



2025 ISKALI CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Pilgrims of Hope

www.iskali.org



 McGRATH
INSTITUTE

2025 ISKALI CONFERENCE

Made possible in partnership with the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame and funding from the Lilly Endowment. Special thanks to Katherine Angulo for making this partnership possible.



Called to serve: **15 Years of Iskali**

Fifteen years ago, Iskali began with a simple desire: to walk with young Latino Catholics and create a space where they could encounter Christ, grow in faith, and build community.



What started as a small seed has become a movement—rooted in service, guided by love, and carried forward by the courage of so many young adults who said “yes” to the mission.

Throughout the years, we’ve witnessed powerful stories of transformation, healing, and leadership. We’ve shared retreats, meals, tears, laughter, and dreams. And we’ve done it together—with hearts open to God and to one another. This milestone isn’t just about time. It’s about lives touched, communities formed, and faith made real through action.

Thank you for being here at the **2025 Iskali Conference**. Your presence means more than you know. Thank you for being part of this growing community—one that believes the Church is alive, young, and full of hope.



Thursday

06:00 p.m. - 06:30 p.m.

06:30 p.m. - 07:00 p.m.

07:00 p.m. - 08:00 p.m.

08:00 p.m. - 09:00 p.m.

09:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.

10:00 p.m. - 11:00 p.m.

11:00 p.m. - 11:30 p.m.

Registration

Hors d'oeuvres and cocktail

Keynote: Sr. Paesie – “How can a young adult embody the role of a Pilgrim of Hope within both Society and the Church?”

Drinks and Networking

Welcome and Housekeeping

Open Activities

End of Day 1

Keynote: Sr. Paesie

Founder, *The Kizito Family*

Born in Nancy, France, Sister Paesie (Claire Joelle Philippe) grew up in a large, faith-filled family and first sensed a call to religious life as a child. Inspired by the life and witness of Mother Teresa, she joined the Missionaries of Charity on her 18th birthday and took her final vows in 1996. Her formation and missionary work took her across Europe and eventually to Haiti in 1999, where she served for nearly two decades among the poorest of the poor.

Over time, Sister felt a new calling—one that led her to found The Kizito Family in 2018, a Catholic community dedicated to protecting, educating, and evangelizing street children in Port-au-Prince. Named after St. Kizito, a 14-year-old Ugandan martyr, the community works in neighborhoods marked by extreme violence and poverty, offering free schools, safe shelters, and spiritual care to hundreds of children and youth.

Sister Paesie continues to live and serve among the most vulnerable, witnessing to the power of love in action. Her life reminds us that true service is not just what we do—it's who we become when we follow Christ to the margins.



Friday

08:00 a.m. - 09:00 a.m.
09:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.
10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
12:00 p.m. - 12:30 p.m.
12:30 p.m. - 02:00 p.m.
02:00 p.m. - 03:00 p.m.

03:00 p.m. - 03:30 p.m.
03:30 p.m. - 04:00 p.m.
04:00 p.m. - 05:00 p.m.
05:00 p.m. - 06:30 p.m.
06:30 p.m. - 07:00 p.m.
07:00 p.m. - 08:00 p.m.
08:00 p.m. - 09:00 p.m.
09:00 p.m. - 10:30 p.m.
11:00 p.m. - 11:45 a.m.
12:00 a.m.

Start of Day 2

Breakfast (A - 09:00 - 09:30 a.m. / B - 09:30 - 10:00 a.m.)

Keynote: Katherine Angulo – “In the Context of Pope Francis’ Jubilee: What It Means for Young Latino Adults in the United States to Be Pilgrims of Hope”

Group Sessions

Open Activities

Lunch (A - 12:30 - 01:15 p.m. / B - 01:15 - 2:00 p.m.)

Panel “Building Hope in Chicago” with John Chandler, Sr. Stephanie Baliga, Blanca Rodríguez, Fr. Leandro Fossa, Pablo Cruz (Moderator)

Group Sessions

Break

Iskali Olympics

Dinner (A - 05:00 - 05:45 p.m. / B - 05:45 - 6:30 p.m.)

