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As I write this column in late January, the Church in North Dakota is facing a serious challenge. A bill has been introduced in the North Dakota Senate that would violate the religious rights of the faithful. Senate Bill 2180 imposes a reporting mandate on those who learn of abuse of a minor even in the context of spiritual advising. This would include every priest who hears sacramental confessions.

No one should doubt that the Church condemns the abuse of minors by any person. We all denounce the abuse of minors and are committed to preventing it, especially in the life of the Church. Priests and deacons are already mandated reporters of any suspected abuse of a minor. Up until now, spiritual advising has been exempted from this mandate in recognition of the right to religious liberty, but SB2180 would end this exemption.

This proposed law would require priests to violate the sacramental seal of confession under threat of imprisonment and fines. And of equal importance, it would violate the rights of all people of faith to practice their religion without government interference. Every penitent has the right to confess their sins anonymously in the sacrament of Reconciliation, and the seal of confession is inviolable. No priest may reveal anything he hears in confession, and he may not identify any person who comes to confession. This obligation is so serious that a priest who breaks the seal of confession would face the penalty of excommunication. SB2180 would violate that right of religious practice and undermine the confidentiality of these most personal and sacred encounters with God’s mercy.

Not only is this proposed law a violation of religious liberty, but it is also inherently biased against religion. If it were not, then the sponsors would have included other confidential relationships in the bill, like the attorney-client privilege. Moreover, it sets a dangerous precedent for further incursions by civil authority into the spiritual lives and religious practice of all people of faith. Once this mandate of disclosure is imposed, others will surely follow. What would prevent authorities from requiring priests to reveal other sins as well? What would prevent priests from being used in surveillance operations by law enforcement officials? For centuries, tyrants have attempted to infiltrate the sanctity of the confessional for their own ends. Many know the story of St. John Nepomucene, who was killed by order of the king of Bohemia because he would not reveal what the queen had told him in confession. This bill is yet another attempt to violate the sacred confidentiality of the sacrament of Reconciliation.

But why is the confession of sins so important, and why does the seal of confession matter so much? Why should the Church require such confidentiality even to the point of the imprisonment or martyrdom of its priests? We must always remember what is actually happening in the sacrament of Reconciliation. With the help of God’s grace, the penitent has arrived at an understanding of his or her own sinfulness and seeks the mercy and forgiveness of God through sacramental confession. Recall what Jesus said to the apostles after his resurrection: “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven, and who sins you hold bound are held bound” (John 20:22-23). Our Lord has conferred on the apostles and on every bishop and priest who continues their ministry the power to grant absolution for sins. But the priest does not absolve in his own name; he absolves sins in the name of God. The priest who hears confessions is the minister of the sacrament. He acts in the person of Christ not only by receiving the confession of the penitent, but also by offering absolution. The seal of confession respects the fact that the penitent is actually confessing to God, and the priest is acting as his instrument of mercy in the context of the sacrament.

Every person, even the gravest sinner, can experience the mercy of God if he is truly repentant. Apart from any civil obligations, the penitent is entitled to confidentiality as he reveals the sins and struggles of his life in Reconciliation. The seal of confession assures the penitent that his sins will not be revealed to others. He can be assured that what he tells the priest will be held in the strictest confidence as if it were known only to God himself. If there were no seal of confession, the Church has a sacred responsibility to offer Christ’s mercy to all, and must never hinder the penitent from approaching our Lord for the grace of forgiveness. Without this assurance of the seal of confession, many people would be reluctant to come forward to confess and receive absolution for their sins. –Bishop John Folda
how many of us would freely confess our sins to a priest? If we feared that our sins would be made public, would we entrust this most intimate part of our lives to a priest? Probably not. The Church has a sacred responsibility to offer Christ’s mercy to all, and must never hinder the penitent from approaching our Lord for the grace of forgiveness. Without this assurance of the seal of confession, many people would be reluctant to come forward to confess and receive absolution for their sins. But this isn’t about hiding abusers or other criminals from prosecution; it’s about protecting the right of every person to seek God’s forgiveness.

Soon we will begin the holy season of Lent, a time of reflection and repentance, but also a time of hope and healing. At this time, more than any other, we celebrate the saving mercy of God, knowing that Christ has died for our sins and lives now in eternal glory. During these forty days, many of us will respond to our Lord’s call to conversion and approach the sacrament of Reconciliation out of a desire to confess our sinfulness and receive the grace of God’s forgiveness. We should be free to receive this grace without fear of outside interference, and without concern for the integrity of the sacraments. I pray that our elected officials will act with wisdom and prudence in representing us and acting for the common good, which includes protecting our right to freely live our Catholic faith. The bill now before our lawmakers is a stark reminder that we should never take this right for granted.

Prayer Intention of Pope Francis

Violence against women
We pray for women who are victims of violence, that they may be protected by society and have their sufferings considered and heeded.
St. Blaise was the bishop of Sebastea and a doctor. The first known record of the saint’s life comes from the medical writings of Amidenus, where he is recorded as helping patients suffering from objects stuck in their throat. St. Blaise is believed to have begun his ministry as a healer then eventually became a “physician of souls.” He then retired to a cave, where he remained in prayer. People often turned to St. Blaise for healing miracles.

In 316, Agricola, the governor of Cappadocia and of Lesser Armenia, arrested then-bishop Blaise for being a Christian. On their way to the jail, a woman set her only son, who was choking to death on a fish bone, at his feet. Blaise cured the child, and though Agricola was amazed, he still tried to get Blaise to renounce his faith. Agricola beat Blaise with a stick and tore at his flesh with iron combs before beheading him.

St. Blaise never went through the beatification or canonization process that is part of the cause of sainthood today because the process wasn’t in place until the 12th century. However, the Church recognizes him as the patron of those who suffer from throat ailments. He is normally pictured with two candles, which is how the Catholic tradition of the blessing of throats with two candles came about.

Historical information from Catholic Online.

Feast day: Feb. 3
Patron: throat illnesses, animals, wool combers, and wool trading
Death: 316

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**FOCUS ON FAITH**

One of the beauties of our wonderful and true Roman Catholic faith is the number of devotions we have. As Catholics, we can sanctify the day, week, or month by making special observances. On Feb. 17, we will observe Ash Wednesday.

One good way to make the Lenten penitential observances a family affair is to “sanctify the month.” Each month can be dedicated to a particular virtue or devotion. From *My Prayer Book*, written by Father F.X. Lasance, copyright 1908, there is a section encouraging Catholics to “practice a particular devotion.”

For February, one of the devotions available is to the Holy Family. Certainly, a family can practice this devotion throughout Lent if they wish. Here’s how: take time to come together as a family once daily to pray and also to teach and learn something about our Catholic faith. Study the Catechism and/or the Bible; pray the Rosary (or a decade); pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy or a Litany; pray one or several Psalms; or pray a group of favorite prayers together throughout Lent. It’s one way a family can grow in holiness and fulfill the obligation to pray, fast, and give alms during Lent.

Teaching and praying. These are two ways individuals and families can grow in holiness and in intimacy together with God the Father, and His Only-Begotten Son, Our Savior Jesus Christ this Lent.

— Father Scott Karnik

Our greatest example in carrying this out is, of course, Jesus Christ. His foster-father St. Joseph and his mother the Blessed Virgin Mary taught Jesus the Jewish faith and Jewish Law. Joseph and Mary themselves obeyed and learned it and obeyed God’s admonition in Deuteronomy, “...be very careful not to forget the things your own eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your heart as long as you live, but make them known to your children and to your children’s children, that day you stood before the Lord, your God, at Horeb, when the Lord said to me: ‘Assemble the people for me, that I may let them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me as long as they live in the land and may so teach their children’” (Deut. 4:9-10).

Jesus learned well the Jewish law. We know this from his temptation in the desert. Satan tempted Jesus to change stones into bread in order to satisfy his physical hunger. Jesus answered Satan: It is written: ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God’” (Matt. 4:4). Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3. Jesus uses the Law to defeat Satan’s temptation by refusing to use his divine power to benefit himself. Jesus will accept whatever God wills. When Satan tempts Jesus to throw himself off the parapet of the Temple to impress the crowd, Jesus refuses: “Again, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test’” (Matt. 4:7). Jesus quotes the Law again written in Deuteronomy 6:16-17. And finally, when Satan tempted Jesus to prostrate himself and worship the Tempter, Jesus answers “Get away, Satan! It is written: ‘The Lord, your God, shall you worship and Him alone shall you serve’” (Matt. 4:10).

The footnote of St. Matthew’s Gospel, Chapter 4 says, “The worship of Satan to which Jesus is tempted is probably intended to recall Israel’s worship of false gods. Jesus’ refusal is expressed in these words: “The Lord, your God, shall you fear; him shall you serve, and by His name you shall swear” (Deut. 6:13). And all of this stems from the great Hebrew Shema Yisra’el: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our god, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength” (Deut. 6:4-5). Then, here come verses six and seven: “Take to heart these words which I command you today. Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut. 4:6-7).

