



GEM IMPACT REPORT

2025



LIGHTING CANDLES,
A YEAR IN MINISTRY

Teaching and Empowering Catholics to Experience
Daily the Loving Embrace of Our Triune God

www.GodsEmbrace.org



A YEAR IN GOD'S GRACE



STACY OEDING

Executive Director

This past year has been a holy year for God's Embrace Ministries. It has been one of deep blessing and sacred surrender. It has been a year of growth and a year of trust.

In a world filled with noise, anxiety, and spiritual hunger, men and women across parishes, dioceses, and states encountered something real — not a program, but a Person. They discovered that prayer is not an obligation, faith is not a theory, and discipleship is not reserved for a few. Christ is near, and He is transforming hearts.

Every online group, retreat, pilgrimage, and hour of spiritual direction is one more candle lit against the darkness — a mission first embraced by our founder Dr. Michael Fonseca and his late wife Cherrie, whose words continue to guide us:

***“Rather than cursing the darkness,
we decided to light candles.”***

This report is a testimony of what God has done — and what your generosity has made possible.

GEM'S CORE VALUES

Faith-FULLY Catholic

Rooted in truth, faithful in practice, and open to the Spirit's leading.

Daily Encounter

A living relationship with Jesus through prayer, Scripture, and discernment.

Open Arms

Welcoming every soul with warmth, dignity, and compassion.

Shared Mission

Partnering with parishes, dioceses, and ministries to build up the Body of Christ.

Enduring Hope

Anchored in Christ in every season of life.



OUR MISSION IN ACTION

Each number below represents a soul touched, a life formed in Christ, a candle lit. Behind every number is a sacred story — a moment when someone chose prayer over distraction, faith over fear, hope over despair. This year, through your partnership, God's Embrace Ministries accompanied hundreds of men and women as they learned to listen for God's voice, deepen their sacramental lives, and rediscover the joy of being Catholic.

Formation & Reach



227
PARTICIPANTS
IN FORMATION
PROGRAMS



10
GEOGRAPHIC
REACH
(STATES/DIOCESE)



50
RECURRING
DONORS
(COVENANT PARTNERS)

- 227 participants took part in formation programs — growing in prayer, Scripture, and Catholic identity.
- 10 states / dioceses now touched by GEM programs, showing the expanding reach of this mission.
- 50 Covenant Partners (recurring donors) standing faithfully with us month after month.

Spiritual Accompaniment



18
HOURS OF
SPIRITUAL
DIRECTION
(MONTHLY)



68,600
HOURS OF
FACE TO FACE
PRAYER

- 18 hours of spiritual direction every month — personal, holy conversations where God's voice is heard and lives are changed.
- 68,600 hours of face-to-face prayer — retreats, small groups, pilgrimages, spiritual exercises, and daily encounters with Christ.

Testimonies of Transformation



8
TESTIMONIES
COLLECTED

8 testimonies formally collected this year — each one a story of renewed prayer, deeper love for the Mass, and restored confidence in Catholic faith.

Participants consistently report:

- Deeper prayer lives
- Renewed understanding of the Mass
- Greater confidence in Catholic beliefs
- Long-term spiritual growth following retreats and pilgrimages



WHY THIS MATTERS

We are not simply teaching information — we are forming disciples.

Through:

- Book-based formation programs
- Facilitator training
- Spiritual Directors Institute
- One-on-one spiritual direction
- Silent retreats, parish groups, and pilgrimages

Through our three pillars, teaching, mentorship and experiences, GEM is building a culture of daily prayer, sacramental living, and missionary discipleship — faith-FULL Catholics alive in Christ and equipped to serve His Church.



Teaching



Mentorship



Experiences

Looking Ahead

The work God has begun is only just unfolding.

Across parishes and dioceses, we are hearing the same longing again and again: Help us pray. Help us discern. Help us walk with God. The need for spiritual formation and accompaniment has never been greater — and neither has the opportunity.

In the year ahead, God's Embrace Ministries will prayerfully focus on:

- Expanding access to spiritual direction for individuals and parish communities
- Training and mentoring new facilitators and spiritual directors
- Deepening parish partnerships that foster daily prayer and sacramental living
- Making formation available to participants that lack resources but hunger for renewal

We step forward with confidence, not in our own strength, but in the faithfulness of God — trusting that, together, we will continue lighting candles that will burn brightly for generations to come.





A MILESTONE YEAR FOR THE GEM SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS INSTITUTE

This year marked a historic moment for God's Embrace Ministries.

In response to the growing spiritual hunger across parishes and dioceses, the GEM Spiritual Directors Institute launched an entire year ahead of schedule — a clear sign that the need for spiritual accompaniment in the Church is no longer emerging... it is urgent.

