Walking with moms in need
A year of service

PLUS

From Bishop Folda: Trusted Sisters
Lidgerwood renovation a labor of love
Seventy years of service: Retiring Mayville organist reflects on music ministry
**Redeemed Women’s Conference 2020**

**trusted sisters**

blessed to be a blessing...growing in faith and friendship

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**Dr. Helen Alvarez**

Helen Alvarez is a Professor of Law at George Mason University. She publishes on matters concerning marriage, parenting, non-marital households, and the First Amendment religion clauses. She is a speaker and a delegate to various United Nations conferences concerning women and the family. Helen will apply her knowledge of faith, civil law, and current cultural trends to assist us in our awareness of cultural influences and how we can effectively respond.

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**Bishop John Folda**

Most Rev. Bishop John Folda, Bishop of the Diocese of Fargo, will preside at Holy Mass, Saturday, at 11:00 am and will shepherd us as sisters in Christ with his spiritual insights.

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**The Vigil Project**

The Vigil Project, a collaborative group of Catholic artists provide Catholic music for the Catholic journey. Friday evening, our prayer in Adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament will be enhanced by the music and testimonies of this community of artists.

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**Dr. James Link**

Dr. Link received his education in theology and clinical psychology from St. Thomas University. As a clinical psychologist he specializes in the integration of religion and spirituality within the practice of psychology. Dr. Link will help us grow in the understanding of the psychology of women and why we approach life the way we do.

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**Nell O’Leary**

Nell O’Leary, wife and mother of four children, is a recovering lawyer turned blogger and speaker. She is a community coordinator for Blessed Is She, a Catholic women’s ministry. Nell’s passion and understanding of women as builders of communities will inspire us to make our families, neighborhoods, parishes, and workplaces an environment where faith can flourish.

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**Friday, March 27**

5:30 pm Doors Open
6:30 pm - 9:30 pm
An evening of prayer, music, & inspiration

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**March 27-28**

**AVALON EVENTS CENTER**

2525 9th Ave. S.
Fargo, ND

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**Saturday, March 28**

8:00 am Doors Open
9:00 am - 5:30 pm
A day of uplifting speakers, Mass, confession & fellowship

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**Early Registration:** $50

**after March 1:** $75

Includes Meal & Refreshments

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Trusted Sisters

It has often been noted that the majority of those who carry out the works of the Church are women. Most of our parish staff members, most of our Catholic school teachers, and most Catholic health care workers are women. And women typically outnumber men when it comes to volunteering for Church projects and activities. From my personal experience as a pastor and now as a bishop, I know how indispensable women are to the life and mission of the Church. But this isn’t just because women are hard workers. It’s because women have a specific and irreplaceable role in God’s plan of salvation history, a role that isn’t just functional but uniquely spiritual and grace-filled.

A number of years ago, Pope St. John Paul II wrote a letter called *Mulieris Dignitatem*, and a subsequent “Letter to Women” several years later. He spoke of what he called the “feminine genius,” the unique perspective and gifts that women bring to every aspect of life and faith. In a time when the cultural elites are trying to blur the distinctions between the sexes, the Church reaffirms the unique character of women (and men), recognizing the beauty of God’s plan in the complementarity of women and men. The dignity of women is forgotten and denigrated in so many ways through pornography, human trafficking, and sexual violence, so more than ever must the Church remember and celebrate the feminine genius in God’s beautiful plan of creation.

The conference itself is dedicated to bringing women together to share the gift of their Catholic faith and to support one another in their calling from our Lord. They are “trusted sisters” to each other and to all the members of the Church. But most importantly, they are trusted sisters to our Lord, beloved and cherished just as Mary and Martha were.

In the Gospels, we read of the close friendship that Jesus had with Mary and Martha. Martha is often recalled as the busy one who was anxious and upset with her sister. But she was striving above all to welcome Jesus into their home, and we shouldn’t forget that she also makes a profound statement of faith after the death of their brother, Lazarus: “I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.” We should also never forget that Mary Magdalene stood at the cross beside Jesus, and later announced his resurrection to the apostles on Easter Sunday. In their own way, these women proclaimed the Gospel and were witnesses to Christ. They were models of missionary discipleship for us all.

As the chief catechist of our diocese, I often think of the many women who serve as catechists in our parishes. Where would we be without them? In a true act of spiritual motherhood, these dedicated women give generously of their time and energy to share the life of Christ with young people, and help them grow as children of God. A similar story could probably be told in every apostolic endeavor in the life of the Church. Pope Francis often mentions the important place of his grandmother in his own faith formation. She was a key personality in passing along the faith to young Jorge Bergoglio, who would one day be called to lead the Church and proclaim that faith to the world.

No matter their vocation, women are called to bring hearts of love to others; they incarnate the love of God in the midst of the Church and nurture the gift of life. Whether as wives, mothers, dedicated single women, widows, or consecrated women religious, women have a profound capacity to influence our culture and to build the culture of life in our society. Their awareness of the needs of others and their receptivity to God’s grace enables them to love sacrificially and to create a culture of life wherever they are.

Of course, we can always look to our Blessed Mother as the perfect example of discipleship, as a mother and sister to us all. Her entire life was lived in communion with God, and in faith she received the Son of God as her own son. She is “blessed among women,” and she offers a pattern for holiness to women of all times and places. Mary is the model of feminine genius that John Paul II spoke of, the one who exemplifies the dignity of all women in God’s divine plan.

I invite all the women of our diocese to this year’s Redeemed Conference for Women: “Trusted Sisters.” The event will be held on March 27–28 and will be an opportunity for women of all ages to gather as sisters in Christ, to pray, to celebrate, and to support one another in the journey of faith. This conference would be an excellent spiritual exercise for Lent, and a great preparation for the upcoming celebrations of Holy Week and Easter. I hope to see many of you there, and I look forward to praying and celebrating with you.

On the last weekend of March, the Diocese of Fargo will once again sponsor a Redeemed Conference for Women, this time called “Trusted Sisters.” One of the keynote speakers will be Helen Alvaré, a remarkable leader in the pro-life cause, a co-worker and consultant to the bishops of the United States, a professor of law, a wife, and a mother. She is just one example of the powerful role that women have in the life of the Church and the life of this nation. Having heard her speak on several occasions, I know she will have much to tell us at this year’s Redeemed Conference.

“"No matter their vocation, women are called to bring hearts of love to others; they incarnate the love of God in the midst of the Church and nurture the gift of life. “ – Bishop John Folda
Mar. 15  •  2 p.m.
Confirmation and First Eucharist,
St. Charles Borromeo, Oakes

Mar. 17  •  3 p.m.
Diocesan Finance Council Meeting,
Pastoral Center, Fargo

Mar. 20  •  6 p.m.
Confirmation and First Eucharist,
St. Cecilia, Harvey

Mar. 21  •  10 a.m.
Confirmation and First Eucharist,
St. Therese, Rugby

Mar. 21  •  5:30 p.m.
Confirmation and First Eucharist,
St. Mark, Bottineau

Mar. 22  •  2 p.m.
Confirmation and First Eucharist,
St. Ann, Belcourt

Mar. 25  •  3 p.m.
St. JPII Schools Board of Directors Meeting,
Pastoral Center, Fargo

Mar. 27–28
Women’s Redeemed Conference,
Avalon Center, Fargo

Mar. 29  •  2 p.m.
Confirmation and First Eucharist,
St. John, Wahpeton

Apr. 2  •  7:30 p.m.
Shanley First Nighter,
Shanley High School, Fargo

Apr. 3  •  5 p.m.
Confirmation and First Eucharist,
St. Anthony, Fargo

Apr. 4  •  10 a.m.
Confirmation and First Eucharist,
St. William, Argusville

Apr. 5  •  10 a.m.
Palm Sunday Mass,
Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Apr. 7  •  11 a.m.
Chrism Mass, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Apr. 9  •  7 p.m.
Mass of the Lord’s Supper,
Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Apr. 10  •  10 a.m.
Stations of the Cross at
Red River Women’s Clinic, Fargo

Apr. 10  •  3 p.m.
Good Friday Service,
Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Apr. 11  •  8:30 p.m.
Easter Vigil in the Holy Night,
Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Apr. 12  •  10 a.m.
Easter Sunday Mass,
Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo
Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of our priests. Through them, we experience your presence in the sacraments. Help our priests to be strong in their vocation. Set their souls on fire with love for your people. Grant them the wisdom, understanding, and strength they need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Inspire them with the vision of your Kingdom. Give them the words they need to spread the Gospel. Allow them to experience joy in their ministry. Help them to become instruments of your divine grace. We ask this through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns as our Eternal Priest. Amen.

“The patient and humble endurance of the cross—whatever nature it may be—is the highest work we have to do.”

–St. Katherine Drexel
Why should I go to confession? My non-Catholic friends tell me they’re forgiven by praying directly to God. Why aren’t Catholics?

As Christians, we all recognize that Jesus’ mission on earth aimed at the forgiveness of sins. Already in the first chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, we see this clearly laid out. When the angel appeared to St. Joseph to tell him to take Mary and the child into his home, the angel instructed Joseph to name the child Jesus, which means “savior.” The angel explains what Jesus would save us from, “For he shall save his people from their sins,” (Matt. 2:21). Jesus rescued us from sin by dying on the cross and rising to new life.

