THE MOST REVEREND GLEN JOHN PROVOST, THIRD BISHOP OF LAKE CHARLES

Catholic Calendar

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PRIVATE AUDIENCE WITH THE HOLY FATHER

St. Pius X seminarian meets Pope Leo XIV

By Pamela Seal
Diocese of Lake Charles

Justin Fontenot, a seminarian for the Diocese of Lake Charles, was blessed with the opportunity to meet Pope Leo XIV with other students in Rome in late August.

Pope Leo received seminarians during a private audience in Clementine Hall in the Apostolic Palace before leading the Angelus in St. Peter's Square. The visit on Sunday, August 23, 2026, with the newest class members of the Pontifical North American College was a special way for them to say hello as the Holy Father's newest neighbors.

Justin continues his studies in Rome after beginning his first year of Configuration Stage. He is a parishioner of St. Pius X Catholic Church in Ragley and the son of Kevin and Michelle Fontenot of Moss Bluff.

When sharing the news of the papal visit with his family, he said, "They were very excited and in disbelief that I was given such a wonderful opportunity. I told them it was hard to fathom that I was actually in the same room as the pope and was able to shake his hand, yet at the same time the pope seemed so familiar like I had been knowing him for a long time."

"It was a small exchange but awesome to hear the pope speak perfect English and with an American accent, of course."

—Justin Fontenot, commenting on his meeting with Pope Leo XIV



Justin Fontenot, a seminarian from St. Pius X Catholic Church studying in Rome for the Diocese of Lake Charles, greets His Holiness Pope Leo XIV in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace on Sunday, August 23. Along with other seminarians from the Pontifical North American College, Fontenot was received by Pope Leo in a private audience. After brief introductions, the Holy Father delivered a message of encouragement, gave them a blessing, and took a group photo with the seminarians. *(Photo courtesy of the Vatican Press Office)*



In his brief encounter with Pope Leo, Justin said he shared his name and where he was from with the Holy Father, who replied, "Great!" as he smiled at the Louisiana seminarian. "It was a small exchange but awesome to hear the pope speak perfect English and with an American accent, of course."

The Holy Father's message to the seminarians was one of encouragement. The Gospel on August 23 was when Jesus entrusted the Church to St. Peter, calling him to be its rock (Matthew 16:13-20). Justin noted that this was providential on the day of the audience with Pope Leo.

"The Holy Father joked with all of us that since last year, this Gospel has taken on new meaning for him," Justin remarked. "The pope encouraged us all in continuing to follow Christ as His disciples. From our time being formed in Rome, as well as the time back in our home dioceses, it is the same Jesus we are following wherever we may be."

Justin said they were also encouraged to set aside time to practice and speak Italian so that they can fully immerse themselves in the unique culture of Rome and Italy.

The encounter with Pope Leo XIV "sparked an even deeper fire in my heart for the Church," Justin shared. "He is the living rock that Christ entrusted His Church and this rock has prevailed, even while being constantly beat by so many waves."

Following his comments, Pope Leo offered a prayer for the seminarians, gave them a blessing, and took a group photo with them. As he was leaving Clementine Hall to pray the Sunday Angelus, the seminarians stopped him briefly to sing, "*Ad Multos Annos*" praying that the Holy Father would have many more beautiful years as the pope, Justin shared.

"This song is very special to the seminary community here at the Pontifical North American College," he said. "We could tell that the Holy Father was moved by it."

Justin said that he is excited about his first year in Rome as he begins theological studies at the University of Saint Thomas Aquina (The Angelicum).

"We will cover various topics from the laws of the Church (Canon Law) to the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible) to Church History as well as the fundamental principles in our belief in God and His Church," he said.

Residing in the Eternal City is allowing Justin a chance to learn from the Saints buried there, the churches all around, and the history that surrounds the city.

"I have already been able to fall more in love with our Faith which preserves and triumphs in every age," he remarked, "as we firmly believe it is God both working in us and watching over us."

In the short time Justin has been in Rome, he said while everything he does is new and exciting, it also presents a learning curve, noting, "All of it is very formative in helping us to grow into good, holy, and capable priests."



