



# **Diocesan Appeal Impact Report 2024–2025**

Dear Friends in Christ,

***“For we are God’s co-workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.”***

1 CORINTHIANS 3:9

We have concluded yet another year when so many of you stood with us and supported the diocesan-parish partnership through your support of the Diocesan Appeal. Despite slim budgets and declining staff—we are down to 41 full time and 22 part time here at the Pastoral Center—parish and diocesan colleagues work together so diligently with service to you in mind, striving for your parish and faith life to be enriching and rewarding. In the Appeal year just completed, we had 119 more donors than the year prior and more importantly, contributions by 12,131 donors increased Appeal revenue from the prior year by 6.6% for a total of \$5,030,410! It is impossible to express my gratitude to all of you who made the choice to actively invest in the diocese—literally you make possible what you will read about on the following pages, and this is just a sliver of the work put forth on behalf of our 14 county Catholic Church. To learn more, please visit [www.RCDA.org](http://www.RCDA.org).

Thank you and God Bless!



*+Edward B. Scharfenberger*  
Edward B. Scharfenberger, D.D.  
Apostolic Administrator

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## Archives

The Diocesan Archive's 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.

### Full time staff: 1 | Part time staff: 0

An example of some of the work done in the Archives is helping the parishioners at St. Joseph in Worcester, NY compile a full history of their parish's pastors so they could be honored during the 150th anniversary celebration of the parish. Donors would be pleased to know that their support helped to make it possible for the archivist to attend a 3-day virtual workshop and training on best practices in archiving born-digital collections.

## Catholic Charities

### Full time staff: 448 | Part time staff: 225

Over the past year, Catholic Charities Emergency Assistance Program has seen a significant rise in demand as more individuals and families struggle with the high cost of living. From food insecurity and utility shut-offs to housing instability and basic needs, the impact is being felt in every area of life—including among those who have never needed help before. In response, they have implemented key improvements to better serve our communities, including streamlined intake processes, expanded mobile outreach, and stronger collaboration with community

partners. These innovations have allowed us to respond more quickly, reach underserved areas, and provide more comprehensive support to those in crisis. The program has made a direct impact on parishes by helping to identify and assist vulnerable individuals—such as seniors facing utility shutoffs or families at risk of eviction—connecting them not only with immediate aid but also long-term resources and hope.

Over 8,000 individuals across our 14-county region received emergency assistance last year—many benefiting from multiple, life stabilizing services.

## Catholic School Office

### Full time staff: 7 | Part time staff: 4

The staff endeavors to support the principals, teachers and families of our 17 diocesan schools with great efficiency. This year staff members worked even harder to absorb the responsibilities of two staff members who left. The Catholic School Office (CSO) provides multiple layers of support: academic, financial, administrative, technical, advancement and safety.

### Our work and efficiency also include:

- Assisting principals in securing over \$1.5 million dollars in New York State grants and aid annually.
- Professional development and policy development work around Artificial Intelligence for teachers and principals.
- Efficiencies for Catholic schools by providing

finance and human resources services that would otherwise cost schools the expenses associated with additional staff members.

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

- All schools are accredited through Cognia. The CSO facilitates ongoing school and system improvement planning.
- Our diocesan high schools have an impressive record of amassing over 20 million dollars of college grants and scholarships amongst the graduates of our three schools.
- Diocesan high school graduates will be attending some of the finest universities and colleges throughout the country.

## Chancery

**Full time staff: 5 | Part time staff: 4**

The Chancery Office supports the Bishop in his pastoral and administrative duties, ensuring efficient operations. The Chief Operating Officer coordinates the day-to-day operations of the pastoral center, much like a parish life director/coordinator, allowing Bishop and the Clergy in these top leadership roles in the Chancery to focus on the pastoral side of their ministry, not 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, the processing of visiting clergy to any parish

in the diocese, the scheduling and logistics of confirmations throughout the diocese, support functions related to diocesan wide events such as ordinations and holy day celebrations, the management of legal and church correspondence and documents, accepting and responding to calls, letters and emails from the faithful of our Diocese.

Effective this past year, Bonni Shippee, Chief Operating Officer, was appointed to serve as Chancellor of the Diocese. By church law, the Chancellor is responsible for the orderly arrangement and accessibility of the records and files that keep the diocese running and are its recorded history. The Chancellor also helps disseminate information to clergy, parishes, and the Catholic faithful that may be beneficial to the people of the Diocese of Albany. Currently a major focus of the Chief Operating Officer along with the Chief Financial Officer and the Director of Evangelization and Strategic Planning is to meet with parish leaders, pastors, trustees, finance and pastoral council chairs as well as lay management staff to share information, better understand how their parish functions and offer support to ensure the most efficient use of staff, facilities and administrative systems.