However, for each of us to accept this salvation in our lives, we need to have contact with the savior in a real way. Jesus leaves two primary ways for us to have forgiveness of our sins. First, baptism washes away all sin, both original sin and any personal sins, in the case of an adult catechumen. But the Lord clearly desired to leave another sacrament to wash away sin committed after baptism, and this is the Sacrament of Confession.

Where do we see Jesus initiate this sacrament? First, Jesus began his public ministry with a call to conversion. Matthew 4:17 says that when Jesus began to preach, he said, “Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” To receive the fruits of Christ’s passion and the forgiveness of our sins, we need to have the proper disposition: interior repentance bolstered by acts of penance.

But none of this yet is proof that we need a special sacrament, because we could indeed turn immediately to God, repent, and receive forgiveness. We see that Jesus directly willed to create a special sacrament to be the ordinary way he would forgive sins after his ascension. In John 20:22-23, the risen Jesus appears to the disciples in the upper room. He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.”

Jesus gives his own spirit, his own power to the disciples to be instruments of his forgiveness. That he willed the outward confession of sins is proved by the fact that the disciples would have to judge what sins to forgive or retain. How could they know whether to forgive or retain sins unless sins were confessed to them?

But why would Jesus leave this power to the disciples? Couldn’t he continue to forgive sins from afar (in heaven)? Yes, of course Jesus has the power to do so. However, isn’t it true that God’s power to forgive is more clearly manifested by using humble instruments to bring about such a great gift? God loves to exercise his power through instruments, and the lower and humbler the instrument, the more his power shines through. That God could forgive sin through a priest more clearly shows his power than if he did it alone.

Another reason Jesus desired to leave a sacrament of forgiveness is because he loves our humanity. As humans, we encounter reality through our senses. We don’t have a spiritual existence that is totally independent of our body. So again, God could forgive us in a purely spiritual way, communicating grace to us without tangible signs. However, because he created us with bodies, he wills to communicate himself to us in sensible ways. The Sacrament of Reconciliation has great power because we use our speech to accuse ourselves of sin. We hear ourselves confess our sins. We acknowledge them openly; we don’t hide from them. This is very human and very healthy on a psychological level. But we also hear God’s forgiveness pronounced over us. The priest speaks in the person of Christ when he says, “I absolve you of your sins...” These words console us on a human level. Thanks be to God for giving us grace in human ways!

Another reason we confess sins to a priest is that our sins are never just between us and God. Every sin, even the smallest, affects every other person on earth, and especially the Body of Christ, the Church. By sin, we are less for others than we should be, we introduce disorder into the world, and we lose out on opportunities for valuable merits for the Church. So, it is just for us to confess to another human being, and receive forgiveness on behalf of the Church.

And, of course, all the sacraments culminate in the Holy Eucharist. One could rightly say that the purpose of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to give us a way to receive the Eucharist worthily. We know that to receive the Eucharist in a state of mortal sin is to eat and drink judgment and punishment upon ourselves (1 Cor. 11:27-30). Confession ensures that we have a means to worthy reception of the Eucharist, the Bread of Life, the foretaste of life everlasting, and the joy of our souls. In the Eucharist, the Kingdom of Heaven comes to us. Confession prepares for this coming: “Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2).

Editor’s note: If you have a question to suggest for consideration in a future column, send to news@fargodiocese.org or mail to New Earth, 5201 Bishops Blvd. S, Suite. A, Fargo, ND 58104, Attn: Ask a Priest.
St. Boniface Church in Lidgerwood has undergone renovations that not only made the church safer, but also aesthetically pleasing. Those renovations are now complete and parishioners are back in their beautifully transformed worship space.

“The carpeting in the church was coming up and was deemed a safety hazard by the diocesan facilities management office,” said Father Peter Anderl, pastor of St. Boniface. “Also, among the other issues we faced, the back wall of the sanctuary behind the altar was just primer with a very small corpus, and it needed something to attract the eyes and hearts of those attending worship.”

Working with Bishop Folda and the diocesan facilities management and liturgy office, the renovations began October 2019. Parishioners donated over a thousand hours of their time to do whatever they could, from grinding the floors to get them ready for new flooring tiles, to painting, setting up scaffolding, and moving pews. Father Anderl called it an “outpouring of love” that parishioners wanted to share their time and talents to help make their house of worship one that would give glory to God and inspire the faithful.

Contractor Mark Heuer, a parishioner at St. Anthony’s Church in Mooreton, supervised much of the work. The floor tiles of
marble and porcelain were purchased at a cost that was just minimally more than regular carpet squares and are expected to last for decades. The main aisle flooring includes three medallions which represent faith, hope, and charity. A new Sacred Heart of Jesus statue was added to replace one that was discarded over 60 years ago, and the new LED lights greatly improve lighting in the church. A baptistery was added in the church gathering space to remind worshipers of their oneness with Jesus Christ through baptism.

By far the most impressive improvements are to the front of the sanctuary. A large mural now graces the wall behind the altar, and statues of Mary and St. John flank the large, new crucifix, giving the wall a 3D effect. The mural was painted by local artist Elizabeth Swankl, who painted murals at Sts. Anne and Joachim in Fargo. She painted the mural by hand, using a magnifying glass in order to provide greater detail. This was necessary because her painting was going to be enlarged on a commercial printer.

“I scanned in the original painting at 2,600 dpi,” said Heuer. “That way when we increased the size and printed out the sections that would go on the wall, we wouldn’t lose the definition of the original painting. It went on the wall in three pieces and looks magnificent.”

The mural also includes the Holy Trinity, and Sts. Boniface and John Nepomucene, in acknowledgement of the combining of two former parishes into one, and for the German and Bohemian communities who founded Lidgerwood’s two original Catholic parishes.

The altar and ambo were built by Hurley’s Religious Goods in Fargo. The ambo depicts when Christ was about to be raised into Heaven, charging his disciples to go out and preach to all nations, thereby giving them the “Living Word.” The altar depicts the Last Supper, where Christ gave his apostles his body and blood, under the form of bread and wine.

“This was God in action,” said Father Anderl. “It was amazing to me to see how the parish came together over the 120 days of the project. What means the most to me is how much the parishioners have made this project their own, how much they appreciate what was done, and how it’s helping in their worship, the whole experience of church and the Mass. That’s most gratifying to me.”

The new altar was solemnly dedicated and the other renovated liturgical items blessed by Bishop Folda at a Mass held on Feb. 2.

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St. Cecilia's Church in Harvey hosted a Life in the Spirit Seminar Jan. 10-12 with 74 people participating. Father Kevin Boucher led the seminar with other priests and religious from the Fargo Diocese assisting with talks and discussion. It was a fruitful weekend as those attending gained understanding and drew closer in relationship with the Holy Spirit. (submitted photo)

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When parishioners of Our Lady of Peace in Mayville go to Sunday Mass, a familiar face will be missing behind the organ. Delores von Ruden has decided it’s time to step aside from her duties as organist and music coordinator at the parish, a role she has filled for seventy-plus years.

“Mayville back then was a mission church, and we maybe had Mass there once a month,” said Delores. “There was a lady there who played the little pump organ, and she said maybe I should play, and that’s how I got started playing for the church.”

Delores started playing the piano at age 16, when her mother and father bought one at an auction sale for $25. She says there was no money to pay for piano lessons, so she taught herself to play. She also doesn’t read music, so to learn a hymn she would have to have someone play it or sing it for her a few times to get the melody. She says the ability to learn music that way is a gift from God, so she tries to give that gift back any way she can.

“It’s really a ministry that allows me to help people,” said Delores. “Doing funerals, weddings, or baptisms, and being able to guide families in their music choices when they didn’t know where to turn. All of the accompanists here are willing to do that for families.”

Delores says music and technology has changed over the seven decades she has been in music ministry. She says Our Lady of Peace has gone through probably four different organs, each one more advanced than the other. Her favorite is the current electronic keyboard, which allows her to transpose hymns.

“Most hymns are written way too high for parishioners to sing,” said Delores. “We can bring the key down now and make it easier for the congregation.”

Delores will still stay active in the community, playing music for different functions and events, but she says she will miss her ministry.

“Piano is my favorite instrument, but I love the organ,” said Delores. “I get a feeling of peace and comfort when I hear the organ played at church.”

Now she’ll enjoy the sound of the organ from the other side of the keyboard.
A teenage girl or a young woman finds herself in what she feels is a hopeless situation… she is pregnant and doesn’t know where to turn for help. Many of these women and girls will confide in a trusted friend, who, though well meaning, will send the young woman to a clinic or someplace like Planned Parenthood. Often times the end result of such a visit is termination of the pregnancy.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) wants to help Catholics and all women in a crisis pregnancy position realize that there are other places to turn for help… for instance, their local Catholic church. To help women get the information they need, the USCCB began a year-long initiative called “Walking with Moms in Need: A year of service.” The initiative, spearheaded by the USCCB’s Committee on Pro-Life Activities, aims to make sure parishes across the United States are equipped with the information and outreach women in a crisis pregnancy situation are searching for, and to guide them toward options other than abortion.

