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ON THE COVER:
John Norberg and his daughter tune into a live-stream Mass with Bishop Folda on March 29 from their home in Frederick, Md. (submitted photo)

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Reflections in a time of pandemic

By the time this edition of *New Earth* arrives in homes, we will be well into our second month of “social distancing” due to the coronavirus outbreak. And it looks like we will also be that much closer to resuming some form of ordinary life in our parishes and our homes. Some adjustments in our routine will be necessary for a while, so “normal” might look a little different to all of us. But life will continue.

Some have assumed that the decision to suspend Masses and other activities of the Church during this pandemic was due to a lack of faith, or that we no longer trust in God’s ability to save us. Nothing could be further from the truth. God gave us the power of common sense and prudence, and out of prudence we have taken radical steps to address a very real risk. History tells us that we have been in this situation before. During the 1918 outbreak of the Spanish flu, bishops all over our country closed churches on the advice of public health officials to limit the spread of the disease. In those places where such precautions were not taken, many more people lost their lives.

Even further back in time, St. Charles Borromeo, the Archbishop of Milan, similarly closed all churches in his diocese during the plague outbreak of 1576. Those bishops had the same concern for the safety of their people that we have today. The Church is serious about protecting the lives of the faithful and the wider society, so sometimes we have to take drastic and unwanted measures in our effort to look out for one another.

A few people have wondered if this coronavirus is some kind of punishment from God. This is one of many natural disasters that afflict our world every year, not to mention the countless instances of cancer, heart disease, stroke, flu, and other illnesses. It’s always risky to attribute a calamity or misfortune to God’s wrath. (See for instance the example of the man born blind in John 9:2.) But I have no doubt that God can use such events to get us to listen to his voice and reform our decisions and behaviors in light of his teachings.

The coronavirus has reminded us once again of the frailty of our human condition. We may imagine at times that we are invincible, and we want to be in control. But this pandemic makes it clear that there are forces we cannot control, and we are still the same fragile human beings we have always been. Such an experience can be disconcerting, but it can also be enlightening if we are willing to see it through the eyes of faith. We can learn a new form of trust, realizing that there is great peace in placing our lives in the loving hands of God. In times of adversity, it’s always good to recall what we read in Isaiah, that the Lord holds us in the palm of his hand (Is 49:16). When we forget that we are his children, and that he is the giver of life, we can expect to be regularly frustrated.

With so many of our usual diversions, like sports, social events, and entertainment put on hold, this could be a great opportunity for additional prayer and meditation. So many of us complain about being too busy and not having enough time, but this might be just the chance we need to make more time for personal prayer. Perhaps we can set aside daily time for bible-reading, or praying the rosary as a family, or making a visit to church to adore Jesus in the Eucharist. Our world is in need of healing, and many people are suffering during this pandemic. Our prayers of intercession can be especially powerful in easing their suffering and restoring their hope.

"With every hardship or sadness, our Lord offers grace to sustain us and to draw us closer to himself. The current pandemic can be a wake-up call and remind us of our dependence on God. It can also remind us of our reliance on each other and move us to a greater spirit of compassion." - Bishop John Folda

Our Lord might also be reminding us of the call to charity and concern for each other. Our acts of social distancing, and even our suspension of public Masses and Church activities can be traced to our Lord’s commandment to “love our neighbor.” The Church has always taught us to be concerned for the common good of all, and such concern is especially needed now. This may be an opportunity to reach out to someone who is alone, a chance to break the loneliness and isolation that others might be experiencing, even after things begin to open up. A simple phone call to someone who is ill or elderly, or even a quick visit at the front door, can be a welcome gift at a time like this. I am edified and grateful for the many creative acts of charity and kindness that I have seen and heard about during this trying time.

We should not make light of the genuine hardship that many people are experiencing due to this pandemic. In a few short months, COVID-19 has become the second leading cause of death in our country, and millions are struggling with unemployment, poverty, fear, and loneliness. But with every hardship or sadness, our Lord offers grace to sustain us and to draw us closer to himself. The current pandemic can be a wake-up call and remind us of our dependence on God. It can also remind us of our reliance on each other and move us to a greater spirit of compassion.

We will all be happy to gather once again for the celebration of Mass and the ordinary public life of our faith community. No matter how long this pandemic continues, let us be attentive to the promptings of God, and let us continue to support and pray for one another.
The remaining scheduled Confirmation and First Eucharist for the Spring of 2020 are canceled.

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For Deacons
We pray that deacons, faithful in their service to the Word and the poor, may be an invigorating symbol for the entire Church.

St. Isidore was born in Madrid, Spain in the latter half of the 12th century. For the greater part of his life he was employed as a laborer on a farm outside the city. Many marvelous happenings accompanied his lifelong work in the fields and continued long after his holy death. He was favored with celestial visions and, it is said, the angels sometimes helped him in his work in the fields. St. Isidore was canonized in 1622.

In 1947, he was proclaimed the patron of the National Rural Conference in the United States. He is the patron of farmers, and his feast day is May 15.

Feast day: May 15
Patroness: farmers, ranchers ag workers, U.S. National Rural Life Conference
Birth: 1070
Death: 1130
Beatified: 1619
Canonized: by Pope Gregory XV, March 12, 1622
The situation we find ourselves in is new territory for literally everyone, impacting every facet of our lives. You don’t need me to point out that obvious fact. No one would have expected that something could make the entire church-going population of the world watch their Easter services from home, but that is exactly what has happened.

There is a danger here, if we weren’t aware. Many appreciate the ability to watch the Mass broadcast, sometimes even from their local parish, yet they’re still disconnected. We call the Mass “the source and summit” of our faith, because it is. It “re-presents” Jesus’ death and resurrection before us. Therefore, there is no real substitute for actually attending the Mass—in the room, in the flesh. Connecting to a Mass via TV or the internet is good when that is as much as one can do, but all of the sacraments are, by nature, the meeting of Christ through a priest with his people. This minimally requires that we be physically present.

How can we avoid letting our hearts grow cold toward the Mass and the sacraments while things are this way? Even once we’re able to start attending Mass again—likely in small, planned groups, equipped with facemasks and hand sanitizer—the congregants may still be unable to receive the Eucharist. Given enough time, we might find ourselves thinking, “I’ve gotten along fine without the Mass. I don’t really need to make an effort to go in the future.”

We have a surprising opportunity right now to expand other aspects of our faith, which in turn can re-energize the way we go to Mass again someday. Such is the practice of making an act of “Spiritual Communion.” One can find prayers online (or hear them recited on a live-streamed Mass) that are called, “An Act of Spiritual Communion,” but St. Thomas Aquinas probably described it best when he wrote, “a spiritual communion is an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the Sacrament of Holy Communion at Mass, and lovingly embracing him as if we had actually received him.” Therefore, “Spiritual Communion” is primarily a desire to be united with God no matter where we are and what we’re doing. Sometimes we talk about receiving the Eucharist as if receiving the Eucharist is getting a thing, but it’s not. Receiving the Eucharist is having an experience with Jesus Christ, and Jesus wants us to have communion with him in everything we do.

God makes himself present in many ways, and they reinforce each other. “Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them,” Jesus famously promised (Matt. 18:20). When a family is gathered to pray in a living room they have the chance to commune with Jesus. Even when someone prays alone, “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.” (Rom. 8:26) When we serve the needy, Jesus told us “you did [those acts] to me.” (Matt. 25:40) Even calling out the name of Jesus connects us to him! The Catechism tells us, “[Jesus’] name is the only name that contains the presence it signifies” (CCC 2666). Simply invoking his name welcomes his presence. Even when circumstances might legitimately keep us from Jesus’ supreme presence in the Eucharist, God does not leave us alone.

You may have already thought of other examples besides those I just listed. Great! Connecting with God, present in so many ways, requires our effort and attention, but that is good! We have to be purposeful to make our hearts his home. If our spiritual vision has become blurred to Jesus’ presence, these efforts are like putting on spiritual glasses. Then, when we have the pleasure of receiving his Body and Blood again, we can be more attentive and intentional to do so with wide open hearts.

When I celebrate Mass currently, I always recite for those watching a newly-composed prayer by Pope Francis asking Jesus to come to us no matter where we are. I will leave that for you here to pray as well. Pray it when you are watching the Mass from your home or in the midst of any other activity.

At your feet, O my Jesus, I prostrate myself and I offer the repentance of my contrite heart, which is humbled in its nothingness and in your holy presence. I adore You in the Sacrament of Your love, the Eucharist. I desire to receive You into the poor dwelling my heart offers You. While waiting for the happiness of sacramental Communion, I wish to possess You in spirit. Come to me, O my Jesus, since I, for my part, am coming to You! May Your love embrace me in life and in death. I believe in Thee, I hope in Thee, I love Thee. Amen.

