



Shepherding Future Shepherds:

Vocations Initiative Backed by Bishops Inspires Believers Nationwide

Supported by Prominent Foundations,

Program Reaches Over 1.5 Million in Two Months

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PHILADELPHIA, PA – The International Institute for Culture (IIC) has launched a groundbreaking Catholic vocations initiative, *Shepherding Future Shepherds*, to address the urgent shortage of priests. Launched this spring, the program has drawn an enthusiastic response from church leaders, foundations, and Catholics nationwide. It seeks to restore trust in the Catholic priesthood and inspire more men to discern a vocation to this sacred calling.

The initiative's first phase, ThankAPriest.com, leverages digital storytelling to renew positive public perception of the priesthood. Through a dedicated website and active social media outreach, *ThankAPriest.com* shares powerful testimonies of priests making a difference in their communities.

In only its first two months since launching, *ThankAPriest.com* has gained significant traction:

- **Over 1.5 million** video views
- **Over 27,000** Facebook followers
- **Over 6,000** email subscribers
- **Over 37,000** total community connections
- **Over 14,000** new connections each month

To date, more than \$160,000 has been raised from individuals and philanthropic foundations, including a \$50,000 grant from the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities to advance the mission of restoring confidence in the priesthood and inspiring new priestly vocations.

The *Shepherding Future Shepherds* initiative has received praise from church leaders and organizations, already garnering substantial media coverage and numerous endorsements.

"Young men today are called to be shepherds but sometimes do not hear the divine call amid the noise and confusion of modern life," said Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. "*Shepherding Future Shepherds* is confronting that crisis directly – offering encouragement, clarity, and the hopeful witness of faithful priests."



“I’ve been involved in Catholic media and apostolic work for nearly three decades, and this level of early momentum is rare,” said Matthew Pinto, founder of Ascension, the Catholic media apostolate, and a member of the *Shepherding Future Shepherds* advisory team. “I was happily surprised to see how this message is resonating with so many Catholics of all ages. Catholics love the priesthood and welcome it being seen in a positive and inspiring light.”

“Our fishing nets are filling quickly,” said Fr. Jeremy Hiers, O.S.A., Director of Augustinian Vocations and advisory team member for *Shepherding Future Shepherds*. “Since Pope Leo XIV’s election, we’ve received over 175 vocation inquiries in just two weeks. It’s a clear sign that the Holy Spirit is moving powerfully, making this initiative incredibly timely for those beginning to discern.”

Each month, *ThankAPriest.com* highlights a new story that captures the life, sacrifice, and joy of the priesthood. The first three feature powerful examples of priestly courage and conversion:

- **[Bishop Christian Carlassare](#)**: An Italian missionary serving war-torn South Sudan with forgiveness and courage after surviving a life-threatening attack.
- **[Father Philip Mulryne](#)**: An Irish former professional soccer player who left fame and fortune to serve God as a priest.
- **[Father Stephen Gadberry](#)**: Military veteran and “American Ninja Warrior” competitor, now drawing new audiences to Christ through his witness.

As the initial phase of a multi-stage program, *ThankAPriest.com* represents only the beginning of a broader strategy to revitalize vocations to the priesthood. Subsequent phases will expand efforts to accompany men actively discerning their vocation. The strong early engagement reflects a growing movement among young Catholics—particularly members of Gen Z—who are seeking deeper meaning, a sense of purpose, and opportunities for service rooted in faith.

To explore stories, share your own, or support the initiative, visit ThankAPriest.com.

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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