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Catholic Leadership Institute



Raising Disciples *in an Apostolic Age*

Catholic Leadership
INSTITUTE

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From the Desk of Jason Shanks, CEO

Dear Friends,



While I may be new to some of you, Catholic Leadership Institute is not new to me. I have long admired and supported CLI's mission, and I am humbled by the trust of the Board of Directors and Episcopal Advisory Board as I step into the role of CEO.

I join an organization built on solid ground, with a strong team, a clear vision, and an ambitious strategic plan already underway. I am especially honored to follow Dan Cellucci, whose leadership has positioned CLI to serve the Church with confidence and hope, and to work alongside Michael School in his new role as President.

For the past several years, my life has been centered on the Eucharistic renewal in the Church. Leading the National Eucharistic Congress was an extraordinary privilege and a deeply personal experience. It reminded me that Jesus Christ is alive and at work in His Church, and that an encounter with Him must always come first, inviting us into mission.

That conviction is what draws me to CLI. Leadership is not ultimately about influence or organizational success; it is about recognizing what God is already doing, responding faithfully, and helping others follow Christ.

As I begin, my first responsibility is to listen and learn—to the Holy Spirit, to the CLI team, and to you who both make up this mission and make this mission possible. I look forward to hearing your stories, learning what God is doing in your communities, and getting to know many of you in the months ahead. This magazine issue is a wonderful place to start.

My own life has taught me that there is no time to waste. Christ invites us into communion—and then asks us to follow Him, together, for the life of the Church and the world.

Sincerely in Christ,

JASON SHANKS, CEO

Meet Jason Shanks

MY NEW ROLE
Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Leadership Institute.

MY HOME
Northern Indiana, where I live with my wife, Melissa, and my five children.

A PLOT TWIST
I grew up as an evangelical Christian. My encounter with the Eucharist during college played a decisive role in leading me into the Catholic Church.

MY PATHWAY HERE
The call to lead CLI very clearly stopped me in my tracks at the intersection of mission, leadership, and renewal. I know that my various roles at my parish ministry, Catholic Charities, OSV Institute, and the National Eucharistic Congress paved the way.

PROFESSIONALLY, I'M PARTICULARLY PROUD OF
I'm torn between two: the institution of a Catholic Youth Summer Camp, and Church's first "shark-tank" style innovation competition and Catholic TED-style talks through the OSV Institute for Catholic Innovation.



WHAT CHANGED EVERYTHING
After surviving COVID-19 and relearning how to walk, I emerged with a deeper understanding of Christ's love and a renewed urgency to equip others to not only know Him but to model his self-emptying service to others. I like to say I now live like I have nothing to lose—and Everything to gain.

WHAT'S COMES NEXT?
CLI's three core pillars say it all: Forge the Future, Embolden the Clergy, and Ignite the Parish.

JASON OFF THE CLOCK

What music is always playing in your car?

None. With 5 kids, and lots of activities, car time looks like a lot of catching up with kids and diving into their lives.

What is your ideal day with the family?

Notre Dame Football! Go Irish!

Which saint would you invite to dinner?

St. Catherine of Siena—but not sure she would eat! My second choice might be St. John Paul II—because I love perogies.

What is something people are surprised to learn about you?

Because of the OSV Institute Challenge I probably have heard more ideas and pitches related to ministry and evangelization than anyone in the Church.

What is one thing you never travel without?

My phone—it has tickets, id, and credit cards. It is my office. It also has my rosary and a devotional book.

JASON, BY THE NUMBERS

2 master's degrees

5 children

45 days intubated and sedated during a life-threatening battle with COVID-19

5 Catholic social-service agencies brought together under his leadership

1 National Eucharistic Congress that welcomed more than 60,000 Catholics

6 Routes to a National Eucharistic Pilgrimage with about 465,000 pilgrims



Raising Disciples *in an Apostolic Age*

What 400+ Catholic leaders discovered when they stopped asking how the Church could serve families—and started asking what the Church could learn from them.

By Mary Serafino, Director of Communications

Michelle Sutton's young family gathers for a celebration, but there are no presents to open.

A candle is lit, but it is not a birthday.

Instead, they are celebrating a different beginning: the anniversary of their daughter's baptism.

Together, they remember the day she was welcomed into the family of God, renew the baptismal promises first made on her behalf, and celebrate her call to carry the light of Christ into the world. "The symposium helped me realize that my children's baptismal anniversaries should be remembered and celebrated just as intentionally as their birthdays" Michelle shared.

This tradition is new for Michelle, Catholic Leadership Institute's Chief of Staff. It was inspired by the 2025-2026 Virtual Symposia on family faith formation and children's catechesis in the Church. Across three sessions, over 400 Catholic leaders participated from across North America, including bishops, priests, religious sisters, parents, educators, parish and diocesan leaders, and representatives of Catholic ministries and apostolates.

