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Contact: Annie Ryland, Director of Outreach

annie@fundforvocations.org

(703) 774-4183

Fund for Vocations Awarded \$4.5 Million to Expand Support for Catholic Vocations – *Single Largest Gift in Fund’s History Represents Landmark Investment in Religious Life for the U.S. Catholic Church.*

West Chester, PA – April 16, 2026

The *Mater Ecclesiae* Fund for Vocations announced today a transformational gift of \$4.5 million from an anonymous benefactor. This gift, payable over three years, represents a catalytic investment in the renewal of the whole Church.

Encouraging vocations to the priesthood and religious life in an increasingly secular culture requires building new solutions to help young people respond to the call. While the decline in vocations has many causes, financial obstacles represent a significant and solvable aspect of the crisis. The new grant, the single-largest donation in the Fund for Vocations’ history, aims at encouraging more young men and women to renew the Church by making vocational discernment as financially feasible as other life paths.

“This landmark gift from a visionary Catholic benefactor comes at a critical moment in the Church’s effort to increase vocations,” said Executive Director Mary Radford. “This gift allows us to expand our grantmaking ability to more candidates and communities. It also allows us to build momentum and awareness around this easily fixable issue in the Church’s vocation pipeline. We can’t wait to partner with more Catholic leaders, communities, and candidates in the effort to increase vocations.”

According to a 2024 survey by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, one-third of candidates are unable to enter religious life due to their educational debt. Student debt can also prevent or delay entry to diocesan formation because most dioceses have caps on the amount of debt with which a young man may enter seminary. Some candidates also report struggling to afford the cost of travel to visit and discern with religious communities.

Since 2007, the Fund for Vocations has helped address the vocations crisis by removing the obstacle of student loan debt for future religious via the St. Joseph Grant Program. This program takes over candidates' monthly student loan payments while they are in formation. In each of the last five years, 25-40 young men and women have been able to enter religious life thanks to these grants.

In addition to St. Joseph grants, the Fund for Vocations has established an ancillary program called the DAD Fund ("Discretionary Anti-Discouragement" Fund) to assist young people with other practical costs associated with discernment and entry. Eligible expenses include items like travel expenses for "Come and See" visits, psychological evaluations required for entry, health insurance premiums (which many religious communities do not cover until first profession of vows) and more. Funds are distributed directly to religious communities to ensure that vocation directors can respond quickly and prudently when a serious candidate needs assistance.

"Every vocation is a priceless gift to the Church," Radford added. "We want to make sure that solvable, financial concerns, whether they are student loans, travel costs, required evaluations, or basic entry expenses, never become cause for discouragement or delay along the journey of discernment."

"Like thousands of other lay people across the country, I began contributing to the Fund for Vocations out of a desire to help great religious orders thrive," said Board Chair Matt Gerken. "Every new candidate to whom the Fund makes a grant is a beautiful sign of contradiction in our very broken world. We are humbled and honored to steward this new gift, which will remove obstacles to vocations and support formation for so many more young people than we have been able to reach in the past."

Since its founding, the Fund for Vocations has made over 350 grants and paid out over \$6.2 million toward the student loan debt of young men and women in religious life. Eighty-four grant recipients are now fully professed or ordained, living out their vows and serving the Church. An additional eighty-two grant recipients are still in formation, preparing to give their lives to Christ.

Katherine Huber, who founded and ran the organization alongside her husband Corey until 2020, shared "Corey and I are so thankful that the organization we established so many years ago has been given such an amazing and generous gift that will enable it to carry on for many years in the future under its new leadership."

"Something mysterious and joyful is happening in the Catholic Church in the United States," said Anne Folan, a longtime friend and board member of the Fund. Citing a March 2026 feature story in the New York Times about the historically unprecedented number of converts to the faith in recent years, she added, "Most of this huge influx are young people! The Church will need more priests and religious to serve them, and God willing, some of them now coming in will hear

and answer that call. The Fund for Vocations will be here for them, and thanks to this incredible gift, we'll be able to meet the needs of this beautiful renewal.”

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ABOUT THE FUND FOR VOCATIONS

The Mater Ecclesiae Fund for Vocations seeks to foster vocations to the Catholic priesthood and religious life by removing financial obstacles that may prevent otherwise qualified candidates from pursuing formation. The Fund for Vocations St. Joseph Grant program takes over student loan payments for candidates during formation and pays off loans fully within five years of final vows for those who persevere. The DAD Fund (or Discretionary Anti-Discouragement Fund) awards funding to religious communities which they can use to defray other expenses related to candidate entry including pre-novitiate health insurance, psychological intake evaluations, travel expenses, and other incidentals. The Fund for Vocations is entirely funded by donations from the Catholic lay faithful. No candidate is ever expected to fundraise for the Fund and is never asked to pay back any monies the Fund paid on his or her behalf during formation if they decide not to proceed to vows. Our vision is for anyone with a vocation to discern free from pressure and without delay. Incorporated in Virginia in late 2006, the Fund for Vocations is a registered nonprofit with headquarters in West Chester, Pennsylvania. fundforvocations.org