



IACS

Institute for Advanced  
Catholic Studies at USC

Instituto para Estudios Superiores  
del Catolicismo de USC

# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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In September 2024, the 2024-26 IACS Fr. James L. Heft, SM Generations in Dialogue cohort gathered at Santa Clara University for its first meeting. The cohort is exploring topics related to transhumanism and medical ethics. On page 12, read a Q&A with Generations in Dialogue participant Michael Baggot, Ph.D.

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# LETTER FROM THE IACS PRESIDENT

Friends,

Welcome to the 2024 Annual Report from the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at USC.

It's been a year and a half since I began serving as president of IACS, a leading independent research center dedicated to furthering the Catholic intellectual tradition and strengthening the Catholic voice.

The IACS impact is tangible and felt broadly in society: in university seminars and classrooms, at our parishes, and in our communities — here in Los Angeles, across the U.S., and around the globe.

Our work is urgently needed. As we collectively navigate deep divides in our society, we remain fully committed to our Institute's important mission of bringing together leading academics and practitioners from across disciplines and religions to create solutions to pressing issues that will be felt for generations. By sponsoring scholars and other thought partners, IACS shapes the ideas that are taught in seminaries and universities, preached in Sunday homilies, and circulated through social media. As a result, student lives are more deeply engaged in the Catholic worldview and parishioners in pews gain a deeper understanding of the faith.

This past year, we launched several exciting initiatives:

- IACS welcomed the new cohort of the Fr. James L. Heft SM Generations in Dialogue Program. The cohort consists of promising early-career scholars engaged in a two-year series of conversations on medical ethics and “transhumanism,” the emerging reality of the integration of technology into the human person. Transhumanism holds significant promise but also grave risks for humanity — it is a tool that must be guided and implemented ethically and strategically.
- In early September, IACS and the University of New Mexico hosted a major national conversation on nuclear weapons strategy and ethics in the 21st century. Our Forum on Nuclear Strategy drew on the Catholic approach to dialogue to frame a serious exchange between diverging views. Participants included key scholars of nuclear ethics, prominent Catholic leaders, high-level nuclear policymakers from NATO and the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations, along with leaders at the national nuclear laboratories and communities affected by nuclear production.
- In mid-December, IACS partnered with the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University and the Domus Communis Foundation to host a symposium in Rome as part of our Humanizing Networks project. We convened twenty authors — including prominent scholars and thoughtful practitioners — in dialogue with some 50 leading technologists, investors, ethicists, and AI practitioners discussing how Catholic (and other) ethical teaching can help ensure that artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies serve the common good.

- We recently launched Engaging the Divides, a new online forum on our website that brings together leading researchers, scholars, and practitioners to discuss important topics and pressing challenges facing the Catholic Church and broader society. Through expert commentary and thoughtful dialogue, we aim to find common ground and craft solutions that inspire understanding and respect on today's divisive issues.

The role of Catholicism is critical in shaping and advancing such debate — including the Catholic commitment to a spirit of civil, respectful engagement that thoughtfully considers different views on controversial issues.

In the year ahead, we'll continue our work at IACS on these and other crucial topics, including:

- How future Catholic leaders can be better trained for constructive engagement in public life.
- How conversations regarding race, anti-racism, and inter-religious relations can be better grounded in theological categories rather than divisive identities — and thus more impactful and effective.
- How Catholic research institutes and Catholic scholars can be knit together into a coherent global network to 'think with the Church' in ways that strengthen the Catholic faith and broaden the Catholic voice on key public issues.

Our future is bright and our plans are bold. We are led by a generous, engaged, and dynamic Board of Trustees. Our staff, meanwhile, is experienced, collaborative, and fully committed to ensuring our Institute's work moves forward and echoes across society.

But our success hinges on your support.

By giving to IACS, you will amplify the Catholic intellectual tradition's influence in the pulpit and in classrooms; in the fields of sociology, politics, technology, science, the humanities and the arts; and in the professions. Your generosity fuels the work of visionary scholars, drives the success of groundbreaking projects, and strengthens



Catholicism's voice in shaping the modern world.

