



2020

Impact



Report

DIOCESE OF OWENSBORO





Block party hosted by Catholic Charities and the Marriage & Family Life Office in Fulton, September 2019.

“None of us is an island, an autonomous and independent ‘I,’ separated from the other, and we can only build the future by standing together, including everyone.”

Pope Francis, April 2017 Vancouver TED Conference

Dear Friends in Christ,

I heard a young parent once say that she thought the greatest gift she could give to God was to take a few quiet minutes out of each day to simply express her appreciation and gratitude for the life entrusted to her care. It was a family of little means and their four young children made finding quiet time very difficult.

What parent isn't thrilled with children who spend time appreciating their effort to make them feel loved and valued? What teacher or religious educator doesn't get joy from a former student's gracious letter? What employee doesn't like hearing words of thanksgiving from an employer or supervisor? Showing appreciation is the primary charism of a person who lives generosity. And we live in a generous community.

As we emerge from a worldwide pandemic, I am truly appreciative of all of you – the People of God – and the things you did to serve the people around you. Our priests and parishes worked diligently to communicate and bring the Mass into our homes through digital means when no other option was possible. Parish and diocesan staff made thousands of calls all over the diocese, checking on our families. We invested hundreds of thousands of dollars into helping people meet their basic needs, including food and housing. We all sacrificed to protect the vulnerable among us. I have jokingly said that once this is all over, we should burn our masks and use them next Lent for the ashes! Seriously, your concern for others during this time was inspiring.

I am so thankful for you. Adversity reveals character and the Catholic Church of western Kentucky responded. The numbers and words in this document may look sterile and cumbersome, but it is our attempt to be accountable. And they do tell a story.

As Pope Francis challenges us in his recent book, "Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future," we will come out of this pandemic different. We are going to work harder on our relationships with Christ, the Catholic Church and with each other. And we are going to put even more effort into appreciating each other's powerful role in this diocesan-wide Church.

As I stated in my own pastoral letter during this time, *"We cannot live without Christian community, the family of the Lord; we need to meet our brothers and sisters who share the fraternity of Christ, the vocation and the search for holiness and salvation of their souls in the rich diversity of ages, personal histories, charisms and vocations."*

Let me again say thank you for your generosity, your prayer, and your service to others this year and every year. It is a blessing to be part of such a generous community.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William F. Medley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend
William F. Medley, D.D.
Bishop, Diocese of Owensboro



Catholic Community AT A GLANCE

Below statistics reflect the 2020 calendar year



51,000
Catholic Population



72

Diocesan priests

44

Permanent
deacons



9

Religious priests
serving our
diocese



117

Sisters

108

Lay ministers

8

Seminarians

638

Infant baptisms

805

First Communion

953

Confirmations



78

Parishes

11,000
assisted annually
through Catholic
Charities



1

Catholic hospital



17

Catholic schools



217

Marriages

49,000+
Served annually



3,500

Students

150

Catholic

67

Interfaith



1

Catholic
university



316

Faculty and staff

506

Deaths

1,000+

Students



Stewardship: Responding to our gifts from God

Unity is not a human invention: "It is a gift from God," says Valeria Vessels, Director of the Stewardship and Development Office.

Valeria says that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the reality of parishes with a limited number of parishioners able to attend Mass in-person was devastating for their communities – both spiritually and financially.

So her office decided to prioritize and invest their time in helping parishes.

"One of our missions was to assist parishes who did not have online giving," says Valeria. "We immediately set up iGiveCatholic to be used by parishes that did not have electronic giving. We were also able to set up the giving platform for Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Owensboro."

Valeria says that at the start of the pandemic, her office arranged to call parishioners across western Kentucky to check in on them and see if they had any prayer intentions. They collected thousands of these intentions in a basket kept in the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church inside the McRaith Catholic Center in Owensboro.

