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ICC following lead of Pope Leo XIV on prioritizing the poor



By VICTORIA ARTHUR
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In the 2026 legislative season and beyond, the Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) has a new lens through which it can evaluate public policies that affect the poor: the first major document issued by Pope Leo XIV.

The American-born pope calls for prioritizing those in most need in the recently released "Dilexi Te (I Have Loved You)," the first apostolic exhortation of his pontificate. Begun by Pope Francis before his death, the document proclaims that "the poor are not a sociological category but the very flesh of Christ," deserving of the utmost compassion and care.

For the ICC, which for nearly 60 years has been drawing on 2,000 years of Catholic social teaching in carrying out its work, "Dilexi Te" offers additional clarity and immediacy.

"This document provides us a wonderful framework with which we can view legislation as it relates to caring for the poor," said Alexander Mingus, executive director of the ICC, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Indiana. "There's a beauty in the way the document goes through the history of the Church's love for the

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Diocese sees large increase in Catechumens, Candidates

By JOHN ROHLF
The Message assistant editor

For the second consecutive year, the Diocese of Evansville saw a substantial increase in both catechumens and candidates that will be welcomed into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil.

Bishop Joseph M. Siegel celebrated the Rite of Election of Catechumens and Calling Candidates to Continuing Conversion Feb. 22 at St. Benedict Cathedral in Evansville. This year, the diocese has 172 catechumens and 175 candidates. This year's combined total of 347 is a one-year increase of 99 that will be welcomed into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil. Last year, the diocese had 118 catechumens and 130 candidates. The combined number of catechumens and candidates has more than doubled from 2024 to 2026.

At the end of the Rite of Election

and Call to Continuing Conversion, Bishop Siegel said as the bishop, it is a special joy to see St. Benedict Cathedral full of the elect and candidates. It is a sign that the Holy Spirit is so active and alive in our parishes throughout the diocese. He assured them of his prayers in the coming weeks as the catechumens and candidates prepare for the Easter sacraments.

Parishes from across the Diocese of Evansville presented their catechumens and candidates, with sponsors joining the catechumens and candidates during the presentation Feb. 22. Bishop Siegel received the catechumens first and then the candidates, who were presented by representatives of their parish.

During the Easter Vigil, catechumens will be baptized, confirmed and receive the Eucharist.

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The Message photo by John Rohlf
Bishop Joseph M. Siegel shakes hands with catechumens and sponsors during the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion Feb. 22 at St. Benedict Cathedral in Evansville.

Diocese holds third annual spelling bee

Students at schools throughout the Diocese of Evansville participated in two separate spelling bees Feb. 17 at the Diocese of Evansville Catholic Center. In the elementary spelling bee, Henry Faraone of St. James School in Haubstadt placed first and Flannery Heuring of Sts. Peter and Paul School in Haubstadt placed second. In the middle school spelling bee, Evangeline Lampert of Holy Trinity School in Jasper placed first and Elena Faraone of St. James School in Haubstadt placed second.

"I would like to thank our Catholic school administrators who wanted to provide students an additional opportunity to come



Submitted photo
Above, Evangeline Lampert, right, of Holy Trinity School in Jasper, placed first in the middle school diocesan spelling bee. Elena Faraone of St. James School in Haubstadt placed second.



The Message photo by John Rohlf
At left, Henry Faraone, right, of St. James School in Haubstadt, placed first in the elementary school diocesan spelling bee. Flannery Heuring of Sts. Peter and Paul School in Haubstadt placed second.

together for this occasion," Diocese of Evansville Associate Superintendent of Schools Kari Ford said. "This is a great opportunity for our students to unite at the Catholic Center following Catholic Schools Week. Thank you to our school teachers and parents for helping prepare their students who participated in the spelling bee. They did a wonderful job!" See more photos on page 2.