

# Father Merrick Bednar “Conviction of the Heart” 2023 Scholarship

## Overview

The “Conviction of the Heart” Scholarship is a **character scholarship** awarded in memory of its namesake, Fr. Merrick Bednar, parochial vicar at St. Bernadette Parish from 1990-1995 who died in 1997 at the age of 33. Given annually since 2003, this scholarship is awarded to a college/trade school-bound high school senior from St. Bernadette Parish who best exemplifies the qualities and ideals of Fr. Merrick, and whose life and faith are lived with great conviction.

## About Fr. Merrick

Inspirational...compassionate... faith-filled...loving. These are just a few of the many words that would describe Fr. Merrick Bednar – a beloved priest at St. Bernadette’s whose life and ministry played out in powerful and profound ways.

Fr. Merrick was well known throughout Western New York for having undergone a heart transplant at the age of 23, followed by a bone marrow transplant a decade later and cancer in between. He passed away on May 12, 1997 – remarkably, on the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his ordination – while awaiting a second heart transplant.

Most would agree that it was not Fr. Merrick’s suffering that endeared him to so many; it was the way he lived his life despite the many challenges he faced. In fact, he always believed his life was an incredible and precious gift – one that showed the true goodness of God. He chose to live that life with integrity, intensity, and an abundant gratitude for all he had been given – making a difference in the countless number of lives he touched and becoming an inspiration to all who knew him. With his zest for life, a wonderful sense of humor, a true concern for others, and an unshakable faith, he seized each day and lived his life with real **conviction of the heart**.

## Selection Criteria

The committee that awards this scholarship carefully reviews all nominations submitted. While academics and extra-curricular activities are not overlooked, **the emphasis of this award is on the student’s quality of character – that is, how the student lives his/her life and faith with real conviction on a daily basis.**

That said, the importance of the student’s letters of recommendation cannot be overstated. They should be written by individuals who know the nominee well and can provide real insight into the student’s character. **An impersonal or “generic” letter – or one citing only academic or extracurricular achievements – does little to strengthen the nominee’s application.**

In addition to being in good standing (i.e. attend Mass weekly, receive the Sacraments, provide service to those in need, etc.) with Saint Bernadette Parish, each applicant shall be required **to submit the following no later than Sunday, May 7th, 2023** to be considered for the scholarship award **(Please note that any application received after May 7th must unfortunately be disqualified):**

1. An essay no longer than **3, typed, double-spaced pages** discussing what being Catholic means to you, the importance of faith in your life, and examples of your convictions exemplifying Christ in your life.
2. **Three only** written recommendations from individuals close to you that **could comment on your Faith-based convictions discussed in your essay**. These individuals might include family members (**limit one recommendation from family member**), clergy, teachers, friends, etc.
3. Attached 2023 application form

## Selection:

A panel of six committee members will each year select the student who through their good standing in the Parish, written essay and accompanying recommendations most closely exemplifies Father Merrick’s ministry here at Saint Bernadette Parish.

**2023 Award amount: \$1,500 (Ceremony at the 11am Mass on Sunday, June 11th, 2023)**

**Father Merrick Bednar “Conviction of the Heart” Scholarship  
2023 Merrick Application Form**

Applicant Name:	First: _____ Middle Initial: _____ Last: _____
Address:	Street: _____ Town/City: _____ Zip Code: _____
Phone Number:	(     ) _____
Email:	_____ @ _____
Baptism:	Name of Parish Baptized: _____ Address: _____  Date Baptized: _____
Confirmation:	Name of Parish Confirmed: _____ Address: _____  Date Confirmed: _____
High School Graduation:	Date of Graduation: _____  Name of High School: _____
College/Trade School You Will Be Attending:	Name of College/Trade School: _____ Address: _____  Curriculum/Trade: _____ or if undecided, please check [ <input type="checkbox"/> ]

**Instructions:**

1. Please fill out this application form completely and legibly as per instructions above.
2. Complete your essay and ask for 3 Letters of Recommendation **(WE STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT YOU PROVIDE EACH PERSON YOU ASK FOR A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION WITH THE ATTACHED INFORMATION SHEET)**
3. Submit this application, your essay and three recommendation letters by Sunday **May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023** to:

Conviction of the Heart Scholarship Committee  
C/O Saint Bernadette’s Faith Formation Office  
5930 South Abbott Road  
Orchard Park, New York 14127  
Attn: Father Merrick Scholarship

Please direct questions to Ralph Jeswald @ (716) 982-2975 or [rjeswald0528@hotmail.com](mailto:rjeswald0528@hotmail.com)

## Father Merrick Bednar “Conviction of the Heart” Scholarship Letter of Recommendation Information and Instructions

### \*\*\* IMPORTANT \*\*\* PLEASE READ

Your letter of recommendation should be no longer than one page in length and **should discuss the selection criteria listed below based upon your relationship with the applicant. Citing specific examples of how you have witnessed the applicant’s faith in his/her life is very important. Please note that traditional comments about scholastic achievements and club membership, although noteworthy are not the scope of this request. A “generic” letter – or one citing only academic or extracurricular achievements – does little to strengthen the nominee’s application.**

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### Selection Criteria

As part of the application process, the applicant will be writing an essay discussing the following faith attributes:

1. What being Catholic means to him/her,
2. The importance of faith in his/her life, and
3. Examples of convictions exemplifying Christ in his/her life.

Please put the following information at the heading of your letter:

**Applicant name**

**Your name**

**Your relationship to the applicant**

When complete, please sign your letter and give a copy to the applicant so he/she may submit with the completed application form.