

ST. MARK THE EVANGELIST CATHOLIC CHURCH

THE WINGED LION

✦ COMMUNITY NEWS



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FALL 2026 EDITION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and *Magnifica Humanitas*

By Rev. Dennis D. Aréchiga

The *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* defines Artificial Intelligence as “The capability of computer systems or algorithms to imitate intelligent human behavior.”

We are in a brave new world, an era in which billions of dollars are being poured into the advancement of A.I., Artificial Intelligence. Author Benjamin C. Kinney stated in *Apex Magazine* that “someday, our artificial intelligences will be capable enough to pass for human.” Yet Shira Ovide shared in *The Washington Post* that a Monmouth University poll found that “only 9 percent of Americans believed that computers with artificial intelligence would do more good than harm to society.” There is a general mistrust of A.I., although its applications are already being used, everywhere; as a concrete example, Liz Freeman reported in the *Naples Daily News* that A.I. is being used “behind the scenes in hospitals to automate workforce tasks, improve patient flow, for operating room scheduling and elsewhere to improve efficiency.”

I remember the first Pastoral Council meeting when a member said, “Let’s ask ChatGPT,” before I knew what that was! It reminded me of the first time I heard a staff member at St. Monica parish say, “Let’s Google that!” over 24 years ago. It’s not a surprise that a few months ago Pope Leo XIV released an encyclical on A.I. entitled *Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the time of Artificial Intelligence* to address issues that A.I. has created.

The following is a reflection attributed to one of our Pastoral Council Members, Allison De La Garza, that was used at one of our recent Pastoral Council Meetings to whet our appetite for members to read the entire encyclical. This is what Allison shared with us, and this is what I’d like to pass on to you:

“On May 25, 2026, Pope Leo XIV released *Magnifica Humanitas*, his first encyclical, addressing the opportunities and challenges presented by artificial intelligence and emerging technologies. At its heart, the document asks a deeply Christian question: How do we ensure that technological progress serves the dignity of the human person and the flourishing of our communities.”

“What Is Magnifica Humanitas?”

There are documents that arrive quietly. And then there are documents that land like a stone in still water, sending ripples across the entire Church and beyond. *Magnifica Humanitas*, Pope Leo XIV’s first encyclical signed on May 15, 2026, is the second kind.

What Is an Encyclical?

An encyclical is one of the highest forms of papal teaching. It is a letter from the Pope addressed to the entire Church and, in this case, to “all men and women of goodwill” on a matter of serious urgency. When a pope writes an encyclical, he is not offering a casual opinion. He is speaking as the universal shepherd, drawing on centuries of Scripture, Tradition, and the lived experience of the Church. *Magnifica Humanitas*, which translates to ‘Magnificent Humanity,’ is Pope Leo XIV’s opening statement to the world

And he chose to make it about artificial intelligence (AI).

Why AI? Why Now?

Some might ask: why is the Pope writing about technology? Shouldn’t the Church focus on prayer, sacraments, and salvation? Pope Leo XIV answers this question directly, echoing his predecessor Leo XIII who faced the same objection in 1891 when he wrote *Rerum Novarum* about workers’ rights and the Industrial Revolution. The proclamation of the Gospel, he insists, cannot overlook the concrete lives of people. And right now, the concrete lives of people are being shaped profoundly and rapidly by artificial intelligence.

AI is not a distant, futuristic concept. It is already deciding who gets a bank loan, who gets called for a job interview, what news you see, what content your children encounter, and increasingly, who lives and who dies on battlefields. These are not technical questions. They are human questions. And human questions are the Church’s business.

Pope Leo XIV wrote this encyclical because silence would have been a failure of pastoral responsibility.

The 135-Year Connection

One of the most striking aspects of *Magnifica Humanitas* is when it was signed: May 15, 2026, exactly 135 years after Leo XIII published *Rerum Novarum* on May 15, 1891.

That was not a coincidence.