“Pregnant and parenting moms in need are in our parishes and neighborhoods,” said the Most Reverend Joseph Naumann,
Archbishop of Kansas City and Chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Pro-Life Activities. During a sermon at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on Jan. 23, Archbishop Naumann went on to say “While many pregnancy resources are appropriately coordinated at the diocesan or regional level, moms in need are best reached at the local level. We have well over 17,000 Catholic parishes in the United States. Each parish is best able to identify the local pregnancy help resources that are currently available and to identify the potential gaps.”

The “Walking with Moms in Need” project is the USCCB’s effort to commemorate Evangelium Vitae, St. Pope John Paul II’s encyclical, which translates to “The Gospel of Life.” Released on March 25, 1995, the late pontiff wrote the encyclical to reiterate and emphasize the Church’s value of human life, and to warn against violating the sanctity of life.

“This service project is a great initiative to build up the culture of life in our communities,” said Bishop John Folda. “We want all our parishes to be aware of the resources available to support mothers in difficult pregnancies, and we want pregnant moms to know they are not alone. Our parishes and our diocese will do what we can to help moms in need and to accompany them as they bring their new little one into the world. As we all know, the Church isn’t just against abortion; it is for life!”

One resource available to parishes is Catholic Charities North Dakota (CCND). The statewide organization provides virtually a one-stop destination for women seeking information or help with their pregnancy. CCND’s Pregnancy, Parenting and Adoption Services (PPAS) program is ready to help secure support in areas of nutrition, medical care, financial assistance, parenting options, and adoption services.

“A lot of the women we work with are an island to themselves. They don’t have any family or other support to help them through, so we do try to create a support system for them,” said Kris Haycraft, PPAS Director. “Sometimes, the biggest hurdle is to make the call, because sometimes they haven’t even said the words ‘I’m pregnant’ out loud, so having the courage to make that first call is by far the hardest thing they may do.”

CCND has offices across the state, but some women don’t feel comfortable in an office setting or don’t have the means to travel to a CCND office. Haycraft says when women call, a CCND social worker will offer to travel and meet with them at a place they feel comfortable, whether that be at home, a library, a parish church, or wherever they choose.

Licensed social workers work with expectant mothers throughout their pregnancy, discussing the options of adoption and parenting while working to help address any unmet needs in their life. Haycraft says about half of clients choose to make an adoption plan for their child and about half choose to parent. When a woman chooses to make an adoption plan, the PPAS program helps them to identify a family to adopt their child. CCND has families waiting to adopt who have already been through the rigorous home-study process and training requirements, and who would be overjoyed to adopt a child into their family. When a woman chooses to parent their child, the PPAS program works to help prepare them for that responsibility. No matter the decision, the PPAS program supports women throughout their pregnancy, through labor and delivery, and for as long as needed after the baby is born.

“We are not here in any way to judge them, or to judge the circumstances surrounding their pregnancy,” said Haycraft. “We are simply here to walk the journey with them and to support them in life-affirming choices for their child.”

Parishes can do their part to offer support locally. Many already have volunteers who make quilts and collect much needed baby supplies they may give without cost. But the “Walking with Moms in Need” project is trying to get parishes, and especially parish priests, to offer even more support. According to the USCCB website, for the year of service the USCCB Pro-Life Committee is developing educational, pastoral, and action-oriented resources for parish use, such as:

- Tools for documenting an inventory of local resources for pregnant mothers in need
• Ideas for improving parish responses
• Prayers for building a culture of life and a civilization of love
• Reflections on the teachings of *Evangelium Vitae, Evangelii Gaudium*, and *Laudato Si*

“Our goal is not only to identify gaps or areas with insufficient resources,” said Archbishop Naumann, “but then to take concrete steps to expand the help available to mothers, not only during the pregnancy but for months and even years after the child’s birth. We want to do everything possible to help both mother and child, not only survive but thrive.”

The “Walking with Moms in Need: A year of service” will run from March 25, 2020 to March 25, 2021. Information on the project may be found on the Diocese of Fargo website at fargodiocese.org/wwmin. More information on the Pregnancy, Parenting, and Adoption Services program provided by Catholic Charities of North Dakota may be found at catholiccharitiesnd.org.

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**A Prayer for Pregnant Mothers**

O Blessed Mother, you received the good news of the incarnation of Christ, your Son, with faith and trust. Grant your protection to all pregnant mothers facing difficulties.

Guide us as we strive to make our parish communities places of welcome and assistance for mothers in need. Help us become instruments of God’s love and compassion.

Mary, Mother of the Church, graciously help us build a culture of life and a civilization of love, together with all people of good will, to the praise and glory of God, the Creator and lover of life. Amen.

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Homeschooling and the domestic church

By Laurie Kraemer

What began as a tiny spark of interest has become a full-blown vocation within my vocation of marriage. I am a homeschooling mom. The call to begin teaching my own children began over 30 years ago when our oldest daughter was six years old. Although I did not recognize it at the time, God was using this means of education to help our family realize our potential as a “little church,” the domestic church.

When I first asked my husband in early 1988 about the possibility of teaching our daughter at home, it wasn’t even legal! Fortunately, the law changed in North Dakota, so in the fall our family began what felt like an adventure and an experiment all rolled into one. We had so much to learn! Yet, we quickly discovered that having different ages working together seemed akin to the one-room schoolhouses we read about during our story-time sessions.

In the early years, I spent countless hours on the couch reading Bible stories, living history books, and great children’s literature with the oldest seated beside me and the youngest in my lap or playing on the floor nearby. The great outdoors, which included a few hobby farm animals, provided a beneficial start in the life sciences. Accomplishing reading, writing, and math at the kitchen table, my students were able to be in the presence of one another while schooling. Growing older, each child received a list of chores, including animal care, meal preparation, and laundry, which needed to be done at some point during the day. This gave me the needed time to teach, as well as equipping my students with a top-notch skill set. In due time, a beautiful integration of faith, book-learning, and home life-skills was realized as a natural result of the homeschool lifestyle.

The official name of our school is St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Home School. A few years into our venture, we read about several interesting saints who were dedicated to education. We then voted to pick a patron saint. Annually, on January 28, we celebrate Thomas Aquinas’ feast day with a recap of his life and a special meal. We also celebrate Catholic Schools Week with “crazy hat day” and “crazy teacher day” (my favorite). Like other parochial school students, we attend daily Mass at least once a week, and our children are strongly encouraged to be active in assisting at Sunday Mass through ministry participation roles such as altar serving and music ministry.

To my surprise, my own faith life received a remarkable jump-start as I began the daily teaching of religion and virtue. While learning right along with my children, I probably benefited the most because I was the one in most need of conversion at the time. I doubt that I would be the person I am today if God had not called me to teach my kids at home.

To be sure, the decision to homeschool requires discernment, often on a yearly basis. Constant prayer is needed: prayer about curriculum choices, prayer about time management, prayer about learning struggles and strong-willed children, prayer about seeking assistance from others... the list is truly endless. Our Catholic support group and the North Dakota Home School Association have been invaluable in providing a means for us to connect and receive encouragement from others in the same walk of life. Active participation in our parish and diocese gives us many opportunities to support, serve, and socialize.

Our adventurous experiment has been by no means perfect. There have been years of plentiful grace and years of great testing. Real life happened along with school, substantial things like the flood of ’97, two adoptions from China, ill health, and human weakness. Through it all, we have walked with Christ at our side. He has immensely blessed our home school efforts and our little domestic church. Thus far, five have graduated from St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Home School, have gone on to higher education of various kinds, and have followed vocations to married life or the priesthood. With two children left to go, the end of my treasured homeschooling vocation will come to an end in a few years. But wait! All our grandchildren are being homeschooled, so perhaps the adventure will take a new direction.

Laurie and her husband Phil live in Grand Forks. They have 7 children and 7 grandchildren. Laurie enjoys mentoring others interested in Catholic homeschooling and can be reached at motherkraemer@gmail.com.
Every conversion story is unique. There's rarely just one thing that will make someone leave their old world behind and cross the river toward Rome. There's often a combination of factors. And sometimes, the road to Rome is taken as a last resort, the final available path after everything else has been tried.

Abigail Favale's story in her book, *Into the Deep*, is no exception. Growing up in southern Utah where her family was one of a handful of evangelical Christians deep in the heart of Mormon country, Favale grew up with the unique perspective of learning her faith as an outsider to the dominant culture. Typical of many Christian kids, she grew up trying to make her parents’ religion her own, while often being tempted by the pull of the culture around her:

“During those (summer) months, I would typically have some immersive religious experience... that would sweep me back into the arms of Christ and have me vowing never to fall away again... all too quickly, summer would end, the emotions ebbed, and things would reset for another cycle.”

These experiences are, I think, fairly common among kids who grew up in the church. There’s a struggling adolescence of faith, when believing things because parents say so is no longer enough, but there isn’t yet enough foundation to truly make the faith one’s own.