Sparked by the desire to know how to pass on a faith to a generation steeped in secular culture and beliefs, the symposia examined the realities facing families, the spiritual capacity of children, and the parish cultures needed to form lifelong disciples.

The insights and learnings of these conversations are shared with the Church in our newly released whitepaper: *Raising Disciples in an Apostolic Age: Charting a New Path for Family Faith Formation*. It is a call to action and hope—a recovery of the fundamentals of forming disciples in the home, a renewed understanding of the role of the family and the child in the Church, and a recognition that faith can still be transmitted with abundant fruit in our modern world.

WE MUST ADOPT A NEW MINDSET

Today, amid social and financial pressures, competing priorities, changing household structures, and cultural narratives that often treat religious belief as optional, families must intentionally choose faith.

At the same time, many parents are exhausted, feel unequipped to share the faith, or have never been formed as disciples themselves. Yet rather than seeing parents as disciples to be formed and essential partners in forming their children, parish systems often treat parents primarily as drivers, volunteers, tuition payers, or enforcers of attendance requirements. One participant resolved, "I want to release the desire to hold on to the way we have 'always' done things because it is easy and safe."

The whitepaper points to one such mindset shift: Parents need initiation as much as instruction. Before they can confidently form their children, they need opportunities to encounter Christ, deepen their own faith, and walk alongside others.

Families do not simply need more information or another program. They need communities that know them, listen to them, and accompany them through the changing stages of family life.

CHILDREN ARE DISCIPLES NOW

Another compelling insight concerns the place of children in the Church. Children are often described as the "future of the Church." Our participants challenged that framing and acknowledge that children are not simply future disciples; they are disciples today, and they belong today—right now, as children.

Children were named as liturgical participants, spiritual knowers, and witnesses who naturally perceive mystery, enter silence, respond to beauty, ask profound theological questions, and demonstrate an authentic trust in God. Their faith frequently draws parents and grandparents back to Mass, the sacraments, and parish life with one participant noting: "I've observed children who have fallen in love with God bring their parents back to the Church. Their love of God is beautiful and contagious."

Continued on Page 6 **>





The Church's task, then, is not merely to make adult religious instruction more entertaining for children. It is to know children well enough to recognize how they encounter God at each stage of development—and to receive the gifts they already offer.

THE FAMILY AS A CATALYST FOR RENEWAL

Perhaps the whitepaper's most significant insight is how we understand family ministry in today's secular culture—as not merely one group within the parish requiring specialized services. They are a lens through which the parish can learn to become a healthier Church.

Families quickly reveal whether parish communication is clear, expectations are realistic, relationships are genuine, spaces are welcoming, and support is available. In the same way, children reveal whether a parish actually believes its own theology. The questions that apply to honoring the child in the Church serve as a litmus test to discover whether or not the parish believes that baptism is a gift, that discipleship is universal, that every member has gifts, and that the Church is a family. If a parish cannot make room or meet a five-year-old in his or her faith journey, the parish likely struggles to make room for others.

When parishes turn their attention to the family, they turn their attention to the whole Body of Christ. In this way, the family is like leaven in the life of the Church: strengthening and renewing the whole community from within.

CLI Leadership Consultant Kate Sullivan expressed her own personal experience: "I may come to catechize, but I have the opportunity to be formed by the young people and families I am accompanying."

How do we bring these learnings into practice? The whitepaper is written to bring the learnings of these conversations to light and to help leaders begin to bring about this mindset shift in their own dioceses, parishes, and families.

Your voice matters in this conversation. We encourage you to download the whitepaper and bring it to your community so that you can identify what forming lifelong disciples in modern times means for your parish. The download also includes a *Parish Life for the Family Assessment* that is designed to help you determine areas of strength and growth in your community and provide creative ideas in putting these learnings into practice. +



***Scan the QR code to download your copy of* Raising Disciples in an Apostolic Age.**

MAGNIFICA HUMANITAS INSPIRES "BUILDERS OF COMMUNION"

By Michael School, President







When Pope Leo published *Magnifica Humanitas*, the CLI Team was eager to read the "AI encyclical" to discern what practical principles and recommendations from the Holy Father we might apply to our day-to-day work. We were surprised, however, to discover that the "AI encyclical" was ultimately much less about Artificial Intelligence and much more about what it means to become more fully human and how we are called to honor and uphold the dignity of every person.