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.
It is an ancient tradition in the Catholic Church that when plagues strike, the people would recite litanies. A litany is a series of invocations, usually of saints or titles of a saint, that ask for intercessory prayers. It is a prayer of petition. Some litanies are public and others for private use only. The Directory on Popular Piety says, “The Litanies of the Saints contain elements deriving from both the liturgical tradition and from popular piety. They are expressions of the Church’s confidence in the intercession of the Saints and an experience of the communion between the Church of the heavenly Jerusalem and the Church on her earthly pilgrim journey” (235). Likewise, the Code of Canon Law states that, “sacramentals are sacred signs which in a sense imitate the sacraments. They signify certain effects, especially spiritual ones, and they achieve these effects through the intercession of the Church” (Canon 1166).

Certain litanies were popular when a plague struck a region or nation. Often they invoked saints that were known to be powerful intercessors for the sick or in case of natural disasters. Often they were prayed during processions in an antiphonal manner. One of the more popular litanies during times of plague was the Litany of the Saints. In addition, particular saints were often called upon singularly or in groups, such as the Fourteen Holy Helpers.

In this time of pandemic, especially since public worship is difficult or impossible, we can still invoke saints and pray litanies. Popular devotions can help sustain our faith. We believe that we are part of the communion of saints and that their prayers are efficacious. The saints want to help us. Here is a litany of some of the saints that were often invoked during times of sickness and plague. This litany is for private use only. Feel free to add your own special patrons.

Lord have mercy
Christ have mercy
Lord have mercy
Christ hear us
Christ graciously hear us

God the Father of Heaven
God the Son, Redeemer of the world
God the Holy Spirit

Mary Mother of God,
Mary, Help of the Sick,
Mary, Health of the Roman People,

Mary, Our Lady of Perpetual Help,
Mary, Comforter of the Afflicted,
St. Joseph, Hope of the Sick,
St. Joseph, Patron of the Dying,
St. Joseph, Terror of Demons,
St. Michael, Light and Hope of souls near death,
St. Michael, our most sure aid,
St. Michael, receiver of the souls of the elect after death,
St. Raphael, whose name means "God heals,"
Guardian Angel, my protector,
All you Holy Angels,

St. George, valiant martyr of Christ,
St. Blaise, zealous bishop and benefactor of the poor,
St. Erasmus, mighty protector of the oppressed,
St. Pantaleon, miraculous exemplar of charity,
St. Vitus, special protector of chastity,
St. Christopher, mighty intercessor in dangers,
St. Dionysius, shining mirror of faith and confidence,
St. Cyriacus, terror of hell,
St. Acacius, helpful advocate in death,
St. Eustace, exemplar of patience in adversity,
St. Giles, despiser of the world,
St. Margaret, valiant champion of the Faith,
St. Catherine, victorious defender of the Faith and of purity,
St. Barbara, mighty patroness of the dying,
Fourteen Holy Helpers,
St. Luke, patron of physicians,
St. Agatha, patron of nurses,
St. Roch, who did expose your life to heal the sick,
St. Sebastian, comforter of the dying,
St. Corona, patron of plague victims,
St. Benedict, protector of those who cry to you,
St. Charles Borromeo, whose selflessness during the great plague won the hearts even of your foes,
St. Gregory the Great, whose prayers ended a plague,
St. Aloysius Gonzaga, who died caring for the sick,
St. Rosalie, by whose intercession a plague ended,
St. Casimir, generous to the sick,
Sts. Cosmas and Damian, holy physicians,
St. Camillus, patron of the sick and health care workers,
St. John of God, patron of hospitals,
St. Frances of Rome, who cared for the sick and the poor,
St. Quirinus of Neuss, patron of those affected by plague,
St. Anthony the Great, patron of those infected by disease,
St. Edwin the Martyr, patron of pandemics,
St. Damien of Molokai, compassionate to the sick and outcasts,
St. Godbereta of Noyon, who miraculously stopped a plague,
St. Henry Morse, who cared for plague victims,
St. Marianne Cope, who saw in the sick the face of Jesus,
Bl. Francis Xavier Seelos, holy priest who died caring for the sick,
All you Holy Saints of God,

From every evil,   Lord save your people
From every sin,
From your anger,
From sudden and unforeseen death,
From the snares of the devil,
From anger, hatred, and all ill-will,
From the spirit of uncleanness,
From lightening and tempest,
From the scourge of earthquake,
From plague, famine, and war,
From everlasting death,

Be merciful to us sinners,   Lord hear our prayer
That you will spare us,
That you will pardon us,
That it may please you to bring us to true repentance,
To deliver our souls from eternal damnation, and the souls of
our brethren, kinsmen, and benefactors,
To give and preserve the fruits of the earth,
To grant eternal rest to all the faithful departed,
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, spare us, Lord.
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, graciously
hear us.
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy
on us.

Let us pray,
Almighty and eternal God, our refuge in every danger, to whom
we turn in our distress; in faith we pray look with compassion on
the afflicted, grant eternal rest to the dead, comfort to mourners,
healing to the sick, peace to the dying, strength to healthcare
workers, wisdom to our leaders and the courage to reach out to
all in love, so that together we may give glory to your holy name.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns
with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Father Goodwin is the Judicial Vicar of the Diocese of Fargo.

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When asked what it was like spiritually to have his entrance to the Catholic faith postponed, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) student Jeff Godfrey from St. Paul’s Newman Center said it was, “pretty difficult.”

“Even with the prospect of restrictions being lifted, I had family coming from out of town and out of state to watch me get baptized,” he said. “This seems unlikely, as I don’t want them to get sick. However, I see it as a test for my faith. I continue to watch holy Mass… a different one each week from around the world.”

Godfrey grew up with divorced parents, one half being a military family that attended a variety of Protestant services, the other being spiritual but not religious.

“I found myself angry all the time,” he said, “my faith was definitely lacking. I felt a void inside of me I wasn’t able to fill. Last summer, I met my current girlfriend at school and started attending daily and Sunday Mass. At first, I found Mass to be quite intimidating. All of the various Protestant denominations I attended previously were very lax. To this day I have to pick up the ‘Mass card’ from the pew every once in a while to keep up, but it’s starting to become second nature.”

Through attending Mass and RCIA classes each week, Godfrey slowly but surely started to feel his anger disappear.

“I started to feel the void I once had begin to fill. I find myself smiling quite often for no reason at all. The only explanation I’ve been able to come up with is that the Holy Spirit has found his way back into my life.”

Michaela Gaislerova, a student at NDSU who also attended RCIA classes at the Cathedral of St. Mary in Fargo, began learning about the Catholic faith through her friend Emily.

“Through my three years at NDSU, Emily has been a light for me and a great example of someone who is living out her faith. I began learning about the Catholic faith through her, and at the beginning of my junior year I joined RCIA. At first I just had a lot of questions. I was discovering the differences between the Catholic Church and Protestant faith. As we kept moving forward with our classes, more and more questions were answered, and I realized that I am excited about the Catholic Church and I want to join. My relationship with Jesus has grown stronger through RCIA.”

Though she was disappointed she was unable to join the Catholic Church during the Easter Vigil Mass, she’s confident “it’s going to happen eventually.”

“I am really excited about having all of my sins washed away through Baptism and then being able to receive communion,” she said.

Greg Hamilton describes himself as “the old man” in St. Mary’s class and has been a practicing Lutheran his entire life. He comes from a family of many pastors.

“Kate, my wife of 34 years, was raised in a Catholic family, and we got to a point in our marriage where it felt natural for me to attend Mass with her,” he said. “I loved the liturgy and the focus on the Eucharist and the sense I had of the wonderful tradition that had changed very little over the years. My Protestant background in the Lutheran church is important to me and instead of viewing it as a step in a different direction, I see it as a natural progression that flows seamlessly from one to another. After all, honoring scripture and the sacraments were instilled in me from an early age, so it has been a natural transition for me.”

While he says the shutdown from the coronavirus slowed some of the momentum, Hamilton embraces the transformation God has given him.

“It is a special gift that I now share with Kate,” he said. “I love the Mass and look forward to it every week. Going through RCIA with the excellent guidance of Mary Hanbury, Brad Gray, and the clergy has been delightful and a true gift from God.”
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FICF
Grand Forks
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Pat Dolan, FICF
General Agent
Fargo
701-298-9922
Patrick.dolan@kofc.org

The Dolan Agency
Confessions amid the coronavirus
Diocesan priests come up with non-traditional ways to minister
By Paul Braun

Empty churches translate to lonely Masses for parish priests across the Fargo Diocese. Since Bishop Folda’s March 17 directive that canceled the celebration of public Masses and diocesan events, along with closing Catholic schools, many priests in the diocese have been going the extra mile to make sure the needs of their parishioners are met as seamlessly as possible amid the restrictions placed on them due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

By far the most noticeable change has been the inability to celebrate the Mass with parishioners present in the church. Many priests have turned to technology to live-stream daily and Sunday Masses. These efforts have allowed the celebration of the Mass to come into the homes of the faithful (see this month’s cover story). But some have gone even farther beyond offering online Masses.

“As a parish staff, we have to be creative in finding ways to reach out and bring the gospel message in the means that we have,” said Father Neil Pfeifer, pastor of St. Philip Neri in Napoleon. “Many of our parishioners have not left their farm or home since this began in March, and they have called, and sent messages to let us know how grateful they are. One benefit is we are receiving letters from people who are out of state who follow us every day. This is one positive use of social media.”