From left: Very Rev. Joshua Rodrigue (Rector/President of Notre Dame Seminary), Luka Hagen, Archbishop James Checchio (Archdiocese of New Orleans), Nicholas Poncho, and Rev. Michael Caraway (Director of Vocations and Seminarians for the Diocese of Lake Charles).
(Photography credit: Notre Dame Seminary)

SEMINARIAN NEWS

Ministry of Lector

Two seminarians from the Diocese of Lake Charles — Luka Hagen and Nicholas Poncho — were among those given the ministry of Lector on September 30, 2026, at Notre Dame Seminary. The Most Reverend James Checchio, Archbishop of New Orleans, presided at the Mass for the Institution of Lectors. The Rite of Institution of Lectors is one of the ministries a seminarian must receive before ordination to the Diaconate and Priesthood. Those given the ministry of Lector are entrusted with reading the Sacred Scriptures during Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours. Each seminarian receiving the ministry of Lector was instructed by Archbishop Checchio to, "Take this book of Holy Scripture and be faithful in handing on the word of God, so that it may grow strong in the hearts of his people." Please pray for Luka and Nicholas that they may grow in wisdom and love of the Scriptures through their new role as lectors.

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The relics of St. Theophane Vénard (1829-1861) are carried by four Canons from the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest into St. Francis de Sales Oratory in Sulphur during the Solemn Consecration and Dedication of the church on October 12, 2026. *(Photography credit: Jay Balza)*

INSTITUTE OF CHRIST THE KING SOVEREIGN PRIEST

Historic Consecration and Dedication of St. Francis de Sales Oratory

SULPHUR — His Excellency, The Most Reverend Glen John Provost, Bishop of Lake Charles, solemnly consecrated St. Francis de Sales Oratory on Monday, October 12, 2026. The historic hours-long ceremony marked the first church consecration in the American Province of the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest in 18 years.

It was at the invitation of Bishop Provost that the Institute established the Catholic Oratory in January 2020 breathing new life into the original location for Our Lady of Prompt Succor Catholic Church, which later served as the city courthouse. The inaugural Solemn High Mass and Blessing was celebrated on March 27, 2021, following an extensive restoration.

The ancient ceremonies of this classical Roman Rite of the Dedication of a Church are rarely ever fully celebrated.

The rites performed on October 12 included the external and internal lustration of the church, the writing of the Greek and Latin alphabets in ashes in the shape of a cross, the procession of the holy relics that were enshrined in the altar stone, the anointing of the 12 consecration crosses, the consecration of the altar with the holy oils, culminating in a Solemn High Mass celebrated by Monsignor Schmitz, Vicar General, in the presence of His Excellency.

Through this solemn consecration, the Oratory was set apart as a sacred dwelling of God and a precious "Gate to Heaven on Earth."

During the consecration of St. Francis de Sales Oratory, the relic of the martyr St. Théophane Venard (1829–1861) was carried by four canons of the Institute of Christ the King in a reverent procession to the church where it was inserted and sealed into the altar stone by Bishop Provost.

St. Vénard was a French Catholic missionary priest and martyr for the Paris Foreign Missions Society and was beheaded in Tonkin, Vietnam for refusing to renounce his faith. He is particularly renowned for inspiring St. Therese of Lisieux, who frequently referred to him as her "dear brother" and drew spiritual strength from his joyful acceptance of martyrdom and his consoling letters written from prison. His feast day is celebrated on November 6.



Bishop Glen John Provost uses the tip of his crozier (pastoral staff) to write the Greek alphabet in sand along one beam of a cross and the Latin (Roman) alphabet along the other beam. The cross extended from corner to corner of the nave. Writing the full alphabets symbolizes an expansion of the Alpha and Omega representing Christ as the beginning and the end of all things. *(Photography credit: Jay Balza)*

The first Rector of the Oratory was Canon Jean-Marie Moreau who served in that role through mid-March 2025 at which time Canon Olivier Meney was assigned as Rector. Canon Moreau oversaw much of the restoration to breathe life back into the landmark.