In many ways, this enduring principle of our Catholic faith is also a central tenet for the way Catholic Leadership Institute approaches our ministry. We recognize that Church leaders are human beings, imperfectly leading and serving one another under the perfect leadership of Christ, the Good Shepherd. We recognize the great privilege and great responsibility of walking alongside leaders in all of their humanity: the joy and the mess, the accomplishments and the limitations. No technology could ever replace the deeply incarnational nature of the relationships God created us for. At the same time, the Church so often invites us into a "both and" rather than an "either or." Artificial Intelligence is a powerful tool available to us, and the challenge is not whether we use it, but how we use it well, allowing it to support and amplify our God given gifts without diminishing the uniquely human creativity, judgment, relationships, and dignity those gifts reflect.

Over the course of an eight week "Encyclical Club" hosted by several members of our team, more than a third of our staff joined to collectively read and discuss what inspired us, what challenged us, the questions that emerged, and, most importantly, what Pope Leo's words might mean for our ministry to the Church.

OUR GIFT TO YOU

Examination of Communion: A Self-Guided Meditation on *Magnifica Humanitas*

From these conversations, CLI developed an Examination of Communion to support our shared discernment and ongoing evaluation of how faithfully we are responding to Pope Leo's invitation. That includes using AI in ways that are accessible and understandable, helping people extend their God given gifts without replacing the uniquely human contribution each person brings. This is only a first step, and we hope that by sharing it, others might also be inspired to become "builders of communion" in their families, workplaces, communities, and Church, ensuring that as technology becomes more capable, it continues to serve our humanity rather than diminish it. +

Taking the Leap, *Passing It On*

Sr. Catherine Peter's journey from curiosity to conversion, calling, and leadership

By Mary Serafino, Director of Communications

It was June 2004, and Katie Logan, who affectionately went by Logan, found herself suspended high above the Pennsylvania countryside on a high ropes course. She had climbed to the top of a bare pole, and her next move was to leap into the air. The instructors assured her that the rope would catch her and the harness she wore would protect her. Two dozen new friends stood below and cheered for her.

Logan: **take the leap.**



A LEAP participant balances from the ropes course while others call out words of encouragement.

This was not the first time Logan found herself on a precipice of something new and scary. She had recently enrolled at Newmann University to play hockey, but an injury during her sophomore year changed her course and coursework. She didn't believe in God and had never met a Catholic. Yet during her recovery, she became involved with campus ministry. Logan is a woman who always wants to know more, seek more, and discover more about herself and the world around her, so she turned her curiosity toward the Catholic Church.

COURAGE

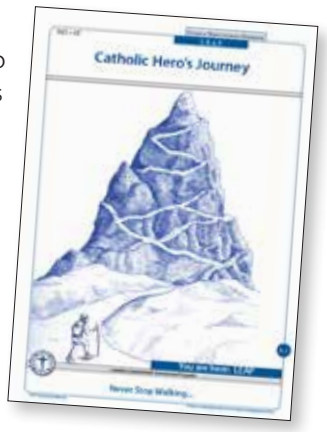
The life and legacy of St. Francis of Assisi led Logan to questions and answers about faith, the dignity of the human person, and service to others. The saint "captured my heart," she said, and her peers provided a soft place to land. Before long, Logan enrolled in RCIA to become a Catholic.

That decision led her to Catholic Leadership Institute's LEAP Weekend Retreat, where she faced her fear of heights. "I was looking for opportunities to grow stronger in the faith," she shared. "I wanted to know more about how we can be Catholic in the world and how that actually plays out."

Logan jumped from the pole that day—and, in a figurative sense, she has been taking leaps ever since. "It helped me step out of myself," she said. "It showed me that you're able to face challenges in life. There are ways to push through, even though sometimes you might fail. That's okay. At least you tried. You get back up and find new ways to approach the obstacles."

THE CALL

For the next year and a half, Logan was part of a Catholic Leadership Institute "Be It" group of five young adults who met monthly to study *The Catholic Heroes Journey*. Together, they explored life skills, personal growth, leadership practices, and ways to share the faith. The group became a safe place to share life's sufferings and joys. It was there that Logan celebrated becoming Catholic in March 2005.



When Logan was in her 30s, God called her to religious life. She entered the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity and became Sr. Catherine Peter. Looking back, she sees that decision, too, as a leap. "I remember thinking I was going crazy and talking to my pastor: 'Why would I ever be chosen for this?'"

But Sr. Catherine Peter's experience had prepared her for this moment. She had already looked down from a great height and jumped anyway. She knew what it was to take a leap of faith—to trust that she was safe with God and supported by the people cheering her on.

LEADING INTO THE FUTURE

Sr. Catherine Peter now serves college students at Michigan Tech through St. Albert the Great, helping them develop opportunities for community service. She still uses the leadership practices she learned from Catholic Leadership Institute and passes them on to her students.

