Coping with COVID-19
Diocesan pastors share trends, changes, and lessons learned

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From Bishop Folda:
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COVID-19 and the use of vaccines

ince last spring, the COVID-19 pandemic has gripped the world, and it continues to impact our nation, our families, and our Church in a profound way. But now, after months of intense work and speculation, several potential vaccines have emerged that give hope for substantial protection from the virus, and more are in development. In fact, at the time of this writing, one of these vaccines has been approved for use in the United States, and approval of another seems imminent. But questions have now arisen about the ethical side of these vaccines and whether we as Catholics should take the vaccines that are now being distributed. Recent reports have revealed that some of the vaccines, like many others already in common use, have certain problems from an ethical point of view, specifically their connection to the use of cell lines derived from past abortions.

Many decades ago, researchers developed cell lines that derived from the tissue of aborted infants, and these cell lines have become widely used in many types of medical research, including the development of vaccines. The Church teaches that it was morally wrong for researchers and pharmaceutical companies to create abortion-derived cell lines. However, because any connection to the past original act of abortion is extremely remote, people may for serious reasons use vaccines produced with such cell lines. Based on documents from the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Academy for Life, it is clear that preserving one's health and that of others outweighs the very remote association with past abortions which were neither desired nor intended by those now using the vaccines.

It is also important to note that the vaccines do not use embryonic stem cells. Nor do they use cells from actual aborted fetal tissue. Some of the manufacturers use the cell lines for actual production of a vaccine, while others only use the cells for testing. And still others do not use the questionable cell lines at all.

While it can be morally acceptable for persons to receive vaccines that involve ethically problematic sources, the Church tells us that it is also necessary for recipients to register their protest and to advocate for the availability of vaccines that have no links to unethical practices. Vaccine recipients can express this directly to their health care providers, and some pharmaceutical companies have already responded by changing their development protocols. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has also strongly advocated to the federal government for ethically produced vaccines that have no connection to immoral practices like abortion.

A few voices have claimed that Catholics should not and cannot receive any vaccines that have any connection with abortion-derived cell lines. However, this objection does not reflect Catholic teaching. The faithful may, without qualms of conscience, receive the available COVID-19 vaccines to protect their own health and the health of others. They may also, in conscience, decide to decline the use of such vaccines or to wait for others that have no ethical taint. Unfortunately, no such vaccine is nearing availability, and the urgency of the current situation allows for the use of vaccines that are less than perfect in an ethical sense.

Some have wondered if there can be a mandate that requires the use of vaccines. There will always be certain individuals who should not receive vaccines for medical reasons determined in consultation with a physician. And the principle of autonomy may lead others to consider the use of vaccines in general to be unacceptable. Certain religious denominations, like the Christian Science Church, teach against the use of any vaccines at all. But there is no Catholic teaching that the reception of vaccines, including those that rely on fetal cell lines from abortions that happened long ago, is sinful.

The social teaching of the Church requires that all of us work together for the common good, and so it would seem reasonable in the current circumstances to encourage as many people as possible to be vaccinated. The COVID-19 virus has proven to

"The faithful may, without qualms of conscience, receive the available COVID-19 vaccines to protect their own health and the health of others. They may also, in conscience, decide to decline the use of such vaccines or to wait for others that have no ethical taint."

-Bishop John Folda
be very dangerous, especially to vulnerable segments of our population. The current pandemic has been devastating in its effects, and by now many of us know someone who lost their life to COVID-19 or was profoundly impacted by its effects. It would seem reasonable, not only for ourselves but for those we love and for the sake of the common good, to consider receiving the vaccination that will be available in the near future.

Vaccines have long been used to protect public health and to ward off the effects of various diseases that once devastated the population: smallpox, polio, mumps, measles, and whooping cough. And getting an annual flu shot has become a normal practice for many of us. The COVID-19 vaccines are still very new, and some of their effects remain unknown. Every medical procedure carries certain risks, and vaccines are no exception. So an individual must weigh the benefits and the burdens of receiving the vaccine, and there is no absolute duty on the part of all persons to be vaccinated.

But there are also risks to declining this or any other vaccine for a dangerous disease, and those risks affect not only ourselves but also those around us, especially those who are most vulnerable. So whether or not to be vaccinated is a personal and prudential decision, but not necessarily a private one. While Catholic teaching upholds the values of autonomy and self-determination, we also understand that autonomy is not an absolute right (as pro-abortion advocates believe). Our self-determination is always conditioned by the common good, the needs of our brothers and sisters. With the pandemic still causing great harm in many parts of the world, including our own state, and with a large portion of the population still at risk, accepting a safe and effective vaccine is justified as a moral good, an act of solidarity with our brothers and sisters, and even an act of charity and mercy.
Saint of the month
Saint Raymond of Pennafort

By Paul Braun

Feast day: Jan. 7
Patron: Canonists
Birth: 1175  Death: 1275

St. Raymond of Pennafort was born in Spain in 1175. From childhood, Raymond had a tender love and devotion to the Blessed Mother. He finished his studies at an early age and became a famous teacher. He then gave up all his honors and entered the Order of the Dominicans. Raymond was humble, very close to God, and won many sinners as converts to Christianity. He founded the Order of Our Lady of Ransom. The brave religious of this Order devoted themselves to saving poor Christians captured by the Moors.

Raymond went with King James of Spain to the Island of Majorca to preach about Jesus. The king was a man of great qualities, but he let himself be ruled by passions and was in a relationship with a woman who wasn’t his wife. Raymond commanded him to send the woman away. The king said he would, but he did not keep his promise, so Raymond decided to leave the island.

The king declared he would punish any ship captain who brought Raymond back to Barcelona. Putting all his trust in God, Raymond spread his cloak upon the water, tied up one corner of it to a stick for a sail, made the Sign of the Cross, stepped onto the cloak, and sailed for six hours until he reached Barcelona. This miracle moved the king. He was sorry for what he had done, and he became a true follower of Christ. Raymond was 100 years old when he died. He was canonized by Pope Clement VIII in 1601.

Historical information from Catholic Online.

DIOCESE OF FARGO OFFICIAL APPOINTMENTS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Most Rev. John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo, has made the following appointments, announcements and/or decrees.

Rev. Bernard A. Pfau Administrator of St. James Basilica, Jamestown; St. Margaret Mary, Buchanan; and St. Mathias, Windsor, effective November 7, 2020, and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Deacon Patrick J. Breen has been appointed Permanent Deacon of Sts. Anne and Joachim Church, Fargo, effective October 31, 2020 and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Deacon Donald J. Brewer has been appointed Permanent Deacon of St. Cecilia’s Church, Velva, and Sts. Peter and Paul Church, Karlruhe, effective October 31, 2020 and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Deacon Tony John Finneman, a permanent deacon of the Bismarck Diocese now living in Fargo, has been appointed Permanent Deacon of Holy Cross Church, West Fargo, effective November 18, 2020 and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Deacon Terrance O. Fischer has been appointed Permanent Deacon of St. Anthony’s Church, Fargo, effective October 31, 2020 and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Deacon Curtis J. Kaufman has been appointed Permanent Deacon of St. Rose Church, Hillsboro, and St. William Church, Argusville, effective October 31, 2020 and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Deacon Kirk P. Ripplinger has been appointed Permanent Deacon of St. James Basilica, Jamestown, St. Margaret Mary Church, Buchanan, and St. Mathias Church, Windsor, effective October 31, 2020 and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Deacon Bartholomew Salazar has been appointed Permanent Deacon of St. John’s Church, New Rockford, and Sts. Peter and Paul Church, McHenry, effective October 31, 2020 and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Deacon Benedict A. Seitz has been appointed Permanent Deacon of Sts. Anne and Joachim Church, Fargo, effective October 31, 2020 and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Deacon Jeffrey L. Vaagen has been appointed Permanent Deacon of St. Joseph’s Church, Devils Lake, effective October 31, 2020 and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Ronald Marvin Burris, formerly a priest of the Diocese of Fargo (ordained December 29, 1985), was dismissed from the clerical state on October 15, 2020 due to persistent illicit absence from ministry.
Prayer Intention of Pope Francis

Human fraternity
May the Lord give us the grace to live in full fellowship with our brothers and sisters of other religions, praying for one another, open to all.

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

In their loneliness, comfort them. In their sorrows, strengthen them. In their frustrations, remind them that through suffering the soul is purified. Show them that they are needed by the Church; they are needed by souls; they are needed for the work of redemption. Amen.

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Which is more important to us as Christians, Jesus’ crucifixion or Resurrection?

Father Kurtis Gunwall
Pastor of St. Anthony’s, Mooreton and Sts. Peter and Paul’s, Mantador

I’ve heard this question before and have learned to look at it from two perspectives—the theological importance that shapes our knowledge and love of God and a personal, particular importance to me at this time in my life.

To begin, let us look at both Jesus’ crucifixion and his Resurrection, not one or the other.

Sometimes we don’t reach the right or most truthful answer because we start with a question that points away from the best answer. We are often presented with questions like this: “Is it ‘A’ or ‘B?”’ The questioner is forcing the answer to be either/or when the most truthful answer may be both/and, a little of both, or even something different than “A” or “B.”

Current example: “Do masks stop COVID-19?” Many people ask as if it’s either “yes” or “no.” I was happy to hear an epidemiologist on the radio answer by providing information on types of masks and explained how the average three-ply cloth stops about 60% of airborne droplets. He did not answer a simple “yes” or “no” because that would not have been accurate or as fully true.