If you continue reading in the Book of Deuteronomy, God tells the Israelites numerous times to teach their children the Law, so they can keep God’s favor and enjoy prosperity and peace in the Promised Land God will give them.

Teaching and praying. These are two ways individuals and families can grow in holiness and in intimacy together with God the Father, and His Only-Begotten Son, Our Savior Jesus Christ this Lent. We can use the wonderful example of devotion to the Holy Family for this month of February and throughout Lent. We can know, love, and serve God better by family prayer and study of our beautiful Catholic faith. It is a good way to strengthen ourselves against Satan’s temptations and become lights of Jesus Christ. Have a holy and happy Lent.

*Editor’s note: If you have a question to suggest for consideration in a future column, send to news@fargodiocese.org.*
New Earth renews commitment to inform, educate, inspire during Catholic Press Month

By Kristina Lahr

February is Catholic Press Month, which recognizes the role of Catholic press in the mission of the Church. New Earth’s mission continues to be to inform, educate, and inspire the faithful to grow in a deeper relationship with God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

While there are many print and virtual forms of media available to us, the Second Vatican Council states, “To instill a fully Christian spirit into readers, a truly Catholic press should be set up and encouraged. Such a press... should be edited with the clear purpose of forming, supporting and advancing public opinion in accord with natural law and Catholic teaching and precepts. It should disseminate and properly explain news concerning the life of the Church. Moreover, the faithful ought to be advised of the necessity both to spread and read the Catholic press to formulate Christian judgments for themselves on all events.”

In a culture that often misunderstands Catholic teaching and worldview, Catholic press allow us to tell our own story and dive into the topics of most concern to us. New Earth is published 11 times a year and reaches over 23,000 households in the diocese and beyond. While all registered parishioners of the diocese receive a copy of New Earth, we recently waived the subscription fee for those outside the diocese, replacing it with a free-will donation, in order to share the Good News with as many people as possible.

Thank you for reading and supporting New Earth. When you’re finished reading an issue, we invite you to pass it on to a friend or family member who may benefit from it. To see how else you can contribute to New Earth’s mission, visit www.fargodioocese.org/new-earth.

Prayer service to end abortion

Monsignor Joseph Goering, rector of the Cathedral of St. Mary in Fargo, leads the faithful in adoration and prayers at the cathedral’s day of prayer for the protection of unborn children. The service took place Jan. 22, the 48th anniversary of the establishment of legal abortions in the United States. Prayers were said for the victims of abortion, their mothers and fathers, and for those medical personnel who take part in abortions. In his remarks, Monsignor Goering said, “It’s important that we see each child as a gift from God, all the way from conception until natural death, and that our society sees each child as a beloved person, creation, a gift from God.”

(Paul Braun | New Earth)
In many instances, especially for the education of our youth, the advancement of the internet-age has made it easier to find wealth of information, goods, and services at our fingertips. Unfortunately, the internet also has its downside with what it brings into the home... a modern culture that glorifies violence and sex, especially through pornography.

In 2015, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) published a document called “Create in Me a Clean Heart: A Pastoral Response to Pornography.” In this document, U.S. bishops say pornography must be addressed in order to protect marriage, the family, and children. When the home includes pornography, the home is no longer a safe haven.

A software company in Michigan called Covenant Eyes, has been teaming with dioceses across the country to raise awareness to the dangers of pornography通过Safe Haven Sundays. Safe Haven Sunday is in its third year in the Diocese of Fargo working to bring effective ways for families to fight pornography in the home.

“It’s critical for parents to realize the danger they place their children in when providing access to the internet,” said Ryan Foley of Covenant Eyes. “Today, it is nearly certain and probable that a child will be exposed to internet pornography. Parents need to have conversations with their children about pornography, and protect them as best they can. It’s often said, the first person to reach a child and discuss sex with them wins the right to keep educating them. We don’t want the first person to teach our children about sex to be internet pornography.”

This year’s theme for Safe Haven Sunday is Equipping the Family, Safety through Connection. At Masses the weekend of Feb. 27–28, booklets and prayer cards will be offered to families to give them insight into the dangers of the possible intrusion of pornography into their children’s lives.

“Parents being on the same page is critical when it comes to internet safety,” said Foley. “Standards around taking your technology to your room at night, to restrictions to apps, and to when or if to allow a child to have a smartphone, are decisions that need both parents to agree, and subsequently reinforce each other when a child seeks to break or push the rules.”

Brad Gray, the director of the Office of Marriage and Family Life for the Diocese of Fargo, says the annual observance of Safe Haven Sunday contributes to establishing a culture that recognizes, upholds, and celebrates God’s design for marriage and sexuality.

“Safe Haven Sunday casts light on the dark underbelly of pornography,” said Gray. “It helps to awaken people to the harm done to individuals, marriages, and families through the use of pornography. It both educates parents about the various subtle ways that pornographers seek to infiltrate their homes and poison the minds and heart of their families, while at the same time equipping parents to protect against these intrusions.”

For more information on Safe Haven Sunday, or to get a copy of the book Connected: How Strong Family Relationships Lead to Internet-Safe Kids, contact the Marriage and Family office at the Diocese of Fargo at (701) 356-7900.
Kevin Lorsung ordained transitional deacon Dec. 19

Deacon Kevin Lorsung prepares the altar after being ordained as a transitional deacon at the Cathedral of St. Mary in Fargo on Dec. 19, 2020. Witnessed by the faithful, Lorsung promised to hold fast to the mystery of faith, proclaim the faith in word and deed, embrace the celibate state, and deepen a spirit of prayer by celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours. Deacons are active in Christian ministry in parishes and hospitals, as well as service to the poor. Deacon Lorsung returned to St. Paul Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. for his final semester and will be ordained a priest on a later date. (photo by Kristina Lahr | New Earth)

North Dakota priest faced multiple crises in 2020, but he's beginning the new year with a hopeful outlook

By Roxane B. Salonen | Originally published in The Forum

“I reached out, and he said he was okay, but was he?” Pfeifer says. “What more could I have done? That’s one of the things I constantly question.”

To help with healing, he brought in a suicide-prevention team, along with the Grief Share group he’d launched. However, more tragedy hit just days after the funeral, when Pfeifer’s friend, Monsignor Jeffrey Wald, a Napoleon native, died at 56 of COVID-19 complications in Jamestown.

“He was a mentor. If I struggled with something, I could pick up a phone and give him a call, and his advice and wisdom were always so sound,” Pfeifer says.

He couldn’t attend, nor preside over, his friend’s funeral Mass at his own parish, however. On the day of Wald’s death, Pfeifer learned he, too, was positive for COVID-19.

“For me to be home during his funeral and planning, it was a really difficult time,” Pfeifer says, adding that prayer and spiritual direction provided solace.

“We need others,” he adds, noting that even pastors need to be pastored at times. “In spiritual direction, we know we’re not alone.”

Though he sensed God near, Pfeifer says, on Oct. 30, this extrovert pastor, whom people describe as “always on the go,” celebrated his 46th birthday in his rectory, alone.

In-person Masses now resumed, his parish “was like sheep without a shepherd,” he says. Pfeifer convinced a few priest friends to travel to preside over Masses during his quarantine.

For the Rev. Neil Pfeifer of St. Philip Neri Church, the litany of crises began in April, when in-person Easter was canceled. “You talk about mourning, starting Holy Week without people in the pews, that in itself is a grief,” Pfeifer says. “What brought me peace was realizing we got to experience this year as Jesus experienced it, with the Agony in the Garden... and to unite that suffering for a greater purpose.”

In some ways, the agony never let up. Pfeifer tried bringing normalcy to the parish, eventually drawing up to 1,500 visitors a week to their community through online Masses. But by the year’s end, a barrage of crises ensued.

It started with the suicide of one of his teen parishioners on Oct. 20, 2020; the second such loss in several years within this small, tight-knit community of 700, and the sixth suicide of his priesthood.
Meantime, he peered longingly from the rectory as his parishioners arrived for Mass without him.

"I would watch from the parking lot, and wave, just trying to make that contact, trying to keep those connections." Then, a few days after Wald’s funeral, on Nov. 9, Monsignor Joseph Senger—who grew up near Pfeifer’s hometown of Rugby—died, at 91, also of COVID-19, in Minot.

"Monsignor Senger is my uncle’s brother," Pfeifer explains, noting that he had to grieve that death from afar.

Even while ill himself, Pfeifer says he never entertained dying; he just wouldn’t let himself go there. Twelve hours after his diagnosis, he wanted to “go back out into the world,” though he refrained.

But the effects still came. By the third day, he’d lost his taste, and the next, his smell. What he calls “brain fog” still hasn’t gone away completely; details elude him at times.

“I still have mornings where my hips feel like gel,” Pfeifer says. “I’m just grateful I can get out of bed, and I can still think and use my arms. We’ve got to keep turning to the blessings.”

And yet, the death toll continued, when, on Nov. 15, another mentor, Monsignor Valentine Gross—a retired priest who helped “build” Sts. Anne and Joachim in Fargo—died at the nursing home in Napoleon, also of COVID-19.