## Communications

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.

### Full time staff: 1 | Part time staff: 2

Over the past year the mini podcast (4 min, 40 seconds) became less mini (now 25 minutes) and now “Called to Serve with Kathy Barrans” can be found on Buzzsprout, Spotify, Amazon Music and Apple. They have created specialty webpages; the Jubilee, Lent, Advent, local memorials to Pope Francis, and Understanding the Papal Conclave to name a few. They have started sending monthly newsletters “From the Communications Office” to better communicate all that the department is doing to serve. They are now sharing all messaging (Bishop statements, Bishop letters, news releases, clergy assignments, NYS Catholic Conference messaging) on the website ([www.rcda.org/news-events/media-center/news-releases](http://www.rcda.org/news-events/media-center/news-releases)) so people can be aware of full messaging rather than relying on the portions the media chooses to share. A weekly video called “This is Our Faith with Bishop Ed”, which teaches about our Catholic faith, is posted on the diocesan Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube pages. The team continues to work with the Office of Evangelization on the Kindness Matters campaign, encouraging

all across our diocese to share kindness and share their stories in the hope that the kindness keeps spreading. Without the support of Diocesan Appeal donors, none of those initiatives would be possible.

## Consultation Center

### Full time staff: 2 | Part time staff: 3

The Consultation Center has a number of counselors and spiritual directors who provide outpatient mental health services and spiritual direction to many people throughout our diocese, including those from Roman Catholic and other faith traditions. In a time when the need for mental health services has grown, we continue to provide a supportive listening ear to many. It is never easy to turn away a potential therapy client in need, but for some time, the demand for our clinical services has exceeded our availability. In order to meet the needs of the community, we remain firm in our commitment to expanding the numbers of our clinical staff. Our spiritual direction program has grown significantly in the past year, in response to more diocesan members expressing interest in furthering their relationship with God. We are proud of our work with those struggling with mental health problems as well as those aiming to grow closer to God. During this time of change and refocus on mission, we hope to provide continued support to our diocesan community. Your commitment to the Diocesan Appeal is invaluable for helping to maintain the services and resources of the Consultation Center.

## Discipleship Formation

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.

### Full time staff: 4 | Part time staff: 2

The staff visited several parishes to meet with pastors and ministry leaders to discuss their observations and concerns regarding the aforementioned ministries with the goal of improving collaboration on behalf of parishioners. The goal of the meetings has been to build relationships and offer parishes our accompaniment and support as they form disciples of Jesus Christ. The meetings have assisted us in better serving our parishes. Pastoral Associate Formation Program: Just having completed its second year, our lay leadership training program welcomed nine recently ordained priests in order to foster collaboration and growth in parish leadership, providing both these young priests and the lay participants with knowledge they will need in parish administration. The annual Marriage Jubilee was held for some 70 couples who were celebrating milestone wedding anniversaries. We also hosted a retreat for the Jubilee Year on the theme Pilgrims of Hope for 70 participants who serve in faith formation ministries. We are preparing to lead over 100 young people on a

diocesan pilgrimage to the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis.

## Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs

### 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 Director has presented “Islam 101” over 80 times in parishes and other communities throughout the diocese. The department publishes a semi-annual newsletter “Oikoumene” which provides resources, quotes and Church teaching on ecumenism/interfaith affairs. The Commission published a booklet “Rooted in Faith: A Guide to Ecumenical & Interreligious Prayer & Service to the Community” sent to parishes in November 2024 with additional copies available. The Director teaches Ecumenism & Interfaith for our lay ministry formation and for other diocesan continuing education programs upon request. The column in The Evangelist called “Our Neighbor’s Faith” is provided by this department.

A unique event this past year that may be of interest: On August 25, 2024 several rabbis and other local Jewish leaders gathered with the Rector of the Cathedral, our Jewish-R.C. Dialogue Committee members and the Commission Director at “Portal” [the sculpture

outside our Cathedral commemorating the 1986 “From Fear to Friendship” Service at ICC; it is a Jew and Christian in embrace] to be in solidarity with the Jewish community amidst rising anti-Semitism.

## **Evangelization & Strategic Planning**

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 staff facilitate 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.

