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ON THE COVER:
The dedication Mass of St. Paul's Newman Center
on the NDSU campus, Oct. 26. (Shanna Filzen)

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The Word became flesh

Every year on Christmas Day, the Mass during the day includes these words from John’s Gospel: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” Christmas is the great mystery of the Incarnation and Birth of our Lord, the coming of the Son of God as our Savior. And how did he choose to save us? He took our human nature to himself, so that in his own person, humanity would be forever redeemed.

When I was named the Bishop of Fargo, one immediate task was to adopt a coat of arms and episcopal motto, the heraldic seal that you often see on my letters and other documents. I chose this exact verse, “The Word Became Flesh” (in Latin, Verbum Caro Factum Est), because the mystery of Christ’s presence among us is so essential to our faith and life as Catholics. Everything in our Catholic faith somehow circles back to this great event when the Son of God, the Word of the Father, became flesh and was born for us in Bethlehem. At the center of my coat of arms I placed the “chi-rho,” the symbol of the person of Christ that we see in many of our churches, to represent this central mystery of our faith: the Word became flesh and dwelled among us.

Christmas reminds us that the Son of God was born as a man for our salvation in a particular place on this earth and at a specific moment in time. His coming wasn’t mythical or ambiguous. It was a real event, a fact. He was born in Bethlehem, the City of David, a real place with real people, to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament. Jesus doesn’t stand aloof from us; he enters right into the grittiness of our history and makes himself a true member of our human family. This is one of the most incredible aspects of our Catholic faith, that God chose out of love to descend from his heavenly dwelling and took our human flesh in order to redeem us, to save us from sin and death. No other religion makes such a claim. He came in the most humble circumstances, born in a stable of Bethlehem, taking to himself all the hardships and challenges of our human condition.

Last year I had the privilege of leading a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and one of the principal stops of our journey was a visit to Bethlehem. We visited the Shepherds’ Field and Chapel, where the humble shepherds heard the amazing news of our Savior’s birth. We also visited the Church of the Nativity, which has marked the place of the birth of Jesus since the earliest days of the Church. There on the floor of the grotto is a silver star with the words of John’s Gospel: “The Word became flesh and dwelled among us.” This is the very site of the stable where Jesus was born, where he forever sanctified our world by his presence, where he began his earthly journey that would open for us the way to heaven.

The name Bethlehem literally means “house of bread.” How fitting it is that the One who would call himself the “living bread come down from heaven” and would give himself to us as the “Bread of Life” should be born in a place called “house of bread.” During the Eucharistic Revival that we celebrate now in our diocese and throughout the nation, we can all look to Bethlehem as the “house of bread” where Jesus first offers himself to us as our Savior, where he gives his “flesh for the life of the world.” When we celebrate Mass on Christmas this year, let’s remember the stable of Bethlehem, the first altar where God made himself one of us and gave himself as a sacrifice of love. In fact, every Mass, every Holy Communion, every prayer before the Eucharist, takes us to that humble town, that holy place where Jesus was born, the One who is indeed the “living bread come down from heaven.”

It is heartbreaking this year to see the land of our Lord’s birth torn by warfare and violence once again. For the last few months, we have seen and heard reports of murder and kidnapping, and tragically the innocent are again the victims of terrorism. It is especially disturbing to see a rise in antisemitism, not only in the Middle East, but in our own country as well. The Church condemns this hatred of the Jewish people in no uncertain terms. Any kind of racial hatred is sinful, and how much more so must this be true when directed against the children of Abraham, from whom was born the Savior of the world in the City of David. During the Nazi persecution of the Jews, Pope Pius XI declared in 1938: “Through Christ and in Christ, we are the spiritual progeny of Abraham. Spiritually we are all Semites.”

As we approach Christmas this year, when we celebrate the coming of the Word Made Flesh and Prince of Peace, let us pray in a special way for peace in the Holy Land. Let us pray for the Jewish people and the Palestinian people, that all may live in peace and be delivered from the shadow of death and destruction. And let us do everything we can to live in peace with one another, the peace that Jesus offers to all who receive him into their hearts. I pray that the birth of the Christ child of Bethlehem will be a source of peace, hope, and joy for us all.
BISHOP FOLDA’S CALENDAR

Dec. 16 at 4 p.m.
Mass at St. Mathias, Pastoral Visit, Windsor

Dec. 17 at 10:30 a.m.
Mass at St. Margaret Mary, Pastoral Visit, Buchanan

Dec. 24 at 11 p.m.
Office of Readings, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Dec. 25 at 12 a.m.
Mass for the Vigil of the Nativity of our Lord, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Dec. 25–Jan. 2
Pastoral Center closed

Jan. 6–12
Region VIII Bishop Retreat, Sarasota, Fla.

FROM BISHOP FOLDA

“The Word became flesh.”

Deacon Thomas Geffre has been granted retirement from active ministry as a permanent deacon, effective October 12, 2023.

Rev. Robert Smith has offered his resignation as pastor of St. Timothy’s, Manvel, effective November 1, 2023, due to reasons of health. Bishop Folda has accepted this resignation effective November 1, 2023.

Rev. Joseph Christensen has been appointed administrator of St. Timothy’s, Manvel, effective November 6, 2023 and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of our priests. Through them, we experience your presence in the sacraments. Help our priests to be strong in their vocation. Set their souls on fire with love for your people. Grant them the wisdom, understanding, and strength they need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Inspire them with the vision of your Kingdom. Give them the words they need to spread the Gospel. Allow them to experience joy in their ministry. Help them to become instruments of your divine grace. We ask this through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns as our Eternal Priest. Amen. (From USCCB)

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In 1263 a German priest stopped at Bolsena while on a pilgrimage to Rome. He was known as being a pious priest, but one who found it difficult to believe that Christ was actually present in the consecrated Host. While celebrating Holy Mass at St. Christina, above the tomb of the saint, he had barely spoken the words of consecration when blood started to seep from the consecrated Host and trickle over his hands onto the altar and the corporal.

The priest was immediately confused. At first he attempted to hide the blood, but then he interrupted the Mass and asked to be taken to the neighboring city of Orvieto, the city where Pope Urban IV was then residing.

The Pope listened to the priest’s account and absolved him. He then sent emissaries for an immediate investigation. When all the facts were ascertained, he ordered the Bishop of the diocese to bring to Orvieto the Host and the linen cloth bearing the stains of blood. With archbishops, cardinals, and other Church dignitaries in attendance, the Pope met the procession and, amid great pomp, had the relics placed in the cathedral. The linen corporal bearing the spots of blood is still reverently enshrined and exhibited in the Cathedral of Orvieto.

It is said that Pope Urban IV was prompted by this miracle to commission St. Thomas Aquinas to compose the Proper for a Mass and an Office honoring the Holy Eucharist as the Body of Christ. One year after the miracle, in August of 1264, Pope Urban IV introduced the saint’s composition, and by means of a papal bull instituted the feast of Corpus Christi.

After visiting the Cathedral of Orvieto, many pilgrims and tourists journey to St. Christina’s Church in Bolsena to see for themselves the place where the miracle occurred. From the north aisle of the church one can enter the Chapel of the Miracle, where the stains on the paved floor are said to have been made by the blood from the miraculous Host.

In August of 1964, on the 700th anniversary of the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi, Pope Paul VI celebrated Holy Mass at the altar where the holy corporal is kept in its golden shrine in the Cathedral of Orvieto.
What do baptisms and funerals have in common?

**ASK A PRIEST**

**FATHER RILEY DURKIN**  
Pastor of St. Aloysius in Lisbon and St. Vincent in Gwinner.

In the church, liturgies reflect this reality. Baptism is a type of birth. A washing clean of original sin and a spiritual adoption into the family of God. In the Gospel of John, a Pharisee named Nicodemus approaches Jesus under the cover of night to ask Jesus about his teachings. Jesus says to him, “Amen, Amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the spirit” (John 3:5). This “rebirth” into adoptive sonship is something that we can’t lose, even through sin.

Funerals, on the other hand, seem like the opposite of a baptism. In baptism, we celebrate life and in funerals we mourn death. Right? Well... kind of.

Death has traditionally been seen in the life of the Church as another birth—a heavenly birth. Many saints’ feast days are on the day of their death for this reason. Sts. Peter and Paul are sometimes referred to as, “the twin founders of Christian Rome.” Not because they are blood brothers (they aren’t), but because they were traditionally said to have been martyred on the same day. They have the same heavenly birthday.

Next time you go to a Catholic baptism or funeral, pay special attention to a few of the symbols that are used at each.

**The Easter Candle:** The large candle that adorns most sanctuaries and is lit throughout the Easter Season is lit for a particular person twice during their life: Their baptism and their funeral. During a baptism, the priest will light a candle from the Easter candle and give it to one of the parents or godparents while saying, “Receive the light of Christ. This light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly, so that your child, enlightened by Christ, may walk always as a child of the light.”

During the funeral, the Easter candle is often front and center in the church in front of the casket. During the petitions, the reader will remind the congregation and the loved ones of the deceased, “In baptism, N. received the light of Christ. Scatter the darkness and lead him/her over the waters of death.”

**The White Garment:** White in the Church is the symbol of purity and cleanliness. During a baptism, after the pouring of the water, the priest will present the baptized with a white garment while saying, “n., you have become a new creation and have clothed yourself with Christ. May this white garment be a sign of your Christian dignity. With your family and friends to help you by word and example, bring it unstained into eternal life.”

In a funeral, this is exactly what happens. After the casket is closed and before the procession begins, the priest, family, or funeral directors cover the casket with a large white cloth called a “pall” (pronounced “paul”). This is a reminder of that same Christian dignity that the deceased was baptized into.

**Sprinkling of water:** In baptism, the most important part of the ceremony is the pouring of water over the head of the child with the words, “n., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” That was the command of Jesus in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19).

In a funeral, the casket is again sprinkled with water as the priest says, “In the waters of baptism, N. died with Christ and rose with him to new life. May he/she now share with him eternal glory.”

**Placing of the Christian Symbol:** At the beginning of every baptism, the priest traces a cross on the forehead of the child while saying, “n., the Church of God receives you with great joy. In her name, I sign you with the Sign of the Cross of Christ our Savior. Then, after me, your parents and godparents will do the same.” This is a symbol of the indelible mark that baptism places on the soul of all Christians. A branding, if you will.