Now out of confinement, Pfeifer not only tended to Gross in his final hours, offering the anointing of the sick and reconciliation, or “last rites,” but presided over his funeral Mass, including helping prepare his body for burial.

“The funeral home needed help, so there I was, putting on his stole, his chasuble, for the last time,” he says. “I’ve never vested a priest for a casket. It brought a lot of closure and revived a lot of great memories.”

Including the impact of his friend’s life.

“My goodness, this guy gave it all for the Lord,” Pfeifer says. “His life was a life of service as a priest, and that’s what I’m called to do, too. But on the human side, I also have to seek that extra help from God.”

Pfeifer’s own illness was more tolerable due to a handful of medical people checking on him by phone daily, he says, and parishioners like Terry and Mary Schwartzenberger.

“Priests have emotions and feelings, too, but sometimes, I think as his flock, we forget that they are human,” Terry says. “It’s not an easy task what he does, and every day is different. You don’t know what’s coming up.”

Terry says the quarantine period of their pastor was trying for everyone. “We were so used to seeing him on a daily basis, and you miss that smile he always offers.”

Mary, a nurse, stayed in especially close contact.

“We had just gone through the COVID ourselves,” she says. “I also have the charism of help and mercy, so you see what needs to get done and do it.”

Along with the stress everyone was bearing, she says, Pfeifer was denied “feeding” his parish family with the Word and Eucharist. But the virus alone concerned her.

“If something’s wrong in the middle of the night, as a priest, you don’t have a bell to ring and someone will come running,” she says.

So, she dropped off vitamins, asked questions and made sure he was getting replenished nutritionally.

“I definitely felt like I was being babied,” Pfeifer says. Mary also helped with church upkeep.

“It was so stressful, with the deaths and sick people and homebound, along with kids hurting,” she says. “It’s just really tough when you look at everything, and you feel that depth of sympathy in your heart.”

She wanted to give back to one who’d given the community so much.

“He has a real soft approach, giving you that direction in that gentle way,” while at the same time, being stern about God’s directives, she says. “He always takes you back to prayer.”

An employee of Napoleon Care Center, where Gross had been living, Mary knows the limitations of COVID-19.

“We lost some residents to COVID, but those who continue to live have lost so much more,” she says, mentioning visitor restrictions. “You definitely see the bare necessities these people need. COVID has robbed them of the close love of their families, which just adds to the sadness of it all.”

Pfeifer says those who approach the COVID-19 crisis with positivity are more equipped to overcome this time mentally and spiritually well.

“People without faith, at the time of death, you can pick out a crowd,” he says, recalling once observing a bereaved woman “drape herself over (her loved one’s) casket,” and lament loudly. “If there is no faith, death is the end. If we’re going to turn to the world for answers, the world will form us.”

“I can’t think of a needier moment for people than right now,” Pfeifer adds, encouraging those struggling to reach out to someone they can trust and share their heart.

“Yes, there was a time when I asked, ‘Lord, how much more are you going to throw on my plate?’” he admits. But talking it out with others helped him get through. “We have no idea how badly people are hurting… and we can be so irrational in our grief that we don’t know what the next step is.”

It’s why he’s never abandoned, even in the coronavirus pandemic, the practice of adoration—having a place to gaze upon Jesus in the Eucharist.

“Putting Jesus up front and center, being able to relay my thoughts and open up, that’s so important,” he says. “There are days I go in there and say, ‘Here’s what’s heavy on my heart,’ and just rest in the Lord. When I leave, I don’t have that problem anymore.”

Despite the year’s hardships, Terry says Napoleon, and their beloved priest, will be OK.

“In our community, no matter what, we turn to prayer and head to church; that’s just what we do.”

And, it would seem, in Pfeifer’s estimate, it is well enough.
Sister Rose Therese Sevigny, 88, died at Maryvale, Valley City on Dec. 24, 2020. Funeral Mass was held Dec. 30, 2020 at the Maryvale chapel.

Sister Rose Therese was born prematurely Nov. 5, 1932 to Simeon and Clara (Demers) Sevigny at home near Oakwood. She graduated high school from St. Aloysius Academy, Oakwood in May 1950. She made Vows of consecrated chastity, obedience, and poverty to God with the Sisters of Mary of the Presentation (SMP), Aug. 22, 1956. In 1964, she received her Bachelor’s degree in elementary education from the College of Great Falls, Mont. In 1981, she received her Master’s degree in elementary education with reading specialty from University of North Dakota, Grand Forks. She worked as a nanny for her nephew Robert Sevigny Zidon and as a salesperson before entering the SMP. She was an elementary teacher for 40 years and worked in administration 17 years along with other ministries.


She is survived by her Religious Community, the Sisters of Mary of the Presentation; sister, Shirley Suda, Grafton; brother, Donald (Diane), Hoven, S.D.; sisters-in-law, Mary Ann Sevigny and Jane Zidon; numerous nieces and nephews, great-nieces and nephews and great-great nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents; brothers, Wilfred (Marcella), Fabien, and Peter; sisters, Agnes (Edmond) Campbell, Ida (Steve) Feltman, Doloria (Lawrence) Dusek, and Lola (Raymond) Houdek; and brother-in-law Paul Suda.
Sister Alice Grommesh, 95, peacefully passed away Dec. 29, 2020, at St. Gerard’s Community of Care, Hankinson. The Funeral Mass was held Jan. 2, also at St. Francis Convent, Hankinson.

Sister Alice grew up in Casselton and entered her Franciscan community in 1945. She made her first religious profession in 1946, and on July 31, 1949, she made her perpetual profession. She taught at St. John’s School, Wahpeton; St. Francis Academy, Hankinson; and at Karlsruhe Public School until being elected to serve on her community’s Provincial Council in 1971.

In 1983, Sister Alice was appointed Local Superior of St. Francis Convent, a post she remained at until 1995. In 1998, she was asked by her Superior to step back into this role for three more years. At the end of this period in the spring of 2002, she was again asked to accept another six-year term of service to the scores of Sisters living at this large convent. The Sisters loved her leadership and her exemplary, cheerful, and generous living of her religious life. For five of these years, she also taught First Holy Communion class for St. Philip’s Church in Hankinson.

On July 1, 2009, Sister Alice retired to an easier schedule but remained helpful and vital to the life of the community. For the next seven years, she again served as seamstress and photographer for the community and helped care for the older Sisters. She was always ready to receive guests and made her life a ministry of hospitality. In October of 2016, she suffered a serious stroke and, needing more help, moved to St. Gerard’s Community of Care where she received expert and loving care until her death.

Sister is survived by her Religious Community; brother Don (Marilyn) Grommesh, Wichita, Kan.; and sisters Claudette Ford, Middletown, N.J., and Evanne Hoyt, Great Falls, Va.; and many nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents, Ralph and Eva (Radermacher) Grommesh; her sisters Mary Bydlon and Monica Johnson; and brothers Roland, Ralph Jr., Harold, Paul, and Vern.
Liturgy of Domestic Church Life: a call to renew our common priesthood

By Kristina Lahr

Each Lent we focus on some way to renew our commitment and relationship to Jesus Christ. We resolve to spend more time in prayer, read scripture, reach out to those in need, give our time and treasure, and fast on certain days from meat or other foods.

If you’re looking to shake up your Lenten routine this year beginning with Ash Wednesday on Feb. 17, consider looking to your home life and living out the liturgy of Domestic Church Life.

In July 2019, Dr. Greg Popcak, Executive Director of the Peyton Institute for Domestic Church Life, and his organization CatholicCounselors.com hosted the Symposium on Catholic Family Life and Spirituality at the University of Notre Dame. Sponsored by the Our Sunday Visitor Institute, Holy Cross Family Ministries, and the McGrath Institute for Church Life, the Symposium brought together over 50 theologians, social scientists, and pastoral ministry professionals who have an international reputation for their writings on family and faith. The mission was to develop a vision for renewing Catholic family life.

From this discussion was born a vision: the liturgy of Domestic Church Life. Dr. Greg Popcak discussed this idea in detail during a Real Presence Radio interview on Dec. 9.

“Liturgy means a public act of worship,” he said. “When we try to do everything we do as a family and bring a little bit of God’s love to it—whether it’s paying bills, washing the dishes, changing diapers, all the things we need to do as families—that effort becomes a public act of worship. We’re honoring God’s intention for the way we treat each other in the home, we’re witnessing to the world what a difference our Catholic faith makes in our relationships, and we’re experiencing God and our faith in the home as the source of warmth in the home.”

The idea of family life as a liturgy may sound strange and maybe even irrelevant to our day-to-day lives, but it has everything to do with how we live our lives as Catholics. Through Baptism, we share in the priesthood of Christ as priest, prophet, and king. This means the laity are part of a common priesthood that is distinct from the ordained priesthood of bishops, priests, and deacons. Yet, it is a true priesthood. If that’s the case, is there a liturgy of the common priesthood lived in homes in the same way that there is a liturgy such as the Mass and the sacraments celebrated at churches?