At the local pastor's suggestion, Sr. Catherine Peter made the prayerful decision to form a university conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, led by students, prayerfully certain it would be a fruitful endeavor.

When Sr. Catherine Peter approached the students with the idea, she shared the lesson she had learned on the ropes course: "This is going to be messy. I don't know exactly what the plan will look like, but we want to introduce service and help people understand the mission of St. Vincent de Paul. Would you like to be part of the journey?"

Her invitation began to bear fruit in the response of the students who said yes to leading this cause for good, even into the unknown. One young man—who eventually became the group's president—shared how he always "wondered how to respond to the challenge of going out and living my faith in the world."

Through her renewed connection with Catholic Leadership Institute, Sr. Catherine Peter has recovered resources that are helping her pass on the leadership she received to the next generation. +



Logan *(second from right)* with her LEAP group and small group leader, Tricia Cellucci *(center)* in the early 2000's.



Sr. Catherine Peter Logan celebrates her profession of temporary vows with the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity in 2024.

FLIPPING THE QUESTION – AUDIO NARRATIVE SERIES

A Bold Missionary Challenge to a Local Church

Where can the Church no longer afford to be today?

When the Archdiocese of Philadelphia began to discuss their strategy for navigating a future of growth in the midst of our culture's shift in the practice of faith, Archbishop Nelson Perez flipped the question: "I want to embark on a new form of pastoral planning: Where does the Church need to be and how?"

Flipping the Question: A Bold New Missionary Mindset for the Church is a three-part audio narrative series exploring this new approach to pastoral planning. It tells the story of how the Archdiocese partnered with Catholic Leadership Institute to reimagine the future of the local Church through a missionary lens.

There was no established playbook, and no model to replicate, only the enduring missionary spirit of the apostolic Church. Throughout the audio series, Dan Cellucci sits down with leaders behind the archdiocese's *Trust and Hope* initiative to explore how this vision is bringing new life to the communities in ways no one could have foreseen, one conversation, one community, and one courageous step at a time.

Scan the QR code to listen to this series. >



A Letter from an Eius Priest

Dear Brother Priest,

As priests, we are constantly asked to fulfill duties that demand our time, energy and attention. Every day we serve in God's vineyard giving ourselves for the sake of building others up. As priests of Jesus Christ, this is the life to which we have been called. It is the life we have chosen. It is a privileged life, but it is a life that can leave one feeling strained, spent and sometimes just running ragged. There is never a lack of things to do in the parish, but in order to give ourselves in a healthy way, we must be healthy ourselves.

I recently completed the Eius Foundations track run by Catholic Leadership Institute. This program is intended to help strengthen our abilities as leaders of God's flock. It starts with the origin of our identity as priests; not just the identity of being one who sacrifices and gives, but one who is first and foremost a beloved son of the Father. This fundamental identity is the firm foundation upon which leadership abilities can be built up. Through a heightened self-awareness as well as a deeper understanding of people in general I have gained greater confidence in the pastoral care that I offer to my people.

The formation and ongoing coaching through Eius have helped me be a better priest. I am certainly not perfect, but when things go awry, I now have a framework through



Fr. Austin Bosse attending an on-site for the Eius Foundations Track in St. Louis, Missouri with brother priests from around the USA.

EIUS
THE PRIEST IS HIS



All Eius cohorts gather regularly for training, prayer, and restful recreation. It's a time of renewal and many priests find peace and friendship in the retreat-like environment.

which I can see where and why things went askew. I have a foundation through which I can restore proper order to my life.

Through the generosity of donors, the Eius program is free for priests. The donors are themselves parishioners who recognized the demands placed on their own priests and wanted to invest in a meaningful way to build us up as priests. Parishioners want to see their priest be happy, healthy and holy and they are willing to invest in that for you.

Eius is an opportunity for us to more fully embody the characteristics of men who are able to generously and joyfully give our lives to our people because of God's love for us. I want to invite you to have your priesthood strengthened as you invest in the essential elements that will help you be the priest that you first aspired to be, the priest that your people desire you to be and the priest that God has called you to be.

Your Brother in Christ,
Fr. Austin Bosse

Fr. Austin Bosse is the Parochial Administrator of St. Louis in the Diocese of Peoria and is a 2026 graduate of the Eius Foundations Track. Please keep Fr. Bosse in your prayers! +

Priests for an Apostolic Age Conference

PRIESTS FOR AN APOSTOLIC AGE

Renew Your Priesthood in the Father's Heart
January 26-29, 2027 | Fort Worth, TX

Join priests and bishops from across the country for this four-day gathering designed to equip, restore, and inspire you to lead your parish into the new mission field of our age.

This year's conference is built around practical experience and honest dialogue among priests and laymen actively navigating fatherhood and parish renewal today.

