



ICC bishops call for 'humane legislative solutions' on immigration



By VICTORIA ARTHUR
Statehouse Correspondent for
Indiana's Catholic Newspapers

As the debate over immigration continues to intensify nationwide, the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) and the state's bishops are urging Indiana lawmakers to seek solutions rooted in empathy and respect for human dignity.

At the heart of the discussion is Senate Bill 76, the centerpiece of immigration legislation in this short session of the Indiana General Assembly. The measure aims to tighten the enforcement of federal immigration laws at the local level in Indiana, mandating cooperation with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) by state and local law enforcement, government bodies, employers, colleges and other entities.

Concerns over the measure, which passed the Indiana Senate in late January and at press time was advancing through the House, prompted the ICC to submit a letter to lawmakers calling for a balanced approach.

The ICC — the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana — urged caution with "continued legislative efforts to amplify indiscriminate immigration enforcement" without also seeking to "protect legal and unauthorized immigrants from unjust discrimination and unnecessary deportation, preserve family unity and promote humane legislative solutions."

"In Indiana, we cannot justify a one-sided approach to immigration policy that is only focused on enforcement,"

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'It's a real honor to be affiliated with a person like he was'

Four high school seniors awarded Father Endress Scholarship

By JOHN ROHLF
The Message
assistant editor

For the fifth year, a total of four Father Endress scholarships were awarded to students at Mater Dei and Reitz Memorial High School.

On Feb. 5, two students at Mater Dei and two students at Reitz Memorial were awarded scholarships of \$10,000 per year, for up to four years. The scholarship has been awarded to two high school seniors at each Evansville school since 2022.

At Reitz Memorial, Maria Hillenbrand and Steven Lasher were announced as recipients of the award. Mater Dei's recipients were Adalyn Wilkinson and Aiden Fehrenbacher.

Maria Hillenbrand is the daughter of Pete and Karri Hillenbrand. She is a member of Holy Rosary Parish in

Evansville.

Josh Reising, Reitz Memorial President, said Hillenbrand is a student who leads with both strength and compassion. He added she is an outstanding scholar who has challenged herself academically through her time at Reitz Memorial while also serving as a leader in student council, campus ministry, Teen Power and athletics, including as a volleyball team captain.

However, what stands out most about Maria is how she authentically lives her faith, Reising said.

After receiving the award, Hillenbrand said the thing that stuck out to her most about Father Endress was his service. The thing she is most excited for is to pay it forward at college, she said.

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Steven Lasher, left, and Maria Hillenbrand pose for a photo after receiving the Father Endress Scholarship at Reitz Memorial High School.



The Message photos by John Rohlf
Aiden Fehrenbacher, left, and Adalyn Wilkinson pose for a photo after receiving the Father Endress Scholarship Feb. 5 at Mater Dei High School.

Diocese hosts annual OCIA retreat

Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) candidates and catechumens from across the Diocese of Evansville gathered Feb. 7 for a retreat at the Diocese of Evansville Catholic Center in Evansville. The retreat is for catechumens and candidates who will enter the Church at the Easter Vigil April 4. Sponsors and OCIA team members also attended. The retreat included tracks for catechumens, candidates and sponsors and a separate track for OCIA team members in English, and a separate Spanish track for Spanish speakers. Bishop Joseph M. Siegel opened the retreat and led morning prayer. *We will publish a full story on the retreat in our Feb. 20 issue.*

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Father Tony Ernst, pastor of St. Francis Xavier Parish in Vincennes and St. Philip Neri Parish in Bicknell, and Diocesan Associate Director of Vocations, serves as the opening speaker for the catechumens, candidates and sponsors.



The Message photos by John Rohlf

Bishop Joseph M. Siegel leads morning prayer Feb. 7 at the Catholic Center.



OCIA team members take part in a workshop.