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North Dakota March for Life leads Right to Life events in January
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Encountering Christ in Catholic schools

I recently met a man who grew up in a Muslim family in Africa. He begged his father, who was a Muslim imam, to attend the nearby Catholic school, and received permission. The young lad was fascinated by the Eucharist and soon wished to go to Holy Communion with his classmates. He begged to be baptized, and at that point, his father and family basically disowned him, but he persevered. Some years later, he felt the call to become a priest, and years later still, he was called by the Pope to be a bishop. He then had the beautiful privilege of baptizing his own father and family, who wished to join him in the Catholic faith. Archbishop Thomas Msusa of Malawi credits his faith and priestly vocation, as well as the conversion of his family, to the profound impact of his Catholic education. It all started when he was allowed to attend a Catholic school. We should never forget the grace of God and the power of our witness to transform lives. Catholic schools are a key place where that grace and transformation can happen.

From Jan. 30 to Feb. 5, the Church in the United States will celebrate Catholic Schools Week, an annual occasion to give thanks for the important role of Catholic schools in the lives of our families and in the life of the Church. Since its earliest days, the Church in the United States has recognized the value of education for our children, but especially an education that is clearly rooted in our Catholic faith. Jesus Christ is the first and preeminent teacher in every Catholic school, where we are free to acknowledge God as the author of all truth. Young people learn that faith and reason go hand in hand, and one supports the other. Daily prayer and regular celebration of the sacraments allow our students and faculty members to encounter Christ throughout the school day, and we discover that religion is not just for Sundays. Students are formed in virtue, and they receive an education that matches or exceeds state and national standards. In a Catholic school, everyone knows that a child has an immortal soul made for heaven. We are forming our young people for lives and vocations here on earth but also for a life with God in eternity.

One of the biggest advocates for Catholic education in the Diocese of Fargo was Monsignor Jeffrey Wald. Monsignor Wald said he was a “convert” to the value of Catholic education because he had never personally attended a Catholic school before he went to the seminary. In each of his priestly assignments, he was able to see firsthand the good things that can happen in the lives of our children who attend Catholic schools. Certainly there is the obvious benefit of passing along the faith and a good, sound education to our young people, but Monsignor Wald was convinced that Catholic schools also have a positive impact on the entire family. The presence of a child in a Catholic school can have a ripple effect with parents, brothers and sisters, and grandparents. A Catholic school can also be a blessing to the entire parish community.

The Church teaches that parents are the first teachers of their own children, and that remains true no matter where a child is educated. No school can supplant the paramount role of a parent. But our Catholic schools strive to partner with our parents to provide the best education possible for their children, not only in the faith but in all subjects. The Catholic school supports parents in their role and assists them in the God-given responsibility they have to raise and educate their children in the Catholic faith. Cooperating with parents, our Catholic school educators work every day to help our children grow in knowledge, wisdom, and grace. Of course, no Catholic school is perfect, and there are always ways to grow and improve in carrying out the mission of Catholic education. But our schools are dedicated to living the Gospel and opening the doors of understanding to every child within its walls. To quote the theme for this year’s Catholic Schools Week, they are places of “faith, excellence, and service.”

As we celebrate Catholic Schools Week this year, I want to thank those who make it possible to carry on the mission of Catholic school education in the Diocese of Fargo. First, I thank the parents for their indispensable participation in the daily work of teaching their children. Without the participation of parents, our Catholic schools could not do what they do. I also want to thank our schoolteachers, administrators, and staff members.

The Catholic school supports parents in their role and assists them in the God-given responsibility they have to raise and educate their children in the Catholic faith. –Bishop John Folda
who dedicate themselves so generously to forming and educating our children. They make great sacrifices to serve in our schools, and we are grateful for their good work and their commitment. I thank our priests, who take an active role in our schools and make Christ present through their pastoral ministry. And I thank the many benefactors and volunteers who give their time, talent, and treasure to support the mission of Catholic education. It’s hard to imagine whether our schools would even exist without the contributions of so many to this important apostolate of the Church.

I’m well aware that not all families have access to a Catholic school in the Diocese of Fargo. To those who do, I hope you will consider the value of a Catholic school education for your children. The blessings will be abundant, and the power to transform lives will be there for every student who walks through the doors.

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**BISHOP FOLDA’S CALENDAR**

**Jan. 20–21**
March for Life, Washington, D.C.

**Jan. 24–25**
Ordination and Installation of Most Rev. Joseph Williams, Cathedral of St. Paul, Minn.

**Jan. 26**
St. JPII Schools Board Meeting, Pastoral Center, Fargo

**Jan. 27**
Operation Andrew Dinner, Bishop’s Residence, Fargo

**Feb. 1**
Mass for St. James Academy, Jamestown

**Feb. 2**
Know Your Faith Catholic Schools Competition, Shanley High School, Fargo

**Feb. 3**
All Catholic Schools Mass, Shanley High School, Fargo

**Feb. 7**
Real Presence Radio Banquet, Delta by Marriott, Fargo

**Feb. 8–9**
National Catholic Bioethics Center Workshop, Dallas, Texas

**Feb. 13**
Vianney Discernment Weekend, Maryvale

**Feb. 19–20**
Parish visits to St. Patrick, Enderlin; Holy Trinity, Fingal; and Our Lady of the Scapular, Sheldon

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**Prayer Intention of Pope Francis January**

For true human fraternity

We pray for all those suffering from religious discrimination and persecution; may their own rights and dignity be recognized, which originate from being brothers and sisters in the human family.
As a young man, Sebastian joined the Roman Army in 283 AD, ostensibly to be of service to other Christians who were being persecuted by the Romans. Sebastian distinguished himself, and for his excellent service, he was promoted to serve in the Praetorian Guard to protect Emperor Diocletian.

While serving as a Praetorian Guard, twin brothers were imprisoned for refusing to make public sacrifices to the Roman gods. The brothers were deacons of the Christian Church. During their imprisonment, their parents visited them to implore them to renounce Christianity. However, Sebastian convinced both parents to convert to Christianity. Sebastian also converted several other prominent individuals, including the local prefect.

This led to his discovery, and he was reported as a Christian to Emperor Diocletian in 286. The Emperor, who was already infamous for ordering the deaths of hundreds of Christians, scolded Sebastian and ordered him to be killed by having him tied to a stake on a training field and used as target practice. Archers riddled his body with arrows. Believed to be dead, the archers left his body for retrieval and burial. He was discovered alive by Irene of Rome, and she hid him and nursed him back to health.

Once well, Sebastian went in search of Diocletian to surprise him. Diocletian was taken aback but quickly recovered his composure. This time, he would not permit Sebastian to escape with his life. He ordered his former guard to be beaten to death with clubs and thrown into the sewers. Sebastian’s body was recovered and buried in the catacombs beneath Rome.

Nearly 80 years after his death his remains were moved to a basilica in Rome. His skull was sent to a German monastery in Ebersburg where it remains to this day.

Historical information from catholic.org.

SAINT OF THE MONTH

St. Sebastian
By Paul Braun

Feast day: January 20
Death: 288
Patron: Soldiers, athletes, and those who desire a saintly life

PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

O Jesus, our great High Priest, hear my humble prayers on behalf of your priests. Give them a deep faith, a bright and firm hope and a burning love, which will ever increase throughout their priestly life.

In their loneliness, comfort them. In their sorrows, strengthen them. In their frustrations, remind them that through suffering the soul is purified. Show them that they are needed by the Church; they are needed by souls; they are needed for the work of redemption. Amen.
One of my favorite Christmas hymns is *O Come all ye Faithful*. The hymn calls each of us to come to adore the new born King—Jesus Christ. The Feast of the Epiphany was the day we remembered the three wise men who followed a star to adore the newborn king of Israel and to bring him gifts. How far would you travel to see Jesus and adore him? What gift would you bring to him?

The Gospel of Matthew tells us the story of the wise men. It never says there are three wise men, only that they brought three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. It is through Catholic tradition that we learn there were three wise men who journeyed from Persia: Balthasar, Melchior, and Caspar.

According to Google maps, a trip from current day Tehran, Iran (Persia) to Bethlehem is 1,200 miles. They traveled on camel through the desert through Iran, Iraq, and Jordan. Talk about a road trip!

Would you be willing to ride a camel from Fargo to Houston, Texas? That is how far the wise men traveled to see Jesus. The good news is that we don’t have to. Jesus Christ, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity is as close as your local Catholic Church.

