The Criterion

Serving the Church in Central and Southern Indiana Since 1960

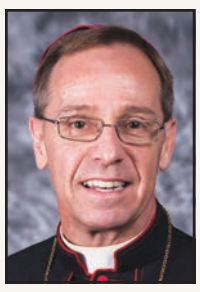
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2027 United Catholic Appeal

Go Forth in Joy

Dear Friends in Christ,

At the heart of our faith is the Eucharist—a call to be transformed and then to transform the world around us. Each time we celebrate Mass, we are sent forth to carry Christ's love into our families, communities, and beyond—to Go Forth in Joy.



The United Catholic Appeal is one of the most powerful ways we live that mission together. It supports the spiritual and pastoral work that shapes our parishes, cares for the poor and vulnerable, educates our young people, and forms tomorrow's priests.

This is our Church. This is our call.

As you prayerfully consider your gift, know that it is not just a donation—it is a response. A response to the Gospel, to the needs of our neighbors, and to the invitation to walk together in faith.

Thank you for your generous heart and faithful witness. May we continue to go forth, renewed in the Eucharist, and united in Christ.

With assurance of my prayers and best wishes for you, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Charles C. Thompson

Most Reverend Charles C. Thompson
Archbishop of Indianapolis

Across the generations, bonds of priests create blessings for the faithful

By Sean Gallagher

Father Anthony Armbruster spent six years in priestly formation at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad before he was ordained on June 1, 2024.

He then spent two years serving as a parochial vicar (also known as an associate pastor) of SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi Parish in Greenwood and St. Martin of Tours Parish in Martinsville.

At the end of that time, Father Armbruster reflected on his gratitude for the support he'd received both from the parishioners he served and Catholics across the archdiocese.

Their contributions to the United Catholic Appeal (UCA) paid for the priestly formation that Father Armbruster received at Saint Meinrad.

"The people who sit in these pews here in this church are the reason that we have priests," he said while sitting in SS. Francis and Clare Church. "I am very much grateful to the people of the archdiocese for those six years."

This help continued during his two years at the Indianapolis South Deanery faith community.



Father Stephen Giannini, left, and Father Anthony Armbruster, posing in SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi Church in Greenwood, served together from 2024-26. Father Giannini was the pastor of SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi Parish in Greenwood and St. Martin of Tours Parish in Martinsville, while Father Armbruster served as parochial vicar in the faith communities. As a newly ordained priest in 2024, Father Armbruster learned much from Father Giannini about the daily life and ministry of a parish priest. (Photo courtesy of Cantaloupe)

'One of the best priests to learn under'

The parishioners there helped Father Armbruster grow into his priestly identity. It's a task they've carried out with many newly ordained priests who have served there since the faith community was founded in 1993.

"They really understand the great mission that they have in forming the new priests," said the priest, who now serves as a parochial vicar at St. Luke the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis. "They're more willing to support [the UCA] because they understand that their priests are the reason why they're able to have the sacraments. Their priests are so important to them."

That very much included Father Stephen Giannini, who served as pastor of SS. Francis and Clare from 2015-26 and St. Martin from 2020-26.

A key part of his ministry during that time was to make his own contribution to helping newly ordained priests make their priestly identity their own, something that Father Armbruster is also grateful for.

"Almost every priest in our archdiocese has told me that I had one of the best priests to learn under for my first few years," he said. "And they were absolutely right."

Father Giannini appreciated Father Armbruster's "dedication to the Church and to his prayer life," adding prayer is "an important piece for all priests, to spend time with prayer with the One who loves us and allowing that relationship to influence the relationships we have with our parishioners and with anybody we come into contact with."

Father Giannini knew from experience that his time with a newly ordained priest would be limited, so he wanted to make the most of it.

So, in Father Armbruster's first year at SS. Francis and Clare and St. Martin, Father Giannini had him focus on getting used to celebrating the sacraments on a regular basis. That included him celebrating the liturgies of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday at SS. Francis and Clare.

Because those liturgies are the most important in the Church's liturgical year and are also more complex than an ordinary Sunday Mass, Father Armbruster said that this assignment from Father Giannini "frightened me quite a bit." At the same time, he said that he "very much appreciated the trust he had in me to do that."