St. Francis de Sales Oratory is a place where the harmony of truth and beauty, of faith and culture, of tradition and Catholic lifestyle can be experienced. Magnificent traditional liturgy, polyphony, Gregorian chant, occasional concerts and recitals performed by professional choirs enhance this amazing site in Louisiana.

The priests of the Institute of Christ the King offer theology, catechism classes, sacramental instruction, spiritual guidance and many events for the faithful and for the youth.

St. Francis de Sales Catholic Oratory is located at 802 South Huntington Street in Sulphur. The Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest apostolate, the only one of its kind in Louisiana, is home for the Traditional Latin Mass, Devotions and Sacraments.

For a Mass schedule, visit www.Institute-Christ-King.org/sulphur-home. To schedule a tour, call 773-891-6127.





AT LEFT: Bishop Provost kneels before the altar in St. Francis de Sales Oratory during the classical Roman Rite of the Dedication after candles in the form of crosses were lit. Additional rites included the consecration of the altar with holy oils, the external and internal lustration of the church, and the unction of the twelve columns. **AT RIGHT:** Bishop Provost sets the blessed cement, closing the sepulchre where the relics of Saint Theophane Vénard (1829-1861) were enshrined in the altar at St. Francis de Sales Oratory. Saint Vénard was a French Catholic missionary priest and martyr for the Paris Foreign Missions Society, and was beheaded in Tonkin, Vietnam for refusing to renounce his faith. His feast day is celebrated on November 6. *(Photography credit: Jay Balza)*

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AT LEFT: Sister Marie Josepha Kluczny, RSM, Executive Director for Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana, gives remarks during the opening ceremony for the People of Hope Museum that made a two-day stop in Lake Charles October 19-20 during its nationwide tour celebrating the power and transformative impact of service to neighbors. **AT RIGHT:** Visitors to the mobile museum step into the immersive storytelling experience to learn more about being on the giving and receiving end of generosity and mercy from others. *(Photography credit: Victoria Watson)*

PEOPLE OF HOPE MUSEUM MAKES TWO-DAY STOP IN LAKE CHARLES

Catholic Charities shines light on volunteers who give hope

By Pamela Seal
Diocese of Lake Charles

LAKE CHARLES — For many, choosing between rent, groceries, electricity, or medicine is a reality they face on a regular basis.

When the People of Hope Museum rolled into Lake Charles for a two-day stop October 19-20, visitors could "walk in the shoes" of those facing difficult choices through a variety of scenarios.

Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana hosted the traveling immersive exhibit at the Lake Charles Event Center as part of a nationwide tour highlighting encounters with people in need and the many volunteers who bring hope into their lives.

Funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., Catholic Charities USA launched the museum in the spring of 2026 with its goal of visiting more than 150 communities through June 2028.

Housed in a 53-foot digitally equipped trailer, Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana opened the visit with an appreciation gathering for its local volunteers.

"You all represent many of our closest partners, friends, and supporters in the work of caring for the suffering in Southwest Louisiana," said Executive Director Sister Marie Josepha Kluczny, RSM.

She thanked Bishop Glen John Provost, who led the opening prayer, for being a strong supporter of the mission at Catholic Charities.

Addressing the volunteers, Sister Marie Josepha reminded them of their mission through service.

"Catholic Charities exists to be the merciful love for those who suffer," she said. "The love of Christ must be alive and at work in the hearts of those who serve. You are part of the way Christ accomplishes his work through Catholic Charities."







Visitors to the People of Hope Musuem learn more about walking in the shoes of their neighbors in need through a poverty simulator, listening to Stories of Hope from volunteers around the country, and writing down ways they will commit to being a person of hope for others. *(Photography credit: Victoria Watson)*



In attendance for the People of Hope Museum's opening ceremony at the Lake Charles Event Center on October 19 are, from left, Sister Mrija Hope Nuculaj, RSM; Sister Anthony Mary Diago, RSM; Father Joseph Caraway; and Bishop Glen John Provost.