The second question is what gift would we bring him? The wise men brought gifts of gold (signifying Christ’s kingship), frankincense (signifying his divinity), and myrrh (signifying his humanity).

Sometimes, people get us what they think we want, what they wish we wanted, or what they think we need. Obviously the most appreciated gift is one a person really wants and needs. So what does one get the Son of God, who literally has everything? What does Jesus want more than anything else?

He wants us—each of us—holding nothing back. He wants to laugh with us, cry with us, and be there when no one else is. He wants us—right where we are today—to be with him.

One way to give ourselves to Jesus is by offering our time to be with him in Eucharistic Adoration. Adoration is a time of quiet prayer in the presence of Jesus Christ. A consecrated host, the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of God, is placed in a monstrance, which is then set on the altar. “Adorers” are then able to be present with the Lord!

During adoration, you can pray the rosary, the Divine Mercy chaplet, Stations of the Cross, or Liturgy of the Hours. You can meditate or contemplate Sacred Scripture or read religious books. You can talk with Jesus, sharing your challenges with him, or sit with Jesus and listen to what he wants to say to you.

Is the Holy Spirit calling you to visit the newborn king just like he called the three wise men? You may ask why we should go all the way to a church to spend time with Jesus. God is everywhere; I get just as much out of praying at home as I do here at a church.

Yes, God is everywhere in creation, and we should pray wherever we are. However, Jesus Christ, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, is not in your living room. He is in the church. It is different, and it does matter!

We have smartphones that allow us to contact anyone around the world in seconds, and we can even see that person live. With that technology, why would we ever need to be together face-to-face?

Many times over the past two years, we’ve been unable to be with those that we love in person. We’ve been restricted from visiting family and friends in nursing homes or from family gatherings in person. We could call these family and friends on the phone and see them, but there is something about being together face-to-face, right?

Likewise, Jesus wants some regular face-to-face time with each of us. So, if you are not already participating in regular Eucharistic adoration, consider beginning this week.
One day when I looked out the window of our little house, I saw a group of Mayan women in their brightly woven skirts on their backs heading to the lake. I was curious, so I followed them. Standing up to their knees in the water with their children splashing alongside, the women scrubbed their clothes on the rocks. They talked and laughed.

As I watched, I had a moment of profound understanding. “Something is missing in my life and now I know what it is. It’s community. My poverty is a poverty of communal life.”

Fast forward 25 years to 2012. My daughter Beth, a new mom, calls me one day and says, “Mom, I’m not going back to the mother’s group. I’ve been there three times, and all they talk about is their kids and what kind of diaper to buy. Isn’t there a place after college where women get together and talk about the real questions of life?”

I recognized in her voice that same loneliness I had as a new mom. At that time, I had been giving talks to mother’s groups on the importance of reading. I found myself driving home from these talks sad. Women were not reading. In fact, not one woman was reading quality literature for her own enjoyment. I realized I wasn’t either. Everyone agreed that reading was important, but they said, “I don’t have time to read. I didn’t do well in my high school literature class. Where would I even start?”

I drove home sad because the talks I was giving only made the women feel guilty. The talks were a reminder of one more thing they were failing at.

So when Beth called that day, her desire for a place to talk about the real questions of life merged with my desire to read more, and Well-Read Mom was born.

The idea was simple. We would read books together. Beth would start a group with her friends in St. Paul and I would start one with my friends in Crosby, Minn. That was 10 years ago. Today there are over 500 groups across the nation.

I am passionate about women growing in friendship. We need each other. We need to have conversations that matter. We need to grow and mature. Cultural change begins with our conversion! St. Catherine of Sienna said, “Become who you are meant to be, and you will set the world on fire.”

At the Redeemed Women’s Conference, I want to share stories of women saints and how they helped each other as trusted sisters. I want to help us understand that we need each other to do the work we have been called to do. When we walk together as sisters, every load we carry is lightened.

I hope to see you at the Redeemed Women’s Conference on March 4 and 5!

For more information or to register, visit fargodiocese.org/redeemedwomen.
North Dakota March for Life leads Right to Life events in January

By Amanda Jensen | Director of the Office of Family Ministry and Respect Life for the Diocese of Bismarck

January 22 will be the 49th anniversary of the 1973 United States’ Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in all 50 states. Since that tragic day, more than 62 million babies have lost their lives. One year later on the first anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision, the first March for Life was organized to lobby Congress to find a legislative solution to protect the unborn with the intention to continue marching until the Roe v. Wade decision was overturned. It hasn’t happened yet, thus, there continues to be a March for Life in our nation’s capital. Here, tens of thousands of people peacefully gather to defend the unborn and proclaim every human being’s right to life.

The Diocese of Bismarck has had a strong and continuous representation at the National March for Life in Washington D.C. for many years with groups from across the diocese attending. This pilgrimage and commitment to defend life is now a tradition. Attendance grows every year. This year, multiple busloads of youth and adults from the diocese, schools, and youth groups will again be traveling to Washington D.C.

The exception to the yearly tradition of the national pilgrimage was in January 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, attendance at the National March for Life was limited. This presented a need for a local option. To encourage the pro-life movement, a group of diocesan and school leaders from across the state came together to create the first-ever North Dakota March for Life. It consisted of Mass celebrated with Bishop David D. Kagan at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, a march to the North Dakota State Capitol, a rally featuring Senator Kevin Cramer, and a moment of silence for the 60+ million lives lost. More than 1,500 people attended.

On Jan. 21, the Diocese of Bismarck will co-sponsor, along with the University of Mary, Knights of Columbus, and a number of other pro-life people and organizations, the second-annual North Dakota March for Life. It begins with Mass at 10:30 am at Cathedral of the Holy Spirit with Bishop David D. Kagan celebrating, a march (or drive) to the North Dakota State Capital steps with programing at 12:30 p.m. to include a keynote speaker and a period of silence for those silenced by abortions.

All are invited to participate and attend. For more information on how to participate, to register, and to check for frequent updates, visit the Diocese of Bismarck website at bismarckdiocese.com/ndmfl. In the case of inclement weather, we will announce alternative plans via this website.

You are also invited to pray to protect human life in the 9 Days for Life novena, from Jan. 19-27. Each day contains prayers, intentions, a short reflection, and suggested actions to help build the culture of life. The novena can be viewed, downloaded, and printed at respectlife.org/9-days-for-life in both English and Spanish. You can also sign-up to receive daily emails or text messages at respectlife.org/9-days-signup.

Thank you for your continued prayerful protection of the invaluable gift of human life!
The Real Presence Radio (RPR) fundraising banquet season is wrapping up with the last two banquets in Fargo on Feb. 7 and Duluth, Minn. on March 8. RPR has been blessed throughout the banquets this year and are thankful to the donors who supported us in prayer, time, talent, and financially in Sioux Falls, S.D.; Rochester, Minn.; Rapid City, S.D.; Aberdeen, S.D., Williston; and Bismarck.

The Fargo banquet will be held at the Delta Hotels by Marriott beginning with a social hour at 5:30 p.m. and dinner at 6:30. The keynote speaker is Dr. Stacy Trasancos, a scientist and theologian with a doctorate in chemistry and a master’s degree in dogmatic theology. She is a wife, mother of seven, and grandmother. Dr. Trasancos worked as a chemist for DuPont before converting to Catholicism and radically restructuring her life. She will share her compelling story of conversion as she lost herself in the materialistic world of science with no faith in God to finding the truth in Catholicism.

“It’s amazing to me now to realize that my love for science was always a search for truth. How wonderful that we can use the technology science brought us to evangelize through radio!” said Dr. Trasancos.

Executive Director of RPR, Mark Hollcraft said, “Our banquets are a critical part of our fundraising efforts each year and bring in about half of our yearly funding. Not only are they important to us financially, but they play a vital part in getting to know our listeners and hearing their feedback, which is very important to us.”

There is still time to attend as a guest, host a table, or sponsor the banquet. For more information, visit RealPresenceRadio.com/banquets or call (877) 795-0122 and speak with Jessica. We look forward to seeing you Feb. 7! 

Dr. Stacy Trasancos.

(submitted photo)
Dr. Stacy Trasancos to share journey of faith and science at RPR banquet
By Lori Kalgard  |   Director of Marketing and Events at Real Presence Radio

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https://www.petersway.com/9873.html
Leland Ryken, editor of *The Christian Imagination*, writes about the complimentary aspect of fiction and the real world in an essay titled *Thinking Christianly About Literature*.