So back to the more vital question, what is the most important moment in Jesus’ life?

...Paul said he desired to know and preach nothing but Christ crucified. He doesn’t deny the importance of the Resurrection. It is both/and when he preaches the Good News. — Father Kurtis Gunwall

Let me begin explaining that there is no single moment or event of his life that is most important. For example, there is no single moment of your life that formed you into the person you are right now. There may be a few moments that were more transformative, but without the others, you would not be the person you are and you would not be ready to do all that God has called and prepared you to do. Even more so, Jesus is the Eternal Son of God, the Incarnate Word made flesh. Therefore, each moment of his life is part of the whole: his incarnation, birth, miracles and teachings, passion, death, and Resurrection, sending the Holy Spirit, forming and guiding His Body, the Church. To choose one as “most” important over all the others proposes a false/inaccurate dichotomy.

I spoke with someone who is not Catholic who took the initial question and explained that Christians should not have crucifixes because Jesus is risen. He isn’t on the cross anymore, so Catholics are mistaken. This thought is built on the belief that Jesus’ Resurrection is the most important truth of the Christian faith. My response is that St. Paul and the early Church were, evidently, also mistaken about this since Paul said he desired to know and preach nothing but Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:23, 2:2; Gal. 3:1). He doesn’t deny the importance of the Resurrection. It is both/and when he preaches the Good News.

Another piece of this approach is built upon God’s eternal plan as it is found in the law, history, wisdom, and prophets of the Jewish Scriptures. Jesus, the Incarnate Word, fulfills that plan in the whole of his life, death, and Resurrection. It is not just both/and (the crucifixion and Resurrection) but “all of the above” including God’s eternal plan from “before creation” to “beyond the end of time.”

Although personally and liturgically we will continually contemplate and thank God for the particular moments of grace, theologically we do best to keep returning to the fullness of faith in Jesus. We live in and see the wholeness of God present as he creates, reconciles, and redeems us.

Editor’s note: If you have a question to suggest for consideration in a future column, send to news@fargodiocese.org.
Familiar Fargo-area icon finds a new home
By Paul Braun

Did you know that the Fargo Diocese once had its own seminary? It was located just south of the Edgewood Golf Course in Fargo and closed down in June of 2011. In 2014, the complex was razed to make room for a housing development. Many items from the seminary were saved, from furniture to windows to works of art.

One of the most recognizable features of the seminary was the iconic cross that stood high above the chapel. The demolition contractor tried to preserve the cross for future use, but it was slightly damaged when it was lowered from its perch. Since then, a proper home has been sought for the cross, but none was found… until now.

Blessed Sacrament Church in West Fargo once had a cross in its prayer garden until it was damaged by a wind storm. Parishioner John Mrozla held possession of the seminary cross and suggested to the parish council and Father Gary Luiten that it be used for the prayer garden. The Cardinal Muench Seminary cross was repaired and installed in October 2020. It now stands in the garden, accompanied by a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, on the north side of the church.

On a side note, in 2018 a young parishioner of Blessed Sacrament, Matthew Fischer, now a senior at West Fargo Sheyenne High School, contacted Father Luiten about an Eagle Scout Project. He hoped to do something for Blessed Sacrament to enhance the landscape. Father Luiten and the Pastoral Council members gave approval for Matthew to build three wooden benches. Two of the benches are anchored on each side of a flower bed and the third has been placed in front of the Mary Statue. These benches, along with the Cardinal Muench cross, make the prayer garden a peaceful and prayerful place at Blessed Sacrament.

The cross that was once atop Cardinal Muench Seminary in Fargo now stands in the prayer garden at Blessed Sacrament Church in West Fargo. (Paul Braun | New Earth)

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Monsignor Valentine G. Gross, 83, of Napoleon, passed away Nov. 15, 2020, at the Napoleon Care Center. Mass of Christian Burial was held Nov. 20 at St. Philip Neri Church in Napoleon. He was buried at St. Philip Neri Cemetery.

Monsignor Gross was born Jan. 20, 1937 to George and Frances (Schwartzenberger) Gross on a farm south of Napoleon. He attended country school south of Napoleon.

Ever since he was a young child, he felt called to become a priest. His brothers and sisters used to “play church.” They would sit in pretend pews and then come up to receive “communion” from Val.

To help fulfill his dream, his parents allowed him to attend St. John’s High School in Collegeville, Minn., graduating in 1955. He graduated from St. John’s College Seminary in 1959 and entered St. Paul Seminary, St. Paul. As a high school junior and again as a college freshman, the aptitude test showed that he was not intellectually fit to be a priest. He was asked to leave the seminary twice. By the grace of God and with the encouragement of his family, Father Bolte, and his lifetime mentor Monsignor Vetter, Val continued his studies. On June 8, 1963, he was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Fargo at his home parish, St. Anthony Church, south of Napoleon.

Monsignor Gross’s first assignment was to Holy Spirit, Fargo, where he served as associate pastor from 1963–69. He then served as associate pastor at St. Boniface, Walhalla, for one year, until he was pastor of St. Michael, Grand Forks, where he served until 1975. He was then the Rector of Cardinal Muench Seminary. He held that position until 1990, when he was appointed pastor of Blessed Sacrament, West Fargo. In 1995, he was asked by Bishop Sullivan to start a new parish, Sts. Anne and Joachim, in Fargo.

Pope John Paul II elevated Monsignor Gross to the rank of Prelate of Honor to His Holiness (giving him the title of Monsignor) in Dec. 1999. He was invested as Monsignor on Feb. 14, 2000.

In the words of Monsignor Gross, “The greatest gift of my priesthood has been the privilege of celebrating the Mass: offering the sacrifice on the altar, sensing the miracle that God performs through the work of my hands, and giving his Heavenly Food to those whose hunger can only truly be satisfied through the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.”

Monsignor Gross is survived by his three sisters, Mary Vetter, Bismarck; Donna Hoffman, Long View, Texas; and Veronica (Wilfred) Masset, LaMoure; three sisters-in-law, Christine Gross, Bismarck; Mary Ann Gross, Bismarck; and Elaine Gross, Napoleon; two brothers-in-law, Edwin Ternes, Bismarck; and Don Hertz, Bismarck; 66 nieces and nephews and many great-nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brothers, Clemens, Joe, and George Gross; sisters, Frances (Clarence) Lindeman, Barbara Ternes, Helen Hertz, and Lucille (Terry) Scherr; brothers-in-law, John Vetter and John Hoffman; nephew, Glen Masset; and niece, Veronica Deis.

Loyola Mary Metzger was born Sept. 27, 1919 in Hannah, N.D. the second of 11 children born to Severius and Lucy (Perius) Metzger. She attended country schools during her elementary years and high school in Wales, St. Alphonsus High School in Langdon, and Sacred Heart Academy in Fargo, where she graduated.

In 1938, she entered the Presentation Sisters. At her reception as a novice, she was given the name Sister Mary Petronilla. In 1944, she made her final profession of vows.

Sister Petronilla graduated from North Dakota Agricultural College with a Bachelor’s degree in Education; from Creighton University in Omaha, Neb. with a Master’s degree in Administration, and from Seattle University in Seattle, Wash. with a Master’s degree in Religious Education. Later she received a certificate in Theology from Regis College in Toronto, Ontario. She did a year’s internship in Spiritual Direction at The Cenacle Retreat House in Wayzata, Minn.

Sister Petronilla taught at St. Anthony’s School, St. Mary’s School, and Shanley High School in Fargo, and was Principal at St. Alphonsus High School in Langdon until the school was closed. She was adult Religious Education Coordinator in the Langdon area and at Blessed Sacrament Church in West Fargo. In 1985, she began her work at Presentation Prayer Center where she served until 2013, albeit she continued to see individuals for spiritual direction until a few months before her death.

In 1987, she developed the Pastoral Care Department at Riverview Place, Fargo, and was active there for 10 years. During this time, she also did chaplaincy work at Villa Maria in Fargo.

In 1976, Sister Petronilla was elected president of the Congregation and held that position for six years. Previously, she had held the positions of Director of Aspirants, Mistress of Novices, and Administrative Council Member. During her term as President, she was a governing board member of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and an officer of the North American Conference of Presentation Sisters. Sister Petronilla loved spending time in nature, was an avid reader, and enjoyed music.

She is survived by the members of her Religious Community; her sisters Marilyn Gapp (Art), Josephine Bittner (Ken); many nieces and nephews; and sisters-in-law Alice, Lorraine, and MaryAnn Metzger. She was preceded in death by her parents, her siblings Silverius, Nestor, Emeric, Arnold, Roy, Ray, Geraldine, and Maurice.

Her funeral was held Oct. 17, 2020 at Nativity Church in Fargo.
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Mask mandates, shut downs, empty schools, canceled events, and pared-down holiday events made the past year unforgettable. For the faithful, 2020 changed how we worship, teach the faith, and support one another.

In August 2020, Ministry Brands, a national religious technology firm, conducted a survey of Catholic and Protestant clergy and office managers around the country to find out how their individual churches and parishes are coping with COVID-19. Six-hundred-forty Protestant churches and 792 Catholic parishes responded to the survey. The questions focused on:

• Challenges the churches faced
• How or if a church was offering worship services
• How churches are engaging members

*New Earth* was interested in how local churches compared to churches nationwide, so we conducted our own survey of pastors in the Fargo Diocese. We asked some of the same questions as Ministry Brands and a few of our own. We sent 66 surveys, and 38 pastors responded. For the purpose of this article, *New Earth* compared local results with only Catholic parishes surveyed nationwide. All answers are anonymous, and all graphics and text presented from the two surveys are used with permission.

