

H O P E



FOUNDATION
for the Diocese of Helena

Through Him, With Him & In Him – Transforming Our Diocese

ANNUAL REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2024

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President's Letter



Hope! There's so much of it in our Diocese right now and much of it is because of the success of the **Because He First Loved Us** Campaign for Catholic Life. Hope for our future! Hope for the number of Catholics coming back to church! Hope for the evangelization of those new

to our faith! Hope for more seminarians and support for our retired clergy!

I feel it's very important to tell you the results of the campaign and its impact not only on our Diocese, but on the Foundation.

- The campaign goal was \$30 million. The Foundation raised:
 - **\$28,992,503** in campaign pledges;
 - **\$11,800,062** pledged to combined campaigns: Resurrection (Bozeman), Cathedral (Helena), St. Mary (Stevensville);
 - **\$48,287,300** in estate gifts;
 - A total of **\$89,079,865** gifts promised!!
- 3,872 pledges were made to this campaign.
- More than \$6,236,913 has already been distributed to the parishes and diocese, and distributions are made quarterly.

This unprecedented generosity reflects a growing hope in our people and their faith. The success of our campaign marks a pivotal moment in our diocese, much like the building of the Cathedral or of Carroll College and will be transformational for the Diocese and the Foundation. We are so grateful for all those who generously pledged money or participated in the campaign.

Matthew 5:16 tells us, "Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father". This campaign has advanced the ability of our parishes and diocese to evangelize and walk with people as they are drawn closer in relationship with Our Savior, Jesus Christ! These results are immeasurable and will be felt in our parishes and communities for generations!

Thank you for being that light shining before others; a light that has truly brought hope back to our diocese and to the Foundation. •

God bless,

Rona Davison | *President 2023-2025*

Executive Director Message



The theme of this annual report is HOPE! The Because He First Loved Us campaign has given our Diocese so much to be thankful for, so much to be excited for! But there is one prayer request we get over and over again. “Our children have left the Church.” So how can we help?

First and foremost, we pray without ceasing. Then we have faith and trust. We know that Jesus the Good Shepherd is actively leaving the 99 sheep to find the one that is lost and bringing them home. It is imperative that there be a Church for our children to come home to, but when we are gone, who will support our faith?

One of the many stories that struck me this year came from a couple who indicated an estate gift. When asked why they would be so generous to the Church through the Foundation, the couple replied “God has been so generous to us, and with deep gratitude, we wanted to use the gifts He entrusted to us to help others experience the same joy of faith

that has blessed our lives. We recognize this gift is our final opportunity to witness to our children—to show them how foundational our faith is to who we are. We see a gift from our estate as a gift to our children and grandchildren.”

The hope the *Because He First Love Us* campaign has built in our diocese doesn’t have to end when the campaign is over. Through falling in love with Jesus daily, and the gifts you leave in your will, we can perpetuate that hope for our children . . . and their children and grandchildren, ensuring that the faith we hold dear continues to be shared, nurtured, and lived by the generations that follow us.

If you would like to talk about the future and how to make a gift that keeps giving through generations, I’d love to discuss your options with you. You can reach me at (406) 389-7051 or email me at dthies@dohmt.org.

In Christ,

Daniel Thies | Executive Director

FDOH STAFF

Dan Thies, Executive Director | Karen Ford, Accountant | Margaret Herriges, Engagement & Marketing

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A sincere thank you to Rod Christiaens, St. Francis, Valier and Helen McCarthy, JD, Butte Catholic Community North, for their time and talent serving on the Foundation’s Board of Trustees. Your support, expertise and vision for the future of our faith cannot be overstated. You always led with your heart for Jesus and for that we are grateful.



Let the Children Come to Me

CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD IN THE DIOCESE OF HELENA

A five-year old child kneels at a prayer table with the crucifix, touching it gently, looking at it for at least five minutes. He points to Jesus on the cross and tells the catechist, "I wasn't playing at the prayer table; I was talking to God. My dad died, but I know that he lives."

This is a story from one of our parishes in the Diocese of Helena that offers the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS). "The whole thought behind CGS is the child already has a relationship with God. We are meant to help that relationship grow," explained Dawn Brannman, the Religious Education Director at Saint Mary Catholic Community in Helena. That's what makes CGS different from other RE programs. "We don't teach them to pray, we are accompanying the kids. It's God teaching them. We will give them a presentation then tell them to talk to God about their questions."