During a funeral, a crucifix is placed on the head of the casket. This is a visible reminder of the permanent mark that baptism has placed on a person. A mark that isn’t erased even in death.

**The Color White:** As stated above, white is the color of new life and cleanliness. For both baptisms and funerals, it is the color that priests will most often wear (although black is also an acceptable option for priests at funerals). This is meant to be another connection between the sacrament of baptism and the sacramental of the funeral liturgy.

Our baptism is the most important day of our Christian life. This life of ours on this earth is not a procession from life until death, but rather from rebirth to rebirth. As it says in the book of Wisdom, “The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead... but they are in peace” (Ws. 3:1-2a, 3b).
Editors Note: During this time of Eucharistic Revival, it’s appropriate during the Advent season to reflect on how Jesus was foretold by the writings of the Old Testament, especially instances where the Eucharistic was foreshadowed.

There are a number of ways in which God has foreshadowed the work of Christ in the Eucharist. He has done so through the various signs of bread and wine in the Old Testament, Abram’s interaction with Melchizedek, the Passover, and the manna and quail the Israelites ate in the desert.

First, there is Abram (later called Abraham) and his encounter with Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God most high, who offered bread and wine and blessed Abram. Melchizedek is both king and priest, as we know Christ to be. The name Melchizedek means, “my king of justice.” Jesus is truly the just king. Melchizedek is the king of the city of Salem, which would later be called Jerusalem. Jesus would make his triumphal entry into Jerusalem as king. “Behold your king comes to you, meek and riding on an ass...” (Matt. 21:5). It is in Jerusalem that Jesus would come to be mocked by the words, “Hail, king of the Jews” (Matt. 27:29). It is here that as king and priest he would offer gifts of bread and wine, consecrating them into his own body and blood, during the Passover. Then, as king and priest, he would offer the sacrifice of his life, thus blessing all of humanity and the descendants of Abram.

Second, we have the Passover, the most significant event for the people of the Old Testament. For a full account of the Passover ritual, read Exodus 12. Here are some highlights that relate to the Eucharist.

We note that a lamb without blemish must be sacrificed according to how much each man could eat. We know from the lips of John the Baptist that Jesus is, “...the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). We also know Jesus is the Lamb without blemish. Pilate proclaimed, “I find no guilt in him” (John 18:38). It is also the case that we must eat the lamb. “...Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you” (John 6:53). The whole assembly was to gather together to sacrifice the lambs. We too are called to assemble for the sacrifice of the Eucharist, the new Passover celebration. Then they were to take the blood of the lamb and put it on the lintels and doorposts where they were going to eat the lamb with unleavened bread. The blood was to be a sign of deliverance of the first born sons of Israel.

We are called to receive the blood of Christ, the only begotten son of the Father, and eat the Bread of Life as a sign of our deliverance from slavery to sin. Exodus goes on to say, “This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the Lord, as a perpetual institution” (Exod. 12:14). They are also required to keep a feast of unleavened bread, “as perpetual institution” (Exod. 12:17). In the Eucharist, all these elements are combined to make up Mass as our keeping of the memorial feast of Christ: “Do this in memory of me” (Luke 22:19). It might also be noted that after God prescribes for them what to do, “the people bowed their head and worshipped” (Exod. 12:27). The Eucharistic sacrifice is where we are called to worship the Lamb of God, in spirit and truth. Another crucial point is that the Eucharist was instituted during the feast of the Passover.

Third, we have God supplying manna and quail for the Israelites in the desert. While the people are in the desert after the Exodus, they murmur against God, accusing him of murderous plans by means of starvation. God responds, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion...” (Exod. 16:4). During the feast of Passover, the year before the Eucharist was instituted at the Last Supper, Jesus says, “…it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven...I am the bread of life...” (John 6:32, 35). It is no coincidence that “the Jews murmured about him” just as they did in Moses’ day (John 6:41). Many Catholics in our day murmur about this as well. In the morning God will give the bread to eat, and “the Lord gives you flesh to eat in the evening” (Exod. 16:8). In the Eucharist, we know that the bread becomes Jesus’ flesh for the life of the world (cf. John 6:33). The Israelites were to eat the flesh, and be filled with bread. In receiving the Eucharist, we, too, must believe Jesus’ words, “Whoever comes to me will never hunger” (John 6:35).

It should be clear now, that our Father knows how to teach his children. In our study of the faith, we can never, ever do away with the Old Testament. In studying the New Testament we must remember the words of the Catechism, “…the books of the Old Testament bear witness to the whole divine pedagogy of God’s saving love...’in them, too, the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way’” (CCC 122).
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In the midst of another academic year, the University of Mary’s growing campus in Rome has once again opened its doors to welcome hundreds of young people to the Eternal City. As the director of the University of Mary’s Rome Campus, I am privileged to be in my eighth year serving alongside Dr. Alessandra Franco, my wife, as the leader of a study abroad program rooted in the life and mission of the universal Church.

With its recent expansion, more students will spend time on the Rome Campus in 2023–2024 than ever before. Over 100 students from the University of Mary will call the Rome Campus home during the current academic year. They will be joined by students visiting from Mary College at Arizona State University, from Dickinson State University, and from the annual High School Pilgrimage sponsored by the Diocese of Bismarck, as well as guests participating in the university’s annual President’s Club Pilgrimage to Rome.

Modeled on St. John Henry Newman’s Idea of a University, the Rome Campus offers students a rigorous and interdisciplinary academic program that is closely integrated with the Student Life and Chaplaincy programs. Students in Rome take five courses that immerse them in the liberal arts tradition—Roman history, art history, philosophy, Italian language and culture, and a theology course focused on the life of St. Benedict and the legacy of the Benedictine Order that he founded not too far from the City of Rome.

With the ancient city as their classroom, students embark on an adventure like no other. From St. Peter’s Basilica and the Sistine Chapel to the ancient Roman Forum and the tomb of St. Francis in Assisi, from the cave where St. Benedict first discerned his vocational calling to Michelangelo’s towering masterpiece “David,” students in the Rome program learn firsthand as they explore Italy’s many historic churches, basilicas, museums, archaeological excavations, and historical sites.

They are led by University of Mary faculty, staff, and chaplains, including world-renowned art historian Elizabeth Lev, as well as American priests and seminarians from the Pontifical North American College in Rome, who serve on the Rome Campus Chaplaincy.

With nearly 800 alumni, students from the university’s Rome program have steadily made their way home to serve their communities in the Dioceses of Bismarck, Fargo, and beyond.

The Rome Campus has been a fountain of vocations. Fifteen young men and women have entered religious life since the program’s foundation by University of Mary president Monsignor James Shea, including eight vocations to the priesthood. To this number we can happily add the dozens of faithful Catholic marriages that saw their genesis on the Rome Campus, and the countless children who have been born to these marriages and have become members of our growing Rome Campus family. As holy priests, nuns, teachers, nurses, accountants, and even employees of the University of Mary, Rome Campus alumni bear witness to the fact that the university does not just educate students for careers, but for life.

I think for example of Father Josh Hill, only recently ordained a priest for the Diocese of Bismarck. A native of Montana, Father Josh first visited the Rome Campus as a young University of Mary student in 2012. Shortly after graduation, he was called back to Rome to serve as the Resident Director on the Rome Campus. It was in Rome that Father Josh first heard the call to the priesthood.

After entering the seminary for the Diocese of Bismarck in 2016, Bishop David Kagan sent Father Josh back to Rome, this time as a student at the Pontifical North American College. During his studies, Father Josh returned to the University of Mary’s Rome Campus for a third time, now as a member of the Rome Campus Chaplaincy and coordinator of seminarian activities.

When Father Josh was finally ordained on June 12, 2023, there were dozens of University of Mary Rome alumni present to share in the joyful occasion, including many priests who were themselves former Rome students or chaplains.

Incredible as it may sound, Father Josh is not the only Hill family member touched by the Rome Campus. In fact, all four Hill siblings studied in Rome. Younger sister Abby was also called to religious life and is now known as Sister Lily Rose of the Father’s Gaze at the Handmaids of the Heart of Jesus, a
Maggie Popp (née Hegeland) is another University of Mary student who was transformed by her experience studying in Rome. When she first arrived on the Rome Campus, Maggie was thinking about leaving the university and transferring to a college closer to home in South Dakota. But an unexpected injury changed her plans...and her life.

Midway through the semester, Maggie broke her leg while playing soccer. Making her way around Rome on crutches, and later in a wheelchair, Maggie was forced to rely on the generosity of her classmates to get to class, ride public transportation, and move around in churches and museums.

Maggie was humbled, and eventually transformed, by the attention and care she received from her Rome Campus classmates and by the good counsel she received from the Rome Campus faculty, staff, and chaplains. It helped that it was Lent. Maggie started jokingly calling her crutches Simon of Cyrene and her wheelchair Judas, since the front wheel had an uncanny knack for falling off as it bumped over Rome’s many cobbled streets. Remarkably, Maggie never complained.

Instead, she returned to Bismarck with a renewed faith and a desire to take her studies more seriously. She immediately enrolled in the University of Mary’s domestic exchange program with Arizona State University. It was there, while a student at Mary College at ASU, that Maggie met another recent Rome alumnus, Isaac Popp. The two became friends.

As Maggie recalls, the shared experience of having both recently studied on the Rome Campus was something that figured prominently their friendship. “We came to understand and value the gift of community, and the selflessness and openness that being a member of such a beautiful community required,” Maggie explains. “Such attributes are also necessary for authentic friendship.”

Eventually, Maggie and Isaac started dating. They were married in 2021, shortly after graduation. Today, both work for the university, Maggie as a Residence Director and Isaac as a Senior Coordinator of Enrollment & Partnerships. They even named their first son “Roman” in honor of the city—and the University of Mary program—that paved the way for their life together.

With another year underway, I offer my heartfelt thanks to the faithful of North Dakota for their generous support of the University of Mary Rome Campus. I invite you to continue praying for our students, who arrive in Rome full of wonder and expectation, that the Lord may open their eyes to his bountiful mercy and the goodness he has planned for them.
A very special tradition at St. Ann’s Catholic School on the Turtle Mountain Reservation is the celebration of Veteran’s Day. Native Americans have a long history of involvement in the military, dating all the way back to the Revolutionary War. Many past and present St. Ann’s parishioners are among their ranks. To mark the day, members of the American Legion Lilley-Dionne Post 262 (Belcourt), joined the students and staff of St. Ann’s Catholic School for a special Mass and luncheon.

