



Shortage of US Priests Reaches Critical Level

New Initiative Aims to Inspire a New Generation to the Priesthood

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PHILADELPHIA, PA – The Catholic Church is facing a growing crisis: a steep decline in seminarians and an aging priesthood threaten the ability to serve parishes and Catholics nationwide.

In response, the International Institute of Culture (IIC), a Philadelphia-based Catholic non-profit, has launched ***ThankAPriest.com***, an initiative to restore the perception of the priesthood's true dignity by sharing inspiring stories of priests who have made a profound impact in people's lives.

"The mission of *ThankAPriest.com* is to highlight the noble calling of the priesthood," said Dr. John M. Haas, president and founder of the IIC. "By sharing stories of priestly heroism and compassion, we hope to inspire young men to recognize the priesthood as a profound and fulfilling vocation."

Bishop Earl K. Fernandes of the Diocese of Columbus says, "I commend the International Institute for Culture and their initiative. Bishops get a lot of complaint letters. It's nice to hear good news about priests, their selfless service, and their heroic work of ministry, which is inspiring to so many. Good deeds don't often make headlines, but the *ThankAPriest.com* initiative, which helps tell these stories, is vital in promoting vocations and building a culture of vocations, which is so necessary for the Church today."

A Call to Share Stories

ThankAPriest.com invites Catholics across the country to share personal stories about how a priest has positively impacted their life or community. These stories will become a cornerstone of the project. They will be shared on social media, e-newsletters, and the website to celebrate the critical role of priests and encourage others to consider this vital calling.

A Crisis in Numbers

The number of active priests in the US plummeted from nearly 60,000 in 1970 to just 35,000 in 2020, even as the Catholic population grew by 20 million. At the current rate, by 2030, some areas may have only one priest for every 6,000 Catholics, forcing parishes to close or merge. Since 1970, nearly 10% of parishes nationwide have closed, with some dioceses experiencing closure rates as high as 28%.



The decline in priestly vocations is driven by broad societal trends, including increasing secularism, a decline in religious practice, the growing influence of individualism, and lingering negative perceptions fueled by past scandals and media portrayals. A national survey conducted by the IIC revealed that 25% of Americans aged 18-29 consider priests as “predatory,” and 28% consider them “untrustworthy,” reflecting the persisting impact of past scandals and a trend seen primarily in that younger age group.

“Our goal is to bring to light the countless untold stories of the good and virtuous work priests do every day,” added Dr. Haas. “This effort is critical not only to restoring confidence in the priesthood but also to inspiring future vocations.”

A Movement to Inspire

ThankAPriest.com offers:

- **Story Sharing:** An interactive platform for Catholics to share personal experiences of how priests have impacted their lives and their families.
- **Curated Profiles:** Inspiring stories of priests shared in both written and video formats.
- **E-Newsletters:** Uplifting accounts and prayer intentions to encourage priestly vocations.
- **Social Media Outreach:** Engaging Catholics, especially young men, by amplifying positive stories of the priesthood through digital media.

[The first story of ThankAPriest.com](#) features Bishop Christian Carlassare, an Italian Comboni missionary who survived a targeted shooting while serving in South Sudan. His courage and forgiveness exemplify the heroism of priests worldwide and inspire others to see the priesthood as a life of virtue and sacrifice.

Building a Brighter Future

This initiative of the IIC combines research, education, and modern media to combat misconceptions about the priesthood and encourage vocations to the priesthood. “Jesus met people where they were,” says Matthew A. Haas, son of Dr. Haas and project director. “Today, that means engaging with young men online through stories that reveal the extraordinary value of priestly service.”

Your Story Matters

Catholics are invited to visit *ThankAPriest.com* to share stories about priests who have inspired or helped them. These contributions will highlight the positive impact of priests and encourage the next generation of men to consider a life of service through the priesthood.

By submitting stories, joining the prayer community, or subscribing to the e-newsletter, Catholics can support this movement to restore confidence in the priesthood, inspire families to promote vocations, and strengthen the Church’s future.



BACKGROUND

International Institute for Culture

The International Institute for Culture (IIC) is a Philadelphia-based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 1989 by Dr. John M. Haas in response to the call of Pope St. John Paul II for the re-evangelization of culture. For over three decades, the IIC has provided cultural and educational programs for priests, seminarians, and laity to deepen their understanding of the Faith and bring people closer to Jesus Christ.

Shepherding Future Shepherds Program

The IIC's *Shepherding Future Shepherds* program is a comprehensive, four-pillar initiative designed to address the critical shortage of priests in the United States by identifying and filling key gaps in vocational support, as revealed in their national survey of vocation directors and in consultation with leaders in vocation ministry. *ThankAPriest.com* serves as the first pillar of this initiative, focusing on restoring public perception of the priesthood's true dignity by sharing inspiring stories of priests who have made a profound impact. This multi-phase effort is led by Dr. John M. Haas, Matthew A. Haas, and Julia Rota, combining decades of experience in theology, education, and media strategy to cultivate a stronger culture of vocations.

Resources

To support vocation ministry efforts, the IIC has conducted extensive research to identify key challenges and opportunities in fostering priestly vocations. The following resources provide valuable insights and data to assist in this mission:

- ***Shepherding Future Shepherds Program***: A comprehensive four-pillar initiative addressing critical gaps in vocation support. [Learn more at priest.org](#).
- **National Survey of Vocation Directors**: A report detailing the challenges and best practices in fostering vocations, based on input from vocation directors across the country. [Access the report here](#).
- **Public Perception Study on the Catholic Church and Priesthood**: A national survey examining public attitudes toward the Catholic Church, Pope Francis, and Catholic priests. [View the full report here](#).
- **Leadership Team & Background**: Learn more about the team leading *Shepherding Future Shepherds*, including their expertise in theology, education, and media strategy. [Read their backgrounds here](#).
- **Advisory Team**: The IIC has assembled an advisory team of experts in vocation ministry, psychology, and media to provide strategic guidance for the *Shepherding Future Shepherds* program. [Learn more about the advisory team here](#).
- **Media Kit Images**: [Available here](#).



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