Together, we can create a legacy that ensures the IACS impact resonates for generations to come.

Learn how you can support our work at [dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/support](https://dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/support).

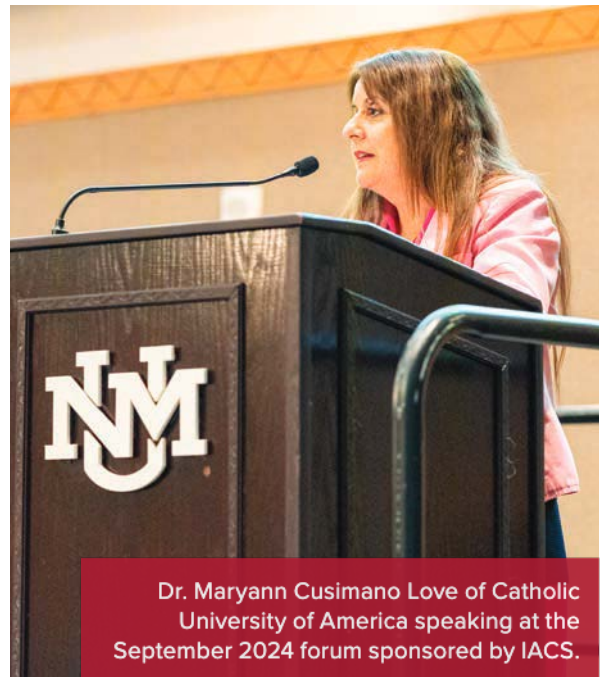
In gratitude,

Richard L. Wood, Ph.D.  
President  
Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at USC

# FORUM ON NUCLEAR STRATEGY: Disarmament & Deterrence in a Dangerous World

**IACS hosted** a groundbreaking discussion in September 2024 at the University of New Mexico featuring high-ranking public policy experts, influential spiritual leaders, and prominent academics exploring strategic and ethical responses to one of the most urgent issues facing humanity: the rising threat of nuclear war.

Considered the first of its kind since the American Catholic bishops reshaped the nuclear weapons debate in the 1980s, “Forum on Nuclear Strategy: Disarmament & Deterrence in a Dangerous World” included nuclear experts, policy makers from the U.S. and NATO, and the intellectual architects of disarmament and deterrence approaches to nuclear weapons policy from Catholic and secular strategic perspectives discussing solutions aimed at securing long-lasting peace across the globe.



“With regional conflicts escalating and the threat of nuclear war rising, humanity is at a critical moment,” IACS President Dr. Richard Wood said. “Our forum served as an important platform for in-depth discussion and debate exploring our current global realities and seeking tangible solutions to the rising threat of nuclear conflict.”

Held in partnership with the Endowed Chair of Roman Catholic Studies at the University of New Mexico and UNM’s Religious Studies Program, the forum is already producing new publications analyzing potential responses to the rising threat of nuclear conflict around the world. The Forum was inspired by Archbishop John Wester’s pastoral letter *Living in Christ’s Peace* (2022) and by New Mexico’s status as the heartland of nuclear weapons production in the US; it was funded through the generosity of IACS Trustee Maureen “Mo” Pecht King.

Several articles will appear in the coming months in the prominent journal of Catholic thought *Commonweal*, with differing views and perspectives on the question of nuclear disarmament and deterrence. Other publications are under development. These articles bring into contemporary relevance the American Catholic bishops’ groundbreaking pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace* from 1983 and recent papal teaching on this terrain.

See a full list of participants and learn more at [dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/nuclearproject](https://dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/nuclearproject)



IACS President Dr. Richard Wood delivered opening remarks at our event “Forum on Nuclear Strategy: Disarmament & Deterrence in a Dangerous World”.



The forum was held at the University of New Mexico and featured nuclear experts, policy makers from the U.S. and NATO, and the intellectual architects of disarmament and deterrence approaches to nuclear weapons policy from Catholic and secular strategic perspectives.



Among the forum’s participants was Cardinal Robert McElroy.

