UPDATE
E-newsletter for the Association

Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities

Issue L No. 4 | *Fall 2026*

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From the Editor

Catholic identity is expressed not only in what our institutions say, but in what they do. In who they serve, how they form students, and how they respond to the needs of their communities, Catholic colleges and universities seek to embody what His Holiness Pope Leo XIV describes in his Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi Te* as "effective witness in the service of one's neighbor, the poor and the oppressed in particular."

This issue brings together examples of that mission in practice: expanding educational opportunity for incarcerated people and those affected by incarceration, examining challenges and trends in faculty compensation, exploring what graduates say they gain from a Catholic education, caring for creation, and responding to communities in crisis.

These stories offer a compelling illustration of the many ways Catholic colleges and universities give witness to their gospel mission of loving thy neighbor in tangible and distinctive ways.

It is my hope that you find this fall issue both useful and inspiring.

Raymond Horchos
Director of Association Research
Editor, October 2026 Newsletter

Feature Story

Redemption in Education: How Prison Education Programs Embody the Catholic Higher Education Tradition

Kenya McCullum, Contributing Writer

> *"Be mindful of prisoners as if sharing their imprisonment..."*
> — Hebrews 13:3

In 1996, Jim Blum was sitting in a prison cell in Colorado, wondering how it all went wrong. After reconnecting with the Catholic faith of his childhood, he began reading books sent by his grandfather and eventually enrolled in a theology master's degree program offered by Catholic Distance University, now Catholic International University.

The university worked with Blum financially, and he continued learning and growing in his faith until he earned his degree. He was released from prison in 2016 and, one year later, launched My Father's House, a housing reentry community for newly paroled men.

"We don't want to just change behavior," Blum said of his work today. "We want to change hearts. We want to change minds. What we're trying to do is to propose a different way of thinking and living."

Jim Blum
Founder, My Father's House

According to the Vera Institute of Justice, incarcerated people who participate in postsecondary education programs have 48% lower odds of returning to prison than those who do not.

Catholic International University now reaches incarcerated learners digitally through Edovo. Since 2018, the university reports delivering more than four million lessons to 300,000 learners in 1,600 facilities. Charlotte Ponticelli, Director of Prison Ministry Programs, says that the work is about more than credentials. Incarcerated learners are seeking "hope and redemption and compassion and accompaniment."

For Blum, the education he received became part of a larger ripple effect. "They were willing to let me get this degree without really paying for it," he said. "It was a 20-year interest-free loan. That was very beautiful."

> ***"We want to change hearts. We want to change minds. What we're trying to do is to propose a different way of thinking and living."***
> ***— Jim Blum***

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Austin Galy
Co-founder, Torero Urban Scholars, University of San Diego

Holistic Healing

Austin Galy, co-founder of Torero Urban Scholars at the University of San Diego, understands the needs of formerly incarcerated college students personally. Growing up in an unstable household, Galy found a sense of belonging in a gang and spent much of his youth in and out of jail. He wanted to turn his life around but struggled to find work because of his record. In 2010, with the advocacy of a mentor, he joined the military.

Military service gave Galy access to stable housing, healthcare, and higher education—and the opportunity to pay that support forward.

Along with co-founder Janelle Brown-Peters, Galy launched Torero Urban Scholars in 2022 to support students who are formerly incarcerated or justice-impacted. The program provides scholarships, community, and campus support, and it trains faculty and administrators to better understand the needs of participating students.

For Galy, that work is inseparable from Catholic identity. "This is quintessential to what it means to embody the values of Christ," he said.

Second Chances

The University of Saint Mary offers another model. After federal legislation in the 1990s ended Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated students, its prison education program eventually came to a halt. With support from the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative (SCP), the program relaunched in 2021 with eight students at Lansing Correctional Facility.

Today, the program offers associate's and bachelor's degrees in business at six facilities, including the United States Disciplinary Barracks and the Federal Correctional Institution, Leavenworth. Director Michelle Workman says business education can give students practical pathways to employment and entrepreneurship after release.