"We offered parishes a free program for increased offertory, which has shown remarkable success for those who took advantage of it," she says. "Some parishes have seen an increase as high as 44% in their Sunday giving."

Throughout 2020, the Office of Stewardship assisted pastors in writing and mailing letters to their parishioners with updates, online giving resources and livestreamed Mass information, as well as helping several parishes create newsletters and coordinate capital campaigns.

Valeria feels blessed to have participated in these initiatives during such a difficult year, and looks forward to fostering a greater sense of unity and stewardship in a post-pandemic world.

"In stewardship we are called to be the Body of Christ," she says, "and the Holy Spirit unites us through our unique, diverse gifts."



Generosity blesses everyone!

Below are just a few of the many mission and vocation collections that the diocese coordinates to assist other ministries in and out of the diocese. God can do powerful things with our generosity!

\$323,938

St. Benedict's Homeless Shelter

\$73,785

Our Sister Diocese of Mandeville, Jamaica

\$27,602

Retired Religious

\$25,470

Catholic Relief Services & Rice Bowl

\$25,000

Brescia University

\$18,330

Vocare Seminarian Fund

\$17,817

Campaign for Human Development

\$9,687

Home Missions

Disciples Response Fund Annual Appeal

The DRF appeal, which began in September 2019 and ran through August 30, 2020, was definitely impacted by COVID-19. However, our donors gave with abundance as we surpassed our goal of \$650,000.



\$658,512

Raised



4,386

Donors

‘Tell me my leadership prays’

A few months ago, as COVID-19 restrictions started to ease, Charlie Hardesty was blessed to be able to visit with campus ministry leaders around the Diocese of Owensboro.

During his trip to Murray State University, the diocesan director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry received a powerful question from one of the missionaries affiliated with FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students).

“Tell me my leadership prays,” said the missionary, asking about the environment of prayer at the McRaith Catholic Center – the pastoral center of the diocese.

“I was more than excited to respond that each morning, diocesan leadership gather at 9 a.m. over Zoom (and now that we are back in the building, we gather in the chapel) to pray for and with one another and for the people of the diocese,” says Charlie.

Mass, Morning Prayer, and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy were a daily occurrence at the McRaith Catholic Center prior to the March 2020 shutdown. However, while staff were unable to meet in person, this Zoom prayer gathering started as a way for the pastoral center staff to stay connected while working from home – and to find support and encouragement through prayer.

“It is the driving force behind much of the work we continue to do and are planning for the future,” says Charlie. “All of our ministry efforts begin with prayer and I am proud that we are living that at the pastoral center.”

Bishop Medley and others lie prostrate during the Good Friday celebration at St. Stephen Cathedral, April 2019.



Bishop Medley with the newly ordained Hispanic permanent deacons at St. Stephen Cathedral, September 2019.



‘How can we care for our priests and parish staffs?’

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, including in western Kentucky, ministry leaders had to act fast.

“As parishes immediately began to think about how to care for their people, we in the diocesan offices shifted to ask ‘How can we care for our priests and parish staffs?’” says Dr. Jeff Andrini, director of the diocesan Office of Evangelization and Discipleship.

Jeff says the pandemic “stopped us in our tracks,” as it froze most of 2020’s plans for evangelization events and activities.

“It could not be business as usual; instead, we needed to find new and creative ways to support our parish staff members and parish communities,” he says.

With Jeff’s guidance, the priests of the Diocese of Owensboro began gathering weekly for prayer, discussion and support via Zoom video conferencing technology. He helped guide parish catechetical leaders through regular Zoom meetings in order that they might network and have some ongoing formation.

“We have learned so much over this past year and I look forward to improving our efforts in serving the parishes and people of the diocese in a post-pandemic world,” says Jeff.



