

Catholic elementary students explore Vocations: Diocesan Director talks faith, service, and God's calling

DUNMORE – In a classroom inside Saint Mary of Mount Carmel School, seventh graders listened attentively as Father Alex Roche, Diocesan Secretary of Clergy Formation, shared stories of his journey to the priesthood.

When one student asked what the best part of being a priest was, Father Alex quickly responded it was being with them and being able to talk about God.

“Sometimes, the best thing that you can do for a kid is to remind them that God loves them, and he has a plan for them,” Father Alex later told *The Catholic Light*.

For many years, staff from the Diocesan Vocations Office has visited Catholic high schools to meet with students that might have an interest in the priesthood or religious life.

Father Alex is now also making it a priority to visit Catholic elementary schools to talk to younger students about prayer, discerning God's call and recognizing the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Father Alex's visits to local Catholic elementary schools have become a cornerstone of his mission to plant seeds of vocation in the hearts of young students, particularly in second and seventh grades, “pivot point” ages when studies show children are developing a new sense of self,



Father Alex Roche, Diocesan Secretary for Clergy Formation, talks to seventh graders at Saint Mary of Mount Carmel School in Dunmore on Oct. 17, 2024. (Photo/Dan Gallagher)

discovering their gifts, and open to listening to God in prayer in a more mature way.

The visits are not just an opportunity to speak with children about the priesthood or religious life, but to emphasize the importance of following God's calling in whatever form it might take.

“They are moments in life when things are starting to shift. They're thinking about God and themselves in different ways, so I've found they're important moments to get in and have some of these conversations,” Father Alex explained.

During each visit, Father Alex takes time to engage with students, answering their questions and helping them explore the idea of a ‘vocation’ in a way that is relatable to their age.

“I thought his talk was very informative,” seventh grader Molly Fox said after a recent presentation. “I learned there is more than one way to pray,

and everybody has their own style.”

“I'm actually thinking about high school and college and what I want to do,” her classmate Sophia Triano admitted.

Triano said a vocation to religious life has crossed her mind, but she currently wants to be an actress.

“I always know that God is with me, and he'll take care of me,” she added.

Traigh Sottile, who also participated in the presentation has also thought about the possibility of being a priest – mostly at the encouragement of his mother – but

recognizes whatever his future holds, he will always need God's guidance and assistance.

“You have to pray, and you have to ask for forgiveness,” he said.

All of Father Alex's efforts are already inspiring young people to think about their own faith journeys and be open to the possibility of serving the Church.

Antonio Ingargiola, a former student from Saint Mary of Mount Carmel School, accompanied Father Alex on his recent trip. He has been discerning a call to the priesthood for more than a year.

“It's really been a continuation of many different things, little comments that people would say, the external confirmation, people saying, ‘you'd be a great priest,’ and the internal stuff, really feeling that desire for God and feeling that this is something I could see myself doing,” Ingargiola stated.

Ingargiola says his Catholic faith is the center of his life. Despite all the challenges young people face in today's world, he hopes when they listen to Father Alex, they will be reminded of Christ's love for them.

“Before anything, we need to remember that we are God's children. I think people become indifferent to God's love and that is something we can't allow to happen,” he added.

Young adults reminded to ‘make Jesus Christ present in this world’ during annual ‘Leave a Mark’ celebration

SCRANTON – At her home parish, Gina Morgese recognizes that she is one of the youngest people in the pews.

While attending the Diocese of Scranton's annual ‘Leave a Mark’ Mass on Nov. 3, the Carbondale native found herself surrounded by many other young Catholics her age, all gathered to joyfully celebrate their shared faith.

“It gives me so much hope that the Church is alive, and God is present,” Morgese said. “I look forward to it every year.”

Held at the Cathedral of Saint Peter, this year marked the ninth annual ‘Leave a Mark’ Mass, which kicks off National Vocation Awareness Week. The name of

the Mass originates from Pope Francis' words to young people during the 2016 World Youth Day in Poland.