**QUESTION #1**

**How is your parish offering Sunday Mass during the pandemic?**

Responses to the national survey show that in-person worship and reception of the sacraments remain important to parishioners. Among the Catholic parishes surveyed, 83% offer Masses in-person and online, while 14% offer in-person only. However, parishes in the Fargo Diocese are more evenly split. Parishes offering in-person and online Masses total 47%, compared to the 83% nationwide. Parishes offering in-person only amount to 53%, which far outpaces the national results.

One possibility for the disparity between the diocesan and the national results could be the rural makeup of the Fargo Diocese. Many smaller parishes likely have had little to no need for live-streaming Masses due to their smaller congregations,
ability to social-distance during Mass, or financial constraints to acquire live-streaming capabilities. Most of the parishes in the Fargo Diocese offering live-streams are in larger communities, where social distancing requirements put a strain on the space available in the church.

**QUESTION #2**

**Have you invested in new or upgraded technology since the pandemic started?**

Thirty-two Fargo Diocese pastors answered this question. Twenty-one of 32 pastors, or 66%, indicated they either purchased or upgraded their technology to allow for live-streaming in some form. Some of the responses stated:

- “We have purchased cameras and a USB conference microphone for virtual (online) meetings and classes, and have dedicated one PC for video-conferencing. We will be purchasing video equipment to stream Mass.”
- “We bought an iPad and a cord to plug into the sound system ($300). We also are paying for a parish website ($240 per year) and a service call Flocknotes ($150 per year) and Formed.org ($1,000). We have bought TVs for live-streaming ($3,400). We also started online giving.”
- “Started with streaming to Facebook, then upgraded to streaming to Facebook and YouTube. And also purchased a low range transmitter for cars to listen to Mass on the radio in the parking lot.”
- “An online recording device was temporary lent to the parish to live-stream Mass during COVID-19.”

**Question #1 - National Survey**

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<th>Mass online only</th>
<th>Mass in-person only</th>
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<td>84%</td>
<td>.02%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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**Question #1 – Local Survey**

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<th>Mass In-person and online</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
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</table>

Monsignor Schlesselmann distributes communion at Holy Spirit Church in Fargo on May 10, the first Sunday that Mass was publicly available after the state shutdown in March 2020. (Kristina Lahr | New Earth)
QUESTION #3
How are you engaging with parishioners during the pandemic?
There are a variety of ways parishes answered this question including everything from video conferencing, social media, and online Masses to texting, email, and phone calls. As referenced earlier, the biggest takeaway from this question is the number of parishes nationwide who are offering online and in-person Masses together compared to local parishes, who appear to shy away from offering online and live-stream options.

QUESTION #4
Have your adult education methods changed?
This question is Fargo Diocese-unique. Some of the comments from pastors were:
• “They have not, we are trying to keep it as normal as possible. We continue to host adult education with social distancing practices in place.”
• “We sometimes have to have participants of a Bible study attend via Zoom.”
• “Trying to do something with The Chosen video in-person. Haven’t found video-conferencing very helpful.”
• “CANCELED.”
• “Social distancing is taking place and adult ed classes are meeting in the church space.”

QUESTION #5
Has your RCIA program changed?
This is another Fargo Diocese-unique question. New Earth wondered if parishes who offer RCIA classes were doing anything different to try to ensure RCIA
candidates would be welcomed into the Church at the Easter Vigil (with or without COVID-19 restrictions). Some of the responses we received were:

- “To mitigate the rate of infections, instructions are done one-on-one instead of meeting in a big group.”
- “We continue the in-person RCIA but have chosen resources to allow us to move online easily if the need arises.”
- “Yes, we have class, Zoom, and meet with people individually to help them come into the Church.”
- “Postponed.”
- “We are sending catechumens to a neighboring parish.”

**QUESTION #6**

**Have you restarted religious education programs?**

This question was asked in both the national survey and locally. Nationally, respondents were evenly split (337 not restarting and 329 restarting). Among our local parishes, *New Earth* gave respondents an opportunity to explain their answers instead of just a yes or no answer. Of 35 who answered the question, 33 parishes have resumed religious education classes, one has not and one indicated the parish doesn’t offer classes. Pastors were varied in their answers on how their parishes were conducting classes:

- “For elementary grades, about half of the families have decided to do RE at home. For in-person sessions, students are required to wear masks. For middle schools and high school, all classes are virtual (online).”
- “To minimize any cross-contamination between school and faith formation students, we are not using our school building’s classrooms until the pandemic is over.”
- “Yes, using packets to work on at home along with the Alive in Christ books and weekly teleconferences to encourage parents and students.”
- “Went to one-time per month instead of weekly and helping parents teach it at home.”
- “Yes. Only changes mandated by the situation; option for ‘home-schooling’ if parents wish. Some have.”

**QUESTION #7**

**Have you had to make changes or reductions in staff?**

This question was asked in both the national and local surveys. Thankfully, most parishes across the country and in our diocese did not have to reduce their staff or make cutbacks.

**QUESTION #8**

**If your parish has a school, have you adapted new technology to provide online or in-person instruction?**

Very few parishes in the Fargo Diocese support a school, so of the 33 pastors who answered this question, it’s not surprising that 24 answered “not applicable.” What was surprising and encouraging was that among the nine pastors who answered, all said that they adopted new technologies for their schools to keep learning progressing whether online or in-person.

**QUESTION #9**

**Do you anticipate changing your Christmas Mass schedule?**

Christmas 2020 has already been celebrated, but not at the time of the *New Earth* survey. This was a Fargo Diocese-unique question to see how COVID-19 might affect one of the Church’s most holy celebrations. Priests were given permission to celebrate an additional Mass to accommodate an expected increase in participation by the faithful. Some pastors made changes, but others took a wait-and-see position:

- “We are adding two additional Masses.”
- “Still to be determined. We may not, I don’t think the older people who have been staying away from Mass will attend on a day when there is a chance there is even more people.”
- “Adding a Mass to enable people spread out more, social distancing, and more attendance.”
- “Yes, going from one children’s Mass to three Masses on Christmas Eve.”
- “We will offer one more Mass on Christmas Eve and one more on Christmas day.”

**Question #7 – National Survey**

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**Question #7 – Local Survey**

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• “Extra Masses will be added as our children’s Mass is usually packed to the walls. We discussed talking about a Mass with mask-only for those who want to use that option. We are going to have a professional musician do a concert for us on Sunday, Dec. 27 for the homebound and care center residents who have not had contact since March. They watch the live-stream Mass every week but not able to receive the Eucharist.”
• “With the ability to have Mass transmitted via projector and screen into social hall, I believe we will keep our regular schedule.”

QUESTION #10
What have you learned about parish life in adapting to COVID-19?

This was another Fargo Diocese-unique question. Responses from pastors included:

• “There is a growing sense for me that we are losing touch with people who are no longer coming to Mass in-person. Things like scheduling for the liturgical Ministries, and people showing up has become more challenging.”
• “Any decision for safety is either praised or criticized. I find this interesting. Not sure about what will change when the pandemic is over. Being new here, still exploring what we do.”
• “I am concerned parishioners believe live-streamed Mass is the same as in-person Mass. The fact of not receiving Communion does not seem to be a big deal if one makes a ‘spiritual communion.’”
• “It has afforded the opportunity or excuse to be in better contact with parishioners, through database management, phone calls, and vlogs.”
• “I’m confident we will continue offering our Sunday Eucharist online.”
• “Prayer/sacraments are showing themselves to be more crucial to people’s lives (not just their ‘spiritual lives’) than perhaps many realized before.”
• “Allowing people to join online even when an event is held in-person was helpful for a few families. They said that they would have liked to participate in other events in the last couple years but could not get out at night due to kids at home. Listening/joining online was an advantage.”
• “Communicate as widely and in as many ways as possible.”
• “It will be a time where things that were already dying will finally be dead, which will allow us to focus on what is actually bearing fruit and having vitality when the pandemic is done.”
• “We cannot continue this way indefinitely. Parish life needs in-person meetings, meals, and retreats. Teleconferencing and using live-streams is a Band-Aid that does not replace in-person interaction. Nevertheless, I think live-streams and putting everything online reaches people that would not be at Church. It is a great evangelization tool and will continue after the pandemic ends.”
My December 2020 graduation from the University of North Dakota (UND) has led me to reflect on my college years. Many things have changed since my freshman year—my hair grew longer, my classes got harder—but through all the growing, changing, and renovations, one thing has been steadfast in my university life: the Newman Center. The Newman Center has been a comfort and refuge amidst this wild semester. This year especially, both the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) Bible study that I led and the one I attended provided me with the much-needed human interaction lacking in my academic classes. My courses were hybrid this fall, which meant we met once a week and attended the rest of the classes through Zoom. This meant long days in my apartment staring at a screen with little more than my houseplants to keep me company. Bible studies provided me with a community that strives to follow Christ—a source of hope and solidarity in these bizarre times.

Since freshman year, Newman has become my second home. Whether it be for Mass, Bible studies, discipleship, student board meetings, or praying in the chapel, I found myself inside its brick façade nearly every day of the week. I deepened my relationship with Christ, and I desired to share the love of God with others. Sometimes I wonder what my life would have looked like if I had not encountered the Newman Center back in 7th grade.

