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Diocese of Erie joins Gannon University in celebrating the Class of 2026

The Diocese of Erie joins Gannon University in celebrating the accomplishments of the Class of 2026 during Spring Commencement ceremonies on Saturday, May 9, 2026. More than 700 students will receive degrees during ceremonies held at Erie Insurance Arena following the annual Baccalaureate Mass at St. Peter Cathedral, celebrated by The Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, J.C.L., Bishop of Erie.

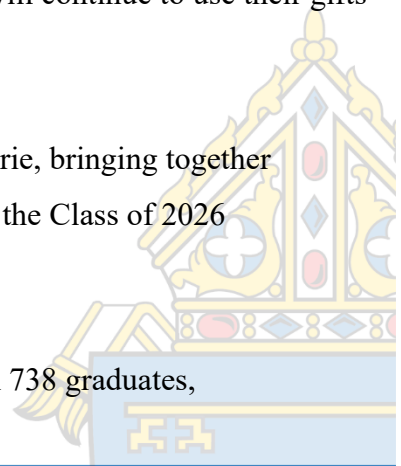
This year’s commencement ceremonies hold special significance for the Diocese of Erie as Bishop Persico was invited to be the keynote speaker at the ceremony and will receive an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*, in recognition of his faithful leadership and enduring commitment to Catholic education. Bishop Persico serves as the chairperson of the Gannon University Board of Trustees.

“A Catholic education prepares students not only for professional success, but for lives of faith, service and leadership,” said Bishop Persico. “We pray the graduates of the Class of 2026 will continue to use their gifts to build up their communities and serve others with hope and compassion.”

The day will begin with Baccalaureate Mass at 10 a.m. at St. Peter Cathedral, Erie, bringing together graduates, families, faculty and friends in thanksgiving for the achievements of the Class of 2026 and in prayer for their future endeavors.

Gannon University President Walter Iwanenko, Ph.D., will confer degrees upon 738 graduates,

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ALLISON MOSIER
DIRECTOR
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
AND ADVANCEMENT
Office 814.824.1171
Cell 814.897.3264
amosier@ErieRCD.org

KRISTINE RILLING
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
AND ADVANCEMENT
Office 814.824.1167
Cell 814.397.8366
krilling@ErieRCD.org

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
AND ADVANCEMENT
Office 814.824.1161

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including doctoral, master's, bachelor's and associate degree recipients. The graduating class includes students from 39 countries, reflecting the university's global reach and commitment to forming students intellectually, spiritually and professionally.

As a Catholic, diocesan university, Gannon University continues to play an important role in advancing the educational and evangelizing mission of the Diocese of Erie through academic excellence, service and leadership formation grounded in the Catholic intellectual tradition.

Commencement Events: A livestream of the ceremonies will be available through Gannon University for family and friends unable to attend in person. Visit: <https://www.gannon.edu/commencement/erie-spring-commencement/>

More about Bishop Persico:

The Most Reverend Lawrence Thomas Persico, 10th bishop of the Diocese of Erie, has dedicated nearly five decades to priestly ministry and leadership in the Catholic Church, with an enduring commitment to Catholic education and the formation of young people.

Born Nov. 21, 1950, in Monessen, Pa., he was raised in a close-knit, faith-centered family in the steel valley of southwestern Pennsylvania. He attended Saint Cajetan Elementary School and Saint Joseph Hall, the diocesan high school seminary in Greensburg. He later earned a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy from Saint Pius X Seminary in Erlanger, Kentucky, and a Master of Divinity from Saint Vincent Seminary in Latrobe. In 1982, he received a licentiate in canon law from The Catholic University of America.

Bishop Persico was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Greensburg on April 30, 1977. Over the next three decades he served in numerous leadership roles including assistant chancellor, vice chancellor and chancellor of the diocese, while also serving as pastor of Saint James Parish in New Alexandria. In 2005 he was appointed vicar general and moderator of the curia, positions that required both pastoral sensitivity and administrative leadership.

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On July 31, 2012, Pope Benedict XVI appointed Monsignor Persico the tenth bishop of the Diocese of Erie. He was ordained and installed at Saint Peter Cathedral on Oct. 1, 2012. His episcopal motto, *Veritas in Caritate* — “Truth in Love” — reflects his approach to ministry rooted in compassion, integrity and service.

Throughout his time as bishop, Bishop Persico has been a strong advocate for Catholic education and the mission of Catholic universities. As Bishop of Erie, he serves as chairperson of the Board of Trustees of Gannon University, providing guidance in preserving the university’s Catholic identity and supporting its commitment to academic excellence, service and the formation of the whole person.

In that role he has worked closely with university leadership, faculty and students, supporting initiatives that strengthen the university’s mission and expand opportunities for students seeking both intellectual and spiritual growth.

Beyond his work with Gannon University, Bishop Persico has served on several national and regional boards and remains active with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference.

Having reached the canonical age of 75 in 2025, Bishop Persico has submitted his resignation to the Holy Father as required by Church law and continues to serve the Diocese of Erie while awaiting the appointment of his successor. We invite the faithful to join in prayer for all those involved in this process – for our Holy Father, for those discerning the next bishop of Erie and for our diocesan family.

To learn more about the episcopal transition and how you can be involved, visit:

<https://www.eriecd.org/transition.html>.

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OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
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