### **Full time staff: 1 | Part time staff: 2**

The office provides diocesan-wide events to bring us closer to knowing and loving Jesus. Additionally, the staff facilitates ongoing formation of parish leaders and parishioners to assure a collaborative effort exists within each parish, pastoral network, and vicariate. This involves consultation with all parishioners and a deep reflection on the core values of the parish community. Program Highlights: 4th Annual Step Up Men’s Conference; 4th Annual Unleashing Love Women’s Conference; Young Adult Regional Groups providing opportunities for Catholics ages 20 to 39 to

grow in a community of faith. 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”). Evangelization Initiatives: Broad scale initiatives including the most recent “Kindness Matters” campaign that continues with additional lawn signs, plus newly available buttons, wristbands, and magnets to encourage the more than 1.4 million people across our Diocese, regardless of their religious affiliation, to be better neighbors to one another. The “Kindness Matters” campaign directs people to a website landing page ([www.RCDA.org/kind](http://www.RCDA.org/kind)) which provides resources and ideas to help us be kinder to one another. Strategic Planning: Information sharing about the state of our diocese and the structure needed to best fulfill the mission of the Church. The goal is to create unity as brothers and sisters in Christ in order to be the best stewards of our limited resources as we develop healthier and more vibrant parishes. Donor contributions fund the budget for the staff who are responsible for implementing 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. The Parish Bookkeeping Support Specialist 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 Teresa: "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**

The diocesan Office of Human Resources (HR) provides centralized management of parish staff administration and benefit coordination. During the 2024–2025 fiscal year the diocesan HR office assisted several parishes with staff reorganization, resulting in a significant reduction in budget, while maintaining quality and mission driven service to parishioners and community partners.

After extensive research and in collaboration with our employment attorneys, the HR office published an updated "Employee Handbook" designed to provide staff with valuable information regarding policies and procedures, as well as their privileges and obligations as an employee. The handbook includes the most up to date matters of employment law issued by the state and federal government. The handbook was accompanied by several addenda; provided to ensure workplace safety, enforcement of employee rights and the protection of God's children.

Through the support of our diocesan donors, the Human Resources staff were able to attend training workshops and conferences to review and learn about the most recent changes in employment policies and laws issued by the state and government. This information is crucial to the successful administration of parish staff.

## Office of Prayer and Worship

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.

### Full time staff: 0 | Part time staff: 2

The staff has continued to provide liturgical support for parishes (regular liturgical updates sent to parish leaders, guidelines, site visits, answering liturgical questions, etc.). The support of generous donors has enabled us to run major Diocesan events such as the Jubilee Year Opening Mass, Rite of Election, the Chrism Mass and Ordinations. The running of these events includes extra musicians, flowers, worship aids, as well as liturgical ministers, logistics, etc. Without the financial help from donations, it would not be possible to have such wonderful liturgical celebrations during the year.

## Real Property and Architecture and Building Commission

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.

### Full time staff: 2 | Part time staff: 0

The goal at the Real Property Office is to assist parishes with all property matters. The majority of a parish’s assets are in the property it owns. Real Property issues are complicated and require care and expertise. The staff has over 35 years of experience and a strong desire to be of service to the parishes. They have developed a strong core of trusted professionals to call on when additional expertise is needed. Examples of what was tackled this year: parishes with encroachment issues which are common with parish property, tax issues including filing the tax-exempt renewal applications annually which are required to maintain property and school tax exemption, assistance with more than 28 leases for various parishes, and assistance with 14 property sales. The Architecture and Building Commission assisted with 48 building projects for the parishes within the diocese.

Some projects were planned, and some were emergencies—this assistance saves the parishes time, money, and headaches. Without these departments, many parishes would have no resources available to them for their property issues. They would have to hire advisors, consultants or other costly professionals for which parishes do not have the finances.

## Office of Safe Environment

**Full time staff: 1 | Part time staff: 0**

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 fiscal year, the SE Office assisted the parishes in obtaining 841 background reports. Eight 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. The SE office is in regular contact with the USCCB's Secretariate for the Protection of Children and Youth and utilizes relevant conferences and learning experiences to stay up to date on the latest safe environment practices to better ensure the protection of our most vulnerable. 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. The Hope and Healing Ministry facilitates Hope and Healing Masses in parishes throughout the year across the diocese. The Ministry works to bring a better understanding of the complexity of trauma through trauma awareness training for clergy, parish staff and parishioners, listening to survivor stories, and offering unique learning experiences. This year the committee brought GROOMED to the area, a survivor's play of abuse and understanding. It also regularly meets with survivors to hear their stories to help remove the stigma, shame and secrecy surrounding talking about abuse. Many of these stories are published on the Hope and Healing webpage on the diocesan website [www.rcda.org/offices/safe-environment/survivors](http://www.rcda.org/offices/safe-environment/survivors).

