



THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF LAKE CHARLES



JOIN US FOR LENT



“Remember that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return.” — Genesis 3:19

Ash Wednesday on February 18 marked the beginning of the 2026 Season of Lent — a time when the faithful contemplate their relationship with God and identify areas in their spiritual life that need work. Church parishes throughout the Diocese of Lake Charles are offering opportunities to grow spiritually during the Holy Season of Lent. From weekly Stations of the Cross, Lenten Missions, Penance Nights, Eucharistic Adoration and more, a list is posted on the diocesan website as a guide to help you along your journey over the next six weeks. Scan the QR code above or visit lcdiocese.org and click on LENT.40DAYS. The list will be updated as information becomes available.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK MASS

Bishop Provost reflects on pursuit of wisdom

By Pamela Seal
Diocese of Lake Charles

LAKE CHARLES — One of Bishop Glen John Provost’s favorite things to do as Bishop of Lake Charles is celebrate the annual Catholic Schools Week Mass. He has been doing so for 19 years.

“It is always a pleasure to celebrate Catholic Schools Week with all of you,” he said as he looked out among the many students from across the Diocese of Lake Charles. “I look forward to this special Mass every year, with this year falling on the Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas.”

In celebration of National Catholic Schools Week that kicked off on January 25, His Excellency was joined on Wednesday, January 28, in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception by the Very Rev. Ruben Buller, Pastor of the Cathedral; Very Rev. Keith Pellerin, Pastor of Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Church; and Rev. Michael Beverung, Parochial Vicar of the Cathedral. Assisting as Master of Ceremonies was Very Rev. Joseph Caraway, Chancellor.

Seniors from St. Louis Catholic High School and eighth-grade students from the other five Catholic schools in the Diocese of Lake Charles gathered to reflect on the importance of the gift of their faith-based education. They were among the 2,249 students enrolled across the diocese.

The sacred music, provided by Our Lady Queen of Heaven and Saint Louis choirs and directed by Colette Tanner, added to the uplifting and prayerful occasion.

Several students were chosen to assist with various parts of the Mass. **Ellie Clanton** from St. Margaret of Scotland Catholic School served as Lector. Gift bearers were **Lauren Bougard** and **Sophie Richard**, both from Our Lady Immaculate Catholic School. Altar Servers from St. Louis Catholic High School were **Harrison Hurt**, **Alex McCall**, **Matthew Landry** and **Benjamin Duplichan**; and from Immaculate Conception Cathedral School — **Briggs Hurt** and **Donovan Reeves**.

Reflection on Wisdom

Seeking the intercession of St. Thomas Aquinas, patron of schools and universities, students, philosophers, theologians, apologists, academics, and chastity, Bishop Provost reflected on wis-



School representatives joining Bishop Glen John Provost outside the Cathedral of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception before the Catholic Schools Week Mass on January 28, 2026, are front row, from left, Ana Boudreaux (OLI), Emily Bougard, (OLI), Henry Anderson (OLS), and Jaleigh Roque (OLQH); middle row, from left, Thomas Abendroth (ICCS), Cecilia Reeves (ICCS), Abby Gatlin (SMCS), and Genevieve Thomas (OLS); back row, from left, Lee O’Quin (OLQH), Benjamin Duplechin (SLCHS), Olivia Tassin (SLCHS), and Kyle Stevenson (SMCS). (Photography Credit: Morris LeBleu)

dom, especially for students.

“From the earliest of times of recording thought, mankind has grappled with the question of wisdom,” the bishop said in his homily. “What is it? Where does one find it? How does one acquire it? The Book of Wisdom tells us simply to ask.”

I prayed, and prudence was given me; I pleaded, and the spirit of Wisdom came to me. — Wisdom 7:7

Bishop Provost pointed out that humility and faith are prerequisites for the pursuit of Wisdom.

“If we think we know it all, then we cannot admit there is something else to learn. That leads not only to ignorance but also to stupidity,” the bishop warned.

“When we ask for something, we trust or have faith that the person being asked will grant the request,” he remarked. “Like a child asking a parent for a favor or a student seeking permission from a teacher, each has faith that the elder or the superior will grant what is being asked for.”

St. Thomas Aquinas understood that the fear of God spoken of in the Bible has more to do with faith than anything else, Bishop

Provost noted.