# HUMANIZING NETWORKS:

## The IACS Impact: Exploring Catholic Ethics and Artificial Intelligence

In December, IACS co-led a two-day forum in Rome that featured Catholic leaders, public officials, software developers, and tech investors exploring the role of the Catholic intellectual tradition in guiding the ethics of new and emerging digital technologies, including artificial intelligence.

The convening was led by IACS and the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University and sponsored by the Domus Communis Foundation in Rome (led by IACS Trustee Kyle Ballarta) as part of “Humanizing Networks: Human Fraternity in the Digital Age,” the Institute’s groundbreaking project bringing together key stakeholders across the globe to discuss connectivity and its impact on our society. We strive to develop a set of ethical guidelines, regulatory frameworks, and best practices in business and investing that can help assure that artificial intelligence, spatial computing, and emerging social media contribute to human thriving and the common good.

Watch for publications to emerge in 2025.

Learn more at: [dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/humanizingnetworks](https://dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/humanizingnetworks).





# RE-THINKING JUSTICE IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT

(Georgetown University Press, 2025)

By Dan Finn, IACS Trustee

**Editor's note:** Our project "Rethinking Justice in Catholic Social Thought" brings together a diverse group of world-class scholars to develop a view of justice that is faithful to the Catholic intellectual tradition, responsive to the best of contemporary insight, and capable of confronting the pressing injustices of our society. The project will result in a new book from Georgetown University Press in June 2025.

## **Everyone wants justice, but people don't agree on what justice means.**

The Catholic tradition has had much to say about justice, from the early church to papal teaching today, which provides essential insight for the twenty-first century. Yet with so many societal changes, the traditional categories for understanding justice that have been passed down from the medieval world are sometimes inadequate or ambiguous when applied to modern conditions.

Some examples: Advocates of "restorative" justice remind us that long-term healing of one-on-one injustices (which are the focus of "commutative" justice) works better when the larger community is involved, rather than only the affected individuals. And because we now elect our leaders, the responsibilities of "distributive" justice traditionally assigned to kings and princes are now born by citizens, which changes how Catholicism contributes to building justice in society.

In addition, there are moral issues that are new or newly complicated in our era. These entail justice obligations related to the environment, social media, privacy, religious freedom, gender, racism, harassment, transparency, social structures, social location, and others.

To address this challenge, the True Wealth of Nations project of the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at USC convened two conferences over three years for conversations among internationally renowned scholars bringing a diversity of perspectives. This book presents the essays that constituted the path to a consensus view of how to understand justice in the contemporary world. These are ideas that matter: think of the cacophony of conflicting, angry voices today regarding what would constitute justice in America. We need new ideas like this to undergird a healthier

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**"Advocates of "restorative" justice remind us that long-term healing of one-on-one injustices (which are the focus of "commutative" justice) works better when the larger community is involved, rather than only the affected individuals."**

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public life together. This volume invites the reader to enter that process step by step.

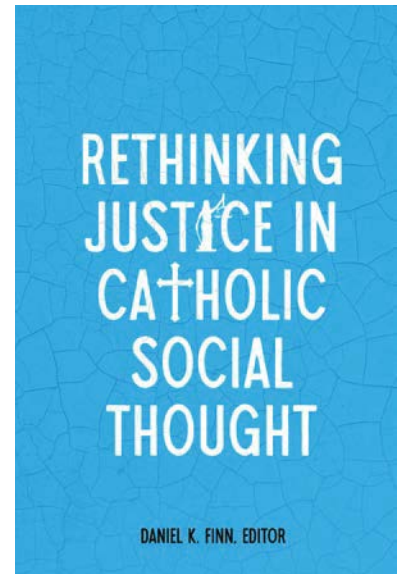
Part I of the book begins with insights from a variety of sources on justice, with special attention to voices from the Global South: African traditional religion, Hinduism and Buddhism, and Catholics and other Christians in Latin America and Asia. We similarly considered insights from the Bible, Thomas Aquinas, secular liberalism, and papal teaching.

Part II presents three constructive accounts of justice based on the earlier deliberations. These three accounts were debated by the group to test whether an agreement was possible.