Fatherhood is about being more than doing.



Are you interested in sponsoring a priest to attend the event? Or perhaps nominating a priest you know who you would like to attend and sponsor? Contact Sue Sowinski for more details:

ssowinski@catholicleaders.org
484-657-7876

Scan the QR code to register today! >

The Best is Yet to Come

Taking a Look at a Next Generation Parish, One Decade Later

By Nicole Jones, Digital Communications Manager



St. James Cathedral in the Diocese of Orlando continues to grow long after completing NGP.

The year 2026 marks Fr. Miguel González's tenth year as pastor of St. James Cathedral Parish in the Diocese of Orlando. As he looks back on the growth and fruit that have come from the parish over the past decade, he credits much of that growth to the accompaniment and support he and the parish received through Next Generation Parish.

When the Diocese of Orlando entered into a partnership with Catholic Leadership Institute in 2017, Bishop John Noonan identified St. James Cathedral as one of ten parishes to participate in Catholic Leadership Institute's first iteration of Next Generation Parish.

"When I was assigned to the Cathedral, it was evident that some changes needed to be made to give the parish some oxygen and new ideas so that the parish could continue to grow," said Fr. González.

Change was not unfamiliar to the St. James community. St. Charles Borromeo Cathedral, the original cathedral for the Diocese of Orlando, was severely damaged by a fire in 1976. Due to the parish's location, St. James became the new cathedral, requiring parishioners to adjust to a new identity and role within the diocese. Years later, another season of change was on the horizon.

"There were moments when I was somewhat nervous," Fr. González stated as he reflected on the beginning of his Next Generation Parish journey. "I was worried about how people were going to react and respond to what we were doing, but at the same time, it was a time to sink or swim for our parish, and I wanted our parish to swim, for the good of the people."

Fr. González did not navigate those changes alone. One of the most lasting elements of Next Generation Parish was the accompaniment he received from Leadership Consultant, Lucille Smith.

BEYOND THE WALLS DOCUMENTARY

Beyond the Walls, a CLI documentary, tells the story of two very different moments in the Next Generation Parish (NGP) journey. In the Diocese of Tulsa, St. Michael, St. Stephen, and St. Teresa—a rural tri-parish led by Fr. Robert Duck—reflect on a journey they have completed and the transformation it has sparked. In the Archdiocese of Atlanta, St. John Vianney Parish, led by Fr. Jack Knight, is just beginning to imagine what might be possible.



Scan the QR code to watch the documentary. >

"Lucille was a good mentor and a good coach" Fr. González shared. "I knew I needed to be open with her in terms of my fears, concerns, and weaknesses for myself and my parish, and she was able to help me identify my strengths and the areas St. James needed to grow."

At times, coaching led Fr. González to challenging crossroads and decisions, particularly around ensuring a shared vision among parish leaders and staff.

"It is definitely one of the toughest things I have gone through as a priest," he said as he reflected on the tough decisions he had to make in relation to his parish and staff. "But the fruit of this service is that I, along with my team, learned how to be more creative in listening to the needs of our parishioners, in providing programs that will help foster their growth, and also help my staff to lead by example within the parish."

A decade later, the fruit of those early decisions continues to multiply. St. James has continued to provide opportunities to grow and encourage leaders throughout the parish through family faith formation, community gatherings, and more.



"In the past ten years, we have continued to grow, expand, and increase creativity and activities that are spiritually uplifting to people. We have also been able to draw out a sense of community and togetherness. We have a firm foundation thanks to Next Generation Parish. As they say, 'The best is yet to come!'" +

WHAT PARISHES NEED TODAY

By John Molloy, Interim Senior Director for Parish Service Strategy

Parishes today face a growing number of challenges. Next Generation Parish has evolved from over a decade of parish accompaniment, and the most recent version addresses three of the most common needs that we have observed in parishes

1. Pastors need a parish team that is formed for mission and united with the pastor in prayer. Whether the team of 2 or 20, whether it is a paid team or volunteer team, it is necessary for the members to grow in communion with God and one another through the sacraments, prayer, and faith sharing. Next Generation Parish doesn't presume this already happens but rather incorporates spiritual formation into the process as a core element for the pastor and his team to experience together.
2. Parishes need a plan that is tailored to the parish's unique mission field. Parishes juggle many priorities, and not all are equally important or urgent. Next Generation Parish guides a pastor and his team through a discernment process to identify what activities and projects to plant, prune, and harvest in a given season. The emphasis for this iteration is intentional focus over increased busyness.

