

Pope Francis designated 2025 as a Jubilee year, a time of forgiveness and reconciliation in the Catholic Church and to renew relationships with God, each other, and creation. The theme for this year, “Pilgrims of Hope,” reminds us that we are being called to “fan the flame of hope that has been given us” and to help others “gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart, and farsighted vision.” (Pope Francis)

I can say with great certainty that Catholic Sisters have been fulfilling that call since they first arrived in the Diocese of Erie 172 years ago. They have been, and continue to be, pilgrims of hope – in the midst of change.

The Benedictine Sisters arrived at St. Marys, Pennsylvania, in 1852 and came to Erie a few years later to educate the children of German immigrants. The Sisters of St. Joseph arrived in Corsica, Pennsylvania, in 1860 to oversee St. Ann’s Academy for Girls. They made their way to Meadville and then Erie in 1865. The Mercy Sisters Came to Titusville in 1870 to help educate the children of Irish immigrants and then arrived in Erie a few years later. These women and Sisters from many other Congregations continue to give hope throughout the thirteen counties of northwestern Pennsylvania.

Many of the contributions of Catholic Sisters to our area are evident through the hospitals, schools, universities, and social service ministries they founded. Few people in the Diocese have not been impacted by one or more of the Sister’s ministries. And while Sisters may not be as involved in some of the ministries they are synonymous with, rest assured they continue to provide hope throughout our Diocese.

They are pilgrims of hope in their service to the poor and the hungry at Emmaus Soup Kitchen and Sister Gus’ Kids Café, in the neighborhood revitalization initiatives at the Sisters of St Joseph Neighborhood Network, through service to women at the Mercy Center for Women, to the elderly at Mercy Terrace, Benetwood, and Saint Mary’s Home of Erie, to children at St. Benedict Child Development Center and the Neighborhood

Art House, and to homeless men at St. Patrick and St. James Havens.

Sisters are pilgrims of hope to families of homicide victims and to the neighborhoods where violence has led to death through their "Take Back the Site Vigils." For twenty-five years, it has been the Catholic Sisters in our community who have come together to reclaim the sites of homicides for non-violence. The Benedictine Sisters, the Sisters of Mercy, and the Sisters of St. Joseph bring together families, friends, and neighbors to pray for the victims and perpetrators. These vigils bring consolation and comfort to families experiencing tremendous tragedies.

Sisters are pilgrims of hope on Good Friday when the Benedictines Sisters invite us to journey from St. Peter Cathedral to sites around Erie while praying for peace and justice along the way.

Many congregations of Catholic Sisters have served in the city and Diocese of Erie, in addition to the Sisters of Mercy, the Sisters of St. Joseph, and the Benedictine Sisters. The list includes the Spiritual Family the Work, the Sisters of St. Basil the Great, the Community of the Anawim, the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, and the Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart. These women continue to respond to the needs of our area and bring hope through education, health care, and social service.

They are pilgrims of hope when the Anawim Sisters and the Spiritual Family the Work offer retreats and work with young people to meet the needs of families. They are pilgrims of hope when the Sisters of St. Basil serve the diocesan offices and outreach efforts to parishes. Just the presence of these women among us enhances our sense of hope.

As Bishop of the Diocese of Erie, I give thanks every day for the gift that our Sisters are for all of us. During this Jubilee year, as we celebrate *Catholic Sisters Week*, March 8th through 14th, let us pause, remember, and be grateful for the spirituality, ministry, and

hope that Catholic Sisters bring to our community. They show us how to live as followers of Jesus Christ, promoting kindness to everyone, and seeking the common good. During *Catholic Sisters Week*, we thank them and their foremothers not just for the tremendous work they have done in the past but what they continue to do every day to make this world a more just place. May their legacy continue to make a difference here in western Pennsylvania as pilgrims of hope amid chaos and change.

Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, J.C.L.
Bishop of Erie