Rerum Novarum was the Church’s response to the Industrial Revolution, a world

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A Q&A Spotlight: Getting to Know Fr. Christopher Popravak, O.F.M.,Cap.



Our parish community thrives because of incredible priests like Fr. Christopher Popravak, O.F.M.,Cap. As one of our visiting priests, he works regularly to preside over Masses, develop inspiring homilies, and listen to our confessions. We are thrilled to share more about Fr. Christopher in this quarter's newsletter spotlight, so you can learn more about his life outside of the walls of St. Mark.

1. What inspired you to pursue the priesthood? Visiting Capuchin priests gave missions, retreats, and Sunday sermons at my home parish. I was drawn to their good preaching and prayerful example.

2. A childhood memory that still makes you smile: Going to a dude ranch with my family and being too proud to ride with the beginners. After my horse ran away with me and I had to be rescued, I learned a bit of humility.

3. Favorite saint or spiritual role model (and why): St. Francis of Assisi's dramatic imitation of Christ inspires me because he had to overcome an initial resistance to change his way of life, pick himself up after failures, and deal with those who challenged his demanding lifestyle—always maintaining a spirit of joy.

4. What part of your ministry brings you the most joy? Celebrating the Eucharist is a wonder to me. I participate in a miracle each day. Hearing confessions, likewise, inspires me as I hear the grace of God active in the lives of so many good people.

5. A meaningful lesson you've learned as a priest: To maintain an awareness of God's presence as I minister and try not to be a hindrance to God's activity.

6. A Scripture passage that has deeply influenced your life: Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Ps. 127

7. A ministry or outreach effort you feel passionate about: The more I discover about our Catholic faith, through prayer and study, the more I want to share our faith with others: preaching and teaching.

8. How can parishioners best support you in your role? By praying for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and by encouraging those of us who are priests and religious.

9. Hobbies or activities you enjoy in your free time: My father and mother met on a 700-plus-mile hike. Like them, I enjoy hiking, most recently walking the Camino in Spain.

10. If you weren't a priest, what other career might you have pursued? In college I studied psychology and worked as an intern at Matteawan State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

11. Coffee or tea: Coffee and Herbal teas.

12. Favorite comfort food: Potato chips.

13. Favorite Liturgical season or Holy Day: The Pascal Triduum.

14. Hidden talent or surprising skill: I enjoy learning languages.

15. If you could have dinner with any historical figure (besides Jesus), who would it be? Benedict XVI.

16. One hope or prayer you have for the people you serve: To strive to put God first in their lives.

17. Anything else you'd like the parish to know about you: Thanks to all for the warm welcome I have experienced at St. Mark's.

Artificial Intelligence (continued)

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being transformed by machines, factories, and capitalism, where workers were being exploited and their dignity trampled. It became the foundation of modern Catholic Social Teaching. It changed how the Church engaged with society forever.

Pope Leo XIV is making a deliberate statement: what the Industrial Revolution was to Leo XIII, artificial intelligence is to us. The scale of disruption is comparable. The stakes for human dignity are just as high. And the Church cannot afford to be silent.

Two Cities, One Choice

At the heart of *Magnifica Humanitas* are two images drawn from Scripture that frame the document.

The first is the Tower of Babel, humanity using its collective power and technology to build something grand, but without God, without care for the vulnerable, and ultimately without wisdom. The result is not unity but fragmentation, not progress but confusion.

The second is Nehemiah rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, a different kind of building project. Not driven by pride or profit, but by prayer, shared responsibility, listening, and a genuine concern for every member of the community. Brick by brick. Together.

Pope Leo XIV says the same choice faces us today. We can use AI to build Babel, a world of algorithmic control, digital exploitation, growing inequality, and the slow erosion of what makes us human. Or we can use it to rebuild Jerusalem, putting technology at the service of human dignity, the common good, and genuine solidarity.