Part III presents the rough consensus of the larger group of scholars on how Catholic social thought can best understand justice today.

From the beginning, we have aimed for a conception of justice that, as far as possible, is coherent, comprehensive, faithful to the tradition, responsive to the best of contemporary insight, adequate for confronting pressing injustices, and stated simply enough to be accessible to non-experts.

Learn more about our project Rethinking Justice in Catholic Social Thought at: [dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/rethinking\\_justice](https://dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/rethinking_justice).



 **Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at USC**

ANNOUNCES THE FR. JAMES L. HEFT, SM GENERATIONS  
IN DIALOGUE COHORT

## TRANSHUMANISM & THE BODY

**Led by Senior Scholar:**  
**Charles Camosy, Ph.D.**  
Professor of Medical Humanities  
Creighton University School  
of Medicine

**Participants:**  
**Michael Baggot, Ph.D.**  
Pontifical Athenaeum  
Regina Apostolorum

**Brian Boyd, Ph.D.**  
Loyola University New Orleans

**Mariele Courtois, Ph.D.**  
Benedictine College

**Kristen Drahos, Ph.D.**  
Baylor University

**Christopher Krall, S.J., Ph.D.**  
Creighton University

**Gabriel LeBeau, M.D.**  
University of Kansas Medical Center,  
Department of Neurosurgery

**Nithin Monteiro, S.J.**  
XIM University, Bhubaneswar, India

**Catherine Moon, Ph.D.**  
Institute for Advanced Studies  
in Culture, University of Virginia

**Joseph M. Vukov, Ph.D.**  
Loyola University Chicago

 **GENERATIONS  
IN DIALOGUE**

[dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/GID](https://dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/GID) | [iacs.usc.edu](https://iacs.usc.edu) | [@iacsusc](https://twitter.com/iacsusc)

# Q&A: GENERATIONS IN DIALOGUE

## Participant Michael Baggot, Ph.D.

Rev. Michael Baggot is a bioethicist who has written and spoken extensively on transhumanism and emerging technologies.

A current participant in the Fr. James L. Heft, SM Generations in Dialogue Program, Rev. Baggot is an assistant professor of bioethics at the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum and an adjunct professor of theology at both the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas — Angelicum in Rome, and the Catholic Institute of Technology.

Dr. Baggot is chief editor of — and a contributor to — the book *Enhancement Fit for Humanity: Perspectives on Emerging Technologies* (Routledge, 2022) and is currently writing a chapter in the upcoming book *Religion and Human Enhancement* that explores how Catholic theology can contribute to an evaluation of transhumanism and radical bodily enhancement. He is also a research scholar at the UNESCO Chair in Bioethics and Human Rights.

His media work includes appearances on Pints with Aquinas, EWTN, and on his co-hosted YouTube channel [Those Two Priests](#). Dr. Baggot grew up in Virginia and was ordained to the priesthood in 2017.

The current Generations in Dialogue cohort includes scholars in the fields of religion, theology, ethics, technology, medicine and science. Together, they are exploring topics related to Transhumanism and the Body. Central to the project will be a Catholic commitment to seeing Christ's face in the most vulnerable and the least among us, particularly those who are discarded or left behind in our modern culture.

Gathering four times per year from Fall 2024 to Fall 2026, the cohort is led by senior scholar and mentor [Charles Camosy, Ph.D.](#), professor of Medical Humanities at the Creighton University School of Medicine and holder of the Monsignor Curran Fellowship in Moral Theology at St. Joseph Seminary in New York.

Generations in Dialogue will advance and promote the scholarship and public profile of the participants, as well as elevate their ideas and voices in a world where they are increasingly needed. The program also encourages reflection on being a scholar of faith within the often secularized intellectual world.

In the Q&A below, we spoke to Rev. Baggot about his research, medical ethics and emerging technology.