Mary Beth Lalka, principal of St. Ann’s, talked about the event, “We have a large number of veterans in our community so it’s important for students to recognize their contribution to our community and nation,” she said. “We wanted to give the students an opportunity to honor the veterans and to spend time socializing with them.”

According to the United Services Organization, since 9/11, almost 19% of all Native Americans have served in the Armed Forces, in comparison to an average of 14% of other ethnicities.

During the school Mass, the names of close to 200 veterans were read during the prayers of the faithful. These included living and deceased members of the military. “The names were submitted by parishioners and by the students themselves,” Lalka shared. “A number of students took the forms home to be filled out by their parents or grandparents, but some students filled the forms out themselves.” Service in the military is a widely-held tradition for many Native American families and the students are very aware of their contribution to society.

At the luncheon, each veteran was given handmade cards from the students, thanking them for their service. The veterans in attendance took the rest of the cards to be distributed during the next local legion meeting. During lunch, a number of students sat at the veterans’ tables, excited to meet them or ask questions about their military service. One student was eager to share a favorite Knock-Knock joke with this new friend, bringing a unique moment of connection between the two and genuine delight to the veteran at his side.

To each of the veterans from St. Ann’s and those across the Diocese of Fargo, thank you for your service and for the sacrifices made by you and your families.
Handmaid of the Lord:

My Heart for My Son

February 2-4, 2024
Franciscan Retreat Center, Hankinson, ND

Register at www.EcclesiaDomestica.net/Registration
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What is it like to be at the journey’s end? There are two words that come to mind. The first is surreal. It seems surreal to think we could finally be at the end of a significant chapter for St. Paul’s Newman Center. Sure, there are a few details to get wrapped up. The ambo, stained glass windows, and capitals will still need to be installed. But at the end of the day, Bishop Folda dedicated the new St. Paul’s chapel on Oct. 26, 2023. This is surreal to me. When you’ve been out presenting the vision, involving others, and asking for partnerships for over eight years, I can only sum it up as surreal when you finally achieve the end you were after.

The second word I think of is grateful. I am grateful to each and every person who sacrificed to give of what they had to make a space where students will encounter the living God. Jesus changes hearts and changes lives. I experienced that as a student, and I know this new church and center will make that same opportunity possible for countless students to come.

I have met some of the most amazing people on this journey. You know who you are, and I want to say again: thank you. Thank you for partnering with God’s work here at St. Paul’s. We could not have succeeded as we have if it had not been his will. So thank you for being the answer to many prayers to bring this Newman Center about. St. Paul and St. John Henry Newman, pray for us.
Bishop Folda's homily at dedication

Truly, the Lord is in this place. How awesome is this shrine! This is nothing but an abode of God, the gateway to heaven. These words of Jacob in the book of Genesis certainly describe this evening. We’ve come together to pray and to dedicate this chapel to our Lord so that it truly will be His shrine and a gateway to heaven for us.

My brothers and sisters, dear friends, I’m very happy. I’m delighted to be with you today, this evening, for this joyful, this glorious occasion, the blessing of this new chapel for St. Paul’s Newman Center. This has been the work of many years, of much sweat. It’s been a long, arduous labor of love for Father Cheney and for his entire team, for all of you, and I congratulate everyone here on what you’ve accomplished.

How awesome is this shrine? You know, for almost 100 years now, there has been a Newman Center, or as they called it in those days, a Newman Club, here at NDSU.

For Catholic students and faculty members, this has been a spiritual home, a place of prayer and study and friendship. Even in the secular environment of a public university, the church is right at home. Because actually the first universities were founded by the church as places to grow in knowledge and wisdom. We recognize that in the search for knowledge, in the search for truth, faith and reason, they belong together, don’t they? The Son of God is truth itself. So in any pursuit of truth, Christ must be present.

There’s a great deal of confusion in our world today, a lot of questioning and doubt about God, about faith, about truth, even wondering if there is such a thing as truth. But this chapel, this place of prayer and study and community, this entire Newman Center dedicated to St. Paul, is a witness to the living presence of God, to the enduring truth of the Gospel. It’s like a great big invitation, an open door to all who are seeking Him.

You know, we’re dedicating a building today, and I’m sure that every one of us here would agree that it’s a beautiful place. Beauty not only attracts the eye, but it touches the soul too, doesn’t it? It’s the physical expression, you might say, of truth and goodness. So it’s fitting that this holy place should be beautiful. That it should be an awesome shrine. But there’s more to this place than just its physical beauty. It is holy. It will be a place where we encounter God. Where everyone on this campus can come into the presence of the Lord and experience His closeness and His love.

In Genesis, Jacob was amazed because he knew that he was in the presence of the living God. He knew that he was on holy ground, in a holy place. In the Gospel, as Jesus speaks...
to the Samaritan woman, he teaches us that he himself is the presence of God in our midst. From then on, He would be the true temple of God, the holy place where God has made His own dwelling in the world image of that true temple.

It is that gateway to heaven that Jacob spoke of. Here we will rejoice to listen to God’s Word just as the people of Jerusalem rejoiced when Ezra read from the Holy Book of the Law as we heard in the first reading. Here we will be able to celebrate the Eucharist, the sacrifice of our salvation. Here we will be able to come and pray knowing that Jesus is present in the tabernacle, always waiting, always ready to share God’s love with us. I dare say this beautiful place will be a little piece of heaven on earth.

The heavenly Jerusalem that we heard of in the reading from Hebrews is where we can meet God and where His grace will be available to all who enter this holy place. There are many parts and symbols in this beautiful liturgy, this rite of dedication. We sprinkled the walls and the gathered faithful as a sign of purification. We will anoint the walls with sacred chrism to remind us that this is not just another building. It is consecrated. It is set aside and made holy for worship.

We will use the incense as a sign of God’s blessing and of our prayers rising up to Him. We will of Christ, who is the light of the world, the light of truth. Most importantly, we will anoint and consecrate the altar with sacred chrism. The altar is the most important feature of a church. It’s that sacred place where the sacrifice of Christ upon His cross is offered to the Father. Upon this altar, Jesus offers Himself for us and to us through the Eucharistic liturgy. Just as He invited His apostles to come and remain with Him, He now will invite the students of this university and all the faithful to come and pray, to receive Him in the Eucharist, and to abide in his love. By accepting his invitation, by drawing near to him, in the moment of his greatest love, his great sacrifice, we can become the sons and daughters of God that He wants us to be.

My friends, this chapel is not only the heart of this Newman Center. It’s also the heart of this entire campus. Right? Because here you will always find Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the reason that we come together. He is the reason for all that we are doing here today and every day. He is the reason this place exists. He will offer to all who come to Him the peace of sharing in His life, the joy of knowing that He calls us, invites us to be one with Him, even to be His friends. I call you friends, He says.

Your heavenly patrons, St. Paul and St. John Henry Newman, wanted nothing more than to know Christ and live in his presence. I’m sure they will be constant spiritual companions to all who enter this holy place. In fact, a relic of St. Paul the Apostle will be deposited in the altar to unite us with the apostolic church to which we all belong. I have no doubt that our Lord will bring forth much grace on this campus, as he has for so many years. Through this holy place, this awesome shrine, this house of God, The gift of faith can be handed on to many, many more generations of young seekers. How awesome is this shrine? This is nothing but an abode of God, the gateway to heaven.
More information, visit: fargodiocese.org/marchforlife

Made for Greatness
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Jan. 19-21 2024
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With spiritual wisdom, sacramental strength, and energizing brotherhood, this retreat will equip husbands and fathers with the inspiration and tools needed to thrive as spiritual leaders in their homes. The retreat will feature spiritual insights, Mass, confession, prayer and reflection, and time for growing as brothers in Christ.

Devin Schadt will lead the retreat.

Devin Schadt is the executive director of the Fathers of St. Joseph, an apostolate that labors for the restoration, redemption, and revitalization of fatherhood. Devin is the author of several books and is the creator of the video-devotional system LEAD: The Four Marks of Fatherly Greatness. Devin lives with his wife and five daughters in the Midwest. Learn more at fathersofstjoseph.org.

MARCH FOR LIFE
January 15-20, 2024
Deadline to register: January 3, 2024

Location: Washington, DC
Cost: $675.00/person
$100 Non-refundable payment due upon registering
Who: students grades 9-12

January 19-21 2024

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VALLEY CITY SMP Health - St. Raphael
Eucharist and care for creation

By Father Michael Hickin | Pastor of churches in Mooreton and Mantador

W
hether it’s the odors clinging to shepherds and their flocks, or the minerals and resin gifted by the Magi, or the census, or the cold shoulder at the inn, our celebration of the Incarnation is constantly embedding our adoration of the God-made-Flesh Mystery in the music of the world—from its rapturous harmonies to its most sour notes.

Currently, a handsome display of pumpkins and gourds adorn the altar at St. Anthony’s, Mooreton. Later, we’ll see poinsettias and a fir tree. In Lent we’re signed with the ash of palm fronds and then come the Easter lilies followed by summer’s cut flowers. And so it goes as a riot of green life makes the circuit of our sanctuaries.

From the time I had my first apartment at 22, I’ve shared living space with plants. Today these friends speak to me. Even without wheat or grapevines, this green world of a gazillion cousins sings of the ties between the Eucharist and the Earth.

On Oct. 4, Pope Francis issued a letter, Laudate Deum, to amplify the message of his 2015 encyclical on “Care for Our Common Home.” The refrain pulsing through Laudato sì’ is “everything is connected.” This truth issues from God’s loving act of Creation, grounds itself in the event of the Incarnation, and finally packages itself in the Paschal Sacrament of the Eucharist for worldwide distribution.

Our national Eucharistic Revival is an excellent moment to attune our ears anew to the melodious bridge between this Blessed Sacrament and our dire responsibilities to heed the cries of our Mother, the Earth, because of the harm we’re inflicting on her (LS, 1-2). Allow me to present a condensed version of a key paragraph from this historic document.

“The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours. The Eucharist, as the living center of the Universe, its overflowing core of love and life, is itself an act of cosmic love: ‘Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world’ (St. John Paul II, Eclesia de Eucharistia). In the Eucharist ‘creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with our Creator’ (homily by Pope Benedict XVI). Thus, the Eucharist also enlightens and motivates our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation.”