Open Activities

Fireside Conversation with Alan Graham

Adoration

Concert: Cindy Esparza

Mini-Lunada (Music-S’mores)

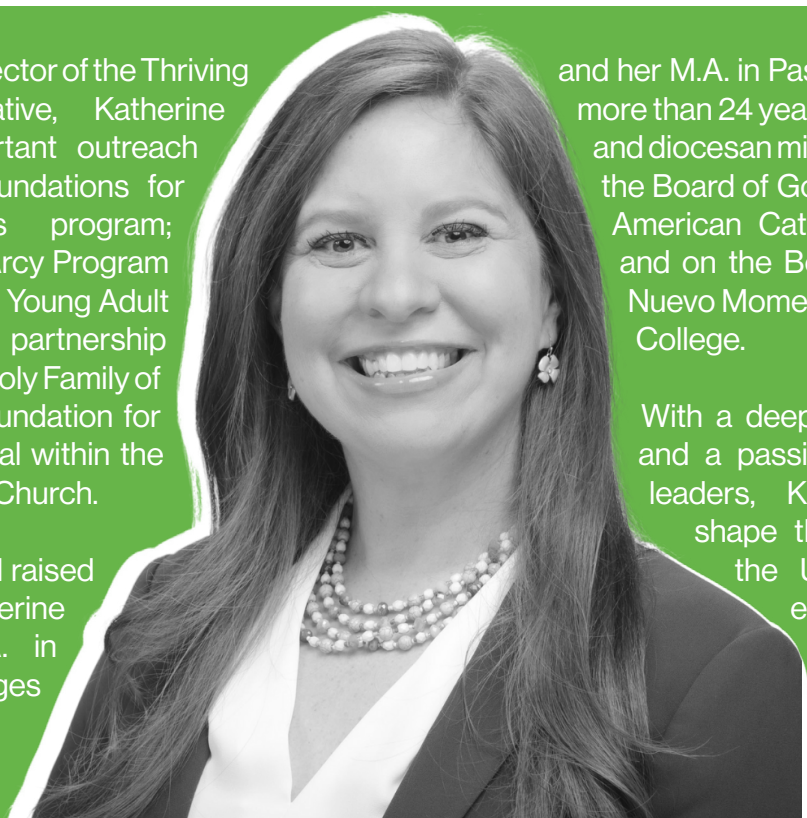
End of Day 2

Keynote: Katherine Angulo

Program Director, *Thriving in Ministry Initiative*, McGrath Institute for Church Life

As the Program Director of the Thriving in Ministry Initiative, Katherine directs four important outreach efforts: Strong Foundations for Catholic Leaders program; Bishop John M. D’Arcy Program in Priestly Renewal, Young Adult Innovation Hub in partnership with Iskali and the Holy Family of Nazareth as the foundation for catechetical renewal within the domestic Hispanic Church.

Born in Mexico and raised in Colombia, Katherine received her B.A. in Modern Languages



and her M.A. in Pastoral Ministries. She has more than 24 years of experience in parish and diocesan ministry. She also serves on the Board of Governors for the Mexican American Catholic Colleges (MACC), and on the Board of Advisors for the Nuevo Momento initiative from Boston College.

With a deep love for evangelization and a passion for forming pastoral leaders, Katherine continues to shape the future of ministry in the U.S. Catholic Church—especially among young adults and Hispanic communities.

Friday

Panel: “Building hope in Chicago”

John Chandler



John J. Chandler is a native Chicagoan. He attended St. Procopius Academy and is a graduate of Notre Dame University. Saint Ignatius just celebrated John's time at school with a 50-year celebration in the fall of 2024. He began teaching at Saint Ignatius in 1974 in Classics and Social Studies. He has taught within every academic department except for Religion. John has coached soccer at Saint Ignatius since 1974. John also continues to teach one class each semester. He moved up through the school's operations through the years and has served as: Business Manager, Vice President of Operations, Vice President of Development and as President since 2020. He is serving as the first lay President of Saint Ignatius College Prep's in the school's history. He is grateful for the wonderful mentorship he has received from many Jesuits over the years. He enjoys farming in his free time.

Sr. Stephanie Baliga



Member of the Franciscans of the Eucharist of Chicago. She has a BA in economics and geography from University of Illinois in Urbana Champaign, a Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies from University of St. Mary of the Lake, and Masters in Teaching from Dominican University. She spends most of her time moving people, resources, and money in and out of Mission of Our Lady of the Angels to help support over 4000 families a month with food and other basic needs. She spearheads “Team OLA” in the Chicago Marathon that has raised over \$2,000,000 to support the Mission. She teaches K-8 religion at St. Sylvester School part time. The Eucharist was the center of her conversion and remains the center of her life.

