



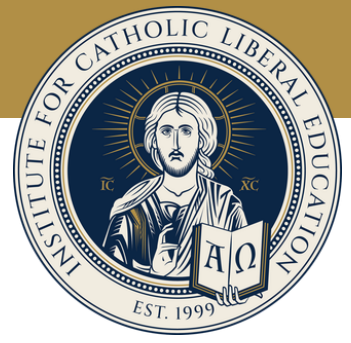
INSTITUTE FOR
CATHOLIC LIBERAL
EDUCATION

2026 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Stepping into the Light



JULY 14-17, 2026 | PREMIER VIDEO PACKAGE



Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Institute for Catholic Liberal Education, it is our pleasure to share these presentations with you from our 14th annual National Conference, which took place in Columbus, OH, in July. As our largest annual event, the National Conference aimed to inspire and equip a growing community of Catholic educators to reclaim the Church's full vision of education and to bring it to life in their classrooms. It was truly a time of prayer, formation, conversation, and celebration.

The theme for our 2026 National Conference, *Stepping into the Light*, was inspired by the compelling scene depicted in Caravaggio's *The Calling of Saint Matthew* and by the words of Saint Catherine of Siena, who said that, "the task of the educator is to bring the soul from the shadows of ignorance into the light of truth."

In Caravaggio's painting, a piercing beam of divine light breaks into the darkness, illuminating Saint Matthew and transforming his life forever. In Scripture, light not only depicts God's presence and transforming power; it also illuminates knowledge and witnesses to the truth. As God's people, we are called to be a light to the nations.

C.S. Lewis noted that knowledge comes not simply by looking at things from the outside in an analytical fashion, such as studying a sunbeam in a dark room; we must also look along the shaft of light — stepping into its path and seeing what else it illuminates. The renewal of Catholic education is not only a venture of studying about the Church's intellectual tradition, but stepping into it and seeing what, and, more importantly, Who—it reveals from the inside.

That is what we aimed to do over our time at the Conference and moving forward. What a blessing it is to reflect upon and celebrate together our sacred calling as Catholic educators. May these presentations provide us with the assistance needed to step boldly into the path of truth and glorify Christ, our Eternal Light!



Danny Flynn

Vice President for Diocesan
and School Relations
Institute for Catholic Liberal
Education



Elisabeth Sullivan

Vice President for Mission
Advancement
Institute for Catholic Liberal
Education

PURCHASE INFORMATION:

The video package may be purchased [HERE](#) or by scanning the QR code.

N.B. Only one purchase is necessary per school. Access is allowed to the school's current faculty and staff only and retained through July 12, 2027.



**"THE RENEWAL OF
CATHOLIC EDUCATION IS
NOT ONLY A VENTURE OF
STUDYING ABOUT THE
CHURCH'S INTELLECTUAL
TRADITION, BUT STEPPING
INTO IT AND SEEING WHAT,
AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY,
WHO — IT REVEALS FROM
THE INSIDE."**

ON THE COVER

Caravaggio's 17th century oil painting, *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, depicts a piercing beam of divine light breaking into the darkness, illuminating Saint Matthew and transforming his life forever at Jesus' calling to his vocation. May we step into His path of truth and bring the light of Christ to the world!





VISIO DIVINA

The Calling of St. Matthew, Caravaggio, ca. 1600

Derek Brooks

Founder, Benedictus Art

A time of guided and prayerful meditation on the work of sacred art that depicts the conference theme.



Light as the Presence of God

Dr. D.C. Schindler

Professor of Metaphysics and Anthropology, The Pontifical John Paul II Institute for the Studies on the Marriage and Family

To step into the light is to enter the fullness of reality. In this plenary address, Dr. D.C. Schindler grounds the conference theme in the Catholic tradition of the pursuit of truth and virtue. He first unpacks Plato's famous Allegory of the Cave, tracking the soul's liberation from the shadows of illusion into the light of the Good. Dr. Schindler then demonstrates how the divine light is not an abstraction, but the very presence of God that makes reality intelligible. Viewers are invited to contemplate how this divine illumination restores human reason, clarifies our vision of creation, and serves as the ultimate source of truth.