This magisterial paragraph, capturing the teachings of our last three popes, plucks the heartstrings of the faithful. To adore the Eucharist is to love the Earth. To be enraptured by the Earth is to be drawn toward the Eucharist.

In his October letter, Francis reminded us that Jesus “was in constant contact with Nature” (64). As the Risen One, he imbues the flowers of the field and the birds of the air (and houseplants) with his radiant Presence. “The world sings of an infinite Love: how can we fail to care for it” (65)?

To extend his mission on Earth, Jesus took up the green world, worked up by the industry of human hands, and became what was once a plant form.

“When the priest says the words, ‘This is my Body,’ his words fall directly on to the bread and directly transform it into the individual reality of Christ. But the great sacramental operation does not cease at that local and momentary event. Even children are taught that, throughout each one’s life and the life of the Church and the history of the world, there is only one Mass and one Communion” (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., The Divine Milieu).

This is the singular movement in whose wake we are all caught up. In this spiritual Bethlehem, House of Bread, the Eucharist strengthens our hands to douse the flames of war and bind our Mother’s wounds.

Thank you, houseplants, for how you hum those precious few bars—everything is connected! May our Holy Communions around this Incarnation Mystery feed our commitment to living lives that are truly, meaningfully, respectfully connected to everything around us. A Eucharistic lifestyle lives in intimate communion with the Earth, our Mother, sensitive to her pain, mindful of her wondrous union with the Son of God. Since in Christ “all things hold together” (Col. 1:17), his Eucharist is the ground that upholds all Creation—to feed on him is to care for her.
The Eucharistic Nativity

By Mary Hanbury | Director of Catechesis for the Diocese of Fargo

This painting by Lorenzo Monaco (c. 1406-10) of the nativity scene stems from the writings of St. Bridget of Sweden (c. 1303–73). Shortly before she died, St. Bridget described her vision of seeing Jesus “naked and shining” on the ground with light radiating out of him as he reached up to his mother.

It seems strange to see baby Jesus lying on the cold ground naked, but in her vision, St. Bridget described seeing the Virgin Mary in prayer before the birth followed by a vision of the newly born Jesus on the ground as Mary was kneeling in adoration before him. St. Bridget also saw and heard angels singing all around the Virgin Mother, as we see in this image above her head.

The ox and the ass in the background are not found in the scripture narrative of the nativity but have a long history of showing up in nativity scenes. Theologians from as early as the 3rd century made a connection with the nativity animals from the passage in Isaiah, “An ox knows its owner, and an ass, its master’s manger” (Isa. 1:3). The ox was seen as the pure and the ass as the impure, also the ox as the Jewish people and the ass as the gentiles. Since then, the ox and the ass have shown up in just about every nativity scene. Notice them hanging their heads over the manger. The ox looks like it is about to eat from the manger. Earlier nativity images portray Jesus resting inside the manger with the animals leaning over as if to begin eating.

Some images even make the manger out to be more like an altar. The message is sacramental. The Early Church Fathers were the first to write about this connection between the nativity and the sacrament of the Eucharist. Bethlehem means “house of bread” and the manger was a feeding trough for animals. Jesus says in the Gospel of John, “If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever,” and, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst” (Jn. 6). Jesus is lying on the ground in front of the feeding trough, the manger, born in the city called “House of Bread.” It is interesting to note that in just the first 16 verses of Luke, the fact that Jesus is in a feeding trough (manger) for animals is mentioned three times. Apparently, it is very important that we “get” that Jesus is lying in a feeding trough. He is the bread of life!

Notice that Joseph is in the foreground. In St. Bridget’s visions, he is not present for the birth but rather steps outside. This small painting is a panel piece part of a larger altarpiece. If we follow the direction Joseph wants us to look, we would see a large depiction of the Annunciation (not shown). This is so no mistake can be made. The child lying on the ground was born of miraculous means, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and that Joseph is only part of the divine plan as one who raises the child as his own.
Church’s social doctrine always remains constant

CHRISTOPHER DODSON
Executive director of the North Dakota Catholic Conference, which acts on behalf of the Catholic bishops of N.D. to respond to public policy issues of concern to the Catholic Church.

Changes are coming to the North Dakota Catholic Conference. The bishops of North Dakota have chosen David Tamisiea as the new executive director of the North Dakota Catholic Conference. David started on Nov. 1.

I will remain as a co-director and the conference’s general counsel while David transitions into the position. For the next months, he and I will share the privilege of writing this column.

The mission and positions of the conference will not change. The North Dakota Catholic Conference represents the state’s Catholic bishops as they apply Catholic social doctrine to present situations. Present situations may change, but Catholic social doctrine does not.

The truth of this statement stuck out as I looked at the first columns I wrote. I started writing this column in June of 2001. Two hundred twenty-five columns followed, spanning 22 years. All of them are online on the North Dakota Catholic Conference’s website (ndcatholic.org).

For example, while the first column in 2001 introduced readers to the North Dakota Catholic Conference, the next three columns discussed issues and principles that are still relevant today.

The second column in 2001 concerned embryonic stem cell research. At the time, politicians and large biotech companies were calling for federal funding of research that intentionally killed human embryos. Federal funding was eventually given, but the research did not yield the results promised and interest in embryonic stem cell research faded. Nevertheless, destructive research on human embryos continues.

Incidentally, destructive research on human embryos was prohibited in North Dakota in 2001 and still is today.

For the third column, I wrote about the United States Catholic bishops’ commitment to the pro-life cause and how their two-prong approach was the best chance for overturning Roe v. Wade and ending abortion in our country. One prong was the call to expand services to pregnant women and families. The other prong was the incremental approach to law and policy. It consisted of passing pro-life laws at the edges of Roe that simultaneously protected unborn life and built the groundwork for overturning Roe.

The legal strategy worked. Last year, the United States Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade and its related cases when it decided Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization. Almost all abortions are now prohibited in North Dakota.

The other part of that approach is also still relevant. The Catholic Church in the United States has re-emphasized the need to reach out to mothers, responding to their needs so that no woman feels compelled to choose abortion.

The fourth column of 2001 was about the then-pending Farm Bill. As I write this, Congress still has not finished work on the 2023 Farm Bill. The principles I discussed for the 2001 Farm Bill apply to the 2023 Farm Bill. They were:

- The Need to Respect the Life and Dignity of the Human Person. Public and social policies must put the human person first. Society cannot consider farmers and ranchers expendable in the name of “progress” or “efficiency.”
- The Common Good. We must work to preserve family farms and ranches because they provide one of the best guarantees of a healthy community.
- The Integrity of Creation. Agriculture should support farmers and ranchers in the exercise of stewardship of Creation.
- The Universal Destination of Goods. The goods of creation are meant for all, throughout generations. Policies should foster a wide distribution of ownership in agriculture rather than concentration and policies should provide just compensation to ranchers and farmers for their labor.
- Subsidiarity. Agriculture policies should not unduly interfere with the ability of persons and communities to exercise responsible self-governance.
- Option for the Poor. We should judge policies concerning rural life according to how they affect the least among us—those with less power and influence, the most vulnerable, and the marginalized.

The fact that these principles are as relevant today as they were in 2001 illustrates how Catholic social doctrine does not change. Catholic social doctrine is not the opinion of particular popes at a particular time. It is part of the Church’s official teaching. Agriculture practices and policies may change. There may not even be a Farm Bill in 22 years. The Church, however, will still have her teaching and it will be relevant to how the country shapes agriculture policies.

The same is true for many issues. Whether the issue concerns human embryos, abortion, agriculture, or any of the many other issues addressed in these columns, the present facts, political situations, and legislators will change. The Church’s social doctrine will not.
The grace of Lisieux and Lourdes

The daily schedule of the seminary is aimed at being conducive towards producing good, holy, happy priests. This schedule consists in stretching men in four areas: development in the spiritual life, growth as Christian men, intellectual growth, and pastoral experience. Comparing men from when they initially enter and begin seminary formation to after they have years of formation behind them, the difference is striking. The formative years in the seminary are immensely productive and beneficial for the future of the Church. As academic work piles up and the everyday stress of being in formation compounds, a pilgrimage can be a helpful way to refocus and regather one’s priorities on Christ alone. Over fall break, I had the unique opportunity to go on a pilgrimage with two other seminarians to Lisieux and Lourdes, France.

As soon as I stepped off the train and into the quiet town of Lisieux, I knew that the Lord had allowed me to take this pilgrimage because it was once again an opportunity to re-dedicate myself to him. In this small French village where St. Therese grew up, I experienced a very powerful peace which had escaped me for much of the semester up to that point. My classes were challenging and presenting quite the hefty workload, and my pastoral assignment had some unique and unforeseen challenges. These things along with the everyday expectations of seminary had pirated my peace, causing me to become distracted in how much work needed to get done on any given day. Although the Lord was still leading me through my semester, I had not taken time to recognize the little blessings found within each day.

Through the intercession of St. Therese and her doctrine of the Little Way, which is doing little things (sometimes even simple expectations) with great love and devotion, I was able to slow down and recognize once again the many blessings the Lord has given me. From spending hours in prayer in front of St. Therese’s grave to reading her Story of a Soul and asking for her intercession, she was able to redirect my focus onto the one who called me to seminary. This immense grace once again allowed me to recognize and rest in the peace that Christ had been trying to give me amid the trials in the first half of the semester.

In the latter half of the week, we again boarded the train for southern France, to the town of Lourdes. Lourdes is popularized by the Marian apparition that took place there in 1858 to St. Bernadette Soubirous. The town is active and occupied by many pilgrims coming to the grotto. In a much different experience than that of Lisieux, Lourdes offered yet another opportunity to grow in the spiritual life. Each night, thousands of pilgrims gather for a candlelight Marian procession around the grounds. The rosary is prayed, and the very famous Lourdes Hymn is sung (in English it is most often referred to as “Immaculate Mary”). Seeing thousands of pilgrims sing to our Blessed Mother while holding up their candles to her gave me great hope.

In that moment, the Blessed Mother was teaching me to place my trust and my hope in her Divine Son. She was leading me to her Son, encouraging me to place all my various anxieties in his care. What a great gift our Lord gave us when he offered to us his own mother as our mother. Her care is so tender, so sweet, and she knows more than anyone else how to love and draw near to her son. In this, she shows us and brings us to him if we only ask her to do it.

