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The Resurrection and the Sunday Mass obligation

“T”he Lord is Risen, he is risen indeed. Alleluia!”

With these words, I wish a Happy Easter to all the faithful of the Diocese of Fargo and to all people of good will in North Dakota. The annual celebration of Easter is a milestone in our lives every year, a day and an entire season that acknowledges the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. After our solemn remembrance of the passion and death of our Lord, we declare with firm faith that Jesus Christ has conquered death and is risen and now lives forever. This is the cornerstone of our faith, the essential truth that enables us to persevere even when our crosses become heavy and darkness is all around us. Jesus is risen, and he has opened up to all of us the way to eternal life.

This last year has had more than its share of darkness. It was just over a year ago, during Lent, when the COVID-19 pandemic exploded in our nation and around the world. Ordinary activities and employment were suspended, and with deep regret we even suspended the public celebration of Mass in our churches. Last year’s observance of Holy Week and Easter was somber and disappointing because we could not all be present for the greatest liturgies of our Church year.

During the months that followed, countless people have been impacted by the unfolding pandemic. Many of us contracted the coronavirus, and a significant number have died. We were isolated from each other for a time, and many people lost their jobs and their livelihood. And on and on.

But now we have cause to rejoice, because we know in faith that Jesus is risen. With great relief, we are seeing significant gains against the spread of COVID-19, and we are free once again to celebrate the mysteries of our salvation, not just on a screen but in our churches, with our families and with all the faithful gathered again as the Body of Christ.

Last year, at the outset of the global pandemic and health crisis, I dispensed all the faithful within the Diocese of Fargo from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. While many of you have already returned to regular attendance and participation at Mass, the dispensation remained in effect.

But in view of the improved situation throughout our state, the time has come for all of us to return once again to active participation in the liturgical life of the Church. Beginning on the weekend of May 1-2, 2021, the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation is reinstated for all the Catholic faithful of the Diocese of Fargo.

There are some exceptions to this obligation. The dispensation remains in effect for those who are ill or who have reason to believe they were recently exposed to COVID-19 or another contagious disease; those who are confined to their homes, or a hospital, or a nursing facility; those who care for the sick, the infirm, and the homebound; those who are unable to attend Mass through no fault of their own; those with underlying health conditions or in a high-risk category; those who have significant fear or anxiety of becoming ill by attending Mass. One may always consult their pastor if questions arise about the obligation to attend Mass.

It is fitting that we should return to Mass during the Easter season. Since the days of the Apostles and the early Church, Sunday was considered the Lord’s Day, the day of the Resurrection. The faithful gathered on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ, the Paschal Mystery of his death and resurrection. And ever since then, the Church has observed Sunday as a solemn feast, the one day of the week when all the faithful come together to worship God. The Church teaches us in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “The Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church’s life” (1277).

We speak of our Sunday obligation to attend Mass, and it is an obligation because of the worship that we owe to God: “Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day” (Exod. 20:8). But we don’t go to Mass only because we have to; we go out of love. We return the love that our Lord offers to us in his saving death and resurrection. We come to hear God’s Word and to receive the incomparable gift of the Eucharist, which no secular activity could ever match. We come not to be entertained, but to rejoice in the salvation that Jesus won for us by giving his life on the cross and taking it up again on the first Easter. We come to Mass because we need to be one with God, and there is no better way to draw near to him than in the sacred liturgy of the Mass. Without the celebration of the Eucharist and the Lord’s Day, we would be aimless and adrift, buffeted by the attractions and the perils of our world. But when we do attend Mass with all the faithful, we know we are rooted in Christ and anchored in the safe harbor of his Church.

Dear brothers and sisters, I pray that all of us will experience the saving grace of our Lord’s resurrection in this holy season of Easter. Our Risen Lord waits to meet us, and will be there when we come once again to celebrate his sacrifice, his Mass.
In Nomine Domini. Amen.

Whereas, due to the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, on March 17, 2020 I dispensed the faithful of the Diocese of Fargo from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation; and

Whereas, circumstances now allow us to attend Mass safely;

Therefore, beginning May 1, 2021, the general obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation is reinstated in the Diocese of Fargo.

This obligation does not apply to those who are ill; those who have reason to believe they were recently exposed to COVID-19 or another serious or contagious illness; those who are confined to their home, a hospital, or a nursing facility; those who care for the sick, the infirm, and the homebound; those who are unable to attend Mass through no fault of their own; those with underlying health conditions or in a high-risk category; and those who have significant fear or anxiety of becoming ill by attending Mass.

One should consult their pastor if questions arise about the obligation to attend Mass.

With an assurance of prayers for the holiness and good health of all, I extend my apostolic blessing to the faithful of the Diocese of Fargo.

+John T. Folda  
Bishop of Fargo  

Given at the Diocesan Pastoral Center  
this 1st day of April, 2021  

Mr. Timothy Olson, JCL  
Chancellor

Diocese of Fargo Official Appointments/Announcements

I hereby recognize the election of

Rev. Thaines Arulandu as a member of the Presbyteral Council. This appointment was effective September 29, 2020 and concludes on September 30, 2023.