Renewing Catholic Education: The Tasks of Crisis Recognition, Tradition Comprehension, and Institutional Innovation

Dr. Michael Naughton

Professor of Catholic Studies, University of St. Thomas, MN

From marriages to businesses to schools, all institutions are in need of renewal; otherwise, they drift, failing both to respond to their times as well as to energize members to their deepest purpose. Dr. Naughton provides a holistic framework for Catholic school faculty and leaders focusing on three interdependent factors of institutional renewal: knowing our problems, recognizing on whose shoulders we stand, and creatively responding in new and innovative ways.

Panel: Image and Likeness: Catholic Liberal Education in the Face of Artificial Intelligence (AI)



Moderator:

- **Peter Crawford**, *Academic Dean for ICLE and founding headmaster of the St. Jerome Institute, who speaks from the front lines of building incarnational, joyful school communities*

Panelists:

- **J. Jacob (Jake) Tawney**, *Director of Curriculum and Academic Resources for the Institute for Catholic Liberal Education, bringing a unique perspective as a classical educator trained in mathematics and computer science*
- **Dr. Jeanne Schindler**, *Fellow of The Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on the Marriage and Family and a leading voice integrating philosophy, theology, and Catholic social thought*
- **The Most Reverend Earl K. Fernandes**, *Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Columbus and a leading voice integrating moral theology, bioethics, and Catholic education*



This panel discussion addresses key questions regarding the renewal of Catholic liberal arts education and the rise of artificial intelligence. What are the implications of AI for an authentic education both within and outside of the classroom? Grounded in our shared Catholic anthropology and in dialogue with Pope Leo XIV's recent encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, this conversation addresses acute and timely questions for Catholic educators who seek to provide a 'diakonia of truth' in a rapidly changing world.

History 250 | An exceptional, free resource telling America's story

www.history250.org

Andrew J. Zwerneman, *President, Cana Academy*

Mathematics and the Sacramental Imagination

J. Jacob (Jake) Tawney, *Director of Curriculum and Academic Resources, ICLE*



Mathematics has a unique place in the liberal arts curriculum in that it bridges heaven and earth. The objects of mathematics are immaterial ideals existing in the mind of God, and yet they find an incarnation in the created universe. It is not too much to say that when God spoke the universe into being, He did so using the language of mathematics. Because of this, mathematics plays an important part in developing in students a sacramental imagination. The visible, material things in God's material world reveal their invisible, immaterial perfections. This is perhaps why there is something unique in each human soul that can only be satisfied by contemplating mathematical things.



Affirming the Common Humanity Underlying All Distinction: The Catholic Educational Response to Disability

Abriana Chilelli

Director of Special Projects, ICLE

What does it mean for Catholic schools to educate from our common humanity? This talk traces the complex history of education for persons with disabilities, contrasting historical exclusion with the Church's enduring witness to the incomparable value of every human person. This session offers a compelling vision for why children with disabilities belong in schools of Catholic liberal education, serving as a call to deeper humanity, a witness to a confused world, and a blueprint for building true schools of belonging.



Teaching Students to Feel Pleasure and Pain at the Wrong Thing: The History of Grades and Grading

Dr. Brian Williams

Dean, Templeton Honors College, Eastern University

Despite their ubiquity in modern schooling, letter grades and percentage scales are relatively recent, ad hoc administrative innovations designed to rank and sort students for an industrial workforce. Drawing from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, this session examines how traditional grading systems can inadvertently warp a student's moral and intellectual formation, training them to chase academic "currency" rather than love what is genuinely good, true, and beautiful. Attendees will trace the history of assessment, uncover the hidden adverse consequences of standard grading scales, and explore alternative evaluation practices that liberate teachers and students to pursue the intrinsic, joyful rewards of learning.

ICLE Info Session

ICLE Staff

Healing the Hearts of Our Youth



Most Reverend Andrew H. Cozzens, *Bishop of the Diocese of Crookston*

In this transformative session, Bishop Cozzens explores the three pillars at the center of every human life: relationship, identity, and mission. When these elements get out of order, confusion and heartache follow. Discover how Catholic educators can guide young people to reorder their priorities, invite them into a life-changing encounter with Christ, and foster true healing from the inside out.



From Rocky Ground to Rich Soil: Making the Transformation from Catholic Identity to Catholic Culture

Dr. Adam Dufault

Superintendent of Catholic Schools, Diocese of Columbus

More than just a crucifix on the wall or just a prayer over the PA, schools that have a rich, authentic Catholic culture create environments in which the Lord is known, served, and loved. They are vibrant places where our faith leads the way, where students learn to live virtuously and be formed in an education rooted in Catholic anthropology.