For Workman, the university's connection to the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth is central. "The University of Saint Mary's Catholic mission is finding dignity in everyone—not just picking and choosing those we deem worthy," she said.

Students have told Workman that university faculty were the first people to treat them as human since incarceration. "We're bringing that Catholic mission and human dignity to individuals who may not get it from anywhere else other than us coming in and giving them that education."

Michelle Workman
Director, Prison Education, University of Saint Mary

By the Numbers

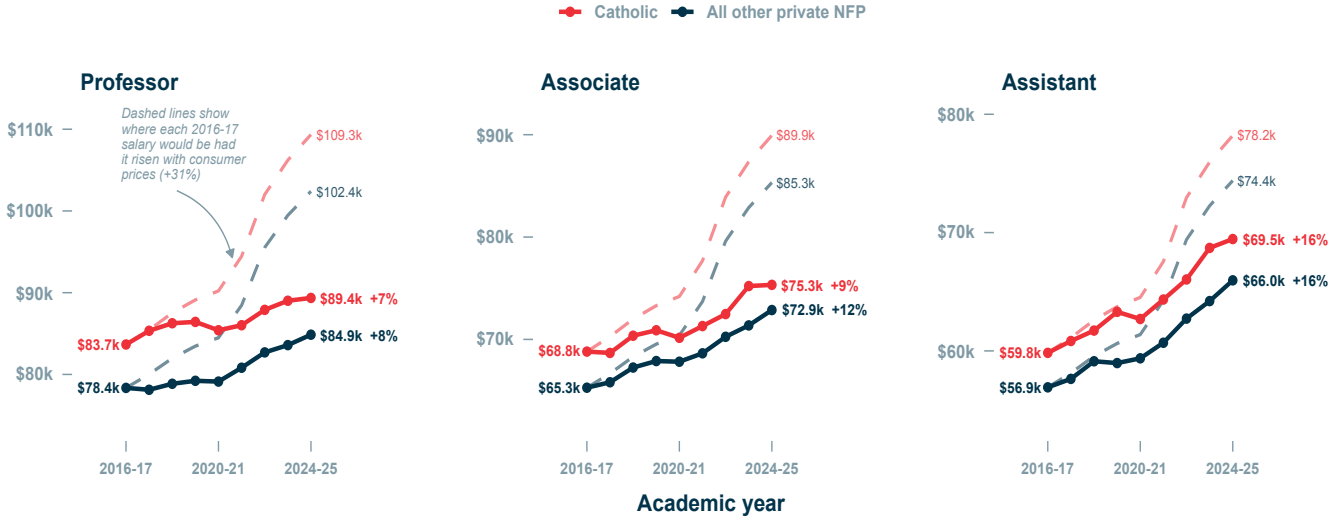
Won't Those Drag Down the Averages? Challenges in Faculty Compensation

David J. Bauer, Director, Casagrande Institute, Viterbo University

A faculty member once looked at a proposed compensation benchmark group and asked whether the Catholic institutions on the list would "drag down the averages." The data suggest otherwise: faculty compensation at Catholic institutions closely tracks that of other private nonprofit peers. The more consequential and sector-wide challenges include inflation, rank compression, and transparency.

Faculty salaries at Catholic institutions have kept pace with non-Catholic peers, but not with inflation

Pay is also compressing across ranks: average Assistant salaries rose 16% compared with 7 to 8% for Professor salaries.



Lines show the typical (median) institution's average 9-month faculty salary for each rank, 2016-17 to 2024-25. Segments share the same criteria: private not-for-profit, four-year or above, Title IV, degree-granting, and at least one full-time instructional staff member at each of the three ranks in every year from 2016-17 to 2024-25, so the same 185 Catholic and 811 all other private NFP institutions are followed in every year. Catholic = IPEDS religious affiliation "Roman Catholic"; All other private NFP = every other private not-for-profit institution meeting the criteria, with or without a religious affiliation. Salaries: IPEDS Instructional Staff Salaries surveys. Inflation: Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI-U, all items, annual averages, matched to the fall year of each academic year.
Prepared by the Casagrande Institute.