300

**Approximate
number of
Zoom prayer
opportunities
held with staff
and/or priests
during the
first year of
the pandemic**

Catholic Charities: A life preserver to start swimming again

Throughout the pandemic, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Owensboro has been a lifeline for thousands of people – a “life preserver when we were drowning,” according to Mercedes Santos-Tellez

Mercedes experienced “culture shock” when her family moved from Louisville to Owensboro. Mercedes says Louisville has a large Latino population, but in Owensboro she felt “lost” to be in the minority.

Adding to that was the strain of the COVID-19 pandemic, which put her family members out of work.

She reached out to Susan Montalvo-Gesser, the director of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Owensboro; and Miguel Quintanilla, Catholic Charities’ paralegal, to see if they could help.

They quickly assisted Mercedes’s family, providing much-needed stability as they pursued new employment opportunities. Susan and Miguel also made themselves available as Mercedes navigated and acclimated to life in a new city.

Later, when Mercedes’s family members were settled in new jobs, she asked Susan and Miguel if she could give something to Catholic Charities in return.

They said no – but Mercedes insisted that “it’s not about paying them back but maybe somebody else could use it.”

She donated \$300, contributing to the many services offered for families and individuals throughout western Kentucky.

Today Mercedes, who is studying political science and pre-law at Brescia University in Owensboro, has been elected the Vice President of Student Body at Brescia, and was selected to represent Brescia with the AIKCU (Association of Independent Kentucky Colleges and Universities) Emerging Leaders Program. As if she wasn’t busy enough, Mercedes also plays on the women’s soccer team and does track and field.

“Catholic Charities has been a great help to us,” says Mercedes. “Without them, I wouldn’t be able to be doing the leadership roles I have today. Susan and Miguel have impacted my life in so many different ways.”



\$300,000

**Amount that Catholic
Charities has been able to devote
to eviction relief, housing and utility
bills since March 2020**

Catholic Schools

2020 was a challenging year for educators across our diocese. State mandates required masks, dividers between desks, and morning temperature checks. However, students, staff and parents all met this challenge with grace and determination. Together, the Catholic school communities created a safe learning environment. This led to the full five-day opening of all Catholic schools once strict protocols were in place. Parents began monitoring their children for symptoms and making smart gathering and travel decisions. Our Catholic Schools Office participated in weekly Zoom meetings with other superintendents around the state and then shared that communication weekly with all diocesan principals and administrators. As it stands, not a single transmission of the virus can be linked back to any classroom setting in our schools.

Catholic Schools Office Mission

The Mission of the Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Owensboro is to share in the Church's mission, to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ as lived out in the Catholic Church which creates a worshipping community of believers whose service is a witness of their Christian love.

The dollars allocated to our Catholic schools or religious education programs are NOT subjected to the diocesan assessment.



Bishop Medley visits with students at Sts. Peter & Paul Catholic School in Hopkinsville, March 2019.

 **17** Total Schools

3
High
Schools

11
Elementary
Schools

 **316** Faculty and Staff

 **3,358** Students

568
17%
Non-Catholic

342
10%
Minority

 **22.5** Average 2020 ACT

‘Every day opening the mailbox was another infusion of hope...’

Back in August 2020, the staff of Gasper River Catholic Youth Camp and Retreat Center in Bowling Green was alarmed to realize the loss of income from all onsite summer camps being cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The entire staff here was stressed and worried about finances and if we’d even have jobs since our PPP (Paycheck Protection Program) money ran out at that time and we had zero income,” recalls Ben Warrell, Gasper River’s director. He mailed a letter to all of their regular “camp families” asking for financial assistance.

“The response was overwhelming and inspiring!” says Ben, explaining that it wasn’t long before both digital and snail mail donations began flooding in.

“Every day opening the mailbox was another infusion of hope,” says Ben.

Overall, the camp families donated more than \$50,000 to help Gasper River pay for expenses and to keep operations running.

“The staff’s mindset – mine included – went from one of fear and depression to one of joy and hope!” says Ben. “It really was a beautiful witness to how God provides and the beauty of the generosity of so many people, many of whom still continue to give to camp!”