Dr. Dufault highlights the efforts of the Diocese of Columbus to bring a rich, authentic Catholic culture into Catholic schools. He explores how leaders can train and guide faculty in building culture, including professional development ideas, training tips, and faith formation experiences. These strategies and techniques are beneficial for diocesan- or school-level implementation to till the soil and plant the seeds of transformation.



“Something Must Be Adventured”: America's 250th and the Freedom of the Children of God

John M. DeJak, J.D.

Executive Director of the Secretariat of Catholic Education, USCCB

Drawing upon his extensive leadership background and expertise rooted in the Catholic intellectual tradition, John DeJak discusses the national landscape of Catholic schooling and the vital work of forming future saints, thinkers, and leaders.

Dr. D.C. Schindler

Professor of Metaphysics and Anthropology, The Pontifical John Paul II Institute for the Studies on the Marriage and Family (Washington, D.C.)

Dr. Schindler is a Professor of Metaphysics and Anthropology and Ph.D. Program Advisor at the John Paul II Institute. He has published more than a dozen books—including two volumes of a planned trilogy on the nature of freedom with the University of Notre Dame Press and a *Robert Spaemann Reader* with Oxford University Press—and more than 80 articles and book chapters. He is an editor of the English-language edition of *Communio: International Catholic Review*, a board member of The College of St. Joseph the Worker, and has served as President of the American Catholic Philosophical Association (2024-25). Dr. Schindler lives in Hyattsville, MD, with his wife, Jeanne, and their three children.

Dr. Michael Naughton

Director, Center for Catholic Studies, University of St. Thomas - MN

Michael Naughton has been a teacher for over 40 years on both secondary and university levels. He is currently the director of the Center for Catholic Studies at the University of St. Thomas (Minnesota), where he holds the Koch Chair in Catholic Studies. Dr. Naughton is author, co-author and co-editor of 12 books and monographs and over 70 articles. His most recent book is called *What We Hold in Trust: Rediscovering the Purpose of Catholic Higher Education* (coauthors Don Briel and Ken Goodpaster). Dr. Naughton serves on several boards including the University of Mary, St. Agnes School's Headmaster's Advisory Board and Catholic Eldercare.

J. Jacob (Jake) Tawney

Director of Curriculum and Academic Resources, ICLE

J. Jacob (Jake) Tawney has been enamored by mathematics for as long as he can remember, from kindergarten to calculus. But he truly fell in love with it during his sophomore year at Denison University during a course on mathematical proofs. After completing an undergraduate degree in mathematics and computer science from Denison, he continued his studies at The Ohio State University. There he earned a master's degree in mathematics, submitting a thesis on the mathematics of juggling. During his time in Ohio, Tawney taught at Upper Arlington High School and the Pontifical College Josephinum, including courses in Euclid and the philosophy of mathematics. In 2014, he relocated his family to Phoenix, Arizona, to join Great Hearts Academies, where he most recently served as the Chief Academic Officer. Jake is the proud husband of Christina and the proud father of eight children, all of whom have something unique in their souls that can only be satisfied by wondering about mathematics.

Dr. Jeanne Schindler

Fellow, The Pontifical John Paul II Institute for the Studies on the Marriage and Family (Washington, D.C.)

Dr. Jeanne Schindler is a Fellow of the John Paul II Institute. Until 2013, she was an associate professor at Villanova University. Dr. Schindler's intellectual interests are interdisciplinary, integrating philosophy, theology, and political science. She has lectured and published in a variety of areas, including Catholic social thought and democratic theory. She edited *Christianity and Civil Society: Catholic and Neo-Calvinist Perspectives* (2008) and co-edited with her husband, D.C. Schindler, *A Robert Spaemann Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2015). Dr. Schindler is a homeschooling mother of three children.