Blanca Rodríguez



Blanca Rodríguez serves as the Youth and Young Adult Coordinator for the Respect Life Office at the Archdiocese of Chicago and works as a mental health therapist at Vita Optimum Counseling, a Catholic private practice. As a first-generation Latina, she is passionate about the intersection of culture, faith, and mental health, and how these shape the decisions and values that form our lives. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling.

She recently completed her term coordinating the JP2 Community in Little Village and continues to serve in ministry by facilitating Theology of the Body courses for young adults across the Chicagoland area. She is deeply committed to walking with mothers in need and upholding the dignity of every human life, Blanca also supports post-abortion healing efforts, partners with women's centers, and helps organize March for Life events. Outside of ministry, Blanca loves dancing, cherishes intentional time with family and friends, and is joyfully preparing for her wedding this year!

Fr. Leandro Fossa, C.S.

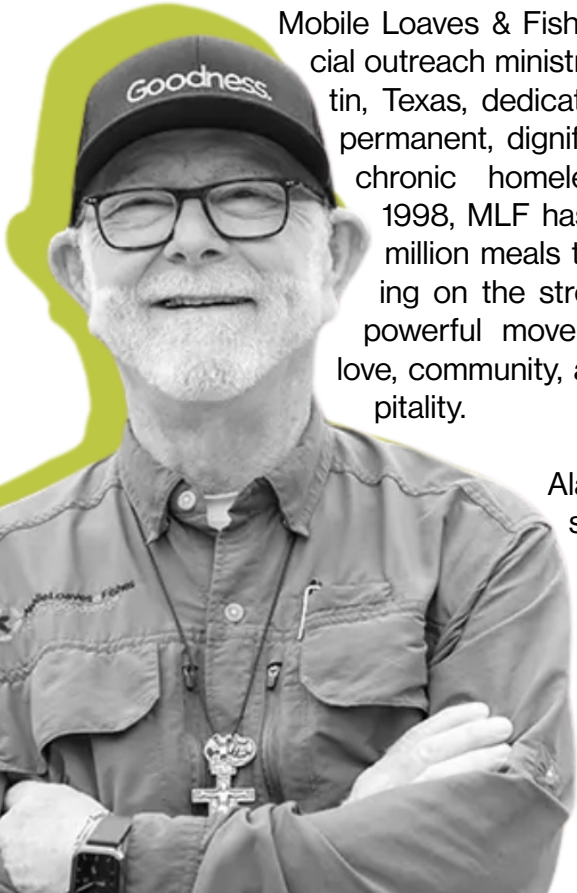


Fr. Leandro Fossa, C.S., is a Brazilian-born priest of the Missionaries of St. Charles (Scalabrinians), a congregation dedicated to the pastoral care of migrants and refugees. Ordained in 2011, he has served diverse communities across the United States, including ministries in Maryland and California. Fluent in Portuguese, Spanish, English, and Italian, Fr. Fossa is known for his inclusive and compassionate approach to ministry. His outreach extends to marginalized populations, such as migrant workers and carnival employees, earning him the affectionate nickname "the carnie priest." Currently, he continues his mission of accompanying migrants and fostering inclusive communities, embodying the Scalabrinian charism of serving those on the move.

Friday

Keynote: Alan Graham

Founder & CEO, *Mobile Loaves & Fishes*



Alan Graham is the founder and CEO of Mobile Loaves & Fishes (MLF), a social outreach ministry based in Austin, Texas, dedicated to providing permanent, dignified solutions to chronic homelessness. Since 1998, MLF has served over 6 million meals to individuals living on the streets and built a powerful movement rooted in love, community, and radical hospitality.

Alan is also the visionary behind Community First! Village, a 51-acre master-planned development that offers affordable housing and a supportive

environment to those who have long struggled with homelessness. With more than 20,000 volunteers engaged, MLF is now the largest prepared feeding program for the homeless in Austin and has inspired similar ministries nationwide.

Before founding MLF, Alan worked in real estate development, leading projects across the U.S. He credits much of MLF's growth to the guidance of those he met on the streets, especially a formerly homeless man named Houston Flake, who helped shape the ministry's successful model.

Alan and his wife, Tricia, have been married since 1984 and have four children and a niece they helped raise. His book, *Welcome Homeless: One Man's Journey of Discovering the Meaning of Home*, captures his personal and spiritual transformation through this work.

Alan's story is a testament to what happens when faith meets action—and when community becomes the cure to homelessness.

Cindy Esparza: Concert & Adoration

Evangelizer & Catholic Music Minister

Cindy Esparza, a dentist from Monterrey, Mexico, is devoted not only to caring for smiles but also to sharing the joy of the Gospel. Her true passion lies in evangelization—through music, teaching, and digital media.