**Q** How has your work intersected with transhumanism and medical ethics?

**A** **MB:** I am currently working on a book that explores a dialogue between Thomism and Transhumanism regarding how to use emerging technologies in the service of human flourishing. After outlining a model for fruitful dialogue between members of different moral traditions, I look at the influence of postmodernism, secularism, liberalism, and expressive individualism in shaping contemporary Transhumanism. I then argue that although the movement offers some positive insights into using technology to improve the physical, cognitive, and

emotional dimensions of human life, it can also distort an adequate vision of human dignity. I have concerns about its impoverished view of the person that fails to fully appreciate our embodiment and the transcendent spiritual dimension of the human soul. I then propose how virtue ethics can integrate the use of emerging technologies, even enhancements, into a richer picture of what it means to be human and live a good life. Finally, I address how philosophical metaphysics can arrive at God as the Author of a teleological human nature and the implications for contemporary bioethical debates.

## **Q** What are the potential dangers/promises of new and emerging technologies?

**A** **MB:** I am excited about ever-more accurate AI tutors that can democratize education and bring customized pedagogy to even the poorest students. I am also eager to see how much advances in AI systems can accelerate disease diagnosis and treatment, as well as drug discovery and testing. Our GID group is currently exploring the benefits and tradeoffs of brain-computer interfaces and AI avatars, which can help individuals who have suffered spinal cord injuries, strokes, or neurological degeneration communicate more rapidly and naturally with the surrounding world.

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“AI platforms that promise constantly accessible friends and lovers risk replacing interpersonal relationships with an ultimately unsatisfying emulation.”

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But like most good things, that comes with temptations. Microsoft, Google, and other major technology companies are discussing how 2025 will see AI systems shift from tools to companions. Some even speak of a new digital species. AI companions and agents could accelerate human productivity and assist human creativity. These AI aids should be integrated into businesses in ways that sustain, rather than eliminate, meaningful work for human beings. However, we should never confuse technological tools with persons. While this distinction may seem obvious, we tend to blur boundaries. For instance, AI platforms that promise constantly accessible friends and lovers risk replacing interpersonal relationships with an ultimately unsatisfying emulation. Instead of addressing the

loneliness epidemic with artificial intimacy, we should work to create more welcoming and caring communities capable of supporting those who struggle most in social relations.

## **Q** How does your Catholic faith inform your work?

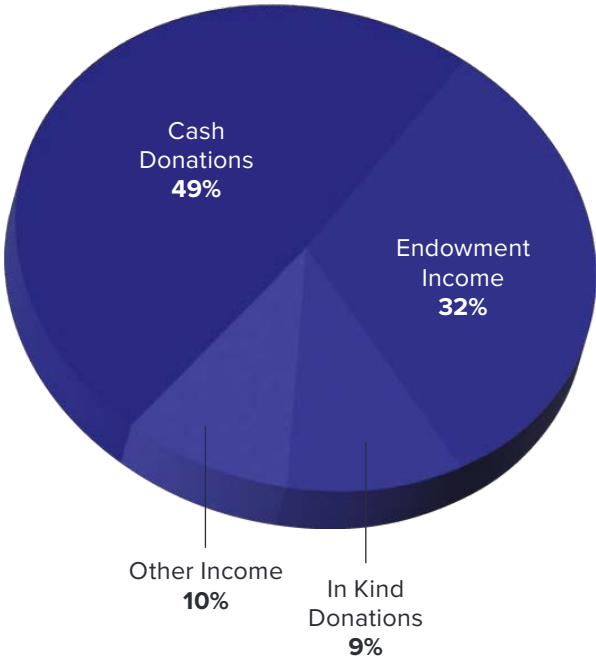
**A** **MB:** My [latest article](#) examined the similarities and differences between secular Transhumanist and Catholic visions of eschatology. Digital immortality projects helpfully demonstrate the perennial and widespread human longing for immortality and transcendence. Yet these same projects also reveal some troubling tendencies to reduce human identity to data and treat the body as an obstacle to human well-being instead of an essential aspect of our personhood. I am also fascinated by how Transhumanism often draws upon Christian ideas and re-presents them in new secular terms. These parallels show areas of shared concern about combating illness, sickness, suffering, and death. But the new narratives are seductive, offering palliative visions that are either unobtainable or will be available only to the very wealthy. So those illusionary narratives challenge Catholics to rediscover the real meaning and spiritual depth of embodiment, vulnerability, redemptive suffering, and hope in the resurrection. In particular, Catholics should rediscover the beauty of divinization as a kind of transhumanism that allows humans, by the gift of divine grace, to go beyond their natural limits to live lives of heroic virtues in this life and blissful union with God in the world without end.