“We learned this concept as something esoteric and intellectual
in religion class or somewhere,” said Dr. Popcak. “Yes, we are priest, prophet, and king. And that’s as far as we get. Priesthood is intimately tied to liturgy. But what’s the liturgy attached to the common priesthood?

“Through the Liturgy of the Eucharist, God heals the damage sin does to our relationship with him, and it gives us the grace to make communion with others possible. The liturgy of Domestic Church Life is a way that God uses family life to heal the damage done to human relationships at its very root. The family is the building block of society, and the church is a ‘family of families’ as Pope Francis says. So when we treat each other in selfish or sinful ways at home, we’re undermining society, the church, and the kingdom of God.”

It’s important here to draw a distinction between the Liturgy of the Church and the liturgy of Domestic Church Life. The liturgy of Domestic Church Life is an analogy, and it in no way replaces the public liturgy with which we participate in Mass. We learn how to pray in the family by imitating the prayers the Church gives us in Mass. These prayers include attitudes of praise, thanksgiving, contrition, restitution, and petition through times of silence, reading, serving, and sacrificing. When the priest sends us forth from Mass declaring, “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord,” following the direction of the Liturgy of the Domestic Church Life is one way we can do just that, beginning with our families.

So what are we, the laity, called to do exactly?

The Liturgy of Domestic Church Life includes three rites: the Rite of Christian Relationship, the Rite of Family Rituals, and the Rite of Reaching Out.

**The rites of the Liturgy of Domestic Church Life**

By Dr. Greg Popcak

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**The Rite of Christian Relationship**

challenges families to practice the Christian vision of love in our homes; working for each other’s ultimate good and creating the kind of intimate communion that flows from the heart of the Trinity. That’s a big job, but four simple practices can help every Christian household cooperate with God’s grace to achieve these lofty goals.

1. **PRIORITIZE FAMILY TIME.** Families can’t create close, intimate relationships if they never see each other. Although there are lots of interesting activities for people to be involved in, Catholic families are called to prioritize family time over all those other activities. Work, school, sports, lessons, clubs, and even charitable works are all valuable, but if our involvement in those activities makes it hard for us to feel truly connected to each other, then our lives are out of order. An overscheduled life is the most common way we desecrate our domestic churches.

2. **PRACTICE EXTRAVAGANT AFFECTION.** The Word became incarnate so that we could have a real, physical experience of God’s love for us. Even after Christ ascended into Heaven, he gave us the sacraments to communicate his love in an intimate, physical way. Christian love is incarnate, embodied and abundant. Christian families, in turn, are called to be appropriately, but extravagantly affectionate with one another. Brain researchers tell us that only about 7% of children receive the amount of affection they need to thrive. God made humans to crave affection even more than food. When families practice appropriate, extravagant affection, we model Christ’s incarnate love and validate each other’s dignity as persons.
3. **PRACTICE PROMPT, GENEROUS, CONSISTENT, CHEERFUL SERVICE AT HOME.** The Church teaches us that to serve with Christ is to reign with him (Lumen Gentium). The primary place the People of God learn Christian service is in the home. Christians aren’t meant to serve each other grudgingly. Parents and children are called to be a team that responds to each other’s needs promptly, generously, consistently, and cheerfully.

4. **PRACTICE DISCIPLESHIP DISCIPLINE.** St. John Bosco promoted a method of discipline he called the “Preventive Method.” He rejected the heavy-handed childrearing methods of the day in favor of an approach emphasizing “reason, religion, and lovingkindness.” Don Bosco also promoted his method as a spiritual exercise that encouraged caregivers to model the prayerful spirit and virtues we wished to inspire in our children. When we practice the gentleness, self-control, and charity required by loving guidance discipline, we model the compassion the Good Shepherd shows for his sheep when we stray.

**THE RITE OF FAMILY RITUALS** isn’t just for “nice things we do when we have the time.” Family rituals are regularly scheduled, expected times when your family meets to work, play, talk, and pray together—every day. When families create strong, daily rituals for working, playing, talking, and praying together, they model how to have a healthy, balanced, Christian life.

1. **WORK RITUALS** include things such as cleaning the kitchen together after meals, picking up the family room together before bed, doing other household projects together, etc. The main point of family work rituals isn’t getting stuff done. It’s using the “stuff” of family life to become a team. Work rituals help families realize that chores aren’t just tasks you do as fast as possible so you can get to the more entertaining stuff. They’re the way families say, “You can count on me. Not just for the fun times. But all the other times, too.”

2. **PLAY RITUALS** include things like game nights, family days, walks, movie nights, baking together, shooting hoops, doing projects together, etc. In a world where “fun” is often synonymous with “sin,” play rituals show it’s possible to have a joy-filled life—without killing your soul in the process.

3. **TALK RITUALS** include meaningful family meals, on-one-one time with your kids, family meetings, and other times where you make a point of bringing up conversations besides who has what practice and what needs to be picked up at the store. When families regularly discuss the highs and lows of the day, how God has blessed them that day, and how they could do a better job taking care of each other, they show they care about each other’s hearts.

4. **PRAYER RITUALS** include things like morning and bedtime family prayer, grace at meals, a family Rosary or chaplet, family blessings, family praise and worship time, reading/discussing Bible stories and, of course, participating as a family in the sacraments. Strong and abundant prayer rituals help you and your kids start to think about God as another part of your family—as the person who knows you best and loves you most.
THE RITE OF REACHING OUT lets God use your family to bless others. This rite helps families practice the royal mission of baptism. Jesus, the King of Kings, humbled himself and served us. To reign with Christ is to serve with Christ (Lumen Gentium, No. 36). We share in Jesus’ royal dignity by using our gifts to make other’s lives easier and more pleasant.

1. GENEROUSLY AND CHEERFULLY SERVE ONE ANOTHER. Did you ever notice how much easier it can be to be kind to strangers than to the members of our own households? The Rite of Reaching Out helps families remember that authentic Christian service must begin with serving your closest neighbor—your family. Ask yourself:
   • Do you respond promptly, generously, and consistently to each other’s needs?
   • Do you serve each other cheerfully (instead of grudgingly)?
   • Do you see the chores and tasks you do around the house as ways to say, “I love you!” to your family, and “Thank you for this blessing!” to God? Or do you think of them as “just stuff that has to get done so you can get to the other more fun/more important stuff.”

The more we practice loving, generous, cheerful service at home, the more the service we give to people outside our homes will be genuine (instead of self-aggrandizing) and properly-ordered (instead of competing with our domestic-church life).

2. THINK ABOUT OTHERS WHILE BEING A FAMILY. This practice helps us remember that everything we’ve been given by God—food, clothing, furniture, toys—doesn’t belong to us. They belong to God. The Church teaches that Christians are stewards—not absolute owners—of the things God has given us. We are to care for the things we have so that when we are done using them, we can pass them along in good condition to others who may need them. Thinking about others while being a family at home means regularly asking if you can prepare a little extra food for a sick or disabled neighbor, or if—as a family—you can go through the gently used toys, clothes, and other things you no longer need and pass them along to your brothers and sisters in Christ.

3. OTHER PRACTICAL WAYS your family can practice this rite include inviting people to your home for fun and godly fellowship, encouraging each other to be intentionally thoughtful and kind to the people you encounter throughout your day, and, of course, serving together as a family in your parish and community. All of these things are simple ways family life, itself, becomes a ministry.
Despite COVID-19, Catholic schools continue acts of service to community

Located in Belcourt, Devils Lake, Fargo, Grand Forks, Jamestown, Langdon, Rugby, Valley City, Wahpeton, and West Fargo, our Diocese of Fargo Catholic schools are educating more than 2,100 students pre-school through 12th grade this school year. One of these schools, Trinity Elementary School in West Fargo, celebrated Catholic Schools Week by reaching out to the community. The act of service and gratitude is something we work hard to instill in the students. Due to COVID-19 we have not been able to physically be out in the community like we want to; however, we have managed to think outside the box to stay connected and provide service in different ways. These are a few ways Trinity reached out:

- Thank you cards made for JPII farming families
- Thank you cards to our local Chamber of Commerce
- Appreciation cards for NDSU pharmacy students and staff
- Encouragement cards for local medical providers
- Thanksgiving and Christmas cards to local nursing home residents including sharing our Advent program online
- Christmas care packages to Good Samaritan in partnership with the Landon’s Light Organization
- Making rosaries for local nursing homes in partnership with the Landon’s Light Organization
- Fill the Dome food drive
- Faith Formation for parents and community provided online by our Trinity Pastors
- Veteran’s Day Program created by our 5th grade students thanking our brave men and women for their service
- Giving social-distanced visits to our parish rectory to brighten spirits and give a warm welcome to visiting priests

Mrs. Brown’s 2nd grade class at Trinity Elementary School in West Fargo holds Thanksgiving cards they made for nursing home residents on World Kindness Day. (photo by Trinity Elementary School)

Please consider the gift of a Catholic school education for your children. Pray for our Diocese of Fargo Catholic Schools that they might flourish as they accomplish their mission of faith-integrated education.