One of Favale’s difficulties with faith, and a dominant theme running through *Into the Deep*, is her experiences of faith as a woman who found herself with only masculine examples to follow. Mary, Rachel, and Esther were only periphery characters in her childhood catechesis, often serving as nothing more than foils or setups to the “real” heroes of the Bible stories, who were invariably male. These experiences left her feeling alienated and dry in a Christianity that didn’t seem to recognize women as having equal value in the eyes of the church or of God.

These experiences culminated in her abandoning the active practice of her faith throughout most of high school and early college studies, succumbing to the dominant secular and sexual culture of ‘90s America. Favale speaks quite candidly about this in the book, as well as her perceived rejection by ‘90s “purity culture” which seemed to want her to perceive herself as something used and broken, that no one would ever want:

“I knew I’d have to break the news to any boy I dated, let him examine my past sins... I believed that I had transgressed beyond the bounds of restoration... this belief abetted continued poor choices, because there was no longer any purity to protect.”

During her university years Favale discovered modern feminism’s rewriting of Christianity, dismissive of tradition and content to reinterpret the Biblical narrative through postmodern feminist critique. While she felt some satisfaction from the looser interpretation of sexual morality and the heightened concentration on the role of women within Christianity, this too began to ring hollow. If the Christianity of her youth had marginalized her as a woman, the feminist take on it had stripped it of its power:

“I was right to conclude as a feminist that God is not actually male... something that, honestly, was not made entirely clear in the churches of my youth... When I look back at my birthright evangelicalism, it’s as if the feminine aspects of the faith have been lopped off: there’s no Mary, no genealogy of heroic female saints... I rightly sensed that something was amiss.”

The second half of *Into the Deep* is exactly what the title suggests, Favale’s coming to a deeper understanding of a faith in which she’s come to trust. As many converts can attest, this second half of the conversion can be much harder. After one has made the moral and intellectual submission, then the real work of changing and growing begins.

I would recommend *Into the Deep* to anyone as an introduction to a greater understanding of the Church’s view of the distinct, unique, and invaluable roles of men and women, as well as those with a spouse who doesn’t share their faith (Favale’s husband was and remains an atheist). This isn’t the type of story you read where everything turns out nice and neat in the end. It’s a real and moving story that shows conversion as both a spiritual and earthly experience, something that doesn’t end but rather begins the story.

The cover art for the book, while perhaps a little confusing, speaks to Favale’s immersion into her newfound Catholic identity, into the “deep” of the Church.

Matt Komprood is the business manager at St. Thomas Aquinas Newman Center in Grand Forks.
In a sense, the expansion project now underway for North Dakota State University’s St. Paul’s Newman Center started 38 years ago.

It was in 1982 that the Rev. James Cheney, a young man who’d grown up on a small dairy farm in northern Minnesota, arrived on campus ready to begin his life’s mission.

“I was going to play football for the Bison and fly jets for the Air Force,” Cheney says.

He couldn’t have imagined a future that would include leading a multimillion-dollar endeavor to enliven the university and its students’ souls. Cheney’s first semester was “a disaster.”

“I began looking for meaning in my life, and I knew God had something to do with that,” he says. “That’s what brought me to the doors of the Newman Center.”

After experiencing a Together Encountering Christ retreat, Cheney’s life began to “radically change.” He got involved in music ministry at the Newman Center, worked there as a janitor and soon, “the Lord began to lay the grace of the priesthood on my heart.” In 1995, Cheney was ordained. He spent two years at a parish in Devils Lake, N.D., another eight in the Cooperstown area and, in 1997, became a chaplain for the U.S. Navy.

“I ended up being deployed and went all over the world,” he says, something he hoped to continue doing. But Bishop Samuel Aquila asked him to oversee the Newman Center of his alma mater instead. Cheney willingly jumped in “full throttle.”

The ministry already had part-time peer ministers, complementing the bishop’s vision of adding a Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) outreach.

“We started with four FOCUS Bible studies, and from there, things just took off,” Cheney says. Around 50 Bible studies happen weekly on campus now. Around 95 percent of all Catholic students will attend a state university, Cheney says. By the time they graduate, 80 percent will have abandoned their faith.

“It’s like a tsunami,” he remarks. “I began to see that this really does deserve the best efforts by the church.”

He knew offering free hot dogs and pizza to draw students wouldn’t be enough, he says. “We began to envision the future of serving the minds and hearts of students for the next 75 to 100 years.”

An increase in sacramental offerings, along with mission trips, campus events, retreats and education, became part of the growth. In 2010, the “bisonCatholic” branding went into effect. Hundreds of students were showing up for daily Mass.

“The fruits have been just crazy,” Cheney says.
Over the last 15 years, the campus has generated close to 100 FOCUS missionaries, around 30 seminarians, eight religious sisters and “tons of tremendous marriages.”

Bryan Wilburn, the center’s director of development and a 2011 graduate of NDSU, came from a rural parish in Montana. At best, his faith was lackluster initially, he says, but an invitation to be part of a Bible study, led by fellow student Jayson Miller, now a priest at Holy Cross Church in West Fargo, introduced him to Christian life at NDSU. Beyond that and Sunday Mass, however, he admits his life “was not very Catholic.” But things changed after attending a FOCUS conference with around 3,000 youth on fire for Christ.

“I no longer had the ignorance I had before, and I knew I couldn’t go back to the way I had been living,” he says. Though he says he was grateful for those earlier experiences, the former building was outdated, small and rather dark. The new one will be the opposite, he says, and include a beautiful 450-seat chapel as its centerpiece, “a jewel for the whole campus.”

Wilburn says he hopes the art and acoustics within will draw not just Catholic students but all who need spiritual reprieve. “We’ll be providing a quiet, prayerful space that anybody can walk into and utilize. Just having a chance to have that intimacy with God, you can’t even put a price on it,” he says.

Planners also hope the housing wing can be open to the general campus population, using a model that’s been successful at the University of Illinois in Champagne’s Newman Center.

AWAITING THE PROMISED LAND

For now, a temporary building at 2505 N. University Drive provides a space for some of the students’ needs. “We are embracing the nomadic nature of our ministry right now,” says Bernadette O’Keefe, campus minister.

Every Sunday, Mass is offered to students at 11 a.m. at Century Theater on campus. A partnership with nearby Holy Spirit parish provides an additional 5 p.m. Mass on Sunday evenings. Additionally, a Saturday afternoon option at 4:30 p.m. takes places weekly at the temporary location.

O’Keefe says she was “positively impacted” by the Newman Center growing up when her family began worshiping there for a time.

“I have memories of my mom playing music for Mass, and a Christmas play we did that the students came to watch,” she says. “I was an angel, and my brother was a shepherd who had a towel wrapped around his head.”

Now, she feels as if she’s “awaiting the promised land,” she says.

“We’re small right now, but we’re about to get very big, and I’m learning to deal with that elasticity. I’m very excited for the new building,” she says.

Paige Hall, a peer minister and senior, will graduate by the center’s projected July 2021 completion, but she shares her gratitude for the enrichment she’s received at the Newman Center, including through visiting the adoration chapel and “taking time with Jesus,” a practice that was new to her as a freshman.

“I found a lot of amazing friends here and grew out of my shell. I’m much more extroverted now than when I first came to campus,” she says, noting that she wishes more students could experience, as she has, how “you can have a good time without partying every night and losing your mind.”

Affirming Hall’s experience, Cheney says practiced religiosity leads to a healthier life.

“It gives young people some semblance of hope and contributes a lot to the overall happiness of a person,” he says.

Scientific studies show that faith leads to stronger relationships, higher addiction-recovery rates and better coping strategies and work habits, he adds.

“This isn’t the Bible guy preaching on the corner,” he says. “There is a battle for the minds and hearts of our young adults, and the shifts we see in the culture start at the university level.”

Cheney says the $21.5 million project, a labor of love which has come through years of prayer and effort, will ultimately build a broader base value at NDSU, increasing the quality and caliber for the entire campus.

“What happens when students are encouraged to become virtuous people who have a semblance of personal integrity?” he asks. “The encounter with Christ changed my life, and I want that for every student because I know what happened to me. My life was a mess, and it completely changed.”

Desiring the best possible life for all NDSU students, he says, drives the project at its core.

“These are our future leaders.”
Handing off the gift of faith to our young people

As Director of Catholic Schools for the Fargo Diocese, I am grateful for the opportunity in this column to feature our Catholic schools. We have 14 Catholic schools located in Belcourt, Devils Lake, Fargo, Grand Forks, Jamestown, Langdon, Rugby, Valley City, Wahpeton, and West Fargo. This school year those schools serve 1,840 students pre-K through 12th grade.

Our Catholic schools strive for excellence in teaching and learning, and we challenge and encourage our students to grow in a spirit of virtue and service to others. Most importantly, our Catholic schools hand on the gift of faith to our young people, and they integrate the faith into every aspect of a child’s education. They fulfill the ideal of the Church’s holistic vision for education, which includes the religious and spiritual dimension of human life. Not just once a week, but every day, our students are invited into a deeper and more loving relationship with God, and they have the opportunity to know Jesus Christ and his Gospel.

