

Branches on the Vine

NEWS FROM THE ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD AUGUST 29 - SEPTEMBER 4, 2026

Local Friends of the Cross Group Honors St. Montfort's *Spiritual Legacy*

- Story by Karen A. Avitabile

// A Friend of the Cross is one chosen by God from among ten thousand who have reason and sense for their only guide. He is truly divine, raised above reason and thoroughly opposed to the things of sense, for he lives in the light of true faith." — St. Louis de Montfort

In his book, *The Letter to The Friends of the Cross*, St. Louis de Montfort (1673-1716) points out that holiness comes from walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Still published today, the book serves as a guide for lay associations, including one that meets in Waterbury.

Nearly four years ago, Elaine Cerullo of Wolcott established the Friends of the Cross group in Waterbury's St. Patrick Oratory Parish to bring together faithful worshippers dedicated to living in consecration to Christ through the Blessed Virgin Mary.

"It was the perfect name for our group," Cerullo says. "The Letter was one of my favorite reads."

Once a month, some 30 people from St. Patrick Oratory Parish and the greater Waterbury area gather at a local restaurant to enjoy fellowship over a meal, engage in spiritual discussions and offer gratitude through prayer and reciting the rosary. On occasion, a guest speaker gives a presentation.

Cerullo attributes the group's name to a period when she and her husband Louis owned St. Michael's Bookstore in downtown Waterbury and distributed many copies of *The Letter*.



Elaine Cerullo, who founded The Friends of the Cross lay association at St. Patrick Oratory Parish in Waterbury, stands with her husband Louis in front of the sign they created for the monthly gatherings.

After the store closed, several loyal patrons desired to meet socially in a faith-centered environment. Inspired by St. Louis de Montfort's *The Letter*, Cerullo established the Friends of the Cross group to stay in touch with many of her customers and build new friendships.

"We are all church friends," she says, "and have a desire to stay connected."

William O'Brien of Wolcott has been attending the Friends of the Cross gatherings since the beginning. "It's a good time to be with other people," he says. "It's a good social group."

Canon Matthew Weaver, pastor and rector of St. Patrick Oratory Parish, regularly attends the Friends of the Cross gatherings. He praises the group's "dedication, devotion and enthusiasm" and desire to unite as a family in Christ.

"My presence helps to strengthen them," Canon Weaver says. "We are in the presence of the mystical body of Christ. We are all friends of the cross." Father John Mariano, a senior priest of

the Archdiocese of Hartford, has often led the group in praying the rosary. "It's good to get people together and pray," he says, adding, "This is a wholesome experience for me."

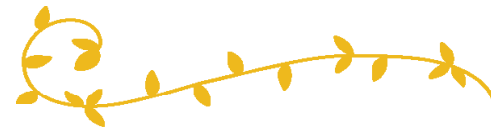
To remember Monsignor John Bevins who frequently joined the Friends of the Cross monthly gatherings, the group keeps his spirit alive with his picture, a candle and flowers on a restaurant table. The longtime Waterbury pastor of the Archdiocese of Hartford died on Oct. 13, 2025, at the age of 93.

"He was a devoted spiritual leader of the Friends of the Cross group," Cerullo adds.

Friends of the Cross gatherings are held on the last Thursday of the month at Amalfi's Italian Ristorante in Waterbury. Anyone who would like to participate should make a reservation by sending an email to elainecerullo@yahoo.com. Participants are asked to bring rosary beads.



Upcoming Events



SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER DATES
THE POWER OF A PRAYING PARENT
St. Catherine of Siena, West Simsbury

Do you worry about your children or grandchildren? Join us for a four-session retreat to discover the power of a praying parent who creates a sacred space for God in their home. "Come" (Matt. 14:29). Email kostelni@cua.edu or scan the QR code to register. Morning session offers a light lunch; evening session offers hors d'oeuvres and small plate meal.