Let’s Knock the Socks Off Giving Hearts Day Feb. 11, 2021

Those who give $50 or more to St. John Paul II Catholic Schools on Giving Hearts Day will receive a pair of custom Deacon socks!
God orchestrated it all: Faith, family, farm

CATHOLIC CULTURE IN THE HOME

JASON KOTRBA
Principal of Holy Spirit School, Fargo

My wife Lynn and I often talk about how God is truly guiding and directing our steps. From my early years serving Mass when Monsignor Wald was an associate pastor at St. Michael’s in Grand Forks, to turning down two different jobs, to get a teaching job at St. Mary’s in Grand Forks that led to my current Holy Spirit principal job, we have to believe that God orchestrated it all. After moving to Moorhead, Minn. and desiring to have children, Monsignor Wald instructed us to say three Hail Marys a day. At first we didn’t know how blessed we would be, but in turn our Holy Mother would bless us abundantly.

Being a family of 10 continues to develop positive memories every day. If anyone wants to find us all together, attend Mass at Holy Spirit at 9 a.m. on Sundays. There are very few times throughout the year when we won’t all be there as a family. We eat most evening meals together, but we have to be honest with ourselves that it’s going to be increasingly difficult with more high schoolers around the table. However, we make it work most of the time. Supper just might be at 5:30 p.m. one night and 7 p.m. the next.

People often say, “I don’t know how you do it” or “I get tired just watching you.” To us, it is just another normal day of being a family. We put our Catholic faith first and our family next. It is important to have structure and routine as a family. The kids know the routine and do what is expected. Not because we are demanding or authoritative but with consistent structure they start to understand that how we operate as a family is important and harmonious. When a family works in harmony, there is great joy. That isn’t to say there are no challenges in our family life, it just means that when we focus on our Catholic faith as a family, our challenges are given to God to handle, and we just need to do our best in our daily life.

When we started looking for a farmhouse about seven years ago, we knew that we needed more space with our growing family. When we found our current farmhouse, the couple who previously owned it accepted our contingent offer. We thought we were on our way to move. However, a couple of weeks later we were notified that a couple from New Jersey paid cash for it sight unseen, and we lost it. It was devastating at first because it fit our family so well, but as the weeks went on there seemed to be a peace and calm to it, like the journey was not over. It was during this time of peace that I experienced visions of Mary in the woods for multiple days on end. I knew something was going to happen.

Sure enough, we got a call a couple of months later that the couple from New Jersey had backed out and the selling couple wanted to know if we wanted to buy the house again. Through the grace of God, we made it happen and have now been there for five years.

Soon, Lynn experienced a spiritual stirring after many days walking in the woods. Thus began Harvest Hope Farm, a non-profit that provides hope for others, spiritually, mentally, and physically. There is more to the story, but we invite you to check out our website harvesthopefarm.org to see how we can help each other. To give you an idea, there is a 500-foot rosary walk with prayer spaces to spend time in quiet, prayer, and meditation. There is also a small grotto of Mary in the back corner of the woods for you to come and pray. The sunsets are gorgeous! We hope you’ll visit soon!

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Does family inspire faith or does faith inspire family?

According to the latest survey on Religion and Public Life from the Pew Research Center, the number of Americans who identify as religious has declined from 78% in 2007 to 65% in 2019; a decline of approximately one percent per year, with no sign of slowing down. A recent Gallup poll revealed that the number of Catholics age 21-29 who are weekly churchgoers declined from 73% in 1955 to 25% in 2017. Clearly, something is wrong.

There is another statistic that closely follows this: the American divorce rate. In fact, these statistics move almost in tandem until about 1990, when the divorce rate began to decline. However, this wasn’t because fewer couples were splitting up, but because more people were choosing to get married later in life, or not at all. The Pew study further reveals that only 58% of children under 18 reside with a married set of biological parents. Observing the same time-period, the United States birth rates have plunged from 105 births per 1,000 women in 1950, to 59 per 1,000 in 2018.

The question then becomes whether these two facts—the decline of religious practice and the decline of the traditional family—are related. In her book, How the West Really Lost God, Mary Eberstadt argues that “...family and faith are the invisible double helix of society... whose strength and momentum depend on one another.” It’s hard to have one without the other.

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The question then becomes whether these two facts—the decline of religious practice and the decline of the traditional family—are related. In her book, How the West Really Lost God, Mary Eberstadt argues that “...family and faith are the invisible double helix of society... whose strength and momentum depend on one another.” It’s hard to have one without the other.

There is the argument that the decline of traditional religious practice is supplanted by other forms of nontraditional “solo” religions or “lite” religion such as the Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, a religion that offers comfort while asking nothing in return but some kind of generalized trust in a god or the universe. Eberstadt doesn’t dispute these claims but rather observes that while a longing for the transcendent and supernatural seems to be a human universal, a belief in the monotheistic God of the Abrahamic faiths is not. A faith in the God of Abraham and in Jesus Christ are transmitted by other means.

So why and how did the West begin to lose its belief in God? Eberstadt goes through a number of the usual explanations given by careful observers, from advances in science, to increasing material prosperity, to the dramatic impact of the First and Second World Wars, but she focuses in on one observation that has gone largely unremarked: that religion and family are two sides of the same coin.

“What you decide to do about your family... whether to have one, whether to marry, how many children you will have: all these are strong predictors of how much time you do (or do not) spend in church... where there is more marriage, there is more religion; where there is less, ditto.”

The thesis statement of Eberstadt’s book is this: family is the driving force behind faith, not the other way around. The usual explanation goes in reverse, saying people are raised in a faith that emphasizes the importance of family life and live their lives accordingly. Eberstadt provides convincing evidence that—in a majority of cases—families drive people towards a strong faith:

“That is the element of doubt that I want to instill here—that conventional sociology of religion—has missed something important about the very nature of religious transmission, (that) the family is not merely a consequence of religious belief. It can also be a conduit to it.”

However, sociology is a notoriously tricky field in which to make accurate predictions, despite Eberstadt’s careful research. As humorist P.J. O’Rourke said, “Folks do lots of stuff, we don’t know why, test on Friday.” How the West Really Lost God concludes with a strong case for both optimism and pessimism, providing a look at trends that could push society in either direction, which all of us would be wise to take into account.

We can take comfort knowing that the most important thing that we as individuals and as a society can do if we are concerned about the direction of society is to listen to the words of the prophet Micah. He said, “…what does the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” Or as St. Theresa of Calcutta put it: “If you want to change the world, go home and love your family.”
Near the beginning of each year, I like to invite readers to look back at how we have used our time. This is especially “timely” (pun intended) as we approach the season of Lent, with its commitment to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. One of the most common reasons for not praying is lack of time, while fasting could save us a little time. Almsgiving involves acts of charity, including giving of our time, talent, and treasure to help the poor and those in need. Thus, what did we do with our time the past 12 months, 365 days, or 8,760 hours? Close to a third of it was spent working, and another third of it should have been spent sleeping. Rest allows us to be more productive and more charitable to others. Have you realized how much less we accomplish, how much less patient to others, and how much more irritable we are when tired? By making sure you get enough rest each night, you could actually be helping others and even making the world a better place!

A final third of our time is spent on everything else, and in the past I’ve shared how caring for ourselves and others leaves little true “free time.” A big consideration is our use of technology, particularly how much time we spent with our screens. This has changed somewhat as most Americans have moved more from watching television to using social media. While the overall amount of screen time continues to rise, there has been growing concern from families to technologists in Silicon Valley who strictly limited their own children’s use of phones and tablets. Since COVID-19 struck, I’m not sure what happened to limiting screen time. Our average daily screen use hit the roof, and it seems like any concerns about too much screen time were thrown out the window. Of course our children (and their parents) whose schools moved classes online didn’t have much choice in the matter. If we’re stuck at home isn’t it much easier to binge watch a television series, movies, or even the news? While it’s good to know what’s happening, is there a point when it becomes harmful? How much is too much?

How can we turn some of the challenges we face into blessings? Perhaps one example is our own tele-health services for counseling and other programs here at Catholic Charities North Dakota. Due to the difficulties of seeing people in hospitals, assisted living, or group homes last spring, we started seeing clients by phone and video. This has been well received, and some people prefer getting help from us in the comfort of their own homes. While many were established clients and so a relationship of trust had already been formed, we hope to continue offering this in the future to help serve more individuals and families who live in small towns far from our Fargo, Bismarck, Grand Forks, and Minot offices.

This Lent I invite you to share your blessings with others. Even if it has been a tough year on you personally, consider the stories of those who gave what they could. One example is people who realized they didn’t need the COVID-19 relief payments they received, so they shared them with others. If these funds were an unexpected blessing, why not be generous in how we use them?