For the past two years, she has taught Christian Life Principles and Values at the University of Monterrey (UEM), while also serving as a retreat guide and Extraordinary Minister of Communion. With over a decade of experience in ministry and a strong digital presence since 2018, Cindy uses music to bring Jesus' message of peace and hope to a wider audience.

Today, she dedicates herself full time to the mission, continuing to inspire others with her faith and joyful witness.



Saturday

08:00 a.m. - 09:00 a.m.
09:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.
10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
12:00 p.m. - 12:30 p.m.
12:30 p.m. - 02:00 p.m.
02:00 p.m. - 03:00 p.m.

03:00 p.m. - 03:30 p.m.
03:30 p.m. - 04:00 p.m.
04:00 p.m. - 04:45 p.m.
04:45 p.m. - 06:00 p.m.
06:00 p.m. - 07:00 p.m.

07:00 p.m. - 08:00 p.m.
08:00 p.m. - 09:00 p.m.
09:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.
10:00 p.m. - 12:00 p.m.
12:00 a.m.

Start of Day 3

Breakfast (A - 09:00 - 9:30 a.m. / B - 09:30 - 10:00 a.m.)

Keynote: Dr. Michael J. Naughton – “Beacons of Hope: The Vital Role of Institutions”

Group Sessions

Break

Lunch (A - 12:30 - 01:15 p.m. / B - 01:15 - 2:00 p.m.)

Panel “Called to Build Hope” with Cristina Lamas, Jose Gonzalez, Mireya Guzman, Martin Cabrera, Jonathan Hernández (Moderator)

Group Sessions

Break

Iskali Stories

Dinner (A - 04:45 - 05:15 p.m. / B - 05:15 - 06:00 p.m.)

Keynote: Montserrat Alvarado – “The Role of Young Latinos in the Church: Building the Church as Pilgrims of Hope”

Reflection with Fr. Esequiel Sánchez– “Our Lady of Guadalupe: Mother of Hope”

Rosas a María: Noche de Reflexión y Devoción a Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe

Adoration Available

Pool Time and Games at Cabrini Hall

End of Day 3

Keynote: Dr. Michael J. Naughton

Director, Center for Catholic Studies, University of St. Thomas

Dr. Michael Naughton is the director of the Center for Catholic Studies at the University of St. Thomas (Minnesota, US) where he holds the Koch Chair in Catholic Studies and is a full professor in the department of Catholic Studies. He also taught in the College of Business for over 20 years.

Author, co-author and co-editor of 12 books and monographs and over 60 articles, his most recent book is *What We Hold in Trust: Rediscovering the Purpose of Catholic Higher Education* (2021). He serves on multiple boards including as board chair for Reell Precision Manufacturing, which has plants and offices in the US, Europe and Asia and the board of trustees at the University of Mary and Catholic Eldercare.



Saturday

Panel: “Called to Build Hope”

Cristina Lamas



Christina Lamas has served as Executive Director of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM) since 2016, bringing over 25 years of experience in Catholic ministry. She began as a parish volunteer and has since held leadership roles at parish, archdiocesan, and national levels.

A graduate of the University of Southern California with degrees in psychology and social work, Christina previously served as Associate Director for the Office of Religious Education in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Her passion lies in forming leaders and empowering young people in their faith.

She currently serves on several national boards, including Catholic Relief Services, the Leadership Roundtable, CARA, NCEA, and SEPI.

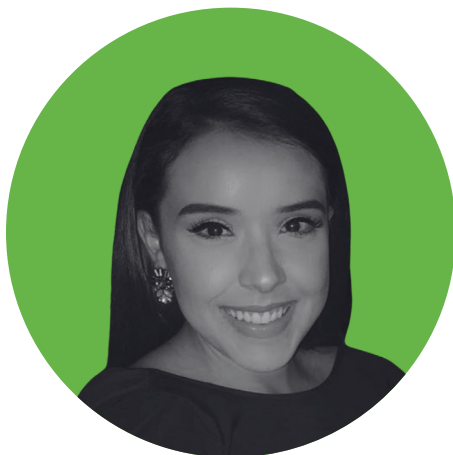
José González



Known as “El Profe,” José Cruz González is a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Chicago, having entered formation in 2022. A second-generation Mexican-American born on Chicago’s southwest side, he holds a degree in Graphic Design and later pursued studies in Education and Special Education. Before seminary, he spent four years supporting students with disabilities at a therapeutic day school.

