

# TODAY'S CATHOLIC WOMEN SPECIAL EDITION

APRIL, 2025 NEWSLETTER



## JOSEPHINE MAESTAS DIOCESAN PRESIDENT

### CATHOLIC DAYS AT THE CAPITAL

This was my first time attending Catholic Days at the Capitol. In years past, others have shared the ins/outs of this event, so I kind of knew what to expect (or I thought I did). There were 11 members of the SPDCCW that went. We split into 3 cars and on Tuesday, March 18th, we headed North to Tally (Tallahassee). My group was a bit late due to a bit of construction delay but we only missed the overview of the first bill. I will say Tuesday was a bit overwhelming for me and I felt it was a bit too fast paced (probably because we arrived a bit late). In my opinion, they should show a video or something for those who are attending for the first time. After they presented everything, we were split up by Diocese and met with our group coordinator (who in her defense, only found

out 3 weeks prior that she was the one who was going). I was extremely nervous as I didn't see anyone from my area of town and feared that I would have to talk to the Legislators alone. Our coordinator was very good about grouping "newbies" with those more "seasoned" and I got paired up with 2 wonderful ladies from Christ the King, one I knew from their CCW. There was a group from St. Leo University which included Fr. Lucius Amarillas, who is going to be our Keynote speaker at this coming SPDCCW convention, so I was able to introduce him to those in our group. We then departed to check in at our hotel and then made plans for dinner out.

The next day, Wednesday, March 19th, everyone started the day with their Bishop. See the picture above with our beloved Bishop Gregory Parkes. Not everyone was in attendance for the picture as the group from St. Leo University decided to sleep in (lol). After your picture was taken, you then proceeded into the hall for breakfast where they presented some awards to very well deserving individuals. They also, recited a rosary, but my group couldn't stay for that as we had an early appointment at the Capitol. There were many groups that day in attendance at the Capitol and so it was very busy

and a bit crowded. However, I was really impressed how polite, friendly and helpful everyone was. Yes there was a lot of walking and standing. The elevators were packed (as they usually are everywhere). There was a police chief in one of the elevators and his group announced it was his birthday, so we all sang to him and he was so embarrassed but pleased. After my group was done for the day, I met up with Missy Garrett and Mary Woltman who let me tag along for the rest of their day. After lunch, we had time to spare before they had their last appointment, so we “ducked” into a committee hearing/meeting. Although, it was for Broward/Dade County, I found it very interesting. I would have loved to go to the gallery and sit in and watch (maybe next time). Although, my day was spent with Aides, I was very impressed that the last appointment for most of us was with an actual Senator from Zephyrhills that everyone seemed to know, Danny Burgess. He was so personable and spent an incredible amount of time with us. Once the day was done at the Capitol, we headed back to the hotel to rest up before heading to the Co-Cathedral for the Red Mass.

The Co-Cathedral was beautiful. I was excited to actually see Governor DeSantis in person. Not sure what I expected, but he walked in just like we do every week for Mass. I will be honest, I was staring to see if he was participating in the Mass, YES he was! By being one of the Diocesan Presidents, it allowed me reserved seating, which was pretty close to where the Governor sat and he entered/exited the church right by our pew. I have to admit, I was more excited and a bit celebrity struck of seeing the Governor than I was any of the Senators, Congressmen and/or the Bishops (could be because I see Bishop Wack and Bishop Parkes often and I had just met Archbishop Wenski at the FCCW Conference (we hosted). As YOUR Diocesan President, it was my esteem honor to be among the other Diocesan Presidents and our FCCW Province Director to bring up the gifts at Mass. It was a very beautiful Mass. We then headed out to dinner and then headed home the next day Thursday.

All in all, it was a very educational and inspiring experience. If you’ve never been, you should try to make it a point to at least attend once. My Momma has always told my Siblings and I that we should never worry, as God will always provide. I had chose to not do any of the talking at the Capitol, but rather to just listen, watch and learn. My group made the decision to sit when we could after each appointment to discuss and take down the notes for the reports that we had to fill out. I had seen this gentleman at the Civic Center earlier, so I knew he was with our group, he stopped to talk with us at the Capitol to ask us how everything was going. I told him it was all a bit overwhelming as this was my first time. He said to hang in there and he would check with me later. I never saw him again...UNTIL at the church. He came up to me after the Mass was over and said he was glad to see I was still standing and that I had made it and then he hugged me. I still to this day do not know his name and/or if he is a legislator or not (see him in the picture below). But God does and He knew I needed something to help calm me so that I could enjoy this amazing experience. So to this kind soul, THANK YOU!!!



# MISSY GARRETT

## FLORIDA COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC WOMEN PROVINCE DIRECTOR ELECT

This was my fifth time attending Catholic Days at the Capitol (“DCAC”). It is an amazing opportunity to join with other Catholics from around the state to show our support of our system of government and our Catholic values. There were four issues we were encouraging our legislators to either support or oppose. The Florida Council of Catholic Bishops provide attendees with handouts describing each bill in simpler terms and talking points for conversations with our legislators or their aides.

