

2026 Lenten Almsgiving

In partnership with Catholic Extension this Lenten season, St. Ignatius of Loyola parish community is **supporting a vital mission: seminarian education and priests in the Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas**. Your efforts will help the men who are answering God's call to serve as priests in one of the most missionary dioceses in our country.

Catholic Extension Society works in solidarity with people in America's poorest regions to build up vibrant and transformative Catholic faith communities. They seek to deepen and expand our commitment to Catholic faith communities by providing resources to develop leaders, ministries, and facilities, while inviting more people across our country to invest in this work.

The Diocese of Little Rock is home to **only 150,000 Catholics—less than 5% of the state's population**. Yet it has become a **national model for fostering vocations**, grounded in its strong missionary identity.

- **44 men ordained priests in the last 15 years (including Fr. Jeff Hebert who grew up at St. Ignatius of Loyola)**
- **25 men currently in seminary**

For comparison: if the nation's largest archdioceses were keeping pace, they would each have had to ordain more than **1,000 priests** in that same time period. None have exceeded 200.

This extraordinary growth is happening in a diocese that simply does not have the financial resources to fully support the cost of priestly formation on its own.

That's where **Catholic Extension**—and generous parishes like **St. Ignatius of Loyola**—make a difference.

Each year, Catholic Extension supports **over 400 seminarians** nationwide by providing:

- Scholarships for **seminary tuition**
- Assistance with **room and board**
- Support for **vocation and formation programs** in under-resourced dioceses

These scholarships ease a tremendous financial burden and allow seminarians to focus fully on discerning and preparing for the priesthood.

Why Your Support Matters

Vocations extend the presence of the Church—especially in places where priests are few and the faithful are spread across wide distances.

By giving this Lent, St. Ignatius of Loyola helps ensure that men called by God can say “yes” to serving where they are needed most. You are helping to form the next generation of priests—the *helping hands* who will celebrate the sacraments, serve the poor, and proclaim the Gospel for decades to come.

Thank you for your generosity!

A Lenten Invitation

This Lent, we invite you to pray, reflect, and give generously.

Your sacrifice helps sustain a missionary Church, strengthens a thriving diocese, and supports future priests whose education and formation depend on our shared faith.

Together, let us build up the Church—one vocation at a time.

Thank you for your continued generosity and for walking this Lenten journey with All Saints Parish.



Fr. Jeff Hebert grew up at St. Ignatius of Loyola and now serves as the Director of Vocations and Seminarians in the Diocese of Little Rock, AR. His seminarian education was supported by Catholic Extension Society and was ordained in 2018.

In partnership with Catholic Extension this Lenten season, St. Ignatius of Loyola parish community is **supporting seminarian education and priests in the Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas.**

During this sacred season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, we are invited to make a gift that will help form the next generation of priests serving one of the most missionary dioceses in our country.

Why This Matters

The Diocese of Little Rock is home to only 150,000 Catholics – less than 5% of Arkansas’ population – yet it has become a national model for fostering vocations.

- 44 men ordained priests in the last 15 years
- 25 men currently in seminary
- A growing Church with limited financial resources

This vibrant missionary diocese simply cannot afford the full cost of priestly formation on its own.

How Your Lenten Gift Will Be Used

Through Catholic Extension, your almsgiving will provide:

- Seminary tuition scholarships
- Room and board assistance
- Formation and vocation program support
- Resources for under-resourced missionary dioceses



Your Lenten Invitation

Almsgiving calls us to sacrifice so that others may flourish.

This Lent, we invite you to:

- Pray for vocations
- Reflect on the gift of the priesthood
- Give generously to support seminarian formation

Your gift helps ensure that men called by God can say “yes.” These scholarships ease a tremendous financial burden and allow seminarians to focus fully on discerning God’s call. Together, we can form the priests who will celebrate the sacraments, serve the poor, and proclaim the Gospel for decades to come.

Thank you for your support and generosity this Lent. Thank you for walking this journey of faith with us.

In partnership with Catholic Extension this Lenten season, St. Ignatius of Loyola parish community is supporting seminarian education and priests in the Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas.