NEXT GENERATION PARISH

3. Parishioners need to become people who engage confidently in apostolic work beyond the parish grounds. From the DMI results, we've noticed that most parishioners and parish staff often do not often engage in spiritual conversations with others and follow up conversations reveal fear and hesitation to do so. Most have not been given opportunities to practice and develop this practice within a parish context. Next Generation Parish provides apostolic ministry practicums – starting with the pastor and his team – so that each person learns to recognize everyday moments of connection with others as opportunities to share the hope of Christ.

Pastors and team members are describing remarkable personal growth and a new sense of missionary creativity taking root in their parishes–transformation they credit directly to their experience of Next Generation Parish. +

Carrying the Torch of Faith and Family

Building the Next Generation of Catholic Leadership in Philadelphia

By Rebecca Reilley, Associate Vice President, Mission Advancement



Andrew McCloskey



When Matthew McCloskey passed away in 2024, he left a legacy of faith, family, and generosity across the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. His son Andrew is carrying that legacy forward, building on his father's commitments while responding to changing needs.

"My father cared deeply about the life of the Church, but he had a particular passion for religious vocations," Andrew said. "He understood that vocations grow from strong families, vibrant parishes, Catholic education, and communities where young people can deepen their faith."

Andrew serves as President of the Ambassadors Fund for Catholic Education and President and Chief Investment Officer of McCloskey Financial Group. Through the Fund, his work includes Catholic schools, campus ministry, parish faith formation, and leadership development.

"I see our work as a natural expansion of what my father began," he said. "Catholic education remains at the heart of that work – not only in our schools, but wherever young people and families are being formed in the faith."

Leadership development is also an increasing priority. "Strong institutions ultimately depend on strong leaders," Andrew said. "We want to help develop priests, educators, and lay leaders who will shape the future of the Church."

The Ambassador's Fund has partnered with Catholic Leadership Institute (CLI) for more than a decade on priestly formation, parish renewal, lay discipleship, and family faith formation. The partnership helped make possible CLI's white paper, *Raising Disciples in an Apostolic Age*.

Parish-based religious education is a particular focus for Andrew. "We invest tremendous energy and resources in Catholic schools, and rightly so," he said. "But many Catholic children receive faith formation through parish religious education. We need to bring that same commitment to excellence to those programs."

"The goal is not simply to fund another program," Andrew said. "It is to identify strong approaches, test what works, and help parishes provide families with the best possible formation in the faith."

That work can reach beyond Philadelphia. "What is particularly exciting is the opportunity to develop and pilot innovative programs here and, when they prove successful, use CLI's national platform to extend that impact well beyond Philadelphia."

For Andrew, the work is also personal. "I think about the Church that my children – and someday their children – will inherit," he said. "That keeps the importance of forming the next generation very real for me."

"One of the most important things my father taught me was that whatever you've been given comes with a responsibility to use it well," Andrew said. "For him, that meant helping people and trying to leave the institutions and communities you care about stronger than you found them." +

Dennis VanAuken:
A LEGACY FROM HEAVEN

Rest in Peace, Friend | 1949-2026







To know Dennis VanAuken was to experience genuine warmth, wisdom, and an unwavering devotion to the Catholic Church. As a beloved Leadership Consultant at Catholic Leadership Institute, Dennis dedicated his career to accompanying pastors, parish leaders, and bishops across the nation. He guided them with patient encouragement, deep wisdom, and loving fraternity.

Among clergy, Dennis was legendary. He possessed a profound talent for helping priests to step into their vocations with vision, purpose, and joy. Even today, after his death, priests frequently share stories with us of Dennis's impact. We love to hear them recall a pivotal coaching conversation, a word of hope during a difficult season, or the selfless care Dennis extended to every shepherd he met. He didn't just teach leadership; he lived it through quiet accompaniment and steadfast faith.

Dennis's commitment to CLI was as deep as it was personal. Every year throughout his tenure, he quietly gave back as a donor, understanding firsthand that over 90% of CLI's work relies entirely on philanthropy.

Dennis' belief in this mission did not end with his earthly life.

Shortly after Dennis died in January of this year, we learned that he left a legacy gift in his will to support our ministry. Through this final, selfless act of generosity, Dennis ensured that his life's work would continue far beyond his time on earth. His planned gift is already immediately at work, equipping priests to lead, emboldening lay leaders to rise from the pews, and building vibrant parish communities for generations to come.

Dennis's journey on earth is complete, but his impact continues from heaven. His planned gift serves as a powerful testament to what it means to build a lasting legacy for the Church, ensuring that our clergy are strengthened, our parishes thrive, and future generations inherit a vibrant, faith-filled Church.

On behalf of all of the leaders CLI is blessed to serve: *"Thank you, Dennis."* +

CREATE YOUR OWN ENDURING LEGACY

Including Catholic Leadership Institute in your will or estate plan guarantees that the leaders of tomorrow receive the guidance and support they need. To learn how you can establish a legacy gift like Dennis, scan the QR code to visit our planned giving webpage.