Unlike a typical textbook based RE program, CGS provides children with hands-on materials to introduce them to Scripture and the liturgy in a developmentally appropriate way. In other words, CGS profoundly respects who children

are and how they learn. Children, especially young children, learn by doing, rather than by traditional instruction. When we provide them with materials which allow them to interact, for example: the parable of the good shepherd or a moment in Mass; they internalize the meaning of these scriptures and liturgical acts . . . And the children respond to it with joy.

A recent article in *Aleteia* describes the program beautifully: "CGS is more like *Lectio Divina* for children. Trained catechists prepare a special environment to help children come to know God and spend time in prayer and contemplation. The children hear, touch, and work with materials that help them understand the life of Jesus, stories from Scripture, the liturgical year, and things of the Church. These tactile experiences, set in an environment of peaceful quiet, offer each child a space where they can talk to God and draw closer to Him on their own. Their relationship with the Good Shepherd is nurtured in a very special way."¹

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is the fruit of a 50-year collaboration between Sofia Cavalletti (a biblical scholar) and Gianna Gobbi



CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD IN OUR DIOCESE

Anaconda Catholic Community	Level 1	St. Francis Xavier, Missoula	Levels 1, 2 & 3
Christ the King, Missoula	Level 1	Saint Mary, Helena	Level 1*
Divine Mercy Academy, Belgrade	Level 1*	St. Matthew, Kalispell	Level 1
Immaculate Conception, Polson	Level 1	St. Richard, Columbia Falls	Level 1
Immaculate Conception, Deer Lodge	Level 1		
Resurrection, Bozeman	Level 1		
		<i>*Level 2 coming soon</i>	

(a Montessori educator), who opened the first “atrium” in Rome in 1954. And it is built on the educational principles of Maria Montessori. It has grown and spread to more than 65 countries and now, it is being introduced in the Diocese of Helena. St. Francis Xavier Parish (Missoula) was the first to offer CGS within our Diocese in 2018. Since that time, nine other locations have sprung up and more are working on acquiring the training needed.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is taught in three levels: Level 1—3-6 year olds; Level 2—6-9 year olds; Level 3—9-12 year olds. There are currently nine parishes/schools in the Helena Diocese with CGS programs. Most of these locations offer Level 1 only at this point, but not only are the number of parishes bringing this program to their children increasing, so are the levels being offered.

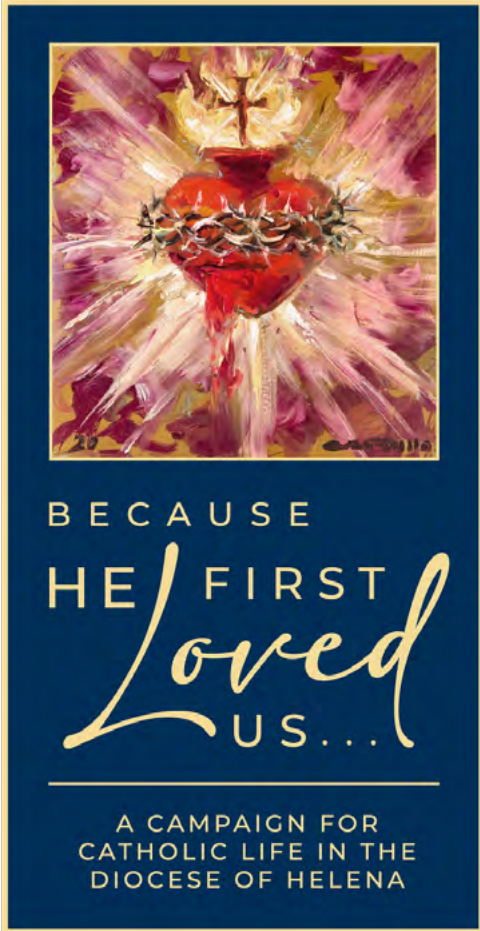
The teachers are called “catechists” and the classroom is referred to as an “atrium”. Items used in the atrium are handmade and painted by parishioners. It requires many volunteers, so CGS becomes a parish-wide event. The catechists must undergo a personal formational experience with 90-100 hours of preparation (per atrium level) in the Biblical and liturgical themes that correspond with the developmental stages of the children. They implement a servant leadership role, using facilitation instead of direct instruction techniques. “CGS is what God put me on this earth for,” Michele Dexter, the Director of CGS at St. Francis Xavier told us. “It opens up our faith and encourages wonder and awe.” The catechist’s job is to mediate an encounter between the child and the Lord . . . and then step back.

At Saint Mary’s, nearly 60 parishioners signed up to help make the items used in the atrium.