But Father Pfeifer has gone beyond just relying on social media. He has also held drive-thru confessions, using proper social distancing techniques, and a drive-in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

“Our community really misses coming together as God’s family, said Father Pfeifer. “To fulfill their hunger and desire, our staff has tried to bring the Lord to our community through various means. We held a vehicle procession around the city to ask God to spare us from the COVID-19 pandemic, we have live-streamed Wednesday night CCD, and we even went out of our way to set up a trailer for adoration in the parking lot on Divine Mercy Sunday and for various prayers. The people gathered and remained in their vehicles to keep the social distancing, and our parking lot has been packed.”

Fathers Michael Slovak, pastor of St. Michael’s in Dunseith, and Dennis Mary Dugan, pastor of St. Ann’s in Belcourt, have been connecting with parishioners face-to-face while expanding their online and social media footprint. In Belcourt, Father Dugan has been doing Eucharistic Processions on Sundays for two or three hours. He says he plans to continue this covering most of the back neighborhoods in the woods near Belcourt. He also holds confessions in the parking lot while in his car and wearing a mask. Parishioners drive-up alongside him wearing masks as well and also receive a bulletin and a Divine Mercy picture to hang on their front door.

In Dunseith, Father Slovak has continued reaching out through the parish’s Facebook page and has added a YouTube channel for embedded videos and live-streaming.

“Since the crisis started, I have learned to use iMovie that came with my Mac,” said Father Slovak. “I make weekly parish news videos that put our bulletin into a news update format. We made a Stations of the Cross video with captions and pictures that we posted the last few Fridays in Lent. I also made an education video to explain indulgences and how to receive the plenary indulgence for Divine Mercy Sunday. In the next weeks, I plan to make a series of videos explaining different parts of the Mass.”

At St. Timothy’s parish in Manvel, parishioners wanted to help Father John Ejike feel a little less lonely when live-streaming Mass to an empty church. They followed the examples of other parishes across the country and placed the photos of parishioners and parish families in the pews. Pictures were placed where the parishioners usually sit. The pew project became quite emotional for Father Ejike and staff at the parish. Walking through the pews reminded them of how important the support of friends and relationships are every day.

With the closing of all Catholic schools, students have had their weekly celebration of the Mass with their peers interrupted, along with the opportunity to go to Reconciliation. Father William Slattery, Chaplain for Sullivan/Shanley Schools in Fargo, decided to use the facilities available at the Cathedral of St. Mary in Fargo to live-stream a Mass every Wednesday morning just for JPII school students as a way to bring as much normality as possible amidst their transition from classroom to online learning.

“At a Catholic school, the sacraments are a foundation of a healthy culture,” said Father Slattery. “With all the needed changes limiting the sizes of public gatherings and social distancing, our need for God’s grace has not changed. So the sacraments remain an important part of our search to comprehend God’s will for our lives and the source by which we find the grace and strength to confront each moment of our day. Making the Mass and confessions available is part of our priestly work, so that we can support our people and keep them connected to the sure ways that God provides them with encounters with his grace and mercy.”

These are just a few examples of the innovative ways parish priests are making the effort to minister as best they can to the faithful of the diocese. Please pray for our priests as they continue their labors of love for us, pray for our Catholic school children, and most of all, pray for the end to this health crisis so we may once again gather together on that joyous day to celebrate the Mass and receive the precious body and blood of our Lord as a faith community once again.
Father Neil Pfeifer, pastor of St. Philip Neri Church in Napoleon, and Deacon Allen Baumgartner, offer drive-up adoration during Divine Mercy Sunday in the church parking lot. (submitted photo)

Father Dennis Mary Dugan, pastor of St. Ann’s Church in Belcourt, offers in-person adoration in the snow (submitted photo)

Seminarians who have had their formation classes interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, use the opportunity to repaint the basement of the Cathedral of St. Mary in Fargo. (submitted photo)

Live-streaming Mass has been a popular response to the cancellation of publically celebrated Masses, and many parishes do the best they can in improvising the technology necessary to do the job, like St. Alphonsus in Langdon shown here. (submitted photo)

Father William Slattery, Chaplain of Sullivan/Shanley schools in Fargo, offers students and their families the opportunity for Reconciliation in the school parking lot. (Paul Braun | New Earth)

Photos of parishioners line the pews at St. Timothy’s Church in Manvel. (submitted photo)

Father Neil Pfeifer, pastor of St. Philip Neri Church in Napoleon, and Deacon Allen Baumgartner, offer drive-up adoration during Divine Mercy Sunday in the church parking lot. (submitted photo)
While it’s easy to dwell on the negatives wrought by COVID-19, like all times of suffering, there is a “silver-lining,” should we allow ourselves to seek it. In my many phone and video chats with family and friends over the last several weeks, there seems to be a consistent pattern to the conversations. After a discussion about new emotional or financial uncertainties and challenges, the conversation would swing back to the positive.

Parents are seeing more of their kids. Spouses have found more time to communicate well. Those once overburdened by the demands of life are finding moments for prayer, rest, and abandoned hobbies. Despite the jobs, celebrations, and opportunities that have been disrupted, there’s something many of us have gained: time.

Time has proven to be a tremendous gift. With the additional difficulty of canceled public Mass, faith formation classes, and parish events, there’s an even greater importance placed on the family and its responsibility to its members to be the first classroom for the faith. The family is a “Domestic Church,” the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. The term dates back to the first century when the Early Church Fathers understood that the home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness.

“To me, the Domestic Church is making our faith come alive in our home,” said Bethany Johnson, mother of six from Kindred. “It means living our lives in such a way that our faith is our way of life, not just something we do on Sunday mornings. It means creating a family culture that mirrors that of the Church.”

Creating that family culture may seem like a luxury to some who may feel they don’t have the time or resources to do it well, but living as a Domestic Church need not be complicated. In fact, Pope Francis said, “simplicity is necessary” at Dublin’s St. Mary’s Pro-Cathedral for the World Meeting of Families in 2018.

“We need simplicity to pray as a family: simplicity is necessary! Praying the Our Father together, around the table, is not something extraordinary: it’s easy. And praying the rosary together, as a family, is very beautiful and a source of great strength! And also praying for one another. The husband for his wife, the wife for her husband, both together for their children, the children for their grandparents…. praying for each other. This is what it means to pray in the family and it is what makes the family strong: prayer.”

“We are all so busy,” said Johnson. “We all wish for life to slow down, to have more time to do the things we want, yet being busy has become our way of life. When our family has too much going on, living as the Domestic Church can feel like just one more thing to have to do. Other challenges could include a lack of knowledge or thinking it has to be complicated to incorporate aspects of our faith in our daily lives. In the end, it’s about priorities.”

Pope Francis urged Catholics to, “pray together as a family; speak of good and holy things; let our Mother Mary into your family life. Celebrate the feasts of the Christian people. Your children will learn from you how to live a Christian life. The faith is passed on ‘around the family table,’ in ordinary conversation, in the language that persevering love alone knows how to speak.”

Father James Ermer, pastor St. Leo’s Church in Casselton, said...
that while the first three of the Ten Commandments focus primarily on our relationship with God, the remaining seven are all the very duties of the family, starting with the fourth commandment: Honor your father and mother.

“What is the role of the family? What does it mean to honor your father and mother?” asked Father Ermer. “The family introduces us to supernatural life. To honor means to form that love which proceeds us [in Christ]. So to honor Mom and Dad is to practice that love. The remaining commandments are the responsibilities of a family. A family does its job when it promotes the sanctity of life (5), the sacredness of sexuality (6), universality of goods (7), and promotes a healthy interior life through truthful and honorable speech (8). Mom and Dad don’t just pass on information about the faith but the privileged mysteries of the faith.”

“My husband and I want to instill the beauty of our faith in our children,” said Johnson. “We feel that by living out our faith in our home as a Domestic Church—doing things within our family to make our faith personal and meaningful—our children will grow in their relationship with Christ and deepen their Catholic roots.”

So what does it look like to live as a Domestic Church? Traditions and celebrations are one way to make certain events special. Christmas and Easter are filled with celebrations, but there are tons of celebrations and feast days throughout the year to make the faith special and meaningful.

“I love making our faith come alive in our home,” said Johnson. “I love planning special meals for a feast day or decorating our family altar according to the Church calendar. It doesn’t need to be complicated. There are countless resources online with ideas for what you can do.”

The United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) provides several ways families can live out their vocation as the Domestic Church.

- Pray as a family first thing in the morning, before bed, or before meals. Include heartfelt unstructured prayer as well.
- Have a crucifix in a prominent place in the home and in every bedroom
- Make the Sacraments a regular celebration
- Begin family traditions based on the seasons celebrated in the liturgical calendar
- Make your vacation a holy pilgrimage by visiting the shrines and saints of our land and the world
- Make worshipping God a priority. Never miss Mass, even while traveling
- Remind your children that they are loved by God and have been given gifts to serve others
- Talk freely about the presence of God in the joys and sorrows of your life
- Welcome into your home and support priests, brothers, sisters, deacons, and lay ministers in the Church
- Allow your children to witness you in private prayer. Encourage your children to pray daily on their own, to listen for God’s call, and if heard, to respond
- Introduce your children to saints, especially the youngest saints to show that holiness is not just for adults but children as well
- Encourage your children to tithe their allowance
- Show the spiritual benefit to work and school. We glorify God through our work

In whatever ways you decide to be a Domestic Church to your family, give yourself the freedom to be bad at it. Praying out-loud with someone we’ve never prayed with before can be awkward. After a difficult day, the last thing we might want to do is try to pray a decade of the rosary with our children. If you try adding an observation but it doesn’t work, don’t stress on it and try something else.