“For this reason, the Church made him the patron of Catholic schools and why we honor him today,” he said. “Scholars have observed that St. Thomas Aquinas was a brilliant thinker because he could argue both the opposing view as well as his own.”

Understanding that humility and faith are virtues, St. Thomas Aquinas approached every question, every challenge with these two attitudes of mind.

“No thinker worth his or her salt can do without these two virtues,” said Bishop Provost. “A student in Catholic school should learn that lesson as well.”

Bishop shares his talent

Following Mass, Bishop Provost interacted with the students by inviting them to ask questions. Knowing what an accomplished pianist the bishop is, the final question was a request from the choir for him to play a piece.

He kindly obliged. In honor of one of the greatest composers in the history of Western music, Bishop Provost played a move-

ment from Mozart’s Fantasia in D minor, much to the delight of the students, teachers and principals gathered.

Since childhood, the bishop has studied music, enjoys playing the piano, and served as house organist at the seminaries where he attended in high school and college.

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Lake Charles — all accredited by Cognia — are **St. Louis Catholic High School**, **Immaculate Conception Cathedral School**, **St. Margaret of Scotland Catholic School**, and **Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic School**, all in Lake Charles; **Our Lady’s Catholic School** in Sulphur; and **Our Lady Immaculate Catholic School** in Jennings.

The annual Catholic Schools Week Mass was coordinated by Sister Mary Kathleen Ronan, R.S.M., Director of the Office of Religious Education for the Diocese of Lake Charles; and Hannah Beard, Administrative Assistant.

To learn more about Catholic schools in the Diocese of Lake Charles, call the Office of Catholic Schools at 337-433-9640, Ext. 400.

2026 Diocesan Students of the Year announced

The Office of Catholic Schools announces the Diocese of Lake Charles 2026 Student of the Year winners for elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Winners are **Benjamin Alcantara Duplechin**, Grade 12, St. Louis Catholic High School in Lake Charles; **Cecilia Reeves**, Grade 8, Immaculate Conception Cathedral School in Lake Charles; and **Emily Bougard**, Grade 5, Our Lady Immaculate Catholic School in Jennings.



Benjamin Duplechin
Grade 12
SLCHS

Benjamin is the son of Kristine Alcantara; Cecilia is the daughter of Chad and Angela Reeves; and Emily is the daughter of Marcus and Katharina Bougard.

The winners were chosen from the school level Students of the Year on Friday, January 16, at the Chancery of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lake Charles. They advance to the state competition in the Diocese of Shreveport on Friday, March 6, to compete in the Louisiana Catholic Student of the Year Program.

The competition is open to Catholic schools in the state’s seven dioceses — Alexandria, Baton Rouge, Houma-Thibodaux, Lafayette, Lake Charles, Shreveport, and the Archdiocese of New Orleans. The program is designed to recognize outstanding students in grades 5, 8, and 12 who have demonstrated excellence in discipleship, leadership, service, citizenship, and academic achievement.

Other winners at the school level were:

- **Immaculate Conception Cathedral School:** Grade 5 — Henry Duvall, son of Matthew and Katherine Duvall

- **St. Margaret of Scotland Catholic School:** Grade 8 — Ellie Clanton, daughter of Owen and Erin Clanton; Grade 5 — Aubrey Weideman, daughter of Kristie Weideman

- **Our Lady Immaculate Catholic School (Jennings):** Grade 8 — Ana Boudreaux, daughter of Daniel and Jeanne Boudreaux

- **Our Lady’s Catholic School (Sulphur):** Grade 8 — Genevieve Thomas, daughter of Kenneth and Jenny Thomas; Grade 5 — Perrin Mouton, son of Justin and Beth Mouton

Winners were selected for the Diocesan Student of the Year honor based on academic achievement, school organization participation, community service, leadership activities, an essay writing assignment, and an interview with a panel of four judges.



Cecilia Reeves
Grade 8
ICCS



Emily Bougard
Grade 5
OLI



BISHOP PROVOST'S ASH WEDNESDAY 2026 HOMILY

Symbolism of ashes is profound witness to faith that transforms lives

“Remember, you are dust.”

There are few reminders of death more dramatic than the ashes of Ash Wednesday.