The encyclical is not anti-technology. It never says AI is

evil. What it says is that technology is never neutral. It takes on the character of the people who build it, fund it, and use it. And so the question is not whether we will use AI, we already are. The question is what kind of people we will be while using it.

What the Encyclical Actually Covers

Magnifica Humanitas is 48 pages and five chapters long. But here is a brief map of the territory:

Chapter One: A Dynamic Approach Faithful to the Gospel
This first chapter traces the history of Catholic Social Teaching from Leo XIII to Pope Francis, showing how the Church has always engaged with and applied the Gospel to the "new things" of each era.

Chapter Two: Foundations and Principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church
This chapter lays out the core principles that must guide our response to AI, including human dignity, the common good, subsidiarity, solidarity, and social justice.

Chapter Three: Technology and the Grandeur of Humanity
This is the doctrinal heart of the encyclical: an honest assessment of AI – what it is, why it can be wonderful, why it is dangerous, and why it can never replace the human person.

Chapter Four: Safeguarding Humanity: Truth, Work and Freedom
Chapter Four moves from principles to the concrete areas of life most transformed – and most at risk – from the digital revolution. It addresses four urgent areas: truth and democracy, education, the dignity of work, and human freedom in the age of digital addiction and surveillance.

Chapter Five: The Culture of Power and the Civilization of Love

The final chapter confronts the most dangerous expression of unchecked power: war – and proposes a 'civilization of love' as the only worth alternative.

Why This Matters to You

You might not be a theologian. You might not read Vatican documents. But if you own a smartphone, use social media, worry about your future, care about justice, or are simply trying to live your faith in a world that feels increasingly confusing and inhuman, this encyclical was written for you.

Pope Leo XIV is not asking Catholics to become Luddites or to fear technology. He is asking us to remain profoundly human. To ask hard questions. To resist the slow drift toward a world where efficiency replaces compassion, where data replaces dignity, and where the logic of profit replaces the logic of love.

Questions for Reflection

Do I view technological changes with fear, or do I seek in them the opportunity to bear witness to my faith?

Does my daily use of technology (phones, social media, apps, AI tools) serve to improve my relationships and include others, or is it becoming a form of isolation? ...

Where do you see technology helping people flourish in our parish community?"

Thank you, Allison, for a wonderful reflection on *Magnifica Humanitas*! Now let's all go read it!

Rev. Dennis D. Arechiga, Pastor

Read the *Magnifica Humanitas* online for free at:

Official Vatican Website:
Read the official document text directly via the

Vatican Library Document Portal
<https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/encyclicals/documents/20260515-magnifica-humanitas.html>



Teen ACTS Shaped My Walk with Christ

By Sienna Lepe

Teen ACTS (Adoration, Community, Theology, and Service) is more than just an acronym. It is the foundation of a retreat that invites teens to encounter Jesus Christ through the sacraments, prayer, community, and a deeper understanding of our Catholic faith. Adoration invites us to worship Christ, present in the Eucharist, and recognize His presence in our lives. Community reminds us that the Church is a family that journeys toward Heaven. Theology deepens our understanding of the faith we profess, and Service calls us to love others with the selfless love Christ has shown us.

When I first stepped onto the bus as a retreatant a few years ago, I had no idea what awaited me at the end of that ride. Looking back, I can confidently say Teen ACTS became one of the greatest blessings of my life. Through this retreat, God revealed that faith is not simply going through the motions, but a relationship with Him. He surrounded me with a family rooted in Christ and showed me the beauty of walking alongside others who seek Him. Because of that experience, returning this



St. Mark Teen ACTS Directors, pictured from left to right: Ryan Byers, Sienna Lepe, Mirabella Ramirez, and Ted Tollette.

summer as a director was humbling and a blessing.

Our theme was Matthew 13:16,

“But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear,”

alongside the Parable of the Sower. Throughout the weekend, we reflected on how the Lord plants seeds through

His Word, the sacraments, and the people He places in our lives. We were invited to recognize His presence, trusting that even when we cannot see the fruit, God is cultivating our hearts.