To our parish communities that support Catholic schools in our diocese, you have my deepest thanks. It is such a great gift to provide this kind of education of eternal significance. Without the support of our parishes, families, benefactors, and dedicated teachers and staff members, it would be impossible to maintain this essential apostolate of the Church.

During Catholic Schools Week in our sponsoring parishes this year, Bishop Folda made this heart-felt appeal to families:

“I also invite every family to consider Catholic schools for your own children. I know that this entails a sacrifice, but we will work with any family to make sure you can afford Catholic education for your sons and daughters. I was blessed to experience Catholic education in my youth, and I want to extend that same blessing to all the children of our diocese. Please pray for the ongoing success of our Catholic schools, and know that I am praying for each one of you and your families. God bless you!”

Please consider a Catholic school in your child’s future.

Meanwhile, no matter where you live, no matter how far the nearest Catholic school is to you, I invite your prayers for all of our diocesan Catholic schools. Please pray the following prayer often. Thank you and thanks be to God for the gift of Catholic education!

Editors note: This is the first of bi-monthly columns submitted by educators and administrators featuring the status and future of our diocesan Catholic schools.

Bishop Folda speaks to Little Deacons and other students at Holy Spirit in Fargo on Feb. 14. (submitted photo)

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**Prayer for Catholic Schools**

By the University of Notre Dame’s “Alliance For Catholic Education”

Preface: … (W)e recognize that our lives and our work are totally dependent upon God. Through prayer, we entrust to God our communities and all we do in service to Catholic schools, as we share Mary’s conviction:

“Nothing will be impossible for God” (Luke 1:37).

Let us pray:

O Christ, our Teacher,
You invite Your faithful people to make disciples in Your name and to announce good news to the poor. We thank You for the gift of Catholic schools, where

the message of Your life, death, and resurrection is proclaimed,
Christian community is experienced,
Service to our brothers and sisters is modeled,
And worship of You is cultivated.

Increase our zeal for ensuring that all children and families can benefit from a high quality Catholic education, and that Catholic schools grow in their ability to nurture the soul of our nation.

We ask this through the intercession of Our Lady, Mother of Catholic Schools. Amen.
Seventy-five years ago, on January 27, 1945, the infantrymen of the Red Army’s 322nd Rifle Division were bludgeoning their way into the Third Reich when they discovered the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camps. The German inventors of industrialized mass slaughter had cleared out earlier, forcing some 60,000 prisoners deemed capable of slave labor in the Fatherland on a march westward, during which many died. Battle-hardened Russian veterans of the brutal war on the Eastern Front were nonetheless shocked by what they found at Auschwitz-Birkenau: 6,000 living skeletons, many suffering from diseases that would kill them before medical care and food restored their strength.

On his pilgrimage there in June 1979, Pope St. John Paul II called Auschwitz-Birkenau the “Golgotha of the modern world.” And it is striking that a world largely inured to murder on a vast scale still recognizes in Auschwitz an icon of radical evil: a barbaric grotesquerie no sane person would attempt to justify. In that sense, the lethal reality of what happened at Auschwitz-Birkenau stands in contradiction to the claim by some Catholic moral theologians—once thought marginalized but now back in business—that there are no “intrinsically evil acts.” If you cannot concede that what was done to over one million innocents in the torture cells, on the gallows, at the “Wall of Death,” and in the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz-Birkenau was “intrinsically evil”—gravely wrong, period—then you are a moral cretin, no matter what your highest earned degree may be.

I’ve been to the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex perhaps 10 times: in recent years, to pray at the cell in Auschwitz I where St. Maximilian Kolbe was starved for two weeks before being killed by an injection of carbolic acid, or to hike around the perimeter of Auschwitz II-Birkenau, praying the sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary while walking past the likely site of St. Edith Stein’s gassing and cremation. And for me, as for many others, the questions inevitably occur: How? Why?

Poland is not on the periphery of Europe; Poland is at the center of Europe, and that part of Poland that was annexed to the Third Reich in 1939 is in the southernmost part of what, after postwar border adjustments, is now central Poland. So at Auschwitz and Birkenau—the German names for the absorbed Polish towns of Oswiecim and Brzezinka—you are not anywhere near the savage peripheries of the film *Apocalypto*. You are, rather, in the middle of the continent that, in the mid-20th century, considered itself the center of world civilization. And that is where the industrialized mass murder of innocents was undertaken.

Libraries of books have been written in an attempt to grasp how Germany, a country renowned for its accomplishments in the arts and sciences, could have handed itself over to a genocidal maniac who looked like a Charlie Chaplin character and rabble-roused in screechy German colored by a strong Austrian accent. That question becomes even more urgent when, in the exhibits at Auschwitz I, the visitor ponders black-and-white photos of the “selection” process at the railroad tracks leading into Auschwitz II-Birkenau—and notices that the SS officers making instant decisions about the life and death of those being unloaded from the cattle cars in which they’d been transported across Europe are quite at ease; some are even smiling. Then you learn that the men who invented this horror included eight officials with the coveted German doctoral degree. And you ask again, “How? Why?”

One piece of that jigsaw puzzle of evil falls into place when it’s remembered that, in the 1920s, German intellectuals developed the notion of *Lebensunwertes Leben*: “Life unworthy of life.” Influenced by the pseudo-science of eugenics and the concern for “race purity” then epidemic throughout the West (not excluding the United States), this wicked idea was first applied to the physically and intellectually handicapped, especially children. From there, it was a short step to its application to Jews, Roma, homosexuals, Slavs, and other *Untermenschen*: lower life-forms. And the concept of “Life unworthy of life,” it must be remembered, was not developed by clods, but by highly-educated people—people who likely thought there was no such thing as an “intrinsically evil act.”

On this anniversary, we fool ourselves if we think humanity has learned its lesson and that an Auschwitz could never happen again. As the Italian Holocaust survivor Primo Levi put it, it did happen, so it can happen again. The form may be different; but the rationale will almost certainly be the same.
Over the past year, it seems we said our final goodbyes to a lot of people. The season of Lent offers an opportunity to reflect on all that these retired and nearby bishops, some well-known priests, some wonderful religious sisters, and many more faithful laypersons too numerous to mention have done for us. At the same time, as we prepare ourselves for Easter, we can see evidence that life and the Church are ever young with the new appointments of Bishop Austin Vetter from Bismarck to Helena, Mont. and Bishop Donald DeGrood from St. Paul and Minneapolis to Sioux Falls, S.D.

Also recently, two of our former directors of Catholic Charities North Dakota passed away. They were Father Gerald McCarthy, who led our agency from 1969–74, and Larry Bernhardt, who guided our organization from 2010–13. Did you know that during our 97 years of existence, Catholic Charities has only had 10 different directors? Thus to have two former directors pass away within months of each other was unprecedented, and sort of shocking to our agency and those close to it.

Many of our supporters and former clients still remember Father McCarthy well from his time as director when we were still known as Catholic Family Service. While our current staff were not blessed to work under Father McCarthy, several of our current employees worked closely with Larry Bernhardt, as did many more clients and friends of Catholic Charities. In fact, Larry was a mentor to several current social workers across the state and was always willing to generously visit and offer his advice and support to our current director, Dianne Nechiporenko, who succeeded Larry after he retired about six years ago.

Father Gerald McCarthy earned a master’s degree in social work from St. Louis University before he was named the executive director. During his time at Catholic Family Service, the agency went through some changes and reorganization in order to better address the needs of people at the time. According to A History of Catholic Family Service from 1998, the demand for services rose while funding sources were reduced. Thus the agency faced some similar challenges then as we do now. After five years of service, Father McCarthy resigned from his position. He remains the last priest to serve as director of Catholic Charities and was succeeded by Roger Schwinghammer in 1974.

Larry Bernhardt became the executive director in 2013, following the leadership of Schwinghammer, Paul Griffin, and Briston Fernandes. In addition to his professional accomplishments in many roles as a licensed social worker himself, Larry was also known as a great storyteller, and someone who could see the big picture and the beauty and joy of life. According to his obituary, Larry’s greatest interests included spending time with his family and close friends and loving of the outdoors.

Although I joined Catholic Charities after Larry retired, I will never forget how he reached out to me with a message of encouragement after one of my first articles appeared in New Earth. Attending his and other funerals reminded me of how short life truly is. More and more I have also come to realize how everything that our agency is now is a product of the leadership of earlier individuals all the way back to our very first director, a young priest in 1923 by the name of Father Vincent Ryan (later the first bishop of the Bismarck Diocese).

Part of the beauty of the Catholic faith is the belief that we never have to really say goodbye. In fact, the term ‘goodbye’ is actually a shortening of the phrase ‘God be with ye!’ I like that understanding much better than the more commonly held finality of one last “goodbye.” Perhaps that’s why other people I’ve met will say “until next time” or “see you later.” We can be confident in our belief that if we follow the Lord and keep his commandments, loving God and loving others as Christ taught us, then we have the hope that we will see them again later—if not on this earth, then just as the good thief on a cross with Jesus was promised—to be together in paradise soon!
Setting parameters for the sake of the common good

Christopher Dodson
Executive Director of the North Dakota Catholic Conference, which acts on behalf of the Catholic Bishops of N.D. to respond to public policy issues of concern to the Catholic Church.