On Ash Wednesday, upon young and old, healthy and ill, ashes are bestowed with those sobering words, “Remember, you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

We are all children of Adam and Eve, and we will all die. For those without faith this is a terrifying thought.

If I am filled with the goods of this life, completely consumed with the pursuit of pleasure without threat of deprivation, why should I be reminded of death.

Satan knows this, and the Evil One uses our selfishness to instill fear in the ultimate end. If the ancient serpent can make us minimize death with euthanasia or viewing abortion as a right, then this must please him indeed. This is all part of what Pope St. John Paul II called the culture of death.

God knows this ploy of the Devil. The Creator God wanted to foil this fear from the first moments of the Fall. It would be a long process in human terms, because God knows our hearts.

So, God prepared a People to receive His Revelation, His Word made Flesh in womb of a saintly virgin, to proclaim His message of Redemption. He would take death and make it an entrée into Eternal Life. He would Himself show us how death is a pathway to Life and how all of our human sufferings can be joined to His Cross.

As I heard it once described, through the Cross and Resurrection God turned the table on the Devil. This Divine reversal is the Good News proclaimed to us by Jesus Christ, and this is the testimony of the ashes.

I have heard it said that the ashes



LEFT: The Most Reverend Glen John Provost, Bishop of Lake Charles, blesses the ashes at the conclusion of the Ash Wednesday Mass on February 18, 2026, in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. **RIGHT:** Bishop Provost marks the foreheads of the faithful with the blessed ashes to serve as a sign of repentance. The ashes are used from the previous year's blessed palm branches. (Photography Credit: Victoria Watson)

on our foreheads violates the Gospel prohibition against performing religious acts to be recognized (cf. Matthew 6:17). In fact, there is no contradiction, for in an earlier passage in that same Gospel our Lord reminds us that we should let our good deeds be seen by others so that they can “glorify your heavenly Father” (Matthew 5:16). The ashes are not for our self-aggrandizement but for a witness to what God has done in transforming death into victory.

Once, many years ago, I was called to a nursing home at the request of a family

to anoint and give Viaticum to their dying mother. To my surprise, she was quite alert, although weak and bedridden. We engaged in some conversation following the holy rites, and I recall our parting words.

I said, “I’ll return to see you again.” To which she responded, “No, that won’t happen. Tonight I will be with mother.”

At the time, I didn’t understand whether she meant her earthly mother or Mother Mary. It didn’t matter. She passed away before midnight. God had granted her the Grace of knowing the

hour of her death. But what is even more compelling is the faith that led her not to fear death but to grasp it as a path to eternal life.

It is this hope in the Resurrection that moves us to place ashes on our heads today. We are truly dust and to dust we shall return, but that is not the end of the story.

Through conversion of life, we strengthen our faith in the redeeming Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The symbolism of the ashes is a profound witness to the faith that transforms lives.

POPE LEO XIV PUBLISHES HIS FIRST LENTEN MESSAGE

Listening and Fasting: Lent is a Time of Conversion

Dear brothers and sisters,

Lent is a time in which the Church, guided by a sense of maternal care, invites us to place the mystery of God back in the center of our lives, in order to find renewal in our faith and keep our hearts from being consumed by the anxieties and distractions of daily life.

Every path towards conversion begins by allowing the word of God to touch our hearts and welcoming it with a docile spirit. There is a relationship between the word, our acceptance of it and the transformation it brings about. For this reason, the Lenten journey is a welcome opportunity to heed the voice of the Lord and renew our commitment to following Christ, accompanying him on the road to Jerusalem, where the mystery of his passion, death and resurrection will be fulfilled.

Listening

This year, I would first like to consider the importance of making room for the word through listening. The willingness to listen is the first way we demonstrate our desire to enter into relationship with someone.

In revealing himself to Moses in the burning bush, God himself teaches us that listening is one of his defining characteristics: “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry” (Ex 3:7). Hearing the cry of the oppressed is the beginning of a story of liberation

in which the Lord calls Moses, sending him to open a path of salvation for his children who have been reduced to slavery.

