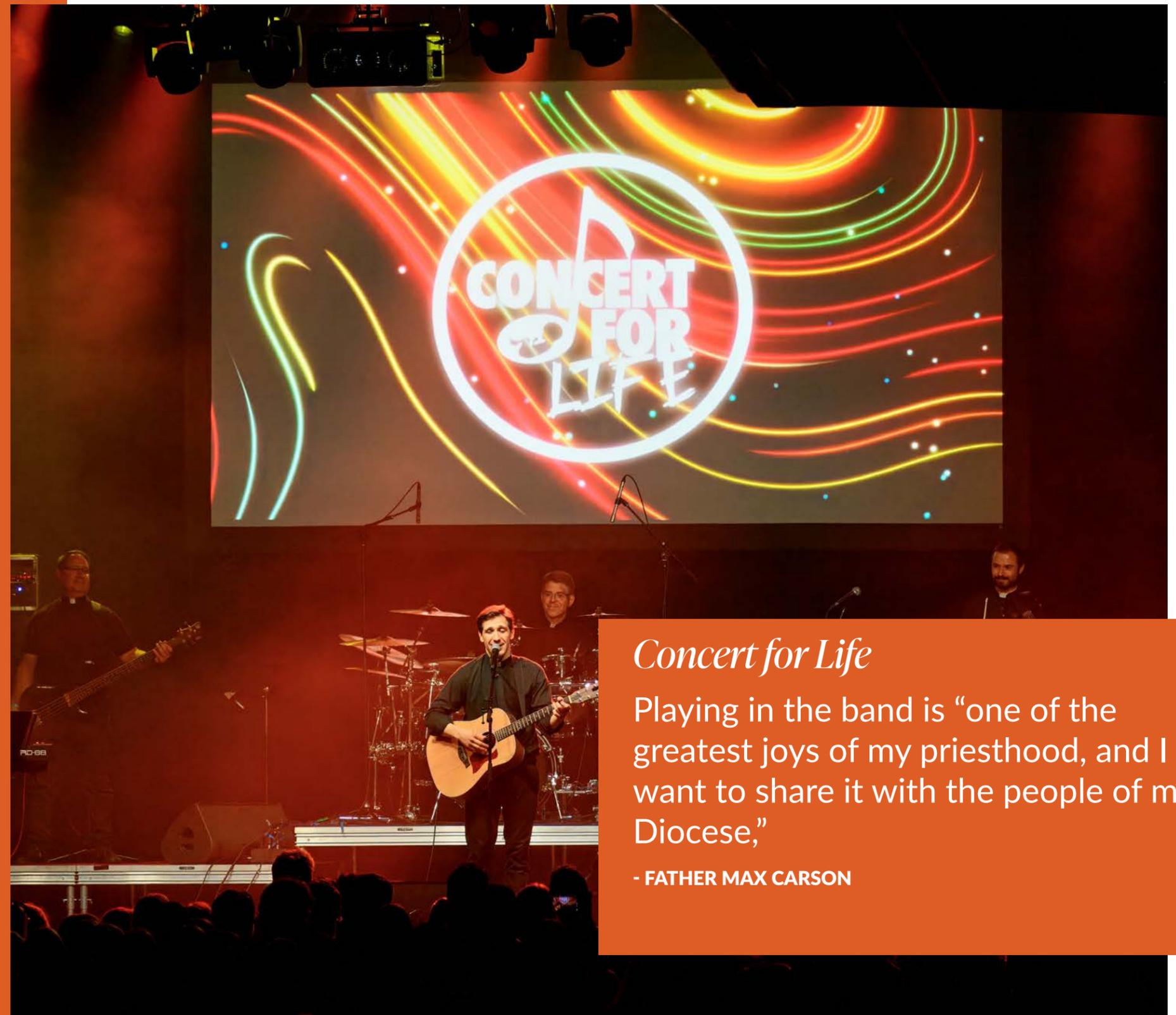
Parishes initiate retreats for youth to encounter Christ.

Engaging Young Adults *in the Faith*

We seek to connect young adults with Jesus Christ, the Church as a welcoming Christian community, the mission of the Church in the world, and a peer community where faith is nurtured and strengthened.

AT A GLANCE

- Young Catholic Network hosted quarterly gatherings, connecting 45-65 young adult professionals in the Des Moines area for professional and spiritual development.
- Multiple parishes launched young adult programming including Bible studies, holy hours, and service projects.
- More than 160 students were involved with Campus Ministry at St. Catherine of Siena, resulting in increased attendance at their Koinonia Retreat and Busy Student Retreat.



Concert for Life

Playing in the band is “one of the greatest joys of my priesthood, and I want to share it with the people of my Diocese,”

- FATHER MAX CARSON

Photo by Mike Gatzke

The Des Moines Concert for Life brought together youth and young adults for music and the celebration of life.

For a few years, Council Bluffs' Father Max Carson had been going to Texas in the summer to be a lead guitarist in an all-priest band.

This past summer, he brought the band to Iowa.

In a concert geared toward young adults, the band showed one can be a young and happy priest celebrating the gifts God gives him.

The faithful were hungry for faith and fun. The sold-out event, called Concert for Life, brought 1,500 to the Val Air Ballroom in West Des Moines, and raised \$8,000 to be split between Gabriel's Corner in Council Bluffs and Pulse Life Advocates based in Des Moines.