The Most Reverend Earl K. Fernandes

Bishop, Diocese of Columbus, OH

The Most Reverend Earl K. Fernandes, the son of Indian immigrants, is the first Indian-American to head a U.S. Roman Catholic diocese. He was ordained and installed as the 13th Bishop of the Diocese of Columbus on May 31, 2022. He holds a doctorate in moral theology from the Alphonsian Academy in Rome. He has given presentations, talks, and retreats around the country and has published articles in four collections of essays published by the Institute for Priestly Formation in Omaha, which also published a book authored by him in 2014. Bishop Fernandes' scholarly essays have also appeared in *Seminary Journal*, *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, *The Linacre Quarterly*, *Journal of the National Apostolate for Inclusion Ministry*.

Abriana Chilelli

Director of Special Projects, ICLE

Abriana has served a variety of leadership roles at the archdiocesan-level in the Archdiocese of Denver. As ICLE's Director of Special Projects, she draws on a wealth of educational leadership experience from the classroom to the archdiocese. She also serves as the Assistant Director of Catholic Education for the Archdiocese of Portland. Abriana has an undergraduate degree from Franciscan University of Steubenville, a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of Colorado, and a master's degree in educational administration from the University of Notre Dame.

Dr. Brian Williams

Dean, Higher Education, Templeton Honors College, Eastern University

Dr. Brian Williams is Dean of the Templeton Honors College, Associate Professor of Ethics and Liberal Studies, and Co-Director of Templeton's Master of Arts in Teaching program. Formerly a Lecturer in Theology and Christian Ethics at the University of Oxford and Director of Oxford Conversations, he holds an MPhil and DPhil in Christian Ethics from Oxford, as well as graduate degrees in theology from Regent College. His research explores the tradition of Christian liberal arts education, with interests in virtue ethics, political thought, Dante, and classical pedagogy. Dr. Williams is the author and editor of several works, including *The Potter's Rib* and *Everyday Ethics*, and serves as General Editor of *Principia: A Journal of Classical Education*. He is an Alcuin Fellow and advisor to multiple classical education organizations.

The Most Reverend Andrew H. Cozzens

Bishop, Diocese of Crookston, MN

Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens graduated from Benedictine College and served as a missionary with NET Ministries and Saint Paul's Outreach before his ordination for the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis in 1997. He holds a doctorate in Sacramental Theology from Rome, focusing on Saint John Paul II's theology of the priesthood, and serves as president of the Institute for Priestly Formation.

After teaching in seminary formation, he was ordained an auxiliary bishop for Saint Paul and Minneapolis in 2013. On December 6, 2021, he was installed as the eighth bishop of the Diocese of Crookston.

Tasked by the U.S. Bishops, Bishop Cozzens led the historic three-year National Eucharistic Revival to strengthen Eucharistic belief. As president of the National Eucharistic Congress Corporation, he oversaw the 10th National Eucharistic Congress in July 2024, which drew over 60,000 Catholics to Indianapolis as the first such U.S. congress in nearly 50 years.

Speaker Biographies

Dr. Adam Dufault

Superintendent of Catholic Schools, Diocese of Columbus

Adam Dufault is the Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Columbus. As the executive educational leader for the hosting diocese, he oversees the spiritual, academic, and operational vitality of numerous elementary and secondary schools. Dufault is a passionate advocate for systemic renewal, focusing on alignment with Catholic identity and authentic pedagogical formation. In his breakout session, "Turning Toward the Light: A Practical Blueprint for Change in Catholic Schools," he draws directly from his executive leadership experience to provide diocesan administrators and principals with actionable strategies. His session outlines a realistic framework for moving school cultures past bureaucratic inertia and toward a unified model centered on Christ and the pursuit of truth.

John M. DeJak, J.D.

Executive Director of the Secretariat of Catholic Education, USCCB

John M. DeJak, J.D. is the Director of the Secretariat of Catholic Education for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). An attorney, former Army Judge Advocate, and veteran classical educator, he has spent over two decades leading and teaching in private Catholic schools, including serving as the founding headmaster of Chesterton Academy and Holy Spirit Academy in Minnesota.

At this conference, he draws upon his extensive leadership background and expertise rooted in the Catholic intellectual tradition to discuss the national landscape of Catholic schooling and the vital work of forming future saints, thinkers, and leaders.

SAVE THE DATE

ICLE 2027 National Conference

Dallas, TX | July 13-16, 2027





SCAN FOR DETAILS AND
TO BE NOTIFIED OF WHEN
REGISTRATION OPENS.



INSTITUTE FOR
CATHOLIC LIBERAL
EDUCATION

www.CatholicLiberalEducation.org/events/national-conference