To learn more about Rev. Baggot and the Generations in Dialogue Program, visit [dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/gid](https://dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/gid).

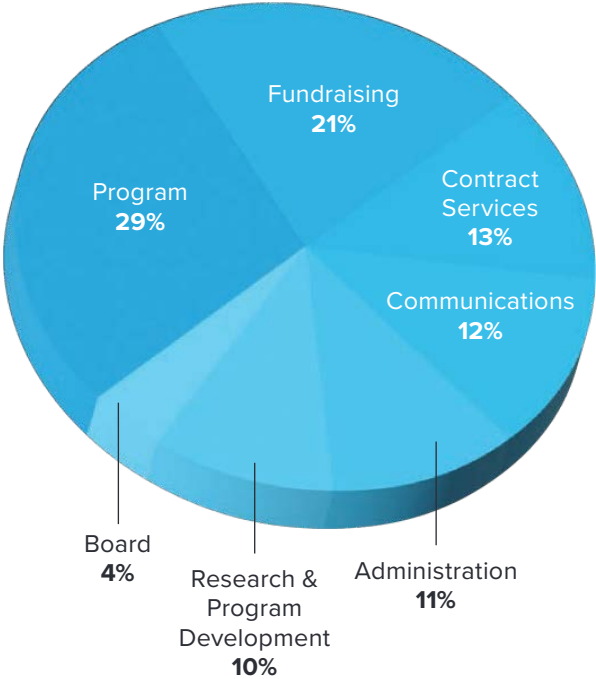
# FINANCIALS

Thanks to endowment revenue, careful expense management and our generous supporters, IACS ended the year with a positive net income. **Fundraising for both program and operations continues to be a priority.**

IACS Income FY24



IACS Expenses FY24



Percentages of salaries have been assigned to program, research, communication, fundraising, administration, and board activities based on staff time allocation reporting.

Your gift will make a difference and help the Institute fulfill its **important** mission.

Learn more at [dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/support](https://dornsife.usc.edu/iacs/support)

# ABOUT IACS

The **Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies** is a global research center located at the USC Dana and David Dornsife College for Letters, Arts and Sciences.

IACS draws from an international pool of scholars from diverse disciplines and religious traditions to further innovative research, create dialogue and spark ideas on Catholic thought, creative imagination and lived experience. We support scholars and artists, produce books, host academic conferences and cultural events, and further the intellectual work of the Catholic Church.

## Our Vision

The Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at USC works to ensure that the rich and evolving tradition of Catholic thinking will thrive among future generations through broad research, teaching, writing, and creative public engagement.

## Our Mission

We are committed to strengthening Catholic thought and imagination and their ability to contribute to the important questions of the day.

Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at USC

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# THE IACS IMPACT

**221 Scholars supported** with more than **\$400,000 in direct funding**

**21 books** with leading academic publishers

**43 academic conferences** and cultural events in the U.S. and Europe



“The first Generations in Dialogue event was spectacular. We had such great scholarly discourse and fellowship. It was wonderful.”

— Catherine Moon, Ph.D., postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia, IACS Generations in Dialogue Scholar



“Many years ago, Joan and I were recruited by Jim Heft to participate in the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at USC. We enjoyed his thoughtful and incisive wit, and his devotion to scholarship. We’re blessed to now have the leadership of President Dr. Richard Wood and Executive Director Becky Cerling, Ph.D., who are continuing and maintaining the important scholarship supported by IACS.”

— Charlie Callanan, longtime IACS supporter



“IACS, as a fully independent center for advanced study, has no agenda set for research, dialogue, and programming. Scholars are selected based solely on merit. No university administration or Church hierarchy has influence over IACS research and programming. Catholicism has historical roots in the invention of the university, the exchange of ideas, and the study of the humanities. The Catholic intellectual tradition has been a great gift to society for centuries. I was attracted to IACS based on the impact of the work that IACS scholars, research and programming have on university students across the globe.”

