



**Diocesan
Appeal**

Diocesan Appeal Impact Report 2023–2024



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE *of* ALBANY

Dear Friends in Christ,

“Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up.” GALATIANS 6:9

In these challenging times for our Diocese and the Catholic Church as a whole, the temptation to feel defeated at times is understandable. Instead, we have hope! Nearly the same number of parishioners supported the Diocesan Appeal this past year (July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024) as in the year prior and we raised nearly the same amount of donor revenue: 12,012 donors contributed \$4,716,133. This enabled us to serve your parish from behind the scenes through administrative and pastoral support via 42 full time and 23 part time Diocesan staff in more than 25 specialty areas (full time staff was reduced 25% from 2022-2023). My gratitude is immense especially for those of you who literally make this possible through your stewardship of the Diocese at whatever level you are able.

In these pages you will find a glimpse of some of the work our Diocesan team provided over this past year. To learn more, please visit [**www.RCDA.org/offices**](http://www.RCDA.org/offices).

Thank you and God Bless!



+Edward B. Scharfenberger
Edward B. Scharfenberger, D.D.
Bishop of Albany

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Archives

Full time staff: 1 | Part time staff: 0

The Diocesan Archives' mission is to collect, organize, preserve and provide access to the official and ancillary records which reflect the work of the people, parishes, institutions, and departments of the Albany Diocese. General access to the unrestricted records collections in the Archives is open to all interested researchers.

Share insight into a program or innovation by your department this past year and its impact on a parish(es) or on a group of individuals: In my role as the diocesan archivist, I presented a program on best practices for handling sacramental records and other important parish documents at the "Recording Grace" learning module in the Pastoral Associate Formation program (see Office for Discipleship Formation information to learn more.)

Something donors would be pleased to know that their support helped to make possible: This past year I retrieved sacramental records for 75 people seeking the sacrament of marriage. Archives also received many sacramental records requests for people seeking to become godparents and confirmation sponsors, widows and widowers who need proof of their marriage for Social Security, and

folks gathering records for passports and Real IDs (and I expect that to increase as we get closer to needing a Real ID to get on a plane in May 2025). I also coordinated with the spiritual advisor at the closing of The College of St. Rose, Albany to explore ways to preserve records and artifacts that are representative of its Catholic identity and its role in our diocese.

Catholic Charities

Full time staff: 522 | Part time staff: 147

Share insight into a program or innovation by your department this past year and its impact on a parish(es) or on a group of individuals: We expanded our Aging Life Services Program into our community-based agencies of Columbia/Greene and Delaware, Otsego and Schoharie as well as Schenectady community through our Tri-County Services Program.

Something donors would be pleased to know that their support helped to make possible: Catholic Charities continues to have a presence in all 14 counties of the Diocese, serving our neighbors in a number of ways including through shelters, apartments, food pantries, soup kitchens, services for seniors, mediation, and helping people navigate systems to get the help they need.

Catholic Schools

Full time staff: 6 | Part time staff: 3

As disciples of Jesus Christ, Lord and Teacher, we at the Catholic School Office provide leadership and guidance, give direction and assistance, and offer support and advice to all members of our diocesan school communities to ensure a future, faithful Church.

Share insight into a program or innovation by your department this past year and its impact on a parish(es) or on a group of individuals:

In the spirit of the continuous improvement of our network of parish and diocesan schools located throughout seven counties, the Catholic School Office hosted three diocesan-wide gatherings for our nearly 500 dedicated educators to provide ongoing professional development and catechist formation in support of our shared ministry. These days of professional growth and learning provided opportunities for our teachers and school leaders to gather in communion to tackle critical issues and innovations impacting education including Artificial Intelligence, Mental Health, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, among several other exciting and engaging topics.