Photography credit: Victoria Watson

Seeing the Need Up Close

The museum features an interactive poverty simulator of making difficult choices and experiencing the realities of living on the margins. This was not lost on David and Pam Messina, regular Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana volunteers who witness many struggling to make ends meet.

David drives the refrigerated truck for 10 of the 11 monthly food distributions. He and Pam both help at the Lake Charles distribution site.

"There are situations we see that will bring tears to your eyes," David said. "When you see what is happening outside your own little bubble, it is eye-opening and life changing. Everyone we serve is very appreciative."

David does not see his volunteer efforts as a sacrifice.

"I look at this as giving back for all the years we have been blessed and never found ourselves in the circumstances that our clients face," he said.

Inspired to Serve

Pam said she volunteers for the people who cannot. She is encouraged by fellow volunteers and Catholic Charities staff.

"It is moving to see people come out to help," she said. "The staff is amazing. Yes, we are helping, but the staff gives their heart and soul every day. They are so passionate about what they do."

Visitors to the museum were invited to get involved through volunteering and gain awareness and understanding of the many good works of Catholic Charities.

Pam's advice to people on the fence about volunteering is: "Just do what you can."

Driving Hope Across Nation

Bringing hope from one city to the next is Corey Boykin of Columbia, South Carolina, who drives the mobile museum. While this is his first experience working with Catholic Charities, he is certain it will not be his last.

Boykin works for the event production and marketing company that built the museum tractor-trailer.

"Most of the work my company does is for Fortune 500 companies. Driving the trailer has had an impact on me," Boykin remarked. "It is not often in my line of work that I am able to do something that gives back. Being a part of the mobile museum has been enlightening, and I can see myself doing more work like this."

Among the few encounters that have stayed with Boykin since he began driving the museum in March 2026 happened during a stop in Vermont.

"A visitor was listening to one of the stories at the Stories of Hope Wall," said Boykin. "She recognized one of the people as someone she knew because this person had helped her daughter who was hearing impaired. The story brought her to tears realizing the impact that Catholic Charities and that person had made in her life."

Other features in the museum include a learning library, a recording studio, and data wall.

Museum about Hope

Although the museum was only in Lake Charles for a couple of days, Sister Marie Josepha said it was clear that visitors were integrating the experience.

"There is a part of the museum where visitors can write down what they commit to doing to be a person of hope and clip it to a wall for others to read," Sister Marie Josepha said. "People wrote about setting aside money to bless someone in need, helping clean the house of an elderly neighbor, or simply complimenting a stranger to brighten their day."

Expressing her happiness in reading the wall, Sister Marie Josepha said, "It showed me that people were really reflecting on the power each of us has to be a person of hope to someone else."

To learn more about Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana or how you can volunteer, visit www.catholiccharitiesswla.org. To learn more about the mobile museum, visit www.peopleofhope.us

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Serra USA president urges prayers for Clergy and Religious

By Anne McCormack
Editor of The Serran

How often do you include current and potential vocations to the priesthood, permanent diaconate and religious life in your prayers? Now's a good time to add Catholic vocations to your daily private and parish petitions.

Additionally, if your parish doesn't already have a Vocations Team or Committee, please consider starting one as an essential component of your community's ministry.

National Vocation Awareness Week was celebrated November 1-7. It is a time officially designated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to promote and pray for vocations to the priesthood, permanent diaconate, and consecrated life.

Lake Charles' own John J. Halloran, Jr., has been praying for vocations since he joined the Serra Club of Lake Charles in 1990. The Lake Charles Serra Club is one of hundreds of clubs across the world that make up Serra International, an organization whose specific mission is to promote, encourage and affirm vocations to the ministerial priesthood, permanent diaconate, and consecrated religious life in the Catholic Church.

This past July, Halloran, a retired US Army Colonel, became president of Serra International's USA Council. In this role, he leads about 8,000 lay Catholics across the country in fulfilling Serra's vocation-focused work. Now, more than ever, Serra's work is vital to the future of the Church as vocations to the priesthood and religious life have declined steadily in the past 50 years.