The state legislature to the south of us is considering a bill that would prohibit medical providers from prescribing puberty-blocking drugs and cross-sex hormones, or conducting mutilating surgeries on a child who has emotional distress surrounding his or her sex. The South Dakota Catholic Conference strongly supports the bill. It has stated: “As theories of sex and gender inconsistent with nature and the natural moral law are increasingly prevalent in popular culture, it is just that the law protect children while they develop and mature physiologically, emotionally, and spiritually.”

It is an important issue which the North Dakota Catholic Conference and other state Catholics are closely following. By the time this column appears, the South Dakota legislature will have decided whether to pass the legislation.

In the meantime, we can examine one of the arguments presented in opposition to the bill. Medical groups, including the American Medical Association, the South Dakota Medical Association, and Sanford Health strongly oppose the legislation on the grounds that it “criminalizes medicine.” Even when legislators offered amendments to clearly remove anything done by physicians in South Dakota or the Sanford system, they continued to oppose the bill on the “principle” that legislators should not regulate medicine.

On some level this argument sounds appealing. Legislators and the general public have respect for doctors. They save lives. I am currently being treated by Sanford physicians and am thankful for that. We already do not like insurance companies inserting themselves into health care decisions by deciding what procedures are covered. The image of politicians doing the same could sink most any legislation.

There is also precedent for taking a hands-off approach to the medical practice. Physicians, like lawyers, accountants, professors, nurses, and other professions traditionally have a certain amount of autonomy. They have their own code of ethics, licensing, and enforcement.

Nevertheless, the principle of self-regulation can go too far. Just because physicians call something “medical” does not make it so and does not mean that it should be legal, even if the profession says it should be. Otherwise, anyone with a medical license could justify something contrary to the moral law.

Several legislative sessions ago lawmakers sought to restrict when physicians can destroy human embryos created through in vitro fertilization. During negotiation discussions, a fertility physician told me and some legislators that any compromise was unacceptable because the legislature “had no business” involving itself in a “medical” issue. I responded by saying that the legislators sitting next to me not only had the right, but also the duty to involve itself in determining what is and what is not “medicine.” A license to practice medicine does not give an absolute right to do something just because the physician calls it “medicine.” In our system of government, lawmakers, not practitioners, define the parameters of what is acceptable within a profession.

Consider the consequences if we become seduced by the argument we should not legislate medicine. North Dakota would not have laws prohibiting physician-assisted suicide, euthanasia, research that destroys human embryos, and human cloning. In the area of abortion, we would not have informed consent requirements, regulations on the use of abortion drugs, parental notification laws, a ban on partial-birth abortion, a ban on post-viability abortions, waiting periods, ultrasound options, and bans on abortion for sex selection or genetic abnormality. All of these could be justified by calling the acts “medical.”

At this moment the American Medical Association is suing the state of North Dakota to stop requirements that women be given information about human biology and the possibility of stopping the effects of the abortion drug regimen. One of its arguments is that the state should not define what should be included in obtaining informed consent because that is a “medical” issue.

The state also restricts what drugs doctors can prescribe, the provision of controlled substances, and the requirements for telemedicine. The legislature, rather than the Board of Medicine, also sets forth a long list of grounds for discipline. Clearly, the concept of legislating the parameters of what is and what is not proper medicine is well established.

Ironically, some of the same medical associations and entities opposed to legislation restricting abortion or sex-reassignment on minors have no problem with bans on “conversion therapy,” which demonstrates that they are selective when it comes to employing the “hands off” argument. They, as much as any legislative body, respond to the political and cultural winds of the time. The difference is that they might be professionals with skill and expertise, but they may not possess the societal wisdom and reflection that comes from the legislative process.

Our task as citizens is to respect the balance between, on the one hand, allowing professional bodies to mostly self-regulate and, on the other hand, the need to set the parameters for the sake of human life, human dignity, and the common good.
Encountering the humanity of Christ in the Holy Land

This January I was blessed to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with my classmates from St. Paul Seminary. To encounter God where he became man and walked among us was one of the greatest gifts of this pilgrimage and the graces from this will flow throughout my life. I was changed for the better due to encountering the humanity of Christ with the assistance of our Mother Mary.

One of the first places we visited was the Basilica of the Annunciation, quite literally where it all began. I was blessed to attend Mass and spend multiple hours of prayer in this basilica. During those times of prayer as I gazed into the cave where Mary gave her fiat, I heard her calling me to follow her. As the trip continued, I followed Mary to Galilee where Jesus called his first disciples. I walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee near the place where Jesus called the first disciples, sensing the Lord calling me to encounter him in a deeper way. The calling of the first disciples is one of my favorite bible passages. Prayerfully reading through this passage as an undergrad at NDSU helped me encounter the Lord and hear his invitation to follow him into seminary. Praying through this passage again as a seminarian at the shoreline where the disciples were called, was an encounter difficult to articulate.

As I knelt before the tomb of Our Lord in the silent hours of the night, I realized that, like Christ, the Father was calling me to rise from my fears and follow Christ from the tomb to the world, boldly proclaiming the Gospel. That night I had a powerful experience of dying to self upon Calvary realizing yet again the deep love of the Father to send his Son to die for all of us. As I walked back to the hotel early the next morning, the sun peaking over the horizon, I could barely contain the joy I felt, graced by my time in the Holy Sepulcher.

As I reflect upon this pilgrimage and my time in seminary, I realize I’ve grown in many ways spiritually, humanly, intellectually, and pastorally. I know that I have much growth yet to do, and so I humbly ask for your prayers for myself and my brother seminarians as we prepare to serve you.

Editor’s Note: Seminarian Life is a column written by current Diocese of Fargo seminarians. Please continue to pray for them.

Kevin Lorsung
Theology III seminarian studying at St. Paul Seminary in St. Paul, Minn.

As I knelt before the tomb of Our Lord in the silent hours of the night, I realized that, like Christ, the Father was calling me to rise from my fears and follow Christ from the tomb to the world, boldly proclaiming the Gospel. – Kevin Lorsung

This deeper encounter I was having with the Lord was fitting as I prepare to give my own fiat on June 5 in St. Mary’s Cathedral where I will be, God willing, ordained a transitional deacon. It is fitting that, like the disciples, I too am a sinner prone to confusion. God still called the disciples regardless, and he was calling me to trust him just as deeply. Moreover, encountering the humanity of Christ helped me realize that he too was tempted to sin. He was extremely thirsty and hungry in the desert, yet he turned to his Father for support and comfort. I am called to do the same. This gave me hope as I approach diaconate ordination, realizing more and more how weak I am and how, like Christ, I can turn to God to fill me with the graces to overcome my weaknesses.

Another beautiful time of encounter with the Lord was when I was blessed to stay overnight with 11 fellow seminarians in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the site of Jesus’s burial. This time of solitude and silence with the Lord was very soothing especially given my doubts and fears about ordination. As I knelt before the tomb of Our Lord in the silent hours of the night, I realized that, like Christ, the Father was calling me to rise from my fears and follow Christ from the tomb to the world, boldly proclaiming the Gospel. That night I had a powerful experience of dying to self upon Calvary realizing yet again the deep love of the Father to send his Son to die for all of us. As I walked back to the hotel early the next morning, the sun peaking over the horizon, I could barely contain the joy I felt, graced by my time in the Holy Sepulcher.

As I reflect upon this pilgrimage and my time in seminary, I realize I’ve grown in many ways spiritually, humanly, intellectually, and pastorally. I know that I have much growth yet to do, and so I humbly ask for your prayers for myself and my brother seminarians as we prepare to serve you.

Editor’s Note: Seminarian Life is a column written by current Diocese of Fargo seminarians. Please continue to pray for them.
On Dec. 20, 2019, the new SECURE Act was signed into law and became effective on Jan. 1, 2020. SECURE is an acronym for “Setting Every Community Up for Retirement Enhancement.” Some would argue this new Act is the most impactful retirement legislation for over a decade. There are two big takeaways from this new legislation:

1. **The SECURE ACT increases the age for required minimum distributions from Individual Retirement Accounts (IRA’s) from 70 1/2 to 72 years of age.** For many folks, this isn’t that big of a change. For those that use the IRA Charitable Rollover option (and there are many that do), the age of eligibility remains 70 1/2 years old and zero-tax charitable distributions remain available for up to $100,000 annually.

   Making an IRA Rollover gift is very easy. First, contact your IRA administrator, because of the popularity of the “rollover,” most administrators provide forms and a procedure to help make a rollover gift. Second, no income taxes on the amount transferred to charity. Third, inform the charity that the gift is coming, what it is for, and where it is coming from. Sometimes IRA Charitable Rollovers arrive at the charity with no name included so the charity cannot apply the gift until it hears from the donor who is looking for an acknowledgment.

2. **The SECURE ACT provides that beneficiaries of retirement accounts (not including spouse), must withdraw an inherited IRA within 10 years.** The Act effectively eliminates stretch IRA plans. As a result, the taxable distributions to most IRA beneficiaries will be larger, and the taxes they pay will be higher.