Remember that God blesses each of our efforts to praise him and grow closer to him. Keep yourself open to what he is calling your specific family to do.
Matthew and Kayla Knudson were married April 16 at St. Boniface Church in Esmond. They had 10 people in the church for the ceremony.

The McNeil family creates a #AWorldOfHearts display at the Nelson home in Devils Lake.

Prososki family dresses up for Easter in their home in Fargo.

Schwebach family watches Easter Sunday Mass from their home in Lidgerwood.

The Johnson family makes unleavened bread to commemorate the Last Supper on Holy Thursday.

The McNeil family creates a coronavirus family hand print.

The Johnson family dresses up for Easter in their home in Fargo.

The Johnson family makes unleavened bread to commemorate the Last Supper on Holy Thursday.

The Johnson family washes feet before Mass on Holy Thursday.

The McNeil family's annual Easter Sunday picture in front of their church.

The McNeil family practices faith formation at home.
Matrimony: A calling to forgive!

“Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope.”

Retrouvaille offers a welcoming and loving space to couples who have been living with the misery of a failing marriage. Retrouvaille offers hope: hope that it is not too late, hope of a different and better marriage. Retrouvaille helps couples to show each other mercy through the opportunities it provides to listen, to forgive, to be reconciled and to move into their futures believing that God loves them and with His help and their efforts, their marriages can be healed and restored. Retrouvaille provides help for marriage problems/difficulties/crises.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL (701) 356-7962 OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE: HELPOURMARRIAGE.COM
A couple of months ago, before we found ourselves living through a pandemic, I was contemplating how my family of six, with four children under the age of nine, lives out our day-to-day faith life. Little did I know that these musings would come back to me as a source of direction and focus a few weeks later when we found ourselves living with a lot of uncertainty.

I was reflecting on the big ways that living our Catholic faith keeps us grounded: family prayer as our homeschool day begins, prayers before meals, prayers at bedtime, weekly Mass, attempts at regular confession, and time for adoration. What a gift the Church gives us in the sacramental life—grace to help us live out our lives as Catholic families. But what about the times between those bigger moments? What about the day-to-day, hour-by-hour?

I am sure for every family this looks a little different, as our God is a creative God. One way our family has found to live each moment well is through the part of our school day where we all gather together and focus our attention on truth, goodness, and beauty—whether that be through hymns, scripture, saints, music, art, or poetry. Or maybe it looks like time exploring nature, reading a good book together, or learning a new art technique. When we take a few minutes each day to intentionally add in some form of truth, goodness, or beauty, we not only see God through those moments, but I find that we are more likely to notice him in many of the other moments of our day as well—like a new bird that shows up at a feeder or those first few blades of green grass that grab our attention. These moments are visions of God in our daily lives that keep us focused on him.

Then mid-March hit. All of a sudden we were all at home social distancing. My husband began working from home, our calendar was cleared of all appointments, play dates, school activities, and worst of all: Mass, confession, and adoration. Our first reaction as a family was to supplement those things as best we could with online Mass and adoration, more examinations of consciences, and more moments of family prayer when we felt worried or scared about the news and abrupt changes. We weren’t used to the changes, yet these efforts still brought grounding and peace.

After a week of our mixed-up routine, I felt like we had gone so off course that we needed to put some basic aspects of our routine back in. The first thing was to start with our morning gathering.

We listened to our favorite composers, read some nature poetry, started a list of the new birds we were seeing, and reread some favorite family books. Holy Week and Easter inspired us to focus on the life of Jesus in scripture, as well as listening to some of our favorite hymns we’d been missing from not attending in-person Mass. Reflecting on the lives of the saints and how they were so strong in the face of adversity helped us to see a bit of our current life story through theirs.

We still are struggling with all of the changes and uncertainties of this time, but we are inspired by these intentional moments of truth, goodness, and beauty. They draw our notice to God throughout our day—the sun reflecting off the puddles of melted snow, the mallard couple eating breakfast in our backyard, the smiles of the neighbors we pass by on our evening walks, a few minutes to video chat with the family and friends we miss so much, and the example of the heroic health care and emergency service workers on the front lines.

We hope and pray that you too are finding a sense of peace and hope through the sacraments-from-afar, and that the great love of God will be ever obvious to you.

Cora Suda is a parishioner of St. Benedict’s Church in Wild Rice.
A few years ago, I was excited to learn Colleen Carroll Campbell had written another book. Not surprisingly, I found the same down-to-earth, personable writer who could clearly speak of the human experience in a way both relatable and entertaining.

The Heart of Perfection is Campbell’s second memoir that, much like the first, weaves stories of her life with scripture and the lives of the saints. Some saints were new to me such as St. Jane de Chantal, a mother, widow, and later a religious sister who also happened to be a friend of St. Francis de Sales. Others I was more familiar with such as St. Benedict of Nursia, St. Alphonsus Liguori, and St. Ignatius of Loyola, but she breathes such life and drama into their lives, I felt like I was meeting them for the first time.

The stories from Campbell’s writing focus on both perfectionism in work and family and “spiritual perfectionism—an obsession with flawlessness rooted in the belief that we can earn God’s love.” The idea perhaps stems from an oversimplified understanding of the scripture verse “So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

While we should strive for perfection, God’s love is not contingent on our effort, nor does God’s love diminish when we fall short. Campbell speaks to the healthy and holy balance between obsessing over our salvation as if it’s something we can achieve purely by our effort and the opposite temptation: assuming that we are decent enough folks and in the end God’s mercy and justice will work in our favor.

One saint Campbell highlights who spoke clearly of that balance is St. Benedict. Around year 500, he founded a monastery that later influenced western monasticism. He also formulated “the rule,” a series of guidelines for holy and ordered living not just for monks but countless religious and lay people ever since.

“While we tend to consider hard-working the guy who skips family dinners and Sunday church to put in more time at the office,” said Campbell. “Benedict would consider him lazy. Anyone who can’t shut up and sit still long enough to pray, read, and study God’s Word is ‘slothful,’ Benedict says, and he should do extra manual labor to curb his addiction to ‘idleness.’”

That’s not to say St. Benedict didn’t value hard work and the persistence it takes to master a skill. Quite the contrary. He was simply attentive to the temptation that work “can easily slide from God-centered mission to self-centered escape” if we aren’t careful.

“For Benedict and his followers,” said Campbell, “a successful life is one that leads to union with God. It’s a whole-life project that demands our complete commitment and engages every aspect of our personality and identity. Work can be a means of pursuing it, but eternity is its end. And while external accomplishments can signal our progress toward that end, our willingness to accept limits on those achievements for love of God’s is often a better marker.”

The Heart of Perfection is great for the self-proclaimed perfectionist, workaholic, those who feel the relentless anxiety to “get ahead,” and those who feel their pious efforts will never be enough to win God’s favor. The saints featured in this book were themselves recovering perfectionists, either in their work or spiritual lives, only to realize that no level of status, amount of money, number of pages of scripture read, or rosaries prayed could ever satisfy their true longing for Jesus and his own perfect will for them.

Kristina Lahr is the assistant editor of New Earth.
Wait a minute Mr. Klocke, I thought you were the advancement director for St. John Paul II Catholic Schools? Why an article on planting trees? Good question and one I’m glad you asked! There is an old wise gem from Socrates that goes like this: “The greatness of a society is achieved when old men plant trees whose shade they may not make use of.”

So, to rephrase it we could say, “The greatness of the future for Catholic education is when our friends who place a high value on Catholic education want to ensure that it is available far beyond their earthly lives.” Making a planned gift to benefit Catholic schools in the Diocese of Fargo can do just that. While there are dozens of ways to create a planned gift legacy for future students, today I’d like to highlight two.

The first tool is a gift in your will or estate plan to help our Diocesan Catholic schools far down the road. Maybe your gift would help a student with financial need with a scholarship, or perhaps you want to help by providing a gift to an endowment at one of our schools for teachers’ salaries so that we can retain our beloved teachers who have changed thousands of students lives over the decades.

The second tool is called a charitable gift annuity. This IRS approved gift could help you now with increased retirement income for you and a loved one and provide an income tax deduction on federal and state income taxes. Using this tool, a donor provides a gift of cash, securities, or other approved property in exchange for guaranteed income payments to one to two recipients for life. At the end of life, any unused remainder in the annuity passes to the Catholic school for the donor’s area of interest. This tool has been popular since the late 1800s and is especially helpful to folks who have cash in a CD (certificate of deposit) or savings account not earning much, or for someone who wants to remove an asset from a sometimes-volatile stock market.

