



Right: Fr. Guillermo Treviño carries a processional cross as part of the US delegation to Pope Leo XIV's World Meeting of Popular Movements in Rome, October 2025.

Below: Fr. Guillermo (left) and Escucha Mi Voz Iowa member Maria Murgia of West Liberty, Iowa, meet with US Senator Chuck Grassley (right) to discuss the need for comprehensive immigration reform during an Escucha Mi Voz Iowa visit to Capitol Hill in April 2022.



CCHD New Leadership Award Recipient Remembered for Pastoral Service and Compassion to Migrants

The immigrant community in eastern Iowa, the members of two small, rural parishes, and the priests of the Diocese of Davenport are among the many groups mourning the unexpected death of Fr. Guillermo Treviño at the age of 39 last October 31.

BY PATRICIA ZAPOR

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development community was familiar with Fr. Guillermo for his work as a founder and most recently chaplain and cochair of Escucha Mi Voz Iowa, an immigrant support organization that receives funding through CCHD.

Alexandra Carroll, director of CCHD, described Fr. Guillermo as a bedrock of the immigrant community, helping the people of Iowa learn that they “have agency” and that the work supported by CCHD “help them to live it.”

Alexandra had recently accompanied Fr. Guillermo to Rome to participate in the World Meeting of Popular Movements. The priest arrived home in Iowa feeling ill after battling symptoms during the trip. He died within a day of his return of what his sister Mariela Treviño-Luna reported as complications of undiagnosed diabetes. Mariela shared a public Facebook post describing her brother’s illness, which developed as the two of them traveled in Italy.

Alexandra related that Fr. Guillermo “won everybody over” with his friendliness during their time at the Meeting of Popular Movements. “You could tell he was a really good pastor,” she continued. “He was very present to you, always ‘in the moment.’”

Fr. Guillermo’s life of service included a years-long association with CCHD, for which he was honored as the recipient of CCHD’s Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award in 2022. The press release announcing the award cited his efforts to win millions of dollars in pandemic relief for essential workers and those who were excluded from benefits. “He helped meatpacking plant workers find their own voice, identify issues impacting their lives, and take effective action to address them, including by contacting government and corporate decision-makers,” it said.

Fr. Guillermo was, “first and foremost, a pastor,” who supported his largely Hispanic parishioners with a spirit of accompaniment, according



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Through the CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (CCHD) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Catholics and friends of CCHD across the country

help poor and low-income Americans to help themselves and their communities out of poverty.

Since 1970, CCHD has contributed more than \$464 million to more than 12,200 low-income-led, community-based projects that strengthen families, create jobs, build affordable housing, fight crime, and improve schools and neighborhoods. CCHD requires that projects develop community leadership and participation so their solutions to poverty will be long-lasting and effective, and so CCHD's investment in people will help break the cycle of poverty. CCHD also educates Catholics about the causes of poverty and seeks to build solidarity between impoverished and affluent persons.



LETTER FROM

THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

When Fr. Guillermo Treviño died tragically young at age 39 on October 31, 2025, he had already lived the kind of life that inspires others.

The pastor of two parishes named for St. Joseph—one in West Liberty and the other in nearby Columbus Junction, Iowa—he was known across Iowa and around the United States for his advocacy on behalf of immigrant communities. Fr. Guillermo, known as “Memo” to his family and close friends, was a founding member and chaplain of Escucha Mi Voz Iowa, a grassroots organization doing essential work to support immigrants’ rights, teach English, and help with documents and other types of assistance.

Fr. Guillermo had been honored in 2022 by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development with our Cardinal Bernardin Young Leadership Award for his work with Escucha Mi Voz, which receives CCHD funding to work across multiple dioceses in Iowa.

Just 12 hours before his death, Fr. Guillermo had returned from a trip to Rome, where he was a representative to the Vatican’s World Gathering of Popular Movements. I was there with him and was struck by his arrival at the Vatican wearing a giant cowboy hat, amid the usual more staid wardrobes of religious habits and formal clerical robes.

He was proud of his Texas roots and of the rural Iowa communities he served. His ever-present cowboy hat announced his pride to the world, as did his enthusiasm for everyone at the gathering. When delegations from around the world were introduced, Fr. Guillermo was among the few in the room to enthusiastically cheer for every country named.

He was, put succinctly, a joy to be around.

For all of us, he was a shining example of so many things CCHD represents: love for his community. Support for their efforts to improve their own lives by working together. And as his parishioners at both St. Joseph’s parishes would attest, accomplishing those goals by being in relationship with the people of his community.

St. Paul wrote about the “foolishness” of Christ and the stubborn hope he brought to the world. That’s what Fr. Guillermo showed us all: how to accompany our sisters and brothers with stubborn hope for making this a better world.

We can best honor him by showing that kind of hope in our efforts as we continue his work. Thank you for the ways you have already supported this mission. I invite you to continue standing with us, in stubborn hope, as CCHD accompanies communities working together to build a more just and compassionate world.

ALEXANDRA CARROLL

Director, Catholic Campaign for Human Development

You can be part of CCHD's critical work by donating at Mass or through your parish's online giving platform. #iGiveCatholic also accepts funds for CCHD. Visit [igivecatholic.org/story/USCCB-CCHD](https://www.givecatholic.org/story/USCCB-CCHD) to learn more.



Left: Fr. Guillermo, wearing his signature cowboy hat during a diocesan clergy convocation. **Right:** Fr. Guillermo (left) and Deacon Kent Ferris pose together after celebrating Mass at St. Joseph parish in West Liberty.

to Deacon Kent E. Ferris, director of Social Action and Catholic Charities for the Diocese of Davenport.