“I just always feel like I can be myself

at these gatherings and connect with other people who have similar beliefs,” Morgese



Students from The University of Scranton participate in the ninth annual ‘Leave a Mark’ Mass on Nov. 3, 2024, at the Cathedral of Saint Peter. (Photos/Mike Melisky)



Following Mass, many young adults, including Gina Morgese, front center, attended a social at the Diocesan Pastoral Center in downtown Scranton.

added. “It can be hard in our secular world, but I love moments like this, where I can

connect with other young Catholics.”

Continued on Page 21

Turn Your PA Tax Dollars Into Student Scholarships

Yes, it is easy to designate the taxes you have to pay through the EITC Program!

DUNMORE – After having watched his older brother attend Holy Cross High School, Christopher Rotell-Tierney always knew he wanted to attend the Dunmore school as well.

“I love the environment. Everyone cares about each other. The faculty genuinely cares about us, not just our academics,” he said.

Now in his senior year, Rotell-Tierney is thankful for scholarship money that has made his dream a reality.

“Our world today is very expensive wherever you turn and the scholarships I have received have helped me not only attend HCHS but has softened the financial blow of everyday life,” he added.

For many students, receiving a scholarship or financial aid makes a Catholic school education possible.

That is why the Diocese of Scranton recently partnered with RedefinED, a company that has proven success in maximizing Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) contributions.

The EITC program is a Pennsylvania initiative that allows both individuals and businesses to direct their state income tax money to benefit students instead of sending that funding to Harrisburg.

“Not only can it change the lives of students, but it can help make Catholic schools more financially sound, by having



Christopher Rotell-Tierney, right, a senior at Holy Cross High School in Dunmore, is one of many students who are thankful for the scholarship money they have received.

PARTICIPATING IS AS EASY AS 1-2-3!

Step 1 Sign-Up

Determine your current year PA State Income tax liability, found on Line 12 of the PA-40 form. Then sign the one-page pledge form with the amount of your contribution.

Step 2 Donate

Once you receive your approval for the tax credit, you will send in the pledge amount, a minimum of just 10% of your tax liability.

Step 3 Claim Your Credit

After your contribution is made, you will receive a K-1 tax form to file with your taxes, providing you with a 90% tax credit on the contribution you made.

In simple terms, the EITC program is a way to direct the tax dollars that you already pay to a Catholic school's financial aid program instead of directing those dollars to the state. When you participate, your tax dollars are turned into scholarships for students in the school that you designate!

more dollars and funding the gap that exists between what they charge (in tuition) and what it actually costs,” Alyse Maslonik, founder and CEO of RedefinED, explained.

This mission is personal for Maslonik, who personally was able to attend a Catholic school because of someone else's EITC contribution. Since founding her company in January 2022, RedefinED has already raised more than \$28 million in tax credit scholarship funding.

“It's really important for me to simplify the process for the everyday person because so many people don't know about the program even though it has been around since 2001,” Maslonik said.

The new Diocesan partnership with RedefinED makes the process easy. The company oversees the work – including all the paperwork after a participant signs a pledge form.

“So often, parents say, ‘it's too good to be true,’” Maslonik admitted. “The biggest push-back that we get is that people can't believe that this exists.”

Getting Involved in the EITC Program in 3 Easy Steps

Anyone who is interested in supporting Catholic education, or students in one of the Diocese of Scranton's 19 Catholic schools, can participate in the EITC program. People do not have to have a child or grandchild enrolled in a Catholic school to participate.

Maslonik said many people appreciate knowing the tangible impact their tax dollars can have on a student's life.

“There's not usually a human connection with the tax dollars that we pay but EITC provides that human connection,” she explained. “They can know, I helped Sally Smith through her education and look at her now.”

Following RedefinED's program, the first thing a participant needs to do is determine what they're currently paying in state taxes.

“Once you figure out what your taxes are, you sign up, write your check, and

get your refund. That is how easy it is,” Maslonik added.

The impact is life changing.