As the new advancement director at JPII Catholic schools, I’d like to offer my 30 years of planned giving experience in helping folks save taxes and increase benefits to their family through planned giving. Think of the beautiful legacy you can leave—providing support for the thousands of students to walk the halls of our schools.

I can provide lots of planning information for our friends and am happy to provide this information to you and your professional advisors like your attorney, tax accountant, trust officer, or insurance professional. There is no substitute for their professional guidance when it comes to your estate.

Currently we may even have match dollars available for some planned gifts, and I can explain the 40% state income tax credit for gifts of $5,000 or more to any of our school’s qualified endowments using these tools and a whole host of other beneficial tools that fit each person’s specific situation.

I’m happy to be a part of your tree-planting team at St. John Paul II Catholic schools to provide the life-changing shade that a Catholic education can provide for our students for future generations to come. Like all of our Catholic schools across the diocese, I partner with Steve Schons of the Catholic Development Foundation of the Diocese of Fargo who manages gifts like these. Contact me anytime at (701) 893-3243 or john.klocke@jp2schools.org. I’d be happy to provide no obligation information and assistance.

Thank you to all of our friends who have or are considering such a planned gift. God Bless!
Faith and hope are for these times

One of my favorite hymns is a recent addition to our Easter repertoire, "Three Days." It begins with an expression of despair—“Three days our world was broken; the Lord of life lay dead,” but then builds to a triumphant conclusion: “Though still Christ’s body suffers, pierced daily by the sword, yet death has no dominion: the risen Christ is Lord!”

As the coronavirus death toll continues to rise, daily media coverage in our country is a mixed bag. Along with a preponderance of ominous and depressing news reports, there have also been many uplifting stories about human generosity and connectedness as well as the power of music, art, and humor to uplift spirits.

As Christians, we should infuse the national narrative with powerful stories of faith in God’s providential care and the hope flowing from Christ’s resurrection. In the midst of so much sickness and fear, our brothers and sisters need us to reassure them that “death has no dominion because the risen Christ is Lord” and really does walk among us!

I have been helping out at our home in Delaware, which has been particularly hard hit by the coronavirus. By the end of Holy Week, we had lost 11 elderly residents to the virus.

I asked God how it was possible to maintain a spirit of hope in the face of so many seemingly untimely deaths. I say “seemingly” because through prayer I realized that these deaths were untimely only in our eyes—not in God’s. If God saw fit to take these individuals to himself through this pandemic, he must have known that their lives had fulfilled his plan and they were ready to return to him.

Our Christian faith assures us that suffering always has value and that those who die believing in Christ will live with him forever. These words must not remain mere platitudes. Christian faith and hope are meant for times such as these. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all” (1 Cor. 15:19).

I’ve been thinking a lot about the example of our foundress, Saint Jeanne Jugan, in response to a situation not unlike our own. In 1857 five novices at our motherhouse died of typhoid fever in a short span of time. Those who remained were heartbroken.

Jeanne Jugan tried to help the novices overcome their sorrow and see their situation as a way of growing stronger in faith and more resolute in hope. After one funeral she comforted the novices, “Come along now, little ones, be brave! One of us has left for Glory; our own turn will come. We must be prepared.”

One of us has left for Glory; our own turn will come—generations of Little Sisters have shared this unshakeable faith in the reality of our heavenly destiny. It has sustained them through good times and bad.

The influenza epidemic of 1918, to which our present situation has been compared, came on the heels of World War I. As 1918 came to a close, our Mother General spoke of “the cross of a universal illness added to the sufferings caused by the war.” She praised the Sisters for their generosity and spirit of sacrifice as they spared no effort in caring for the elderly despite the most precarious circumstances.

The Congregation also underwent severe trials during World War II. In 1944 our novitiate in Marino, Italy and a home in France were destroyed during Allied bombings, killing 32 Little Sisters and 70 residents. A plan to evacuate the novices to a safer location in Rome fell through and just hours later 28 Sisters were buried in the rubble when a bomb fell on them during the community’s lunch.

One of the survivors later wrote, “We came to realize that what God wanted was not a few departures for Rome, but numerous departures for Heaven.”

As we mourn the loss of our dear residents, I’ve tried to think of their deaths as departures for heaven, their passage to Glory. During this Easter season I pray that the contemplation of Christ’s victory over sin and death will help us to rise above the cloud of tragedy hanging over us and renew our faith in the power of the resurrection to lift us all to Glory.
In recent years, self-care has become one of the most popular topics in the fields of social work and counseling. This makes sense since our social workers and counselors often help people facing very difficult situations in their lives. Social workers see these challenges not just once or a couple of times, but over and over in their work. They do an incredible job giving of themselves to help others, and so each year we celebrate National Social Workers Month in March to recognize all the good they do.

While we may not see all the stresses and challenges others face in the same way as social workers, health, legal, and other workers do, you and I all experience stress and suffering in our own lives. We also see it in the lives of our families and friends. How can we deal with stress and cope in a safe, healthy way? One of our licensed counselors offers a helpful post on building resiliency on the News and Events page of our website at www.CatholicCharitiesND.org. In the post, she describes five characteristic ways that resilient people approach life. Additionally, she offers some great tips on increasing our own resiliency to respond to stressors from the coronavirus or other life trauma.

Our faith also includes a need for self-care. A well-known priest recently reminded me that even those involved in Christian faith-based service can lose their effectiveness if they are not being renewed with the love of God for others. That is, unless our own cups are being filled up first, we may have nothing to give others. No matter how great our own personal gifts may be, unless we continually refill our own cup, we could burn out and no longer be able to meet the needs of others. —Chad Prososki

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Many remember St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta as one of the greatest charitable examples of the 20th century. St. Teresa understood that she and her sisters were called to help the “poorest of the poor” because of their spiritual background and who they were. She was commonly said to have told her sisters, “Without our suffering, our work would simply be social work, very good and helpful, but it would not be the work of Jesus Christ, not part of the Redemption.” Thus she always started the day with prayer and contemplation for her and all her sisters in order to fill up their own cups with the love of Jesus before they went out into the streets to help others.

At Catholic Charities North Dakota, we hope that our values can also help us to serve people from all walks of life, including some of the most vulnerable members of our society. To do this, it is important for our staff to remember the importance of self-care. I also ask that right now each of us consider this question as well: as we adjust to the current and perhaps some long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, how do we take care of ourselves so that we can continue to serve others? The challenges of social distancing from our churches, schools, and favorite businesses proves that we are social creatures, meant to love and care for one another. Of course we cannot help others if our own cup is empty, so let’s find creative ways to fill up our own cups. Together we can be the hands and feet of Jesus to love and serve our neighbors throughout North Dakota and beyond!
Health care directives bring peace of mind in uncertain times

The North Dakota Catholic Conference urges everyone to have a health care directive, especially during these difficult and uncertain times.

The greatest advantage of a health care directive... is the peace of mind that preparing one can provide. The discussions among family members, loved ones, and friends about what should happen and who should make decisions eliminates fears, conflicts, and anxieties.

– Christopher Dodson

A health care directive, also known as an advance directive, allows you to state who would make health care decisions for you and what you would like done if you cannot speak for yourself. A health care directive, especially one that conforms to Catholic teaching, is the best way to ensure that your wishes are respected and that your physical and spiritual care reflects Catholic teaching. To repeat, everyone should have a health care directive. They are not just for people who are nearing death, sick, or old. Anyone of any age and condition could become unable to speak for themselves, even if the inability is temporary. Moreover, the best time to have discussions with your loved ones about your care is before you are nearing death, sick, or old.

The North Dakota Catholic Conference has a Catholic health care directive and has provided guidance on the use of health care directives for many years. Several months before the COVID-19 virus hit our country, the conference started work to update and improve our health care directive outreach. We completely redesigned North Dakota Catholic Conference’s website on health care directives from top to bottom. The questions and answers received an update.

Most importantly, the directives themselves were redesigned to fit on to letter-size sheets. The prior version was legal-size. The reformatted directive now consists of three pages rather than two, but it has two distinct advantages. First, it is now easier for the average person to download and print at home. Second, it is easier for your health care provider to electronically scan and make it part of your medical file. If you already have a health care directive from the North Dakota Catholic Conference completed on the legal-size paper, do not worry. It is still valid.

The new website and directive size were ready to launch when the virus hit. Suddenly the completion of health care directives became more timely than ever.

The pandemic, with its resulting stay-at-home practices, might also have provided the best opportunity to complete a health care directive. A health care directive serves many purposes. It provides some legal protection to health care providers when issuing orders based on the directive or a health care agent’s instructions. It respects a person’s right to determine their care. It expedites decision-making during critical times.

The greatest advantage of a health care directive, however, is the peace of mind that preparing one can provide. The discussions among family members, loved ones, and friends about what should happen and who should make decisions eliminates fears, conflicts, and anxieties. During this time of social distancing and spending more time at home is a good time to talk about and complete a health care directive. Do not wait until you are admitted to a hospital.

The North Dakota Catholic Conference has health care directives available for download at: ndcatholic.org/chd. Catholic and non-Catholic Christian versions are available. The conference will also mail hard copies of the directives to anyone free of charge. Persons wanting hard copies can order online or contact our office at (701) 223-2519.