The first one was to oppose Senate Bill 1700 and House Bill 471 for physician Assisted Suicide in the State of Florida. This would devalue the lives of the elderly, seriously ill and disabled. Those seeking to end their life with the assistance of a physician would not have to be psychologically screened or counseled. Mental health conditions often bring about thoughts of suicide. Additionally, the health insurance providers and governments may be encouraged to suggest suicide over treatment to cut costs. This directly contradicts the roll of a physician as healer. We are called to recognize the inherent dignity of every human life. A person does not become expendable simply because they have a deep misunderstanding of their own value and identity. We are called to help others recognize that their lives are intrinsically good and that they are worthy of love even in their final days when death is imminent.

The second was to oppose several bills that have been filed for Death Penalty Expansion of the pool of persons eligible

This was my second time attending Catholic days at the Capital. There were four issues that had been identified to speak on; expanding the death penalty, funding for prisons, assisted suicides and human embryology. Concerning the assisted suicide, I was surprised since I had not heard anything about that issue. although it has not been to the first committee meeting I would’ve thought we would’ve heard more about it. In essence, what would be allowed if a person was terminal a doctor could give them a cocktail of pills to end their lives. A point that was made from the bishops was that what happens if the person was depressed. This opens up such a slippery slope. With all four issues, the bishops was raising the point that every human being deserves dignity, and the sanctity of life must be maintained.

Unfortunately, in some of the cases, the senator or representative was not aware that we were coming or

to be killed by the death penalty. In capital felony cases, juries determine whether the criminal act included at least two “aggravating factors”, which are defined by law. Two of the proposed bills would add new options of aggravating factors to the list making it more likely the juries would find two “aggravating factors” to be applicable. Additionally, the third proposed bill would make sex trafficking a capital felony instead of a life felony and it also provides its own list of “aggravating factors”. Again, life has dignity.

The third was to support House Bill 1255 for Required Instruction in Human Embryology. This would add to the required health education curriculum in grades 6-12 a high-definition ultrasound video showing the development of a human heart and other organs and movement of the limbs and head. It must also include a high-quality video showing and describing the process of fertilization and various stages of human development in the uterus, noting significant markers in cell growth and organ development. Knowledge is crucial for understanding reproductive health, pregnancy and basic human biology. This would be a scientific approach and not a respect life approach to educating our youth to help them understand how factors like maternal health, environment, and lifestyle choices can impact prenatal health and development.

The fourth was to support a budget item to assist with Improving Prison Infrastructure and Conditions. The physical condition of many of the facilities in Florida is very bad: electrical infrastructure and plumbing, windows, roofing, flooring and more are in urgent need of repair and around 75% of the housing units lack air conditioning. Although they are convicted of a crime, they are still human beings and deserving of the right to a life with dignity.

# COLEEN WARD

## DIOCESAN FIRST VICE PRESIDENT

had previous commitments. Their aides were helpful, although they would not speak on their Senator’s or Representative’s view.

We were fortunate to be able to speak with our Senator Danny Burgess. He resides in Wesley Chapel, and is a practicing Catholic. Four young people from Saint Leo presented the speaking points as well as their own views on the issue. Senator Burgess agreed to the sanctity of life.

I was heartened to see so many young people attending Catholic days at the Capital. The Red Mass was Inspiring. Seeing our bishops there along with our legislators and judicial members Gave me hope that there’s so many

Catholics living their faith. At the end of the Mass there were thank you's. When the bishop thanked everyone for the support of turning down amendment four there was a

thunderous applause. It brought tears to my eyes. I would encourage anyone to attend at least once if possible.

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## SUSAN O'BRIEN

### DIOCESAN SECOND VICE PRESIDENT

This was my first time going to Catholic Days at the Capitol. I have written to my state legislators in the past, and was looking forward to meeting them in person. Unfortunately, I was not able to see those from my district,, but did meet others.

Tuesday started with a presentation regarding the three bills and one appropriation the Florida Bishops had picked to discuss with the legislators this year. These were bills regarding Assisted Suicide, Death Penalty Expansion, and Required Instruction in Human Embryology, and appropriation of resources to improve prison infrastructure and conditions and meet prison staffing needs. We then met with our Diocesan coordinator who had a list of the legislators our group would be talking to on Wednesday. I was feeling a bit overwhelmed at this point, but decided to tag along on Wednesday with a group of attendees who were more experienced with this process.

Wednesday started with a breakfast with all of the people who were attending Catholic Days. There were presentations of yearly awards by the Bishops followed by all of us heading to the Capitol building. That day there were many, many groups visiting their legislators. We had some appointments, but also walked about seeing who was available for a walk-in visit. The staff in the Capitol building were all very nice,

helping us find our way to office, elevators, etc. We had a chance to speak with other groups who were there to discuss various bills and appropriations.