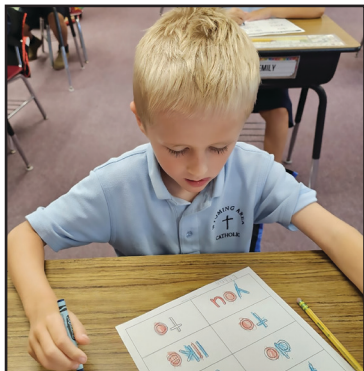
For Rotell-Tierney, being immersed in theology classes and attending Masses regularly at Holy Cross High School has made him a better person.

“The everyday environment, where I am able to experience my Catholic faith, has definitely changed my view of life and myself and has made me realize that part of what we should be doing is helping in our community, giving back to others when we can,” he said.

For more information or to participate in the EITC tax credit program, contact Hayley Youngkin, donor relationship manager for RedefinED covering the Scranton area, at (814) 419-5505 or Hayley@redefiningeducation.org. For general information, you can visit RedefinED's website at redefiningeducation.org.

Diocese of Scranton
CATHOLIC
 SCHOOL SYSTEM
 FAITH • ACADEMICS • SERVICE

The Diocese of Scranton is committed to educating our students in an environment that is academically excellent and facilitates the development of moral judgment and Christian decision-making. We are proud to share the following successes of our students in the classroom and in their service to others. Each day, our schools are fulfilling their mission of preparing today's youth and young adults to become tomorrow's faith-filled leaders.



Since the beginning of the school year, students in Mrs. Dana Ungureit's first grade class at **Wyoming Area Catholic School in Exeter** have been learning ways to differentiate between vowels and consonants during their reading class.



At the beginning of November, students at **Saint John Neumann Jr./Sr. High School in Williamsport** hosted a Mock Presidential Election, learning all about the voting process and the importance of making their voices heard.



First graders at **La Salle Academy in Jessup** organized a fundraiser to benefit the cats and dogs waiting for adoption at Griffin Pond Animal Shelter.



The seventh grade class at **Our Lady of Peace School in Clarks Green** presented skits based on the Beatitudes at the school's All Saints Day Liturgy.



Grades 6-8 at **Saint Mary of Mount Carmel School in Dunmore** designed and painted a Pennsylvania Department of Transportation plow, as part of the Paint the Plow Program, under the guidance of their art teacher, Mrs. Lubinski. The plow will be used this winter to enhance public awareness, promote safety, and foster a greater appreciation of both PennDOT and our school's art program.



To celebrate the beginning of November, fifth graders at **Holy Family Academy in Hazleton** created a project for the whole school to enjoy entitled "A Latte To Be Thankful For."

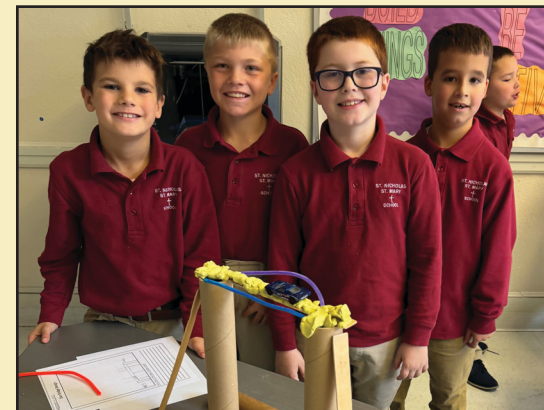


Kindergarten students at **Saint Clare/Saint Paul School in Scranton** enjoyed tasting different apples in honor of Johnny Appleseed Day.



Newly elected officers and homeroom representatives from **Good Shepherd Academy in Kingston** recently participated in the school's Student Council Induction Ceremony.

Students in the second grade at **Saint Nicholas/Saint Mary School in Wilkes-Barre** recently completed a project where students built a bridge out of basic paper products and office supplies that needed to be strong enough for a model car to cross.





When you're in a pinch, call Pinch Designs! The newly added entrepreneurship class at **Holy Cross High School in Dunmore** is hard at work learning what it takes to run a business, including branding, budgeting, and speaking with customers. The students have been fulfilling requests from teachers and taking orders for different school events, which includes making banners.