A Look Back at *25 Years of Leadership*

By Nicole Berlucci, Engagement and Mission Advancement Associate

"For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love you have demonstrated for his name by having served and continuing to serve the holy ones." Hebrews 6:10



When I sat down with Dan Cellucci for his last interview as CEO, this scripture verse came to mind. Dan talked about his tenure both as CEO and in other roles within the organization, and his answers revealed a life and decade of leadership marked by love for the Church, CLI, the team, and above all, the Lord.

Q. What will you never forget about your time as CEO of CLI?

A. The meeting with our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, is definitely at the top of the list. It was not simply meeting with him as an introduction, it was also bringing the 35 years of effort and labor, and love and devotion to the Church to him. Sitting down and talking about the ways this team, past and present, has labored for the Church and Her leaders and the generosity that has made it possible.

Q. How has your definition of leadership changed throughout your time at CLI?

A. I think the fundamental change for me in leadership is who you can be, not what you do. Everyone in the Church can be both a follower and leader. If you are intentional about who you try to be, impact is more expansive not only on yourself but on others and on who you are serving.

Q. How do you hope your time as CEO will be remembered?

A. This apostolate is a gift to the Church in showing Her leaders that there is a future, and it is beautiful. We want Church leaders to see that the future is not something to fear, but instead, to walk towards with great confidence in the Lord's goodness. And yes—even though the road ahead might be daunting, you were meant to for that journey, and you are not alone. And at the end is a future God is calling you to. That's how I hope my time as CEO is remembered.

Q. How hard is it to let go?

A. 10 years ago, I would've said it is really hard. However, this apostolate has let me mature in my faith through very difficult and very beautiful experiences, and because of that I know CLI doesn't belong to me; it belongs to the Lord. I've had the privilege to steward and care for that gift, but that doesn't mean it's mine to hold onto. CLI is in God's Beloved Hands.

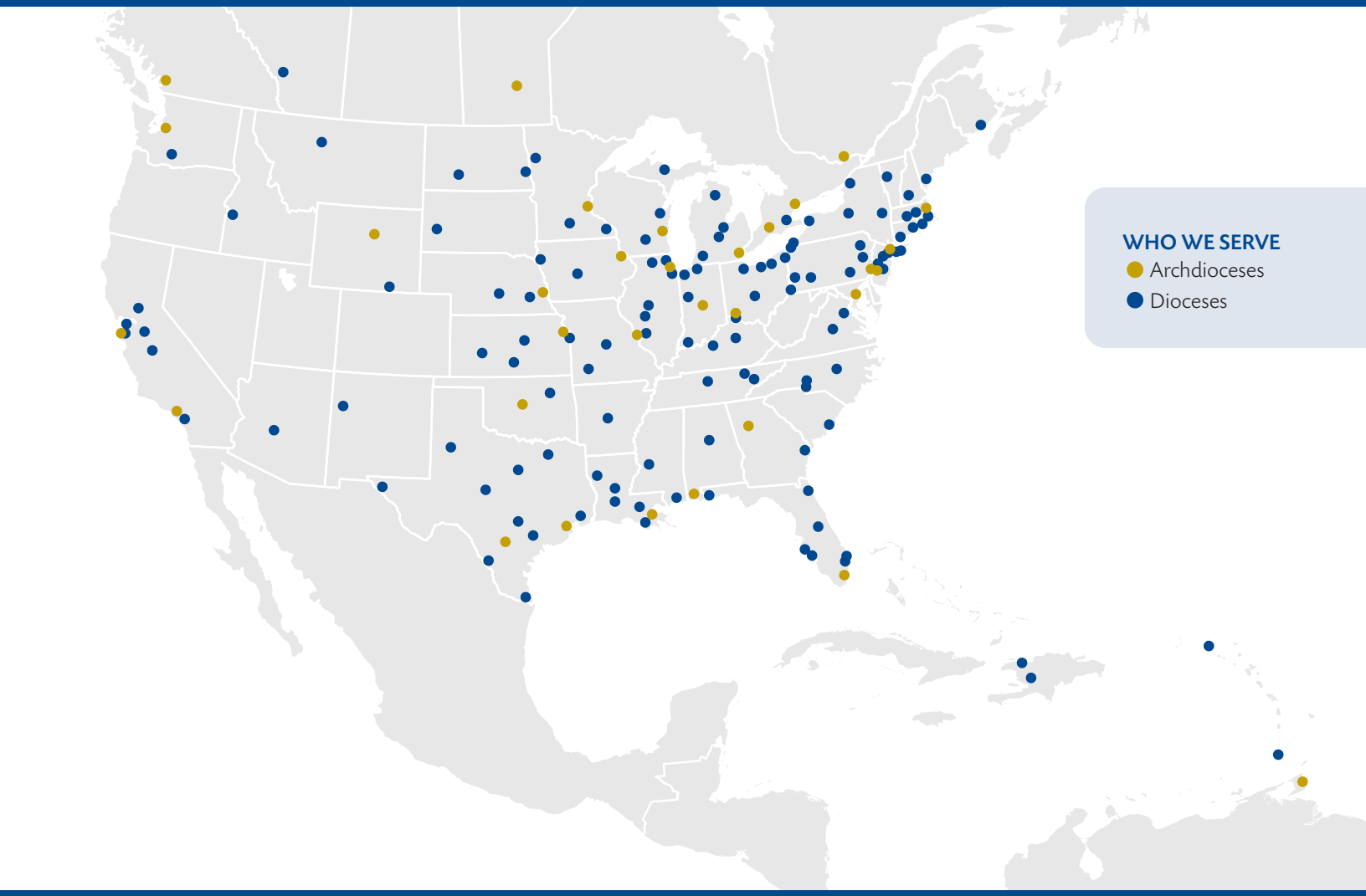
Q. If you could go back and tell one thing to the young adult Dan taking his first jump on the CLI ropes course, what would it be?