Our God is one who seeks to involve us. Even today he shares with us what is in his heart. Because of this, listening to the word in the liturgy teaches us to listen to the truth of reality. In the midst of the many voices present in our personal lives and in society, Sacred Scripture helps us to recognize and respond to the cry of those who are anguished and suffering. In order to foster this inner openness to listening, we must allow God to teach us how to listen as he does. We must recognize that “the condition of the poor is a cry that, throughout human history, constantly challenges our lives, societies, political and economic systems, and, not least, the Church.” [1]

Fasting

If Lent is a time for listening, fasting is a concrete way to prepare ourselves to receive the word of God. Abstaining from food is an ancient ascetic practice that is essential on the path of conversion. Precisely because it involves the body, fasting makes it easier to recognize what we “hunger” for and what we deem necessary for our sustenance. Moreover, it helps us to identify and order our “appetites,” keeping our hunger and thirst for justice alive and freeing us from complacency. Thus, it teaches us to pray and act responsibly towards our neighbor.

With spiritual insight, Saint Augustine helps us to understand the tension between the present moment and the future fulfillment that characterizes this custody of the heart. He observes that: “In the course of earthly life, it is incumbent upon men and women to hunger and thirst for justice, but to be satisfied belongs to the next life. Angels are satisfied with this bread, this food. The human race, on the other hand, hungers for it; we are all drawn to it in our desire. This reaching out in desire expands the soul and increases its capacity.” [2] Understood in this way, fasting not only permits us to govern our desire, purifying it and making it freer, but also to expand it, so that it is directed towards God and doing good.

However, in order to practice fasting in accordance with its evangelical character and avoid the temptation that leads to pride, it must be lived in faith and humility. It must be grounded in communion with the Lord, because “those who are unable to nourish themselves with the word of God do not fast properly.” [3] As a visible sign of our inner commitment to turn away from sin and evil with the help of grace, fasting must also include other forms of self-denial aimed at helping us to acquire a more sober lifestyle, since “austerity alone makes the Christian life strong and authentic.” [4]

In this regard, I would like to invite you to a very practical and frequently unappreciated form of

abstinence: that of refraining from words that offend and hurt our neighbor. Let us begin by disarming our language, avoiding harsh words and rash judgement, refraining from slander and speaking ill of those who are not present and cannot defend themselves. Instead, let us strive to measure our words and cultivate kindness and respect in our families, among our friends, at work, on social media, in political debates, in the media and in Christian communities. In this way, words of hatred will give way to words of hope and peace.

Together

Finally, Lent emphasizes the communal aspect of listening to the word and fasting. The Bible itself underlines this dimension in multiple ways. For example, the Book of Nehemiah recounts how the people gathered to listen to the public reading of the Law, preparing to profess their faith and worship through fasting, so as to renew the covenant with God (cf. 9:1-3).

Likewise, our parishes, families, ecclesial groups and religious communities are called to undertake a shared journey during Lent, in which listening to the word of God, as well as to the cry of the poor and of the earth, becomes part of our community life, and fasting a foundation for sincere repentance. In this context, conversion refers not only to one’s conscience, but also to the quality of our relationships and dialogue. It means allowing

ourselves to be challenged by reality and recognizing what truly guides our desires — both within our ecclesial communities and as regards humanity’s thirst for justice and reconciliation.

Dear friends, let us ask for the grace of a Lent that leads us to greater attentiveness to God and to the least among us. Let us ask for the strength that comes from the type of fasting that also extends to our use of language, so that hurtful words may diminish and give way to a greater space for the voice of others. Let us strive to make our communities places where the cry of those who suffer finds welcome, and listening opens paths towards liberation, making us ready and eager to contribute to building a civilization of love.

I impart my heartfelt blessing upon all of you and your Lenten journey.

From the Vatican, 5 February 2026, Memorial of Saint Agatha, Virgin and Martyr

LEO PP. XIV

[1] Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi Te* (4 October 2025), 9.

[2] Augustine *The Usefulness of Fasting*, 1, 1.

[3] Benedict XVI, *Catechesis* (9 March 2011).

[4] Paul VI, *Catechesis* (8 February 1978).



'God will never forget the needy; the hope of the afflicted will never perish.' – Psalm 9:18

Jazz Brunch will support Catholic Charities

LAKE CHARLES — The good works of Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana will be in the spotlight during its annual Jazz Brunch fundraiser to benefit its ministry of serving the poor.

The event will be Sunday, March 15, at the Historic Cash and Carry, 801 Enterprise Boulevard, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m., allowing guests time to browse and bid on silent auction items before brunch begins.