It appealed to Catholics of all ages with grandparents and young parents bringing children along with students and young adults clustered with friends.

The concert was proposed by Father Carson and supported with diocesan resources. Marriage & Family Life Director Justin White arranged for the concert venue. Digital Evangelist Alexis Ries promoted the concert using various digital platforms and arranged for online ticket sales through the diocesan website dmdiocese.org.

"How the kids were dancing and enjoying (the concert) was my highlight," said Sacred Heart Sister Shiji Mattakal John, of St. Pius X Parish in Urbandale. "They may not remember what we teach them in the catechism classes, but they will remember this."



Photo by Mike Gatzke



Photo by Megan Schultz

The number of young adults taking part in faith-related activities at the St. Catherine of Siena Student Center at Drake University has climbed in recent years. The goal is more than keeping young adults in the faith but to form disciples who live their faith and share their faith with others.

More than 160 students were involved in a Bible study in the 2024-2025 school year. "Statistically, that's higher than a lot of big schools," said Megan Schultz, diocesan Campus Minister who is based at St. Catherine. While FOCUS missionaries (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) led some of the Bible studies, most were led by students themselves.

The 5 p.m. Sunday evening Mass for students draws about 70 young adults, most of whom stay for a community dinner afterward.

"It's cool to see that come alive," Schultz said. "You can see the community grow."

And the number of young people participating in retreats has doubled. The first year of the spring Busy Students Retreat, there were 11 students who participated. This past year, the number doubled to 22 students. As part of the retreat, students see a spiritual director four days in a row. Some continue their spiritual growth after the retreat.

"I still have students who found their own spiritual directors or are still talking to the spiritual directors from the retreat. It didn't stop. The graces of that communication with a priest or trusted spiritual director continued," Schultz said.

Moving forward, Schultz will be looking for progress. Signs include, but are not limited to, numbers. She said: "I hope this isn't just a four-year church that they go to, but it inspires them to be Catholics who live the Gospel in their 9-5 jobs, and families, and with friends who aren't Catholic."

Focusing on young adults bears fruit.

Preparing Disciples for the *Domestic* *Church*

The family is placed at the heart of discipleship and mission. It is the privileged place for evangelization, catechesis, and spiritual growth.

AT A GLANCE

- 10 parish communities received a Lilly Foundations grant through the National Community of Catechetical Leaders to work with a consultant to create plans to more effectively engage the whole family in faith formation.
- Increased participation in marriage preparation resulted in an increase in Pre-Cana workshops and attendees.
- 10 new sponsor couples were trained.
- The pilot program for Thrive, an online marriage workshop from Kansas City, continues to show great promise.



St. John the Apostle, Norwalk

“How are we walking with our moms and dads? In some of our families it’s grandparents who are doing all of this. In some of them it’s foster families. All sorts of families, all sorts of shapes. How are we walking with them and then helping them really be the domestic church?”

- JOHN GAFFNEY, DIRECTOR OF EVANGELIZATION & MISSION

Photo by Anne Marie Cox

Faith formation project being launched to engage and equip parents to be more confident in their roles as faith leaders.

The Des Moines Diocese is one of 20 dioceses developing plans to engage and equip parents to be more confident in their roles as faith leaders within their families.

The Parents and Families at the Center of Faith Formation project is being piloted by the National Community of Catechetical Leaders and funded by a \$1.25 million grant from the Lilly Endowment. The Diocese is facilitating this grassroots effort to create plans that are customized for each of the 10 parishes participating.

The parishes began by looking at “how families are successfully transmitting faith and values and then trying to build on that, to look to the strengths of families in our time, in our day,” said Paulette Chapman, a longtime faith formation consultant from Urbandale who is assisting the Diocese. Passing on the faith is more than sharing knowledge. It’s about accompaniment, says John Gaffney diocesan director of Evangelization & Mission.

“How are we walking with our moms and dads? In some of our families it’s grandparents who are doing all of this. In some of them it’s foster families. All sorts of families, all sorts of shapes,” he explained. “How are we walking with them and then helping them really be the domestic church?”