Following this pilgrimage, this gift from the Lord, I have been able to dedicate myself more resolutely than was possible before. The daily seminary schedule is very regimented, aiming at producing good, holy priests. This is only successful when done in conjunction with a working relationship with Jesus Christ. The pilgrimage to France helped me rediscover and appreciate the peace that only Jesus can give. That, in all reality, was the grace of Lisieux and Lourdes.
The gift of a father: How love leads to vocations

THE CATHOLIC CULTURALIST

DR. R. JARED STAUDT
Husband and father of six, Director of Content for Exodus 90, and a Benedictine oblate

In the beginning is the Father. He is the source and goal of all life. From him flows communion through the gift of his entire life to the Son, his perfect image, and from them proceeds the love of the Spirit. Likewise, within creation, life itself is a gift, and therefore it is love. This is the secret to life, without which we cannot be happy. God made us not only to receive his life but also to give our lives back to him and to others.

This is what fathers must model to their children. The father provides security in body and mind by being “there for them,” to care for and protect them, helping them to come to the maturity needed to grow to the “full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). Both parents serve essential and complementary roles. Mothers, among many other things, provide the nurturing that younger children need, while the influence of fathers increases in adolescence as children venture into the world. He provides confidence through his stable presence that guides his children to discover their own vocation. His presence must do more than model the right thing to do. He must offer fatherly love, affirming the goodness of his children, and investing time in them.

It bears repeating that fathers are by far the number one influence on their children’s faith. Another recent study, this time from the non-profit Communio, confirms this: “The decline of married fatherhood created a shock to our culture leading to increases in the number of bad outcomes for children, and it has caused the rapid decline in Christianity over the last 40 years. Marriage rates have dropped 31 percent since 2000 and 61 percent since 1970. This study concludes the religious nomes are likely to continue their growth for two to three decades after the number of married resident fathers stabilizes. Therefore, churches must immediately adopt new strategies and approaches to restore marriage and improve fatherhood.”

We find the crisis of fatherhood at the base of a vocational crisis both for religious vocations and marriage. Too often, young people do not imagine life to be a gift they have been entrusted and which, in turn, is meant to be given for others. They are not experiencing the reality of this gift from a father. Self-sufficiency plagues the fatherless, creating an illusion of autonomy that masks deeper needs of communion and dependence. Unmoored youth try to find happiness by focusing on the self, which only leads to misery. Fatherlessness essentially constitutes societal suicide, stemming from an identity crisis and lack of purpose. The love of a father grounds us in reality, helping us to know that our lives are good and we belong within a community greater than ourselves.

Gil Bailie makes the connection between fathers and culture in his new book, *The Apocalypse of the Sovereign Self* (Angelico, 2023): “It is the fatherly responsibility... to provide the child with a cultural, moral, and historical patrimony—an inheritance: an appreciation for the transgenerational drama in which the child’s life is situated. The father prepares the child to *perform* whatever might be his unique role as a bridge connecting his ancestors and descendants. His message is, ‘You belong, and this gift of belonging will require something from you, and I am here to help you learn how to meet your responsibilities’” (249). Without a father, one is cut off from the past and, therefore, cannot stake out a clear future. Belonging brings spiritual and psychological security, which in turn inspires the freedom and joy needed to pass on this blessing.

Our culture rages against patriarchy, the rule of the father, although we are finding that without it we are also losing hierarchy, the holy rule of Christ in his Church. In the end, the hierarchy exists for patriarchy because the Father has gifted life to us and wants us to use it to express his love. This is what patriarchy means—not domination but an order that flows from the source of life and guides toward the goal. We do not name the heavenly Father after earthly fathers. Rather, they take their name from him because they are meant to provide a glimpse of his love in giving life and guiding his children to happiness.

Although the role of a strong biological father can never be replaced, the love of the heavenly Father can still come to us through the mentorship and friendship of father figures. Often, God works through a spiritual father or pastor to draw us to greater faith, love, and maturity. Fatherhood entails relationship, dependence, trust and love, all of which are crucial to the psychological and spiritual development needed to embrace a vocation. If fatherhood plays a central role in faith, family and our culture, manifesting the love of the heavenly Father, then we must raise up new generations of fathers in the Church. Only this will restore a proper patriarchy, a manifestation of the Father’s love in our lives and culture.

Dr. Staudt’s column is syndicated by the Denver Catholic, the official publication of the Archdiocese of Denver.
How basic training drew me back to the faith

By Paul Braun | Editor of New Earth

It was February 1984. I had just arrived late on a Friday evening to Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas to begin the six weeks that would change my life. I had a pretty good idea what to expect at Air Force basic training going in, but those first few days were a whirlwind of running, getting shouted at, stripping down my individualism, and all around chaos, courtesy of our three training instructors, whom I learned to fear those first few weeks at Lackland.

The next day, we were given the opportunity to make a brief telephone call home to let our families know we arrived safely and that they wouldn’t be hearing from us for a while. My mother asked how I was doing, and I broke down a little, telling her that maybe I had made a mistake signing up. My father just said, “Buck up!” He was right. I signed the papers, I was there, and I had to make the best of it.

My decision to join the Air Force was based on several factors. First, I was a college drop out. I had no direction in my life, and I wandered aimlessly for several months after leaving college. I had stopped attending Mass regularly while in school, and I was not involved with the Catholic student center at all. Add to that the death of my favorite “brother-cousin” in October of 1983, and I was on a downward spiral. I had to get some direction in my life.

While attending school, I became involved in Air Force ROTC. Being a part of that group peaked my interest in possibly becoming a missile officer upon graduation. Unfortunately, I had started college a few years late and was ineligible for an Air Force scholarship or commission, so I lost all interest in obtaining my degree.

Fast-forward to January 1984. I drove by an Air Force recruiting station near my home and enlisted. My father said it was the best decision I had made so far in my young life, but my mother thought I was throwing away six good years of my life. After the first two days of basic training, I was thinking maybe she was right.

The first Sunday of basic training, my flight gathered in the day room after morning chow, and the training instructor told us we were going to clean the barracks that Sunday and every Sunday for the next six weeks. But then came the caveat. “We’re all going to make this place spit-shine, unless some of you sissy-boys want to go to church this morning instead. I have to offer you the chance to go.” Well, that was my opportunity to get out of some cleaning that day, so I took up the offer and marched with some others from my flight to the base chapel. Mind you, I hadn’t attended Mass for quite some time, but this was an excuse to get out of cleaning duty. Not exactly the right frame of mind or heart to have to attend Mass. However, an amazing thing happened!

While sitting in the chapel during the Eucharistic prayer, I felt a strange feeling coming over me. The best way I can describe it is the sense of a soft blanket crossing my shoulders. I felt warm, accepted, welcomed. It was as if God was pulling my close, saying, “Where have you been, my son?” My emotions took over, and I was pretty emotional through the rest of the Mass.

After Mass, I asked the training instructor if I could stay after for a little while and talk to the Catholic chaplain. He reluctantly agreed, and I went into the chaplain’s office and told him my story of where I had come from, where I was in life, why I had decided to attend church, and the feelings I had experienced at Mass. He said, “Let me hear your confession, and we’ll go from there.” So I made what was probably the most heart-felt confession I had ever made in my young life. The chaplain admonished me a bit for neglecting my Sunday obligations and for coming to Mass only to get out of cleaning duties, pardoned me for my past sins, welcomed me back to the fold, and encouraged me to come to Mass each Sunday during training and to talk to him afterwards. Maybe he just wanted to make sure I was actually coming to Mass, but those talks were very instructive and eye-opening.

I can’t remember the young priest’s name, but I am forever grateful for his encouragement, guidance and understanding. He helped me get through the rest of basic training, and most importantly put me back on the path of living my Catholic faith again. With the help of my dear faith-filled wife, I have stayed on that path to this day, marveling as to how a cynical motive to get out of barracks duty turned my faith life around, and fondly recalling the wonderful feeling of God’s presence and forgiveness on that Sunday so long ago.
A message from Bishop John Folda

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

With praise and thanksgiving to God, I am deeply grateful for your generosity during the past fiscal year. We live in a tumultuous world, but that does not stop us from being the light to the world that Jesus calls us to be. High inflationary pressures, continued war in the Ukraine, the Israeli conflict, continued supply chain issues, and much more try to detract from the good that is all around us. Jesus is not limited by earthly concerns.

We continue our emphasis on evangelization and rural life. Agriculture sustains all of us, and Jesus used many examples of crops and animals in his teaching. The Eucharistic Revival continues to gain momentum and enthusiasm, as we look ahead to the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis in July 2024. Our Diocesan Synod meeting is scheduled for April 2024 at Sts. Anne and Joachim Church in Fargo.

Your support helps us to be Christ to others, and provides for catechesis, Catholic education, charity, justice, worship, personal spiritual growth, and pastoral ministry.

What follows is the annual accountability report, which covers the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023. The Diocesan Finance Council, which includes 10 laypersons from throughout the diocese and five diocesan representatives, assists me in the painstaking task of overseeing diocesan finances. We are thankful for your generous and consistent financial support. May God bless you and reward you for your financial assistance, prayers, and acts of service in response to his call.

The condensed summary of our reports, found in this issue, is intended to give you a broad view of the normal operations of our diocese and its ministries, as well as the contributions made by our diocese to the national and international work of the Church. This report summarizes many pages of audit reports on the Diocese of Fargo, and the Catholic Development Foundation. Complete audited financial reports are available to the faithful of the diocese via links on our website under the Finance Office. A copy of each report may also be reviewed in the Diocesan Finance Office.

These ministries and other diocesan services link together the parishes that constitute the Diocese of Fargo. Good stewardship begins with the faith and understanding that we all are called to give back to God a first portion of the gifts he has bestowed on us. Your gifts of time, talent, and treasure are reflected in this annual report. Your trust in God is reflected in your gifts to the Church and your parishes.

As in the past, we planned and evaluated the compelling needs of the diocesan Church against available resources. I believe that responsible and creative stewardship guided this process, and I pledge to continue good stewardship in the future. The shortfall in this year’s revenue was covered by earnings and reserves from prior year’s surplus.