Something donors would be pleased to know that their support helped to make possible: Ahead of the official kick off to

the 2023–2024 school year, the Catholic School Office assisted local parishes, pastors, and school board and community members with the recruitment, hiring, and ongoing mentorship of new principals at 10 out of our 19 Catholic schools following the well-deserved retirements of several longstanding school leaders of *Higher-Powered Learning*.

Chancery

Full time staff: 5 | Part time staff: 4

The Chancery is the administrative office of the Diocese and is comprised of the Bishop, four lay staff, three priests and one deacon who serve in parishes but who also have diocesan administrative roles. The Chief Operating Officer coordinates the day-to-day operations of the pastoral center, much like a parish life director/coordinator. The Chief Operating Officer is assisted by three lay staff whose job duties in the Chancery allow the Bishop and clergy in top leadership roles in the Chancery to focus on the pastoral side of their ministry rather than business operations. Some of the diocesan administrative tasks handled by the Chancery Office include but are not limited to: obtaining clergy coverage for parishes when a priest is on vacation or ill, processing of visiting clergy to any parish in the diocese, the scheduling and logistics of confirmations throughout

the diocese, supporting diocesan wide events such as ordinations and holy day celebrations, the management of legal and church correspondence and documents, and accepting and responding to calls, letters and emails from the faithful of our Diocese.

Communications

Full time staff: 1 | Part time staff: 2

The Office of Communications works to advance the overall mission of the Bishop of Albany and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany through strategic communications, media relations, social and digital media, and public information, proactively promoting the ministries of our various offices and departments, parishes and schools.

Share insight into a program or innovation by your department this past year and its impact on a parish(es) or on a group of individuals: The Communications Office obtained a USCCB Grant and produced a 5-part teaching series on the Catholic Mass that is now available for anyone in our parishes to use to teach about our faith: www.RCDA.org/PowerOfOneHour. It includes interviews with our priests, video from our parishes, and comes complete with study guides for each segment. The office also created a webpage

to preserve and share video recordings of all of the wonderful teachings at the NYS Eucharistic Congress at Our Lady of Martyrs Shrine in Auriesville in October, 2023: www.RCDA.org/NYSEC2023/Speaker-Videos. Those can also be used by anyone in our parishes to further our faith.

Something donors would be pleased to know that their support helped to make possible: Donor support allows the Communications office to create teaching tools for all who further the faith in our diocese such as the Power of One Hour video series on the Mass and a mini podcast called, “Called to Serve” sharing stories of how God calls many to serve in our diocese. You can find those stories at www.RCDA.org/CalledToServePodcast and they air each day on WOPG Radio – 89.9 FM/1460 AM, a Catholic radio station in our diocese — at 3:30am and 10:30am.

Consultation Center

The Consultation Center of the Diocese of Albany has served the diocese since December 6, 1969, providing clients with several forms of mental health assistance, including individual, group, and marital/family therapies, spiritual direction, and workshops and lectures. The Center’s founding purpose was to offer mental health treatment to priests and religious of our diocese at a time when such services had not been

accessible. Since our inception, the mission and clientele of the Center have expanded to include the laity, and today, the bulk of our clients come from the local community. While we are not offering groups at present, we remain a referral resource for clients looking for various support and therapy groups. The COVID pandemic saw an explosion in the need for mental health services in our community. Years after the worst of the pandemic, we continue to see great need and interest in therapy services, so much so that our therapists often are fully booked. All members of our clinical staff are licensed in New York State and include psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, and licensed mental health counselors. Our spiritual directors have all completed training in spiritual direction.

Fr. Tom Konopka, LCSW, the Executive Director, is committed to raising awareness of mental health issues in our parishes and is a strong advocate of utilization of therapy and spiritual direction to help navigate life's difficulties. The Center remains a much-needed asset within our diocese as a place to find psychological healing and spiritual growth. Your donation to the Diocesan Appeal assists us in our mission.