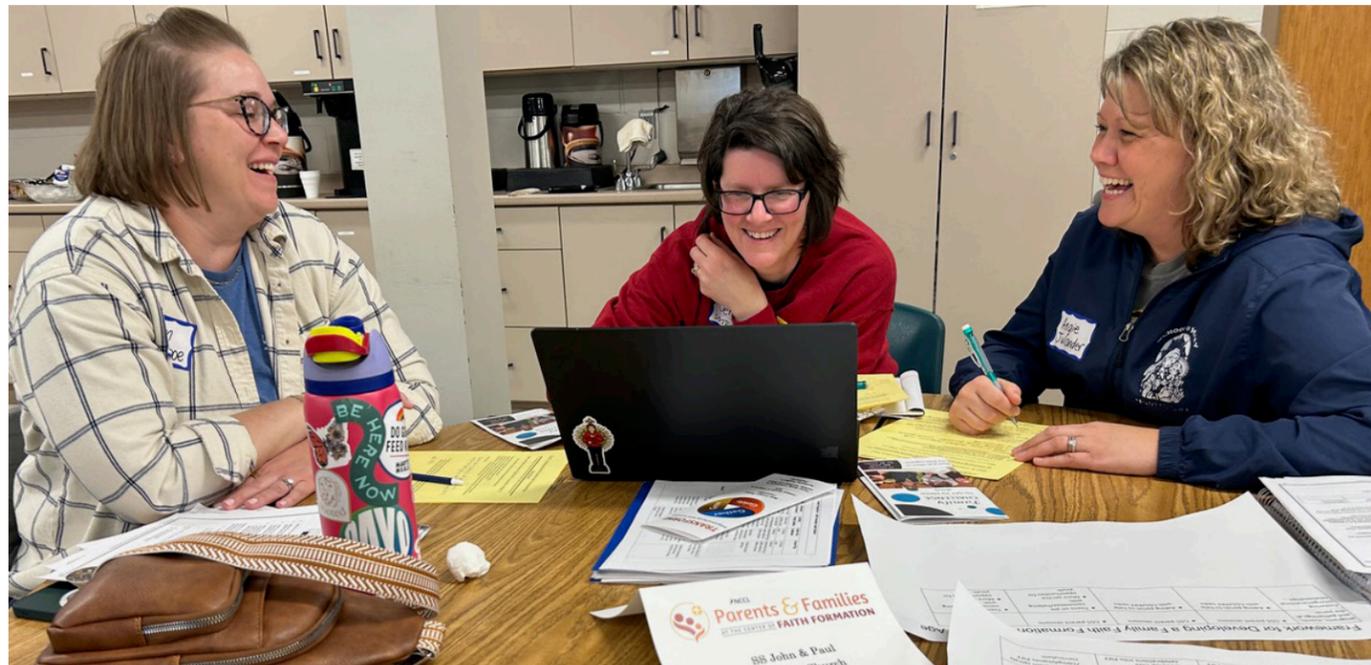


Photo by Paulette Chapman



Photo reprinted with permission from Jenna McEntee

Sponsor couples are critical in providing parish-based love and care to engaged couples who are preparing for the sacrament of marriage. The pastoral care sponsor couples offer helps engaged couples understand the sacramentality of marriage in the eyes of God and the Catholic Church; it is a covenant in the eyes of God.

New diocesan Marriage & Family Life Director Justin White is planning to renew opportunities for training and fellowship among sponsor couples. Appreciating the vital role sponsor couples play in accompanying engaged couples prior to marriage, he’s wondering what fruit might come from mentorship or accompaniment of couples in the first few years after their marriage.

Is this a role sponsor couples might be interested in filling?

White plans to listen to sponsor couples and to clergy and gather feedback about whether it’s possible to expand and lengthen the time the Church accompanies parishioners at this point in their faith journeys.

“Providing a concentration of pastoral care in the five years before marriage for young adults and engaged couples and for five years after marriage gives us 10 years to accompany young adults into family life,” said White. “I think there is great potential in helping our young families encounter God, deepen friendships with God and other young couples, and find communion and community in the Church.”

Expanding the role of sponsor couples.

Communicating the Gospel *Boldly & Clearly*

Communication is key to a thriving, active Catholic parish. It moves parishioners from a maintenance approach to a mission approach in sharing the love of God with others

AT A GLANCE

- 42 parishes are active on Catholic Social Media, where 2,163 posts were shared across Facebook, Instagram, and X (Twitter) during FY25.
- 8 presentations on different aspects of Catholic Social Teaching were presented by Dr. John Huynh at parishes across the Diocese.
- Held a Parish Communications Summit to offer professional development for parish staff and volunteers.
- Launched digital campaigns for Lent & Advent which included videos, social media content, and offline faith activities for the family.



Catholic Social Media

“Catholic Social Media makes it easy for small parishes with limited staff and hours to easily grab content created by the Diocese and share on their social media accounts.”

- PARISH STAFF IN A CATHOLIC SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEY

Photo from the Basilica of St. John

Widening the Diocesan *Digital Footprint*

Saturate various forms of media with the Catholic message and convey the beauty of Catholic teaching to those beyond the pews.

AT A GLANCE

- Traffic to the website from social media was up 39% as the Diocese focused on regularly posting articles from The Catholic Mirror to Facebook & Instagram to increase its readership (which saw a 53% increase in digital readership).
- Creation of daily prayer reels posted to Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube resulted in 1,411 new YouTube subscribers.
- Consistent posting on social media caused Facebook reach to nearly double (up 95%) and Instagram saw its reach grow by 309%.
- Social media content from the Diocese on Catholic Social Media is helping parishes increase their reach on digital platforms.



Research shows **51%** of U.S. Catholics say they pray daily and **44%** say religion is important in their lives. With a majority of U.S. adults using social media, this is a prime area for evangelization.

- PEW RESEARCH CENTER "RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE STUDY OF U.S. ADULTS CONDUCTED JULY 17, 2023-MARCH 4, 2024"

Widening the diocesan communications footprint to include more digital platforms

Sixty percent of U.S Catholics don't regularly attend Mass, but 51% say they pray daily and 44% say religion is important in their lives. So, how do we reach these Catholics that aren't in our pews?

We find them online.