Directing allowed me to witness those seeds grow. Seeing teens come before Jesus in the Eucharist, hearing testimonies of God's faithfulness, and watching retreatants gather on their own to praise and worship Him reminded me that He is drawing hearts to Himself. Seeing young people desire a relationship with Christ and leave as brothers and sisters in Him was a joy I will never forget.

Teen ACTS has shaped my walk with Christ. It has taught me to seek Him in every season, trust in His faithfulness, and recognize His presence through His Church and the people He places in my life. My prayer is that the seeds planted during this retreat continue to bear fruit, leading each retreatant closer to Christ and reminding them that they were never meant to walk the journey alone.

Sienna Lepe is one of the Teen ACTS 2026 Teen Directors.

WOMEN'S GUILD & KNIGHTS' 2026 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Sofia Bernal
Ryan Byers
Arianna Diaz
Mateo Espejo
Isabella Guerrero
Emily Kaman
Sienna Lepe
Angelina Nieto Otero
Riley Smith
Kamila Valencia

Congratulations!



Of the seven Sacraments, which one is most meaningful to you at this point in your faith journey? Explain your choice by sharing how it connects to your own experience and what the Church teaches about it.

gave us the eucharist. Not only can we physically see him but we are able to hold his living body in our hands. He has given me the chance to be with him during adoration which is an experience I will never give up. It is already overwhelming just to be thinking about our Lord, but to be in the same room and absorb his love, is a true sacrament.

My favorite part of the eucharist is consuming and having God as close to me as possible. When consuming I always feel a warmth deep in my chest that I can only describe as love. I mean this is his living body that he has given up for me! Because this is so important to me I figured why not share it with others, this is when I became a eucharist minister. Being able to share this indescribable feeling with others has truly brought me to a new perspective.

The eucharist is the root of our faith. The church has taught me that as Catholics we are the only ones who wholeheartedly believe that the eucharist is the living body of Jesus Christ. It is not just a wafer that you are obligated to eat every Sunday, but a sacrament given up for us to grow closer to God in a way that no one else can satisfy. The eucharist is so important to the roots of our faith.

The church has taught me a lot, but the most important one of them all is the eucharist. The eucharist will forever be the root of my heart. Whatever I am going through I know who is always beside me and whose love will never falter or fail.

Angelina Nieto Otero is a 2026 scholarship recipient.

By Angelina Nieto Otero

To be Catholic means to have faith, it means to have trust, but most importantly it means to believe. I have the most faith in God through the eucharist. Not only can I see a physical representation of our lord through the eucharist, but I am blessed enough to consume it and become one with him. But most importantly the eucharist is a constant reminder of why I believe.

The beauty of the eucharist is not easy to describe to others. I think this is because its beauty comes from the depths of God's heart. It is hard to believe in something that you cannot physically see, this is why I believe God

By Arianna Diaz

Intercession means to pray over one person or another group of individuals. This is important because it teaches us about how to be selfless like Jesus was. Intercession and prayer has always been an important part of my life. When you learn a new prayer, such as the Divine Mercy Chaplet, or the Rosary, you learn not only to pray over your own intentions, but in the intentions of others. The Rosary was taught to me by my mother, and we prayed one Rosary every night for a few years with my family, in doing this very powerful prayer. I caught a habit of praying over others rather than for my own personal gain, I found it made me feel happier, and it felt nice to pray over someone who needs a little extra support. Hearing my mom pray over different people who are going through different situations, before she got to herself, taught me about selflessness, and the impact one quick prayer can have on many others lives.

Intercession is not only an important part of prayer and praying like a true Catholic, but also it is what God calls us to do. I learned more about Intercession during my own trials and tribulations. In some of the hardest parts of my life, when I felt like my world was crumbling down, the thing that always helped the most is when others had asked to pray over me, after their powerful prayers and kind words, I felt a love unlike any other, I felt God's love. The peace that God's love brought to me made me feel like with Him, I would be all right, and that if anybody could save me, it would be Him. Intercession is powerful, and it doesn't always have to be a prayer similar to or the same as the Rosary, or Divine Mercy Chaplet, it could be as simple or as small as asking God to pray over and be there for someone during their hardships and struggles.