The 2025–2026 Cohort at a Glance:

46 total members
currently active in
the Institute

23 new candidates
preparing for
certification

13 Certified spiritual
directors serving as
the formation team

9 Accelerated-track
participants to be
certified in 2026

Diocesan Endorsement & Church Support

The GEM Spiritual Directors Institute carries the full endorsement of:

Most Rev. Brendan J. Cahill
Bishop of Victoria, Texas

Bishop Cahill has publicly affirmed the fruitfulness of GEM's work and its impact across dioceses — a powerful testament to the integrity, fidelity, and depth of formation that defines our program. His support reflects the Church's growing recognition that spiritual direction is not a luxury — it is essential to authentic discipleship.

This extraordinary response confirms what pastors and parish leaders are telling us: people are longing not just for answers — but for someone to walk with them.



WHY SPIRITUAL DIRECTION MATTERS

In an age of distraction, isolation, and spiritual confusion, Catholics are asking deeper questions:

- How do I hear God's voice?
- How do I discern His will?
- How do I grow in holiness in the middle of ordinary life?

Spiritual direction provides sacred space where these questions are welcomed. It is a relationship rooted in prayer, guided discernment, and listening to the Holy Spirit — helping individuals recognize how God is already at work in their lives.

Throughout Church history, spiritual direction has formed saints, strengthened clergy, and sustained missionary disciples. Today, it is more needed than ever.



**Our Founder and Mentor
Dr. Michael Fonseca**

What Makes the GEM Institute Unique

Our directors are shaped through:

- A three-year formation model, developed by Dr. Michael Fonseca, that is rooted in Scripture, Ignatian spirituality, and Catholic tradition
- Supervised practicum and team mentorship
- Integration of prayer, theological reflection, and pastoral application
- Ongoing accountability within a living spiritual community

Graduates do not simply receive certification — they emerge as faithful, discerning companions ready to serve:

- Facilitating group spiritual direction through GEM small groups in their parishes
- GEM One-on-one spiritual direction
- GEM Institute Formation
- Retreats, spiritual care, and evangelization
- Parishes & diocesan ministries

GEM Spiritual Directors

They are men and women formed to walk reverently with souls — listening for God's movement and helping others discover His loving embrace.



SERVING WITH FAITH. LEADING WITH LOVE.

Behind every program, every prayer hour, and every soul accompanied stands a board of men and women who steward the mission of God's Embrace Ministries with prayerful discernment and professional integrity.

Our Board of Directors serves not simply as advisors, but as guardians of the mission — ensuring that every decision remains faithful to the Church, financially responsible, and responsive to the spiritual needs of God's people.



The GEM Board exists to:

Our Purpose

- Safeguard the Catholic identity and spiritual integrity of the ministry
- Provide strategic vision and governance
- Ensure sound financial stewardship and transparency
- Advocate for the mission across parishes, dioceses, and communities
- Pray intentionally for every soul entrusted to God's Embrace

Each board member commits to:

- Faithful participation in quarterly board meetings
- Prayerful discernment and accountability
- Serving as ambassadors of God's Embrace Ministries

GEM Board Members

(from left)

Cody Horton
Victoria, Texas

Fr. Wayne Flagg
El Campo, Texas

DeeAnn Hooper, Secretary
Schulenburg, Texas

Dr. Michael Fonseca, Founder
Seadrift, Texas

Ralph Schmidt
Schulenburg, Texas

Jerry DeShaw, President
Holland Michigan

Chris Cruickshank, Vice President
Rockford, Michigan

Not Pictured:
Randall Becker,
Bel Air, Maryland

Steve Fase,
Rockford, Michigan

Eamon McCourt, Treasurer
Schulenburg, Texas



THANK YOU FOR LIGHTING CANDLES WITH US

Because of your generosity, hearts are being healed, disciples are being formed, and the Church is being strengthened. Every hour of prayer, every life accompanied through spiritual direction, every retreat and pilgrimage — all of it is made possible through the faithful partnership of people like you.

Your support is not a transaction. It is a sacred participation in God's work.

As we look to the year ahead, we invite you to continue walking with us as a Covenant Partner or to consider a special year-end gift.

Your gift allows us to:

- Train spiritual directors
- Expand parish formation programs
- Provide one-on-one spiritual accompaniment
- Bring prayer and renewal to communities across the nation

Your generosity ensures that no soul walks alone. By becoming a Covenant Partner or making a year-end gift, you help light the path of faith for generations to come.

Together, we are not just funding ministry — we are forming souls for eternity.

CONTACT US



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HOW TO SUPPORT GOD'S EMBRACE MINISTRIES

Give Online:

www.GodsEmbrace.org

Scan the QR Code:



Give by Mail:

God's Embrace Ministries
1601 High Hill Rd.
Schulenburg, Tx 78956

Become a Covenant Partner:

Monthly recurring gifts create stable, sustainable ministry.