I have three older siblings who also attended UND, which means I’ve witnessed ten welcome weekends at UND. As the youngest sibling, I earned the title of “move-in crew.” Along with arguing about who had to move the bed, my family also had a tradition of going to Mass at the Newman Center after moving one of my siblings in. As the years went by and I grew in my faith, I found it inspiring that college students would desire to pursue their faith in a culture that seems so contrary to it. When I decided that I wanted to go to UND, I also decided I wanted to make my faith a priority.

As an eleven-year-old, I could never have imagined the impact the Newman Center would have on my life. I am incredibly grateful for Newman because it not only provides opportunities for spiritual formation, but it has also graced me with life-long authentic friends who challenge me in my faith. I’m thankful that Newman offers easy access to the sacraments on campus. Daily Mass, adoration, and confession have been safe harbors from the sometimes-overwhelming sea of college life. Having a church so close to where I live has kindled within me the fire of faith and the love of Christ.

Being able to attend adoration almost daily on campus is extremely special to me. No matter what kind of day I am having, entering the quiet and tranquil chapel to meet Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament always puts my life into focus. Adoration at Newman has given me a place to go when the rigors of university life are too much. It became the haven where I surrendered the deepest longings of my heart to the one who knows me better than I know myself.

I am but one person, and countless others no doubt share the same life-giving effects of Newman. The Newman Center is so much more than a place that provides fun social activities. It is a place to cultivate friendships and a lasting faith. I can safely say that my life at the Newman has given me the best gift anyone could receive—a love for Christ and his children and a desire to share this with others.
As November began, I had to take a 12-day plunge into quarantine. The worst part was I received my call an hour-and-a-half before a funeral. Luckily, my neighbor could get here quickly and sub for me.

I regretted missing the funeral. Amanda, the 95-year-old woman, and her husband (who died five years ago) were the heartbeat of the town. Every activity and fundraiser seemed enriched by their presence and involvement.

After the husband died, Amanda moved to the local nursing home. Amanda did not call it “home.” Home was a two-story house on main street, where she would invite friends to watch the parade every July 4.

I renewed my acquaintance with Amanda the first Saturday that I served at the nursing home. It was the weekend after July 4. There sat Amanda in the front row of chairs with her bright red sweater and a big smile. She was ready for a great day. That is the way she was almost every Saturday. Once in a while she would take a back-row seat and sleep during liturgy, but usually she was alert and singing. She could hold the tune in her 90s and sing from memory—especially at Christmas!

The day before the funeral, I met with her two daughters and told them some precious stories about their mom. One day I was called to the home to see another resident. As I was leaving, I thought I would stick my head in the cafeteria. There was Amanda, smartly dressed, having a cup of coffee. I asked if I could join her. She graciously received me and asked if I wanted coffee and a treat. She got up to get it for me. We had a great visit.

As I was leaving, I said to Amanda, “Isn’t it great to live in a place where the coffee is always on, and there are treats at all times of the day?” Amanda looked at me with a long stare, bit her lip, and said, “Father, I don’t live here! I’m a volunteer!” I smiled and said, “Amanda, I forgot about the big house on main street. That is where you live, right?” “Yes,” she said sternly.

After another post-Mass coffee and chat as I was bundling up my stuff to go home, Amanda showed up dressed in a beautiful black coat, hat, and mufflers to keep her hands warm.

She was coming my way. I knew she would want a ride home, and I had to figure out a way to let her down easily.

I asked her where she was going. She said she was looking for a ride home to the house on main street. She looked at me like I could give her a ride. I said, “You might not know this but our city passed a new law this week. It says that no city resident can pick up hitchhikers. If we get caught, we lose our license. I can’t give you a ride. I’m so sorry.”

She looked me over and said, “I did not know that.” She turned around and went down the hall to her room.

DUE TO HER MUSIC TALENTS, WHENEVER I TRIED OUT A NEW SONG ON THE MASS ATTENDEES, I WOULD SIT DOWN NEXT TO AMANDA, GIVE HER A BOOK OPEN TO THE PAGE, AND TEACH HER THE SONG BEFORE MASS. SHE WAS ALWAYS APPRECIATIVE, AND I ENJOYED HER BEAUTIFUL HIGH SOPRANO VOICE LEADING THE NEW SONG.

For as graceful as Amanda was during her time with us, I am sure she is dancing with her husband, Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit in the banquet and dance halls of heaven!

Most everyone has someone in the family or neighborhood with memory lapses. The hard part is meeting them where they are that day and walking with them on the journey. My tip is to meet them with good humor and a friendly smile. The person will be happy, and you will be happy for trying.
Tell me if this sounds familiar. You see a young family in the front of Mass with at least four kids under the age of six. The parents are strategically situated on either end to play zone defense against this passel of children. The two-year-old has a suspicious face, and the four-year-old won’t leave the baby in his car seat alone. Trouble is brewing. Well my friends, this would be the Wilburn family.

When I thought about the different ways my wife and I work to instill the faith in our family, one aspect stood out: we sit at the front of Mass. We don’t do this for show; if anything, we do this even at the risk of being on display. Our rationale is fairly simple. If we don’t sit in the front, our kids don’t get as much out of Mass. I would like to submit to you today three reasons I encourage my fellow parents to move on up to the front.

**REASON 1:**
**BEING IN THE FRONT ALLOWS YOU TO POINT OUT WHAT’S HAPPENING TO YOUR KIDS**

Our kids are smarter than we give them credit for. My six-year-old can recite back to me the entire plot of the show he just watched. It follows that I also believe he’s capable of understanding our faith when presented through the story of salvation. If they get distracted, which they will, I ask them to find certain saints in the church. When the consecration comes, my wife always does a great job telling the kids that it’s Jesus who the priest is lifting up. It’s also been helpful to pick up kids books from Hurley’s or Holy Family Bookstore that specifically explain the Mass through pictures. It’s just another way for our kids to follow along and keep their minds on the liturgy.

**REASON 2:**
**TERRIBLE SPOT, TERRIBLE KIDS**

Imagine you’re three or four feet tall in the back of a church like Sts. Anne and Joachim in Fargo. The only thing you see is the backside of the person in front of you. It’s no wonder kids lose interest with what’s happening. The farther back we are the more squirrely the kids get. I know there might be some opposition on this point. You might say, “well, my kids already act terrible, so if we sit in the front, it will be that much worse.” I disagree. Even though I still have to take my kids out of Mass like other parents, when I bring them back in, they are up front. And, as I said before, being up front allows them to focus more. However, I will admit sitting in the front asks something more of you, which leads me to my next point.

**REASON 3:**
**IT RAISES THE BAR FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY**

My wife and I are not immune to the occasional tantrum overtaking our smaller family members. Sitting in the front of church, I know this is even more apparent. I see it as a challenge for me to expect more of my kids. Being in a visible spot, there is not the temptation to let it slide, and this benefits the children. They know that certain actions have certain consequences every time. You might be surprised how quickly kids stop testing the system when they figure out the path goes somewhere they don’t want to be.

I want to be clear when I say I am not advocating for the focus of your Mass to be on other people seeing you and their perceptions. It shouldn’t be. However, I do think a healthy parish is like a family. I find people in the parish give my kids more benefit of the doubt than I do, but like any of my other extended family, I ask my kids to be respectful of them.

Ultimately, we sit in front to give our kids the best chance of growing in relationship with God. In any other facet of life, whether it be sports, concerts, or talks, we always seek to get the best seats. So when you go to Mass, don’t make it any different. Get the best seats in the house. Sit up front.
It was early in the 20th century, war loomed on the horizon for the world, and a young, newly ordained priest rode a ship bound for home after leaving Rome, the place of his formation and ordination. A half century later, this same man rode a ship back to Rome, donned with the red cap of a cardinal, on his way to making history.

This provides a brief backdrop to Henry Morton Robinson’s work *The Cardinal*, giving a fictional account of the first American cardinal to vote in a papal conclave. While the overall premise of the work may seem of mild historical interest to some and an outright bore to others, the events of Stephen Fermoyle’s life between these two sea voyages is anything but boring.

This work follows the life of Stephen Fermoyle, a Boston kid ordained a priest by the Pope, who lives and grows through tumultuous times in the life of the Church. Faced with the coming of two World Wars, contraception and abortion, issues of social justice and freedom, Stephen encounters many issues that still face the Church today. Enthusiasts of the Church’s academic life will enjoy following Stephen through this time when the Church thoughtfully responds to these crises, especially as they impact the Church in America. Robinson is true to the times and historical in the story of this fictional priest, incorporating real life players and events to enhance the historical value of the piece as seen through the eyes of Stephen.

Also of interest is the way Robinson details Stephen Fermoyle’s rise through the ecclesial ranks of the Church. Going from Father to Monsignor, Bishop, Archbishop, and finally Cardinal, readers will see through Stephen’s experiences an inside glimpse into the hierarchical structure of the Church. It is not pretty and includes many difficult administrative predicaments, but through this, Robinson brings the reader to understand more fully what being a member of Church hierarchy means and how men strive to fulfill these duties in a saintly manner.

While these experiences are insightful and interesting, what will forever stick with me from this story are the characters. We see Stephen as a Boston kid, who grew up in a faithful Catholic family with its foibles but also its enduring virtue. We live through the struggles of this family as they face death, vice, and new life. Through all this, the family remains true, and we see a loving Catholic family that produced a future prelate of the Church, which, as one character notes, is the best foundation for a good priest.

