



Late Chicago Pastor was a Legendary "Extension Priest"

**Father Bernie Pietrzak was co-founder of Catholic Extension Society's
Mission Immersion Program.**

Fr. Bernie with Fr. Jack Wall, President of Catholic Extension, in 2018

The Saint Anne Catholic Community dedicates its 2024 Almsgiving to the memory of Fr. Bernie Pietrzak.

The following is taken from a piece that Catholic Extension published December 1, 2023.

Father Jack Wall, president of Catholic Extension Society said, "Father Bernie was more than a wonderful priest and beloved pastor, he was the co-founder of Catholic Extension Society's pastor immersion and parish partnership programs. He is and will forever be a legend."

Starting almost a decade ago, Father Bernie partnered with Catholic Extension Society to connect his parish in solidarity (spiritually and financially) to support the hopes and dreams of Catholic faith communities in the poorest regions of our country.



He sought to activate the missionary spirit within the parish he shepherded, believing that it would lead to much good.

He was right.

What he started spread beyond his parish and sparked a national movement.

Not only did Father Bernie and the team at St. Anne's raise \$250,000 to support the poor and

marginalized through various Lenten appeals in collaboration with Catholic Extension Society, he also inspired other parishes to do the same.

Since 2017, Father Bernie and the Saint Anne Faithjustice team have raised \$250,000 through various Lenten appeals in collaboration with Catholic Extension to support poor and marginalized people and their communities.

Since 2017, the Lilly Endowment, Inc., a major funder of religious congregations in America, invested \$1.5M in grants to nationally expand our mission immersion and parish partnership program that Father Bernie envisioned and started along with pastors

of neighboring parishes in the Archdiocese of Chicago. As a result, over 400 pastors, priests, and parish leaders representing 60 dioceses across the country have been able to follow Father Bernie's lead. And the Church in America is better and stronger because of it.

An "Extension Priest"

Father Bernie, was among those clergy, actively "awakening the mission spirit across America," in the words of Catholic Extension's founder, Father Francis Clement Kelley.

While attending a Catholic Extension event less than a week before his death, he remarked,

I've become an 'Extension Priest'"

An Extension priest is one that realizes that any meaningful transformation begins with an open heart. He is one that understands that a church is not a club—a club is member-centered, while a church is mission-driven.

**Great parishes are the ones that awaken
the mission spirit in their people.**

Father Bernie would actively encourage other pastors to get involved with Catholic Extension Society, so that they too could be in touch with all the uplifting and inspiring aspects of the Church's life beyond just the four walls of their parish.

That openness led Father Bernie on mission immersion trips organized by Catholic Extension that took him to

Native American Reservations
in Rapid City, South Dakota





Visits with Catholic sisters in disaster-struck communities in Puerto Rico



Poor towns along the U.S. – Mexico border



Mass with migrant farmworkers and their families in fields of Yakima Valley

A week before he died, Father Bernie was scheduled to travel with Catholic Extension to the Indigenous communities we support in California's Coachella Valley.

Bishop Joseph Tyson, of the Diocese of Yakima, Washington, said, "Father Bernie had a pastoral vision that was both visionary and specific. He led his parishioners as well as brother priests on pastoral visits including his visits here to Yakima. On the granular level he was close to his parishioners and because he knew their passion could identify those who shared his own passion for Catholic Extension and its mission to places like the diocese of Yakima."

A legacy of joy

Everywhere Father Bernie went he brought the joy and inspiration of his encounters back to his parish.

He bonded with everyone along the way, both the communities he visited and people who were his companions on the journey. He did so on this trip to Puerto Rico with fellow priests from the Archdiocese of Chicago in October 2021.

You could hear his laugh from a mile away. Once on a flight back to Chicago after one of his immersion trips with Catholic Extension, he laughed so loudly and frequently, that all of the other passengers became his audience.

No doubt, the beloved priest's infectious laugh and love of life will accompany his spirit to the gates of God's kingdom. Remembering his joy and humor will give his mourners some measure of comfort as we grapple with the staggering loss.

But perhaps even more comforting is to know that his legacy now lives on among parishes across the country, even though he is no longer with us.

Thanks to his example, countless Catholics are coming to a greater awareness of the fact that both the priestly vocation as well as the vocation of all the baptized faithful are strengthened by encounters, especially by encounters that bring us face to face with Christ in the poor. Just as Jesus' ministry grew through his direct encounter with peoples



and groups on the margins, so too do we grow in our Christian vocations through our real encounters.

Father Bernie- thanks for the laughter, the memories, and more importantly, the lessons you taught us. Let the legacy live on! Ad Moltos Annos!