Although Father Giannini aided his younger brother priest by giving him specific tasks in his ministry, he also helped him simply through the relationship they shared for two years.

'Be simple when it comes to faith'

"It's a lot of listening," Father Giannini said. "It's the time at the end of a day. It's letting the associate pastor reveal to me what they're concerned about, or what successes they've had where they were so pleased that they were able to do something. I'll sit there and affirm them in that.

"Sometimes—and I need this for myself, too—I'll say, 'Well, maybe we could have done it a different way,' which is how we all learn."

Father Armbruster appreciated the chance to learn from Father Giannini just by watching how he lived as a priest from day to day.

"One of the lessons he taught me is how to be simple when it comes to faith," Father Armbruster said. "It just comes down to loving the Lord and giving him more and more of ourselves every single day."

Father Armbruster saw this simplicity in Father Giannini's "own resolve to take on the challenges of the parish" and in "sitting with the Lord and praying, even in the empty church by himself."

"When it comes to the heart of the priest, he is so much united to the Lord that it doesn't have to be a very complicated thing, that it's just simply being with the Lord and knowing that he has called you to that," Father Armbruster added. "If nothing else, he has really encouraged me and taught me to know that this is what I've been called to do and to be confident in that."

Perhaps the last lesson that Father Giannini passed on to Father Armbruster came when both priests learned that they would begin new assignments in July.

'I will serve as long as I'm able to'

Although Father Giannini at 70 was eligible to retire from parish administration, he came to the realization in prayer that "I've got one more adventure in my life."

"That's why I'm off to St. Mary Parish in Greensburg," he said, "to have another adventure with God and God's people there. I'm not retiring right now because I love being a priest … ."

Father Armbruster admires the dedication to priestly life and ministry he sees in Father Giannini and hopes to emulate it in his own life.

He said that when he was ordained, "I surrendered my life to the Lord and to the archdiocese. I will serve as long as I'm able to. Even if I'm past that age of retirement, but still am able to do it, I will do it."

The support that the faithful of the archdiocese give to retired priests through the UCA helps young priests like Father Armbruster give themselves more freely to their ministry to the Church across central and southern Indiana.

"Looking at the financial struggles that are hitting people right now in our country, I realize that I am tremendously fortunate and blessed to have the support of the United Catholic Appeal …," he said. "I can keep serving and keep doing what the Lord has called me to do, knowing that I'm being supported in that work."

(To learn more about a vocation to the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, visit HearGodsCall.com. For more information about the United Catholic Appeal, the ministries it supports, to watch a video of interviews with those in this article or to donate, go to unitedcatholicappeal.org or call the Office of Stewardship and Development at 317-236-1415.) †

Special wraparound highlights ministries supported by United Catholic Appeal

This week's special issue of *The Criterion* includes four pages highlighting important ministries supported by the annual United Catholic Appeal.

You'll find stories focusing on the impact that the "Protecting Our Children" program of Catholic Charities continues to have by providing guidance to children and parents on the dangers of social media; a longtime pastor and younger priest reflecting on their ministry at parishes, and one example of how the Department of Pastoral Ministries helps pastors and parishes meet the pastoral needs of Catholics in central and southern Indiana.

The ministries highlighted in these articles, along with countless others, are supported by the United Catholic Appeal. This year's goal is $6.3 million.

The regular Nov. 13 issue of *The Criterion* is included as 12 pages inside this special edition.

You'll find many of our regular features there: Archbishop Charles C. Thompson's weekly column, the calendar of events and our perspectives page.

Thank you for reading your archdiocesan newspaper. †

To learn more about the annual appeal or to donate, scan the QR code to the left or log on to UnitedCatholicAppeal.org.

UCA funds help ministry assist mother 'in search of peace' after miscarriage

By Natalie Hoefer

When an ultrasound at 20 weeks revealed that Keri Wisniowski had suffered a miscarriage, the first person she and her husband Jason turned to might seem unexpected.

"We drove straight to Nativity," says Keri, referring to the family's parish, Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ in Indianapolis. "I went straight in and said, 'Father Eric, what do we do?' "

The couple was "in search of peace" in how to honor "the dignity of human life" of their unborn child according to the teaching of the Catholic Church.

Their pastor at the time, Father Eric Augenstein, knew just what to do. He called Gabriela Ross, director of the archdiocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life.

