



A Call to Something Higher

Five questions with Father John I. Jenkins, the 2026 recipient of the Commonweal Centennial Award

Rev. John I. Jenkins, CSC, president emeritus of the University of Notre Dame, is the 2026 recipient of the *Commonweal* Centennial Award. *Commonweal* will present the award to Fr. Jenkins at its biennial Benefit Dinner on October 5 in New York City. As the *Commonweal* staff pulls together the event, Fr. Jenkins took a few moments to talk with us.

The relationship between the University of Notre Dame and *Commonweal* has existed almost as long as the magazine has been in print. Why do you think this relationship has remained so strong over the years?

In 1883, the university established the Laetare Medal, our highest award. It's presented annually to a leading lay Catholic whose genius has ennobled the arts and sciences, illustrated the ideals of the Church, and enriched the heritage of humanity. Over the years, *Commonweal* has demonstrated the importance of a lay Catholic voice, not only in the Church but in wider society. I think that's largely why *Commonweal* has always had a great presence at Notre Dame.

Do you recall when you were introduced to *Commonweal*?

Like a lot of other *Commonweal* readers, I'm sure it was during my college days. It was always in the libraries, so I read the magazine often. My attention to the magazine certainly increased as I entered the seminary, when I started to think more intentionally about the issues I cared most about at that time.

As president of Notre Dame, you led a renewed emphasis on the university's mission of educating the whole person. How can colleges and universities continue to cultivate the human person in the era of the algorithm?

I'm apprehensive about the rise of AI and the thinking of those who influence it. It's ever more critical to have a coherent moral vision and to educate people in light of that moral vision. I see in AI a great peril—and a great opportunity for Catholic universities to offer people a more expansive view of the human person and what's possible for us.

In 2016, you lamented in an interview with *Commonweal* contributor John Gehring about the corrosive political climate, while championing civility and common ground. Do Catholics have something particularly distinctive to contribute in this effort?

My life has seen a great shift. When I was young, I did not know anyone who voted Republican. If you were Catholic, you were a Democrat. It has since gone the other way, for a lot of different reasons. Political operatives, for instance, have found ways to mobilize religious groups—Evangelical or Catholic—through divisive issues, whether it's abortion or transgender rights. Steve Bannon has described this as “turning on the hate,” which characterizes politics on both the left and the right today, unfortunately. As Catholics, we have to resist that strategy. We have to resist the vilification of people who disagree with us and instead focus on the richness of Catholic teaching.

In America today, Catholic identity has become an increasingly contentious topic, from the voting booth to the parish pews. How is Pope Leo helping us think about Catholic identity in different ways?

Like Pope Francis before him, Pope Leo is offering a more expansive presentation of Catholic teaching. At every opportunity, he has resisted any attempt to simplify it. Pope Leo knows what he thinks and he says what he means, but he never gives way to the anger and meanness that so characterizes public life today. In this and many other ways, I think Pope Leo is calling us to something different and something higher.



Father John I. Jenkins, president emeritus of Notre Dame and the 2026 recipient of the Commonweal Centennial Award



Paul Saunders,
Commonweal's chair emeritus

'That's What We Do'

As he prepares to step away from the Board of Trustees, *Commonweal's* chair emeritus can't stop championing the magazine he's grown to love

As he remembers it, Paul Saunders, a fixture of *Commonweal's* board of directors for two decades, discovered the magazine largely by accident. "I was a freshman at Fordham. In those days—we're talking in the late 1950s—if you lived on campus, you had a little mail slot. Once a week, someone would slide an issue of *Commonweal* and the *Catholic Worker* into it. I would flip through the pages and, my apologies to Dorothy Day and the fine editors at *Commonweal*, that was about all as far as I ever got with either."

A more formal relationship with the magazine started four decades later, when *Commonweal's* then-editor Margaret O'Brien Steinfelds asked him to write about his experiences representing Fr. Charlie Curran in his lawsuit against Catholic University. In 1986, the Vatican declared that Curran, then a tenured professor of theology at the university, was no longer "suitable or eligible" to teach theology. Curran sued for breach of contract, claiming that as a tenured professor, he had certain rights to academic freedom pursuant to which only his academic peers could judge the competency of his work. "It was a high-profile case," said Saunders, a retired partner at the law firm Cravath, Swaine & Moore. "It was all over the papers. I represented Charlie Curran for about five years—until he no longer wanted to take the trial any further. He told me, 'I'm done. If they don't want me at Catholic University, I'll go some place else.'" (To read Saunders's account of the case, visit cwlmag.org/CurranCase.)