Though raised Catholic, José left the Church in 2008 and later returned in 2019—an experience that reignited his faith and led him to join Iskali. There, he found a community that helped deepen his relationship with God and clarify his call to the priesthood. Today, he continues his formation with a heart for service, hoping to one day serve the people of God with compassion and humility.

Mireya Guzmán



Mireya works as a Senior Financial Analyst at CRG, a Real Estate Development and Investment firm where she is responsible for supporting regional offices, the capital markets group, and senior leadership with financial analysis of new and existing development projects and analysis of the consolidated CRG platform. Prior to joining CRG, Mireya was a Portfolio Manager for Wintrust Bank in Chicago, where she actively managed a commercial real estate loan portfolio totaling ~\$1.3 billion in loan commitments secured by various asset types located across distinct U.S. markets.

Mireya received her B.A. in Economics with a minor in Political Science and a B.A. in Spanish Language and Literature from Dominican University in River Forest, IL, in 2018. She was a member of Sigma Delta Pi (National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society). Mireya is also a member of the Young Associates Board (YAB) of Almost Home Kids.

Martin Cabrera



Martin Cabrera is the CEO and Founder of Cabrera Capital Markets, a global investment banking and brokerage firm, and Cabrera Capital Partners, a real estate investment and development company. With over 25 years of experience, he has led the issuance of hundreds of billions in debt and equity for clients across public and private sectors, and currently spearheads a \$400M mixed-use redevelopment project on Chicago's Southwest side.

A graduate of Northern Illinois University, Martin also studied at the London School of Economics. He serves on numerous civic and faith-based boards, including the Chicago Community Trust, World Business Chicago, the Archdiocese of Chicago's Finance Council, and St. Ignatius College Prep.

Saturday

Keynote: Montserrat Alvarado

President & COO, EWTN News

Born in Mexico City, Montse Alvarado is the first Latina President and COO of EWTN News, the news division of the Eternal Word Television Network, where she oversees global news platforms including the Catholic News Agency, the National Catholic Register, and a lineup of television and radio news programs. She is also the founding anchor of the weekly show *News in Depth*.

Profiled by the *Wall Street Journal* as “A defender of all religion, on the front lines of America’s culture wars,” she worked with the team at the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty—a renowned non-profit defending religious freedom as a human right—for 14 years, securing 12 victories at the Supreme Court for clients like the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Montse serves on the boards of various Catholic non-profits and advises the U.S. Catholic Bishops through their Religious Liberty Committee.

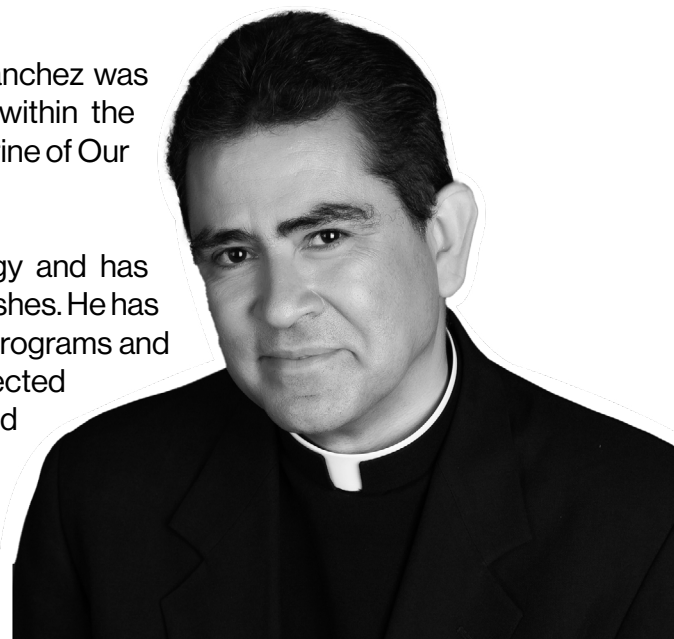


Reflection: Very Rev. Esequiel Sánchez

Rector, Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Born in Chicago to Mexican immigrant parents, Fr. Esequiel Sánchez was ordained in 1995 and has served in various leadership roles within the Archdiocese of Chicago. He currently serves as Rector of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Des Plaines, IL.