It is one of four offices that comprise the archdiocese's Department of Pastoral Ministries, along with Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Human Life and Dignity and Intercultural Ministry.

"Most parishioners are going to interface at the parish level with their pastor," says Deacon Thomas Hosty, director of the department. But pastors "can't possibly know all of the latest and best resources available in particular areas. That's where we come into the picture. We help support our pastors so that they can serve their parishioners."

The Department of Pastoral Ministries "is completely funded by the United Catholic Appeal," Deacon Hosty adds. "Without those dollars, we don't have the ability to serve our Church and our pastors."

And Ross would not have been able to provide the answers and peace the Wisniowskis sought in their time of suffering.

'The Church wants to be there'

After Father Augenstein shared with Ross the Wisniowskis' situation and contact information, she called Keri.

"I just listened to her story, talked with her, prayed with her," says Ross.

The couple had specific medical questions, so Ross suggested contacting Dr. Michael Pedilla, one of the Catholic physicians on a list Ross created on her office's website after vetting each for adherence to Church teaching.

She also connected them with Our Lady of Peace Catholic Cemetery in Indianapolis, which has an infant loss section.

And Ross brought God into the situation, telling Keri that "God is with us, even in the suffering, that he cares about that child even more than we do," and "that the Church wants to be there for her, too."

Keri contacted Dr. Padilla, who she says "offered his sympathy" and answered her questions about next steps in light of Catholic teaching.

With that information, she was able to have an inducement procedure to give birth to the baby, whom the couple named Levi. She was able to hold her baby and had a mold made of his tiny footprints.

The Wisniowskis were then able to give "our baby Levi" a proper burial at Our Lady of Peace, where she and Jason "go to see him."

Keri also used another vetted list found on the Marriage and Family Life website to contact a Catholic therapist "for our family to be able to work through the issues we've had to face through this situation," she says. She and Jason have six children ranging in age from 10 years old to 9 months.

Keri says it was a blessing to have "somebody to talk to, and knowing that the Church has those type of resources for you to contact," including Catholic therapists she contacted from another online list vetted by Ross.

Assisting the Wisniowskis is just one example of how the Office of Marriage and Family Life helps pastors and parishes meet the pastoral needs of parishioners.



Deacon Thomas Hosty, director of the archdiocesan Department of Pastoral Ministries, and Gabriela Ross, director of the archdiocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life, smile in SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis. (Photos courtesy of Cantaloupe)

Resources 'beyond a parish's ability'

Occasionally, Ross works with parishioners. But most often, she says, "I help pastors [and] parish leaders who are building relationships with the people in the pews. They're the ones that are there day in and day out, walking with the families who need help the most. …

"I love all the good things that our parishes do to support families locally," she says. "But there are situations that require resources that are beyond a parish's ability to offer."

Her role is to "provide resources, training, consultation [and] support" in those cases.

To do this, Ross says she spends time "becoming an expert in what materials, what programs, what resources are effective that are true to our Catholic beliefs and understandings."

The resources cover areas from marriage preparation and marriage enrichment to Natural Family Planning, infertility support, miscarriage and child loss, healing from divorce and more—all in line with Church teaching.

Ross shares these resources directly with pastors and parish leaders. Many of the resources are also available on her office's website, including several in Spanish and a few in French, Korean, Vietnamese and more.

"There are always new things that we're hearing about, new ways that we want to support families," says Ross.

For example, Father Todd Goodson, pastor of Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish in Greenwood, contacted her about a couple suffering from the death of a child who wanted to start an in-person ministry for parents grieving the same loss.



Keri Wisniowski, a member of Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ Parish in Indianapolis, is grateful for the guidance she received from the archdiocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life after suffering a miscarriage.

Ross worked with the couple. Through research and seeking additional funding, she was able to help them launch an archdiocesan chapter of the Catholic-based Red Bird Ministries. It resides at Our Lady of the Greenwood but welcomes members of other parishes.

"Giving to the United Catholic Appeal helps sustain what we're doing but hopefully can also continue to help us to grow, so that we can have more ministries" and resources to help pastors and parishes meet the marriage and family needs of their parishioners, says Ross.

Donations to the appeal help the other offices in the Department of Pastoral Ministries do the same.