Later, in 2008, *Commonweal* contributor Dennis O'Brien, then the president of the University of Rochester, invited Saunders to join the magazine's board of directors, along with business executive Tim Welsh and former *Commonweal* editor Peter Steinfelds, to help—as Paul Baumann wrote in the announcement—"plan for the magazine's future, review major decisions, and (not least) raise money." One of the first major initiatives they took on was the expansion of "the *Commonweal* Web site" [sic] and the development of the magazine's outreach to undergraduate and graduate students through subscriptions, speakers series, and events programming. "Dennis was the one who turned what was essentially an advisory board into a corporate organization," Saunders said. "I was happy to help be a part of that."

What he's since come to admire most about the magazine he used to skim as an undergraduate is its tradition of editorial excellence and its commitment to promoting the common good. "We have the best writers. We have the best editors. And we continue to find new readers who want to learn as much as they can about politics and democracy, the Church, and their place in the world. That's what we do and, thanks to the new generation of leaders, that's what we're going to keep doing."

The Gift that Keeps on Giving

Now old enough to be in graduate school, the College Subscription Program continues to foster the next generation of *Commonweal* readers

In 2000, to help *Commonweal* keep up with the changing patterns of Catholic life and Catholic education in a new century, Mary Anne and William P. Ford established the College Subscription Program. By soliciting donors to sponsor five gift subscriptions for undergraduate and graduate students around the country—"at the discounted (and tax-deductible) price of \$18 per gift"—the Fords ensured that another generation of readers and writers would find an intellectual home in the pages of the magazine. As one appreciative beneficiary of the program wrote in a 2004 letter to the editor, "This magazine has been such a blessing to me as I seek to grow intellectually and spiritually through my college years and beyond. Publications such as *Commonweal* remind me that the beauty of our faith lies in its ability to be so relevant."

More than a quarter-century later, the program is still going strong. It continues to introduce *Commonweal* to active and engaged readers when they are forming their reading habits, exploring their faith, and mapping out their futures. Today, hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students on college campuses from St. John's in Queens, New York, to Seattle University in Washington are enrolled in the program, thanks to the generosity of individual donors.

"The College Subscription Program is one of the most important and longest-lasting efforts we have at *Commonweal*," said executive director Ellen B. Koneck. "Through it, we've reached new readers, of course, but interns, fellows, staff, contributing writers, and even donors have also found us first through it. The ability to give the magazine to young people during this critical season of their lives yields fruit we often see years later."

Broadcast News

***Commonweal's* first narrative podcast series is breaking ground and drawing attention**

Since launching in 2018, *The Commonweal Podcast* has hosted conversations with more than 160 writers, theologians, artists, journalists, and activists. It has taken thousands of *Commonweal* subscribers beyond the pages of the latest issue to shed fresh light on the news, books, movies, music, and political developments that spur debate and deserve deeper reflection. It has been downloaded nearly half-a-million times. For all of the pod's many milestones, however, it had never featured a multiepisode narrative series—until this year.

On June 10, *Commonweal's* inaugural Centennial Fellow Aaron Robertson premiered his series *The City and the Cross*, which chronicles the rise, erosion, and defiant survival of Black Catholic Detroit. Across three episodes, Robertson traces this arc, from the improvisational origins of Black Catholic churches in the early twentieth century and the creative ferment of the 1960s and 1970s through the devastating closures of 1989 and into the present, when another wave of church closures is looming.

"The series is far more immersive, powerful, and challenging than a piece of magazine writing could ever be," said associate editor and podcast producer Griffin Oleynick. "Using archival recordings, music clips, and new interviews with participants, it throws listeners right into the struggles of Black Catholics in twentieth-century Detroit, who vigorously fought the Catholic

Church's racism and institutional neglect to preserve the spiritual communities they'd proudly built."

We're not the only ones raving about the series. After the second episode aired on June 17, *National Catholic Reporter* ran an online feature on Robertson, his fellowship, and the series. "My heart is always with the written word," Robertson told the outlet. "But there is something to hearing the voices of people who lived through this history. One of the things I wanted to convey with this podcast is just how emotional this was for Catholics who lost their church homes."

The City and the Cross was also highlighted at the top of *Axios Detroit's* daily newsletter, with editors calling it "a powerful new podcast about the tumultuous history of Black Catholics in the Motor City." Robertson also spoke with Michigan Public Radio, and he and his series will also be featured in the *Black Catholic Messenger*.