With trumpets and the sound of the horn, shout with joy to the King, the Lord! (Psalm 98:6)

Students at **Saint John Neumann Elementary School in Williamsport** are sharpening their musical talents and creating a school band, including this fifth grader practicing his saxophone.



During Fire Prevention Month, the **Scranton Fire Department** met with pre-kindergarten to second grade students at **All Saints Academy in Scranton** to share their wisdom about remaining safe in case of a fire or other emergency.



Mr. David Durham gave a presentation on National Parks to the fifth grade class at **Notre Dame Elementary School in East Stroudsburg**.



Students in the first grade at **Epiphany School in Sayre** celebrated the 50th day of school with a sock-hop dance party and 1950s-themed activities.



The **Excelsior Hose Company No. 2** visited the pre-kindergarten class at **Holy Rosary School in Duryea** as students learned about fire safety and had the chance to tour the fire truck.



Junior **Georgel Bioh**, Senior **Matthew Ahnert**, and Junior **Alana Jackson** volunteered with their fellow students to greet visitors, provide refreshments, and serve as tour guides during the fall open house at **Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School in East Stroudsburg**.



There's no better way to read than with a (stuffed) furry friend by your side as demonstrated here by a student at **Saint Agnes School in Towanda**.

'Leave a Mark' Mass focuses on young adults

Continued from Page 14

The Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, served as principal celebrant of the Mass, and Father Alex Roche, Diocesan Secretary for Clergy Formation, delivered the homily.

From the moment the opening hymn, "Lift Up Your Hearts," filled the Cathedral, it was clear that this was no ordinary Mass – it was a celebration of youth, hope, and the power of the Church to unite.

"We are reminded that if we seek to know where we're going in life, our vocation, our calling, if we want a sense of peace and purpose and joy, we must build our lives on the rock that is Jesus," Father Roche said during his homily.

Speaking directly to his young audience, Father Roche reminded the young Catholics that each one of them is created in God's image and has a unique purpose.

He also challenged them to be witnesses of Christ in

our world – using examples of Christ the Good Shepherd, Christ the Healer, and Christ the Teacher.

"Your calling is to make Jesus Christ present in this world, and you're all called to do that in a different way," he explained.

Following the Mass, the celebration continued with a lively social at the Diocesan Pastoral Center, which featured food trucks, seasonal treats and more. Young adults from different parishes and universities mingled, shared stories, and made new connections.

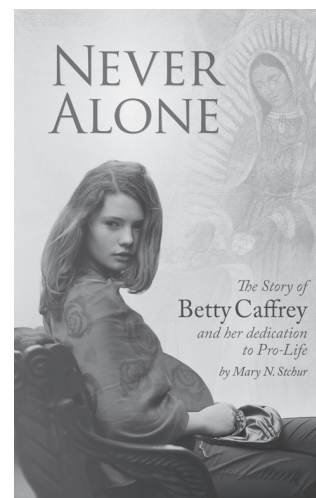
"I really enjoy seeing how many young adults and people are interested in proclaiming their faith and not hiding it behind anything," Chloe McDougall of Marywood University said. "It's exciting to meet new people and connect the universities and churches that have people here today."

Michael Garcia attended the 'Leave a Mark' Mass with several other young adults from his young group at

Saint Matthew Parish in East Stroudsburg.

"I love it over here," he said. For Garcia and many others who attended, the night was filled with faith, fun, and fellowship, and was a reminder of the importance of providing opportunities for young adults to connect, grow in their faith, and experience the love of Christ in meaningful ways.

"My message for everyone is to go to your parish and see if there is a youth group. If not, see if a neighboring parish has a youth group because youth group is awesome. It's very fun and you definitely have to experience it," Garcia said.



Never Alone

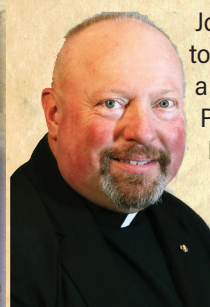
by **Mary N. Stchur, M.Ed.** is the Biography of **Betty Caffrey** who has dedicated over 45 years as Founder and President of the Wyoming Valley Chapter of Pennsylvanians for Human Life. It features historical photos and news stories recalling the Pro-Life successes, efforts, and challenges which the Chapter has withstood throughout the years under the leadership of Mrs. Caffrey. At the age of 95, Betty Caffrey is still active in the day-to-day running of the Pro-Life Center and stands as an inspirational warrior in the fight for the protection of the unborn.

