

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Catholic Extension Society Announces the 2024-2025 Lumen Christi Award Finalists**

Chicago, IL — [Catholic Extension Society](http://www.catholicextension.org/) today announces the 2024-2025 Lumen Christi Award finalists. The [Lumen Christi Award](https://www.catholicextension.org/what-we-do/lumen-christi-award/), established in 1978, is Catholic Extension’s highest honor given to people who radiate and reveal the light of Christ present in the communities where they serve. This year, 37 Extension Dioceses submitted nominations for the award. Out of the 37 nominations, seven were chosen as award finalists.

The annual award is a reminder of the transformative impact of the Catholic Church in our society.

“This year’s Lumen Christi Award finalists have each found a way to play their part in making a difference in the lives of others,” Fr. Jack Wall, president of Catholic Extension Society, said. “They are helping to build up a better nation, where people care for one another, and where the pain of others does not fall on deaf ears. They feel called to be a blessing in places where there is no shortage of trouble and tribulation.”

Award finalists receive $10,000 to support and enhance their ministry. From among these finalists, the Lumen Christi Award recipient will ultimately be selected and given a $25,000 grant, along with an additional $25,000 grant for the nominating diocese. Catholic Extension Society will reveal the award recipient this fall.

This year’s finalists represent the good work of the Catholic Church in action. They bring about confidence, joy and faith within the communities they encounter, recognizing the face of Christ within each soul they touch.

The seven finalists include:

**Deacon Stephen Sellers | Diocese of Beaumont, Texas**

Deacon Stephen Sellers teaches prisoners that hope must start somewhere. When he first visited death row at a Texas prison in 2017, he wasn’t sure he could handle returning. “I went back out in the parking lot and prayed that God would never send me back there again,” he recalled. He feared he would not be strong enough for this work. But he has since found the beauty of a ministry that offers light and hope in a place that so desperately needs it. Deacon Sellers works with inmates who will one day be free, those sentenced to life and those awaiting execution. No matter their circumstances, he strives to ensure that their time served behind bars is a chance for transformation. Prison ministry has been shown to be an effective tool in reducing recidivism. Exposure to faith lessens the likelihood of convicted criminals re-offending. Deacon Sellers travels about 400 miles a week in his truck to help prisoners discover God’s unconditional love in a ministry that benefits these men as well as the larger society.

**Holy Rosary Catholic Church | Diocese of Birmingham, Alabama**

Holy Rosary Catholic Church serves one of the poorest neighborhoods in Birmingham—known as Gate City—where many families live on fixed incomes. The 40-member parish offers a food pantry that feeds more than 800 people a month. A 19% rise in prices and the expiration of federal pandemic safety nets have exacerbated financial hardships for many Gate City residents, creating increased dependence on the food pantry for life-sustaining groceries and basic supplies. The parish also runs a youth soccer program that provides a safe and fun environment for children and teens to develop positive behavior skills. Holy Rosary demonstrates how a faith community can transform an entire town or neighborhood. They feed the hungry in body and spirit.

**Sister Lisa Maurer, OSB | Diocese of Duluth, Minnesota**

Sister Lisa Maurer coaches college players on football and faith. A member of the Benedictine Sisters of the St. Scholastica Monastery, she is a beloved and trusted figure for her team, for the College of St. Scholastica and for the entire Diocese of Duluth in northeast Minnesota. In 2015, athletic staff asked her to become an assistant coach after taking notice of her keen interest in the sport and well-being of the students at the college next to the monastery.

In addition to the football program, she is committed to all the student athletes in the college’s 22 athletic programs. She has found that young people feel comfortable speaking to her because of her role as a coach. It opens pathways for discussions on the struggles of real life. Coaching, she found, can be used as a “real-life application of how we live as people.”

**Sister Mary Lisa Renfer, RSM, DO | Diocese of Knoxville, Tennessee**

Sister Mary Lisa Renfer, a Religious Sister of Mercy, earned her Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree from Michigan State University. This unique fusion of a medical degree and a religious vocation prepared Sr. Mary Lisa to become the medical director of St. Mary’s Legacy Clinic (SMLC), a mobile clinic that serves the poor in eastern Kentucky. The clinic covers a lot of ground. Last year it traveled over 11,000 miles. SMLC has 10 practice sites and will see over 1,500 patients this year with the help of a network of 100 health care professionals who lend their medical expertise to the mission. Seventy-two percent of patients live in extreme poverty and lack insurance and basic health care. Sr. Mary Lisa attends to the spiritual needs of her patients alongside their physical ailments. She never separates the healing of the body from the ministry to the soul.

**Eddie Michael | Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky**

Eddie Michael, a lifelong resident of Louisa, Kentucky, repairs both homes and hearts. He is the executive director of the Father Beiting Appalachian Mission Center (FBAMC). The center is an outreach ministry of the Diocese of Lexington that welcomes volunteer groups from around the U.S. who donate thousands of hours conducting home repairs in Appalachia. Michael leads an average of 200 home visits per year to assess the social service needs of the family as well as the condition of their home. The Home Repair Program completes an average of 50 home repair projects annually, with projects ranging from handicap-accessible ramp installments to roofing repairs. Oftentimes, former clients are so grateful that they become volunteers themselves, leading to an ever-growing ministry of compassion.

**Sarah Alley | Diocese of Memphis, Tennessee**

Sarah Alley is a former athlete and teacher who hasn’t let her ALS diagnosis stop her from serving God and her community. Several months after her diagnosis in 2015, Alley said she was angry with God. But He spoke to her saying, “Sarah, you are much more than your body.” That is when Alley discovered her special ability, which was forged by embracing her adversity and grounded in the enabling Spirit of God. Although she is unable to use her hands to type due to her illness, she uses her eyes to create words to blog about her experience with ALS and her journey to spread God’s love to others. Additionally, she is the race director for “Autumn Walk for ALS,” and works with Matthew 25:40, a local outreach ministry that assists in feeding 700 people per month. She also runs three separate weekly Bible studies with people from different Christian denominations. “As long as I’m living, I will use my brain to help others in need. I love my city, and I love the Lord,” she said.

**Father Earl Henley, MSC | Diocese of San Bernardino, California**

Father Earl Henley is an 82-year-old missionary priest who continues to listen to and learn from the Native American communities he serves in southern California. A priest of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Fr. Henley says that “presence” is key in his ministry as he drives hundreds of miles every month working among six different Native American Catholic communities. He honors and preserves their traditions and culture as he encourages them to pursue their dreams and continue to journey with God. Fr. Henley believes that allowing the richness of our Catholic faith speak to the beauty of the Native American culture results in a vibrant spirituality which enhances all who participate.

 To read more about this year’s Lumen Christi finalists, visit [catholicextension.org/finalists](https://www.catholicextension.org/what-we-do/lumen-christi-award/2024-2025-lumen-christi-award-finalists/).

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**About Catholic Extension Society**:  Founded in 1905, Catholic Extension Society works in solidarity with people to build up vibrant and transformative Catholic faith communities among the poor in the poorest regions of America. For more information visit[www.catholicextension.org](http://www.catholicextension.org/); follow us on Facebook at[facebook.com/catholicextension](http://www.facebook.com/catholicextension) or on Twitter at[@CathExtension](http://www.twitter.com/cathextension).