In addition to the Fermoyle family, memorable characters abound in Stephen’s life. Of particular interest to me were the pastors that Stephen worked with during his life. First is Father “Dollar-Bill” Monaghan, the gruff fundraiser who can squeeze every penny out of his parishioners. Despite his gruff demeanor, there is a redemptive value to Father Monaghan that comes to fruition following his experiences with then-Father Fermoyle.

Another character of note is Cardinal Glennon. The relationship between Stephen and Cardinal Glennon follows an interesting arc, beginning with disdain, followed by mutual respect, and finally paternal love. There is much to learn from Cardinal Glennon, but nothing speaks more than the moments where his pastoral heart is exposed, and he becomes a loving father to his people. These moments are rare, but they show the soft heart of a seasoned administrator.

In short, there is a great deal of interest in this novel as Robinson views the most critical issues facing the Church in America in the first part of the twentieth century through the eyes of a priest. There is intellectual debate, challenges to the Church’s social teaching, and insight into the hierarchical workings of the Church. In all of this, what speaks most to me are the characters Robinson so richly develops. They speak to us in our weaknesses, they are people we will cherish, and they are witnesses that a life of holiness can take on many different forms. For no other reason, I hope everyone reads this book and is moved by the examples of holiness portrayed within.
Much has been said about the past year, and much more will be said when we look back in the future. Once we think we have it all figured out, the rules change on us again. Therefore, as we approach this New Year, here are some final thoughts from 2020. What a strange time and a strange year it was.

Who would have thought so many people could be affected by COVID-19? Our assisted living facilities and nursing homes have been some of the hardest hit as the virus continues to disproportionately affect the elderly. Young people have been deeply affected as well, with entire lives put on hold and futures in jeopardy. People of all ages have lost job opportunities, faced uncertainty with schooling, and stepped back in their interactions with others.

We also look at those who recently passed away. Many were close to the Catholic Charities North Dakota’s mission to serve those in need, including our former executive director Larry Bernhardt, some well-known religious such as our 2013 Caritas Service Award recipient Sister Thomas Welder and Sister Petronilla Metzger, and clergy including Monsignor Jeffrey Wald, Monsignor Val Gross, and Monsignor Joseph Senger. Losing loved ones was especially tough on those who could not attend funerals in person.

As difficult as illnesses and physical losses have been, do you ever wonder about the toll living with such changes in our human interaction? Our faith and Catholic Social Teaching remind us that from the very beginning, “Man was not meant to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). Rather, part of our innate human dignity of being created in the image and likeness of God is that we were made for a relationship with him and others. As God is relational, a community of three persons in one through the Blessed Trinity, so too are we meant to live in relationship with God and with others.

It’s not just social isolation either, but sometimes it’s too much togetherness. Those working from home can be presented with their own challenges. We’ve had husbands and wives in counseling with difficulties from spending more time together than before, often in limited spaces. Those with children at home may have the further challenge of attending to them while trying to work at the same time.

Given all of the social changes due to isolating and quarantines, is it any wonder depression and anxiety continue taking a toll? Will we ever go back to the way it was? A recent Blue Cross Blue Shield Association survey indicates that nearly a third of the millennial generation suffer from mental health concerns, and over 90% of the young adults acknowledge the pandemic has harmed their mental health. If you or someone you know needs someone to talk with, please know our services continue despite COVID-19 as our counselors use social distancing and telehealth to safely serve those in need in your communities. Even the holidays have been limited, from Easter to Thanksgiving, and then Christmas. This is so difficult for families who are apart, and especially those who are older and alone, but someone shared the best explanation or response I’ve heard on why they were canceling their Thanksgiving plans. They simply told their aging parents something like this, “Mom, Dad I love you, and I’m staying home this year because I want to spend many more Thanksgivings and Christmases with you.”

Despite everything, I am amazed at how engaged people are with their parishes and faith even if they aren’t attending in person right now. With the fluctuating COVID-19 case numbers, people are often hesitant to return to Mass. Yet the ways churches reach out is incredible, and some of the stories I hear when I speak with our supporters warms the heart. There are glimmers of hope out there to encourage us along the way.

For Catholic Charities, one of those great rays of sunshine is your support in this difficult time. We’ve heard some great comments about our Catholic Charities Sunday video, which you can watch at www.CatholicCharitiesND.org to learn how supporting Catholic Charities is a concrete way to help others in need. We are also over $155,000 toward our goal of $175,000, which we couldn’t have done without all of you!

Many who may not have a lot of wealth have been more generous than ever and are supporting the organizations they care about most. It is so encouraging when you believe in us and support what we are doing here. On behalf of Catholic Charities North Dakota, may you all have a Merry Christmas and an even happier New Year in 2021.
Should I get vaccinated?

**MAKING SENSE OF BIOETHICS**

**FATHER TADEUSZ PACHOLCZYK, PHD**
Director of education at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia

Recently, many people have been reaching out with questions about vaccines. So, I thought it would be helpful to mention some of the most common ones and try to provide some answers.

**Are there sound medical reasons to oppose vaccination?**
There can be, but vaccines typically provide a path towards individual protection and herd immunity that involves less burden and risk than becoming infected with a disease. Today’s childhood vaccination schedule protects against more than a dozen different diseases. Some individuals, though, may need to decline vaccines if they have a compromised immune system or an allergy to one of the ingredients. When a vaccine is determined to be safe and effective, it will often make sense for healthy individuals to choose, on their own initiative, to get immunized.

**Are vaccines safe?** The safety profile of vaccines is typically verified by extensive clinical trials involving more than 30,000 participants. Even after successful safety testing, children or adults can develop symptoms or problems, apparently from an inoculation they received. When the problem is further investigated, it may turn out to be a separate health issue unrelated to vaccination. Still, vaccines are not a zero-risk proposal, and on rare occasions, adverse events do occur. No medical intervention is ever completely risk-free. The risk of complications or side effects from vaccines, being reasonably low overall, can be deemed acceptable when compared to the prospect of complications that may arise from the disease itself. For generations, some of those complications included family members living in an iron lung after being ravaged by polio, married individuals rendered infertile from mumps, and infants dying due to whooping cough. Recent generations have been shielded from these types of devastating outcomes through the availability of vaccines.

**Are there ethical reasons not to receive vaccines?** Certain concerns of conscience arise when cell lines derived from abortions are used in the development and production of vaccines. Vaccines should not be manufactured in this way, and pharmaceutical companies should not make use of these fetal cell lines. The Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has noted, however, that when vaccines have been produced this way, it is morally permissible to receive them. When equivalent alternative vaccines that don’t rely on such cell lines are available, however, those should clearly be the preferred option.

**Why wouldn’t it be wrong to receive a vaccine made from aborted fetal cell lines?** No moral evil is committed by those who get inoculated with vaccines made from problematic cell lines; rather those who originally exploited aborted children for their cells, or established pharmaceutical company policies that rely on the abortion-derived cells, commit moral evils. The one receiving the vaccine has no causal connection to these wrongful decisions made previously by others, and the end user cannot be held culpable for their wrongdoing. Even so, the Vatican emphasizes that when we receive vaccines manufactured in this way, we should take steps to register our disagreement and call on pharmaceutical companies to reformulate their vaccines using alternative and ethically acceptable cell sources. Fortunately, none of the 2020-2021 flu vaccines use aborted fetal material, a common concern as the winter season draws near. However, even if they did, it would be ethically permissible to receive the vaccine as an end user, as explained.

**If a vaccine for COVID-19 becomes available, would we be obliged as Christians and as citizens to take it to defeat the spread of the virus?** Each person must evaluate his or her individual situation and make a good prudential judgment regarding the benefit-to-burden ratio when accepting a COVID-19 vaccine. For example, health care workers who have not been exposed to COVID-19 should seriously consider the benefits of getting vaccinated, and their workplace may even require it. The elderly and other vulnerable populations should carefully consider the benefits as well. For younger individuals with very low chances of detrimental outcomes there may be less urgency, particularly if they do not have any contact with vulnerable populations. Governments should not compel citizens to accept COVID-19 vaccinations, but rather inform them of the benefits and risks while encouraging them to carefully decide for themselves.

**What about the new technologies behind RNA vaccines which have never been used before in humans?** The criteria for vaccine safety and efficacy are generally well-established and won’t differ fundamentally for a COVID-19 RNA vaccine when compared to other more standard types of vaccines. In light of the various studies that have already been done in animals, and presupposing rigorous human clinical trials, it should soon become clear whether mRNA vaccines are as safe and effective as other vaccines.

These kinds of questions about vaccinations and human health merit attention, as they manifest an important desire both for sound scientific information and ethical clarity.
New budget makes room for religious freedom

On Dec. 3, Governor Burgum presented his proposed budget for the 2021-2023 biennium. It includes something that could enhance the exercise of religious freedom for some of our state’s most vulnerable residents.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us have come to appreciate the importance of worship space and being in the presence of other believers. Whether we agree or disagree with the voluntary or mandated restrictions on gathering in churches, we should all agree that, to the extent it is safe and possible, people should have access to places dedicated to worship.

This access is something that until the pandemic most of us in the United States took for granted. Unlike in some other countries, Americans are mostly free to build churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other places of worship.

