



August 17, 2025



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Pope Leo XIV bestows Papal Honors on 50 members of the Diocese of Arlington



Dear Friends,

We are absolutely thrilled to share some wonderful news from the Catholic Diocese of Arlington. Our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, has bestowed Papal Honors on 50 members of our diocese, concluding the 50th Anniversary Golden Jubilee. The Papal Honors consist of two distinguished decorations: the Cross Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice and the Benemerenti Medal. We feel incredibly blessed to count several of these award recipients among our closest supporters, individuals who have been involved in meaningful ways in the work that we do at Porto Charities.

President and Co-Founder, Leo Alonso



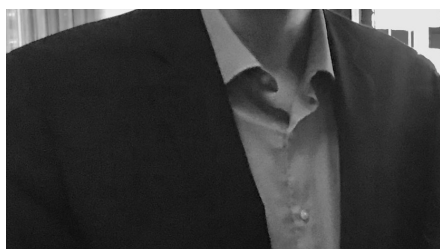
We are especially delighted that Leo Alonso is a well-deserved recipient of this special recognition. For more than 40 years, Leo has dedicated his life to supporting children and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. His exemplary leadership within our organization, his passion for coaching his teams in the Special Olympics, and the love and care with which he has raised his children, especially Vivian, who was born with Down Syndrome, are just a few examples of his tireless commitment. The support he has provided to countless strangers who call him for help finding a school, employment, or housing for their children with disabilities

has created the lasting legacy of Leo Alonso, and we are so proud to see him honored with this award. Leo is one of the original families who made the Options Program at Paul VI Catholic High School a reality back in 1998, which led to the creation of additional programs at the other three diocesan high schools and many elementary schools. Few people have done so much, in true, tangible ways, for our community. When asked how he felt about receiving this honor, Leo said (with a teary eye and a broken, humble voice), "It's all about the kids. For those we support to live a life like everyone else so that they may accomplish the things that our previous generations did not think were possible."

Board Member, Art Bennett



We are also grateful that Art Bennett has been honored with this award. Since joining our Board of Directors, his commitment to our cause and insightful advice have helped Porto Charities grow significantly over the past couple of years. As the Chair of our Special Kids / Special Needs campaign, he has increased parish participation in



ways we never thought possible, and thanks to that, we have been able to increase significantly our grants to schools in our diocese in the short time he has been with us. Upon learning of the award, Art shared, "I am deeply surprised, profoundly honored, and sincerely grateful to be awarded the Benemerenti Papal Medal. My time in the Diocese of Arlington has been marked by receiving far more than I have ever been able to give—an ongoing testament to the boundless charity and grace of God. May God be praised. I am especially grateful to my wife, Laraine, for her unwavering, radical support and love, and to my family for their constant encouragement throughout all my endeavors. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to Bishop Burbidge for his leadership and for the great kindness he has shown in nominating me for this honor. I am equally thankful to my colleagues and friends for their steadfast support and companionship."

Porto Charities' Strong Supporters



Steve and Kathy Pryor
Cross Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice



Tom & Laura Bell
Benemerenti Medal



Alan Holmer
Benemerenti Medal



Robert Tessier
Benemerenti Medal



Kevin Bohli
Benemerenti Medal

The list of worthy recipients also includes other close friends of Porto Charities. **Stephen and Katherine Pryor**, who served as our 2025 Gala Honorary Chairs, were honored with the Cross Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice, a decoration of the Holy See conferred for distinguished service to the Catholic Church by lay people and clergy.

Other recipients of the Benemerenti Medal include **Thomas and Laura Bell**, our 2024

Gala Honorary Chairs, who have been wonderful supporters of our mission. Additionally, two of our Gala Masters of Ceremony, **Robert Tessier** (2025) and **Alan Holmer** (2023), were also honored with the Benemerenti Medal, as was **Kevin Bohli**, Executive Director of the Office of Youth, Campus, and Young Adult Ministries, who has encouraged parishes across our diocese to include youth with disabilities, whether it's in ministries, at events, or the annual Youth Camp.

We are so very blessed that our organization is supported by so many outstanding people. These men and women are Catholics who, through their work and generosity, have improved the lives of many in our community. Their selflessness and dedication are a testament to our shared mission. Congratulations!

Sincerely,
Porto Charities

Make a Gift to Porto Charities



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2025

OCT 3

GOLF
TOURNAMENT

OCT 13

BISHOP'S
DISABILITY MASS

DEC 7

CHRISTMAS
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APR 2

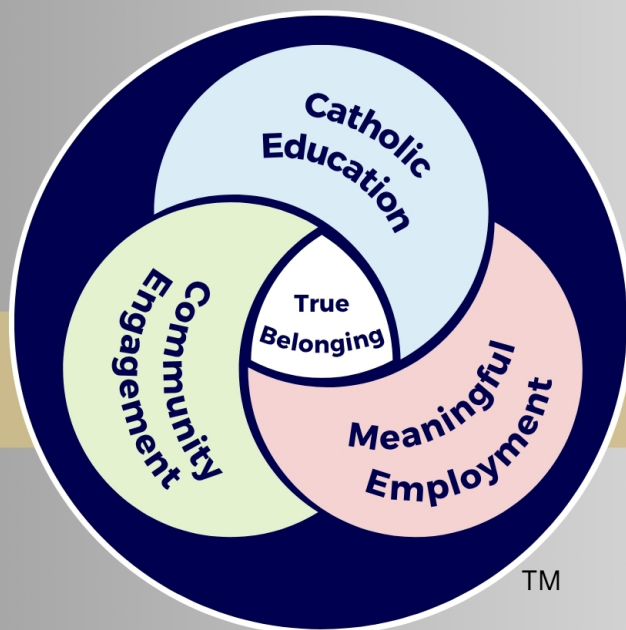
AWARDS
GALA

2026

www.portocharities.org

Events

Building a Culture of Belonging



Porto Charities is a 501(c)3 organization that builds a culture of belonging for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities by increasing their access to Catholic education, meaningful employment, and community engagement in the Diocese of Arlington.



*True Belonging
means being seen,
known and valued.*



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