Everything used in the atrium was made by parishioners. One person made an altar that looks just like the altar at Saint Mary’s! Each project was accompanied with a prayer that they were asked to focus on while making the item; bringing Jesus into the very construction of the tools used in the atrium. In this way, the Good Shepherd encompasses the entire parish.

Trina Matthews, a catechist at Divine Mercy Academy in Belgrade shared, “When the child is able to meet Jesus in this stage of development, meeting him with joy and basking in that gift—they want to return that gift of joy to their community. They learn who they were meant to be and that they are beloved of God and then they can give Him to the world. It’s discipleship and it starts with the little ones.”

Continued on pg 8



Blessed be the Lord!

A CELEBRATION OF FAITH AND THANKSGIVING

With grateful hearts, we share the results of the *Because HE First Loved Us* Campaign for Catholic Life:



\$28,992,503

PLEGGED



\$11,800,062

PLEGGED TO
COMBINED
CAMPAIGNS FOR
RESURRECTION
(BOZEMAN),
CATHEDRAL OF ST.
HELENA, ST. MARY
(STEVENSVILLE)



\$48,287,300

ESTATE GIFTS

\$89,079,865

TOTAL GIFTS PROMISED

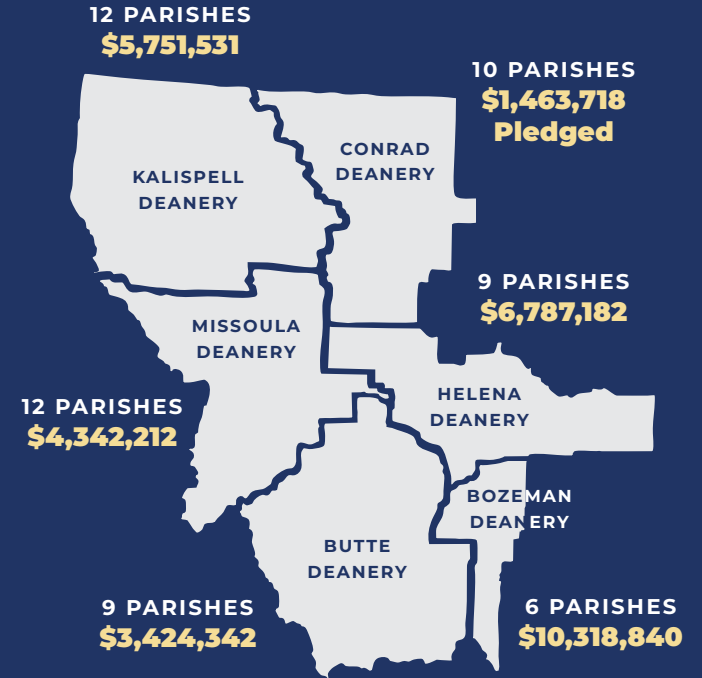
This amazing result was achieved thanks to the faithful and supportive people in our Diocese.

Whether you gave financially or in prayer, our goal was reached—and exceeded—because of YOU!

These gifts are already being distributed to parishes and missions to meet their individual campaign purposes and to the Diocese to build evangelization efforts, provide for seminarian education and

clergy senior status retirement, and for the restoration of the Cathedral of St. Helena.

A special thank you to our parish priests who gave so much of themselves to meet their people and their goals. All Glory to God for the graces He has given and the faithful, loving, prayerful people who contributed to the success of this campaign!



\$6,236,913

DISTRIBUTED TO PARISHES TO DATE

\$4,019,585

ENDOWED WITH THE FOUNDATION TO DATE

\$3,554,658

DISTRIBUTED TO PRIESTS' RETIREMENT AND CATHEDRAL RESTORATION TO DATE

\$8,704,740

RAISED BY BISHOP VETTER



Defining success for the CGS doesn't come with hard numbers; it comes from the stories we hear of the impact on the lives of the children who participate. Parents have shared that their children are much more prayerful in Mass . . . remember these are three- to six-year-olds! The children learn to meditate, they use their imagination and put themselves in the scriptural scene. They are learning to become quiet and reflect. It's a heart and mind connection.

At Saint Mary's, each CGS family is given a home altar with a bible and the liturgical colors. One family disclosed that as soon as they set it up their child said, "Okay Mom and Dad, I need

to be alone now. I have a lot of praying to do," and she prayed there for half an hour!