In a state where the Catholic population is around five percent, the Diocese of Little Rock is making big things happen. In many ways, Little Rock is a model for how Catholic Extension support can help the Catholic Church to flourish in spite of enormous challenges. For more than a century, Catholic Extension Society has stood in partnership with the Diocese of Little Rock to strengthen this missionary Church.

The Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas

The Diocese of Little Rock was established by Pope Gregory XVI on November 28, 1843. From its founding, the diocese has covered the entire state of Arkansas – a vast missionary territory spanning 75 counties and more than 52,000 square miles. Today, approximately 170,000 Catholics live in Arkansas, representing less than 5% of the state's total population. By contrast, the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston serves nearly 1.8 million Catholics – more than ten times the Catholic population of Arkansas. The Diocese of Little Rock has 25 seminarians, roughly 7,000 Catholics per seminarian while the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston has approximately 1 seminarian for every 34,000 Catholics. Proportionally, Little Rock is fostering vocations at nearly five times the rate of Galveston-Houston.



Understanding the Need

Unlike densely Catholic regions of the country, parishes in Arkansas are often separated by long rural distances, and many communities are small, geographically isolated, and financially limited. In some areas, Catholics travel great distances to attend Mass, and certain parishes do not have a resident priest.

When Catholics are spread across thousands of miles and represent a small minority of the population, the local Church has fewer financial resources to sustain its ministries – including the education and formation of future priests. Yet the need for priests is even greater in such a setting. A single priest may serve multiple parishes, travel hours each week to celebrate Mass, and minister to communities that would otherwise go without regular access to the sacraments.

One of the most significant developments in recent decades has been the rapid growth of the Hispanic Catholic population. Hispanic children now make up a large and increasing percentage of those enrolled in religious education programs, and Hispanic youth and young adults are becoming a dynamic and essential part of parish life. This growth is a tremendous blessing – but it also increases the need for well-formed, bilingual, and missionary priests who can shepherd diverse and expanding communities. As congregations grow, so does the demand for sacramental ministry, pastoral leadership, and vocational outreach. Formation today determines whether these communities will have priests tomorrow.

When we understand the demographics of the Diocese of Little Rock, we see the vision clearly: a small but vibrant Catholic population spread across a vast territory, growing in diversity, and deeply in need of well-prepared shepherds. By supporting the formation and education of seminarians, we are investing in the spiritual future of an entire state. This Lent, your generosity supports the formation and education of priests and helps the communities they serve.

In partnership with Catholic Extension this Lenten season, St. Ignatius of Loyola parish community is supporting seminarian education and priests in the Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas.

Mission Appeal Representative – Father Jeff Hebert

Fr. Jeff Hebert grew one of 11 children in the suburbs of Houston attending St. Ignatius of Loyola and now serves as the Director of Vocations and Seminarians in the Diocese of Little Rock, AR. Catholic Extension Society was honored to have supported his seminarian education so he could answer God's call to serve his people.

Before Fr. Jeff Hebert's priestly ordination in 2018, he was clear about what kind of priest he wanted to be for God's people – "a priest who has the smell of the sheep."

Fr. Hebert, 38, became the diocesan vocations director in 2021, helping guide discerners and seminarians to hopefully build that strong connection of faith to their own flocks one day. While he had served only as an associate pastor at St. Joseph Church in Conway before Bishop Anthony B. Taylor assigned him to the role of assistant vocations director and prefect of the House of Formation in June 2020, Fr. Hebert said the parish and all the people he ministers to are always in his mind when he works with young men.

"It's really the thing I'm trying to get these young men to understand and to conform their hearts to the heart of Christ that smells like the sheep, because I actually have the sheep in mind," Fr. Hebert said. "And so that's really helped me to kind of guide that and to really reconcile the ministry that I have now as opposed to being in a parish or in parish ministry is that I still have the parish in mind. There's no point in forming these guys to be a theoretical priest."