A place dedicated for worship is not always available to persons in institutional settings. These settings include nursing homes, jails, prisons, military installations, developmental centers, and state hospitals. People in these settings cannot go and build worship spaces. It is dependent upon the institution to provide areas dedicated to worship.

To help ensure that people in institutional settings have access to what is needed for worship according to their faith, Congress passed the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA). RLUIPA prevents all government institutions, even those at the local and state level, from placing a substantial burden on the religious exercise of the institutions’ residents unless the action is in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest and is the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest.

Although RLUIPA provides a high standard of protection, in practice it may not always mean access to an actual chapel or worship space.

Not too long ago a North Dakota county built a state-of-the-art jail but inexplicably did not include a chapel or even a space where priests could hear confessions. It took some involvement by the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and pressure from local pastors to get the jail to provide an accommodation that allows worship services in the jail’s cafeteria.

A cafeteria, however, is not a chapel. Institutionalized persons should have access to worship space that is designed for worship. This fact brings us to the Governor’s budget request.

Governor Burgum is requesting that the Department of Human Services be authorized to build a new state hospital in Jamestown to replace the current hospital, which is aging beyond repair. A new state hospital would include a chapel, which would remedy a problem that has existed at the hospital for over 20 years.

For decades, the State Hospital had a chapel that was used by both patients and the local community. In fact, members of the St. James Basilica’s community attended Mass there every Saturday. Designed for varying uses, it had an altar and area dedicated solely for Catholic use. A separate Protestant altar was used for other Christian services. The chapel, which was a separate building on the campus, included an organ, pews, meeting space, and was fully stocked with hymnals, prayer books, and worship items for various faiths, Christian and non-Christian.

When the James River Correctional Center took over a part of the state hospital campus in 1997 however, the chapel was cut-off from the rest of the State Hospital. Some assurances were made that the hospital would try to find ways to get patients to the chapel. The tunnels that connected the hospital to the chapel however, were soon blocked off. Walking above-ground and around the new prison was not feasible. Catholic and non-Catholic services at the chapel were discontinued and the chapel has sat unused for 20 years. Ironically, the prison has never used the chapel.

Today patients at the State Hospital worship in a small former living room in a converted apartment. Like a cafeteria in a jail, a former living room is not an ideal place for worship.

The proposed new state hospital would have a dedicated chapel that would accommodate different faith groups. Like the old chapel, it could have an altar dedicated for Catholic use. In fact, the old altar, with its cross and relic, is still available.

Consideration of chapels and even chaplaincy services can get lost in government planning and operations. Many state legislators might not even think about asking whether the new state hospital would have a chapel.

Public officials and legislators however, should always consider the religious freedom of institutionalized persons and the need for dedicated worship space. Like food, shelter, and health care, religious exercise is a fundamental and essential service that governments must provide to all institutionalized persons. A new state hospital in Jamestown could be a step in that direction.
When I was about four years old, I had an experience common to many American children. I dressed up like a pilgrim for Thanksgiving. For me, this was not just a game of make believe. It was a serious and solemn exercise.

I do not remember how old I was when I heard my parents, aunts, and uncles talking about how my great aunt, on my father’s side, had discovered that we were descended from Mayflower passenger John Howland. I was amazed to hear that he had fallen off the ship in a storm, and that if he hadn’t been rescued, I would not exist.

Over this past year, as I became aware of the upcoming centenary celebration of the Mayflower crossing, a question in my heart has been what it means to be patriotic. My lifelong study of history forbids any naive or triumphalist fanfare in the face of the bitter ambiguities lurking within every human story, threatening to taint the moments of heroism and tenderness.

I cannot cease to mourn over the shattering of Christian unity that formed the backdrop for our nation’s origins. I cannot forget how fragile, fleeting, and rare have been the moments of true peace and brotherhood between European Americans and Native Americans. I must not lose my sense of keen compassion for my seafaring ancestors crowded below deck, advancing at the maddeningly slow pace of two miles an hour, only to arrive in a barren land, 200 miles north of their intended destination. Then, they endured the onset of a harsh winter that would claim the lives of half of their small community. Nonetheless, there is a genuine reason to celebrate.

Upon learning that my ancestor John Howland—who would have 10 children and 88 grandchildren—was accompanied on the Mayflower not only by his future wife, 13 year-old Elizabeth Tilley, but also by her parents John Tilley and Joan Hurst, I revisited my genealogy. I found three more Mayflower ancestors! Francis Cooke was a wool comber, whose wife and children would join him in Plymouth in 1623. Stephen Hopkins had already been shipwrecked in Bermuda before this second voyage to the New World. His story was a source of Shakespeare’s play, The Tempest. His daughter Damaris would have been but a toddler on the Mayflower. Stephen’s wife, Elizabeth Fisher, gave birth to a son named Oceanus aboard the ship. In fact, Damaris died in Plymouth when she was still a child, but her parents had another daughter, also named Damaris, from whom I am descended.

Damaris intrigues me, though she would seem to be least significant. I have always loved the name Damaris and the story in Acts about her coming to the faith in response to St. Paul’s speech at the Areopagus in Athens. She heard him speak of an unknown God who “made from one the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth, and he fixed the ordered seasons and the boundaries of their regions...” (Acts 17:26). When Paul got to the point of announcing the Resurrection, his audience lost interest and dispersed, but Damaris stayed. She caught a glimpse of a life beyond this world, and this was enough to lead her to the fullness of faith.

Such a longing for something beyond is what is common to both pilgrims and pioneers. The American spirit is characterized as a desire to go ever further—even as far as the moon—to search for a new frontier.... While our American ancestors may have been imperfect, our momentum towards the infinite may predispose us to undertake the ultimate pilgrimage from earth to heaven. – Sister Veronica

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Such a longing for something beyond is what is common to both pilgrims and pioneers. The American spirit is characterized as a desire to go ever further—even as far as the moon—to search for a new frontier. This expansiveness gives me hope for the people of this country. While our American ancestors may have been imperfect, our momentum towards the infinite may predispose us to undertake the ultimate pilgrimage from earth to heaven. Mary, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, is an apt patroness for the United States because her total receptivity to the newness of God’s ways images the soul of America. Yes, I am American, for I have always been a pilgrim.

When Damaris Hopkins crossed the great Atlantic, she was a tiny child. She became a founding mother of America, not through any virtue or decision of her own but by sheer providence. Some identify the landing of the Mayflower as the birth of our nation, but Isaiah asks, “Can a country be brought forth in one day, or a nation be born in a single moment?” (Isa. 66:8). Men and women may cooperate in the building up of a land and angels may also be employed, but the creation of a nation is an act of God. “All the nations You have made shall come and fall prostrate before You and glorify Your name, O Lord” (Ps. 86:9).
This past August I began my third year of theology at Mount St. Mary Seminary. Of course, there were a few necessary changes due to the pandemic. We were asked to observe three Ws: wear a mask, wash your hands often, and watch your distance. The rector also asked each of us to pray a daily Memorare to the Blessed Virgin Mary, asking for protection of the seminary community from COVID-19. Through her intercession, no seminarian at the Mount got the coronavirus during our first semester. Thanks be to God! So, with a few inconveniences, seminary formation continued.

Preaching is such an essential ministry of a deacon and a priest. It helps people come to know and love Jesus Christ—to call upon him. – Matthew Kensok

Third theology year is a pivotal year in seminary formation. After this year, God-willing, I will be ordained to the transitional diaconate. As a deacon, I will be able to preach the homily at Mass. As such, one of my classes this past semester was Homiletics, where my class practiced preaching in front of each other. Each member of my class was able to craft and deliver a mock “homily” in front of the class. With a seminary priest-instructor guiding us, we were assigned various days to preach. We were assigned specific weekday or Sunday Mass readings from various seasons: Ordinary Time, Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, etc. For example, one of my homilies was for the “Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year C.”

As I began to prepare each homily, the first step was to review the readings, but I had to go beyond simply reading the Mass readings. I had to pray with them. I had to ask the Lord in prayer, “What do you want me to tell your people?” The homily should not be about what I want to say, but rather what Jesus wants to say through me. After praying with the readings, it was time to craft the homily. I also did some research, studying the scripture passages with the help of scripture scholars and Bible commentaries. I think that a good homily should include an explanation of the Scripture and an application for our lives.

After writing the homily, my attention turned toward delivering it. I would practice it several times before presenting it to the class. We met in our small seminary chapel to give us the feel of an actual liturgical setting. We even recited the conclusion of the Gospel reading: “The Gospel of the Lord… Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.” At first, I was rather nervous, but as the semester continued, we all became more and more comfortable at the ambo. After delivering the homily, the instructor and my classmates would give positive and constructive feedback, both on content and mechanics: “That was a great homily. I really liked your point about… I think your homily could have been better if you said… You had good volume and your pacing was excellent, but I noticed you tapping your hands… Were you nervous?”

As I move into my last semester before diaconate, we will have another homiletics class. We will have even more opportunities to practice preaching before we give our first “real homily.” While some of the work is done by writing the homily at my desk, most of the work is done on my knees in prayer. Jesus, teach me to preach. So far, he has. He has given me the words that he wants me to say.

