



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Pope Leo XIV Commends Catholic Extension Society for strengthening church's presence among the poor**

CHICAGO – [Catholic Extension Society](https://www.catholicextension.org) board of governors participated in a private audience with Pope Leo XIV at the Vatican on Monday, pledging their commitment to the pope's pastoral vision and priorities.

For more than 120 years, Catholic Extension Society's mission has been to build up vibrant Catholic faith communities. "This missionary enthusiasm is still needed today," the pope told them. "And so, I would like to thank you for your continued efforts to minister to the needs of the poorer Catholic communities."

He specifically commended Catholic Extension Society's work in Puerto Rico, a years-long, island-wide recovery program it has led, which seeks to rebuild 600 schools and churches damaged by natural disasters.

Picking up on themes from his first apostolic exhortation, *Dilexi Te*, ("On Love for the Poor"), the Holy Father said, "The support you provide in these communities is a beautiful expression of the universality of the church and the living reminder that love for our neighbor is tangible proof of the authenticity of our love for God."

Among Catholic Extension Society's board delegation was a group of Catholic leaders who receive Catholic Extension Society's support for their ministry to the poor, including various religious sisters working with refugees and with immigrant communities.

The Holy Father commented, "I, likewise, encourage the pastoral care you are offering to the disadvantaged, as well as to the many immigrant families in the United States. It is imperative that our brothers and sisters experience the warmth of a community marked by the presence of Christ."

After his remarks, one of the religious sisters in attendance, Sr. Fatima Santiago, ICM, a member of the board of governors, presented the Holy father with letters from immigrant families she serves in South Texas who have experienced traumatic separations and severe economic hardships due to the detention or deportation of mothers with children. Included in the package was a letter from one woman who has two severely autistic children who has been detained, throwing her family into total chaos. The Holy Father received these letters, and assured Sr. Fatima of his prayers.

Another religious sister in the delegation, Sr. Lucia Murashko, OSBM, who has served near the frontlines of the war in Ukraine for four years, presented photos to the pope of two Ukrainian men, who are prisoners of war. Sr. Lucia ministers to their wives, as they raise children alone.

Upon entering the audience hall, Pope Leo immediately recognized the presence of Father Jack Wall and was aware that he grew up in the same working-class town, Dolton, IL, as Catholic Extension Society's president.

Fr. Jack Wall said, "It was so special for us as a pontifical society to find inspiration in Pope Leo's pastoral vision as we work to build up the Church in the poorest regions of the U.S. The Holy Father has specified his desire for a Church that prioritizes the poor, one that builds bridges through dialogue, and one that promotes peace in a world where there are so many threats to human dignity."

Pope Leo summarized the value of the mission of Catholic Extension Society with these words, "Love for the poor can therefore be understood as the 'evangelical hallmark of a Church faithful to the heart of God.'" (*[Dilexi Te](#)* 103)

For more information on Catholic Extension Society, visit [catholicextension.org](http://catholicextension.org).

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**About Catholic Extension Society:** Founded in 1905, Catholic Extension Society works in solidarity with people to build up vibrant and transformative Catholic faith communities among the poor in the poorest regions of America. For more information visit [www.catholicextension.org](http://www.catholicextension.org); follow us on Facebook at [facebook.com/catholicextension](https://facebook.com/catholicextension) or on X (Formerly Twitter) at [@CathExtension](https://twitter.com/CathExtension).