I am convinced that through the goodness and generosity of the Catholics of our diocese, we will continue to rise to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters. Your continued support through prayer, volunteer service, and financial commitment, is a positive sign of a community alive in our Catholic faith. May God generously reward and bless you and your families.

You are in my constant prayers. Please pray for me.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo
We have all heard the saying, “We reap what we sow.” Since 1985, the Catholic Development Foundation (CDF) has been sowing the seeds of generous Catholics throughout the Diocese of Fargo. Because of this generosity, hundreds of Catholic programs and ministries within the framework of our diocese will continue to grow and strengthen our Catholic faith community for years to come.

CDF is a securely structured organization that was incorporated in 1985. As a publicly supported 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, CDF helps donors achieve their charitable and financial goals. The foundation ensures the security of all donated funds. The funds are used only for their intended purposes as designated by the donors. CDF has produced wonderful benefits for many parishes and diocesan programs over the last five years. Distributions from the CDF for parishes, cemeteries, schools, diocesan programs, clergy/seminarian education and other apostolates have totaled $17,327,580.

On pages 27-28, you will see a list of endowments currently established for various Catholic ministries and parishes. I encourage you to review this list to see which ones are created in your community or otherwise important to you. All Diocese of Fargo parishes have an endowment established in the CDF. If you do not see your parish listed, it’s simply because it hasn’t been funded by a donation yet.

God has planted within us a desire to give and to receive. The CDF’s ability to easily receive gifts and help donors offer gifts is rewarding both for donors and for those who are assisted. Donors know their gifts are long-term investments for current and future Catholics. I encourage you to become a Catholic Development Foundation donor. Every contribution, no matter the size, makes a difference in the lives of Catholics in our diocese. Planning and making a gift now will allow you to witness your charity in action.

Thank you and may your blessings be multiplied through your generosity to the CDF. For more information about Catholic Development Foundation, visit cdfnd.org or call (701) 356-7926.

Sincerely, Steve Schons | President
Other financial funds and related information

CUSTODIAL FUND

The Custodial Fund is used for monies that are from national collections taken up in the parishes, and the Diocesan Insurance Program. When national collections (e.g. Black & Indian Mission, Peter’s Pence/Holy Father, Good Friday/Holy Land, Religious Retirement) are taken, the monies from each parish are sent to the Diocese. Once all the monies from all parishes are received, a single check is sent on behalf of the people of the diocese to the intended national office or agency.

During this past year, the following collections were forwarded to national offices:

- Aid to Ukraine: $11,105
- Black & Indian Missions: $23,319
- Catholic Home Missions: $30,002
- Holy Land: $60,887
- Peter’s Pence/Holy Father: $22,953
- World Mission/Propagation of the Faith: $29,043
- Religious Retirement: $34,928
- Catholic Relief Services: $7,778
- Disaster Relief: $2,564
- Others (e.g., Homeless Shelters): $3,258

The Diocese of Fargo received $68,626 from the Black & Indian Mission Office this year for direct aid to Native American communities in the diocese and Catholic schools with Native American and Black American students.

All parishes participate in the diocesan insurance program through Catholic Mutual. Catholic Mutual sends bills to the parishes based on a $2,500 deductible. The parishes make payments to the Diocese for these insurance premiums. Catholic Mutual bills the Diocese based on a $25,000 deductible, and the Diocese makes payments to Catholic Mutual. The premium difference or spread between the $2,500 and $25,000 deductibles is retained in the Insurance Reserve and is used to pay insurance claims. Parishes receive a rebate from the fund to bring deductibles down to $1,000.

CATHOLIC DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

The Catholic Development Foundation was established in 1985 as a separate entity that exists as an “umbrella Foundation” for Catholic churches and institutions. The Foundation serves as a vehicle for Catholic entities to accumulate endowments, perpetual care funds, and the like through bequests and deferred gift planning. Gift planning tools such as charitable gift annuities, charitable remainder uni-trusts, charitable lead annuity trusts, and other deferred gift plans utilize the Foundation as a means of providing for the Church after our earthly existence.

At June 30, 2023 there were:
- Endowments for parishes and agencies: $20,642,686
- Endowments for Seminarians/Clergy Education: $22,580,627
- Perpetual Care Cemetery Funds: $3,762,426
- Endowments for Diocesan Programming: $1,895,798
- Endowments for Catholic schools: $25,619,764
- Other Apostolates: $1,828,091
- Annuities/Uni-trusts: $2,766,794
- Donor Advised Funds: $4,947,747

The Catholic Development Foundation provides a permanent way for donors to make a positive impact for years to come on the well-being of the Catholic Church and people served through its many ministries. As an umbrella foundation for the Catholic entities in the Diocese of Fargo, the Catholic Development Foundation seeks to support financially the spiritual, educational, and social well-being of our Catholic Faith community and to help donors achieve their charitable and financial goals through a legacy gift. All endowments are qualified endowment funds making contributions eligible for the 40% North Dakota Tax Credit.

North Dakota Tax Credits benefit the Church and you

A few years ago, ND legislators passed a bill that allowed a very generous tax credit to those who make a charitable gift to a ND qualified endowment. If you are a North Dakota resident and make a gift of $5,000 or more to a ND qualified endowment, you are eligible for a 40 percent tax credit on your ND taxes. Tax credits are much different from a tax deduction because they reduce your tax liability dollar for dollar. The maximum tax credit allowed is $20,000 for individuals or $40,000 for married couples filing jointly. However, credits may be carried forward up to three years.

The following is an example of how tax credits may benefit you:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GIFT AMOUNT</th>
<th>$5,000</th>
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<th>$50,000</th>
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<tr>
<td>Federal tax savings</td>
<td>-$1,200</td>
<td>-$6,000</td>
<td>-$12,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>ND state income tax credit</td>
<td>-$2,000</td>
<td>-$10,000</td>
<td>-$20,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net “Cost” of Gift</td>
<td>$1,800</td>
<td>$9,000</td>
<td>$18,000</td>
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</table>

*Based on individuals that fall in the 24 percent Federal tax bracket. Please consult your own financial or tax advisor for your unique situation.
Catholic Development Foundation (CDF) offers many ways to give and leave a legacy. CDF accepts gifts of cash, appreciated securities, and real estate. All gifts are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. And, you choose the parish, school, or organization which will benefit from your gift.

**Gifts that start making a difference today**
These are gifts that are easy to make and see immediate impact.
- Existing Endowment Fund
- Donor Advised Fund
- New Endowment Fund

**Gifts that give back – Life income gifts**
These types of gifts provide income for the donor’s lifetime, any remainder goes to the donor’s charity of choice.
- Charitable Gift Annuity
- Charitable Remainder Trust
- Charitable Unitrust

**Gifts that bear fruits later – Deferred gifts**
The benefits an organization receives from these gifts are deferred until a later time, typically after a donor passes away.
- Charitable Bequest
- Life Estate

*For more information, please contact Steve at (701) 356-7926 or visit cdfnd.org.*

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**Endowment Funds in the Catholic Development Foundation**

The Catholic Development Foundation has 500+ funds supporting a variety of Catholic parishes, cemeteries, schools, ministries and programs. Because we simply don’t have the space to print the entire list, go to cdfnd.org/endowment to review the list established in the name of Parishes, Cemeteries, Seminarians and Clergy Education, and Catholic Schools.

The following is a partial list of individual, family, and other sponsored endowment funds that are most active. If you have questions, or seek additional information, contact Steve Schons at (701) 356-7926 or email steve.schons@fargodiocese.org.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Endowment Fund Name</th>
<th>For the benefit of:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holy Cross Church “R. E. and Youth Ministry” Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Holy Cross Church of West Fargo for Religious Education and Youth Ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nativity Faith Formation Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Nativity Church of Fargo for faith formation ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nativity Social Justice Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Nativity Parish, Fargo social justice ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverend Maurice Mueller Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Nativity Church of Fargo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Presence Radio Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Real Presence Radio</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Vincent de Paul Society—St. Anthony’s Church of Fargo Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. Anthony’s Church of Fargo for St. Vincent de Paul Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Gustafson Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. Charles Church of Oakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endowment Fund Name</td>
<td>For the benefit of:</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Charles Church of Oakes “Music” Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. Charles Church of Oakes for Music ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Charles Church of Oakes “Teen Life” Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. Charles Church of Oakes for Teen Life ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallum Family 2 Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. Gianna’s Maternity Home, Minto</td>
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<tr>
<td>John and Jan Klocke Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. Gianna’s Maternity Home, Real Presence Radio, Women’s Care Clinic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Gianna’s Maternity Home</td>
<td>St. Gianna’s Maternity Home, Minto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles and Mary Ellen Frey Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. James Basilica of Jamestown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. John’s the Evangelist Church “Education” Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. John the Evangelist Church of New Rockford for Education ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob and Dayle Dietz Memorial Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. John the Evangelist’s Church, Wahpeton</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. John’s Church of Grafton “Poorest of Poor” Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. John’s Church of Grafton for ministry of the poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. John’s, Wahpeton, Hunger Fund Endowment</td>
<td>St. John’s Church of Wahpeton for Ministry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sylvester and Shirley Gores Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. Joseph’s Church of Devils Lake</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeffrey and JoAnn Kitchens Family Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. Joseph’s Church of Devils Lake</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bishop James S. Sullivan 3 Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. Mary’s Cathedral of Fargo</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Mary’s Church of Forman Youth and Education Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. Mary’s Church, Forman for Youth and Education ministry</td>
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<td>Chuck and Meghan Breen Family Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. Rose of Lima Church of Hillsboro</td>
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<td>St. Rose of Lima Church “Improvement” Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. Rose of Lima Church of Hillsboro for improvements</td>
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<td>Anawim Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. Thomas Newman Center of Grand Forks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert and Sally Artz Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo, Catholic Schools, and Catholic parishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Experience Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo for Beginning Experience Ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage Tribunal Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo for Marriage Tribunal Ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miracle of Cana Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese Catholic Education, Respect Life, Marriage, Family, Vocations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverend Duane Cote Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo for Scholarship to Seminarians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcella Feist Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo for Seminarian Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardinal Aloisius Muench Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo for Seminarian Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George and Marcella Allmaras Memorial Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo for Seminarian Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul and Harriet Grevig Family Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo for Seminarian Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverend Donald Leiphon Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo for Seminarian Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverend Darin Didier Memorial Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo for Seminarian Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV Mass Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo for TV Mass Ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Disciples Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo for Young Disciples Ministry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Ministry “Scholarship” Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo for Youth Ministry Scholarships (formerly known as Diane Brooks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Care Clinic Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Women’s Care Clinic (formerly known as First Choice Clinic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diocese of Fargo Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo for general purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archbishop Samuel Aquila Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo for Seminarian Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfred Ritzke Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Diocese of Fargo for scholarships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Charities ND Endowment Fund</td>
<td>General Endowment for Catholic Charities ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas U. &amp; Patricia S. Crary Memorial Fund</td>
<td>For the benefit of St. Anthony’s Fargo, Richardton Abbey, and St. JPII Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enderlin—St. Patrick’s Rectory Endowment Fund</td>
<td>St. Patrick’s Church of Enderlin Rectory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoselton Family Endowment Fund</td>
<td>Perpetual care and upkeep of St. Edward’s Cemetery at Drayton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Msgr. Val Gross Memorial Fund</td>
<td>The Diocese of Fargo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visit cdfnd.org or call (701) 336-7926 for more information.
Retrouvaille is a program designed to help struggling marriages regain their health. It helps husband and wife rediscover or re-awaken the love and commitment that originally brought them together. The program is highly successful in saving hurting marriages, even bringing reconciliation to couples who have already separated or divorced. Retrouvaille is a peer ministry of volunteer couples that can help you learn the tools of healthy communication and healing.