Helping others is 'their passion'

The staff of each of the department's four offices "stand here in the background as this ultimate resource for both the pastors and the parishes," says Deacon Hosty. He calls his staff "subject matter experts in their particular areas.

"They're up to date on the latest and the best of the areas of their ministries. They have curated resources that are faithful to the Church's teaching but are also relevant to today. And so, the pastors or the parishes can access all of these resources from our department to help their parishioners" in ways a parish "may not have the bandwidth to address."

For instance, a parish might have a Respect Life Ministry. But no single parish could offer the statewide Youth Rally for Life and Mass for Life that the Office of Human Life and Dignity helps coordinate each year in January. More than 1,800 Catholic youths across Indiana participated in the January 2026 event.

And as the number of Latino Catholics in the archdiocese grows, "Not every parish is equipped when it comes to knowing the best way to conduct Hispanic youth ministry," says Deacon Hosty.

The Office of Intercultural Ministry is there to help the parishes. The office includes Hispanic Ministry and the Intercultural Pastoral Institute, as well as Black Catholic Ministry and support for other cultural groups.

The support by staff in the department goes beyond phone calls and putting resources online.

"People don't know how much we stay in contact with our pastors," says Deacon Hosty. "It's a very intentional effort. We visit every deanery. We try to … have rapport and trust with [pastors and parish leaders] so that they can call us when they have those needs."

With funds from the United Catholic Appeal, "Every parish within the archdiocese can tap into these very unique, specialized areas of ministry where they can be ensured that they're getting [resources] that are faithful to the Church's teaching and are the latest available," he adds.

Keri is grateful that her pastor tapped into that resource by reaching out to Ross. Without her help, "It would have added so much uncertainty in my heart, [wondering if] I was doing the right thing or that my baby would not have been respected."

She expresses thanks "to the archdiocese for having these people available, people who care and want to help other people. You can tell in their hearts that that's their passion."

(Information about the offices of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Human Life and Dignity, Intercultural Ministry and Marriage and Family Life can be found under the "Offices" tab at archindy.org. For more information about the United Catholic Appeal, the ministries it supports, to watch a video of interviews with those in this article or to donate, go to unitedcatholicappeal.org or call the Office of Stewardship and Development at 317-236-1415.) †

‘You’re worthy of love’: program guides children, parents to avoid dangers of social media

By John Shaughnessy

Theresa Chamblee still gets emotional when she thinks about a special moment of love and support, a moment that convinces her that all she is doing to educate and protect children from online predators and even their own doubts and worries greatly matters.

The moment occurred about a month after Chamblee presented the “Protecting Our Children” program to eighth-grade students at a Catholic school in the archdiocese.

“The principal reached out to me to let me know that the program is making an impact because they had a seventh-grade student, a girl, who had met someone online,” recalls Chamblee, the director of Social Concerns for Catholic Charities in the archdiocese. “She was starting to get scared about it, and she didn’t know how to shut it down.

“It was the eighth-grade girls who just kind of surrounded her with love and told her to shut it down. They were really supportive of the seventh grader, who then felt like she could talk to someone about it.

“A big part of the program is empowering our kids to be able to have the back of their friends. Youths standing with youths and saying, ‘You’re not alone.’ I just love that. It gives me chills.”

The “Protecting Our Children” program is just one of the many efforts of the Social Concerns ministries in the archdiocese, ministries that also include connections with parishes to help the poor and vulnerable, anti-trafficking education, promotion of justice for immigrants and programs for domestic and international humanitarian assistance.

The “Protecting Our Children” program and these other Social Concerns ministries wouldn’t be possible without financial contributions to the archdiocese’s United Catholic Appeal, Chamblee says.

“It is very critical. I work directly with parishes and Catholic schools in the greater community. There’s no grant money out there for this type of ministry,” she says. “I’m really humbled by all the individuals who share their time, talent and treasure because we can’t do this alone. We are all Church. We are all one family.”

‘The answer is love’

Like all the Social Concerns ministries, the “Protecting Our Children” program approaches its efforts from the twin foundations of love and faith.

“The program came about because I had so many parents and so many teachers telling me their stories,” Chamblee says. “We’re seeing such a rise in depression and anxiety associated with social media and gaming apps. But what was most scary was when I found out that the number one way our kids are being targeted for sexual exploitation and trafficking is through social media and gaming apps.