This year's Jazz Brunch will feature live jazz music, a delicious brunch spread and a silent auction offering a variety of quality items and unique experiences.

All proceeds from the event will benefit the vital programs and services provided by Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana, which serve thousands of individuals and families in need across Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron and Jefferson Davis parishes.

"Christ's love and mercy are the cornerstone of our Mission at Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana," said Sister Marie Josepha Kluczny, RSM, Executive Director. "It is God's love, alive and active in His people, that not only stirs our desire to serve, but also strengthens and sustains us in that service."

While many associate Catholic Charities with food distribution and disaster recovery efforts, the

agency provides a variety of other valuable services. Some of those good works include rent and utilities assistance, homeless outreach and a laundry/shower trailer, food bank, help with prescription and funeral costs, SNAP applications, and prisoner re-entry services.

The theme for this year's Jazz Brunch is "I have loved you" (Rev 3:9) based on the Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi Te* of the Holy Father Leo XIV to all Christians on love for the poor.

Sister Marie Josepha reminds people that Catholic Charities is here to serve the community, and it doesn't have to always be for massive disasters.

"We are also here for the disasters of everyday life and survival," she emphasized. "I want to remind the community, remind our donors, and remind our friends across our five-parish region that we are here," said Sister Marie Josepha, "but we need support to continue our good works."

Entertainment for the brunch will include the smooth sounds of "The Sharp Nines," a jazz trio featuring local musicians Mason Feduccia, Wesley Royer and Taylor Teague.

Sister Marie Josepha sees the fundraiser as valuable time to connect with people who have been supportive throughout the years. She remarked, "I am looking forward to seeing the people we are serving and meeting people who really want to be there serving. It is so enlivening!"

CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA JAZZ BRUNCH FUNDRAISER



Providing Help. Creating Hope.

Sunday, March 15, 2026

11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Doors will open at 10:30 a.m.

Historic Cash & Carry

801 Enterprise Boulevard in Lake Charles

All proceeds will benefit the vital programs and services provided by Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana

Live Jazz Music • Delicious Brunch Meal • Great Silent Auction



Ticket Information

Individual tickets are \$125 each, and reserved tables for eight (8) guests may be purchased for \$2,000. Every guest will receive a special hand-made gift from Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana.

To purchase tickets, donate a silent auction item, or make a monetary donation, visit www.catholiccharitiesswla.com and scroll down on the homepage. You may also call Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana at 337-439-7436 for more details.

Cash, checks and credit cards will be accepted for payment of winning auction bids on the day of the Jazz Brunch.

Impact Report

"As I reflect on all we accomplished in 2024-2025, I am deeply moved by the outpouring of support we have received and by the

countless lives touched through our programs and services," said Sister Marie Josepha.

Highlights from the 2024-2025 Impact Report are:

- **Food Bank:** 917,063 pounds of food distributed to 3,691 households throughout Southwest Louisiana

- **Laundry / Shower Trailer:** 681 warm showers and 1,113 loads of laundry

- **SNAP (Food Stamps) Applications:** 196 new applications approved

- **Disaster Relief:** 51 households were helped with furniture (\$43,865); 13 households with appliances (\$10,705); 14 households with home repairs (\$39,005); and 36 households given A/C, fans, or heaters (\$5,270)

- **Utilities:** 180 households were helped with utilities for a total of \$46,519

- **Rent Assistance:** 470 house-

holds were assisted with rent/ mortgage for a total of \$330,520

- **Homeless Outreach:** 539 individuals served and of that number, 70 people achieved permanent housing

- **Prisoner Re-Entry Program:** 115 individuals served with job training, housing assistance, and other essential services to transition back into the community after incarceration

- **Volunteer Hours:** 10,420 hours logged, and 185,938 pounds of donated food and other goods were received and dispersed to people in need throughout Southwest Louisiana

For more information on the amazing work of Catholic Charities, visit <https://catholiccharitiesswla.com/about-us/#impact-report>

If you are interested in helping with the ministry of Catholic Charities, email volunteer@catholiccharitiesswla.org. Individuals and groups are welcome.

ANNUAL PRO-LIFE MARCH MESSAGE: 'LOVE THEM BOTH'

Dubois shares story on her life being spared from abortion

By Pamela Seal
Diocese of Lake Charles

LAKE CHARLES — "Love Them Both" was the theme for the 30th annual Louisiana Life March Southwest through downtown Lake Charles on Thursday, January 22, 2026. The pro-life March takes place every year on the "Day of Prayer for Legal Protection for Unborn Children."