Not willing to let go of your marriage?

Weekend for couples March 1-3, 2024

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For more information, Call (701) 356-7903 or visit HelpOurMarriage.com

January 12-14, 2024

Redeemed
Eucharistic Congress

September 6 & 7, 2024
Jamestown Civic Center

Scott Hahn
Julianne Stanz
Bishop John Folda
Eucharistic procession and more!

DEVO TED
A GOING DEEPER silent retreat for young adults

“True devotion does us no harm whatsoever, but instead perfects all things”
-Saint Francis De Sales

More information to come!
LIFE’S MILESTONES

Louis and Theresa Hamel have enjoyed being parishioners of St. Mary’s Church in Lakota their entire married lives. They celebrated 74 years of marriage on Nov. 16. They now reside together at Bethany retirement home in Fargo.

Jim and Janet Richard, parishioners of Holy Cross in West Fargo, will celebrate their 50th anniversary on Dec. 29. They were married at St. Mary’s in Visalia, Calif. and have one son, a daughter-in-law, and three 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 January issue is Dec. 11, and the deadline for the February issue is Jan. 9.

Be part of New Earth!

The diocesan publication, New Earth, aims to provide informational, educational, and inspirational stories and photos about the people and places of the Diocese of Fargo. You are invited to submit articles, photographs, and story ideas for consideration and inclusion in an upcoming issue. The following are the 2024 printing deadlines for New Earth.

- **Email**: news@fargodiocese.org
- **Website**: www.fargodiocese.org/new-earth
- **Mail**: Diocese of Fargo – New Earth, 5201 Bishops Blvd., Suite A, Fargo, ND 58104
- **Phone**: (701) 356-7900

All submitted articles must meet approval before being published. No item is guaranteed except for paid advertising.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue Month</th>
<th>Submission Deadline</th>
<th>Expected Arrival</th>
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<tr>
<td>January 2024</td>
<td>Dec. 11, 2023</td>
<td>Jan. 5, 2024</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2024</td>
<td>Jan. 9</td>
<td>Feb. 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2024</td>
<td>Feb. 6</td>
<td>Mar. 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2024</td>
<td>Mar. 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2024</td>
<td>Apr. 9</td>
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<td>June 2024</td>
<td>May 14</td>
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<td>July/August 2024</td>
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<td>September 2024</td>
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<td>Nov. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2024</td>
<td>Nov. 12</td>
<td>Dec. 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We Remember

*Please remember in prayer the faithful departed from our parishes, our diocese and throughout the world.*

*These names and corrections were submitted after the November New Earth deadline. Included are those who passed away between Oct. 1, 2022 and Sept. 30, 2023.*


**HOPE – St. Agatha’s**: Marlene Woodbury–Aug. 6, 2023.

**MEDINA – St. Mary’s**: Arlen Hillius–Mar. 9, 2023.


A glimpse of the past

These news items, compiled by Susan Noah, were found in *New Earth* and its predecessor, *Catholic Action News.*

75 years ago — 1948

A statistical survey of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Fargo shows the number of baptisms and deaths went up in 1948 over 1947, but the total number of marriages went down. There were 3,576 baptisms in 1948 versus 2,793 in 1947.

The figures for 1948 show that marriages declined from 1947. In 1948 there were 969 marriages while in 1947 there were 1,064. The number of deaths in 1947 increased to 689 deaths from 669 in 1947.

The 14 Catholic hospitals did a record business during 1948 administering to 36,894 patients against 35,092 in 1947. The six Catholic schools of Nursing in the Diocese still enroll only 273 nurses. The number of nurses in 1947 was 274, but in 1946, there were 370 student nurses.

50 years ago — 1973

A Youth Rally with a capacity crowd of over 250 high school students of the neighboring parishes of St. John’s, Wyndmere, was staged on Dec. 10, at 7:30 p.m. Bishop Driscoll was the main celebrant and homilist for the Folk Mass with the theme of Hope and reflecting on the words of Christ, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

Richard Klosterman and catechists and adult leaders of the neighboring parishes were in charge of the liturgical and social celebrations. “The student response was enthusiastic and enriching,” Mr. Klosterman stated. “We hope the celebration will be an annual event.”

20 years ago — 2003

As diocesan employees prepared to move their offices from the Queen of Peace Retreat Center to their new pastoral center, Father Joseph Goering, the chancellor, celebrated Mass Dec. 11 in the chapel of the old center. In doing so, he recognized the end of one period in the history of the Diocese of Fargo and the beginning of another.

The move to the new pastoral center, at 5201 Bishops Boulevard in south Fargo, was foreseen years ago when the diocese purchased 80 acres of land bordered on the north by 52nd Avenue South and on the west by 25th Street South.

Winter events

**Milnor:** St. Arnold’s Church will host their annual Christmas Pantry on Dec. 6, from 4 to 6 p.m. Shop for cookies, candies, and Christmas gift plates. Raffle tickets to win cash prizes.

**Grand Forks:** St. Mary’s social concerns committee is hosting their annual Christmas Cookie Walk. Dec. 16 from 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. Cookies are $9/lb. Breads and specialties sold separately. Cider and coffee served.

**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.

Stay up to date!

Follow Diocese of Fargo online.

WANT TO ADVERTISE IN NEW EARTH?

Contact Kristina Bloomsburg
(701) 356-7900 or newearthads@fargodiocese.org

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Minnesota bishop issues letter about steps needed for Sister Annella Zervas’ cause

By Patti Maguire Armstrong | Catholic News Agency

A letter from Bishop Andrew Cozzens of the Crookston Diocese released Oct. 15 announced that preliminary steps are being taken that could lead to opening a cause for the canonization of Sister Annella Zervas, OSB.

Zervas died at the age of 26 in 1926 in her family home in Moorhead, Minn., after a debilitating and painful skin disease.

Amanda Zurface, a canon lawyer, read the bishop’s letter at the Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto in the St. Benedict Monastery cemetery in St. Joseph, Minn., where Zervas is buried. Approximately 150 people gathered for the event, many part of a monthly group that has been praying for Zervas’ canonization.

Although Zervas died almost 100 years ago, she remains very alive in the hearts and minds of a growing number of people, largely because of the efforts of Patrick Norton, a house painter, husband, and father of three from Avon, Minn.

On Oct. 27, 2010, while painting light posts in front of the grotto, Norton says a religious sister in an old-style habit appeared to him and told him he was doing a good job. They chatted a bit, and when she turned to go, she vanished before his eyes. He later identified her as Sister Annella Zervas through photos and discovered she was buried in that cemetery. Since then, he has felt called to share her story far and wide.

In the letter he wrote, Cozzens thanked the group for “perseverance in prayer and witnessing to the importance of living a holy life as seen in your commitment through spreading the message of Sister Annella.”

The bishop shared that he too is inspired by the nun’s story, which he learned about through his own sister. He acknowledged receiving many requests from people to begin the formal process of investigation to determine her holiness. However, he noted, “there are formalities and stages that involve canon lawyers, historians, theologians, and doctors to instructing a cause of beatification and canonization. I ask that you be patient as we follow the procedures set out for us by the Church for a study such as this, and I also ask for your prayers.”

Cozzens shared the website For the Promotion of the Life of Sister Annella Zervas, OSB, for people wanting to stay informed about the study of Zervas’ life, to share a story about her, or to report answers to prayer through the nun’s intercession (people can also email sisterannellazervas@gmail.com).

When Zervas died, many believed she was a saint. Two booklets about her life were written: “Ticket to Eternity,” by James Kritzeck, published in 1957, and “Apostles of Suffering in Our Day,” written by Benedictine priest Joseph Kreuter and published in 1929.

There is uncertainty as to whether there was ever a cause opened for Zervas.

Older writings often refer to Zervas as “Servant of God,” a title given to a candidate for sainthood after a cause has been opened and is under investigation prior to being declared “Venerable.”

“That is one of the things that needs to be investigated,” Zurface told CNA at the cemetery prior to the reading of the letter. She credited Norton with resurrecting an interest in Zervas’ life.

According to Norton, 100,000 copies have been distributed of the booklet “Apostles of Suffering in Our Day.”

Those praying for the Benedictine sister’s intercession have reported miracles and answers to prayers. But the Church is always cautious about such things, Zurface said, so it’s premature to say any more than is in the letter.

Monsignor David Baumgartner, rector of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Crookston and the other canon lawyer preparing the groundwork for the cause, noted that the main tasks right now are to work on bylaws to form a guild and to establish it as a nonprofit organization.

A “guild” is the traditional association formed to support, through prayer and promotion, a candidate for sainthood. “When the guild is established, they will be the ones to petition for a cause to open,” he explained. “The letter was presented at this time, so people will be aware of what the diocese is doing in regard to Sister Annella.”

After the reading of Cozzens’ letter, Norton shared with the group his own story of how he came to know Zervas. And Rose Lindgren from Sartell, Minn., told the group she was healed of bladder cancer five years ago after praying to Zervas.