Discipleship Formation

Full time staff: 3 | Part time staff: 2

The Office for Discipleship Formation exists to support parishes in their ministries that call, form and send disciples of the Lord Jesus into the world. In particular, the Bishop has asked us to support these ministries: marriage and family life, faith formation (for all ages), sacramental preparation, youth ministry, lay formation, pastoral care of the sick, and respect life.

The Office for Discipleship Formation collaborated with the Office of Evangelization & Strategic Planning to establish and offer the Pastoral Associate for Leadership Formation Program. The 14 women and men who completed the program received a solid foundation for serving as pastoral associates who can assist pastors in the overall care of the parish – thus allowing pastors more time to tend to the sacramental and spiritual needs of parishioners. The Office for Discipleship Formation offers support and hands-on training for those who minister to parishioners of all ages. To mention just two ways we do this, we support faith formation leaders who, in turn, support catechists to hand on the Catholic faith to children and young people and we also support pastoral care leaders and volunteers who go out to minister with

parishioners who are sick, homebound or living in care facilities. Of special note, the Office for Discipleship Formation has continued to offer virtual or hybrid opportunities so that more people from throughout the diocese can participate. This office also took the lead in fulfilling Pope Francis' request that every diocese offer synod sessions in preparation for the Synod Assembly to be held at the Vatican in October 2024. These sessions allowed parishioners to share their insights and wisdom for advancing the mission of the Church on the local, national, and universal levels.

Something donors would be pleased to know that their support helped to make possible: Your generosity helped: prepare 230 couples for the Sacrament of Marriage; train new faith formation leaders in parishes, offer various faith enrichment opportunities and trainings (retreats, workshops, presentations, etc.) to over 200 individuals from all corners of the diocese, organize a pilgrimage of more than 100 young people and adults to the National Catholic Youth Conference.

Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs Office

Full time staff: 0 | Part time staff: 2

Established in 1968, the Commission strives to encourage mutual growth toward the fullness of unity in Christ and toward productive inter-religious affairs.

The Diocesan Commission for Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs relates to the 'others' in our Diocese of Albany. For example, we strive to develop and maintain good ecumenical relations with our fellow Christians, Protestants and Orthodox. We also strive to maintain and improve our interfaith relations, especially with Jews and Muslims. Particularly with the ongoing war in Gaza, keeping up good local relations and the lines of communication open is crucial. This year marks the 40th anniversary of our reconstituted Jewish-Roman Catholic dialogue committee and it was commemorated with a gathering at "Portal" (the sculpture outside our cathedral: A Jew & Christian in embrace) to pray for an end to antisemitism and a speedy, just and lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis; 10 Jews and 10 Christians walked through "Portal" together. With the closing of The College of St. Rose and thus the loss of the Interfaith Sanctuary at the College, thanks to Siena College, that interfaith ministry will continue with our involvement.

Evangelization & Strategic Planning

Full time staff: 1 | Part time staff: 2

The Office of Evangelization & Strategic Planning assists Episcopal Vicars, Pastors, and Parish Life Directors to fulfill the mission of Jesus in our time through education, retreats, and inter-parish conversation. The office facilitates ongoing formation of parish leaders and parishioners to assure a collaborative effort exists within each parish community, the Local Catholic Communities (LCCs), and the Vicariate. This involves a large consultation of all parishioners and a deep reflection on the core values of the parish community.

Share insight into a program or innovation by your department this past year and its impact on a parish(es) or on a group of individuals:

Step Up Men's Conference: More than 250 men from across the Diocese of Albany attended our diocesan men's conference.

Unleashing Love Women's Conference: More than 425 women from across the Diocese of Albany attended our diocesan women's conference.

Young Adult Regional Groups: There are now six young adult regional groups

established across the Diocese of Albany building a community for twenty- and thirty-year old Catholics. Additionally, the diocese hosts several large-scale young adult gatherings that include Holy Hours ("Holy Hour & Happy Hour"), social gatherings with presentations ("Good News & Cold Brews"), and prayer events with small faith sharing ("Real Talk Rosary").

