



The Father McKenna

C E N T E R • I N C

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December 2025 Newsletter

SUNY Brockport Highlights Case Management Intern Max Johnson's Time at the McKenna Center



The end of the fall semester is here, and that sadly means saying goodbye to Max, who has served as a Case Management Intern at the Center over the past months as part of the SUNY Washington Internship Program. Max has had a tremendous impact on our staff, volunteers, and clients, rapidly becoming a core member of our team and a welcome face for returning guests. SUNY Brockport visited the Center a few weeks ago to shine a spotlight on Max's success in an article which you can read [here](#).

Our video team also sat down with Max recently to hear about his time at the Center and what he's found most meaningful about serving men experiencing homelessness and families facing food insecurity in the district. You can watch that video [here](#), and see similar spotlights of other clients and staff on our YouTube channel!



**Final Reminder:
McKenna Center Advent Mass
Saturday, December 20 • 4:00 PM**

Our Advent Mass is this Saturday! We look forward to seeing you for an afternoon of prayer and song as we celebrate the Christmas season! Light refreshments will follow in the Center, and parking will be available in the Gonzaga garage.



Food Pantry Statistics Correction



In our digital 2025 Impact Report, we used the incorrect graphic while highlighting our Food Pantry Program statistics for the year. Given the remarkable year that our Pantry had, we wanted to be sure we shared the results that you helped to create!

Over the past year, our Food Pantry served 1,137 households, a 41% increase over 2024. The team, alongside dedicated community volunteers, facilitated 5,400 pantry visits and distributed more than 160,000 pounds of food!

The Food Pantry has a profound impact on our community, supporting families with small children and serving as a great way to stay in touch with former day program clients now in housing. We also run some of our favorite specialty programs out of the pantry, including Thanksgiving turkey baskets (over 330 this year!) and Christmas presents for children of our member families. We could not be more grateful for your support, which enables these programs to continue to meet needs as demand grows.

Dilexi Te: A Reflection on Pope Leo XIV's First Apostolic Exhortation by Spiritual Director Jimmy Beh (Gonzaga '11)

On the Morning of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Gonzaga gathered for a school wide mass in St. Aloysius Church, which was presided over by Fr. Harry Geib, SJ (one of our Board Members here at the McKenna Center). This was Fr. Geib's farewell mass at Gonzaga as he is being missioned for a new assignment starting in January 2026. We will certainly miss his presence both here at the Center and on Eye St.

In part of Fr. Geib's homily, he shared a simple and powerful reminder about Mary— Mary had free will. Mary could have said yes or no to God, and she decided to say yes. We too, just like Mary, have the same agency throughout our lives. We can say yes or no to God— or as Fr. Geib put it, “yay or nay.”

Thankfully, we do not have to discern God's invitations all on our own— we have Scripture, Tradition, spiritual directors, faith communities, and teachings that aid us in our discernment. And, as of early October 2025, we were given a new teaching by Pope Leo XIV, which reminds us of a difficult and vital path to holiness; **LOVE FOR THE POOR**.



Gonzaga students share lunch with guests

This new teaching, *Dilexi Te*, is Pope Leo's first Apostolic Exhortation, which was started by Pope Francis and then completed by Pope Leo. In it, Leo (and Francis) states clearly in the second chapter;

“Wanting to inaugurate a kingdom of justice, fraternity and solidarity, God has a special place in his heart for those who are discriminated against and oppressed, and he asks us, his Church, to make a decisive and radical choice in favor of the weakest.”

The directness of *Dilexi Te* is both challenging and clear. God is in and with the poor! Always.

So how do we respond? What does decisiveness and radicality look like when we are already juggling many other responsibilities? How can any of us even make a real difference to the personal and structural problems that perpetuate poverty and marginalization?

Well, the first step is for us to stop looking at it as a task or something to squeeze into our schedule. Instead, we must see that we are being called into a new way of being in relationship (solidarity) with the poor and marginalized. As Fr. Greg Boyle, SJ said in a commencement speech, “*You go to the margins not to make a difference, but so that folks at the margins make you different.*”

Every one of us has the resources and time to encounter the marginalized. Whether it is through an informal encounter on the street or a dedicated volunteering opportunity here at McKenna or elsewhere. It does not need to start grandiose— but it must start with a loving gaze that sees the ‘other’ as brother and sister (fraternity).



December Graduation from Catholic Charities' Financial Literacy Class

If we can begin by shifting our perspective from “doing social justice” to caring for and being with our brothers and sisters then we begin to enter into this decisiveness and radicality Leo is calling us to. What could be more radical than seeing a drug addicted, single mom or the formerly incarcerated and now homeless gang member as your brother and sister? The justice for all we wish to see in our world flows out of our right relationship with those in need and not from the top down.

Each of us is being invited by God to favor the weakest and most vulnerable in our society with the freedom to act in our own creative and loving ways. So how will we respond? Yay? Or Nay?

I'll leave you with this quick story from a friend that I think summarizes this well.

Imagine that you lived a full, healthy, happy, and faithful life, and you die peacefully of old age and suddenly you find yourself at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter comes out and joyfully welcomes you. He says, “Your record is looking REALLY good. I just have a quick follow up question. In your life did you feed the hungry, care for the sick, give drink to the thirsty, visit the imprisoned, and welcome the stranger?” You respond confidently, “Yes, I did. I tried my best in life to take the Beatitudes seriously!” Peter goes, “That is so great to hear. Could you tell me some of their names...?”

May you all have a Blessed Advent Season and a very Merry Christmas.

Peace,

Jimmy Beh

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