A. I would tell him to rest in the fact that he is enough for his Lord. All the Lord wants is his heart and his best effort. I think early on at CLI, I was constantly trying to prove something or to do enough for our Lord. But I've learned through my years and the many seasons of CLI, if you are trying to prove something, it's not of God. He doesn't need or want us to perform for Him. He wants our love. If our actions are rooted in our love of Him, we should fear nothing. +

DAN OVER THE YEARS



CLI ACROSS NORTH AMERICA

















FROM OUR FOUNDER

Thirty-five years ago, Catholic Leadership Institute began with a single, faithful conviction: that when you strengthen a leader, you transform the Church.

Looking through the pages of this issue of *Via Magazine*, my heart is filled with profound gratitude. From the whitepaper *Raising Disciples in an Apostolic Age* to the inspiring witness of next-generation leaders to the profound impact that our donors create, I see a vibrant truth on display: the future of parish renewal is alive, active, and deeply rooted in our families. *Thank you for being a part of our Catholic Leadership Institute family.*

As we mark our 35th anniversary, I often marvel at the sheer multiplication of grace I have witnessed. I find myself wondering: *How many missionary disciples have been inspired through the work of CLI?* How many priests have been renewed in their sacred calling, how many lay leaders have brought Christ to another, and how many souls have been reached because of the participants who stepped up? Only God knows the true count, but the fruits are all around us.

This season of milestone also brings a moment of transition. We extend our deepest, heartfelt prayers of gratitude to Dan Cellucci for his extraordinary 25 years of leadership and devotion. At the same time, we give joyful thanks as we welcome Jason Shanks as our new CEO.

To every priest, parishioner, partner, and benefactor who has formed this CLI family over the last 35 years, *thank you.* Together, under God's guidance, we continue to forge the future of our Church and cultivate disciples of all ages.

With great gratitude,
Tim Flanagan, Founder

LEADERSHIP

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THEY ARE NOT SIMPLY THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH. THEY ARE THE CHURCH TODAY.

At Catholic Leadership Institute, we are listening to and learning from the next generation of young laypeople, religious, and priests. Their questions challenge us, their leadership inspires us, and their witness strengthens our hope for the Church.

Meet some of the emerging leaders who are helping CLI and the wider Church imagine a joy-filled future rooted in Jesus Christ.



Scan the QR code to watch our video **Introducing the Next Generation.** >

CONGRATULATIONS, MIKE SCHOOL!

The CLI Board of Directors named Michael School the President of the organization as it enters a new season of growth and executive leadership. After serving CLI for 5 years and most recently as the Chief Operating Officer, Mike brings a deep understanding of the people and services that make up the mission. In this expanded role, he will serve alongside newly appointed CEO, Jason Shanks, supporting CLI's continued growth and capacity to serve Catholic leaders.

Congratulations to Mike as he begins this chapter of leadership and service to the Church!



Catholic Leadership INSTITUTE

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PRAYER FOR LEADERS

Dear Lord,

We pray that you will create among us Catholic leaders; individuals made in your image who will apply your teachings in their lives and positively impact our families, our workplaces, our communities, and our Church. Help us to inspire those with whom we come in contact to share their God-given talents, to do your will and to find a place in your kingdom where their deepest joys and the world's deepest hungers meet and cry for their special qualities and abilities. Make us leaders, Lord, leaders with strength and courage to follow you. Leaders who make your love visible to the world in all of our words and actions. Amen.

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