“Whether I give a parent presentation or a student presentation, I always ask, ‘What is one thing we all need to survive besides air, water and food?’ The answer is love. We were created in love, to be loved, and we are loved by a God of love.

“And so, I thought it was very important that the very first session [of three] really hone in on that. We don’t even go into social media and trafficking. The first session is all about telling these kiddos, ‘You’re worthy of love. You’re unrepeatable. God wanted you to be.’ ”

One of the most revealing results of the program—which is geared toward seventh- and eighth-grade students—has come through inviting students to privately share their thoughts and concerns on the index cards that Chamblee gives them during her presentations. The students are also invited to write their names or initials on the cards if they want to talk to someone one-on-one.

Chamblee notes, “There have always been at least two to three index cards that I receive back of just someone saying, ‘I’ve never talked about this, but I need help.’ ‘How do I not hate myself?’ ‘How do I not struggle with what other people think of me?’

“One of the parts of the program that is so important is to help them understand they’re not alone. They’re not alone in the mistakes they’ve made. That they are worthy of being loved no matter what. Every single class, we have someone who will write something on those cards that breaks my heart. At the same time, I’m like, ‘Wow, that kid is brave,’ to be able to say, ‘I don’t want to do this anymore. I don’t want to walk alone anymore.’ ”



Theresa Chamblee leads the archdiocese’s “Protecting Our Children” program, a program that’s made possible by the United Catholic Appeal and that empowers students to avoid the dangers of social media. (Photo courtesy of Cantaloupe)

‘They knew they had a safe place’

In four years of sharing the program, Chamblee has visited more than 40 schools in the archdiocese, reaching an estimated 2,000 students and 2,000 parents. She praises the archdiocese’s Office of Catholic Schools for its support of the program. Staff members at St. Mark the Evangelist School in Indianapolis are among the school leaders who believe all schools should embrace the program.

“We’ve had ‘Protecting Our Children’ in our school for around three years now, and we’ll continue to keep it coming back every year,” says Jen Kocher, St. Mark’s principal.

“There are a handful of companies you can use to come in and help educate your students on being safe online, but the piece that they’re missing that we get from ‘Protecting Our Children’ is the piece where they teach them to love themselves, and they teach them their self-value.”

Rachel Gehret has seen the difference the program has made in her role as St. Mark’s middle school religion teacher.

“This program aligns so well with the foundational things of what I teach as a Catholic school teacher, where we are created in God’s image and likeness, and we are made for love and by love,” Gehret says.

“There have been times where I’ve noticed that students have struggled, and after this program, it’s really helped empower them to stand up and speak for themselves when they need help. And it’s helped them empower each other.

“Sometimes, the girls are struggling with self-esteem issues. They don’t know who they can go to, to say that they don’t feel good about themselves, that they don’t know how to love themselves. And having this, where we see concerning things on the index cards, we can connect the girls or boys with our guidance counselor—and just give them the tools to recognize the gift that they are.”

The program is also designed to help parents who often ask Chamblee, “How do I start to talk to my kids about this?”

“I’m going to give them resources of how to start those conversations because it’s not easy for anyone,” says Chamblee, a mother of six. “The number one thing that kids have said that has helped them from falling prey to these grooming methods online is that they knew they had a safe place to fall. They knew they had a safe place where they could go and say, ‘I made a mistake’ or ‘I just got this crazy, explicit picture. I don’t know what to do.’ And it takes that fear away for them.

“So, having a safe place to land with a trusted adult, their parents, their grandparents, that’s probably the greatest preventer of them ever being groomed online.

“Our kids have to navigate through things that we couldn’t even fathom ten years ago. And for them to just know that they can talk to someone about that is huge.”

The program is a necessity in a time of ever-increasing social media concerns and challenges concerning children’s safety and well-being, says Kocher, St. Mark’s principal.

“The ability to be able to bring this program in at little to no cost to our school is a value I can’t put a number on,” she says. “So those who are donating or supporting the United Catholic Appeal, you’re helping make this possible in our schools.”

(For more information about Social Concerns ministries in the archdiocese, go to www.archindy.org/socialconcerns*.)* †