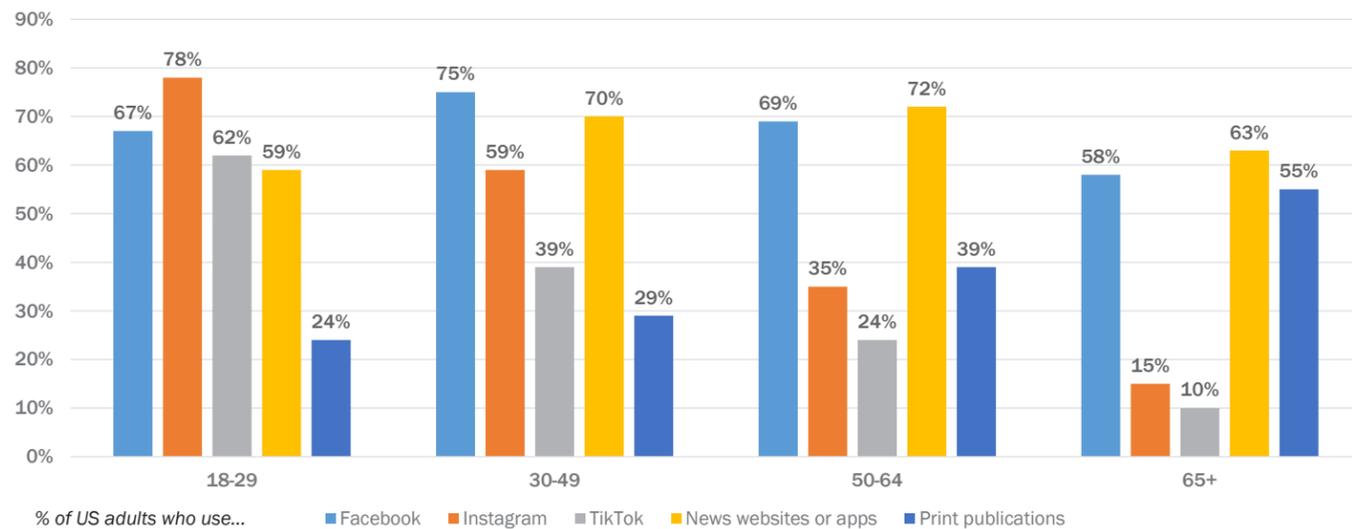
While Mass attendance may be down, social media sites continue to see new users signing up every single day. A study from Pew Research Center highlighted how the different age demographics are engaging online.

One way to reach disengaged Catholics is to reach them on Facebook - the most consistently used social media platform for adults. There is also an increased need to use Instagram, which outpaced Facebook for users in the 18-29 demographic.

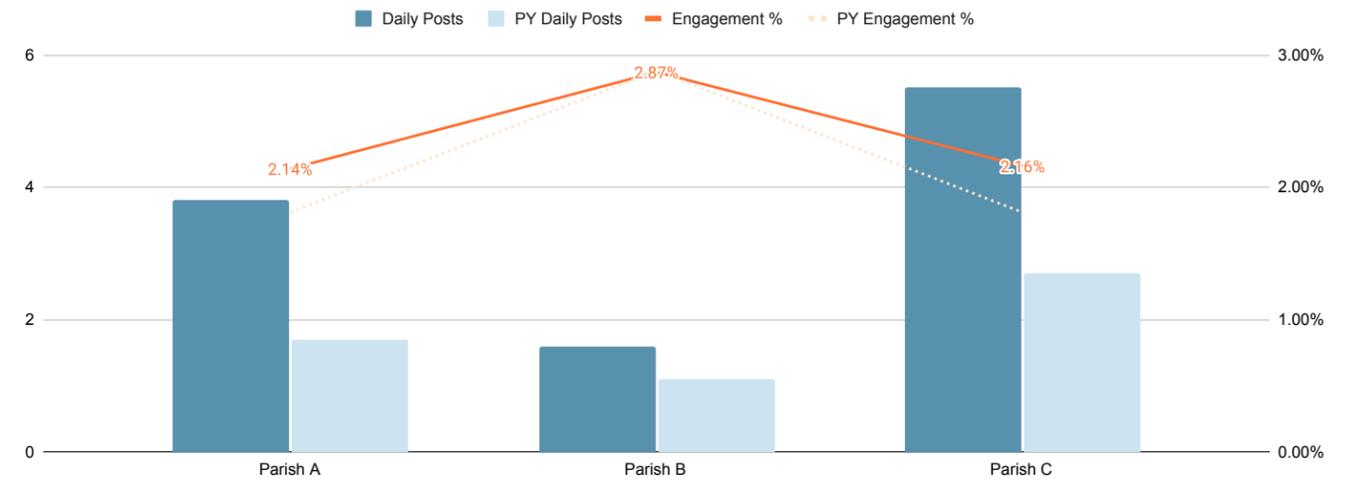
The younger our audience, the less likely they are to be interacting with the print version of The Catholic Mirror, so to reach them we need to be cross-posting that content onto our digital platforms. After doing so this year, we saw a 53% increase in digital readership of news & blog articles on the website.

Demographic Overview

Media Usage by Age Groups



<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/>
<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/news-platform-fact-sheet/>



All three parishes that participated in the case study saw an increase in daily posts after launching Catholic Social Media. Parishes A & C also saw a boost in their post engagement rates.