An otherwise cloudy and dreary day gave way to a beautiful sunset as nearly 200 walked in support of the sanctity and dignity of life at all stages, and to hear the story of Amber Dubois who was conceived in rape.

This year's march made its way from the Veterans' Memorial Park at the Lake Charles Civic Center to the Calcasieu Parish Courthouse steps for a candlelight prayer vigil. It is sponsored by Louisiana Right to Life, New Life Counseling Pregnancy Center, ABC Pregnancy Center, Louisiana Baptist Convention, Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops, United Pentecostal Church of Louisiana, Louisiana Family Forum, the Knights of Columbus, and Concerned Women for America.

The Very Rev. Matthew Cormier, Pastor of Christ the King Catholic Church in the Diocese of Lake Charles, led the opening prayer reminding all that God is the one who knitted each one of us together in our mother's womb. Father Cormier gave thanks to God, our Creator, who alone has the power to impart the breath of life.

Why We March

Nicole Bertrand, Executive Director of New Life Counseling Pregnancy Center, said the Life March began in 1996 for the babies whose lives were never given a chance.

"We gather for a moment to pause, a moment to grieve, and a moment to acknowledge the profound loss of lives in the silent suffering carried by so many," said Bertrand. "From the beginning, this march and vigil were meant to surround women with compassion and love."

Bertrand assured those gathered that the march continues because the need has



A crowd gathers in support of life at all stages gather for the annual Life March Southwest candlelight vigil in downtown Lake Charles on January 22 on the "Day of Prayer for Legal Protection for Unborn Children."
(Photography Credit: Morris LeBleu)

not disappeared.

"We continue because women are still facing unplanned pregnancies, uncertainty, and fear. We continue because healing is still needed for hearts, for families, and for our community. We continue because love requires action, and that action continues beyond this evening," she said.

Every Life Matters

If there was one message that featured speaker Amber wanted to get across as she courageously shared her story, it was this: "When we get love right, we get life right."

"We could all be somewhere else, but we all chose tonight to march for life, to march for love," the young mother from the Acadiana-Lafayette area remarked as she began her talk. "Those who march for life march for love because we know that love is not always easy. Love isn't always convenient; sometimes, it's a little messy."

Amber (along with three younger sisters) was raised by her grandparents after her parents divorced when she was 6 years old.

"My dad's parents loved us deeply and made many sacrifices for us," she said.

"They made sure there was food on the table, we were clothed, went to church, and had friends who helped us make good choices."

Growing up felt like a normal childhood for Amber until she realized from being around her classmates that her upbringing was anything but normal.

By the time she was a teenager, she convinced her mother to have a heart-to-heart talk and answer all her questions. It was a day that changed her life and explained areas of her life where she knew "deep, deep down that something was missing."

Amber's mother revealed to her that her father was not her biological father; that she had been conceived in rape.

"When I asked my mom, who is an atheist, why she made the choice to keep me, she said that the pain of terminating the life within her would have been greater than the pain of the rape itself. It would just be pain upon pain," Amber recalled.

"According to the world — even pro-lifers — I did not deserve to be here. I was an accident," she shared. For many years, Amber struggled with this mindset.

"I felt like I had to prove that I deserved

to breathe the same air as everyone else," she said. "I had to prove that my mom made the right decision in keeping me. As I grew older, I would hear 'pro-life, except in the case of rape, except in the case of Amber.' Thankfully, God was not done with me yet."

When Amber asked her mom if she ever regretted not having an abortion, "She told me I was the best decision she ever made."

Even though Roe v. Wade has been overturned, many states still offer abortion in the case of rape, incest, or if the mother's life is in danger.

Amber told the crowd that the world has to stop seeing people like her as less.

"Why are people like me always the first to go? It is not fair. It is not just," she said. Moving on with her life, Amber is now married, a theology teacher at Catholic High in New Iberia, has three unborn babies in heaven, and a 6-month-old.

"I can stand here and share this part of my story, this vulnerable piece of myself — for people like my mom and for people like me — and how we can "Love Them Both," she said. "Thank you for marching and thank you for saving the 'little Ambers.'"