— Available at —
Heaven & Earth Gift Shop Scranton
Barnes & Noble Wilkes-Barre
Bedwick's Pharmacy Wilkes-Barre

For more information, contact: mnstchur@gmail.com

For a Photo Album from the 2024 'Leave a Mark' Mass, visit the Diocese of Scranton on Facebook

Father Bert Kozen Holy Year Italy Pilgrimage



Join Fr. Bert Kozen from St. Luke Church in Jersey Shore together with Immaculate Conception Church, Williamsport on a spiritually transformative experience in Rome, Assisi, Capri, Pompeii and Orvieto. Pass through the Holy Doors of Rome's Four Major Basilicas and receive a plenary indulgence. Meet and pray with the Holy Father at a Papal Audience. Walk the streets of Assisi where St. Francis and St. Clare renewed the Church and taught us to love Lady Poverty and the beauty of God's creation. Wonder at the Eucharistic Miracle at Orvieto where a consecrated host bled at the altar when a priest doubted Christ's presence in the Blessed Sacrament.

October 15-23, 2025 - 9 Days
\$4,949 from Newark

For Info & Reservations, Contact Fr. Bert Kozen, Immaculate Conception Parish, 5973 Jacks Hollow Rd, Williamsport, PA 17702
 Telephone: 570-745-3301 - Email: icsloffice@comcast.net

Don't miss this opportunity to see and experience all the beauty of our faith and the world-famous sites and food of Italy. Itinerary and online registration are available at: <https://bit.ly/KozenItaly>



STUCKER TOURS

570-655-8458 • For a complete list of tours • www.stuckertours.com

ATLANTIC CITY RESORTS CASINO OVERNIGHT
 April. 27-28 • \$199 double occ.
\$15 Slotplay & \$25 Food credit

ALOHA FROM VEGAS - Elvis impersonator show, performed by a world renowned artist at the Fulton Theater, Lancaster • May 18 • Hear your favorite tunes, incl. Love Me Tender, All Shook Up, & Jailhouse Rock. Incl. Miller's Smorgasbord All You Can Eat • \$199

HIDDEN GEMS OF OHIO • July 12-15
 Visit to The Wilds, see white rhinos, giraffe's, cheetahs & more on an open air safari tour. Tour the magical wonderland of Castle Noel, see props, costumes and more from your favorite Christmas movies! Ohio State Reformatory, site where the hit movie "The Shawshank Redemption" was filmed, 6 meals. • \$998

THE BEST OF THE MAHONEY BROTHERS HUNTERDON HILLS PLAYHOUSE
 March 1 • The greatest hits of the BeeGees, Neil Diamond, the Beatles, Billy Joel & more, + Wind Creek Casino with \$25 Slotplay • \$185

BRANSON, MO

June 21-29 • 6 of the best shows, including one on the Showboat Branson Bell, Dogwood Canyon Nature Tram Tour and picnic lunch at the Chuckwagon Pavilion, 12 meals, visit to St. Louis, Titanic Museum and more! • \$2,049

SENECA ALLEGANY RESORT CASINO OVERNIGHT & BINGO HALL
July 20-21 • \$75 Slotplay + \$20 food credit. Plus a stop at Tioga Downs Casino • \$249

SOUTH DAKOTA & YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK,
August 9-22 • Badlands National Park and tour of Deadwood, (20) meals, chuckwagon dinner & Rodeo, Mount Rushmore, Safari Jeep Tour and **MUCH MORE!** • \$3,499

"NOAH'S ARK" 30TH ANNIVERSARY AT SIGHT & SOUND THEATER,
 Lancaster, PA • April 3, July 26, Oct. 4, - Meal incl., **Excellent Front, Center Seats!** • \$219