Inflation. Between 2016–17 and 2024–25, consumer prices rose much faster than faculty salaries, eroding purchasing power at every rank. Faculty in practical disciplines may feel the opportunity cost of working in academia especially acutely.

Rank compression. Average salaries for assistant professors rose about 16% over the period, compared with roughly 7% to 8% for professors. As the gap between ranks narrows, experienced faculty may reasonably ask whether their expertise and years of service are adequately valued.

Transparency. Faculty increasingly want to understand how starting salaries, discipline differentials, promotion increases, overload pay, and compression adjustments are determined. Boards and general counsel are asking similar questions as pay-equity laws and litigation increase.

Institutions may not be able to outpace inflation, but they can be clear about the philosophy, benchmarks, and rules behind compensation decisions.

For mission-driven institutions committed to the dignity of work and the just wage, consistency and transparency are themselves expressions of mission.

The Data Corner

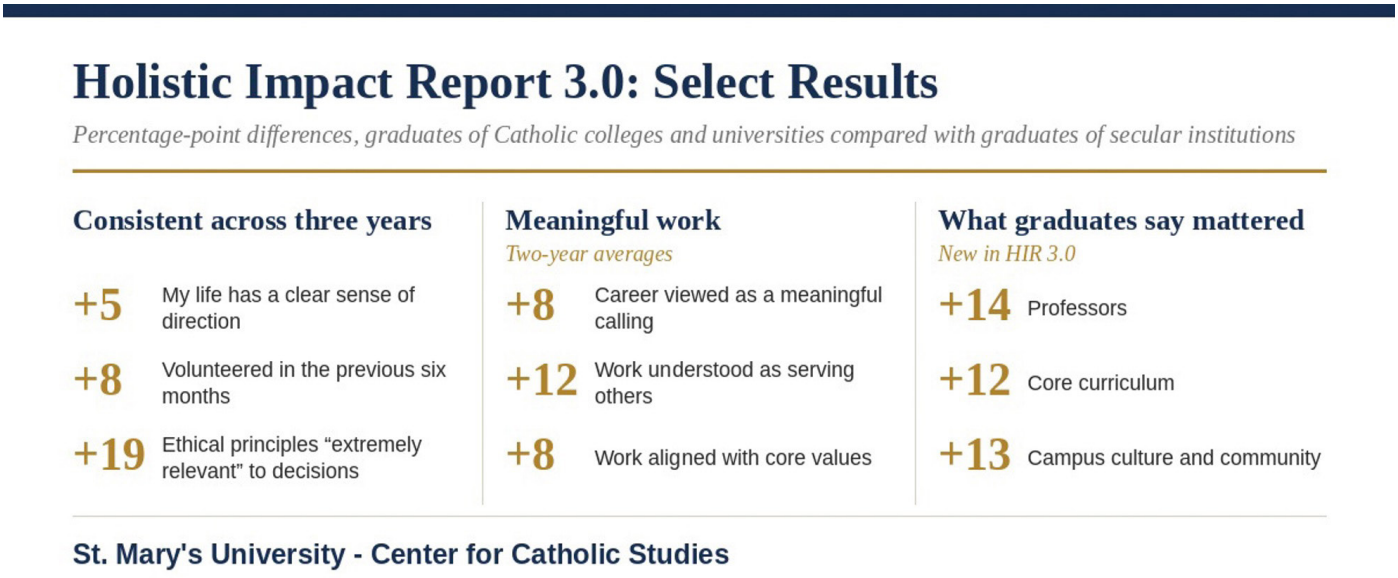
What Catholic Mission Delivers: Findings from the Holistic Impact Report 3.0

Jason King, Beirne Chair of Catholic Studies and Director of the Center for Catholic Studies, St. Mary's University

The value of higher education is consistently questioned these days. For Catholic higher education, that presents an opportunity to speak about what our mission delivers. The Holistic Impact Report (HIR), now in its third year, offers evidence for that case. Across three national studies, graduates of Catholic colleges and universities have consistently reported more meaningful and satisfying lives, stronger community engagement, and greater commitment to principles in their ethical decisions.