The visit ended with attending the 50th annual Red Mass of the Holy Spirit at the co-cathedral of St. Thomas More in Tallahassee. The chief celebrant was Archbishop Wenski of Miami, with six other Florida Bishops as co-celebrants, including our own Bishop Parkes. This Mass gave us the opportunity to pray for our legislators, judges, lawyers, and other elected officials. There were many Florida officials there, as well as our Governor, Ronald DeSantis. The Mass was a beautiful liturgy that included wonderful music and song by the Cathedral choir. The gifts were brought to the altar by the seven Diocesan Council of Catholic of Catholic Women Presidents, as well as the Florida Council of Catholic Women President and President-Elect.

One thing I would change for next time would be to look at the committee and other meeting schedules and try to attend a few of those. (I do watch some of those on the Florida Channel but it would be great to sit in some in person.)

I plan on following up on the progress of the bills and budget appropriation on the Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops website and the Florida House and Senate websites.

I encourage all of our members to attend this annual event, if your are able. It is very educational and a good look at how our state government works.

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I was happy to be able to attend Catholic Days at the Capitol again this year. Some of the highlights for me were the rosary led by the bishops and of course, the Red Mass. I enjoyed the awards presentation, hearing about some very special people who give so much of their time and talent to Catholic issues. Visiting our legislators was a disappointment, because we did not have appointments and they were unavailable to meet with us. We did visit one representative who took a long time with us, sharing some of his beliefs and his life's journey. He was a black man, who attended Catholic schools in Florida- segregated schools. He truly was an inspiration

## ELLEN JIMENEZ

### DIOCESAN SERVICE COMMISSIONER

to me! And, seeing so many of us dressed in red as we walked those buildings made me aware that we do make a difference by showing up at the Capitol.

I think one reason more of our women don't attend Catholic Days is the cost and transportation issues. I'm glad I could drive, but the nighttime driving in an unknown area is getting hard for me.

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## KATHY HUEY

### DIOCESAN SPIRITUALITY COMMISSIONER

is much to do in 2 days. The overview and presentation of Legislative priorities was excellent. However our Diocesan planning session was not really a planning session, it was just giving us our assignments. I understand our Diocesan representative was only given this responsibility 3 weeks

before and had no prior knowledge of Catholic Days, so she did the best she could under those circumstances. In fact, most of those attending had been to Catholic Days before and knew what to do. The group from my District did not have any specified appointments, but we still visited the offices of our Representative and Senator. After visiting those in our Districts and those in other Districts as we were asked, we found out that calling the Representative or Senator, specifically in Hernando County, will not secure an appointment. It must be done by email. As we already know that Catholic Days will be in early February next year, my suggestion is that the Diocesan representative starts securing appointments during the latter part of this year.

The Breakfast Buffet is wonderful and the Award presentations are very inspiring. I also enjoyed being able to pray the Rosary with the Bishops before proceeding to the Capital.

Everyone I encountered while visiting the legislators were very kind and helpful, especially as we were wandering around the building not knowing in which direction we were to go. We were honored to meet Senator Darryl Rouson and Representative Kevin Steele. They both took the time to explain their positions on the legislative issues we were there to speak about. They did not always agree with our

Catholic position, but were understanding of our viewpoint.

The Annual Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit is always the highlight of the trip for me. It's awe-inspiring to see all of the Bishops together and also so many priests. I'm also always impressed at the number of legislators and their staff who attend and also that Governor DeSantis attends the Mass.

I recommend that everyone who gets the opportunity should attend Catholic Days at the Capital at least once. It's an opportunity, as Catholics and constituents to inform our legislators of our Catholic position on specific legislative issues. There is power in numbers and to see that many people dressed in red, representing their Catholic faith is amazing.

I asked Father Pat Rebel for his insights into the trip to Catholic Days at the Capital. He enjoyed it very much and would go again. He felt it was difficult to do everything in 2 days. He thought it felt rushed. He loved meeting with Senator Rouson and Representative Steele. He thought they were personable and respectful and while they may not have agreed with our position on certain issues, they were respectful to our point of view.

Father Pat suggested that the Diocese should have a bus to take us to Tallahassee.

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## DOREEN WARD

OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY CCW,  
PRESIDENT

I have to say as a first time attendee to the Catholic days at the capital it was a little overwhelming, especially the first day. A lot of information is thrown at you within a short time. Unfortunately, we were not able to meet with many of our legislatures or senators, but I was fortunate enough to be able to meet With Senator Danny Burgess, and he did

take time to speak to us. It seemed that most of them were unaware of these pending bills. The one comment that was made by one of the aids is that she probably would support the Bill on the death penalty not because she does agree with it, but it would not look well voting against something that was gonna penalize people who are trafficking children, the one thing that impressed me so much was the amount of young people attending both during the day and at the Red Mass it was encouraging to see that our faith is being passed on to the next generation.



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## FR. TED COSTELLO

SPDCCW SPIRITUAL ADVISOR

I've been going to Catholic Days at the Capitol for over 12 years. It's a great experience and helps us to understand how our government works but not only that we could voice for those who speak for also, we get to have an interaction with our Senator and representative and then at the end of that day we ended up with the mass of the Holy Spirit, which is a great opportunity.