North Dakota law requires a health care directive to be either witnessed by two individuals or notarized. Neither the notary nor the witness may be: a person you designate as your agent or alternate agent; your spouse; a person related to you by blood, marriage, or adoption; a person entitled to inherit any part of your estate upon your death; or person who has, at the time of executing this document, any claim against your estate.

These requirements provide protection to you. However, they pose some challenges during this time of emergency. It might be near impossible to find or be near impartial witnesses or notary publics. Although hospitals usually have notaries on staff, many are not on location during this pandemic.

The North Dakota Catholic Conference is working with Governor Burgum’s office, the Secretary of State, the North Dakota Hospital Association, and others to resolve this problem. In the meantime, complete the form as much as possible and discuss it with your loved ones. Take the form with you if you are hospitalized, even if it is missing some signatures. Even if a notary public is not immediately available, hospitals will work with you to try to get your form officiated.

The options for getting a health care directive notarized may change during this emergency. Please contact the North Dakota Catholic Conference with any questions and for the latest information.
This last August I began my seminary formation for the Diocese of Fargo. I was sent out to Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, Md. Like many new seminarians, I was nervous but also excited starting my formation to the priesthood. I was ready to start classes and meet my new classmates, but most of all I just wanted to get used to the routine of seminary life. After some time, I found that routine, but that was about to be challenged for me.

Like everyone, my life has recently been changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. After some deliberation, the seminary staff decided to send home all the seminarians around the middle of March to continue formation online. This presented us with a completely new set of challenges and questions. Where are we going to live? How are formation and meetings going to take place? Will I be able to take part in some form of recreation? Will I be able to pray well? Many of these questions had no immediate answer, and I felt like a fish out of water.

One thing this pandemic has made me realize is how dependent we truly are on God’s graces. If something as small as a virus can change how our country operates, how much more do we need God’s grace not only to live but to live a life pleasing to God? Human life can be fragile at times, and we can clearly see that at this time. We can try our best to prevent the sufferings that this life can bring, but ultimately God is the one in control, not us.

If there is one blessing that I am receiving because of all this, it’s that God is teaching me how to let him be in control and to trust him. I’ve realized there is little that I can control in this situation, and that I just need to let go and let God do his thing. – Richie Stenger

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

Trust in the Lord in uncertain times

SEMINARIAN LIFE
Richie Stenger
Pre-Theology I seminarian studying at Mount St. Mary Seminary, Emmitsburg, Md.

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If there is one blessing that I am receiving because of all this, it’s that God is teaching me how to let him be in control and to trust him. I’ve realized there is little that I can control in this situation, and that I just need to let go and let God do his thing. It upset me that the only thing I could do was sit and wait for answers on God’s timing.

As I have been praying about this in my life, I have been reflecting often on how Mary’s plans were greatly changed by God, particularly her flight into Egypt with Jesus and Joseph. Mary trusted God to become the mother of Jesus, but shortly after Jesus’s birth, she was challenged again. Mary didn’t get to go to a nice home in a nice community to raise Jesus. Instead, she is sent across a desert with Joseph and the newborn Jesus to Egypt to flee from King Herod’s wrath, all due to a dream that Joseph received. Mary must have had many questions as well. “Where in Egypt are we going to stay? What route are we going to take? Will we be safe? Where will we get food and water?” Despite her anxieties, she continued to trust our Lord throughout all of this, and that is why Mary is a great example for all of us during these unknown times.

God sure seems to have a way of giving us what we need when we need it, but not any bit too early. This has been the case for me lately. And although it can be painful at times, it has been very necessary for me to grow to trust our Lord more. I think it is particularly important for us to turn to Mary for her intercession during these unknown times. She will certainly help us grow closer to her son.

I’ve realized that there is little that I can control in this situation, and that I just need to let go and let God do his thing. – Richie Stenger

One thing this pandemic has made me realize is how dependent we truly are on God’s graces. If something as small as a virus can change how our country operates, how much more do we need God’s grace not only to live but to live a life pleasing to God? Human life can be fragile at times, and we can clearly see that at this time. We can try our best to prevent the sufferings that this life can bring, but ultimately God is the one in control, not us.

If there is one blessing that I am receiving because of all this, it’s that God is teaching me how to let him be in control and to trust him. I’ve realized there is little that I can control in this situation, and that I just need to let go and let God do his thing. It upset me that the only thing I could do was sit and wait for answers on God’s timing.

As I have been praying about this in my life, I have been reflecting often on how Mary’s plans were greatly changed by God, particularly her flight into Egypt with Jesus and Joseph. Mary trusted God to become the mother of Jesus, but shortly after Jesus’s birth,
Despite the major interruptions the COVID-19 pandemic has caused, the vital work of the Church continues in our diocese, parishes, ministries, apostolates, and the myriad of other programs. In the midst of all that is going on, many are looking forward to coming together inside the doors of our churches and once again experience the sacraments and fellowship with their Catholic family. It will be a joyous day when that happens.

Meanwhile, Congress continues to respond to the pandemic with new legislation. The most recent piece of legislation is called the CARES Act. I would like to outline two items in this Act that may favorably affect you or a loved one.

1. **$300 Tax Deduction for non-itemizers.** So you don’t itemize on your federal return? You are not alone. The majority (about 90%) of tax filers do not itemize since the standard deductions have increased so significantly. But, with the new legislation in the CARES Act, all non-itemizers will receive a $300 tax deduction on charitable gifts made up to that amount in tax year 2020. A tax deduction reduces the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) that the federal government uses to calculate tax and determine which tax bracket you belong. For an individual in the 24% federal tax bracket, this will save $72.

2. **Charitable donation deduction increases to 100% AGI for itemizers.** In a typical tax year, once a taxpayer’s Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) is calculated, 60% of AGI has been the maximum amount of a charitable deduction available in that tax year. For example: if an individual has AGI of $75,000, then during that tax year, their maximum charitable deduction for donations made would be $45,000. However, with the new CARES Act legislation, Congress has granted a charitable deduction opportunity, for those who itemize, up to 100% of AGI for the year 2020. There is also a carry-forward provision available for taxpayers who can’t or don’t need the full deduction in the year 2020.

In February, I wrote about the SECURE Act. By far, most of the feedback I’ve had is regarding the children who are named beneficiaries on an Individual Retirement Account (IRA). In December, Congress passed the SECURE Act, limiting stretch payments to IRA beneficiaries to 10 years. If you planned to benefit your children with your IRA, your heirs will now pay higher taxes on the inheritance they receive from you. When you revisit your estate plan, consider funding a Testamentary Charitable Remainder Unitrust with your IRA balance. This plan can provide lifetime payments to your heirs and spread out the taxes on their inheritance.

One further thought given the ups and downs with the current market. Many in our diocese have found Charitable Gift Annuities a wonderful way to receive a guaranteed income stream. A person might be surprised by the benefits. One can exchange low-performing stock, CDs, or cash for guaranteed life-time fixed payments. If the person makes the gift of an appreciated asset, he or she will not have to pay capital gains when the annuity is funded. Also, Charitable Gift annuitants benefit from a tax deduction this year and a portion of the payments could be tax-free. For a free illustration, contact me anytime at steve.schons@fargodiocese.org or call (701) 356-7926.

As usual, this information is not intended as tax, legal, or financial advice. Consult your personal financial advisor or tax attorney for information specific to your situation.
First Saturdays are special here at St. Anne’s Guest Home, Grand Forks. They are the day that our area-wide Catholic women’s group gathers for prayer, Mass, fellowship, and an inspirational message. For our March 7 meeting I was chosen to give the talk. Not often in this position, it was quite the experience for me. I hope my listeners got half as much out of my sharing as I got out of preparing it!

I decided to entitle my talk “Anchoring Your Day with Jesus.” Jesus truly is the anchor of our souls, and our best friend. My topic was using the Morning Offering and the evening Examen prayers to strengthen one’s friendship with Christ.

I have to admit, preparing this talk was instrumental in my own life, helping me to renew my own efforts at “anchoring my day” with him with these prayers. Studying and refreshing my memory on these prayer practices opened my heart in a new way to fostering an “attitude of gratitude” in an intentional way.

Like me, you may have prayed these prayers for years, or maybe you’ve never really heard much about either one. Wherever you’re at, I will share here a little history about these prayers and the significance they have, as well as steps for praying the examen in an effective way.

Let’s begin with the Morning Offering. Many people offer intentions for the “Apostleship of Prayer” during this offering. This is a movement which prays for intentions suggested by the Pope, and which originated in France in the 1800s, according to the National Catholic Register. For 130 years, the popes have been offering their monthly intentions in this prayer apostolate. Pope Leo XIII, who was the first pontiff to participate, said that our morning offering is “of fundamental importance in the life of each and every one of the faithful. It is a daily reminder to make our entire day, our whole life, “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.”