Preaching is such an essential ministry of a deacon and a priest. It helps people come to know and love Jesus Christ—to call upon him. St. Paul reminds us, “But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent?” (Rom. 10:14-15). The Church needs good, holy men to be sent by the Lord to preach. The Church needs priests and deacons. As I prepare to make this last step before the priesthood, I hear the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” My response continues to be that of Isaiah the prophet: “Here I am! Send me” (Isa. 6:8).
Don't do this with your will

Your will is one of the most important documents you will ever sign. There are certain things to avoid in order to do it right. Here are five of the more critical “don’ts” to consider:

1. Don’t put it off until later
   The worst thing you can do in creating a will is to procrastinate. You can keep waiting for a more convenient time. However, the years have a way of slipping by. A will delayed is a will not done. Now is the time—while you are able—to do your will. For your sake, and the sake of your loved ones, do your will now.

2. Don’t do it by yourself
   Saving a few bucks by writing your own will, or using a mass-produced generic form, will not provide the level of inner peace and confidence you and your family deserve. Nothing can replace the benefits of a face-to-face meeting with a good estate-planning attorney who asks the right questions and who knows how to draft a will that meets the specific requirements of your state of residence. Seek out a qualified attorney and have your estate plans done right.

3. Don’t rely on it solely
   Your will needs to be considered along with other transfer documents, such as life insurance policies, joint-ownership accounts, and retirement accounts. Other estate-planning documents might include power of attorney, appropriate health care provisions, and a living will. Again, a good attorney can help you coordinate your planning and provide added assurance that everything you need is prepared legally and according to your wishes.

4. Don’t put it away and forget about it
   Things change. Children grow up. New laws are passed affecting estate planning. New developments occur regarding health issues and financial resources. An outdated will could create more problems than it solves. It’s a good idea to get out your will every year and review it. Make sure it does what you want. Keep your will current.

5. Don’t put it where no one can find it
   A will is worthless unless it can be located and duly recorded at your death. Yet nearly every day someone dies with a “lost” will. Be sure to put it in a safe place, but also let someone else know where it is. Tell one or more loved ones or a trusted friend. A little foresight like this can spare your family added stress during their time of grief.

At the Diocese of Fargo, we have a wonderful Will/Estate Planning information packet. If you would like one sent to you, contact me at steve.schons@fargodiocese.org or (701) 356-7926.
Lyle J. Lothspeich, parishioner of St. Alphonsus Church in Langdon, will celebrate his 90th birthday on Jan. 12. He was married to Iris A. Fischer for more than 60 years before she passed away on Oct. 19, 2018. He has 5 children, 15 grandchildren, and 5 great-grandchildren.

Deacon Jeff and Lola Faul, parishioners of St. Cecilia Church in Harvey, celebrated their 50th anniversary on Oct. 3. They were married at Sacred Heart Church in Cando, and have 2 children and 3 grandsons.

Tony and June Prom, parishioners of St. Cecilia Church in Harvey, celebrated their 60th anniversary on Nov. 23. They have 6 children and 6 grandchildren and continue to live on the homestead farm near Harvey.

As a way to celebrate life and love, we encourage parishioners in the Diocese of Fargo to send a photo and news brief for anniversaries of 50 years or 60+ years or birthdays of 80+ years to: New Earth, Diocese of Fargo, 5201 Bishops Blvd. S., Suite A, Fargo, ND 58104 or news@fargodiocese.org.

75 years ago — 1946
The birthday of the pastor and the last payment of the parish mortgage were two reasons to celebrate for the people of St. Patrick’s church in Enderlin on Sunday evening, January 13. The master of ceremonies related that not only did this mark the end of the parish debt but that, at the same time, the parish made necessary improvements amounting to three thousand dollars. Father McGee was gifted a new pen and pencil set during the evening. The program included songs by a male quartette, a piano solo by Lorraine Kaspari, and a reading by Miss Reiten.

50 years ago — 1971
A new $318,000 Blessed Sacrament church and social hall project was dedicated and blessed by Bishop Justin A. Driscoll in ceremonies January 10 in West Fargo. The new space replaces a Quonset that had been used as the parish church since 1949. The slightly circular church is fully carpeted and air-conditioned, and has a seating capacity of about 400. The multi-purpose hall is also air-conditioned and can be divided in to six classrooms. Planning began in 1968 with groundbreaking in April 1970.

20 years ago — 2001
Forty years of dreaming and planning have resulted in a new addition to Holy Family Church in Grand Forks. The new spaces were blessed January 21. The gathering room seats 150 people. A homey garden room and commons area are flooded with natural light coming through the floor to ceiling windows. The main office space is equipped with a new phone system with paging and voice mail capabilities, and the computer is now on a network. The reception area and print room are well thought out and have all the luxuries of a proper office and more. Work was also done to the rectory opening walls and making it handicapped accessible. Holy Family became a parish on March 1, 1960.
Day of Prayer and Penance for Unborn Children set for Jan. 22

A Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing will be offered Jan. 22 at 7 p.m. at the Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo. The prayer service is being held in observance of the liturgical Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children, marking the 48th anniversary of legalization of abortion in our nation. In addition to this time of prayer, the faithful are encouraged to do some form of fasting or self-denial for the healing of our nation from the effects of abortion on families, our culture, and society.

National Catholic Schools Week celebrates faith, excellence, service

National Catholic Schools Week will be observed Jan. 31–Feb. 6 with the theme “Catholic Schools: Faith. Excellence. Service.” Located in Belcourt, Devils Lake, Fargo, Grand Forks, Jamestown, Langdon, Rugby, Valley City, Wahpeton, and West Fargo, our Diocese of Fargo Catholic schools are educating more than 2,100 students pre-school through 12th grade this school year. Please pray for our Diocese of Fargo Catholic Schools as they strive to accomplish their unique mission of educating the whole child—including integration of the spiritual dimension which unifies the human person.

Quotable
St. Francis de Sales
Feast day January 24

"You learn to speak by speaking, to study by studying, to run by running, to work by working, and just so, you learn to love by loving. All those who think to learn in any other way deceive themselves."

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No pandemic can extinguish Christ’s light, pope says at Angelus
By Carol Glatz | Catholic News Service

No pandemic and no kind of crisis can extinguish the light of Christ, Pope Francis said.
May people let his light into their heart “and let us lend a hand to those who need it most. In this way God will be born anew in us and among us,” the pope said in his remarks after praying the Angelus with visitors gathered in St. Peter’s Square Dec. 6.

From his studio window of the apostolic palace, the pope indicated the 92-foot-tall spruce tree already standing in the square and the work underway setting up this year’s Nativity scene.

“These two signs of Christmas are being prepared, to the delight of children and adults, too,” in many homes around the world, he said.

“They are signs of hope, especially in this difficult time,” the pope said.

However, it is essential that people go beyond the symbols and embrace their meaning, which is Jesus—“the infinite goodness” that God revealed and made shine on the world, he added.

“There is no pandemic, there is no crisis that can extinguish this light,” he told the visitors who held umbrellas or were wearing rain gear under cloudy skies and alternating rain and drizzle.

Before the Angelus prayer, the pope spoke about Advent being a time to prepare for receiving the Lord at Christmas and, therefore, the need for conversion.

Conversion requires a change in “direction and orientation” as well as a change in one’s way of thinking.

One must be sorrowful for one’s sins and want to turn “from evil to good, from sin to love of God” forever, he said.

“To exclude sin, it is also necessary to reject everything that is connected to sin; the things that are connected to sin and that need to be rejected—a worldly mentality, excessive esteem for comforts, excessive esteem for pleasure, for well-being, for wealth,” he said.

Along with being detached from sin and worldliness, one must also be focused on searching for God and his kingdom, and seeking communion and friendship with God, he said.

“But this is not easy.”

“Temptation always pulls down, pulls down, and thus the ties that keep us close to sin: inconstancy, discouragement, malice, unwholesome environments, bad examples,” he said.

People may be tempted to become discouraged and believe it is impossible to truly convert.

“But it is possible” and people must avoid these discouraging thoughts as if they were “quicksand,” which will quickly mire one into a “mediocre existence.”

People must remind themselves that “no one can convert by his or her own strength,” the pope said.

“It is a grace that the Lord gives you and thus we need to forcefully ask God for it” and “open ourselves up to the beauty, the goodness, the tenderness of God.”

“God is not a bad father, an unkind father, no. He is tender. He loves us so much, like the Good Shepherd, who searches for the last member of his flock,” the pope said.

“You begin to walk, because it is he who moves you to walk, and you will see how he will arrive. Pray, walk, and you will always take a step forward.”

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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 Goring, 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.
The Year of St. Joseph: What Catholics need to know

By Catholic News Agency

On Dec. 8, Pope Francis announced a Year of St. Joseph, in honor of the 150th anniversary of the saint’s proclamation as patron of the Universal Church.

Pope Francis said he was establishing the year so that “every member of the faithful, following his example, may strengthen their life of faith daily in the complete fulfillment of God’s will.”

Here’s what you need to know about the Year of St. Joseph:

Why does the Church have years dedicated to specific topics?

The Church observes the passage of time through the liturgical calendar—which includes feasts such as Easter and Christmas, and seasons such as Lent and Advent. In addition, however, popes can set aside time for the Church to reflect more deeply on a specific aspect of Catholic teaching or belief. Past years designated by recent popes include a Year of Faith, Year of the Eucharist, and Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Why did the Pope declare a year of St. Joseph?

In making his declaration, Pope Francis noted that this year marks the 150th anniversary of the saint’s proclamation as patron of the Universal Church by Pope Pius IX on Dec. 8, 1870. Pope Francis said the coronavirus pandemic has heightened his desire to reflect on St. Joseph, as so many people during the pandemic have made hidden sacrifices to protect others, just as St. Joseph quietly protected and cared for Mary and Jesus.