The catechists at Divine Mercy Academy share similar children's stories, or as they call them, "pearls". A four-year-old child, after being presented with the City of Jerusalem 3D-map, sat down next to it and said, "I'm going to really enjoy being in this city." In a different atrium, a catechist shares the story of a five-year-old who was learning the Found Sheep lesson. The child asked, "Jesus calls the sheep by name; what are their names?" She started naming the sheep after her family members and suddenly realized, "The sheep are us!"

These stories—and so many more—move our hearts and define success as hearts that open and fill with the joy of Jesus. Trina from Divine Mercy Academy expounded, "It's been extremely positive and hope-filled because we have this door that has opened in front of us and so many graces are pouring through." •

"Let the children come to me and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it."

— LUKE 18:16-17

The Foundation has a robust grants program for parishes and ministries within our Diocese. Each summer we award (approximately) \$100,000 in "Faith-in-Action" grants, up to \$5,000 each, to build evangelization efforts. To date, \$25,500 in grants have been given to these CGS programs in the Diocese of Helena.

Read more stories about the beautiful faith displayed by the children in CGS at fdoh.org/stories.

To learn more about Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, contact the Evangelization office at the Diocese of Helena at (406)389-7068.

¹ <https://aleteia.org/2025/04/09/the-book-of-wine-and-flowers>

By the Numbers

FISCAL YEAR 2024



247 CHARITABLE GIFT ANNUITIES MANAGED

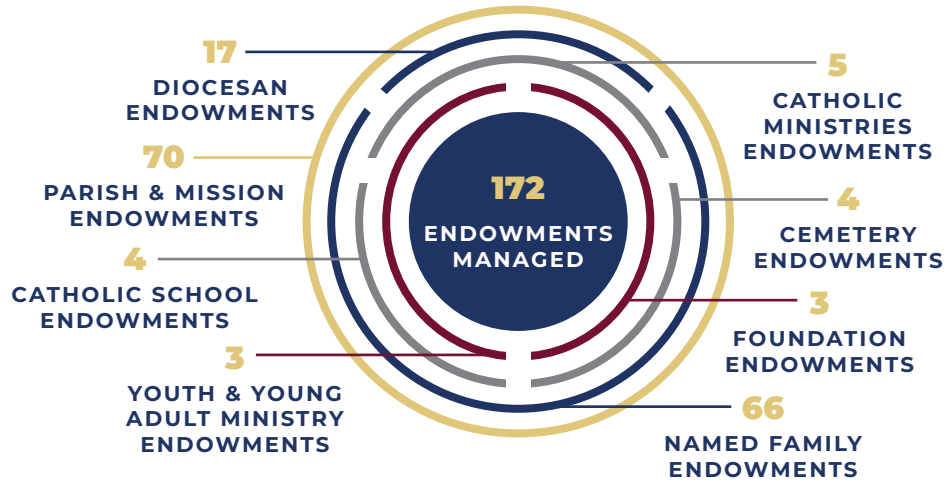


17 BOARD MEMBERS



3 STAFF

NUMBER OF ENDOWMENTS



\$1,275,992

FOUNDATION'S TOTAL DISTRIBUTIONS
FISCAL YEAR 2024

\$374,168

PARISH
MINISTRIES

\$111,887

YOUTH & YOUNG
ADULT MINISTRY

\$73,123

AID TO NEEDY

\$295,903

BISHOP'S PASTORAL
OUTREACH

\$51,275

OTHER DIOCESAN
MINISTRIES

\$88,026

GRANTS

\$175,357

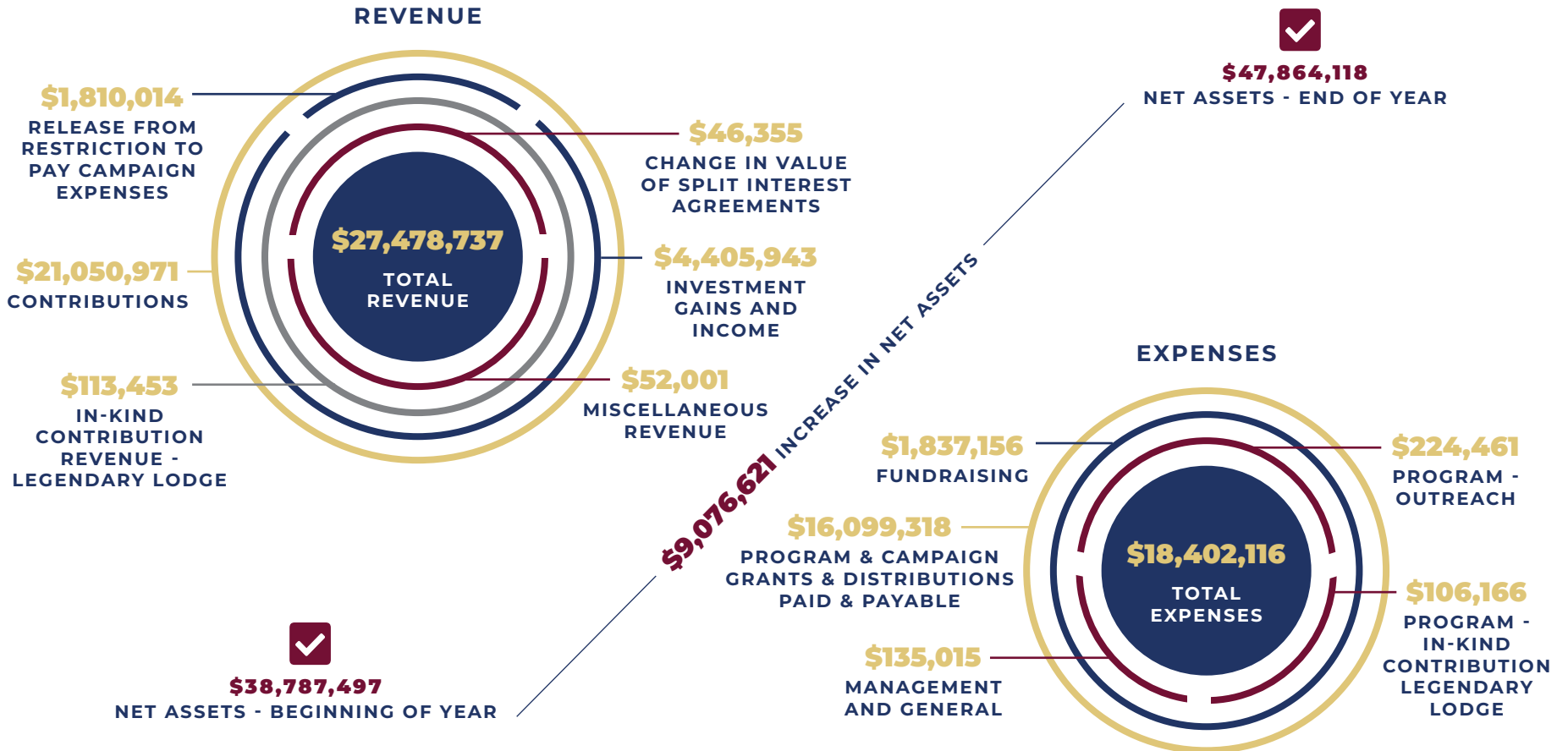