Though it might have taken us almost a decade to produce a narrative podcast series, the skillful storytelling and early success of Robertson's *The City and the Cross* teaches us two things: it was well worth the wait, and we're only getting started.



Literary Endeavors

From the Bronx to a Big Five Publisher, our *Commonweal* intern embarks on a career in the written word

In between helping editors prepare articles for the *Commonweal* website, writing capsule book reviews, and curating the Tuesday newsletter, our editorial intern Allison Schneider, an English major at Fordham College at Rose Hill, was busy revising her senior thesis on Toni Morrison and the Black Catholic imagination.

Her hard work didn't go unnoticed. Here, in the *Commonweal* office, editors were constantly raving about Allison's performance (and her good company). While uptown in the Bronx, faculty in Fordham's English Department were singling out her scholarship. In the spring, the department presented Allison with the Bernice Kilduff White and John J. White Prize for Excellence in the Study of English Literature in recognition of her outstanding critical essay.

Writing her thesis—"Body and Blood: The Black Catholic Imagination in Toni Morrison's Novels"—Allison worked with Angela Alaimo O'Donnell, associate director of Fordham's Curran Center for American Catholic Studies and frequent *Commonweal* contributor. "She was an incredible mentor," said Allison. "She helped me make this paper the best it can be. Working with her has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my time at Fordham."

Around this same time, Allison was helping *Commonweal's* inaugural Centennial Fellow Aaron Robertson organize interviews for his podcast series, *The City and the Cross*. "That was a privilege," she said, "I even got a shoutout in the credits, which was unexpected and cool. But everything I did at *Commonweal* was an enlightening extension of my education. I received invaluable hands-on experience, and everyone in the *Commonweal* community welcomed me with open arms. I feel that the relationships we built here have real staying power."

After graduating *summa cum laude* from Fordham and moving on from the magazine, Allison joined HarperCollins, one of the Big Five book publishers, as an intern in the production editorial department. She is currently helping to produce forthcoming titles for children, middle-grade, and young-adult readers.



Allison Schneider

Awards Season

Senior Correspondent Heidi Schlumpf recognized by the Catholic Media Association

Anyone who works with senior correspondent Heidi Schlumpf or reads her work in *Commonweal* is already well aware of her talent as a writer and her acumen for tracking down a story. But, as the cardinal rule of journalism reminds us, it's always best to get confirmation from a second source.

Luckily, the Catholic Media Association recently announced its 2026 slate of awards. True to form, Schlumpf took home two. She earned second place for her coverage of the conclave with *National Catholic Reporter*. Describing the award-winning package, "The First American Pope? This Cardinal Has the Best Chance of Making History in This Conclave," the award committee at the Catholic Media Association highlighted its "interesting and descriptive picture of the new pope," which not only introduced readers to Robert Prevost, but also helped them understand why he was elected pope. *National Catholic Reporter*'s Christopher White, Brian Roewe, Katie Collins Scott, and Dan Delorenzo shared in the honors.

In another category, Schlumpf won third place for her piece about sanctuary in *U.S. Catholic*, along with Cecilia González-Andrieu and Peter Feuerherd, who also contributed to the publication's package on immigration. In its commendation, the award committee wrote, "The standout piece is the sanctuary feature, which brings together history, policy, theology, and present-day stakes with depth and clarity."

Over the years, the Catholic Media Association has recognized Schlumpf's work with multiple prizes, most notably for her investigative reporting about EWTN and the business practices of Dynamic Catholic's Matthew Kelly. The association also recognized her pieces about the 2024 election in *Mother Jones* and *U.S. Catholic*. She earned second-place honors for news analysis from Religion News Service for her NCR pieces about Catholic Trump voters, legal activist Leonard Leo, and women's responses to the 2024 election.

Announcing this year's awards, Kerry Weber, president of the Catholic Media Association, said, "It remains a lovely perk of the Catholic Media Association to present the Catholic Media Awards to honor the amazing creativity of our members, as well as their depth of talent and commitment to our trade."

Keep an eye out for more evidence of Schlumpf's award-winning talent and unwavering commitment to her trade in the pages of *Commonweal*.



**MONDAY
OCTOBER 5, 6:30 P.M.**

**PIER 60, CHELSEA PIERS
NEW YORK CITY**



YOU'RE INVITED

Join us as *Commonweal* celebrates 102 years of continuous publication

Honoring Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C., President Emeritus of the University of Notre Dame with the 2026 Commonweal Centennial Award

For more information & registration, visit cwlmag.org/benefit2026.