"Serra is important to me because I have experienced the shortage of priests in my lifetime, especially in the military," Halloran says. "During Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom I, I might see a priest every four to six weeks, and it was usually one from a Navy ship making his rounds to offer Mass and Confession."

The presence of priests in civilian life is likewise sparse. According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, the statistics paint a dire picture: While the US Catholic population has grown by about 2 million since they started recording such data in 1965, the number of priests has plummeted by over 40 percent, down from over 58,000 to about 34,500 in 2025. Last year, there were 3,674 parishes in the United States without a resident pastor.



Lake Charles Catholic John J. Halloran, Jr. (second from right) was installed as Serra's US Council President in Indianapolis in July. He is joined by (from left): Serra Club of Lake Charles President Dr. Keith DeSonier; Serra International President Margo Geddie of Houston; and Serra International Executive Director John Liston of Chicago, Ill.

"These days, we have priests who serve multiple parishes," Halloran said. "Many years ago, there was one priest for about every 1,000 laypeople. Now we have one priest for about every 4,000 laypeople. Decades ago, the United States would send priests to other countries; now the reverse seems to be true."

As for religious sisters, while CARA counted just shy of 180,000 working for the Church in 1965, the 2025 figure of 33,135 reflects an even steeper downward trend.

Halloran's top goal as president of Serra's US Council is to get more American Catholics concerned and passionate about promoting religious vocations to join Serra and amplify its mission. The theme for his two-year term, "Concern, Commitment, and Courage" describes the qualities needed for those who feel called to be a part of the Serra apostolate.

Locally, the 100 members of Serra Club of Lake Charles support the diocese's vocations initiatives by coordinating fundraising and awareness activities.

One particular highlight of the year is the club's annual Clergy and Religious Recognition event, which honors priests and sisters celebrating milestone anniversaries with Mass, lunch, and a gift of $10 per anniversary year. This event took place in September at Our Lady of Prompt Succor Catholic Church in Sulphur, where 13 priests, 8 deacons, and 5 religious sisters were honored for their combined 910 years of service. Over the 19 years that this program has existed, over $112,000 has been presented to local priests, permanent deacons and the sisters.

Born and raised in New York, Halloran moved to Lake Charles in 1987. He married his college sweetheart, Nila, and were married for 45 years before she "was deployed to Heaven," as Halloran says. They had three children, who in turn produced 16 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Nila was an emergency room registered nurse and was also a member of the Serra Club of Lake Charles. The Hallorans made St. Theodore Catholic Church in Moss Bluff their parish home.

Halloran entered the military as a Regular Army 2nd Lieutenant. He retired with the rank of Colonel after 32 years of service in 2008. Much like his military career, he rose through the ranks of Serra, serving as his club's president for 11 years and then moving up through the organization's national and international hierarchy. He was installed as the US Council's president in July at Serra's 83rd international convention in Indianapolis and will complete his term in 2028.

Serra International was founded in Seattle in 1935. About 15,000 lay Catholics make up its membership in Serra Clubs all across the world. For more information on Serra International, visit serrainternational.org, or serraus.org for Serra's activities in the United States. If you are interested in joining one of the two Serra Clubs in the Diocese of Lake Charles, contact John Halloran at colhalloran@hotmail.com.

CELEBRATING NATIONAL VOCATION AWARENESS WEEK

Students throughout the Diocese of Lake Charles participated in National Vocation Awareness Week November 1-7.

Middle schoolers, high schoolers, and the College Students at Cowboy Catholics had opportunities to visit with various Priests and Religious from throughout our diocese as they visited the Catholic Schools to talk about vocations and joined the Cowboy Catholics for a special Grace and Grub.

Please join us in praying for all the young people in our diocese to answer God's call and follow where He leads them.

"God our Father, we thank you for calling men and women to serve in your Son's Kingdom as priests and religious. Send your Holy Spirit to help others to respond generously and courageously to your call. May our community of faith support vocations of sacrificial love in our youth and young adults. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever." Amen.