PRIESTLY
SUPPORT

\$61,240

GUATEMALA
MISSION

\$45,013

OTHER
NON-DIOCESAN



Bishop's Letter



When I was a kid, I was given a pail calf to raise as my own. I fed it, and took care of it, but it kept getting sicker and sicker until it died. I was so afraid to tell my dad, but I had to. I said, "I did everything I could." He asked me, "Why didn't you come to me for help?" I didn't have an

answer. My dad told me, "If you had come to me for help, that calf may not have died." Thankfully, I had another pail calf. When it got sick, I went to my dad for help. He helped me, and when this calf died, I knew I really had done everything I could because I went to him for help. And isn't that true with our heavenly Father, too? If we turn to him, he will walk with us.

I want to thank you all for your prayers for, and generosity to, the **Because He First Loved Us** Campaign for Catholic Life. It was a success because our Diocese turned to the Lord first. This campaign was about bringing hearts to Jesus, first and foremost, but in today's world, we need money to help us do that.

The Because He First Loved Us campaign, has created so much hope in our Diocese. Parishes are busy planning their evangelization efforts, our retired priests have a more secure future, the Cathedral has been repaired, and we have 13 seminarians! God willing, more will enter the seminary next fall. In this Jubilee Year of Hope, isn't this a beautiful thing to be realized? And isn't it wonderful to realize it's because we turned to our Father in our hour of need?

Thank you for your generous hearts. Know my prayers for you and please pray for me. ●

In Christ, I am

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Austin A. Vetter".

Bishop Austin A. Vetter
Bishop of the Helena Diocese



The Foundation's gift to the people of our Diocese

Create a will today to care for your loved ones and steward the resources God has entrusted to you. Wills are expensive. This one is free!



→ Get started at FreeWill.com/fdoh

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