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

A Strong Course for the Future

A letter from the Editor

Dear Commonweal Associates,

My annual missive to you comes at a time of exciting transition and gathering momentum.

Here in 2026, we're approaching our 102nd year of continuous publication and looking forward to our biannual Commonweal Benefit Dinner on October 5, where we'll be honoring Rev. John I. Jenkins, CSC, former president of the University of Notre Dame. We've welcomed new writers and staff members, redesigned the homepage of the *Commonweal* website, and expanded our podcast programming. And we've traveled far and wide for numerous in-person events, panels, and gatherings—even meeting some of you along the way. Whether we've come face-to-face or not, let me use this opportunity to thank all of you. Associates are the reason any of this is possible.

The past year has again proved the need for a publication like *Commonweal*. As an independent journal of opinion edited by lay Catholics, we've been able to bring our unique perspective and depth of analysis to news of the Church and the world. There's the election of Pope Leo XIV and the mission he's embarked on as the first pope from the United States. The actions of the second Trump administration and its dehumanizing policies on immigration, economics, and international relations. Developments in American Catholicism, from statements by the bishops on immigration to the role of Catholic social teaching in everyday life. The future of pluralist, Christian democracy amid a rising global tide of nationalism. We're hardly impartial, but we think coverage like this makes us unique.

Just as unique is the deep loyalty of our donors. And we're meeting that loyalty with something more intentional: our Second Century Associates program. This program rewards those who donate \$1,000 or more with greater recognition, meaningful benefits, and real relationships at every giving level. It creates a clearer pathway for donors who want to do more as we pursue the Second Century Campaign. The response in the first year of our Second Century Associates program was striking: giving at the \$1,000+ level increased 147 percent over the prior year. And that helped us surpass the \$6 million mark on the way to our campaign goal of \$10 million. Early indicators show we could hit \$8 million by the end of 2026, yet we hope to do more. The October 2026 Benefit Dinner will mark the next major campaign milestone, but remember: our Second Century Campaign counts all giving—major gifts, board commitments, foundation grants, bequests, and Associates support.

Your contributions to the campaign can help us work toward three future-oriented priorities of *Commonweal's* Second Century Strategy: financial sustainability, new audiences, and public thought leadership. Thanks to you, we've already made progress on these fronts. We've expanded outreach and opportunities for the Edward Skillin Society—supporters who include *Commonweal* in their estate planning. We've inaugurated the Commonweal Centennial Fellowship for writers in the early or middle state of their careers. And we're seeing the fruits of working with like-minded partners in a growing ecosystem of academic institutions, foundations, and other nonprofits. All of this sets us on a strong course for the future.

It's a future you can be a part of—and that we need you to be a part of. Individual supporters like you remain the backbone of our organization. Indeed, 72 percent of *Commonweal's* revenue in 2025 came from fundraising. This demonstrates your confidence not only in what *Commonweal* is, but what it's becoming.

And for that, we could not be more grateful.



DOMINIC PREZIOSI
Editor, *Commonweal*

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

COMMONWEAL AT A GLANCE

More than 100 years of archival
content available online

11 Print Issues
a Year

Roughly 13,000 current print
and digital subscribers

More than 2 million page views
on our website in 2025

42,000 podcast downloads in 2025

35,000 email
newsletter readers

Nearly 45,000 followers
across various social media

Mor than 50 local communities
using discussion resources

2,303 donors in 2025

15-person staff based throughout
the United States

Live and Virtual Events

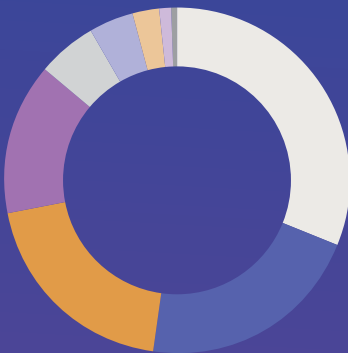
THE BASICS

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STAFF: 15 \$2.5 Million

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Features Editor, Senior Correspondent,
Managing Editor, Special Projects Editor,
Digital Editor, Editorial Assistant

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Marketing & Audience Development Director,
Mission & Partnerships Director,
Finance & Operations Manager

2025 REVENUE SOURCES



Planned Giving Bequests:	31.15%
Second Century Associates:	21.34%
Subscriptions:	19.65%
Commonwealth Associates Support:	14.13%
Fundraising Event Revenue:	5.42%
Advertising:	4.38%
Foundation Grants:	2.54%
College Subscription Program:	0.88%
Miscellaneous:	0.51%

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