— Marty Skrip, IACS Trustee

# BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at USC

The Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at USC is led by trustees who are leaders in the worlds of business, tech, philanthropy, arts, academia and religion. IACS trustees provide governance and oversight while working collaboratively to further our mission of advancing the exploration of Catholic thought, imagination and experience. IACS trustees also serve as ambassadors, helping communicate the Institute's initiatives, programs and goals within their networks and among the public.



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Founder and CEO, Falkon Ventures



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Chair of the Board, University Professor of Law and Religion and Director of the Eleanor H. McCullen Center for Law, Religion and Public Policy at Villanova University



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Assistant provincial for the Marianist Province of the United States



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Vice president of AI Initiatives, Personal Systems Division at HP



**Maureen Shea**  
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**Martin J. Skrip**  
Retired, KPMG LLP senior corporate tax partner



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Emeritus Professor of Economics and Theology at St. John's University and the College of St. Benedict



**Rev. Martin Solma, S.M.**  
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**Rich Grimes**  
Managing principal, Tournament Wireless Strategies LLC



**Peter Steinfelds**  
Retired author, religion columnist for *The New York Times*, University Professor at Fordham University and Co-Director of the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture

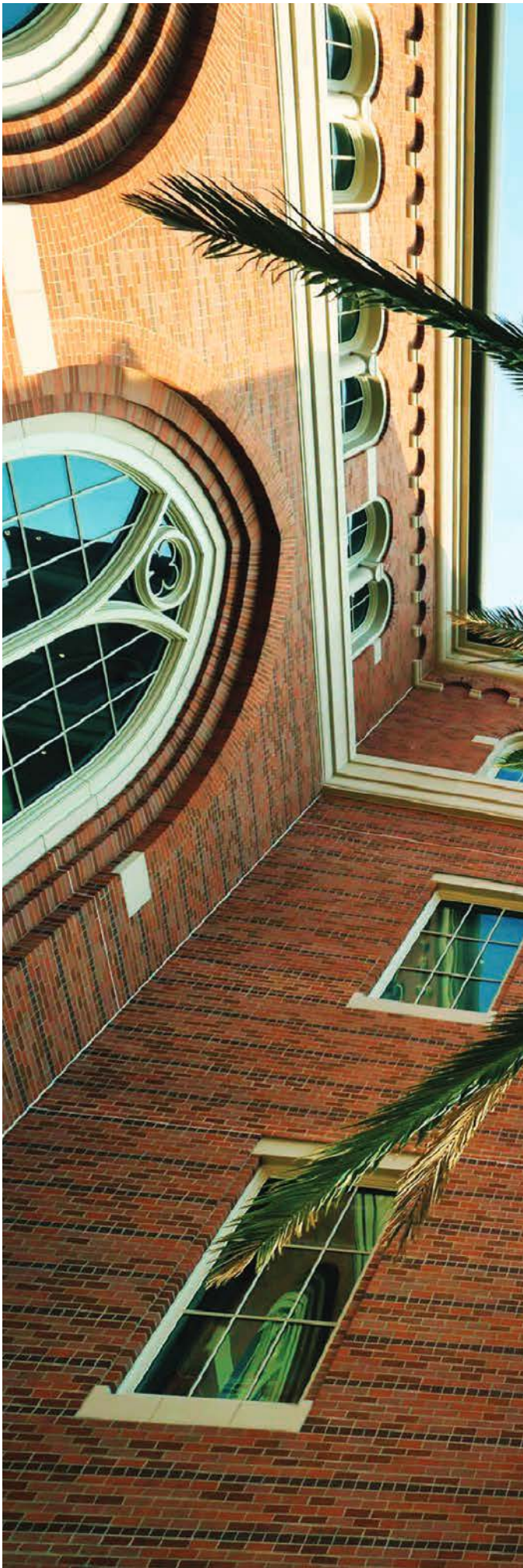


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**Jason Zenk**  
Senior managing director, EnTrustGlobal





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