This Feb. 11 is Giving Hearts Day. We would love to have you start your Lenten almsgiving just a little earlier this year by supporting Catholic Charities North Dakota and other local nonprofits.
“Culture Warrior” and the fallacy of misplaced concreteness

The Jesuit philosopher Bernard Lonergan urged all thinkers to follow the four epistemic imperatives: be attentive... be intelligent... be reasonable... and finally, be responsible. –Bishop Robert Barron

Two champions of the Catholic left—and particular heroes of mine—are Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King. Both of these worthies stood boldly athwart what they took to be dysfunctional features of the culture of their time and both were willing to endure mockery, marginalization, and imprisonment. One would be hard pressed to characterize Ms. Day as willing to endure mockery, marginalization, and imprisonment. Both were extremely “divisive,” and I would not hesitate for a moment to call them divisive, and of course, “an unwillingness to dialogue.” I can only smile when I hear this from representatives of the left, for they seem blithely to overlook their own rather fierce resistance to the culture in regard to a wide range of issues. When people on the port side of the Catholic commentariat hold forth against racism, xenophobia, homophobia, militarism, capital punishment, environmental pollution, the current immigration policy of our country, etc., how are they not engaging in culture warfare? How are they not being, in their own way, negative, divisive, and reluctant to dialogue?

One of the least illuminating descriptors that makes its way around the Catholic commentariat is “culture warrior.” The term is invariably used by someone on the left in order to excoriate a right-wing Catholic for his opposition to abortion-on-demand, gay marriage, restrictions on religious liberty, etc. This resistance, we are told, amounts to “negativity,” “divisiveness,” and of course, “an unwillingness to dialogue.” I feel that the way his opponent is characterizing the issue is unfair. In either case, the real matter is obscured, and the use of the term doesn’t move anyone even a bit closer to the truth. Infinitely preferable to trading in insulting abstractions that apply as much to oneself as to one’s opponent is to engage in the tough work of authentic argument. The Jesuit philosopher Bernard Lonergan urged all thinkers to follow the four epistemic imperatives: be attentive (see what is really there to be seen); be intelligent (form plausible hypotheses to explain a given phenomenon); be reasonable (make judgments so as determine which of a variety of bright ideas is in fact the right idea); and finally, be responsible (accept the full implications of the judgment made). To do so is to argue about concrete matters, or in the language of Aristotle, to stay on the “rough ground” of what is real.

There are many reasons why the Catholic conversation has become dysfunctional, especially in the social media space: tribalism, ad hominem attacks, guilt by association, Girardian Twitter mobs, etc. Might I suggest that the fallacy of misplaced concreteness is another key reason? And might I further suggest that whenever you see the term “culture warrior,” you might, at least in your imagination, throw a penalty flag, realizing that constructive argument about the real has just been derailed?
From a Catholic perspective, what happened at our nation’s capitol on Jan. 6 was not true politics. Nor was much of the rhetoric, acrimony, and hostility that preceded it.

The political commentator and columnist Mark Shields often said that politics is the peaceable resolution of conflict among legitimate competing interests. I first heard him give that definition at a conference on Catholic social justice and it has always made sense to me.

Politics, at its core, is the act to getting an individual or organization to do what he, she, or it would otherwise not have done. If that act of persuasion, however, is not peaceful, it becomes an act of violence. If the competing interests are not legitimate, what passes for politics is really just an exercise to divide, further an evil, or serve a narrow self-interest.

It turns out that the definition used by Shields, who is Catholic, is not far off from how politics is viewed in Catholic teaching. The Catholic view of politics is that it should be peaceful, serve the common good, and be an act of charity.

Pope Francis’ 2019 World Day of Peace Address was entitled “Good Politics is at the Service of Peace.” It begins: “In sending his disciples forth on mission, Jesus told them: ‘Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you’ (Lk. 10:5-6). Bringing peace is central to the mission of Christ’s disciples. That peace is offered to all those men and women who long for peace amid the tragedies and violence that mark human history. The ‘house’ of which Jesus speaks is every family, community, country, and continent, in all their diversity and history. It is first and foremost each individual person, without distinction or discrimination. But it is also our ‘common home’ the world in which God has placed us and which we are called to care for and cultivate.” Good politics, therefore, is at the “service of peace.”

Another principle in Catholic teaching is that ends cannot justify the means. This means that we can never consider violence—and actions that incite violence—as acceptable, even if a person believes it will result in peace or a greater good.

The Catholic view of politics

The assault on our nation’s capitol and the rhetoric leading to it was not an act of peace.

True politics also requires that the purpose be legitimate. In his 2013 apostolic exhortation Evangelii Guadium, Pope Francis wrote that politics must seek the common good. In his World Day of Peace address, he went further. He wrote that true politics must build “human community and institutions,” serve “society as a whole,” and be for the “good of the city, the nation and all mankind.”

Politics cannot, he wrote, come from a “thirst for power,” “become a means of oppression, marginalization and even destruction,” or flout “community rules.”

The assault on our nation’s capitol and the rhetoric leading to it was not in furtherance of the common good or any legitimate purpose.

In Evangelii Guadium, Pope Francis wrote that politics should be “one of the highest forms of charity.” He quoted Pope Benedict XVI, who wrote that charity “is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members, or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic, and political ones).”

Charity, therefore, should not only motivate and shape our political life, it should be the very purpose of politics. In his most recent encyclical, Fratelli Tutti, the pope calls for “political love” that “transcends every individualistic mindset.” There is no place for “us vs. them,” division, or demagoguery in authentic politics.

The assault on our nation’s capitol and the rhetoric leading to it was not an act of charity.

I have throughout this column called attention to the rhetoric leading to the assault on the capitol because the riot and attack did not come out of nowhere. All of us need to examine our actions and reevaluate the actions of others. Were all the tweets, speeches, Facebook posts, campaign literature, and more acts of true politics marked by peace, legitimate purpose, and charity?

When examining our actions, we should avoid the “you also” argument. What the “other” side did never justifies the actions of another.

Politics, true politics, is not a team sport where the purpose is to defeat the other side. The purpose of politics is not to win and destroy at all costs but to peacefully resolve legitimate differences in the name of love.

Somehow, somewhere, we lost sight of that purpose and only with serious reflection, conversion, and acceptance of God’s love can we regain it.
The Avengers and I had been going strong since August every Wednesday night at 7 p.m. via Zoom—no mean feat, given the fact that their weekly CCD class followed fast on the heels of a day of distance learning. But I should explain.

For some time, I referred to my St. Michael the Archangel, Dunseith CCD class as “the big kids.” Well yes, they are the oldest students in our program, but “the big kids” wasn’t exactly a moniker to write home about. I told them they needed to come up with a better name.


“The St. Michael’s Avengers!” one boy piped up. I gulped a bit, but felt honor-bound to bring his proposal to the floor. The motion passed unanimously: all the students enthusiastically backed their classmate’s suggestion.

As I say, the Avengers and I had been chugging steadily through Alive in Christ for perhaps ten weeks when we arrived at chapter 5, “Living in Community.” Confession: I hadn’t spent much time prepping for that particular lesson. All right, I barely glanced over the chapter. Truth to tell, Wednesdays are pretty much non-stop for me.

“Not a problem,” I reassured myself. “This one’s basically a no-brainer. I’ll just say something along the lines of, ‘Living in community means actively pursuing the common good.’”

Hmm. That’ll be clear as mud. How to convey the idea of “the common good?” I didn’t want to present just a definition but the truth that the common good is key to the survival of not just our community but all communities.

I honestly don’t remember what explanation I gave my kids that particular Wednesday night. Whatever I said, apparently they rolled with it nicely. I don’t recall any questions. Maybe the term “the common good” never even made it onto their radar. After all, they’re only children.

“It’s different with me. I’m an adult who knows all too well that when any group of people (any society, culture, or nation) respects and actively works for its common good, that group will not just survive but flourish. When it doesn’t, the community will inevitably begin to die. It’s that simple.

And now for the painfully obvious question: are we as a people, in our nation’s rather short history, working for the common good?

For starters, the common good is the exact opposite of looking out for number one—that is, of focusing unduly on me, myself, and I—the unholy trinity. St. Paul urged his congregation at Philippi to pursue the common good when he told them, “Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but [also] everyone for those of others” (Phil 2:3-4). On a national level, we see an easily-understood description of the common good in President John F. Kennedy’s oft-quoted, “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1905): “In keeping with the social nature of man, the good of each individual is necessarily related to the common good, which in turn can be defined only in reference to the human person: Do not live entirely isolated, having retreated into yourselves, as if you were already justified, but gather instead to seek the common good together.”

Friends, I say it’s time to compose an Examination of Conscience based on the common good. Here’s how I would start, with an eye to our present COVID-19 pandemic:

- As coronavirus cases spiked in our country, have I stopped to ask what I could do to help my local brothers and sisters battling unemployment, depression, illness, and loneliness, or have I become turned in on myself? Does my charity end at my front door?

- Have I prayed faithfully for those most affected by the virus and for all on “the front lines:” EMTs, medical personnel, nursing home staff, and administrators?

- Have I made an effort to learn how the coronavirus is affecting our brothers and sisters outside the U.S., and to pray for them?

- When it comes to wearing a mask and social distancing, have I been mindful not only of my own health and personal preferences but also of the health—the survival, even—of others? This question has haunted me these past nine months, given my friends with compromised immune systems and other underlying health conditions.

- During this present health crisis, have I been willing to work cooperatively, energetically and creatively with those of different viewpoints to achieve the common good?