"Literature is built on a grand paradox: It is a make-believe world that nonetheless reminds us of real life and clarifies it for us. Reading and writing literature depend on a respect for the ability of the imagination to embody truth. There is no valid reason for the perennial Christian preference of biography, history, and the newspaper to fiction and poetry. The former tell us what happened, while literature tells us what happens."

A story need not have anything to do with Christianity on the outside to draw us into a deeper understanding of ourselves and our faith. Books written during a time and place when Christian values are the norm or by authors who have an understanding of God as king and savior of humanity tend to tell stories with these values at their core.

"What we call the Catholic novel is not necessarily about a Christianized or catholicized world," writes Catholic author Flannery O’Connor in *Mystery and Manners*, "but simply…one in which the truth as Christians know it has been used as a light to see the world by. The catholic novel can't be categorized by subject matter, but only by what it assumes about human and divine reality."

The importance of the imagination is something Jack Sharpe, publisher of Bethlehem Books in Bathgate, N.D. knows well. Bethlehem Books is a publishing company that reprints good books for children and youth—fiction and biography selected mainly from authors of the early 20th century into the early 1960s.

"The mission of Bethlehem Books is an out-growth of our community's 50 years of Christian life together and our active search for and collective enjoyment of many good books for children and adults," said Sharpe. "In our enthusiastic mining of this medium, we noticed that good children’s books could be healing for adults as well as formative for children. After 20 years of being a reading and home-schooling community, we...

"Use your imagination" is often something we just tell our children as they learn the workings of the world and pass the time. Yet we continue to use our imaginations throughout our lives to help us navigate the world and our place in it. We might imagine how our life would be different with a career change, what kind of parent we would be, or simply how that recent conversation might have gone if we had just said something else.

Beyond imaging what could be, we can also imagine what is. While we may not see them, there are spiritual realities present in our daily lives. Choirs of angels and saints singing with us as we proclaim the Gloria during Mass. God’s outpouring of grace washes us when we receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In every Catholic church and adoration chapel, the Eucharist still appears to be bread and wine, but by faith nourished by a deeper understanding of the realities before us, we know it to be the body and blood of Jesus Christ in our midst.

How are our imaginations doing? In our age of endless social media feeds, overloaded streaming services, and advertisers screaming for our attention, what images are permeating the quiet moments of our life? What do we imagine about our future, our relationships, our bodies, and our abilities? How do we imagine God looks at us? In our leisure time, are we pursuing images and entertainment that foster a healthy understanding of ourselves as sons and daughters of God, or do our habits teach us—subtly—that we are something else?

“There is nothing more fundamental than the imagination, and that our loss of respect for it is directly linked to religious apathy,” writes Janine Langan, professor Emerita of Christianity and Culture at the University of Toronto, in her essay *The Christian Imagination*. "...Educating the imagination is thus of primordial importance. The secular world knows this. Advertisers, politicians, and totalitarian regimes have developed a science of this faculty, and a whole technology through which to manipulate it. Logically, Christians should be well armed against such manipulation. They are heirs to the greatest imaginative tradition alive on this planet."

Many Christians have found proper food for the imagination in literature. Books rooted in a proper understanding of the human person can reorient our minds to live in the world as we ought, not as the world permits us.
Leland Ryken, editor of *The Christian Imagination*, writes about the complimentary aspect of fiction and the real world in an essay titled *Thinking Christianly About Literature*.

“Literature is built on a grand paradox: It is a make-believe world that nonetheless reminds us of real life and clarifies it for us…. Reading and writing literature depend on a respect for the ability of the imagination to embody truth. There is no valid reason for the perennial Christian preference of biography, history, and the newspaper to fiction and poetry. The former tell us what happened, while literature tells us what happens.”

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Bethlehem Books reprints and remarkets books by first finding books they enjoy and then searching for who holds the copyrights to those books. By reprinting books from generations past, they make these books more accessible for today’s audience. Their books include titles from all genres and styles that meet various needs and tastes of individual people. What they share in common is a respect for the whole person, helping to nurture culture and families with good stories that highlight life’s adventures, great and small.

“These books are the fruit of a culture which took for granted that God created the world, every human life has value, and the world contains order and reason,” said Sharpe. “Such a shared understanding has been conducive to the creation of stories filled with meaningful relationships and trustworthy outcomes. We believe that well-written works built on this foundation nurture children’s imaginations with truth and beauty. Our books are for everyone—young or old, religious or secular.”

The Bethlehem community is a group of lay Catholics, married couples, and privately vowed singles who have a common life and work. They are also Benedictine oblates, people who follow the Rule of St. Benedict by becoming spiritually associated with a particular Benedictine Monastery. The Bethlehem community are connected to Mount Angel Abbey in Oregon.

“Early on, even before we became Catholic, we connected with the Benedictine spirituality expressed in the Rule of St. Benedict,” said Sharpe. “One of the things that resonated was St. Benedict’s emphasis on moderation—especially practical for a lay community of families and single people. We also responded to the life of stability he describes that creates a context in which on-going conversion is possible. The prologue to the Rule St. Benedict expressed it as ‘going all together to everlasting life.’ Also, a fruit of Benedictine life through the centuries has been the preserving of culture—which we see expressed in a small way in our preserving of books through our publishing and extensive book collections.”
Carrie Gress, author of *Nudging Conversions*, explains the importance of culture when it comes to leading others to the faith.

“True culture, as an authentic reflection of God’s love, isn’t just for children. It has the potential to leave a similar imprint upon every soul: renewal, refreshment, and a peaceful sense of contentedness—all fingerprints of God’s handiwork. Culture may not trigger instantaneous conversion, but it serves to open the individual up to the gifts God has to offer and wants to offer in abundance.”

Reading has a unique ability to exercise the imagination since there are no (or few) visuals to paint an image for us. Bethlehem Books’ tag line is “Literature to feed the imagination.”

“This sums up why we think the books we work with are important,” said Sharpe. “These books give healthy and life-giving food to children’s imaginations. Many of them show images of the goodness of everyday life in concrete examples. For this reason they also can bring healing to adults and fill in ‘gaps’ in their own childhood experience.”

After reading a book by George MacDonald, C.S. Lewis said, “...my imagination was, in a certain sense, baptized; the rest of me, not unnaturally, took longer... I had not the faintest notion what I had let myself in for by buying *Phantastes*” (*Surprised by Joy*).

“It is important to have a Catholic imagination because we need an imagination that reflects truth—that mirrors reality truly,” said Sharpe. “Hand in hand with this goes the ability to recognize truth anywhere, in all its multi-layered dimensions. As spiritual writer Oswald Chambers expresses it, we need to

“Since it is likely that children will meet cruel enemies, let them at least have heard of brave knights and heroic courage.” - C.S. Lewis
learn to see sacramentally, letting the world God has made—permeated by his divine action—teach us to use our imaginations aright” (*My Utmost for His Highest*).

Young or old, our imagination sticks with us, for good or for ill. As we settle into these cool winter months, let’s be sure to fill our leisure time with wholesome stories that feed us with beauty, truth, and goodness.

Illustration from The Winged Watchman by Hilda Van Stockum. (submitted photo)

**Red Falcons of Trémoine**

“A wholly appealing young novel of knights and chivalry and a mixed up inheritance puts all the romantic elements of Richard I’s England into this colorful tale. Leo, a boy who has spent his life at St. Michael’s Abbey and is preparing to take religious orders, is our hero. Plots and counter plots are excitingly worked out, told with the touch of humor and naturalness that make them more immediate, and at last Leo becomes the vehicle for a new and firmly welded understanding. With battles, fair ladies, crotchety lords, this is panoply for the Crusade era and good reading for the early teens too.” –Kirkus Review

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**A few of the Bethlehem Community’s favorite books**

(*Books published by Bethlehem Books*)

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**Letzenstein Chronicles***  |  Trevor, Meriol
“Since 3rd grade, I have been loving Bethlehem Books. The wholesome stories with a good Catholic worldview have captured my imagination and taken me to wonderful places. The dangers that characters might face are always met with fortitude, while moments of happiness are sheer, warm delight. I am 21 now, and I still particularly enjoy re-reading the books of the Letzenstein series by Meriol Trevor. They give me hope as I glimpse into another world, a world where dangers and political intrigues occur just as much as today but where faith and goodness still hold strong amid the darkness.”
–Local reader

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**The Winged Watchman***  |  Van Stockum, Hilda
“Hilda Van Stockum’s stories have always been full of faith and family affection. This book, her finest, steps outside the small circle to tell the story not only of a family but of Holland during the German occupation. There is no dwelling on the inhumanities of the time, but there is no overlooking them either. The story has tragedy, but it also has humor.”
–Review from The Horn Book, volume 38, October 1962