## Stewardship & Development

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.

### Full time staff: 3 | Part time staff: 1

The primary responsibility of the Stewardship staff is the development of and logistics for the Diocesan-wide Appeal solicitations throughout the fiscal year, reducing the burden on parish staff who held that responsibility for many years. After each Diocesan Appeal solicitation, the team evaluates results and adjusts to maximize effectiveness for both donors and parishes. Donors and non-donors are regularly surveyed for insights to inform strategy. New and enhanced marketing tools and data analysis are provided for parishes each year to make their work easier in promoting the Appeal and to impact their success in raising offertory revenue. For 2024-25 we had an increase in donor revenue of 6.6% and a slight increase in number of donors over last year. We retained 78% of donors from the prior year and had an increase of 2,690 donors who either gave for the first time or who had not supported in several years.

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 fourth 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 which brought the FreeWill tool again to parishioners of the Diocese through underwriting by The Foundation. A new addition was the Smart Giving Tools which make gift-giving with stocks, donor advised funds, or QCDs much easier to record and track. 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

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.

### Full time staff: 2 | Part time staff: 2

The Tribunal requires a special software program to manage the movement of cases.



This program is local and installed on each computer. The vendor of the database program informed the team that an upgrade was needed since the vendor was ending their technical support for local programs. The company is migrating its program to a cloud-based online service. The new service will involve a significant upfront charge and will entail an annual subscription fee for each Tribunal minister on the program. Your sacrifices for the Appeal allow the Tribunal to engage in this required upgrade.

A valued minister of the Tribunal retired last year but despite that, they were able to provide the same care to all who approached the Tribunal. Last year, 380 parties were served for marriage with dispensation or permission requests. Also, fifty-five people petitioned the Tribunal to investigate the validity of their marriages. They are only able to do what they do in Jesus' name because of donors.

## Vocations

**Full time staff: 1 | Part time staff: 7**

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 fulltime formation and education program including master's level philosophy and theological training, pastoral experience, spiritual growth and human development.

Each dollar contributed goes towards paying for their formation, which includes their education, health insurance, monthly stipend, and community events. The men are then able to completely give themselves over in prayer to discern where the Lord is calling them to serve. Thank you for your continued support of the future ministers in the Catholic Church that, God willing, will be ordained and available for each of us to call upon for our spiritual, family and emotional needs. **May God continue to bless you for your continued support of the future gardeners, tending the soil in the Lord's vineyard.**

## RCDA Department Leaders



### **Archives**

**Amy Brozio-Andrews**  
Diocesan Archivist



### **Consultation Center**

**Rev. Thomas E. Konopka,**  
**L.C.S.W.**  
Executive Director



### **Catholic Charities**

**Sr. Betsy Van Deusen**  
CEO



### **Consultation Center**

**Dr. Ginna Roeding**  
Director of Clinical Operations



### **Catholic School Office**

**Dr. Christopher Bott**  
Superintendent



### **Discipleship Formation**

**David Amico**  
Director



### **Chancery**

**Bonni Shippee**  
Chief Operating Officer



### **Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs**

**Rev. James Kane**  
Director/Ecumenical Officer



### **Communications**

**Kathy Barrans**  
Communications Director



### **Evangelization & Strategic Planning**

**Deacon Al Censullo**  
Strategic Planning Support  
Services



#### **Finance**

**Deacon Gregg Wilbur**  
Chief Financial Officer



#### **Office of Safe Environment**

**Ann Marie Carswell**  
Director



#### **Human Resources**

**Pamela Danz**  
Director



#### **Stewardship & Development**

**Nancy Spadaro Bielawa**  
Executive Director



#### **Office of Prayer and Worship**

**Very Rev. Anthony Barratt**  
Director



#### **The Tribunal**

**Very Rev. Matthew H. Frisoni,**  
**S.T.L., J.C.L.**  
Judicial Vicar



#### **Real Property and Architecture and Building Commission**

**Michael Kane**  
Real Property Director,  
Architecture & Building  
Commission Coordinator



#### **Vocations**

**Very Rev. Brian Kelly**  
Director



# Diocesan Appeal

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**Diocesan Appeal Year**  
**July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025**