Friends, what would you add to my Examination of Conscience? Together let us look not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others.
As I entered my second year of seminary, what I looked forward to most was getting an apostolate. The apostolate program at the seminary gives upperclassmen seminarians the opportunity to put some of their education and formation to practical application by helping in schools, religious education programs, nursing homes, etc. The thought of applying some of what I have learned at seminary along with my love of the Lord excited me. I also saw apostolates as a taste of the role of a diocesan priest in the world. The seminary is a wonderful place, and I am so thankful for its many blessings, but as a priest, I will spend much of my time in a different environment. Apostolates provide a little reminder of what seminary is preparing me to do.

At the year’s beginning, the pandemic and associated restrictions were still affecting life in Nebraska, so I was unsure if I would spend this year with my desire to have an apostolate unfulfilled. Thankfully, after speaking with many parishes and schools in the region, enough of them were comfortable with seminarians coming that we began apostolates in the middle of the fall semester. My apostolate this year involves assisting in the confirmation classes of a Spanish-speaking parish in Lincoln, which has been difficult but also an opportunity for growth.

I grew up learning both English and Spanish, having lived part of my childhood in a Spanish speaking country, though English has always been my dominant language as it was the language spoken at home. Even with this familiarity of Spanish, I have not been using it as much as when I was younger so I worried I wouldn’t remember enough to be an effective teacher. In the first few classes, the students were not very engaged or responsive to my questions. Since my catechesis has been primarily in English, it was often a humbling experience when I tried to talk about a theological topic in Spanish. Whenever I asked a question in Spanish, they often answered in English, which I worried was due to them noticing my struggles with theological vocabulary. The teachers I’ve been assisting are gracious in helping me fill in the words I can’t remember or just never learned. In addition, my apostolate is also a considerable time commitment each Wednesday, which makes finding time for prayer more difficult. My initial experience left me drained and lacking confidence. Thankfully, this is not the end of the story.

With time, I became more comfortable teaching lessons and entire classes. The students opened up and asked more questions. I also found the students often seemed to prefer English, likely from going to school in English. Though making some things easier, this wasn’t what I hoped for. I wanted a Spanish refresher, and to see how well I could articulate the faith in Spanish. Still, I began to love my apostolate, and I am thankful for both its many blessings and difficulties.

My apostolate has been an opportunity for much growth. I’ve become more comfortable sharing the faith. It has also helped me battle perfectionism. I found I am self-conscious and uncomfortable speaking when I am not sure that everything I am saying is correct and intelligent sounding. I tried to put up a façade and plan everything out to the point that I was not letting myself be myself. This impeded the way I shared Christ with the students. However, when I finally let myself be myself, the students became much more interested, and holding their attention never posed much of a problem. I still don’t have everything figured out and I would not consider myself an experienced teacher in any regard, but through my apostolate I have grown much as a teacher, a seminarian, and a man.
In 1959, 62 years ago this month, Auxiliary Bishop of Fargo, Leo Dworshak was knee deep in meetings, strategy sessions, and training parish leaders as he prepared for the first-ever Diocesan Development Program. Curious about the beginnings of our diocesan appeal, I paged through some archived news articles and other documents. I realized that there was an extraordinary amount of time and energy used to get this appeal off the ground.

The following is an excerpt from New Earth’s predecessor, Catholic Action News, in April 1959. It provides a snapshot into the size and scope of our diocese’s first-ever appeal:

“The new plan contemplates an appeal each year on the first Sunday in May for the budget and building fund as explained in detail in previous issues of Catholic Action News. The essence of the plan involves a personal contact by a representative of the Bishop with every person who enjoys an income. Naturally, this involves a large organization. The most Rev. Bishop as Honorary Chairman heads this up. The Rev. James Walsh was designated Executive Chairman by Bishop Dworchak. Each pastor services as Honorary Chairman and a Parish Vice Chairman for every 100 persons with an income. Each Vice Chairman selects five Team Captains and each Team Captain selects five Team Members. In this way about 7,000 workers have been enlisted and will go forth like a great army between 2 and 6 p.m. today to launch this new program.”

I’m sure there are many who may remember these early days of the Diocese Development Program (DDP). Through the years, the administration of this annual appeal has changed quite a bit. Firstly, the name of the appeal changed to God’s Gift Appeal, as we know it today. Instead of employing thousands of volunteers to make personal visits to Catholic households, pastors mainly carry the message annually to the pulpit over a few weeks in February. An annual video message from our bishop is shared with the faithful in their home parish. Instead of a personal visit, Catholic households now receive a packet of information inviting them to participate in God’s Gift Appeal. One thing that has definitely changed over the years are the creative giving options available. Approximately 18% of donations given to God’s Gift Appeal come electronically via credit/debit or other bank transfer. For favorable tax considerations, some are using gifts of commodities (crops or livestock) or securities such as stock and IRA transfers.

Much has changed over the years for the diocesan appeal, but at least one thing remains the same. Our diocese and the programs/ministries it provides (Seminarian Education, Religious Education, Faith Formation, Marriage and Family Life, Respect Life Office, to name a few) simply do not exist without financial support from the faithful. These necessary programs provide education and evangelization to the faithful to every corner of our diocese.

As you receive your God’s Gift Appeal packets in the mail, please take a moment to open and read the impact your generosity supports. God’s Gift Appeal supports all we are and all we do as a Catholic faith community. I encourage you and your family to participate.

I’ll leave you with excerpts from letters published to the faithful in the Diocese of Fargo from both Cardinal Aloyisous Muench (then Archbishop Muench) and Bishop Dworschak in 1959:

“Naturally, you will ask yourself, ‘How much should I give?’ The Holy Bible gives you the answer in the words of the pious Tobias to his son Tobias: ‘If thou have much, give abundantly, and if thou have little, take care even so to bestow willing a little.’ St. Paul also has an answer to your question. He wrote to the faithful of the city of Corinth: ‘Mark this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Let each one give according as he has determined in his heart, not grudgingly or from compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.’” –Archbishop Muench

“Your response to our appeal this year is of particular importance because it launches our new program. I am sure that the generosity which characterized our people in the past will not be lacking this year. The whole material development of the Diocese depends on it. May God reward your charity a hundredfold and may He richly bless your homes and families.” –Auxiliary Bishop Dworschak

62 years and going strong

STEWARDSHIP

STEVE SCHONS

Director of stewardship and development for the Diocese of Fargo

Job opening

Director of Liturgy

St. Joseph Catholic Church, Moorhead, MN, a vibrant parish of 1,600 families, is seeking a full-time director of liturgy. Visit www.stjoemhd.com/employment-opportunities for a list of responsibilities. Position is open on July 1; however, the position can begin May 1 to ensure a smooth transition.

Submit cover letter, resume, and references by March 15 to: Search Committee; 218 10th St. S., Moorhead, MN 56560 or knoe1@stjoemhd.com. Interviews will begin April 6. A full job description will be provided once application is received.
Allen and Beverly Austfjord, parishioners of St. Brigid of Ireland Church, Cavalier, celebrated their 65th anniversary on Jan. 24. They were married at Sts. Nereus and Achilleus Church in Neche. They have been blessed with 4 children, 11 grandchildren, and 14 great-grandchildren.

Doug and Mary Shockman, parishioners of Assumption Church in Dickey, celebrated 50 years of marriage on Sept. 5, 2020. They were married in an ecumenical service at Epworth United Methodist Church in Valley City. They have 3 children and 6 grandchildren.

Bob and Cheryl Hager, parishioners of Nativity Church in Fargo, celebrated their 50th anniversary on Jan. 9. They were married at St. Henry’s Church in Alice. They have 3 married sons and 5 grandchildren.

Mike and Kathy Vandrovec, parishioners of St. Benedict’s Church at Wild Rice, will celebrate their 50th anniversary on Feb. 13. They were married at St. Benedict’s and have 2 children and 4 grandchildren.

Roger and Charlotte Burt of Lawton and parishioners of St. Joseph’s Church in Devils Lake, celebrated their 70th anniversary on Feb. 2. They were married at Sacred Heart Church in Oakland, Calif. They are blessed with 4 children, 6 grandchildren, and many great-grandchildren.

Robert Borho celebrated his 90th birthday on Feb. 5. Robert and his wife Viola are parishioners of St. Joseph’s Church in Devils Lake and have been married for 65 years. They have 6 children, 12 children, and 7 great-grandchildren with 2 more on the way.

Jerome and Carol Rivard, parishioners of St. Anthony of Padua Church in Fargo, celebrated their 60th anniversary on Feb. 4. They were married at St. Joseph’s Church in Ada, Minn. They have 4 children, 11 grandchildren, and 3 great-grandchildren.

Virginia (Johnson) Carter, parishioner of Holy Spirit Church in Fargo, will celebrate her 103rd birthday on Feb. 22. Ginny presently lives at Touchmark in Fargo.

Don and Nancy (Leinen) Roehrich, parishioners of Holy Cross Church in West Fargo, will celebrate their 50th anniversary on Feb. 13. They were married at St. Anthony’s Church in Fairmount. They have 2 children and 4 grandchildren.