The morning offering doesn’t take long. In fact, you can tape it to your bathroom mirror or commit it to memory and say it while dressing. It’s a wonderful way to offer everything the day may hold up to our Lord, through Mary his mother. It is good to make this offering before rushing into the whirlwind that can be our day, bringing to him consciously, intentionally, all the “prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of the day.” At daily Mass, you can bring this offering, placing it on the altar in your mind’s eye while the bread and wine are prepared. Either way, in the Morning Offering, you can offer everything in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Morning Offering can be the first hinge, you might say, in living your day with intention and for Jesus.

The Examen Prayer comes to us mainly from St. Ignatius of Loyola. According to an article from the Catholic Exchange, the daily Examen is like shining a floodlight on our heart. It can help us be more aware of God’s action in our lives.

Recognizing God’s presence with us is the first step in making a fruitful evening examen. We want to remember that he is truly with us throughout the day. We remember that he has been our friend and our father, with us in all our comings and goings. Next, we stop to give thanks to God for all his blessings during the day. This is so important.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you with his light. He sees everything and can help you to look back on your day more clearly and perceptively. As you go through the examen, at some point, you will probably become aware of ways that you have not acted as you should. An important part of the examen is repentance; we turn to God for forgiveness for ways in which we have not been faithful.

We want to look back on our day, reviewing it in the light of the Holy Spirit. One way which I find helpful and insightful is to think through the day using first person plural: “We cleaned house...We went to work” (meaning Jesus and I). This is a wonderful way to remind ourselves that our best friend was truly with us all along! It also helps us to catch times we sinned: We did not scold our neighbor, I did!

Reflect on the day. Try to notice patterns, times you showed love, and times you were selfish. Finally, turn your mind to the coming day. Think of how you might do better. Ask God’s help for troubles you can anticipate (and for those you may not). This concluding part can be a great step in avoiding sins and mistakes tomorrow. An appropriate prayer to close the Examen is the Our Father.

Pope John Paul II said this about the Morning Offering and evening Examen Prayer: “Remember the past with gratitude. Live the present with enthusiasm. Look forward to the future with confidence.”
W hen I was a young priest, a funeral family chose John 14:1–12 as the Gospel for their beloved mother’s funeral. It is the Gospel of Mother’s Day weekend this year. I had not celebrated many funerals, and I read and read about John 14 and I still did not know what to do or say. At that moment, the phone rang; it was a sister from the local convent.

She said she knew exactly what I should preach and invited me over for coffee. We ate and drank and laughed; she said no word about John 14. Finally, I asked her what advice she had for me. She said: “Tell this story.”

There was once (and usually is) an old sister in her mid-90s in the infirmary. The night nurse’s helper was a sister in her 70s with a great appreciation for work and care.

One night the old sister woke, and nothing the nurse did helped the old sister go back to sleep, so she called on her helper. The helper came and talked to the old sister about books she was reading. Finally, she asked the old sister if she would like her to read to her if this mid-night awakening happened again. The old sister said: “Yes!” The younger sister asked what book she should bring. The old sister said: “The Bible.” The younger sister said she would be ready any night the old sister was awake.

The next night, the old sister was awake again. The younger sister reported for duty, and the old sister chose the Gospel of John to start. The younger sister read all the way to chapter 10, and the next night they got to chapter 14. When the younger sister read about the “dwelling place” Jesus was preparing in heaven for each of his followers, she closed the Bible and asked the old sister what she thought.

The old sister sighed and said, “In my youth while I lived in a one-room sod house with my parents and nine brothers and sisters, I read that the promised dwelling place was a mansion. I thought that would be great! That promise brought me to the convent.”

At the convent, the old sister shared a room with a young woman. They had two beds, two desks, a sink and two closets. Why they had two closets, they did not know. They all wore the same habit and got fresh, clean ones from the laundry. No need for a closet; a bookshelf would have been better.

While at the convent, the old sister learned in a new translation of the Bible that the mansion had been replaced by a “house.” She thought that was still better than the one-room sod house and the small room she was sharing with the other “want-to-be” sister.

When the old sister was assigned to a school with six other sisters, they each got their own room/office. Her room was a mess; she was not a good housekeeper, but she was a great teacher. She was in heaven; the students needed her; she felt great! While teaching, she read a new translation of the Bible that said “Jesus was preparing a home” for his beloved servants. She wondered what the dimensions of a home was. She thought if the home is like the room she had at the school convent, heaven will be a fine place.

Now, the old sister sighed again. “Did you say he is preparing for me a ‘dwelling place?’ That could be a cardboard box placed over a heating grate on a Washington DC curb for all we know. But if Jesus is preparing it, it will be wonderful.”

The older sister continued, “I have always had faith in Jesus. He has always provided for me—food, shelter, work, friends, and faith. He is not going to let me down in heaven—whatever the dwelling place he is preparing for me.”

The old sister’s faith is the kind of faith we all need to weather the current trial in our life—COVID-19. Let us be strong and pray for one another.

Father Miller is the pastor of St. Mary’s Church in Park River and St. Luke’s Church in Veseleyville. If you have a faith story to share, contact Father Bert at bert.miller@fargodiocese.org.

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@fargodiocese.org.
Don and Rose Schumacher, parishioners of Holy Family Church in Grand Forks, will celebrate their 66th anniversary on June 2. Don celebrated his 95th birthday on April 10, and Rose celebrated her 90th birthday on May 3. They have 4 children, 10 grandchildren, and 13 great-grandchildren.

Lawrence Heley, parishioner of St. Boniface Church in Lidgerwood, celebrated his 90th birthday on April 28. He was married to Marlys Wahler for 66 years until her passing in 2017. He still lives on a farm and helps with farming. He has 4 children, 9 grandchildren, and 8 great-grandchildren with 1 on the way.

Sally and Don Voeller will celebrate their 60th anniversary on June 13. They were married at St. Ann’s Church in Fillmore and are now parishioners at Nativity Church in Fargo. They have 3 children, 7 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren.

Patty Sauter, parishioner of St. Cecilia’s Church in Harvey, celebrated her 90th birthday on April 16. Patty and Harold were married for 55 years until Harold passed away in 2010. They have 10 children (1 deceased), 15 grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren, and 1 great-great-grandchild.

**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.

**75 years ago — 1945**
Heartened by the urgent request of the Catholic people at Wyndmere to have a resident pastor of their own, His Excellency, the Most Rev. Aloisius J. Muench raised the status of St. John the Baptist Mission to that of a parish on May 10, the Feast of the Ascension. From 1912 to 1935, the mission church was attended by priests who came from Lidgerwood. In 1935, it was attached to St. John’s in Wahpeton. Rev. George Krile is the first appointed pastor to lead the 200 souls at Wyndmere.

**50 years ago — 1970**
Father Francis Smalley proudly reported that Blessed Sacrament Church in West Fargo will begin construction of a new church building this month. The new structure will be 14,500 square feet and completely carpeted and air conditioned. In addition to the sanctuary, there will be a social hall, kitchen facilities, office space, classrooms and a storage room. It is expected to be completed in April 1971. Membership in the parish is over 1,500.

**20 years ago — 2000**
Bishop James S. Sullivan blessed the Sts. Anne and Joachim parish building site in a groundbreaking ceremony on May 17. This marks the beginning of construction on phase one of the new parish center to be erected on the corner of 52nd Avenue and 25th Street South in Fargo. It’s the largest project ever undertaken by a parish in the diocese and will include offices, a gathering space and a social hall which should be completed by fall of 2001.

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

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To Know God... To Love God... To Serve God...
When the threat of the coronavirus began shutting down U.S. cities and towns, then activities one-by-one in mid-March, it also began chipping away at the country’s “very busy, achievement-oriented culture,” said Emily Cash, a psychologist and director of the Saint Luke Center in Louisville, Ky., part of the Saint Luke Institute clergy treatment center based in Silver Spring, Md.

In the U.S., “we focus on productivity, we focus on what we can accomplish, how hard we’re working… We all tend to wear that with a lot of pride,” she said in an April 8 interview with Catholic News Service.

And though the present confinement can bring on what can seem like a heavy weight on our psyche, it also can bring a great spiritual opportunity, one we often hear about but may not stop long enough to truly take in during our busy lives.

“From the spiritual perspective, the huge challenge for all of us is how do we internalize the knowledge that God loves us for what we are, not what we do, not what we produce or what we accomplish,” Cash said. “In this moment, we’re all forced to be still and redefine business and redefine productivity, and be still in a way that we’ve never really been called to do. How can we, maybe deepen our faith, our understanding that God loves us, in spite of what we’re not producing, exactly because of who we are… and accepting that in a different way? I think that really can be very powerful for folks.”

As the pandemic seems to advance each day in the U.S. with no certain timeline of when it will end, she urges those with anxieties to focus on the day ahead.

“What I’m encouraging my clients to do… is to focus less on an end date and more on one day at a time,” she said. “What do I need today? What can I do today? How do I ground myself today? Because when we fixate on those end dates and those are not met, we are faced with a whole other rush of anxieties and disappointments and so trying to deal with one day at a time, moment by moment, can be a real anchoring experience for folks.”

When authorities began encouraging the now widespread stay-at-home orders, the adrenaline of the situation allowed people to put stress aside, to some degree, she said, “but the uncertainty and length of this, for all of us is a challenge.”

