



# The MESSAGE

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## Growth in Catholic schools 'a wonderful thing to celebrate'

By JOHN ROHLF

The Message assistant editor

Students from all 26 schools in the Diocese of Evansville filled St. Benedict Cathedral in Evansville for the 2025 Catholic Schools Week Mass.

Bishop Joseph M. Siegel celebrated the annual Mass Jan. 28 at the Cathedral. Twenty-three priests from parishes with schools across the Diocese of Evansville concelebrated the Mass. Deacon Dan Niemeier, president at Mater Dei High School, assisted during the Mass. Over 850 students and staff with the 26 diocesan Catholic schools attended the Mass.

The Mass was celebrated on the feast day of St. Thomas Aquinas, priest and Doctor of the Church. During the Mass, Bishop Siegel said it was very providential they gathered for the Catholic Schools Week Mass on the feast day of St. Thomas.

During his homily, Bishop Siegel said St. Thomas Aquinas managed to bal-

ance his spiritual life and relationship with the Lord, along with being an accomplished scholar. Bishop Siegel said this union of faith and academics is what makes Catholic schools unique. He said it is so appropriate that St. Thomas Aquinas is a special patron of Catholic education. There is much St. Thomas can teach both the budding scholars among the students in the schools and others who may not rise to academic prominence, Bishop Siegel said.

Bishop Siegel noted St. Thomas Aquinas can help us to ask ourselves what we are missing and how we can come to a deeper love and understanding of the gift and mystery of the Holy Eucharist. Bishop Siegel noted St. Thomas' great devotion to the Mass and Eucharist.

Bishop Siegel said we may not be theologians but we are called to know our faith well so we can share it with others, teach it to others and at times,

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The Message photo by Megan Erbacher

Students from the Diocese of Evansville's four Catholic high schools pose for a photo with Bishop Joseph M. Siegel before he celebrated the 2025 Catholic Schools Week Mass at St. Benedict Cathedral in Evansville. Shown are Aiden Henry, left, Washington Catholic High School in Washington; Isaiah Schaefer, Mater Dei High School in Evansville; Bishop Siegel; Elexus Frey, Rivet High School in Vincennes; and Mackenzie Aimone, Reitz Memorial High School in Evansville.

## Bull ride sponsorships net over \$30,000 during MEO fundraiser

By JOHN ROHLF

The Message assistant editor

A change in format and venue at this year's Marian Educational Outreach annual fundraiser yielded an increase of over 100 attendees over last year's event.

Marian Educational Outreach held their annual fundraising event Feb. 1 at Warehouse 410 in Evansville. This year's event

theme was Raisin' Buck\$ on a Bull. Three-hundred people signed up to attend this year's event, which included dinner, multiple opportunities to contribute financially during the annual event and a bull riding competition with 13 competitors. Last year's event drew in 175 people.

Bishop Joseph M. Siegel led prayer at the beginning of the event prior to dinner. Father Christopher Droste, pastor at St. Boniface Parish in Evansville and priest delegate at Mater Dei High School, won the bull riding event.

Marian Educational Outreach has a long-standing mission of supporting Catholic schools and partnering with them to ensure

that children with disabilities are able to receive a quality education, MEO Executive Director Emily Schnapf said. They are now partnering to serve over 1,000 students directly.

"It is an honor to witness the wonderful work that happens on a daily basis in our Catholic diocese," Schnapf said. "Your generosity tonight allows us to support the teachers, the administrators and all school staff through grant cycles, professional development and staffing assistance."

Schnapf said Raisin' Buck\$ on a Bull came to life through planning and brainstorming to not only bring joy to the donors during the event, but to involve many community members who loyally support the organization. She said the 13 riders on the panel were



The Message photo by John Rohlf

Father Christopher Droste takes his turn on the bull during the Marian Educational Outreach Raisin' Buck\$ on a Bull fundraiser Feb. 1 at Warehouse 410 in Evansville.

strategically chosen to increase fundraising, market their mission and honor those who hold MEO near to their heart.

"Many of our riders have been supporting the organization for years," Schnapf said.

"And all of our riders are passionate about the mission."

Prior to the event, individuals had the opportunity to donate funds towards each of

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### OCIA Retreat

OCIA candidates from across the Diocese of Evansville gathered Jan. 25 for a retreat at the Catholic Center in Evansville. Over 160 people attended the retreat, which is for catechumens and candidates who will be entering the Church at the Easter Vigil on April 19. Sponsors and OCIA Team members also attended. The retreat included tracks for English and Spanish speakers. Bishop Joseph M. Siegel opened the retreat and led morning prayer. (See more photos on page 2.)

The Message photos by John Rohlf