



## POPE FRANCIS BESTOWS HONORS ON 15 PERSONS FOR EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE TO THE DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH



Bishop Michael Olson announced that Pope Francis has bestowed the Benemerenti Medal on 15 Catholic faithful who have provided exceptional service to the Diocese of Fort Worth, including one posthumous award.

The awards will be bestowed on the individuals by Bishop Olson on Saturday, February 10, 2024, during the vigil Mass at St. Patrick Cathedral, which is located at 1206 Throckmorton St., Fort Worth. The vigil Mass is at 5 p.m. and it is open to the public. The Benemerenti Medal will also be presented to the family of a deceased individual who provided exceptional service to the Diocese.

The honorees come from various parts of the Diocese, which comprises 28 counties in North Texas. “Since its establishment in 1969 as a diocese under the episcopal leadership of Bishop John Cassata, the Diocese of Fort Worth has always placed a priority on the importance of baptismal call to ministry. The Diocese of Fort Worth continues to be blessed to have many lay members who further the mission of the Church in North Texas,” Bishop Olson said. “The individuals to whom Pope Francis has graciously awarded the Benemerenti Medal represent so many exceptional examples of faithful lay ministers in the Diocese of

Fort Worth.”

The Benemerenti Medal was first given by Pope Pius VI as a military award to papal soldiers in the late 1700s. In mid-1800s, Pope Gregory XVI created a special Benemerenti medal to reward those who fought courageously in the papal army at Ferrara, Bologna, and Vienna. In 1925, Pope Pius XI expanded the granting of the medal to include individuals in civil, military, laity, and clergy positions as a recognition of exceptional service to the Catholic Church.

**The Diocese of Fort Worth Benemerenti Medal honorees are:**

- **Michael Brown** of Wichita Falls (posthumously to his family) for his commitment to seminarian education. Over the course of more than 30 years, he raised more than \$3.5 million to help fund the formation of priests by organizing semi-annual fundraising dinners.
- **Joyce Brown Thomas** of Fort Worth for “exemplary commitment to service at Our Mother of Mercy Catholic Church” as sacristan, Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, reader at Mass, officer of the St. Anne’s Altar Society, a core member of the diocesan Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Annual Memorial Mass and leadership within the National Conference of Catholic Women.
- **Jim Goldsworthy** of Gainesville for years of generous stewardship of St. Mary Catholic Church and School in Gainesville as well as service to the City of Gainesville as vice mayor and mayor, using the spirit of his Catholic faith to “courageously [help] heal old wounds and to promote racial harmony among all people.”
- **LaDorne Hart** of Keller for “unwavering support of your husband, Monsignor E. James Hart, through his conversion and appointment to diocesan chancellor and moderator of the curia, which has allowed his ministry, and yours by extension, to bear an abundance of fruit in the life of the Church within the Diocese of Fort Worth. You have facilitated his work as a priest and a respected leader by your joyful sacrifices and humility.”
- **John Crumley** of Fort Worth in recognition of “outstanding service and dedication to our faith community” including with the Knights of Columbus, the Serra Club, and the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre; as a St. Patrick Cathedral Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion and a reader; and as the diocesan attorney in assisting the bishop in developing new policies regarding safe environment for minors, just employment practices, and new norms and practices for ethical conduct of the clergy and lay employees.
- **Nancy Eder** of Fort Worth for more than 25 years of “exemplary commitment to the ongoing medical care for the priests, seminarians, and the Catholic schools, and most especially your creative response and implementation of COVID-19 protocols throughout the Diocese of Fort Worth.”
- **Deacon James Novak** of Seymour for years of “outstanding service and dedication” to the faith community as an individual and as a permanent deacon at Seymour’s Sacred Heart Parish and St. Mary of the Assumption Parish in Megargel, which includes formation of diocesan seminarians, enculturation of foreign priests, and collaboration with other local Protestant communities in the Seymour area to provide for the physical and spiritual needs of indigent and itinerant poor.
- **Rilda Novak** of Seymour for “outstanding service and dedication” to the faith through her work at Seymour’s Sacred Heart Parish for the bereaved, as mentor for young couples preparing to receive the sacrament of Matrimony, as well as for dutiful service to the Altar Society in preparing and repairing vestments and serving as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.
- **Doreen Quinn** of Arlington for “dedicated service in fostering Catholic education and supporting and nurturing her family as a dedicated wife and mother. As a parishioner of Most Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, you have provided invaluable assistance to couples in their preparation for the sacrament of Matrimony and served as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.” She has been a member of the Fort Worth Chapter of Legatus since 2007.

- **Bill Quinn** of Arlington for “dedicated service and generous stewardship of your gifts,” especially for his intellectual skill and experience as a money manager by assisting the Diocese by screening companies for investment and avoiding investment with companies who do not align with Catholic teaching.
- **Mary Patricia Pelletier** of Arlington for her “dedicated life as a wife of a disabled veteran and mother of five children” who practice the Catholic faith, as well as operating a crisis pregnancy center that “has saved the lives of over 10,000 babies throughout its history, and the work you continue to do with James [Pelletier, her son] in assisting women in crisis pregnancies since the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* has changed the lives of so many.”
- **Deacon Tacho Perez** of Wichita Falls for “dedicated service among the Hispanic population” in Wichita Falls, including newly arrived immigrants as well as longtime citizens and for serving as a permanent deacon by assisting at Mass, consoling the bereaved, conducting funerals, visiting the sick, and bringing the homebound Holy Communion.
- **Tessy Ross** of Fort Worth for “dedicated service in fostering Catholic education as a St. Andrew Catholic School junior high school teacher and, secondly in the Diocesan Catholic School Office to address the needs of financially challenged schools.” She holds active membership in the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre to include planning and organization of regional conferences of the Order and assisting in planning and organizing large diocesan celebrations including the ordination and installation of two bishops and the celebration of the 40th and 50th anniversaries of the Diocese’s establishment.
- **Bill Ross** of Fort Worth for “dedicated service in fostering and promotion of vocations as a member of the Serra Club and by organizing the annual Diocesan Vocation Awareness Program to assist young men and women to discern a vocation to priesthood or religious life.” He is an active member in the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre, including planning and organization of regional conferences of the Order.
- **Sandra Townsend** of Fort Worth for “years of outstanding service and dedication” to the faith for her “dedicated joy and care” for her kindergarten students during her 42 years of teaching at St. Andrew Catholic School.

In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI honored 10 individuals in the Diocese of Fort Worth with the Benemerenti Medal.