"Fire of Faith" events are hosted by the diocese where all are welcome to gather in worship and socialize. "Generations of Faith" is a collaboration between the Diocese of Albany and several entities with the goal of nurturing our faith journeys while developing multi-generational relationships.

"Kindness Matters" Evangelization

Initiative: The purpose of "Kindness Matters" is to encourage the more than 1.4 million people across our Diocese, regardless of their religious affiliation, to step up and be better neighbors to one another. This initiative will gain momentum one person at a time and one small act of kindness at a time. The vehicle for the "Kindness Matters" campaign will be lawn signs and the call to action is to direct people to a website landing page (www.RCDA.org/kind) which will provide resources and ideas to help us be kinder to one another.

Something donors would be pleased to know that their support helped to make possible: Donor contributions fund the budget for the staff who are responsible for initiating all of the above initiatives.

Finance

Full time staff: 7 | Part time staff: 2

Under the direction of the Chief Financial Officer, the Finance Office provides direct accounting and financial services to the administrative offices and programs provided by the Diocese. In addition, the office administers the employee benefits and oversight of the finances of parishes and other entities subject to the authority of the Bishop. With regard to the oversight of parishes, through its Parish Support Specialist and Internal Auditor, the Finance Office assists parishes in the maintenance of financial records and controls in accordance with legal requirements and stated Diocesan policies. The Comptroller and CFO are responsible for the review of the annual budget and financial reports of the parishes.

The work of the Finance Office is extensive and widespread. To highlight the Diocese-parish interaction, Sister Teresa Baillargeon, C.R., is featured. As the Parish Bookkeeping Support

Specialist, she supports parish personnel, including parish bookkeepers, in the use of the Diocesan account software, PDS Ledger. She reviews annual budgets and year-end financial reports submitted by the parishes and helps to resolve any issues noted during this process. She answers bookkeeping questions and helps to resolve accounting issues at the parish level. Sister Theresa: “It is not uncommon that I spend over an hour with a parish bookkeeper at one time. In fact, I would estimate that 85% of my day is spent working with parish bookkeepers. My accounting and computer skills have helped to create more knowledgeable bookkeepers. However, I believe that my ability to listen and to encourage others has had the most impact on the parish. Parish staff are better able to support their Pastor and to serve their Parish. Ultimately, they are able to assist us in the Finance Office by doing their jobs so well.”

Human Resources

Full time staff: 2 | Part time staff: 0

Share insight into a program or innovation by your department this past year and its impact on a parish(es) or on a group of individuals: The diocesan Office of Human Resources (HR) provides centralized management of parish employee benefits, including claims for NYS Disability and Paid Family Leave. This requires

communicating with the parish, the employee, medical offices, and the insurance company to track each claim to its conclusion, ensuring that appropriate benefits are paid to the employee. During the 2023–2024 fiscal year diocesan HR assisted parishes with 95 such claims. HR has also guided parishes in meeting their NY State mandate to provide employees with paid leave for COVID related absences, regularly providing timely information on CDC guidelines for managing these absences. HR also manages the health insurance enrollments, changes, and terminations for over 500 employees across the diocese.

Something donors would be pleased to know that their support helped to make possible: After conducting extensive research, diocesan HR has implemented a cost-effective offer of dental and vision insurance for parish, school, and diocesan staff. This is a benefit that was highly sought after by staff and should contribute to employee wellness as they take advantage of this healthcare. It is also hoped that offering these benefits will enhance employee recruitment and retention in our parishes and schools.

Prayer and Worship

Full time staff: 0 | Part time staff: 2

The Director of Prayer and Worship works collaboratively with the Diocesan Liturgical Commission to assist the Bishop in fulfilling his role “to promote, regulate and be vigilant over the liturgical life in his diocese.” (GIRM n 387) This is accomplished through overseeing the preparation for and execution of episcopal liturgies, developing policies and guidelines and providing statements and programs of liturgical catechesis. The director also participates in state and national organizations in support of the liturgical apostolate.