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**The Miracle of St. Nicholas**  |  Whelan, Gloria
“Th church in a Russian village in the 20th century has been closed for 60 years. But once it was ‘as crowded as a pod full of peas.’ Why can’t we celebrate Christmas tomorrow in St. Nicholas? Alexi asks. The answer is that it would take a miracle. When asked how she came to write this book, author Gloria Whelan said, ‘Alexander Solzhenitsyn describes how as he traveled across the Russian countryside, his landmarks along the way were the steeples of village churches—churches that were locked and empty. This sad sight stayed with me, and I longed like Alexi to open those churches once again.’”
–Local reader
Diocesan Catholic schools to celebrate National Catholic Schools Week Jan. 30–Feb. 5

By Mike Hagstrom | Diocesan Director of Schools

National Catholic Schools Week will be observed Jan 30–Feb. 5, with the theme “Catholic Schools: Faith. Excellence. Service.” Catholic schools in the Fargo Diocese, located in Belcourt, Devils Lake, Fargo, Grand Forks, Jamestown, Langdon, Rugby, Valley City, Wahpeton, and West Fargo, will be participating in several in-school events during the week to highlight the advantages of a Catholic education for students. A total of 180 teachers are educating 2,256 students pre-school through 12th grade this school year.

Shanley High School in Fargo will be hosting one of the most popular state-wide events, the annual Know Your Faith competition, on Feb. 2. Shanley is the defending state champion, having captured the title last year at Bishop Ryan High School, Minot. In addition to Shanley and Bishop Ryan, participating schools include St. Mary’s Central High School, Bismarck; Trinity High School, Dickinson; and East Sacred Heart High School, East Grand Forks, Minn.

The theme this year is “Rome AD 64.” Student participants and fans will be invited to dress as martyrs or Romans. Bishop John Folda will be serving as moderator. The competition begins at 11 a.m. and will be broadcast on the Real Presence Radio network.

Please pray for our Diocese of Fargo Catholic Schools as they strive to accomplish their unique mission of educating the whole child—including integration of the spiritual dimension which unifies the human person.
God speaks through little things

“Yo gleamed and shine, and chase away my blindness. You exhaled odors, and I drew in my breath and do pant after You. I tasted, and do hunger and thirst.” St. Augustine

Throughout that winter of 1968, we would notice her at the 10:15 a.m. Sunday Mass, nine rows from the altar on the pulpit side. Or more accurately, we would notice her hat.

The hat was a beige-ish color that today’s Etsy merchants would call “ecru,” but which to my eight-year-old mind was milk-in-the-bottom-of-the-bowl-after-you’d-eaten-all-the-Cocoa Puffs color. The hat’s distinguishing feature was a panoply of dangling sequins, nickel-sized discs that would make gentle clicking sounds whenever the hat-wearer bent her head in prayer. With the reliability of a road sign, the hat would draw us towards the pew in which my family normally sat. Even my distractible and directionally-challenged little brother would simply head for the glinting discs when my mother, late as usual, hurried us into church during the Epistle.

After our quarter-mile walk through winter weather, the hardwood pew was as inviting as a hearthside. There, after completing our weekly shuffle of glove-peeling and hat-doffing, my brother and I would be hastily placed in reverent postures by maternal hands. Once we were settled, I would be free to indulge my senses until the Concluding Rite. I’d listen contentedly to the church sounds: the voice of the priest echoing in the cavernous church, the click of rosary beads, the hiss of dwindling candles, the clink of coins in the collection basket. I would smell the lingering incense, the melting wax, the wet wool of my coat, my mother’s Sunday perfume.

And I would watch the light shimmer, dance, and wink on the ecru sequins in front of me. In those moments, the world was as perfect a place as I could imagine. There was comfort, light, security, and warmth. My family was with me, and God was there. Right there.

More than half a century later, I still am mesmerized by sequins. In any craft goods aisle, I’ll stand transfixed, fingering a package of sequins and turning it this way and that so as to see the light play on the smooth, shiny shapes. Invariably, the image of those dangling ecru discs will come vividly to mind, and I’ll be mentally transported to a place that’s welcoming and warm, fragrant and familiar, sublime and—above all—sacred.

It’s easy to encounter God in the natural world; even those who don’t know him can feel his presence in a glowing sunrise or a sparkling waterfall. But God also speaks to us through the little things: “little” in either size or significance, “things” that are either abstract or concrete. He is the communicator whose voice may be heard in the stuff of everyday life.

How is God speaking to you today? What trinket or trial, parley or picture has brought Him to mind?

“Creator God, thank you for the gift of my five senses. Help me to encounter You through their rightful use. Give me an attentive spirit so that I may say with Samuel, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’”

Like Daughter Zion, the fenced in maiden, each Carmelite dwells in a secret, faraway hiding place like the ones we wistfully remember from childhood and thought we had lost forever. No matter how it may falsely appear to mere onlookers, only those who enter it know that it is no fantasy but real, beyond our wildest dreams. Only they drink from the sealed fountain, water welling from the Virgin’s Heart and live forever.
Chalk up the door frame and cut the king’s cake—it’s Epiphany!

By Mary Hanbury
Director of Catechesis for the Diocese of Fargo

Today there is a medieval custom that has gained some popularity in recent years to mark and bless your own home with a remembrance of the visit of the three kings on Epiphany. It starts with blessed chalk in which you write over the main door of your house the following formula; “20 + C + B + M + 22.” The numbers are the current year split into two parts. The plus signs are crosses, and the letters are the first initial of the traditional names of each of the kings: Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior. The initials may also be interpreted as the Latin phrase, Christus mansionem benedicit, “may Christ bless the house.” The act of writing the names along with the prayer invites the presence of God into the home and blesses all who live and visit there. You can find a blessing on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website at usccb.org/prayers/blessing-home-and-household-epiphany.

Another tradition on Epiphany is to eat the King’s cake. On the Twelfth Night was a festive party that included a cake named after the three kings. There are a variety of recipes out there with origins in different countries that range from a type of coffee cake to a sweet pastry. The one thing in common was the cake had to be round, like a crown. It was the French who settled in Louisiana who brought the tradition to the United States along with the tradition of carnival (carne vale, Latin for “meat farewell”) and Marti Gras (French for “Fat Tuesday”). Over time the king’s cake took on a meaning of its own and became the Marti Gras cake decorated with colors of green, purple, and gold. It also became synonymous with the party season of carnival which begins on Jan. 6 and lasts until Ash Wednesday. One interesting tradition is that baked inside the cake is a plastic baby to represent the baby Jesus. The one who gets the piece with the baby is known as the king and plans the party the next year.

As we begin this new year, consider adding an Epiphany tradition. The blessing of the family home certainly is a great way to begin the new year.
Identity politics leaves us asking who we are

We are witnessing a shift in society. Western cultural norms and expressions once treated as de rigueur, or at least unremarked upon, are now seen as inappropriate and hostile. Cries of cultural appropriation, attaching one’s personal pronouns to social media profiles and email signatures, and ever-shifting gender norms are enough to leave one’s head spinning. To be sure, some of the recent societal conversations have been beneficial. Here I’m thinking of increased attention to biased policing and hiring policies, increased access to the upper reaches of society and economics by members of historically disadvantaged groups, and long-overdue days of reckoning for those who have used their power and position to abuse and take advantage of those beneath them.

However, many of these beneficial changes have been dwarfed in recent years by other significant cultural shifts: the decline of the two-parent family, increased violence and unrest, and greater economic disparity. Some of these changes are easier to understand than others. On the more confusing side of the spectrum is “identity politics,” which is an ever-evolving term that seeks to answer the question “who am I?” Unfortunately, the results of this quest increasingly encourage us to define ourselves in opposition, rather than in relation, to each other.

In Primal Screams, Mary Eberstadt seeks to trace the roots of current obsessions with self-determination of identity to larger forces that have been in play for decades. In a chapter titled “A New Theory: The Great Scattering,” she proposes an explanation for the current cultural moment:

“Many people today are claiming to be victims, because they and their societies are victims—not so much of the “isms” they point to as oppressors, but because the human animal has been selected for familial forms of socialization that for many people no longer exist” (37).

People are not meant to be completely self-determining. Of course, our decisions influence the course of our lives: what we study, where we live, whom we marry, and so on. But these choices are best rooted within the context of a unified society. For generations past, a basic identity was given to you at birth. You might not have liked it, but you knew what it was. It meant something to be a member of a family, a religion, or to reside in a certain place or country. Then, as one grew and matured, a new identity was taken on in relation to one’s previous identity. Choices of residence, spouse, and vocation all sprang from one’s primary identity. It served as a North Star, no matter how far away from it you chose to travel.