Catholic Social Media is a social media management platform exclusively for Catholic parishes and dioceses. Parishes have access to custom content generated by the Diocese and are able to easily post that content across their social media channels, along with content that they generate and upload.

To analyze the impact of Catholic Social Media on parish social media use and engagement the Diocese did an in-depth analyses on 3 parishes using the platform.

On average, parishes that used Catholic Social Media started posting more frequently which resulted in a 68% increase in social media impressions, a 26% increase in their social media reach (the number of unique individuals reached) and a 12% boost in post engagement (likes, comments, & shares).

Original content uploaded by the parish still has the best performance on social media, but this case study highlighted the positive impacts of posting more frequently and using complementary content from the Diocese to drive engagement.

Study shows Catholic Social Media boosts parish digital footprint

Transforming the *Structure & Culture* of the Catholic Pastoral Center

We can better cultivate connections by strengthening structural facets of the Diocese of Des Moines to serve parishes.

AT A GLANCE

- Aligned technology, policies, and services to support the mission and vision of the Diocese.
- Created a new deanery structure to encourage parish and priestly collaboration.
- Implemented Paylocity across all parishes for greater consistency in accounting and HR practices.
- Transitioned the Safe Environment program to be digital to improve processing time for volunteers and new staff hires.
- Offered professional development for staff in the Catholic Pastoral Center and in the parishes.



“The hope is to create more
localized support and vitality.”

- FATHER DAVID FLEMING, SPEAKING ON THE CREATION OF
THE NEW DEANERY STRUCTURE

Serving parishes with technology and centralized processes

The Diocese assists parishes by using efficiencies, technology, and centralizing where applicable to lessen the amount of time parish staff spend on business affairs so they can spend more time on the mission of sowing God's Spirit in the hearts and minds of people.

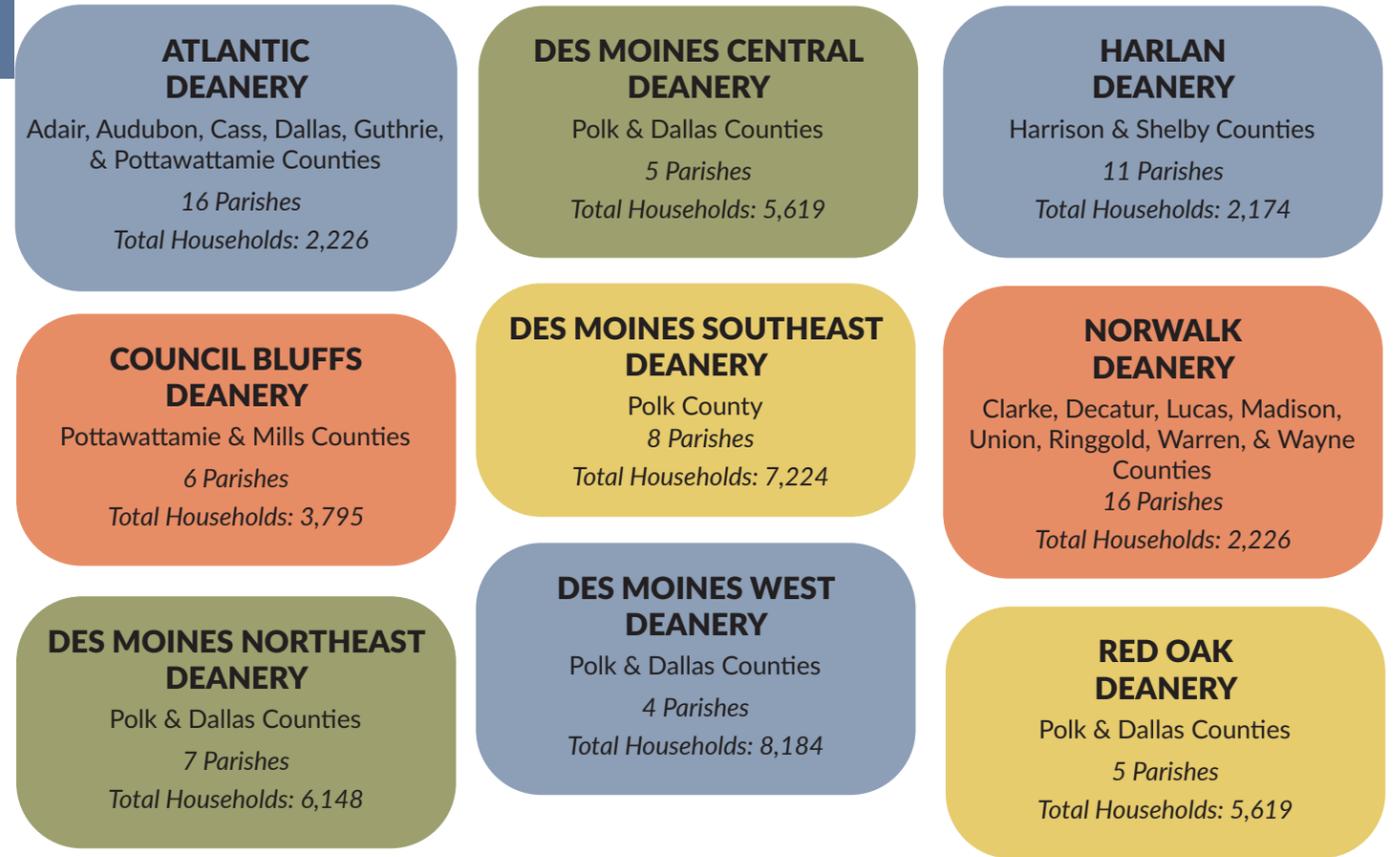
One recent example of this was the diocesan Finance Office's implementation and training of a cloud-based service for Human Resources and payroll. With all 80 parishes and 16 schools using Paylocity, there is now greater consistency in accounting practices and guidance for Human Resource practices. Tech support is available both through Paylocity and the Diocese's Finance and HR Offices.