The past two years have added another dimension to that picture. Graduates of Catholic colleges and universities are more likely to describe their work as a meaningful calling, to say it aligns with their values, and to see it as serving others. HIR 3.0 opens a new line of inquiry, asking what parts of college did graduates themselves see as important in shaping their lives? Graduates of Catholic higher education institutions were substantially more likely to identify professors, the core curriculum, and campus culture and community as important.

When the value of higher education is questioned, Catholic colleges and universities can point to what their mission delivers: graduates who lead more meaningful lives, engage their communities, commit to ethical principles, and find in their work a calling to serve others.



From the Field

Knowing God, Knowing Earth: Laudato Si' Pilgrimages at Catholic Colleges and Universities

Anna Johnson, North America Senior Programs Manager, Laudato Si' Movement

"When we got to the river, the skies just opened up. We had a plan with a sound system, but we just had to laugh as we all got drenched," said Anne Attea at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, MN. Their experience was unique, but not isolated: last year, during the 800th anniversary of St. Francis' "Canticle of the Creatures" and the 10th anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' landmark encyclical on caring for creation, hundreds of Pilgrimages of Hope for Creation took place across the country, and many experienced how, when we work with God's Creation, we can find the Divine in the unexpected.

Students, staff, and faculty at Bellarmine University participated in a Laudato Si' Pilgrimage in September 2025.

From Louisville to Seattle, the Bay Area to New York, and Texas to Minnesota, Catholic colleges and universities across the country took part in this national movement to get out into the natural world, whether on campus, at a state park, a site of ecological destruction, or the state capitol. As they embarked on these sacred journeys — college and university presidents, professors, ministers, students, priests, women religious, and brothers walking together — they integrated prayer, movement, calls to integral ecology, local ecosystems, and hope.

Questions about our relationship with the natural world can feel especially pressing for students as they consider the future they are being prepared to help shape. Catholic higher education offers a distinctive framework for engaging those questions — one rooted not only in concern, but in responsibility, hope, and care for creation.

So why does it matter that these young people attend a Catholic institution? In a culture that can easily default to anxiety or disengagement, our Catholic faith offers another way. Through the Paschal Mystery, we learn to hold suffering and hope together. Many of the pilgrimages reflected that posture, visiting places marked by ecological harm while praying for restoration and remaining attentive to signs of renewal. At Edgewood University, Sr. Mary Kremer, OP, shared, "We went to places on campus that were significant as a way of saying thank you." She added, "Out of gratitude comes a commitment to whatever happens."

Along the way, organizers and participants were invited to reflect on the relationships Pope Leo XIV has described as central to human flourishing: "with God, with others, with nature and with ourselves... Through our commitment to them, we can grow in hope by living out the interdisciplinary approach of *Laudato Si'* and the call to unity and collaboration that flows from it." In practice, the pilgrimages modeled the kinds of habits Catholic institutions seek to cultivate in students: community, resilience, gratitude, and attentiveness to the sacred.

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Knowing God, Knowing Earth (continued)

Organizers and participants also created opportunities for collaboration. At Bellarmine University, the annual Tree Campus USA pilgrimage expanded to include the broader community. "It really is a tradition now," Dr. Kate Bulinski, Associate Professor of Geosciences in the School of Environmental Studies, shared. "People really look forward to it, and faculty build it into their classes." After Villanova and Saint Joseph's University joined forces for a shared pilgrimage, Aaron Lemma, Project Manager at EcoPhilly, reflected, "Walking down Lancaster and Montgomery Aves between two rival schools showed exactly how we need to approach the work of Laudato Si'— together, differences aside, all gifts welcome."

Pamphlet from 2025 Bellarmine University Tree Pilgrimage.

Our students are graduating into a world of complex moral and ethical questions, and Catholic higher education can help equip them to engage those questions thoughtfully and collaboratively. Lemma shared, "We pilgrimage so we can be united, moving towards a common purpose. We arrive being more of ourselves — a loving community working together to build the Kingdom of God on Earth."

This year, we are inviting students, faculty, and staff to participate in the Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor Synodal Conversations, which seek to build bridges between the crises we face and a hopeful future we can work toward together. Find out more here!