Fr. Sánchez holds degrees in Social Psychology and Theology and has served as Director of Hispanic Ministry and pastor of multiple parishes. He has contributed to numerous archdiocesan councils and formation programs and currently oversees nine parishes as Dean of Deanery F. A respected teacher and speaker, he also forms Spanish-speaking leaders and deacon candidates through the Instituto de Liderazgo Pastoral.



08:00 a.m. - 09:00 a.m.

09:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

12:00 a.m. - 01:00 p.m.

01:00 p.m. - 03:00 p.m.

Start of day 4

Breakfast (A - 09:00 - 09:30 a.m. / B - 09:30 - 10:00 a.m.)

Keynote: Vicente Del Real – “Beacons of Faith and Hope”

Mass presided by Fr. José María García-Maldonado

Cookout

Beacons of Faith and Hope: Vicente Del Real

Founder and CEO, *Iskali*

Vicente Del Real is a Mexican immigrant and the visionary founder of *Iskali*, an independent Catholic non-profit based in Chicago, Illinois, dedicated to forming and equipping young Latino adults to be faith-filled transformative leaders. With a dynamic leadership style and a passion for his mission, Vicente is a catalyst for transformational change within the Latino community. He was honored as part of the 2020 class of 40 under 40 by *Negocios Now*, a prestigious Hispanic business publication, for his outstanding contributions to leadership and entrepreneurship in the Chicagoland area. Vicente graduated from the Stanford Latino Entrepreneurship Initiative within the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies at the Stanford Graduate School of Business as part of LBAN he also holds a Master's Degree in Pastoral Arts from the Catholic Theological Union.

In addition to his work with *Iskali*, Vicente is a keynote speaker and has addressed audiences in National Catholic conferences and esteemed institutions such as Georgetown University, Boston College, University of Notre Dame, and others. He also shares his expertise as a part-time faculty member at Loyola University Chicago. Del Real's dedication to fostering leadership and empowering the next generation is not just a mission—it's a calling. Through his work with *Iskali* and beyond, he continues to inspire, uplift, and ignite change in the lives of young people.



Dear Iskali Family,

This year marks 15 years since Iskali began—a small “yes” that has grown into a movement of young people walking together in faith, service, and community. What started with a handful of young adults seeking something more has become a place of belonging, transformation, and mission for thousands.

Over the past few days, we’ve witnessed something beautiful: people encountering Christ again, rediscovering their call, and finding strength in one another. This conference isn’t just a gathering—it’s a reminder that God is still calling, still forming, and still sending. He’s writing new stories in each of our lives.

Fifteen years have taught me that God works in silence and surprise. That our deepest call is not just to believe, but to belong—to Him, to His Church, and to one another. And that faith, when lived in community, changes everything.

To our speakers, volunteers, priests, musicians, and staff—thank you for helping create sacred space. To every young adult who showed up with an open heart—thank you for being part of this journey. Your presence is proof that the Church is alive and full of hope.

As we look ahead, let’s keep choosing Christ—together. Let’s continue building a Church where Latino young adults are seen, formed, and sent. Thank you for being part of Iskali’s story.

With blessings and gratitude,



Be part of our mission!

HELP US CHANGE THE ODDS

Did you know?

9% of U.S. graduate students are Latinos.
22% of Latinos will achieve an Associate's Degree or higher.
17% a Bachelor's Degree.
44% of Latino students are first-generation attendees.

Financial barriers are the main obstacle.

The Iskali Scholarship Fund aims to change the odds for first-gen Latino college students and has provided 80 scholarships in the last 3 years. This fund motivates and supports Latino students, inspiring more to pursue higher education successfully.

Join us in supporting first-generation Latino college students. Donate to the Iskali Scholarship Fund today and help pave the way for more success stories in higher education!



**SCAN TO CHANGE
THE ODDS**

INVEST IN OUR FUTURE

Iskali thrives, serving hundreds of young adults with an integral approach to faith and evangelization.

Relying heavily on volunteers, we've expanded to require more staff, enhanced programming, and renovations to Casa Iskali, our main evangelization hub.

To achieve these goals, we've launched Iskali's Capital Campaign.

It is time to form, empower and equip young adults to become transformative leaders as we shape today and tomorrow's Church and societies.

Your contributions are truly transformative. Join us in shaping the lives of Latino young adults and investing in their future!



**SCAN TO INVEST IN
THE FUTURE OF OUR FAITH**

Thank you for your support and your love for Iskali. Your generosity brings us closer to forming, equipping, and empowering more young Latino adults to become transformative leaders. May Our Virgencita de Guadalupe always protect you and lead you to Christ.