The process of implementing Paylocity created opportunities through the Business Office Forum meetings and trainings to cultivate connections by building stronger relationships between diocesan staff and parish staff. Providing this tool was also an opportunity for us to practice servant leadership by listening and evaluating the needs of parishes, then finding a tool that could alleviate some of the burden of back-end business responsibilities. Using tools like Microsoft Teams, we are able to interactively train parishes and schools outside the Des Moines metro area in real time in addition to the Business Office Forums. In some cases, having Paylocity has allowed us to take some of the burden associated with Human Resources Information System and payroll tasks off of the smallest parishes.



Photo by Anne Marie Cox

New Deanery Structure for the Diocese of Des Moines



Father David Fleming, tasked with pastoral planning for the Diocese, found opportunities for greater collaboration to help parishes thrive. He learned many other dioceses have a deanery system.

There are several benefits to forming groups of parishes in close proximity to each other.

- For parishes and parishioners, the groupings foster greater collaboration, thereby forming a stronger communion. While some parishes currently share staff or programs, the hope is that the parish family design brings people closer for encounters and friendships in faith.
- For priests, the groupings create a stronger connection among those living and working close to each other;
- For the Bishop, the plan provides a structure that better supports and pastorally cares for the faithful.

Father Fleming said: "The hope is to create more localized support and vitality."

Deaneries foster greater collaboration

Moving Safe Environment to be a digital process for improved efficiency

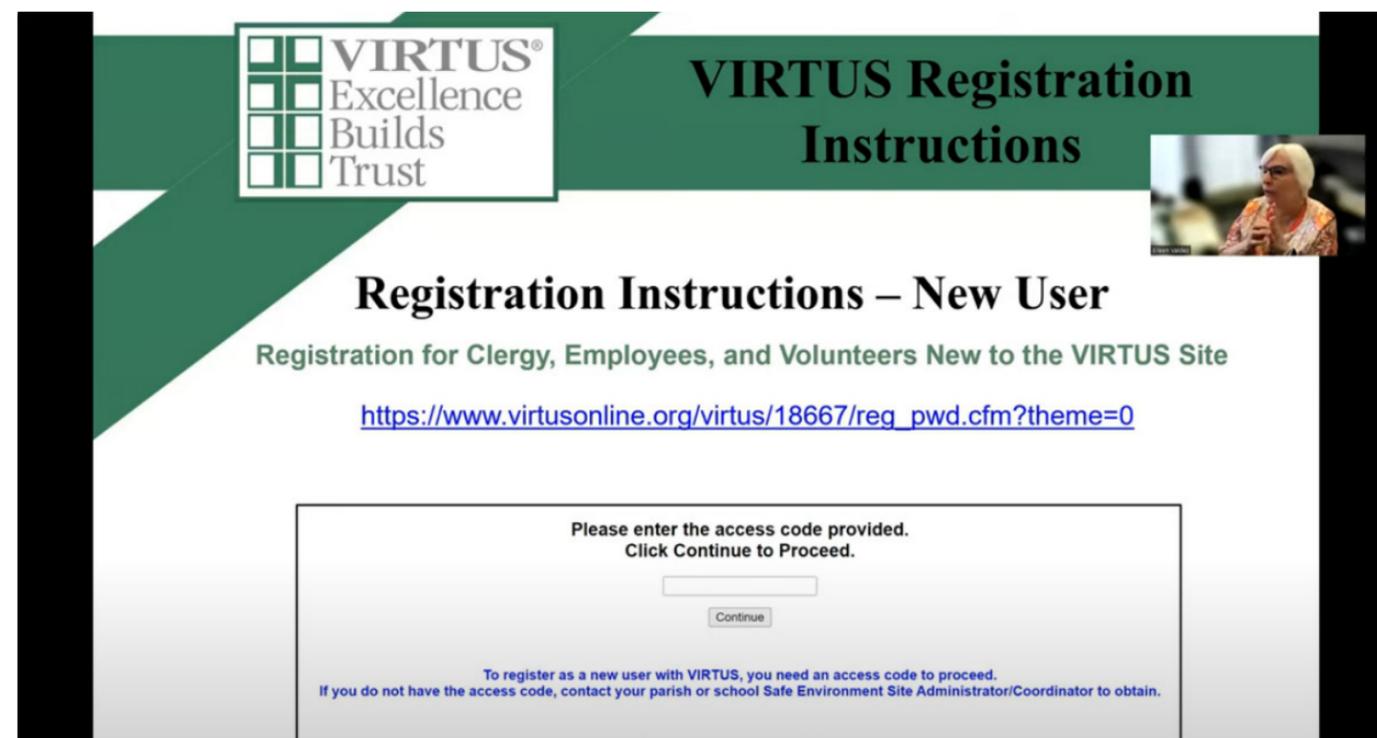
The goal of the Diocese of Des Moines' safe environment program is to create a safe environment for children and train staff and volunteers on how to identify and act on suspicious behavior. The program requires background screening, the signing of a Code of Conduct, and online training through the VIRTUS program for employees and volunteers who spend three or more hours per month with children in our parishes and Catholic schools.