Anna Johnson is the North America Senior Programs Manager for the Laudato Si' Movement (LSM). Before joining LSM, she spent over a decade working in Catholic Social Teaching and global solidarity curriculum design and leadership training, particularly with youth and young adults.

UPDATE | WINTER ISSUE

Share your stories and ideas with ACCU!

ACCU welcomes articles, campus news, and member perspectives for our upcoming winter issue. Contact **accu@accunet.org** or **kharrington@accunet.org**.

From the Field

Mission in Action: When Weather Hits

Michael Hahn, Associate Dean and Associate Professor, School of Education, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota

Extreme weather can turn institutional mission into immediate action. Recent responses at Gonzaga University, Calumet College of St. Joseph, and Saint Louis University show Catholic institutions serving as anchors for their communities when crisis arrives.

Gonzaga University

When wildfires struck the Spokane area in August 2026, Gonzaga University housed more than 200 people, including international students from nearby Whitworth University. National Guard members stayed on campus, dining services provided meals, and the university became a donation site for water, clothing, and other necessities.

Gonzaga's Jesuit commitment to *cura personalis* — care for the whole person — became tangible in shelter, food, prayer, and accompaniment. Ellen Maccarone, Ph.D., Vice President of Mission Integration, recalled a retired faculty member displaced by the fires who told her that his family came to Gonzaga because "they knew that Gonzaga would take care of them."

The response, Maccarone said, was typical of a community that is "fiercely loyal to each other and their community."

Calumet College of St. Joseph

At nearly the same time, severe weather in northwest Indiana caused extensive damage and prolonged power outages. Calumet College of St. Joseph opened its campus to neighbors who needed electricity, internet access, clean water, food, and relief from the summer heat.

The response reflected Calumet College's stated commitment to human dignity, social justice, and service. Rev. Tim McFarland, CPPS, Ph.D., Professor of Theology and Director of Mission and Ministry, said the college seeks to make its mission "real for students and their learning more than theoretical."

Saint Louis University

Saint Louis University continues to support neighborhoods affected by the May 2025 tornado that caused widespread damage across St. Louis. In the immediate aftermath, SLU opened Chaifetz Arena as a Disaster Assistance Center, where more than thirty agencies and organizations helped residents navigate recovery.

The university also organized volunteers, collected supplies, provided healthcare, and offered emergency funding and temporary housing to affected students and employees. "It's a good example of SLU's Jesuit mission in action, with an emphasis on continuing to show up for our neighbors as recovery goes on," said Ben Perlman, Ph.D., CASP, Assistant Vice President of Student Engagement.

These responses differ in scale, but each illustrates the same point: Catholic identity becomes visible in the habits institutions have already formed—whom they notice, how quickly they mobilize, and whether neighbors believe the university will show up when they need it.

ACCU Bulletin

Kathryn Harrington Joins ACCU as Executive Director for External Affairs

Kathryn Harrington joined ACCU in July to lead the Association's communications, marketing, and external positioning. Learn more about Kathryn here.

ACCU Website Wins Platinum MarCom Award

ACCU's redesigned website has received a 2026 Platinum MarCom Award in the Association category. The international competition recognizes outstanding achievement in marketing and communications.

Developed in partnership with AndiSites, the new website launched this fall with streamlined access to ACCU programs, research, news, and member resources. Explore the new website at accunet.org.

Programs & Events

2027 Annual Meeting

Unified by Hope

Join ACCU in Washington, DC, January 30–February 1, 2027, for Unified by Hope. Registration is now open. Refer to the Annual Meeting programming page for updates.
Register here.

ASACCU SSAO Annual Roundtable

Student affairs leaders will gather at DePaul University November 5–6 for peer discussion on timely issues.
Registration information.

Institute for New Presidents

Virtual sessions continue throughout the year, with an in-person gathering on January 29, 2027, before the Annual Meeting. Learn more and register.

The Next 250: The Promise of Pluralism for America's Future

This November 15–17 gathering in Philadelphia will explore religious freedom, civic pluralism, and leadership for the future. Learn more and register.