“Each of us can discover in Joseph—the man who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence—an intercessor, a support and a guide in times of trouble,” the pope wrote.

He also said he wanted to highlight St. Joseph’s role as a father who served his family with charity and humility, adding, “Our world today needs fathers.”

When does the Year of St. Joseph begin and end?

The year began Dec. 8, 2020 and concludes on Dec. 8, 2021.

What special graces are available during this year?

As Catholics pray and reflect on the life of St. Joseph throughout the coming year, they also have opportunities to gain a plenary indulgence, or remission of all temporal punishment due to sin. An indulgence can be applied to oneself or to a soul in Purgatory.

An indulgence requires a specific act, defined by the Church, as well as sacramental confession, Eucharistic Communion, prayer for the pope’s intentions, and full detachment from sin. Special indulgences during the Year of St. Joseph can be received through more than a dozen different prayers and actions, including praying for the unemployed, entrusting one’s daily work to St. Joseph, performing a corporal or spiritual work of mercy, or meditating for at least 30 minutes on the Lord’s Prayer.

Why does the Church honor St. Joseph?

Catholics do not worship saints, but ask for their heavenly intercession before God and seek to imitate their virtues here on earth. The Catholic Church honors St. Joseph as the foster father of Jesus. He is invoked as the patron saint of the Universal Church. He is also the patron of workers, fathers, and a happy death.

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U.S. & WORLD NEWS
Those who work in agriculture should consider the relationship between Creator, man, and nature, striving to operate on a paradigm of solidarity, not profit alone, Pope Francis said Dec. 15.

Pope Francis made the comment in a message to Coldiretti, an Italian national confederation of cultivators during its end-of-year assembly.

Coldiretti is the largest association representing and assisting Italian agriculture. Its annual meeting was held online this year due to the ongoing health emergency.

The meeting is an event that “challenges every person of good will to rethink, even more today, the relationship between man, nature and the Creator as a factor of profound balance and communion,” the pope said, “in the search not for the logic of profit, but of service, not of the exploitation of resources, but of care and attention for nature as a welcoming home for all.”

In the message, which was signed by Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Francis noted the theme of the association’s meeting: “Italy restarts with the heroes of food.”

The theme refers to the call to “restart” the economy after the national lockdown for the coronavirus this spring. Agriculture was one of the many sectors affected by the pandemic’s restrictions, in part because many of the seasonal migrant workers who assist with harvesting crops were unable to enter the country.

Demand was also affected, and in the first half of 2020, sale prices were down by more than 63%, affecting 70% of agriculture companies in northern Italy.

This is not the first time this year that the pope has made comments directed at the industry. At a general audience in May, he highlighted the plight of agricultural workers.

“On May 1, I received several messages about the world of work and its problems. I was particularly struck by that of the agricultural workers, among them many migrants, who work in the Italian countryside. Unfortunately, many are very harshly exploited,” he said May 6.

“It is true that the current crisis affects everyone, but people’s dignity must always be respected. That is why I add my voice to the appeal of these workers and of all exploited workers. May the crisis give us the opportunity to make the dignity of the person and of work the center of our concern.”

In his message to Coldiretti, Pope Francis encouraged those who work in the sector to look for new paths “in the way of charity and solidarity for a global and realer response to the phenomenon of poverty and inequality among peoples, especially in this crucial phase of world history.”

He also gave the association’s members and their families his apostolic blessing and wished them, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, “abundant heavenly gifts” and a peaceful and good Christmas.
Only frequent church attendees avoided downward mental health trend in 2020

By Catholic News Agency

Americans who attend religious services weekly are the only demographic group appearing to show improved mental health in 2020, despite the stresses of the coronavirus pandemic and other events, says a new survey.

The survey otherwise shows significant self-reported mental health declines among those previously in excellent health.

In 2019, about 42% of those who reported attending religious services weekly told Gallup that their mental health was excellent. In 2020, 46% said the same, an increase of 4 percentage points. Only 35% of those who attend services nearly weekly or monthly reported excellent mental health, down 12 percentage points from last year. Among those who attend seldom or never, 29% reported excellent mental health, down 13 percentage points.

While coronavirus restrictions have often limited peoples' ability to attend religious services, the Gallup survey did not ask respondents whether they faced such limits.

Overall, respondents reporting excellent health declined from 43% to 34%, while those who reported excellent or good health declined from 85% to 76%. About 18% reported fair mental health while 5% reported poor mental health.

Gallup has conducted the same November Health and Healthcare Survey every year since 2001. The latest Gallup survey was conducted Nov. 5-19. Its random sample of 1,018 U.S. adults age 18 and older claims a margin of error of plus or minus 4% for the total sample.

The coronavirus has killed some 290,000 Americans—generally the elderly and those with vulnerable health—and hospitalized even more. The virus and restrictions aiming to limit its spread have hindered social and economic life as well as mental health care. Unemployment and underemployment rates have soared. The year 2020 also witnessed a controversial presidential election, protests against coronavirus restrictions, demonstrations against police after the death of George Floyd, and major civil unrest, riots, and vandalism throughout the United States.

Survey responses of self-reported excellent mental health are “eight points lower than Gallup has measured in any prior year,” the polling company said Dec. 7.

The other demographic group showing little change in excellent mental health was by partisan affiliation: Democrats were down only 1 percentage point from last year, compared to other partisan groups. However, only 29% of Democrats self-reported excellent mental health, compared to independents, who were down 11 points to 32%, and Republicans, who were down 15 points to 41%.

Demographic groups which tended to report excellent mental health the most were those making $100,000 or more, those aged 50 to 64, married people, and men. Those groups which tended not to report excellent mental health were those making under $40,000, those aged 18-29, the unmarried, and women. “These demographic patterns have been mostly consistent over the past 20 years,” Gallup said.
Battlefield report: A war not for the faint of heart

When I was a senior in college, my father, a proud U.S. Air Force veteran, suggested I sign up for the military. I didn’t see myself as military material and took offense. Did he not think I was smart enough to be a collegian academic? Though I now admire my father’s years of military service more than ever, I don’t regret the path I chose studying journalism. But being an outspoken Christian in this age, and active in pro-life sidewalk ministry, it seems that Dad got his wish.

No, it’s not exactly the life of service he’d imagined for me, but I have been engaged in a true, ongoing battle, along with my comrades who meet each week at our state’s only abortion facility, hoping to help steer a fellow human or two from the enemy’s grasp.

I have to be honest. The battle has become fiercer in recent months, and at times, I’ve grown weary. I know others feel the same. This war is not for the faint of heart.

A few months ago, before the city of Fargo’s mask mandate dictating mask use even outside where social-distancing would be difficult, some of us had deliberated whether masks would be prudent, given our short time being near the clients and our desire to make eye contact and communicate with our faces in that brief space.

In one particular incident, I was trying to talk to one of the women who had left the facility, likely post-abortion, to let her know about some resources of healing, and that we would be praying for her. As I moved in her direction, one of the escorts who is particularly aggressive began walking in front of me, backwards, to prevent me from reaching the woman, and then, getting up in my face, yelled, “You’re obviously not pro-life!”

It was stunning, yet not surprising, to hear this from someone who’d just helped around 15 women end the lives of their children. Notice the cunning of the Evil One here. You are at an abortion facility praying and trying to help these women who are broken, and yet the ones who have sided with evil—yes, Satan delights in this gruesome practice, an offense against the most vulnerable and sacred—are deeming themselves the ones who are truly pro-life.

I cannot tell you how grieved I have felt in these last months over what we have faced on the sidewalk, in addition to the usual challenges. We have not been reckless. We have chosen prudently, given the circumstances. Yet evil wins, or so it seems. Given the increasing number of these kinds of situations, in which the escorts have become empowered to not only conduct their dirty deeds but try to shame us, I have been tempted, many times, to just hang it up. I have even fallen into the trap of thoughts like, “If people want to have abortions, I guess they will. I shouldn’t have to risk my life for that.” Because by showing up, we too are putting our lives on the line, both spiritually and physically.

But then, I recognize Satan’s ploy—in the escorts’ satisfaction in making us out to be the evildoers, and in the temptation to feel inclined to just stay home and out of the way. As I’m home praying for the women, wondering whether they really need me there, I see a note from 40 Days for Life, telling of a woman, that very morning, who seems to have changed her mind because of a prayer advocate’s gentle persuasion.

It’s then I recall 2 Tim. 4:2, and how God calls us to stand in his place and be persistent, “whether it is convenient or inconvenient.” And I renew my commitment to the sidewalk.

I know that I can’t possibly compare my few hours there each week with the days and even months that men and women have fought in physical battles to keep us free. But the spiritual battle that wages is palpably felt in that corner of our city is also real, and brutal, and can only be won by God’s hand and our prayers.

We know who wins, but in the meantime, God calls us into the fray, promising his protection, yet also warning us it won’t be easy. And, as we continue to discover, God is right.

Please continue to pray for us, and never forget the true enemy: “And do thou, oh prince of the heavenly host, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls.”

Roxane B. Salonen, a wife and mother of five, is a local writer, as well as a speaker and radio host for Real Presence Radio. Roxane also writes weekly for The Forum newspaper and monthly for CatholicMom.com. Reach her at roxanebsalonen@gmail.com.
Do you know where we are? The answer will be revealed in the February *New Earth*.

Where in the diocese are we?

Last month’s photo is of St. Brigid’s Church in Cavalier.