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## **Catholic Extension Announces the 2023-2024 Lumen Christi Award Finalists**

Chicago, IL — [Catholic Extension](https://catholicextension.org) today announces the 2023-2024 Lumen Christi Award finalists. The [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, 41 Extension Dioceses submitted nominations for the award. Out of the 41 nominations, seven were chosen as award finalists.

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

"What this year's class of finalists share in common is that they all reach out to people who are in great need," said Fr. Jack Wall, president of Catholic Extension. "They are ministering to those who are victims of disasters, war, violence, and societal exclusion. Yet, instead of letting them remain as victims, our finalists have stepped up to help restore the humanity of those they serve and help them reclaim their full potential. They do this by radiating and revealing Christ's light that is present among them, that needs to be let out."

The following seven nominees have been chosen as award finalists and will receive \$10,000 to support and enhance their ministries. From among these finalists, the 2023-2024 Lumen Christi Award recipient will ultimately be selected and given \$25,000, along with an additional \$25,000 for the nominating diocese. The award recipient will be revealed this fall.

The seven finalists include:

### **BROTHER DALE MOONEY, FSC | DIOCESE OF HELENA, MONTANA**

Brother Dale Mooney plants hope and the love of Christ in the community he serves in the Blackfeet Nation Reservation in the Diocese of Helena, Montana. For the past 11 years, he has served as president of the De La Salle Blackfeet School on the Blackfeet Nation reservation. The school educates fourth through eighth graders, helping prepare them emotionally and academically for high school. The school is associated with Little Flower Parish, a faith

community serving the Blackfeet people that Catholic Extension has supported for more than five decades. Only 60 percent of Native students enrolled in the reservation's public schools graduate high school, yet De La Salle Blackfeet School has nearly a 100 percent graduation rate for its students. Brother Dale and his devoted team do this by earning the respect of the community and parents. One-on-one tutoring, excellent school athletics, and cultural and service immersions are also part of the school's formula for success. Every day, Brother Dale models to the children what it means to serve.

#### **FATHER OLIN PIERRE-LOUIS | ARCHDIOCESE OF SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO**

Haitian refugees arriving in rickety boats find shelter at this priest's poor parish. The refugees fleeing the chaos in Haiti, washing up on the shores of Puerto Rico, find refuge with the help of Father Olin Pierre-Louis, who is the pastor of San Mateo Parish in San Juan. The Haitian-born priest of the Archdiocese of San Juan is the pastor of San Mateo. Its weekly collection is only \$200, but Father Pierre-Louis knows that it does not take a big budget to live the Gospel. Every week, the Creole-speaking priest, houses migrants who are released to his care by customs and border protection. Twice a month, Father Pierre-Louis fills the parish van with food, clothing, and other necessities. They drive it to the coast, take a 24-hour ferry to the Dominican Republic, drive it to Haiti and then deliver the goods. They do this in hope that Haitians won't be forced to migrate and put their lives in danger.

#### **SISTER CATHERINE NAGL | DIOCESE OF GRAND ISLAND, NEBRASKA**

From a young age, Sister Catherine always knew that she wanted to help children, especially those who require special care and attention. Sister Catherine's ministry, called The Family of the Good Shepherd, takes place in an unassuming house on a quiet street in Grand Island, Nebraska. Since 2010, she has cared for more than 50 children, many of whom were considered too challenging to be housed or fostered by other caretakers. She takes in short-and-long-term foster children and helps them understand their worth as well as realize their potential.

#### **CARMEN ALICIA RODRÍGUEZ ECHEVARRÍA | DIOCESE OF PONCE, PUERTO RICO**

At an earthquake-damaged school, Carmen Alicia Rodríguez Echevarría is the principal of Inmaculada Concepción School in Guayanilla, Puerto Rico. The 2020 earthquake destroyed one half of the school's facility, when the church collapsed and fell on top of a section of the school. The school continues to operate with only half of the space. Undeterred, she has more than doubled the enrollment of the school during the past three years as principal. Enrollment increased from 90 students to 230. The school serves families who are in financial distress due to the economic downturn and disasters that have afflicted Puerto Rico in recent years. In spite of their many challenges, the school provides excellent education to the children of this community.

#### **SISTERS OF THE ORDER OF ST. BASIL THE GREAT | UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC ARCHEPARCHY OF PHILADELPHIA**

The Sisters of the Order of St. Basil the Great's monastery in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, is less than 40 miles from the frontlines of the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia. In their Zaporizhzhia monastery and across Ukraine, the sisters regularly house women and children, whose husbands and fathers are at war and whose homes and livelihoods have been destroyed. They give comfort and clothing to the soldiers, some of whom have come to their monastery straight from the battlefield trenches. They also make regular supply runs to outlying war-torn

villages in combat zones, bringing food, gas for cooking, water, clothes and sleeping bags in the coldest months. The sisters also provide care to refugees in the U.S., including at their motherhouse in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, just north of Philadelphia where many of the displaced Ukrainians now live. The sisters provide food, clothing, and furniture to help Ukrainians during their difficult first months in America.

### **ST. MARÍA EUFRASIA HOME | DIOCESE OF ARECIBO, PUERTO RICO**

Girls in crisis pregnancies as young as 11 years old find support at St. María Eufrasia Home in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. Many of them are pregnant as the result of abuse or assault. What these girls share in common is that they all independently decided to see their pregnancies through before arriving at St. María Eufrasia, where they receive help to pursue that goal. The current facility was built with support from Catholic Extension in 2001. Since the early days of St. María Eufrasia's founding in the mid-1980s, over 1,000 pregnant girls under the age of 18 have been helped. The girls need assistance not only with their own ongoing emotional and educational development, but also with caring for the babies they have decided to bring into this world. Psychological counseling, health services, tutoring, career support and up to two years of housing are all part of what they receive at St. María Eufrasia.

### **MARÍA-CRUZ GRAY | DIOCESE OF SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH**

During María-Cruz Gray's 24 years as director of Hispanic ministry in the Catholic Church in Utah, Gray has left no community of the state untouched, no matter how small or remote. The result is that she has become a visible manifestation of the Church's presence and care to 200,000 Hispanic Catholics throughout the state. The key to Gray's success was to make her ministry more than the mission of one woman. Everywhere she has gone in Utah, she has empowered a new generation of leaders for the Church, finding new difference makers in the most far-flung communities. In her efforts to identify committed lay leaders across the state, Gray made sure that she went not only to the metro areas but also to places where Catholics are largely a minority and where people work difficult, laborious jobs in agriculture or mining. Many of the Catholic missions in these communities don't have resident priests, adding urgency to finding committed lay leaders to ensure that the Church remains strong. Gray has been instrumental in the formation of Hispanic lay ecclesiastical ministers throughout the diocese.

To read more about the Lumen Christi Award, visit <http://www.catholicextension.org/lumen-christi-award>.

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