Since 2021, Fr. Guillermo was pastor of two parishes, each named St. Joseph: one in West Liberty and one in Columbus Junction, about 25 miles apart in eastern Iowa. Fr. Guillermo was born in San Antonio, Texas, on March 7, 1986. His family moved to Moline, Illinois, where he attended school through community college before he went to Conception Seminary in Conception, Missouri, and the University of St. Mary of the Lake—Mundelein Seminary in Illinois. He was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Davenport in 2015 and went on to serve a parish in Iowa City and St. Joseph in West Liberty and to be the chaplain of Regina Catholic Schools in Iowa City before his assignment as pastor.

According to Deacon Kent, Fr. Guillermo “cared deeply for the people of his two parishes, wanting only the best for them. He wished for them to fully experience life in the Church, in the sacraments, and in community.” That meant, for example, adapting schedules for sacramental preparation to take into account parishioners’ busy work and school schedules.

“Second, although he was not anyone’s biological father, he attended school events for kids from both parishes as if they were his own,” said Deacon Kent. “It was not a passive thing, but all the selfies taken with the youth showed them how their priest, their parish, could be part of their lives in a different way.”

Fr. Guillermo’s community involvement stretched beyond even those roles. Deacon Kent said that he was part of the West Liberty Chamber of Commerce and that the area’s public school staff and local law enforcement also knew him well.

Deacon Kent said Fr. Guillermo’s involvement with *Escucha Mi Voz* and *Iowa City Catholic Worker* “modeled for both the clergy and laity . . . just how vibrant the Catholic faith can be. Every challenge faced began in prayer, included listening and learning from those who had experienced injustice, and then led to an action aimed to effect change.”

He added that “it is only now we are beginning to fully appreciate the extent of his contribution. Fr. Guillermo Treviño’s impact knew neither denominational nor geographical bounds.”

This ecumenical impact was best exemplified when the members of St. Paul’s United Methodist Church in Cedar Rapids honored Fr. Guillermo posthumously with their church’s Dr. Percy and Lileah Harris Who Is My Neighbor Award in January 2026. The recognition was just one of many tributes to Fr. Guillermo after his death.

Davenport Bishop Dennis Walsh said in a statement upon the priest’s death: “Words cannot adequately express the deep sense of loss we feel across the diocese.”

“Fr. Guillermo lived his priesthood with a remarkable and authentic closeness to his people,” he continued.

Every challenge faced began in prayer, included listening and learning from those who had experienced injustice, and then led to an action aimed to effect” change.

“Fr. Guillermo’s heart was consistently with those in need,” Bishop Walsh wrote. “Throughout the current migrant crises, he showed great compassion for the many migrants who find themselves on edge due to aggressive immigration enforcement action. His voice was becoming a beacon of hope and advocacy on this vital issue, gaining national prominence.”

A local Iowa news outlet, *Little Village*, and the *Catholic Messenger*, newspaper of the Davenport diocese, described Fr. Guillermo’s regular advocacy on behalf of immigrants: particularly Pascual Pedro, a 20-year-old parishioner from West Liberty. Pascual was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and deported to Guatemala.



Far Left: Fr. Guillermo (left) and Deacon Kent hold a wrestling belt at a county fair. "Fr. Guillermo was a big wrestling fan. We may be a curious ministerial tag team." **Left:** Deacon Kent during a visit to Peru. **Below:** Deacon Kent (left) and Fr. Guillermo (right) pose with Barb Arland-Fye, former editor of *Catholic Messenger*, the Diocese of Davenport's newspaper.



During a program at Georgetown University's Institute on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life in Washington, DC, on last September 11, Fr. Guillermo was asked how the recent climate of large-scale deportations was playing out in his community of immigrant farm laborers.

"I'd say on July 1 this year my life changed," said Fr. Guillermo, going on to tell about getting a text that day from Pascual's grandfather. The young man had gone to his routine check-in with ICE, where he was detained and sent to jail. The young man had never so much as been accused of a crime.

That same evening, Fr. Guillermo and his parish organized a prayer vigil, which drew 50 people. "That was pretty impressive for rural Iowa," he said at the Georgetown program. That vigil led to an organized effort to call ICE to seek information about the young man. Before long, 1,500 people, constituting perhaps half the town, had called ICE on Pascual's behalf. "The power of the people," he said, "it's amazing."

"If we speak up, and don't be afraid to do it," Fr. Guillermo said, "one voice is a lot." Working through *Escucha Mi Voz*, people from the community continued to escort immigrants to their check-ins. "Some people were detained, but not the ones we went with."

"Just make a big deal of everything," Fr. Guillermo told the Georgetown audience, "that's what we're doing."

During that visit to Washington, Alexandra said, Fr. Guillermo paid visits to members of Congress and their staffs. That included meeting with the staff of Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who requested the meeting.

Sanders posted a tribute to Fr. Guillermo on Facebook on November 1. "He was a brave man who will be missed as a tireless voice and leader for the vulnerable. Let us carry forth his mission of justice."

Little Village noted that Sanders had advocated on behalf of Pascual. In August, when he was in Iowa for a rally, the senator joined a forum on the topic of immigration and ICE at St. Joseph in West Liberty.

More than 600 people posted comments on Sanders's post about the priest, many citing personal encounters with Fr. Guillermo and lamenting his death. ✚



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