Frances Dahl, parishioner of St. George Church in Cooperstown, celebrated her 100th birthday on Jan. 29. She and her late husband, Clifford Dahl, who died in 2009, were blessed with 4 children, 6 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren.
Eva Deibert, parishioner of St. Cecilia’s Church in Velva and former parishioner of Sts. Peter and Paul in Karlruhe, celebrated her 98th birthday Feb. 2. Her husband John passed away in 2016, one month from their 70th anniversary. She has 4 children, 7 grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren, and 1 great-great-grandchild.

Sister Eloise Marie Pulskamp, SMP, will celebrate her 100th birthday on Feb. 28. She will celebrate 80 years of vowed life with the Sisters of Mary of the Presentation this summer. Sister Eloise Marie spends her days in prayer and crocheting prayer shawls for the sick and dying.

Gladys Fluge, parishioner of Sacred Heart Church in Cando, celebrated her 90th birthday on Jan. 27. She was a sister with the Franciscan Sisters of Dillingen in Hankinson from 1949–72. Gladys was happily married to Arne Fluge from 1975 until his death in 2013. They adopted 3 children and have 4 grandchildren.

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

Donald Wold celebrated his 95th birthday on Dec. 18, 2020. He is pictured here with his 3 children: Mark, Mary, and John. Don is a parishioner of Assumption Church in Starkweather.

A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST
These news items, compiled by Danielle Ottman, were found in New Earth and its predecessor, Catholic Action News.

75 years ago — 1946
It’s hats off to the pastor and people of St. Arnold’s parish in Milnor for the completion of the payment for the new parish rectory. The 92 souls of the parish completely liquidated the $3,680 debt and have enough for a $300 reserve. Plans for the future include relocation of the church edifice, some redecorating, and building a full church basement. Keep going Milnor!

50 years ago — 1971
Villa Maria, a new 130-bed retirement and nursing home facility in south Fargo, opened in February. It’s a nonsectarian and non-denominational residence under the proprietorship of Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Crary, Fargo. The home offers 24-hour nursing care and has physical and occupational therapy facilities, whirlpool bath and other services. Mass is provided regularly. Construction began in May, 1970.

20 years ago — 2001
Pope John Paul II addressed the members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society international coordinating committee participating in his weekly general audience and commended their work as a reminder to the church of its obligation to serve Christ in the poor, and as one of the most effective ways of sharing “the infinite tenderness of our Father in heaven.” The Society has chapters, or conferences as they are called, in 130 countries and has been a part of the Fargo Diocese since 1968. The St. Anthony’s conference in Fargo received their Certificate of Aggregation on Dec. 8, 2000. The Society is a lay, charitable organization founded in Paris, France, in 1833 by (now) Blessed Frederic Ozanam.
ANNOUNCING AN UPCOMING RETROUVAILLE WEEKEND FOR COUPLES

MARCH 5-7, 2021
FARGO, ND

Faith, Hope and Love
Are these present in your marriage? Have you given up hope that they can be?

In 1 Corinthians 13:13 Jesus tells us the greatest of these is Love. Living in a marriage that is missing love can be difficult. If you have given up hope that your marriage can and will get better, ask your spouse to consider attending a Retrouvaille program. Retrouvaille is an international Christian-based ministry that offers a three-stage program to help couples improve their marriages. First, a weekend program is attended, followed by post-weekend meetings. Finally, an on-going monthly small group of couples gather for support and growth. If improving your marriage is important to you, reach out today for more information.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL (701) 356-7962 OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE: HELPOURMARRIAGE.COM
Vatican begins vaccinating residents of its homeless shelters

By Cindy Wooden | Catholic News Service

As the Vatican health service continued vaccinating Vatican residents and employees against COVID-19, it also began offering the vaccine to homeless people who live in Vatican-owned shelters.

The first 25 shelter residents were vaccinated Jan. 20, the Vatican said, and more will be given the vaccine in coming days.

Members of the first group to receive the shots were men and women over the age of 60, most of whom have serious health problems, Vatican News reported. They live at the Vatican’s newest shelter, the Palazzo Migliori, which is staffed by members of the Community of Sant’Egidio, and in the separate shelters for women and for men run by the Missionaries of Charity.

While most are Italian, the group also included people from Georgia and Romania. Some staff of the shelters also were vaccinated Jan. 20, along with Vatican employees who had appointments at the same time in the atrium of the Vatican audience hall.

Vatican photos showed the group accompanied by Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, who himself had contracted the coronavirus and was released from the hospital Jan. 4 after 10 days of treatment for pneumonia.

“We thank the pope for the gift he’s given us,” Mario, a resident of the Palazzo Migliori, told Vatican News. “It went great; now I have added security.”

Carlo Santoro, a member of the Sant’Egidio Community who helps at the shelter, said that many of the residents were afraid of the vaccine and of needles, but they also know there have been cases of COVID-19 in the shelters.

Health care workers explained the effects and long-term benefits of the vaccine, Santoro said. “Even if the importance of this gesture was not immediately clear to all of them,” he said, “it will be a liberation for them because the only hope for getting out of this pandemic is to be vaccinated.”

The Vatican began offering the Pfizer vaccine to its residents and employees Jan. 13. Both Pope Francis and retired Pope Benedict XVI have received the first of the two-dose vaccine.

The director of the Vatican health service, Dr. Andrea Arcangeli, had said in December that the Vatican had secured promises for enough doses to cover the employees, residents and pensioners who requested it. He did not, however, say exactly how many doses the Vatican purchased.

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MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO: Diocese of Fargo - TV Mass
5201 Bishops Blvd. S, Suite A, Fargo, ND 58104
It was afternoon, and many of the prayer advocates had gone home. My friend and I had only recently shown up to cover the shift when most women are leaving, their wombs either already emptied or preparing, through a pill, to evacuate the living child within.

From the edge of the sidewalk in front of our state’s only abortion facility, a pickup stopped, parking across the street directly in front of us. It didn’t concern us; vehicles come and go along this busy pathway all day long.

We soon realized the driver was approaching us. Recognizing his face, I felt assured. I’d seen him many times at Mass, so likely, he was friend not foe.

Though he could well have been there to do business with one of the adjoining shops, it quickly became apparent that we were the reason for his visit. The escorts had all gone by now, so he had an easy entry. “I just wanted to thank you for what you’re doing out here,” he said. And then he pressed a $100 bill into the hands of my best prayer buddy. “Buy some hot chocolate or something. Again, thank you.”

After a brief conversation with the man, he jumped back into his pickup and left, leaving us warmed—no hot chocolate needed.

How many times had we stood there, watching the escorts offer their donuts and coffee to the volunteers who come to bring women into the facility with the firm purpose of abortion? Yes, they believe they are helping. No, we are not the only ones who deserve to be warmed on a chilly winter’s day. But in facing these frequent gestures toward those operating or helping the abortion facility, the mind begins to ponder what’s at the heart of it all.

At their simplest, I see these actions as the giver doing something charitable from their perspective. But it’s more than a warm drink and a treat, hand warmers, or cash. In reaching out at this particular juncture of our city, on this specific day, it becomes a movement of the heart. That movement declares something. One is either professing support for abortion, or not.

Every day, we are faced with hundreds of choices. In those, we either advance toward God or away from him. Sometimes we make the right choice, and sometimes we don’t. Sometimes those choices are weightier than others. They can even have eternal consequences. As sinners, we must all weigh these decisions every day. It’s part of being human. We won’t always get it right.

But when people show up on the sidewalk with kindness toward those of us who have committed a certain portion of our lives to this cause—and not always with ease—it is about so much more than whatever the gift might be.

Several years ago, I wrote about an unkempt passerby on the sidewalk who gave us money and thanked us, not unlike the man who stopped by more recently. His gift was a crumpled-up dollar bill. It’s one I keep pinned to a bulletin board in my bedroom to remind me of God’s beautiful and often surprising consolations toward those who do his will.

As I’ve reflected on these two gifts given years apart, I see them so much the same. The wrinkled buck was just as valuable as the $100 bill, even though one has more monetary worth. Both came from the heart, represented the stirrings of the conscience, and touched us deeply.

Not long before Ben Franklin’s visit, another man who cannot come to the sidewalk to pray with us, but whose heart has been moved by our efforts, sent a Christmas card with cash through the mail. “Thank you and your friends for all you do to stop abortions. Use the money to buy items to help your cause.”

We’ve never solicited money for our volunteer efforts, and please know that mentioning this here is not that, either. What I wish to convey is this: these moments tell of God’s provisions. When we do his will, he will see to it that we are provided for—whether monetarily, through prayer, or in the friendships we form along the way.

I am writing this in January, the Sanctity of Life month. It has been a hard year, but God is with us. Please be assured, the hearts of those who love him continue to beat brightly. Now, to ensure that the voiceless for whom we speak will have that same chance.

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

The answer will be revealed in the March New Earth.

Where in the diocese are we?

Last month’s photo is of St. Stephen’s Church in Larimore.