Those dealing with coronavirus anxiety may be experiencing post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety, sleep disruption, confusion, anger, fear, frustration and boredom, she said, in a video posted on Saint Luke’s website. She encourages those trying to manage the anxiety to get the facts from sources such as the Centers for Disease Control as well as local authorities.

But she warns not to do too much of a “deep dive” into information, to limit activity that might prove to be too stressful at the end of the day and to practice self-care.

She encourages clients to think about their physical, emotional and spiritual opportunity, one we often hear about but may not stop long enough to truly take in during our busy lives.

“So, what am I going to do for myself spiritually today? That’s going to look like a shared prayer with a (virtual) community, a spiritual reading… I know I need more laughter in my life: Am I going to watch a funny YouTube video? Am I going to call a friend?”

Evenings should be about planning out the next day: what to accomplish, even if it’s broken into one-hour chunks or 30-minute chunks, she said.

“We want control of what we’re doing,” she said. “When we feel healthy, we want control over our structure, we are productive. When we are able to connect, we feel better. Building elements of that into the day is something I’m really encouraging folks to do.”

Even after the crisis has ended, it may take a while for the world to return to the one we knew, she said.

“I think there’s going to be increased caution,” she said. “Though people may experience a sense of freedom, people may also have a feeling of uncertainty, lack of security, trust.

“So, I think it will be a little bit of a push and pull and dance as we all come back from that,” she said.

When she works with clients who have experienced trauma, she explains that there’s an emotional peak of that experience and then as you heal, little aftershocks appear that may take months or years to settle.

But until that happens, she encouraged compassion for oneself and for others.

“Ideally what we’d like to be able to do is greet each day with a different level of peace because what we know is that we, as a country, as a world, we’ll be facing a lot of loss,” she said. “There are certainly communities that have already been faced with that. But I think what we know, from the numbers and from that data, is that we will continue to face that (loss). There’s a way in which, if we can focus on one moment at a time, we’ll be more equipped and better prepared to be able to handle that and to come out on the other side.”
People often telephone Sister Maria Elena Romero, a Capuchin Franciscan Poor Clare in Wilmington, Del., to ask for her to pray for a personal intention, to sound out a problem, sometimes just to cry.

But lately, she’s received a phone call or two with a different kind of problem: boredom.

As people around the world are asked to work from home, limit their contact with others and introduce “social distancing” into their vocabulary and lives, the sheltering in place authorities are asking the public to observe is causing some to go stir crazy.

But for Sister Romero, limiting contact with the outside world is a part of life she observes as a cloistered nun. That means that like the other dozen or so sisters who live in her Capuchin Franciscan community in Wilmington, she only leaves the confines of the Veronica Giuliani monastery for limited reasons, such as a doctor’s appointment.

When it comes to limiting contact with the outside world, she’s kind of an expert, you might say.

Her advice for those struggling with the current reality of staying in place? First, make a schedule, she said.

“If you’re idle, of course you’re going to get bored,” she said in a March 16 telephone interview with Catholic News Service.

The day at the monastery for the Wilmington Poor Clares begins at 5 a.m. when they make their bed, get dressed for the day, then head to the chapel for prayer at 5:30 a.m. Though most may not want to get up at this hour, it’s a good idea to set a regular time to get up, start the day with prayer, give thanks, then organize work that needs to be done that day.

Some would be surprised, but life inside a monastery is pretty packed with activity. Though the day revolves around a scheduled set of prayers, there are clothes and dishes to be washed, meals for 12 to prepare, finances to sort, food and supplies that need to be ordered or purchased. Each sister is assigned a chore to tackle.

Likewise, at home, she said, make a list of chores or responsibilities that need to be accomplished that day and dole them out: whether it’s working from home, doing homework, or cleaning or fixing things. For those who don’t have other responsibilities, assign a productive chore for yourself or others, to stay busy until lunchtime. A family member can be assigned to prepare lunch for others or each person can take up a different task: set the table, load the dishwasher or help the person cooking to clean as lunch is prepared.

People often complain that they don’t have enough time for family. Lunch as family, a novelty for many, can be a great opportunity to catch up with how children, spouses, or another family member are dealing with confinement. The period after lunch can be used to rest, to read, to check in with friends or co-workers by phone, she said.

Sister Romero said she has suggested to those who tell her that they’re struggling with boredom to be creative about prayer.

“Changing your setting always helps. Find a place to be alone and that always helps to clear your head,” she said.

A lot of people tell her how they never learned specific prayers or to pray the rosary, so “I tell them this is your opportunity,” she said. Time also can be used for self-reflection, to ask oneself whether they’ve wronged others and to seek forgiveness, to examine fears or to make a plan of how to help someone else who might be struggling—even if it’s just through a phone call.

The time before dinner for the sisters includes a longer period of prayer, sometimes accompanied by reading as a community, then meditation, ending with prayer, then dinner, cleaning up, followed by what some call social time or recreation time. For the Poor Clares, this can be used as a time to build community—an important aspect for any group who lives together.

Families can do much like the sisters and cook and clean up together, have a longer time to interact and check in, then play cards or board games, take part in physical activity by walking in the yard together, watch a movie, or read.

Though it’s good to keep informed, Sister Romero suggested that people carve out quiet time before bed, listen to music or pray or meditate, whatever it takes to get themselves out of the anxiety caused in a time of uncertainty, she said.

“Light a candle and meditate,” she said. “This is a great time to ask for forgiveness, to look inside the self and cleanse the soul.” Many have complained to her in the past that they never have time, “but here it is,” she said.

“This can be a time for blessings,” she said. “But you have to take advantage of it, to see the good side of it, and then it can be a blessed time, a time to ask for mercy, to give thanks, to think about others, to reflect.”
By the time this reaches you, we will be a good two months into living alongside the COVID-19 epidemic that has gripped our world. Like every sphere of society, the sidewalk at our state’s only abortion facility has shifted as this pandemic continues to pursue its victims.

My own confronting of this virus happened earlier than some. Even as many of my friends were still saying the coronavirus was akin to the flu and would pass by nearly unnoticed, I already had seen and believed evidence to the contrary.

Because of this, on March 11, just hours before President Trump announced an international travel ban, I slipped into the adoration chapel at St. Mary’s Cathedral and prayed for our world. My sons were about to board a bus bound for Phoenix for a Shanley High School Fine Arts Tour, and I, to follow them en route by plane the next day.

At this point, in-country travel was not yet banned, but people were growing nervous. I knew the window was closing, but with one son recently relocated to Arizona and the other two on their way, my mother’s heart moved forward in the planned direction. Only minutes before boarding, however, I learned someone on my flight had recently returned from Rome. Though there was no indication of exposure, this put me in an immediate mindset of needing to ponder the real implications. And so, when I returned, I took extra precautions. One of them was to remove myself from sidewalk ministry to wait things out.

The week before our trip, I’d gathered for a social with other sidewalk advocates committed to this cause, and together, we’d said one of the most heartfelt prayers possible for all involved in the heart-wrenching business of abortion. The last thing I wanted to do was part ways, just as we were beginning to bond more deeply.

Many did continue to show up on the sidewalk, absolutely committed to the cause despite increasing warnings to stay home. I struggled with this, knowing that it might seem I’d grown weak in faith. And yet, in prayer, and in my heart, every indication was that my family needed me now more than the sidewalk.

This pandemic has been a good time for all of us to review our priorities. Our two college daughters have been home, trying to figure out how to move forward, and our two highschool sons have been doing the same. Our three middle children have all been laid off from their food-industry jobs. And while I remain steadfast in my commitment to bring an end to abortion in our state, praying from home has helped me see that even in our limitations, God will find ways to use us. It’s been a reminder too, that we need to be in constant discernment regarding God’s will.

God has given me a zeal for sidewalk ministry, but he has given me an even greater zeal to be a worthy wife and mother. These roles must take precedence. As my husband, who works in an essential field, has been heading into the front lines of this battle every day, someone needed to be the heart of our home. Here I am, Lord.

One of our pastor friends who comes to the sidewalk regularly shared a Scripture passage from Proverbs 22:3, repeated in 27:12, to encourage me: “The astute see an evil and hide, while the naïve continue on and pay the penalty.” I shared in turn one from Isaiah 26:20: “Go, my people, enter your chambers and close the doors behind you; Hide yourselves for a brief moment, until the wrath is past.” I have complied with restrictions with the idea they would be temporary but anticipate rejoining my fellow sidewalk advocates soon.

Sadly, abortion has persisted, even as the pandemic removed us from regular daily activities and worship of God. It’s been a confusing and often frustrating time. I don’t regret my chance to refocus and tend to those right in front of me, while making an earnest appeal to the God of life, who holds us all in his hands.

At the same time, I’m grieved that through all the changes we’ve experienced communally, the killing of innocent life did not pause. Our governor did not use this opportunity to halt what you and I know is not only not an essential business, but one that has participated with the virus in seeking to destroy.

As we move forward in the weeks to come, may we pray together with greater fervor than ever, “Give us this day our daily bread... and deliver us from evil. Amen.”

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 June New Earth.

Where in the diocese are we?

Last month’s photo is from St. Mary’s Church in Park River.