Eberstadt’s argument is that a consequence of the sexual revolution is that it has left the children of that society twisting in the wind. Rather than unshackling them from the constraints of traditional morality, they are left searching for something, anything, that can tell them who they are and where they belong. Children from a family with a revolving cast of stepfathers and part-siblings cannot answer the basic question of who are their parents and siblings, let alone find their place in society.

Eberstadt’s arguments will be familiar to those on the conservative side of the aisle. Indeed, the proposal that people raised in societies with ever-rotating family members, no connection to faith or country, would find themselves unmoored and adrift is so obvious to barely warrant mentioning, but for the fact that so many people are looking for any other explanation.

I admire the inclusion of brief reflections by Rod Dreher, Mark Lilla, and Peter Thiel. These contributors provide additional explanation as well as some disagreement with Eberstadt’s thesis. Lilla argues that economic conditions play an important role, citing the example of China’s decreasing family size, a culture largely untouched by the Western sexual revolution. His explanation is that the current societal shifts are due in large part to economic shifts: it’s a trade-off to be able to provide a “better” life for one child, than to raise five children in relative poverty. I applaud Eberstadt for including alternative perspectives in her book. I hope we will see more of this collaboration between conservative and liberal voices and viewpoints in the future, rather than simply talking past each other. Understanding these different viewpoints is essential to grasping the current cultural moment.
If you don’t have a will in place, the Diocese of Fargo just gave you one less excuse not to have one. As of Jan. 1, the Diocese of Fargo has partnered with FreeWill to provide you an opportunity to create or plan a will.

This new service provided online by FreeWill is not going to be the complete answer for many. But what they do provide is an easy and intuitive planning resource to the members of our diocese. FreeWill’s online tool allows a person to make a legally valid plan in about 20-30 minutes. It walks the user through a step-by-step process with instructions and/or considerations. Bottom line: an estimated 70% of the U.S. population does not have a will in place. We know how difficult estate planning can be, but it’s still an important task to provide protection for ourselves and especially for our family friends that we will ultimately leave behind. FreeWill’s estate planning tool will allow users to, at a minimum, start the planning process so when they visit with their attorney, they have their priorities established and assets listed.

FreeWill is legally valid in North Dakota and in the other 49 states, with language specifically tailored to each state. Every aspect of FreeWill was developed with the help and expertise of legal advisors including a variety of practicing attorneys and academics who support FreeWill’s mission to increase access to law and enable charitable giving. However, if a user would prefer to finalize their will with an attorney, they can use FreeWill to create a list of documented wishes.

This new service will provide the opportunity to create a simple will, but for many, especially those who are business owners, farmers, or wish to establish a trust or incorporate other creative estate planning into their will, visiting with their preferred estate-planning attorney is recommended.

If you don’t have a will or have a family member or friend that should be considering a will, I encourage you to go to freewill.com/fargodiocese and check it out. It’s a wonderful planning tool and a great way to get started.

If you have any questions, or would like more information, contact me at steve.schons@fargodiocese.org.

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Some unique things about seminary life

Pat Sorrells
Pre-Theology II at Mount St. Mary
Seminary in Emmitsburg, Md.

The goings and comings of life in a seminary are unique. We have a rule of life that we have to follow, times for communal prayer, and one or two house jobs we are responsible for carrying out during the academic year.

The first unique thing we do here at seminary is attend communal prayer. There are both optional communal prayer opportunities like a house-wide rosary at 8 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays, as well as required communal prayer opportunities such as Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours almost every day. We can also get together on our own with a small group, brother seminarians from our dioceses, or the floor we live on to pray communally.

The second unique thing at seminary is to have one or two house jobs. House jobs are not all that dissimilar to having a chore one is required to do. Each house job should take about one hour per week to accomplish, and it’s not all that uncommon for men to have more than one house job. Some house jobs include singing in the main Schola at the seminary, doing the seminary kitchen laundry, or staffing a position in our seminary Student Government Association. There is a lot that goes into taking care of a building that houses over 158 men each academic year. So employing the help of seminarians to keep the place running is needed.

The third unique thing is we on occasion donate items to a dorm room called The Mannocchio (pronounced muh-NO-key-oh) Mart, named after a prominent priest of the seminary. This room serves as our house-wide free thrift store. A seminarian is free to donate any items or take whatever they want at no cost. People donate things like coffee makers, clerical shirts, and many books. Stopping by frequently is not a bad idea!

One last unique thing is that we form friendships with seminarians studying for dioceses across the United States and the world. Yes, there are a lot of men here from the east coast since the seminary is in Maryland. But we also have men here from Illinois, Colorado, Georgia, as well as some international seminarians. Getting to know men from all these different regions is an eye-opening experience.

All in all, seminary life is an enjoyable experience. I have made friends, grown in my understanding of my faith, and learned how to pray better. Thank you for all of your prayers thus far. May God bless you.
Jesus as a baby is the heart of Catholic social doctrine

Many Christians, including Catholics, have difficulty understanding that “structures of sin” may exist separately from our own individual sins. I suspect that certain religious and political strains of thought in the United States that emphasize the individual as paramount contribute to this problem. The false idea that we are autonomous individuals acting in isolation prevents us from accepting and addressing the social consequences of our sins and the sins of others.

Christians know the temptations of Christmas. Every Advent season, our priests remind us to focus on the coming of Christ as an infant and not to get distracted by gifts, parties, lights, decorations, concerts, and travel.

Yet even well-intentioned and well-disciplined Christians can miss the deeper significance of Christmas, which is the incarnation of God. Christmas is more than the observance of a birthday on the calendar. It is the celebration of the visible manifestation that God entered this world and became flesh.

We often forget that for much of the ancient world and still for many religions today, the idea that God would touch the earth, much less become human, was and is scandalous. If God was truly God, he would not or could not lower himself to become material and human like us. Human existence was considered not just imperfect, but too much marked by pain, misery, fear, violence, unknowns, and, of course, death. A true god, it was thought, could not demean himself by touching such a lowly existence.

Yet that is what happened. God not only walked on this earth, he assumed human nature from the moment of his conception within the Virgin Mary.

Christmas, therefore, is not just a birthday celebration. It is a recognition of the most significant event in human history and a fundamental principle of our faith and life.

In the document of the Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes, the council fathers stated: “For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin” (22).

Because of this, the Church puts the incarnation at the center of her social doctrine. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church states, “for this reason [the incarnation] the Church recognizes as her fundamental duty the task of seeing that this union is continuously brought about and renewed. In Christ the Lord, the Church indicates and strives to be the first to embark upon the path of the human person, and she invites all people to recognize in everyone—near and far, known and unknown, and above all in the poor and the suffering—a brother or sister ‘for whom Christ died’” (1 Cor. 8:11; Rom. 14:15) (105).

Put more simply, because God became human, humans matter. Because we are created in God’s image, all humans have a dignity that is not earned and cannot be taken away.

Political and economic ideologies tend to reduce humans to mere pawns that fit their agenda. The Church, remembering the incarnation, rejects these attempts to reduce humans to mere instruments or pawns in a class, national, or racial struggle.

Instead, the Church puts the human person at the center of social life. All economic, business, political, and social matters must put first the human person, especially the least among us. The Compendium states: “Human society is therefore the object of the social teaching of the Church since she is neither outside nor over and above socially united men, but exists exclusively in them and, therefore, for them” (106).

It states further: “Men and women, in the concrete circumstances of history, represent the heart and soul of Catholic social thought.” Moreover, that the Church must “defend human dignity in the face of every attempt to redimension or distort its image” and denounce “the many violations of human dignity” (107).

The Church teaches that we must do this not just because it is a good thing to do or that respecting others is good for society. Those things are true. But if we do good toward others just because it is good for us, we are missing the point. “Do not the pagans do the same” (Matt. 5:47)?

We put the human person at the center of social life because we put Christ at the center of our life. The human person is the clearest reflection of God’s presence in the world.

This brings us back to Christmas. That baby lying in the manger is our savior, but human, like us. Jesus was an unborn baby. Jesus was conceived and born in what was considered a scandalous situation. Jesus was a refugee. Jesus was poor. Jesus lived in an occupied land. Jesus came from a marginalized, dismissed town. Jesus was at times ignored. Jesus suffered. Jesus was put to death by the state.