Share insight into a program or innovation by your department this past year and its impact on a parish(es) or on a group of individuals: We have added a number of new guidelines to help parish leaders, groups and parishes as they celebrate the sacraments and the liturgy. A particular program this year has been to supply various resources as we continue the three-year Eucharistic Revival.

Something donors would be pleased to know that their support helped to make possible: Support from the Diocesan Appeal has helped us to organize and to celebrate a number of major Diocesan events such as the Rite of Election, the

Chrism Mass, and the 2024 Ordination Mass where five new priests and one new deacon were ordained. The Appeal also helped the Office to answer over 160 liturgical enquiries or requests for help.

Real Property, Building Services, IT, and Architecture and Building Commission

Full time staff: 4 | Part time staff: 4

The Office of Real Property provides oversight on all real estate matters for the Diocese, parishes and affiliated entities. This includes sales, purchases, leases and development. The office works closely with the Chancery, Pastoral Planning, Finance and legal counsel providing assistance, information and guidance related to those matters. The director is a member of the Architecture & Building Commission and serves on a number of boards for corporations affiliated with the Diocese. Real Property also manages our IT staff person and Pastoral Center front desk staff.

Share insight into a program or innovation by your department this past year and its impact on a parish(es) or on a group of individuals: Our parish archive systems went through a comprehensive organization project which has made

finding information for parishes much more efficient. We receive frequent requests for Real Property records from parishes. We are also in the process of digitizing the archive files. New systems were refined this year to increase available resources to parishes and communicate effectively. This allows us to draft leases, assist with sales, building projects, tax-renewal applications and all property issues in a timely manner.

Something donors would be pleased to know that their support helped to make possible: Donor support allows staff to assist parishes Monday–Friday from 8:30–4:00.

Safe Environment

Full time staff: 2 | Part time staff: 0

Share insight into a program or innovation by your department this past year and its impact on a parish(es) or on a group of individuals: The Office of Safe Environment (SE) provides parishes and schools with tools to maintain a safe environment for children. The Office manages the program for criminal background screening for all employees and all volunteers working with children. During the past year, the SE Office assisted the parishes in obtaining 975 background reports. Fifteen reports contained criminal records necessitating

an investigation and individualized assessment (communication with the applicant, consultation with law enforcement, probation officers, district attorney's office, and others) to determine if the criminal conviction precludes employment or volunteering with children. The SE office also ensures that age-appropriate awareness training programs are in place for children in our schools and catechetical programs, as well as adult training in child abuse awareness and prevention for employees, volunteers, teachers, clergy, and seminarians. On-site visits to parishes and schools are made periodically to assure compliance with these programs and to provide support and guidance to parish staff and leaders.

Something donors would be pleased to know that their support helped to make possible: The SE Office coordinates the Hope and Healing Ministry. This Ministry strives to bring healing to all those affected by the trauma of abuse including victims/survivors, clergy, and parishioners who struggle with the emotional toll from the abuse scandal. Hope and Healing Masses are celebrated in parishes throughout the year across the diocese, and the Ministry is working to create training programs for trauma-informed listening and support programs for parishioners and clergy.

Stewardship & Development

Full time staff: 3 | Part time staff: 1

The Office of Stewardship and Development of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany conducts the annual Diocesan Appeal and coordinates the majority of diocesan fundraising initiatives, oversees The Foundation of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany and the Re-Igniting Our Faith Campaign. The staff also provides fundraising consulting services to parishes.