The power of prayer, and praying for others is important, and will show great joys and benefits to the lives of everyone involved. Intercession is to pray for others and to be selfless like Jesus was. Intercession has shaped my day to day prayers, and has helped me understand and know what God's love truly feels like.

Arianna Diaz is a 2026 scholarship recipient

Catholics believe that Mary prays for us and leads us closer to her Son, Jesus. What does this intercession mean to you, and how do you experience it in your own prayer life?



Welcome to the Team!

We are thrilled to welcome our new Music Coordinator, Rick McLaughlin, a highly accomplished musician and liturgist with sacred music experience. Holding degrees and specialized training from the University of Kansas and the UTSA, he is a talented lyric baritone proficient in piano, organ, trumpet, and conducting. Rick's extensive and distinguished background will undoubtedly enrich our worship and community life.

We also welcome Lori Martinez, our new Children's Ministry Coordinator, and David White, our new principal organist.

Please join us in giving them a warm welcome when you see them around the parish!

Sacred Music is a Hallmark of Liturgical Life at St. Mark

By Rick McLaughlin

Since our parish's beginning, beautiful and sacred music has been a hallmark of our liturgical life. Thanks to the dedication of countless choristers, instrumentalists, cantors, organists, and esteemed directors, St. Mark has historically set the standard in our Archdiocese for pristine and prayerful liturgical music. Our present hymnody and choral library are replete with impressive repertoire. Our signature, concert-worthy Buzard Opus 38 Pipe Organ at the literal hands of trained

organists supports and inspires our sung prayer and fills our ears and hearts with music from the Divine Composer.

This Fall, as we enter our second half-century of parish life at St. Mark, our Music Ministry has ambitious plans which will require strong support and participation from existing and new music ministers. It is a deep honor for me to lead the effort.

If you, or someone you know and can encourage, feel called to serve - as singer or instrumentalist - NOW is the

time to come forward!

St. Cecilia, Patron Saint of Musicians, pray for us.

Rick McLaughlin is our Music Ministry Coordinator



Deepening Our Relationship with God through Silence

"Contemplative Prayer is the opening of mind and heart – our whole being – to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words and emotions, whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, thinking, feeling and choosing; even closer than consciousness itself."
— Fr. Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*

Centering Prayer is a receptive method of Christian silent prayer that deepens our relationship with God, the Indwelling Presence. It is a prayer in which we can experience God's presence within us. This method of prayer is both a relationship with God and a discipline to deepen that relationship through silence (as described

by Sr. Thelma Hall in *Too Deep for Words*).

To enter the silence that is too deep for words, Jesus' words to the apostles in Gethsemane might well be applied: "Sit here, while I pray." The famous Trappist monk Thomas Merton provided a unique expression of this concept: "It is a risky thing to pray, and the danger is that our very prayers get between God and us. The great thing in prayer is not to pray, but to go directly to God. If saying your prayers is an obstacle to prayer, cut it out! Let Jesus pray. Thank God, Jesus is praying. Forget yourself. Enter into the prayer of Jesus. Let him pray in you... The best way to pray is: Stop! Let prayer pray within you, whether you know it or not.

This means a deep awareness of our true inner identity... [that] by grace we are Christ. Our relationship with God is that of Christ to the Father in the Spirit."

If you are looking to quiet your mind and deepen your spiritual journey, please consider joining our Centering Prayer Group.

- Where: Library
- When: Tuesdays from 11:00 am to 12:00 pm
- Reach out to parishioner Linda Monson at 210-844-1516 for more details.

You can also learn more about centering prayer by visiting the Contemplative Outreach San Antonio (COSA) website at centeringprayer.com/cosa.