85

Number of campers who attended Gasper on the Go, a mobile camp brought to Owensboro and Paducah.

Several of those campers from 2020 have become week-long campers in 2021!

\$50,000

Donated by friends of Gasper River



Gasper on the Go met in Owensboro and Paducah in the summer of 2020.



Bishop Medley greets attendees at the Ordination to the Permanent Diaconate for Hispanic deacons at St. Stephen Cathedral, September 2019.

Diocesan Hispanic/Latino Ministry encounters and empowers our intercultural Church

"Hispanic Catholics, all across western Kentucky, continue to grow in leadership, parish involvement and in giving which is a blessing to all of us," says Deacon Chris Gutiérrez, director of Hispanic/Latino Ministry.

Having actively served in Hispanic ministry since 2007, Deacon Chris has seen a lot of progress made to empower marginalized Latino communities across the region, but there is still much work to be done.

"Rather than feeling pressured to culturally assimilate, ('fit in'), and especially in this increasingly secularized world, immigrant children and their parents must feel that they're loved unconditionally for who they are and with what they bring," says Deacon Chris.

He credits diocesan opportunities like the annual Encuentro ("encounter") gathering – open to all Latino families of the diocese – for "enlivening" parish-level ministries, which in turn enliven families and local communities.

A recent positive development was when the diocese welcomed Fr. Lustein Blanco Grajales from Mexico to serve as the parochial vicar at St. Michael Parish in Sebree – home to one of the area's rapidly-growing Latino communities. Fr. Lustein has been instrumental in establishing a diocesan Hispanic marriage formation opportunity, called "Banquete de Bodas," for couples across western Kentucky.

"Our role as a diocese, and Church, is to accompany – by providing continuous pastoral support and tools necessary for parents and their children as we all navigate the new reality among us of an intercultural Church," says Deacon Chris.



14

**Parishes with
Hispanic/Latino
Ministry**

8

**Hispanic/Latino
Deacons**



22

**Weekly Masses
celebrated in
Spanish**

4

**Hispanic/Latino
Priests**



3,600%

**Percentage increase
in diocesan social
media reach once the
pandemic hit**

‘The goal is to let them know that we as a diocese care for them’

The primary purpose of the Communications Office is to share the Good News. This means the good news of Christ, but also the good news of how God is moving and touching those across our entire 32-county diocese.

Not long after the COVID-19 pandemic began, there was a noticeable increase in our diocese’s social media followers. As many around western Kentucky were sent home to work and some even let go or laid off by their employers, these folks were turning to social media for news, advice, and encouragement while battling fear, depression and isolation.

Diocesan digital media specialist, Laura Rigsby, created the “How Can We Pray for You?” initiative. It was established to monitor and respond to followers’ prayer intentions on social media.

“The goal is to let our followers know that we as a diocese care for them and desire to minister to their needs through prayer,” says Laura. “We make an effort to pray for and then respond by ‘commenting’ on every single prayer request we receive.”

Over the course of a year, hundreds of prayer requests came pouring in and a dedicated team of diocesan staff members took time to purposely pray for these people individually.

Some of the best responses to these requests for prayer were when answers to prayer were also posted for everyone to see. During a year of so much uncertainty, these communications platforms provided encouragement and hope.

‘Discernment never happens alone’

Christopher Grief was nervous at first to tell his friends and family that he was discerning the priesthood.

“I didn’t know how they would respond or react. I didn’t think I was worthy enough for this calling,” says Christopher, a Diocese of Owensboro seminarian entering his third year of Theology at St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in southern Indiana.

However, through daily prayer and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, he knew he was being called to something more – something radical.

“My family’s support, after I told them, was emotional and inspiring,” says Christopher, who realizes now that discernment “never happens alone.”

“As the disciples understood their calling together, we must rely on the help of others to know what vocation we are being called to,” he says. “My parish community, friends, and family have been with me, and for that, I am grateful.”