Share insight into a program or innovation by your department this past year and its impact on a parish(es) or on a group of individuals: The Stewardship staff is responsible for the development of and logistics for the Diocesan-wide Appeal solicitations throughout the fiscal year, reducing the burden on parish staff. After each Diocesan Appeal solicitation, the team evaluates results and makes adjustments to maximize effectiveness for both donors and parishes. New and enhanced tools are provided for parishes each year to make their work in promoting the Appeal easier to manage. Our Database Administrator works with parish staff on utilizing the parish reporting tool which provides real-time access to their Appeal donor details. Our Office Manager fields hundreds of donor and parish calls each month. For the

third consecutive year, it cost \$.07 to raise \$1.00 compared to the national average of \$.15–\$.20. The Stewardship team also manages The Foundation of the RCDA and this year brought the FreeWill tool again to parishioners of the Diocese through underwriting by the Foundation. Re-Igniting Our Faith is also managed by the small Stewardship team which entails working with donors on their pledge fulfillment and with parishes on the distribution of raised funds for their case statement initiatives.

The Tribunal

Full time staff: 2 | Part time staff: 4

The Judicial Vicar (Officialis) of the Diocese of Albany constitutes one Tribunal with the Bishop of Albany. The Tribunal resolves judicial conflicts in the Catholic Church. On behalf of separated and divorced persons, the Tribunal promotes the Gospel by receiving and investigating petitions for an ecclesiastical declaration of matrimonial nullity. The process of the inquiry opens a path toward healing and peace for those who seek our pastoral care.

The canon lawyers of our department also provide advice and counsel to pastors and all ministers who collaborate with them concerning

pastoral situations or questions that arise. Additionally, our department processes all requests for dispensations or permissions related to the celebration of marriage.

Share insight into a program or innovation by your department this past year and its impact on a parish(es) or on a group of individuals:

Our Diocesan Appeal offerings help to fund the ministers of the Tribunal who examine issues involving marriage nullity (a/k/a “annulment” requests) and to assist the Bishop with various legal matters. Our offerings helped the Diocese send Deacon Andrew Haskins to Saint Paul University in Ottawa from 2019 to 2022. He received his licentiate in canon law and began serving as a Judge in our Tribunal in 2022. This is a tremendous help as he assists the caseload of our only other Judge, Fr. Matthew Frisoni, our Judicial Vicar. Our offerings to the Appeal contribute to training the next priest or deacon who joins this important ministry.

Something donors would be pleased to know that their support helped to make possible:

Thanks to our generous Diocesan Appeal offerings, no person or parish is ever charged a fee for any pastoral services or to petition for a declaration of nullity of marriage.

Vocations

Full time staff: 2 | Part time staff: 5

The Diocesan Appeal funds all aspects of priestly and diaconate education and formation. Your contribution to the Diocesan Appeal allows those discerning “the call” to enter into a full-time formation and education program including master’s level philosophy and theological training, pastoral experience, spiritual growth and human development.

The future priests and deacons of the diocese immerse themselves each year in a different pastoral training aspect of their formation including parish, prison and hospital ministry, Catholic Charities outreach, faith formation and youth ministry, etc. Every part of the program includes self-reflection, established standards of ministry to be achieved and formal evaluations by experienced professionals, lay ministers and clergy formation advisors. The goal upon ordination is that we have helped form a well-rounded and developed minister who not only is able to lead, but more importantly work alongside the faithful who the Bishop has entrusted with their care.

Your sacrificial offering makes it possible for the future priests and deacons of the Albany Diocese to listen more closely to Jesus’ whisper in their hearts...His voice

calling them to become His hands, feet and presence in humble service to us all.

With endless gratitude, the entire Vocations Team would like to thank you personally for your continued prayers, encouragement and financial support of the future spiritual leaders of Christ’s church. As a donor to the Diocesan Appeal each day we see your contribution in action and in thanksgiving hold you and your families in our daily prayers. Thank you! May God bless you in the same way you have been a blessing to all of us.



***"Restore to me the joy of
your salvation and uphold
me with a willing spirit."***

PSALM 51:14



Diocesan Appeal

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Diocesan Appeal Year
July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024