Sept. 23, 30, Oct. 7, 14 @ 10AM – 12:30PM OR
Sept. 26, Oct. 3, 10, 17 @ 6:15PM – 8:30PM



SEPTEMBER 9 @ 6PM **\$25**
OPEN DOORS, OPEN HEARTS WITH FR. RAY KELLY | A BENEFIT CONCERT FOR IMMACARE
Northwest Catholic High School, West Hartford

Join Ireland's beloved Singing Priest, Fr. Ray Kelly, for his only CT performance! Enjoy an unforgettable evening of inspiring music, laughter, and heartwarming stories while supporting ImmaCare's mission to serve individuals experiencing homelessness. Inspired by Fr. Ray's Open Road, Open Heart tour, this special concert celebrates hope, compassion, and new beginnings. 100% of proceeds benefit ImmaCare.

Tickets start at \$25. Doors open at 6:00 PM.
For tickets or information contact Teresa Wierbicki at **860-580-5644** | twierbicki@immacare.org or scan the QR Code.



SEPTEMBER 22 @ 10AM - 11:30AM
FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT, THE HEART OF JOHN'S GOSPEL
Archdiocese of Hartford Pastoral Center, Bloomfield

Join us for a mini course on the Gospel of John - Tuesday mornings at the Pastoral Center in Bloomfield beginning September 22. Email Dayanee.Olivieri@aohct.org to register. The spirituality of this Gospel unfolds gradually as each character encounters Jesus, whose mission is sustained by the abiding presence of the Spirit - a presence that strengthens us in our own daily struggles with the world.



SEPTEMBER 8 @ 7AM - 9AM
CATHOLIC CHARITIES HELP AND HOPE BREAKFAST
Cathedral of St. Joseph, Hartford

Join Catholic Charities for the 2026 Help & Hope Breakfast featuring UConn Coach Dan Hurley. This inspiring morning celebrates hope, resilience, and the power of community while supporting Catholic Charities' mission of providing help and creating hope. Visit www.ccaoh.org/hope for info and sponsorships availability.



SEPTEMBER 12 @ 9AM - 3PM
LOURDES IN A DAY PILGRIMAGE
Cathedral of Saint Joseph, Hartford

Experience the grace and healing power of Lourdes right here in CT! Join Archbishop Coyne, Bishop Reidy, Bishop Rosazza, and Fr. MacNeill for a day of prayer and renewal. The event is fully handicap accessible, and a complimentary lunch will be served. Please RSVP by September 2. Register with Mark Sullivan at lourdesinaday@gmail.com or scan the QR Code.



SEPTEMBER 15 @ 7PM
HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS AND PREVENTION PRESENTATION
St. Paul Parish Hall, Kensington

All are invited to a human trafficking awareness and prevention presentation sponsored by the Culture of Life and Social Action Ministries at St. Paul Parish. A member of the Human Trafficking Task Force of the Archdiocese of Hartford will provide an overview of human trafficking and introduce a prevention framework for engaging parishioners in this important work. Participants will learn about key elements of prevention and practical steps that parishes, ministries, and individuals can take to reduce vulnerability and strengthen their communities.

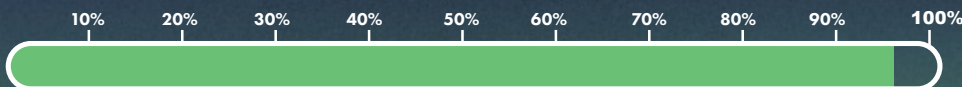


SEPTEMBER 20 @ 7:15PM
FOR HUMANITY'S SAKE: POPE LEO XIV AND THE AI REVOLUTION
St. Thomas More Golden Center, New Haven

A public discussion of Magnifica Humanitas, the pope's long anticipated response to the breakneck advance of artificial intelligence and the implications for human flourishing. Join us for this multi-sided conversation with a panel of distinguished experts about the document's premises, arguments, and response thus far, as well as its potential influence on the most consequential technological development of our time. Visit stm.yale.edu to reserve a spot.

2026 ARCHBISHOP'S ANNUAL APPEAL

Scan the QR code to learn how you can make a lasting impact!



Total Goal: \$10M 98.84% as of 8/17/26

\$9,884,197.93 in pledges from 27,405 generous donors

*This figure does not include bequests given to the Archbishop's Annual Appeal



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www.archdioceseofhartford.org/appeal