He admits that discerning a call to priestly or religious life takes time. His prayer is that others remain open to the possibility of Christ calling them: “That you trust in God and know he loves you.”

“This is a beautiful life and one that I am excited to share,” says Christopher.





Community – and hope – offered for young people during pandemic

Youth and young adult ministries thrive on interpersonal relationships, in-person activities and gatherings for young people to intentionally share about their life of faith with their peers.

But when the COVID-19 pandemic shut down ministry “as we know it,” there were times that “it felt impossible to do the work that we wanted to do,” says Charlie Hardesty, the director of the diocese’s Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry.

With an age demographic that already suffered from high degrees of loneliness even before COVID-19 was a household term, Charlie and his fellow ministry leaders knew something had to be done.

“Creatively moving gatherings and opportunities to online settings wasn’t perfect – but it offered much-needed community and hope to both youth and young adults in the diocese,” says Charlie.

Charlie is especially proud of the diocesan-wide online Youth Ministry Christmas 2020 Party that was a collaboration between his office and several parish youth ministers. He is also happy with the success of monthly Theology on Tap “Home Brew” sessions for young adults to gather virtually with nationally-recognized Catholic speakers.

“There is a renewed excitement in the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry after a year-plus of most in-person gatherings being postponed or cancelled,” says Charlie. “Many of our parishes are gearing up to gather their young people again for summer activities and the outlook is bright as we head into the fall for a more normal experience of youth and young adult ministry.”

Growing a strong marriage and family life

In May 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic halted in-person events, Danny May and his Office of Marriage and Family Life learned the hard way that eight straight hours of Zoom videoconferencing is not the best way to experience a PreCana marriage preparation course.

"We decided to move all marriage preparation (PreCana, Engaged Encounter, and ReMarriage – our program for couples preparing for marriage after one or both persons have experienced a declaration of invalidity or death of a former spouse) to an online, self-paced platform," says Danny.

It's a much better experience for couples "because they can take their time with it," he adds.

"Dadvent" – a play on the words "dad" and "Advent" – was another example of using technology to provide encounter and faith-building opportunities during a pandemic.

Through Dadvent, Danny's office collaborated with several committed Catholic husbands and fathers to host a Sunday night reflection series open to all men of the diocese during Advent 2020. They offered a similar faith-sharing experience for men during Lent 2021.

And Grace Marriage, a local marriage formation program, has grown in leaps and bounds within the Catholic community.

Danny says he is "particularly encouraged" by this despite the pandemic setbacks.

"We switched from solely in-person to a hybrid model: some sessions were held in-person, some over Zoom, and some self-guided at home," he says. "But our couples managed, and in May 2021, facilitator couples hosted a 'come and see' half-day session for new couples to experience Grace Marriage."

"Now expanding outside Owensboro, Grace Marriage teams are forming in Henderson and Whitesville, with potentially two more parishes joining in the next few months as well," he adds.