Everywhere we look in society, there he is. In the unborn, the scandalized, the refugee, the poor, the marginalized, the ignored, the suffering, and the condemned, there is Jesus. Christmas means Emmanuel—he walks among us. He, the child whose birth we celebrate, is the heart of Catholic social doctrine.
Grocery store encounter a reminder to slow down

D

uring the first week of Advent, I launched the year’s theme “light one candle for peace” at St. Ann’s Catholic School in Belcourt. In the hall outside my classroom I taped four posters with huge Advent candles. A fifth poster features a lovely Nativity scene bearing the cheerful exhortation, “Let’s make this the best (holiest) Advent of our lives!”

I gazed on my school preparations with a certain measure of satisfaction. Lord, what do you think? I’ve left no stone unturned, wouldn’t you say? This is definitely going to be the best Advent ever!

A few days later and my “best Advent ever” wasn’t panning out quite as planned. It rapidly became far more demanding than I anticipated. Note to self: Never say to God, “I’ve left no stone unturned.”

There was nothing difficult about throwing together a few quick Advent posters or teaching my students to “light one candle for peace.” That was the easy part. My undoing came when I decided I should do some background reading on the meaning of peace myself. In the words of the old song, “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.”

The first article I discovered proved to be a real jackpot: Cackie Upchurch’s Blessed are the Peacemakers. Here I learned that “shalom,” or peace, is, “along with justice and truth... to be a hallmark of God’s people.... Shalom is well-being, tranquility, at-oneness or wholeness.”

Tranquility one of the hallmarks of God’s people? A recent memory came to me then.

I careened down the aisles of the nearby grocery store, clocking close to 75 mph in a vain attempt to score four cans of Bush’s Best Black Beans, the lone holdouts on my lengthy convent grocery list. At this point, my ardent desire is to somehow stumble upon said BBBB, dash to the checkout lane/finish line, and not bowl over anyone in the process. I strongly suspect that, having crossed the finish line, I’ll discover that my friendly checkout person is a first day trainee.

Out of the corner of my eye I couldn’t help noticing a frag-

ile, wilted-looking lady of indeterminate age approaching me, unsteadily nudging her own cart containing six or seven dainty items down the same aisle. She’s wearing dark polyester stretch pants, brown snow boots, a puffy light blue parka and is moving at glacial speed. I know she’s trying to catch my attention. I’ve seen that look many times, but making eye contact and smiling at her would mean slowing me down even more.

I know well from experience what will follow if I break my stride. She’ll ask me what community I’m with and if I know Sister Mary Polycarp (or some such name), a dear sister with a community I’ve never heard of in a place I’ve never heard of either. Maybe Sister Polycarp was a first-rate teacher she remembers fondly from fourth grade, or she is a relative of some sort. Yes, this hesitant soul in polyester would dearly love a conversation with a Sister, even a brief chat with a total stranger she’ll probably never see again. It could call forth a host of happy memories or provide a momentary escape from her island of loneliness. It’s not every day you run into a Sister after all.

All this crosses my mind in a matter of seconds, during which time I’ve unconsciously slowed my buggy down to mere cruising speed. The frail lady and I are now perhaps four feet apart. She catches my eyes and a gentle, delighted smile lights up her tired face. “Well hello, Sister. Are you from around here? What community are you with?”

I take a deep breath and struggle to imitate her lovely smile. “No. I’m originally from Upstate New York, but I really like North Dakota. Beautiful country here....”

Diocesan policy: Reporting child abuse

The Diocese of Fargo is committed to the protection of youth. Please report any incidents or suspected incidents of child abuse, including sexual abuse, to civil authorities. If the situation involves a member of the clergy or a religious order, a seminarian, or an employee of a Catholic school, parish, the diocesan offices or other Catholic entity within the diocese, we ask that you also report the incident or suspected incident to Msgr. Joseph Goering, vicar general, at (701) 356-7945 or the victim assistance coordinator, at (701) 356-7965 or by email at victimassistance@fargodiocese.org. To make a report of sexual abuse of a minor and related misconduct by bishops, go to ReportBishopAbuse.org or call 1-800-276-1562.
A recent article in the New York Times by Gina Kolata chronicles the remarkable story of a patient who for many years suffered from type 1 diabetes. After receiving a newly-developed form of embryonic stem cell infusion, he became able to live insulin-free, apparently cured of his blood sugar imbalances.

It was largely a matter of time, funding and elbow grease before cures of this kind would start to appear. That makes it urgent for us, as a society, to confront and address the ethical questions arising in the wake of these up and coming therapies. We can formulate the ethical question this way: Is it wrong to develop treatments that rely on the direct destruction of fellow human beings who are in their embryonic stages?

It should go without saying that it is always wrong to take the life of one human being to harvest body parts, even to save the life of another human being. Such medicine is fundamentally exploitative and immoral, and ought to be summarily rejected.

Many people are beginning to ask, however, whether receiving a treatment for diabetes developed from embryonic stem cells is really different from getting vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine developed using abortion-derived cell lines?

The two cases are, in fact, quite different.

When it comes to abortion-derived cell lines and their use in developing some of the COVID-19 vaccines, the wrong that was committed involved taking somatic cells (not stem cells), such as kidney cells or retinal cells, from an aborted fetus and working them up in order to prepare a special “cell line” for use in research or vaccine development. The abortion, it should be noted, as wrong as it was in itself, was not performed in order to obtain research material, and the evil of this “corpse raiding” was compounded by not having obtained valid informed consent.

What makes embryonic stem cell-based therapies ethically worse is that a very young human being, still in his or her embryonic stage of existence, is being targeted and intentionally killed in order to obtain the desired stem cells that stand at the center of that medical treatment.

Why, then, would it be morally allowable to receive a vaccine prepared using abortion-derived cell lines, but morally unacceptable to receive a diabetes treatment developed from embryonic stem cells?

Because the type of moral offense and its gravity are different in kind and degree. Directly killing someone to obtain their cells for treatment is different in kind and worse than the wrong-doing involved in taking cells from a corpse, even from a young human whose life was unjustly ended for an unrelated reason. It is always wrong to steal, even from a cadaver. But it’s much worse to kill in order to take.

In one case the researcher himself becomes the executioner who procures cells and tissues from the individual he has just directly and purposefully killed; in the other case, the researcher shows up at the morgue or the abortion clinic following the death, and procures cells or tissues from the individual’s body (with the death having occurred at the hands of others and the researcher afterwards profiting from the resultant cadaver). This latter case would not raise ethical concerns at all if researchers were to derive the needed cells from a miscarriage instead of a direct abortion. If an unborn baby girl, for example, were to die of natural causes, her parents could validly grant informed consent for the use of tissues and cells from her body, in effect donating her body to science.

These kinds of distinctions are important, because receiving a diabetes treatment produced with embryonic stem cells signals a willingness on our part to tolerate the killing of younger human beings in order to benefit others who are older. Meanwhile, receiving a COVID-19 vaccine produced using abortion-derived cell lines does not indicate a willingness on our part to tolerate killing for research (since the killing was not done for research, but for some other unrelated motive), and instead indicates a willingness to tolerate cells and tissues that were unethically taken from a corpse.

Should we always avoid using therapies that are produced using embryonic stem cells taken from young humans who were killed in order to obtain the cells? Yes, such therapies are unethical because killing one human being for the purpose of healing another crosses a fundamental moral line.

But the fact that the question is being raised reminds us of the slippery ethical slope that arises whenever we try to use parts of human beings derived from abortions: legally permitting abortion only makes the confusion worse. Hence, there is an urgent need to encourage the use of alternative, non-embryo-derived cell sources by researchers, including cells derived from miscarriages, adult stem cells, or embryonic-type alternatives such as induced pluripotent stem cells, which can be obtained by genetically manipulating adult human skin cells. These approaches open a path forward in the direction of ethical research and medical therapies.
LIFE’S MILESTONES

Pete and Cherrie Thomas, parishioners of St. Cecilia Church in Velva, will celebrate their 50th anniversary Jan. 14. They have 3 children: Steve (Nicole), Tom (Wendy), Amy (Erik) Nelson and 6 grandchildren.

Cy and Leona Kotaska, parishioners of St. Cecilia Church in Velva, celebrated their 50th anniversary Dec. 28. They have 2 sons: Christopher (Nicole) and Eric (Heather) and 5 grandchildren.