   If you were planning to utilize a “stretch IRA plan,” the SECURE Act has dramatically changed the tax law rules, substantially increasing the income taxes paid by your children on inherited IRAs. Of the many types of trusts out there, the Testamentary Charitable Remainder Unitrust is an excellent plan to replace old stretch IRA plans.

   What is a Testamentary Charitable Remainder Trust? It’s simply a trust that is tax-exempt designed to make income payments to your heirs over their lifetimes or for a term of 20 years. At the end of the trust, the remaining principal is distributed to support a charity like your church for example. The trust is sometimes called a “give it twice” trust because it enables you to give the gift of income to your heirs and leave a potentially comparable gift to support your charity.

   Some other considerations:
   - The heirs whom you want to be the income beneficiaries must be specifically named in the trust and alive when the trust is created.
   - If a named heir is under 30 years of age, a calculation needs to be run to determine if the trust will qualify to make lifetime payments. If not, you can use a term of 20 years, which is twice the period allowed under the SECURE Act.
   - The tax law requires a minimum payout rate of 5%.
   - The trust must be named as a beneficiary of your IRA; if you name your estate as the beneficiary, the IRA will be taxed, thus negating your planning.
   - Exceptions to the SECURE Act 10-year rule include a surviving spouse and children under the age of 18.

   This information is not intended as tax, legal, or financial advice. Consult your personal financial advisor or tax attorney for your information specific to your situation.

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**Trinity Youth Camp 2020**

Trinity Youth Camp is a Catholic camping experience for youth entering 4th-8th grade fall 2020.

- June 14—18* Red Willow | Binford, ND
- July 8 – 12 Pelican Lake | Bottineau, ND
- July 15 – 19 Camp of the Cross | Garrison, ND
- July 22—26 Pelican Lake | Bottineau, ND
- *Red Willow camp runs Sunday-Thursday

Activities include Good News, crafts, recreation, water sports, daily Mass, skits, campfires, new friends, and much more!

For more information, and to register go to our website:

www.trinityyouthcampnd.com

*Registration is due one week prior to the start of each session.
It was Friday and classes were over. Looking forward to a great weekend with her family, University of North Dakota (UND) student Madison Hartje was en-route from UND to Cavalier. Road conditions, however, weren’t the best. There were some patches of ice.

Near the Oslo exit, Madison abruptly came upon the scene of an accident. Several cars were already off the road. Unexpectedly, there was a vehicle right ahead of her. In order to avoid crashing into that vehicle, Madison had to veer into the other lane.

Madison was suddenly spinning out of control. She remembers seeing another car and a semi-truck in her path. To complicate matters, she noticed that she was headed right for the guardrail of the bridge.

After coming to a full stop, Madison found that not only did she not hit another vehicle, her car never even touched the impending guardrail. With adrenaline at full throttle, she managed to catch her breath. Just then, she looked down at her cup holder. Right there were some Miraculous Medals.

Madison made the connection right away. Having the Miraculous Medals meant having the prayers of Our Lady. “I believe that saved my life,” she declared. Through the grace of God, requested by the Mother of God, Madison came through the incident unharmed.

Going to Mass that weekend at St. Brigid in Cavalier, Madison and her mom, Tara, picked up a bulletin and started reading the front-page article about a previous occurrence of how the Wieler family had been helped by the prayers of the Blessed Mother through the Miraculous Medal. As they read the article, the tears flowed.

We give thanks and praise to God that, shortly after Miraculous Medals were distributed to the parishes of St. Brigid and St. Patrick, we have already been shown the fruit of devotion to Our Lord through Our Lady. Jesus, while he was on the cross, gave us the tremendous gift of his mother. We are grateful for this gift.

Regarding the Miraculous Medals, “Everyone should have one,” Madison suggests. Not a bad suggestion!

Father Charles LaCroix is the pastor of St. Brigid’s Church in Cavalier and St. Patrick’s Church in Crystal.

Editor’s note: Stories of Faith is a recurring feature in New Earth. If you have a faith story to tell, contact Father Bert Miller at bert.miller@fargodziocese.org.
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 Monsignor Joseph P. Goering at (701) 356-7945 or Larry Bernhardt at (701) 356-7945 or VictimAssistance@fargodiocese.org. For additional information about victim assistance, visit www.fargodiocese.org/victimassistance.
Events across the Diocese

Catholic Man Night expands locations

Join other men for an evening of fellowship at Catholic Man Night. The evening begins at 6 p.m. with adoration and confession followed by a meal, prayer, and a speaker.

Mar. 19: Holy Family Church, Grand Forks
Apr. 16: Holy Family Church, Grand Forks
Apr. 16: St. Anthony Church, Fargo – speaker Father Kyle Metzger
May 12: Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo – speaker Father Larry Delaney

Head to Valley City for a parish mission

Join St. Catherine’s Church in Valley City for their parish mission starting at 6:30 p.m. each evening from March 29 to April 1. Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers will speak on the topic: Relationships with God and Family. Deacon Harold is the author of *The Mass in Sacred Scripture* and hosts his own weekly radio show, “From the Rooftops,” on Radio Maria, and can be seen as the host of several popular EWTN television series.

Head to Lidgerwood for a parish mission

Father Robert Altier will present a parish mission on Marriage and Family March 29 through March 31 at St. Boniface Church in Lidgerwood. Lodging is available at the Franciscan Monastery in Hankinson. For more information, call (701) 538-4604.

Wimbledon to host Middle School Extravaganza on April 18

All middle school students are invited to the Middle School Extravaganza on April 18 at the former Wimbledon School at 208 Center Street and at St. Boniface Church in Wimbledon. Keynote speaker Scott Anthony is a 20-year veteran in youth ministry from York, Pa. with a wonderful wit who has much to share about the Catholic faith and help students grow closer to Jesus.

This event will include Mass, adoration, reconciliation, a Eucharistic procession, workshops, and a dance. Parishes will be receiving information about how to sign up for this event presented by the Catholic Youth Advisory Committee, a high school leadership team developed by the Youth and Young Adult Ministry Department of the Diocese of Fargo.

Deadline to register at your parish is April 1. Contact Kathy Loney at (701) 356-7902.

Join Reboot! Live at Holy Family Church in Grand Forks

Chris Stefanick will be hosting Reboot! Live at Holy Family Church in Grand Forks on April 29 from 7 to 9:30 p.m. Tickets are $25 which includes admission as well as select copies of Chris’ books. Tickets are available at www.reallifecatholic.com or the parish office.

Chris Stefanick is a renowned Catholic author, speaker, television host, and is the founder of Real Life Catholic, a non-profit organization. His message reaches over 85,000 people a year. Reboot! is a fun and inspiring experience for those ages 12 and up. During this experience, Stefanick helps apply the inspiring truth of the Gospel to everyday life.

**PARISH MEALS**

GRAND FORKS: Holy Family Church will sponsor their 28th annual old fashioned spaghetti dinner on March 15 from noon to 6 p.m. Free will offering.

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**A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST**

75 years ago — 1945
A successful weekend retreat for Catholic farmers was held in Devils Lake on March 10 and 11. As far as is known, this was the first two-day retreat ever conducted exclusively for farmers. It was conducted by Father John Heinz, Director of Rural Life for the Bismarck diocese. In his conferences, Father stressed the dignity of labor and gave a glowing description of St. Isidore, patron saint of farmers.

50 years ago — 1970
The Congregation for the Clergy has granted all U.S. bishops the faculty to permit the faithful of their dioceses to fulfill their Sunday or holy day of obligation by attending Masses of the feast offered on the evening before. Receipt of the permissions was announced by a spokesman for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. More than 25 of some 160 U.S. dioceses and archdioceses have already asked for and received the so-called Saturday Mass permissions.

20 years ago — 2000
On Saturday, March 25, in union with Bishop James S. Sullivan, the people of the Diocese of Fargo are invited to make a historic and solemn Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary during this jubilee year. March 25 marks the solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, formerly known as the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On this day, the church recalls that moment when the Archangel Gabriel was sent to the Blessed Virgin Mary to announce the coming of the Messiah. The Pope reminds us that the nations will always find refuge under her protection. A small devotional medal is available at no cost to all parishioners.

*These news items, compiled by Danielle Thomas, were found in New Earth and its predecessor, Catholic Action News.*
Jim and Theresa (Lizakowski) Briske, parishioners of St. Michael’s Church in Grand Forks, celebrated their 60th anniversary on Feb. 25. They have 4 children, 8 grandchildren, one angel in heaven, and 3 1/2 great-grandchildren. They sing and play guitar together in a band called “Theresa and the Plowboys” at senior citizen events.

Loretta Althoff celebrated her 95th birthday on Feb 27. She was married to Leo in 1947 and is a parishioner of St. Anthony Church in Mooreton. They have eight children and currently live at St. Gerard’s Community Care in Hankinson.

Hilde Sodawasser celebrated her 90th birthday on Feb. 21. She is a parishioner of the Basilica St. James in Jamestown. She was married to Gil Sodawasser for 59 years until his passing in 2005. They had 6 children (5 surviving), 12 grandchildren, and 18 great-grandchildren.