45

Couples attended marriage preparation

10

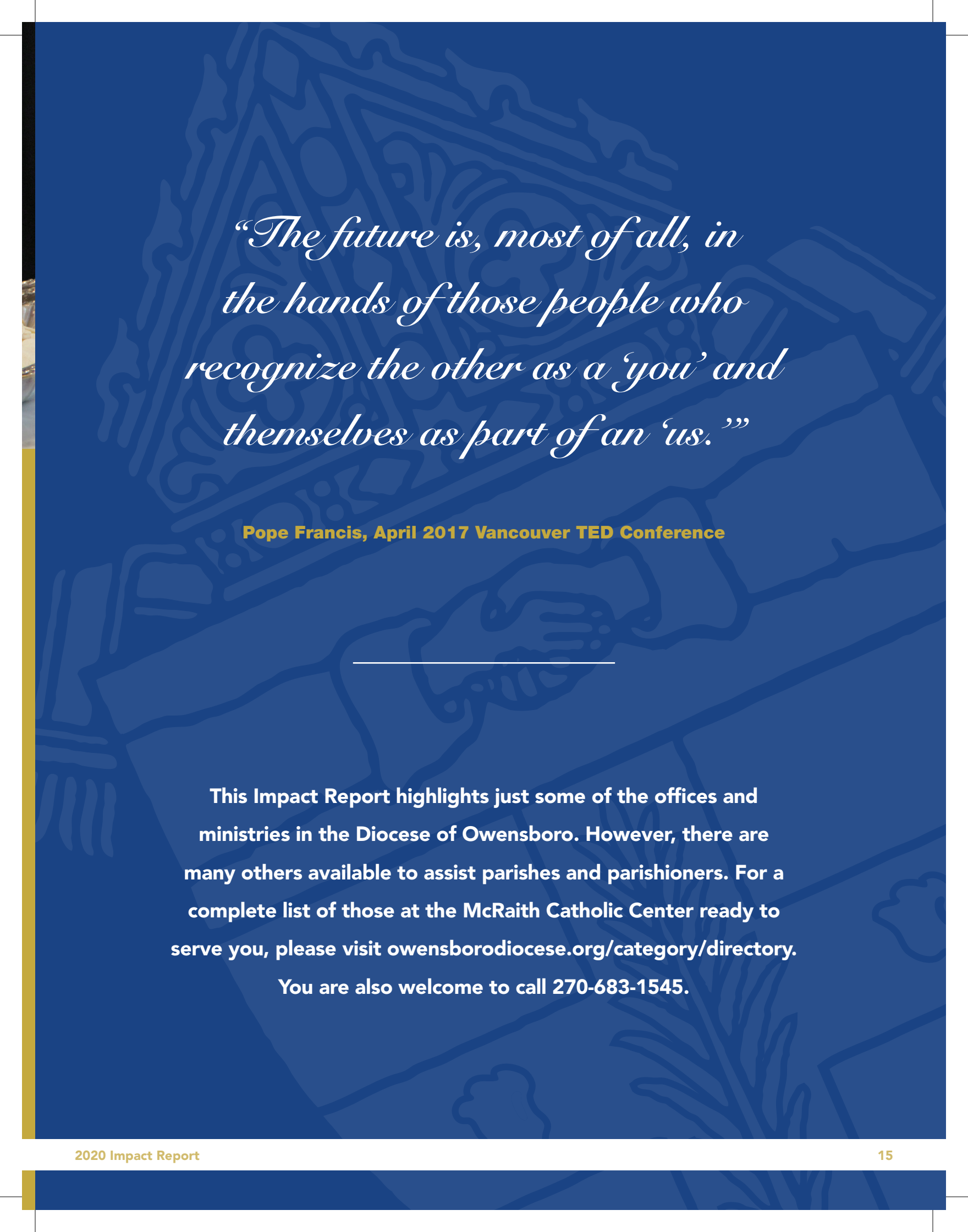
Participated in Natural Family Planning training

22

Couples continued with Grace Marriage

150+

Registered for men's group studies via Zoom

The background of the page features a large, faint, blue-toned illustration. It depicts a hand reaching up from the bottom, holding a plant sprout with several leaves. The lines are thick and stylized, giving it a graphic, almost woodcut-like appearance. The entire page has a dark blue background with this illustration overlaid.

*“The future is, most of all, in
the hands of those people who
recognize the other as a ‘you’ and
themselves as part of an ‘us.’”*

Pope Francis, April 2017 Vancouver TED Conference

This Impact Report highlights just some of the offices and ministries in the Diocese of Owensboro. However, there are many others available to assist parishes and parishioners. For a complete list of those at the McRaith Catholic Center ready to serve you, please visit owensborodiocese.org/category/directory.

You are also welcome to call 270-683-1545.



Diocese of
OWENSBORO



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