Judy Heintz, parishioner of St. Therese the Little Flower Church in Rugby, celebrated her 80th birthday on Dec. 15. Judy and her late husband Christ are blessed with 5 children, 13 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES
Life’s Milestones includes anniversaries for marriages, ordinations, and religious vows for 25, 40, 50, 60, 65, and 70+ years and birthdays for 80, 85, 90, 95, and 100+ years for those in the Diocese of Fargo. Submissions will only be accepted for milestones occurring during the month of publication, one month prior, or one month following. Send a photo with text to news@fargodiocese.org or to Diocese of Fargo, New Earth, 5201 Bishops Blvd S, Suite A, Fargo, ND 58104 with a stamped return envelope and phone number. Deadline for the February issue is Jan. 18.

Tumors disappeared at the touch of Blessed Solanus Casey. In response to St. Padre Pio’s prayers, limbs grew and backs straightened. In the lives of the saints, miraculous healings are routine.

We need not be saints or in the presence of one to experience healing. Healings were a major part of Jesus’ minstry during his earthly life, and they have by no means stopped in the centuries to follow. What is lacking is our courage to ask for healing and our willingness to share how God has worked in our lives.

New Earth is searching for stories of physical or mental healings that the people of our diocese have either witnessed or experienced. The miracle could be big or small, anything from the healing of a life-threatening illness, healing from any sort of pain or discomfort, healing from addiction, or the sudden outpouring of peace or joy during a time of great stress.

Stories should be 100 to 400 words and include your name, your parish, and a photo of yourself, family, or something that connects to your story. If you’d like help writing your story of God’s work in your life, let us know and we’d be happy to help. Contact Kristina with submissions or questions no later than Feb. 10 at kristina.lahr@fargodiocese.org or (701) 356-7900.

Have you witnessed or experienced a miracle? Share the story with New Earth!

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75 years ago — 1947
St. Benedict’s Mission Church in the Turtle Mountain Reservation was destroyed by fire during Mass. Outside temperatures that morning necessitated a good-sized fire in the furnace. Right after the Pater Noster, a roaring and crackling sound could be heard coming from the basement. Realizing the church was on fire, Father immediately consumed the Sacred Species and rushed the people out of the building. They were able to carry a few statues with them – just in time at that. Within minutes the whole church was ablaze and, less than an hour later, ashes were all that remained of the above ground structure. Mass will be held in the basement under a temporary roof until the chapel can be rebuilt.

50 years ago — 1972
During January we prayed especially for Church unity and brotherhood among various religious groups – that all may be one. Bishop Driscoll advises that Catholics must lead the way through prayer, study, and dialogue, to effect unity among all Christians. This is the Ecumenical Movement of Vatican II which will center in the Eucharist, the God-given bond of unity and charity. It calls for internal review and renewal on the part of all. It requires understanding, forgiveness, mutual labor, and love. It presumes honesty, fidelity, respect for faith and conscience.

20 years ago — 2002
The Catholic Schools in Fargo held the last all-school Mass at the Shanley High School at the north Fargo location during Catholic Schools Week. Students from Holy Spirit and Nativity Elementary, Sullivan Middle, and Shanley High, as well as students from St. Francis and St. Joseph in Moorhead, attended the Mass. Fourth graders from Nativity Elementary began the Mass with the song, “I Am a Promise.” The 2002-2003 school year will begin in the new school at 52nd Ave. S., Fargo.

Day of Prayer asks for the legal protection of unborn children
A prayer service for forgiveness and healing will be held Jan. 22 at 7 p.m. at the Cathedral of St. Mary in Fargo. The prayer service is in observance of the liturgical Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children, marking the 49th anniversary of legalization of abortion in our nation. In addition to this time of prayer, faithful are encouraged to do some form of fasting or self-denial for the healing of our nation from the effects of abortion on families, our culture, and society.

Annual Valentine Wine & Dine supports youth activities
Holy Spirit Church in Fargo will host its 12th annual Valentine Wine & Dine on Feb. 12 from 5 to 8 p.m. This fundraiser for parish youth activities features an elegant dinner paired with wines, as well as silent and live auctions and games throughout the evening. Tickets are $60/person and may be purchased until Feb. 4 by calling the parish office at (701) 232-5900. For more information, visit holyspiritfargo.com/wine-dine.

Come to a Life in the Spirit weekend in Harvey
Come attend a Life in the Spirit Weekend Feb. 25 at 6 p.m. through Feb. 27 at 3 p.m. at St. Cecilia’s Church in Harvey. The seminar serves as an introduction or renewal to a life in the power of the Holy Spirit leading to a new and deeper relationship with the Lord. The weekend includes praise and worship, talks and testimony, discussion groups, healing of memories, prayer, and more. Father Kevin Boucher will be the spiritual director. Register by Feb. 18. Meals provided. Free will offering. For more information and to register, contact Rosalie at raxtman@gondtc.com or (701) 324-2706 or the parish office at stcecilia@gondtc.com or (701) 324-2144. No cost housing available in St. Cecilia’s Social Center.
El Paso bishop says pre-Christmas border visit draws him closer to faith

By Rhina Guidos | Catholic News Service

A little more than a month after being chosen chairman-elect of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ migration committee, Bishop Mark J. Seitz wasted no time in heading across an international bridge Dec. 20 from his Diocese of El Paso, Texas, to the neighboring city of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

He wanted to get “a pulse,” he said, of what people are experiencing days after the Biden administration restarted a Trump-era program that keeps migrants on the other side of the border as they wait for their asylum claims to be heard.

He stopped by to chat with men and women, some from Central America, some from Haiti and South America, dropping off gifts for their children, blessing those who asked for a blessing, and talking to shelter workers on the front lines about what the past few weeks have been like.

On Dec. 6, the Biden administration restarted the Migrant Protection Protocols, also known as the “Remain in Mexico” program. Though President Joe Biden promised to end it, U.S. courts have prevented its demise.

In recent weeks, Mexico once again agreed to cooperate with U.S. officials, allowing migrants to wait in its border towns after receiving reassurances that the program, under the Biden administration, would provide better conditions for asylum-seekers, including access to medical care, legal help, and vaccinations.

While U.S. Department of Homeland Security officials say they still are working on ending the program, they also promised more humane treatment, saying they would give more legal help to migrants and make their wait time for an answer shorter.

“We spoke with a group of men who have been returned under that ill-conceived program,” said Bishop Seitz in a Dec. 20 telephone interview with Catholic News Service from Ciudad Juarez. “I have to say that despite promises that it would be different, better, we did not see that today.”

He said he spoke with a group of men seeking safety from the economic, political, and humanitarian problems gripping Venezuela. But instead of finding refuge, they feel like prisoners at a border they can’t cross, he said.

They can’t work in Mexico as they wait in squalid conditions, hoping for reprieve that may never come from U.S. immigration courts. It’s hard to find a place to shower and daily sustenance can be a challenge.

“It’s such a mistreatment of our fellow human beings,” said Bishop Seitz.

And yet there are shelters, some run by Catholics, others run by different faith groups, trying to alleviate some of the suffering. The bishop visited a facility run by an Anglican pastor who bought pigs, fish and some plants that migrants can care for, giving them some sort of purpose and sustenance while they wait for whatever comes next in their lives.

Through a project called the Border Refugee Assistance Fund, the Diocese of El Paso has been able to help such shelters, serving the migrants and the migrants themselves. They have no other choice but to entrust their situations, the uncertainty of their lives or of their children’s future to a higher power, he said.

For the bishop, the visit, even with the desperation he witnessed and the hardship, “it drives me to the Lord,” he said.

He said he didn’t want to comfort the people he met “with platitudes.” He said he didn’t know what would happen to them or even that all would be OK in the end. But all he could do was be with them and put it in the hands of God.
St. Joseph’s quiet humility teaches value of silence, pope says

By Junno Arocho Esteves | Catholic News Service

The absence of any words attributed to St. Joseph in the Gospels speaks volumes about the importance of silence, Pope Francis said. St. Joseph’s silence was “not mutism,” but a quality that allowed him to listen to the word and will of the Holy Spirit, the pope said during his weekly general audience Dec. 15, 2021.

“This is why we must learn from Joseph to cultivate silence—that space of interiority in our days in which we give the Spirit the opportunity to regenerate us, to console us, to correct us,” he said.

During his audience in the Vatican’s Paul VI hall, Pope Francis continued his series of talks on St. Joseph, reflecting on his silence which is “an important personal aspect” that even Christ incorporated in his own life and ministry.

“Jesus was raised in this ‘school,’ in the house of Nazareth, with the daily example of Mary and Joseph,” the pope explained. “And it is not surprising that he himself sought spaces of silence in his days and invited his disciples to have such an experience.”