The children of LeRoy and Carol Holub congratulate their parents on their 60th anniversary on March 21 with wishes for continued happiness and good health. They are parishioners of Holy Cross Church in West Fargo.

Share life’s milestones As a way to celebrate life and love, we encourage parishioners throughout the Diocese of Fargo to send a photo and news brief about golden anniversaries and anniversaries of 60 or more years or birthdays of 80 or more years to: New Earth, Diocese of Fargo, 5201 Bishops Blvd. S., Suite A, Fargo, ND 58104 or news@fargodiocese.org.

The University of Mary, in partnership with the Diocese of Bismarck, Annunciation Monastery, and Assumption Abbey, is hosting the 5th annual Vocations Jamboree and Expo on March 18. The event, which is free and open to the public, begins with Mass at 10 a.m. in Our Lady of Annunciation Chapel. The is expo from 11 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. in the Lumen Vitae University Center (LVUC) and is followed by the keynote presentation with Sarah Swafford and Father John Burns at 7:30 p.m. in Founders Hall.

Both Swafford and Burns are accomplished speakers and authors. Swafford, an Archison, Kan. native, is a frequent guest on EWTN programs while also hosting their “At the Heart of Relationships” program. Her recent book Emotional Virtue: A Guide to Drama-Free Relationships is a huge hit amongst young people and garners great reviews on both iBooks and Amazon.

Burns first thought he wanted to be a businessman when he got his business degree from the University of Notre Dame. Not feeling satisfied in that career, Burns followed a call from God to the priesthood before being ordained in 2010. As a priest in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, he’s worked extensively with Mother Teresa’s order, the Missionaries of Charity, and provides retreats in Africa, Europe, and the U.S. Burns’ very popular book, Lift Up Your Heart: A 10-Day personal Retreat with St. Francis de Sales, is the winner of the 2018 Catholic Press Association Award.

The expo features dozens of vocations directors and teams representing a broad range of religious orders and service communities from across the country gathering on campus to pray together and witness to the joy and beauty of life consecrated to God’s call. Exhibits and display booths will showcase the distinctive charism, history, and mission of each group.

University of Mary students and young people from the region will have the opportunity to meet with representatives from the visiting communities to learn more about the rich variety of religious life in the Church today.

Catholic and Christian service and missionary organizations will also participate in the Jamboree. To register online go to umary.edu/VocJam.
Those who are meek are patient, gentle and merciful, drawing people together and salvaging relationships, Pope Francis said.

Meekness entails tenaciously holding onto one’s trust in and relationship with God and protectively guarding his gifts of peace, mercy and fraternity, the pope said Feb. 19 during his weekly general audience in the Paul VI hall.

The pope continued a series of talks on the Eight Beatitudes by reflecting on the third beatitude, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.”

It seems strange that meekness and inheriting land are somehow related, the pope said. But, he said, it is rooted in Psalm 37:3-11, which tells believers to trust in the Lord, refrain from anger, be patient and “make your righteousness shine” for then shall they “inherit the earth” and “delight in great prosperity.”

The “land” the psalm refers to is something greater than some earthly territory, which is so often a source of conflict, war and aggression, the pope said.

“That land is a promise and a gift for the people of God,” he said. It is heaven—that “new earth” that God has made for his children. “Therefore, the meek are those who ‘inherit’ the most sublime of territories,” Pope Francis said. “They are not cowards, weak, looking for some fallback moral principle in order to steer clear of trouble. Far from it!”

Whether a person is meek is seen during moments of conflict, crisis or pressure, he said, since it’s easy to seem meek when life goes smoothly.

“You see it in how they react to a hostile situation,” when they are attacked or offended, he said.

Meekness is what Jesus displayed during his passion since, according to St. Peter, Jesus returned no insult, did not threaten and instead, “handed himself over to the one who judges justly.”

To talk about meekness, the pope said, it is important also to talk about the sin of wrath.

“A moment of anger can destroy so many things; you lose control and you don’t evaluate what is really important and you can ruin a relationship” with someone, sometimes irreparably, he said.

How many family members, he added, no longer speak with each other or are cold with each other because of anger, which always divides, while meekness, “gathers together.”

“Meekness conquers many things. Meekness is able to win over hearts, salvage friendships and much more,” he said.

Bishops and aid agencies praise coronavirus response

American bishops and leaders of Catholic aid agencies have praised Vatican and U.S. responses to the coronavirus outbreak, and encouraged the faithful to stay informed about the disease.

“As communities and public health officials respond to the outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in China and closely monitor its presence and progression in other parts of the world, we join in solidarity and prayer for those impacted or working to treat those infected by the disease,” said a statement from Bishop David Malloy of Rockford, Ill., Sean Callahan, president of Catholic Relief Services, and Sister Mary Haddad, RSM, president of the Catholic Health Association of the United States. Malloy is the chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on International Justice and Peace.

The three organizations “hope that governments will work together in partnership to improve all nations’ capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to this virus.”

“The Catholic Church in the United States stands in solidarity with those affected by the coronavirus and their families, health workers who are valiantly trying to diagnose and treat patients, and those under quarantine awaiting results of their screening for the virus,” said the statement.

They offered both prayers for continued healing, as well as for support for various organizations that are working to contain the outbreak and treat those who are sickened. The statement highlighted efforts by both the United States and Vatican.

Earlier this month, the Vatican sent 700,000 respiratory masks to China, and “Catholic healthcare providers are at the front line of providing treatment and care to those impacted by the virus.”

The U.S. has transported more than 17 tons of medical supplies to China, something the bishops conference said “demonstrates the critical importance of the need to work together and to invest in crucial health care systems here and in other countries, thus preventing and responding to community-wide emergencies.”
A round 30 of us gathered near the Avalon that evening, our mostly white signs blending partially into the snow piles that aligned like walls along the sidewalk abutting the events center in Fargo. Flashlights affixed and some of our signs now settled in snow mounds near the street entrance, we proclaimed in defiance: “Abortion is NOT normal.”

Though gathering here seemed similar to our weekly day vigil on the sidewalk downtown, where abortions happen in our city, this felt markedly different. On “abortion day,” we mostly pray, plead, and provide hope. But an event helping fund the destruction of our youngest citizens seemed to beg not just prayers but protest.

This dessert banquet to raise money for abortions had been happening for years, but most of us were ignorant. Our attentions were drawn, however, through a Facebook page for area Catholic women, where a member had posted a High Plains Reader ad announcing the “Choice Desserts: Abortion is Normal” on Jan. 24, the same day as the March for Life in Washington, D.C.

The “all ages welcome” affair would feature decadent desserts, silent and live auctions, and a cash bar, along with national guest speaker Amelia Bonow of the “Shout Your Abortion” campaign. The hosting entity, the North Dakota Women in Need, exists, according to its website ndwinfund.org, to “serve as a safety net for those who would not otherwise be able to obtain an abortion.” In other words, attendees would be the pro-abortion movers and shakers in our community, those who not only support abortion with their lips but with their checkbooks.

“This sounds like an event that could use a prayerful protest,” I mentioned on the Facebook page in response, and in a matter of days, we’d arranged to meet that Friday with signs and the intent to prayerfully counter the effort’s deceptive aims.

On that snow-filled night, as we watched the abortion funders arrive, sneak out of their vehicles, and scurry into the building in their ties, suits, dresses, and heels, our collective hearts proverbially broke. Being so far from the building entrance made conveying our message difficult. In order to be heard, some began verbally projecting the words we’d written on our signs. “Abortion hurts women!” I said loudly, joining others.

A brief pause followed, and in the dark silence of the night, the agonizing message of one of our post-abortive companions came forth: “Abortion killed my baby!” Her lament of regret and warning rang hauntingly through the icy air. Would her words reach the consciences of those entering the building? Could they even perceive the torment they’d set in motion through emptying their purses and pockets this night?

Only the Father of Lies could celebrate such an event, while undoubtedly, the Father of Life grieved with us. Especially troubling was the presence of children, as young as 10 or 11, who clung to the coattails and cloaks of those responsible for guiding them safely through life. Soon, they’d be led into a room where the death of innocent children, only a few years younger, would be hailed as a just act.

“Can you imagine the message this sends to a child whose parent brought him here?” I asked one of my sidewalk sisters. “On some level, won’t they recognize that they could have been among the casualties by their own parents’ hands?”

The chill I felt while pondering this had less to do with the cold now piercing my toes and more with knowing these young ones stand innocently among the vulnerable and voiceless victims of abortion. I could only pray that someday, this night would return to their consciousness in a more enlightened form, and that awakened by truth, they’d join our pleas.

As we stood with our signs in the snow, feeling a bit helpless save for our prayers, I recalled the many words that resound in our culture these days, and how often they come veiled in the shadows of deception.

As these warped words fall around us constantly, we can feel hopeless, like we did that night standing out in the cold as the crowds poured into the warm building to cheer for death. But let us be heartened by this reality: We have the Word who will lead us aright and can penetrate any distant door or closed heart.

As we charge our flashlights in order to illuminate love, whether in snow or sand, let us continue to lean on this wonderful Word—and him alone—for our lasting hope.

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

Where in the diocese are we?

Last month’s photo is from St. Andrew’s Church in Westhope.