When the safe environment program rolled out to parishes and religious education programs in the Diocese of Des Moines more than 20 years ago, there was much paperwork involved.

This created at least two challenges. Approval to hire staff or volunteers was delayed because of paperwork needing to be sent to the Catholic Pastoral Center, and confidential information on application forms needed to be secured.

Today, the process of doing background checks, Code of Conduct, and training have gone digital, not only saving time but providing an increased level of confidentiality.

The results? The applications are processed faster and with a greater degree of security for confidential information. It means parishes and schools can hire staff or approve of volunteers more quickly so they can focus on the mission of sowing God's Spirit in the hearts and minds of people.



The screenshot shows the VIRTUS Registration Instructions page. At the top left is the VIRTUS logo with the tagline "VIRTUS Excellence Builds Trust". The main heading is "VIRTUS Registration Instructions". Below this is a sub-heading "Registration Instructions – New User" and a link: "Registration for Clergy, Employees, and Volunteers New to the VIRTUS Site" with the URL https://www.virtusonline.org/virtus/18667/reg_pwd.cfm?theme=0. A form field is shown with the instruction "Please enter the access code provided. Click Continue to Proceed." and a "Continue" button. At the bottom, there is a note: "To register as a new user with VIRTUS, you need an access code to proceed. If you do not have the access code, contact your parish or school Safe Environment Site Administrator/Coordinator to obtain."



Photo by Alexis Ries

Just about every month – especially during the school year – leadership in various ministries gather to deepen their own faith so they can model what it means to be Catholic, share the faith with others, and grow professionally. We call these professional development opportunities “ministering to the ministers.”

Every month during the academic year, school administrators meet for professional development and deepening their faith. Teachers also meet every month during the school year for professional development.

Parish catechetical leadership meets monthly during the academic year, either in person or online, for professional development and faith growth.

Quarterly, pastors and parish business managers meet to review guidelines and best practices for budgets, parish Finance Councils, insurance, risk assessments, best practices for technology, and more.

Twice per year, parish communication coordinators gather to get updates on Catholic Social Media, best practices for websites and e-newsletters, copyright guidelines and more.

We strive to be the best we can by sharing success stories, addressing challenges, and supporting one another through prayer.

Servant leadership is at the core of what we do

Strengthening Catholic Schools with the new Region Business Office

A key priority of the strategic plan for the Diocese of Des Moines is transforming the structure and culture of the Pastoral Center. Nowhere is that seen more clearly than on the second floor, which has become a hub of service directed toward the organizations at the heart of our diocesan mission: our schools.

The new Region Business Office – made up of 16 dedicated individuals – was founded to be the single supporter of human resources, information technology, and financial services needs for all 12 Catholic schools in the Des Moines metro. This goal has been implemented in a phased approach. Through the 2024-2025 school year, the Region Business Office provided support for seven schools.

In January 2025, 13 members of the team moved to a centralized base of operations on the second floor of the Pastoral Center, providing a unified base of operations for the first time. This physical consolidation laid the groundwork for a major milestone.