Like Jesus, he said, all Christians should follow St. Joseph’s example “to recover this contemplative dimension of life.”

At the same time, the pope said that often “silence frightens us a little because it asks us to delve into ourselves and to confront the part of us that is true.”

“Many people are afraid of silence, they have to speak and speak and speak, or listen to the radio or television; but they cannot accept silence because they are afraid,” the pope said.

Another challenge, he continued, is that while silence allows men and women to listen to the Holy Spirit, “it is not easy to recognize that voice, which is very often mixed up with the thousand voices of worries, temptations, desires, and hopes that dwell within us.”

Furthermore, without the practice of silence, Christians can be tempted to use their words for “flattery, bragging, lies, backbiting and slander” rather than “making the truth shine.”

Calling on men and women to follow the example of St. Joseph, Pope Francis said the benefit of silence in one’s heart, will “heal our language, our words and above all our choices.”

“I am not saying to fall into muteness; no, silence,” the pope said.

Too often, he said, “we work on something and when we finish, immediately we look for our telephone to make another call. We are always like this, and it does not help, this makes us slip into superficiality.”

“Profoundness of the heart grows with silence, a silence that is not mutism as I said, but that leaves space for wisdom, reflection and the Holy Spirit. We are afraid of moments of silence. Let us not be afraid! It will do us good,” he said.

At the end of the audience, Pope Francis asked pilgrims to remember Haiti in their prayers after a gas tanker explosion Dec. 13 in Cap-Haitien killed 62 people and left dozens injured.

“Poor Haiti,” the pope said. It is “one thing after another. They are a people who suffer. Let us pray for Haiti, they are good people, wonderful people, religious people. But they are suffering so much.”

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Mourning, prayer, and a resolve to rebuild follow devastating tornadoes

By Catholic News Service

A papal telegram conveyed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, said Pope Francis “was saddened to learn of the devastating impact of the tornadoes” in the Midwest and the South.

“He offers heartfelt prayers that almighty God will grant eternal peace to those who have died, comfort to those who mourn their loss, and strength to all those affected by this immense tragedy,” it said.

“With gratitude for the tireless efforts of the rescue workers and all engaged in caring for the injured, the grieving families and those left homeless, Pope Francis invokes upon all engaged in the massive work of relief and rebuilding the Lord’s gifts of strength and generous perseverance in the service of their brothers and sisters,” said the telegram, which Cardinal Parolin sent to Archbishop Christophe Pierre, the apostolic nuncio in the U.S.

Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, said the destruction and devastation was “heartbreaking” and called for prayer and assistance for all those who were in the path of the storms.

“During this Advent season where we wait in joyful anticipation for the birth of our Lord, we pray for those who have been injured, for those who have lost their lives, and for their grieving families and communities,” said Archbishops Gomez and Coakley. “May those who have been impacted by these storms find peace, comfort and hope in our faith and in God’s endless love.

“We also pray for the emergency responders and those who have begun the work of providing for the needs of the impacted in these communities in the recovery efforts,” they said in a statement issued late Dec. 11. “We entrust all our brothers and sisters in harm’s way to our Blessed Mother, and we ask for her continued protection and for her intercession in comforting those who are suffering.”

The two prelates urged Catholics and all people of goodwill to donate to recovery efforts and financial help for tornado victims by supporting the work of Catholic Charities USA: catholiccharities.us/campaign/ccusa-disaster-relief/c353051.

Mourning, prayer, and a resolve to rebuild shattered lives, homes, and businesses in Mayfield followed one of the most powerful twisters in U.S. history that leveled the city of 10,000 in western Kentucky overnight Dec. 10, 2021.

The Bluegrass State was the worst hit as numerous devastating tornadoes traveled across it and its neighboring states of Illinois, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Missouri.

As of Dec. 14, at least 74 people were confirmed dead in Kentucky, including a 2-month-old infant; 109 people remained unaccounted for.

At least 14 other people were killed in the other states: six in Illinois, four in Tennessee, and two each in Arkansas and Missouri.

As members of two of Mayfield’s faith congregations came together to pray Dec. 12 amid rubble—piles of brick, metal, and glass—prayers for their city and all of those affected by the ferocious mid-December twisters came from far and wide, including from Pope Francis and the U.S. Catholic bishops, and from close to home—Bishop William F. Medley of Owensboro, whose diocese covers western Kentucky.

Debris surrounds a destroyed home in Mayfield, Ky., Dec. 11, 2021 after a devastating tornado ripped through the town. More than 30 tornadoes were reported across six states late Dec. 10, and early Dec. 11, killing dozens of people and leaving a trail of devastation. (CNS/Cheney Orr, Reuters)
COVID-19 reminded me of the unparalleled gift of life

SIDEWALK STORIES

ROXANE B. SALONEN
Mother of five, writer for The Forum and CatholicMom.com, speaker and radio host for Real Presence Radio

Stepping outside for the first time after my COVID-19 quarantine, I paused to inhale the fresh, fall air. It was Oct. 31, 2021, and I had never felt so grateful for my life.

A few weeks earlier, the dreaded virus that has turned our world upside-down had reached into our family’s lives, as so many others. This tendril of this illness, originated in a faraway land, found the sacred interior of our home, and all we could do was wait it out, tend to our symptoms, and pray each of our body’s immunity would do its job.

When friends appeared without request, dropping off food, vitamins, and other helpful remedies, I felt God’s deep generosity and love. Soon, I would be driven to offer the same to others suffering.

Though all of our family members who’d contracted COVID-19 ultimately came through it, as we waited, moments of uncertainty mingled with our isolation. Though we knew our chances for survival were high, we also know this virus can be unpredictable. I took nothing for granted.

My husband, a survivor of two open-heart surgeries, seemed more confident of the outcome. But during my worst days, I caught myself playing the “What if?” game. I prayed almost constantly for grace and mercy, asking myself if I was ready for death, should it come. “No!” I concluded emphatically, not so much for myself, but yearned to remain here for now, to serve and love our family and others.

My main symptoms included extreme weakness and nausea, while my lungs seemed untouched. As the days grew long, the illness refusing to let up quickly, I sensed the Grim Reaper sitting on our front steps, just beyond our bedroom window, salivating at the prospect of our possible demise. Was it the Divine Mercy image on our screen door that sent him away, unsatisfied?

A few weeks later, a friend who’d also just evaded the illness’s grip, mentioned how quickly God had begun showing him the fruits of his illness, for in his suffering, he had developed more compassion for others going through the same. I nodded.

COVID-19 had also given me a keener heart toward others suffering this and other illnesses.

No day has passed since that I have not been extra thankful to God for loving me so tenderly, and giving me more chances to love him back here on earth, surrounded by family.

Surviving COVID-19 also brought an unanticipated freedom, quelling some of the worries I’d been carrying mentally, even if subconsciously, before infection. The mystery was no longer so mysterious. We’d overcome and could move forward with the plans God seemed to have set before us. We celebrated Thanksgiving and our 30th wedding anniversary with a heightened appreciation for every blessing.

The end of our quarantine also meant the resuming of previous activities, including my commitment to pray at the sidewalk of our state’s only abortion facility on Wednesdays. In the return, I found myself especially emotional, even bereft. I had just come through an illness that had made me contemplate death, and it seemed even more unfathomable now that anyone would purposefully rob anyone of the most primal gift, life itself.

Enduring COVID-19, my appreciation for life had increased tenfold—not only for my own life, but every life God has brought forth. In light of this disease that has left us all so shattered in so many ways, how could any of us so callously minimize the profundity of such a sublime gift?

The excuses of those insisting on abortion began ringing loudly in my ears: “She’s already made up her mind.” “I just have to keep this appointment.” “It’s not the right time.” Now, it all seemed even more hollow. After all, every last person alive today came from someone’s sacrifice. We were all born through the sweat and pain of our parents.

A month after my COVID-19 bout, oral arguments for the Dobbs vs. Jackson case to review the 1973 Supreme Court case of Roe v. Wade took place on what is Fargo’s “abortion day.” As I tried to convince a soft-hearted father to save his baby’s life, and he resisted, the impact of this court decision seemed weightier than ever.

Since experiencing COVID-19, I’m even more convinced than previously of the unparalleled and exquisite reality of life and its worthiness to be upheld in every instance. Let’s pray the justices agree.
Do you know where we are?
The answer will be revealed in the February New Earth.

Where in the diocese are we?

Last month’s photo is of Sacred Heart Church in Cando.