Zervas was born Anna Cordelia Zervas in Moorhead, Minn., on Apr. 7, 1900. Even as a young girl, she had a deep interior life, taking great pains to prepare for her first holy Communion and walking a mile daily to attend Mass. She left home for the
Order of St. Benedict in St. Joseph at age 15 in August 1915. Her letters home reflect her happiness, but she also battled with terrible homesickness. When she made her perpetual vows in 1922, she said that any doubts as to her vocation vanished. But by the following year, a peculiar skin disease attacked her body, which included terrible itching day and night.

Zervas continued her work as a music teacher at St. Mary’s School in Bismarck until eventually her condition made it impossible. Her body began to swell, her skin turning a deep red and burning. Her swollen limbs oozed and developed sores; her skin sloughed off in chunks and strips; thornlike stickers developed within her pores and had to be painfully removed. Zervas was diagnosed in 1924 at the University of Minnesota with pityriasis rubra pilaris, a chronic skin disease that had no medical treatments at the time. With the consent of her superiors, she was transferred to her parents' house in Moorhead, where her mother cared for her for two years until her death.

“The pains became more intense; the patient’s cheerfulness remained the same,” Father Kreuter wrote in, “An Apostle of Suffering in Our Day.” “Yes, Lord, send me more pain, but give me the strength to bear it,” is a prayer that was repeatedly uttered by Sister Annella in the midst of excruciating pains of body and anguish of soul which lasted almost continually for two long years.”

At the end, a priest brought the Blessed Sacrament and placed it on the communion table before her. “Peacefully, she passed away in the presence of her sacramental Lord, surrounded by her parents, brothers, and sisters reciting the rosary and a prayer to St. Benedict for a happy death on Aug. 14, 1926,” Father Kreuter wrote. “The penetrating, nauseating odor of corrupt flesh that had followed in the wake of her ailment disappeared altogether from the moment of her passing.” She was placed in her parish church in a simple casket of black in her religious habit, the crucifix she had kissed so often in her hands. From there she was moved to St. Joseph, where she is now buried.

Fighting euthanasia in Canada: Amanda Achtman is a millennial on a mission

By Zoe Romanowsky | Catholic News Agency

When the Canadian government began discussing the legalization of euthanasia for those whose deaths were “reasonably foreseeable,” 32-year-old Amanda Achtman said something in her began to stir. Her grandfather was in his mid-90s at the time and fit the description.

“There were a few of times, toward the end of his life, that he faced some truly challenging weeks and said he wanted to die,” Achtman recalled. “But thank God no physician could legally concede to a person’s suicidal ideation in such vulnerable moments. To all of our surprise—including his—his condition and his outlook improved considerably before his death at age 96.” Achtman and her grandfather were able to have a memorable final visit that “forged her character and became one of the greatest gifts he ever gave me.”

The experience of walking with her grandfather in his last days led Achtman to work that she believes is a calling. On Aug. 1, she launched a multifaceted cultural project called Dying to Meet You, which seeks to “humanize our conversations and experiences around suffering, death, meaning, and hope.” This mission is accomplished through a mix of interviews, short films, community events, and conversations.

“This cultural project is my primary mission, and I am grateful to be able to dedicate the majority of my energy to it,” Achtman told CNA.

Achtman was born and raised in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. She grew up in a Jewish-Catholic family with, she said, “a strong attachment to these two traditions that constitute the tenor of my complete personality.”

Her Polish-Jewish grandfather, with whom she had a very close relationship as a young adult, had become an atheist because of the Holocaust and was always challenging her to face up to the big questions of mortality and morality.

“One of the ways I did this was by traveling on the March of Remembrance and Hope Holocaust study trip to Germany and Poland when I was 18,” Achtman said. “My experiences listen-
Then, in 2021, the Canadian government began to remove injection,” Achtman explained. And, consent could be withdrawn any time before the lethal independent witnesses after a mandatory time of reflection. “The death request needed to be made in writing before two "grievous and irremediable condition."

In 2016, the Canadian government legalized euthanasia nationwide. The criterion to be killed in a hospital was informed consent on the part of an adult who was deemed to have a "grievous and irremediable condition."

“The death request needed to be made in writing before two independent witnesses after a mandatory time of reflection. And, consent could be withdrawn any time before the lethal injection,” Achtman explained. Then, in 2021, the Canadian government began to remove those safeguards. “The legislative change involved requiring only one witness, allowing the possible waiving of the need for final consent, and the removal, in many cases, of any reflection period,” Achtman told CNA.

“Furthermore, a new ‘track’ was invented for ‘persons whose natural death is not reasonably foreseeable.’ This meant that Canadians with disabilities became at greater risk of premature death through euthanasia. Once death-by-physician became seen as a human right, there was practically no limit as to who should ‘qualify.’ As long as killing is seen as a legitimate means to eliminate suffering, there is no limit to who could be at risk.” Euthanasia—now called medical assistance in dying (MAiD) in Canada—is set to further expand on March 17, 2024, to those whose sole underlying condition is “mental illness.” Last year, Dr. Louis Roy of the Quebec College of Physicians and Surgeons testified before a special joint committee that his organization thinks euthanasia should be expanded to infants with “severe malformations” and “grave and severe syndromes.”

Achtman followed the debates around end-of-life issues in Canada and wanted to figure out a way to restore “a right response to the reality of suffering and death in our lives.”

“The fact is, our mortality is part of what makes life precious, our relationships worth cherishing, and our lives worth giving out of love. That’s why we need to bring cultural renewal to death and dying, restoring our understanding of its meaning to the human condition.”

When it comes to the mission of Dying to Meet You, Achtman told CNA that “God has put on my heart two key objectives: the prevention of euthanasia and the encouragement of hope” and added that “the aim of this cultural project is to improve our cultural conversation and engagement around suffering, death, meaning, and hope through a mix of interviews, writing, videos, and events.”

Achtman said the project is an experiment in the themes Pope Francis speaks about often—encounter, accompaniment, going to the peripheries, and contributing to a fraternal spirit.

“There is a strong basis for opposition to euthanasia across almost all religions and cultures, traditionally speaking,” Achtman said. “Partly from my own upbringing in a Jewish-Catholic family, I am passionate about how the cultural richness of such a plurality of traditions in Canada can bolster and enrich our value of all human life.”

Many believe euthanasia is compassionate care for those who suffer. Shouldn’t we be able to do what we want with our own lives? And can suffering have any meaning for someone who doesn’t believe in God? Achtman said these questions remind her of something Mother Teresa said: “If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other,” as well as the John Donne quote “Each man’s death diminishes me, for I am involved in mankind.”

“Our lives are not wholly our own and how we live and die affects the communities to which we belong,” Achtman said. “That is not a religious argument but an empirical observation about human life. If someone lacks ties and is without family and social support, then that is the crisis to which the adequate response is presence and assistance—not abandonment or hastened death. As one of my heroes, Father Alfred Delp, put it, a suffering person makes an ongoing appeal to your inner nobility, to your sacrificial strength and capacity to love. Don’t miss the opportunity.”

How has God worked in your life?
How have you experienced God’s love or mercy?
What’s your testimony? What’s your vocation story?
Share your story with New Earth!

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Candles flickered as the sun dropped behind the earth, and flowers were placed lovingly along the sidewalk—an offering to the babies who have died at the Moorhead Red River Women’s Clinic this past year, along with their parents, extended family, and all they were meant to bless.

The 2023 40 Days for Life Fall Campaign closing gathering the evening of Nov. 5 also featured songs, several talks, and prayers—including for the abortion workers to someday see the truth.

Many of the several dozen sidewalk advocates gathered did not even see the figure in the large red cloak, white bonnet and black facemask at the corner of Highway 75 slip in behind them until the presentations had concluded, nor the large white flag, which read: “We Won’t Go Back: Bans Off Our Bodies.”

When approached, the person stepped backward as if frightened, but remained silent. Several advocates quietly commented on the creepiness of the figure, likening it to the Grim Reaper. But the shadowy presence did not deter those who had come to bring light, which shone through the sparks of their candles and the hope in their voices.

Light certainly shone brightly when Terry Melby stepped upon the flatbed truck and shared her own story of abortion and the lifetime of regret it had left.

Her father was a pastor, she said, and yet in college, she was among those clamoring for abortion rights, even though she vowed to never have one herself. “I didn’t even really know what an abortion was,” she admitted. “But I thought it should be safe and legal.”

Melby was already a mother of two, finishing her nursing degree with the goal of someday delivering babies when, newly divorced, she became pregnant. “The bottom fell out of my world,” she said. She couldn’t imagine herself as a single mother of three, so when a loved one advised abortion, she felt she needed to consider it.

Melby asked her mentors at college what happens in an abortion, and they assured her it would just involve a mass of cells no larger than the tip of a pencil, with no nerve endings. She became convinced and figured that if she did it quickly and early enough it would be OK.

“The day of the abortion, I entered the back door of a private facility,” she said. The person who performed the procedure was an infertility specialist who helped women become pregnant by day, and in off hours, aborted the pregnancies of mostly college students.

“I cried all day that day,” she said, and during the procedure, she tried to yell, “Stop!” Though unsure if she actually got the words out, by the time she thought it, she knew the baby was either already dead or dying, she said. “I knew I had just killed my baby.”

That reality haunted her, and despite seeking forgiveness in the church, relief didn’t come. “At Christmas time, everywhere I looked I saw Baby Jesus and Mary, and I knew I was the worst mother in the world.”

She began conceiving a suicide plan. But it was thwarted by a loving and faithful uncle, who had sensed in prayer that his niece was in trouble, and convinced her she needed to live for her children.

“Women who have had abortions live in that state of regret,” Melby said. “But later, I finally understood who Jesus really was. He loved me so much that he died for me.” The healing process could begin. “Old things began passing away.”

Her uncle, Melby said, had listened to the Lord and responded, and she encouraged those gathered to do the same. “Thank you for loving the broken women like me,” she said, and for the continued prayers for the women who come to this facility.

“Thank you for opening your arms for us down the road.”

“The tentacles of abortion reach out in so many ways,” she continued, into family lines and so many loved ones deprived of that child’s love and presence.

Ending with a reading of 2 Cor. 4:6, Melby reflected the little lights being held out around her: “For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of the darkness,’ has shown in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of [Jesus] Christ.”
Do you know where we are?
The answer will be revealed in the January New Earth.

Where in the diocese are we?
Last month’s photo is from Carmel of Mary Monastery near Wahpeton.