It's the mentality he believes Msgr. Scott Friend, former Vocations Director, felt throughout his service. Msgr. Friend grew vocations throughout his tenure, with 44 priests ordained, 24 more in formation and the construction of the House of Formation, where seminarians and discerners live and study.

"Really understanding vocations as a sign of God's love for us but also as a reason for the people to continue to believe, and just kind of seeing how that fits into the greater proclamation of the kingdom of God. It's been really cool for me," Fr. Hebert said.

As vocations director, Fr. Hebert visits parishes and schools outside of Central Arkansas to talk more about vocations. He also visits with discernment groups at different parts of the state for young men.

"I think what society needs in priests today, above all, they are men of faith. And I don't mean that in the cliché, just like prayerful men. Men who actually believe the things they're proclaiming from the pulpit," he said. "Men who actually believe that the source and the summit, the highest thing we do is the celebration of the Eucharist, the communal celebration. I think men who believe truly what the Gospel revealed. It's really about handing on the message of Jesus Christ in the way and the tradition he has left us."

Fr. Hebert said his role is not to choose the future priests but to guide them in God's will. Lay Catholics planting seeds in the minds of young men who they think would be good priests can be life-changing. In his own vocation story, a woman he had never met put her hand on his shoulder and said, "You're going to be a priest someday."

Help us form future priests, like Fr. Jeff Hebert, by supporting seminarian and priest education in the Diocese of Little Rock, AR. Thank you for your support and generosity this Lent!

In partnership with Catholic Extension this Lenten season, St. Ignatius of Loyola parish community is supporting seminarian education and priests in the Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas.

At Catholic Extension, a missionary spirit permeates everything we do. We learn so much from faith communities on the margins and believe in their vitality. Since its founding, Catholic Extension has funded leaders who share a missionary vision. Catholic Extension supports seminarians and priests who are relentlessly devoted to serving people in the peripheries, often traveling great distances to reach them.

Missionary Vocations in Little Rock – There is a powerful trend for new vocations to the priesthood in the Diocese of Little Rock. In the past 15 years, 44 men have been ordained in the Diocese of Little Rock, AR where there are only 150,000 Catholics. 25 more are in the seminary. During this 15-year period, the median age of priests has fallen from 65 to an amazing 48 years old. To get some grasp of how stunning these numbers are, the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston would have to have ordained more than 1,000 priests in the same 15-year period to keep pace with the Diocese of Little Rock. No diocese in the nation has exceeded 200 ordinations according to the Official Catholic Directory.

Many factors have contributed to this boom, including mentorship from Monsignor Scott Friend, the vocations director since 2005. Monsignor Friend visits youth programs, planting the seed of vocations early. “We introduce young people to peer ministry and being part of a faith community”. At the local high schools, he holds vocational signing events, similar to what athletes do for sports teams, so high school seniors can sign a letter of intent to join seminary.

How then do poor dioceses with many seminarians afford education costs? Catholic Extension has a creative solution. Today, priests require 6 to 8 years of formal training. In the Catholic tradition, the Church sponsors the education of its seminarians, who in turn commit to a lifetime of service with little financial reward. While the investment of education in seminarians eventually pays off through the lifelong service of the priest, the up-front cost is no less daunting. This means that financially strapped, yet seminarian-rich dioceses like Little Rock require funding solutions like those from Catholic Extension.



And it is not just the numbers that are impressive. It is the quality of those ordained that is most powerful. Fr. Stephen Hart, a priest from the Diocese of Little Rock, AR, says his calling came early in life. “My parents always said, “Your happiness is found in God’s will. Ask Him what He wants, and He will tell you,” he said. “Growing up, I remember watching our pastor and seeing myself in him.” He was ordained in 2017. He currently covers three parishes and talks with such enthusiasm about his faith communities. He doesn’t complain about the mileage but rather focuses on how hungry for the Gospel his people are and how great the harvest is. They are his fuel.

Each year, Catholic Extension supports over 400 seminarians in their path to the priesthood. We provide scholarships that help struggling dioceses pay for seminarian tuition as well as room and board. In addition, we support vocational programs in these areas. Help us form future priests by supporting seminarian and priest education in Little Rock.