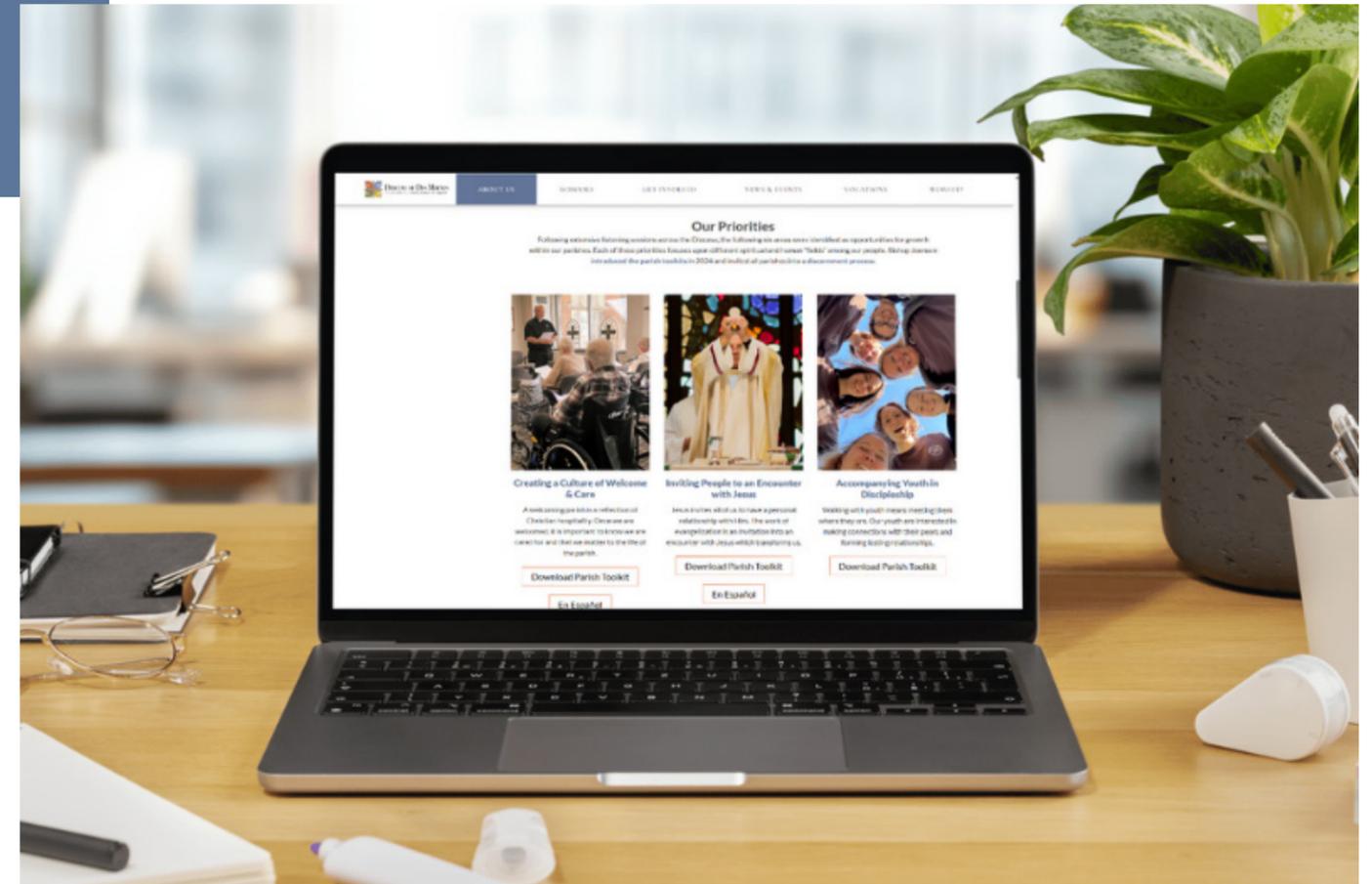
This summer, the Region Business Office completed onboarding of the final five Des Moines metro Catholic schools. Holy Trinity, Sacred Heart, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Pius X, and St. Theresa joined seven existing schools under the umbrella of shared business services.

This unified approach ensures all teachers, administrators, and staff get the same high-quality benefits and support, no matter where they work. By taking on the complexities of business operations, the Region Business Office allows administrators and teachers to do what they do best: provide a high-quality, faith-filled education.

This act of service doesn't just streamline operations. It strengthens our entire school system, ensuring our educators can continue forming the next generation of Catholic leaders.



**DES MOINES REGIONAL
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**



Are you ready to take your parish to the next level?

The Diocese offers six toolkits, created by parish and school leadership, that compile good ideas and best practices in six pastoral priority areas of the Diocese. First, start with an introduction to the toolkits, penned by Bishop William Joensen. He introduces the origin of the toolkits and how they can help parishes thrive. Then, use a parish discernment process in collaboration with parishioners to determine the needs of your parish.

For more information about a specific toolkit or pastoral priority, you can contact the following people:

- *Creating a Culture of Welcome & Care*, Cathy Jordan at cjordan@dmdiocese.org
- *Inviting People to an Encounter with Jesus*, John Gaffney at jgaffney@dmdiocese.org
- *Accompanying Youth in Discipleship*, Jessica Pancho at jpancho@dmdiocese.org
- *Engaging Young Adults in the Faith*, Justin White at jwhite@dmdiocese.org
- *Preparing Disciples for the Domestic Church*, Justin White at jwhite@dmdiocese.org
- *Communicating the Gospel Boldly & Clearly*, Anne Marie Cox at acox@dmdiocese.org

Find the toolkits at dmdiocese.org/about-us

Thank you!

“To be grateful is to recognize the love of God in everything he has given us – and he has given us everything.”- Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk and writer

The Diocese of Des Moines is tremendously grateful to the thousands of people who contribute directly or indirectly in support of its mission to sow God’s Spirit in their homes, parishes, and broader community.

Thank you for your generous contributions to the Annual Diocesan Appeal, which primarily funds the diocesan ministries that assist parishes and schools advance their missions.

Thank you for supporting your parish’s mission by tithing regularly. Your gifts do so much more than keep the lights on! They directly support opportunities for encounters with Christ for all of us: for children and young adults, for parents, and for senior citizens. They provide resources for deepening friendships, and they support faith formation for those preparing to grow closer to Christ through the sacraments.

Thank you for your generous gifts to the Ignite! capital campaign, which provides support to Catholic school students, to parishes through the Parish Mission Renewal grants, and other initiatives that foster vitality in our faith communities.

Thank you to the generous donors who wish to see their legacy of supporting the mission of the Catholic Church continue for many years to come!

We are one Body in Christ, and together, we are cultivating connections in Christ through opportunities for encounter, friendship, and communion!



DIOCESE OF DES MOINES
CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS IN CHRIST