Rev. James Gross as a member of the Presbyteral Council. This appointment was effective September 29, 2020 and concludes on September 30, 2023.

Rev. William Slattery as a member of the Presbyteral Council. This appointment was effective September 29, 2020 and concludes on September 30, 2023.

I herewith appoint

Rev. Msgr. Brian Donahue as a member of the Presbyteral Council. This appointment was effective September 29, 2020 and concludes on September 30, 2023.

Rev. James Gross to the College of Consultor for the Diocese of Fargo, effective March 10, 2021 and continuing to the expiration of the term of the College on March 5, 2024. This appointment is to fill a vacancy left by a member of the college constituted on March 5, 2019.

Rev. Timothy Johnson has been granted retirement, effective March 26, 2021.

I have determined that

Deacon Leslie Noehre’s assignment as permanent deacon at Holy Family Catholic Church, Grand Forks, ND, has concluded on February 28, 2021. Deacon Noehre remains incardinated as deacon of the Diocese of Fargo, and he now resides in the Diocese of Bismarck.
**BISHOP FOLDA’S CALENDAR**

**Apr. 10 • 10 a.m.**
Confirmation and First Eucharist, St. Therese, Rugby

**Apr. 11 • 1 p.m.**
Confirmation and First Eucharist, Sacred Heart, Carrington

**Apr. 12**
Priests’ Spring Education Day, Sts. Anne and Joachim, Fargo

**Apr. 13 • 11 a.m.**
Priests’ Council, Pastoral Center, Fargo

**Apr. 14 • 6 p.m.**
Catholic Man Night, Holy Cross, West Fargo

**Apr. 16 • 6 p.m.**
Confirmation and First Eucharist, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

**Apr. 18 • 2 p.m.**
Confirmation and First Eucharist, St. John, Wahpeton

**Apr. 21 • 3 p.m.**
St. JPII Schools Board Meeting, Pastoral Center, Fargo

**Apr. 22 • 2 p.m.**
Diocesan Pastoral Council Meeting, Pastoral Center, Fargo

**Apr. 23 • 6 p.m.**
Confirmation and First Eucharist, St. Anthony, Fargo

**Apr. 24 • 10 a.m.**
Confirmation and First Eucharist, Holy Spirit, Fargo

**Apr. 24 • 5 p.m.**
Shanley Dinner and Auction

**Apr. 25 • 2 p.m.**
Confirmation and First Eucharist, Holy Cross, West Fargo

**Apr. 25 • 5 p.m.**
Confirmation and First Eucharist, St. Leo, Casselton

**Apr. 30 • 7 p.m.**
Confirmation and First Eucharist, Sts. Anne and Joachim, Fargo

**May 1 • 10 a.m.**
Confirmation and First Eucharist, Holy Family, Grand Forks

**May 1 • 7 p.m.**
Confirmation and First Eucharist, St. Stanislaus, Warsaw

**May 2 • 12 p.m.**
Confirmation and First Eucharist, St. Joseph, Devils Lake

**May 6 • 1 p.m.**
Diocesan Schools Principals and Pastors Meeting, Pastoral Center, Fargo

**May 7 • 6 p.m.**
Confirmation and First Eucharist, St. Aloysius, Lisbon

**May 8 • 10 a.m.**
Confirmation and First Eucharist, St. Helena, Ellendale

**May 8 • 7 p.m.**
Confirmation and First Eucharist, St. Philip Neri, Napoleon

**Quotable**

St. Gianna Molla
Feast day April 28

“The secret of happiness is to live moment by moment and to thank God for all that He, in His goodness, sends to us day after day.”
In 1858, 14-year-old Bernadette was sent with her younger sister and a friend to gather firewood, when a very beautiful lady appeared to her above a rose bush in a grotto called Massabielle (Tuta de Massavelha). The woman wore blue and white and smiled at Bernadette before making the sign of the cross with a rosary of ivory and gold. Bernadette fell to her knees, took out her own rosary and began to pray. Though her sister and friend claimed they were unable to see her, Bernadette knew what she saw was real.

The lady, Our Blessed Mother, appeared to Bernadette many times at the grotto. At one point, she told Bernadette to drink from the spring at the grotto, which miraculously appeared with clear, fresh water. Many believed Bernadette was seeing the Blessed Virgin, but many more, including Church leaders, did not. Eventually, the Church recognized the apparitions in 1862. To this day the spring has been the site of miraculous cures, and a church has been built on the site of the grotto.

In 1866, Bernadette took the religious habit of a postulant and joined the Sisters of Charity at their motherhouse at Nevers. Bernadette spent the rest of her life there working as an infirmary assistant and later a sacristan. Unfortunately, she was diagnosed with tuberculosis of the bone in her right knee and was unable to take part in convent life. She died in the Sainte Croix Infirmary of the Convent of Saint-Gildard at the age of 35 on April 16, 1879, while praying the holy rosary.

Today her body is encased in a gold and crystal casket in the Chapel of St. Bernadette at the mother house in Nevers. She was beatified in 1925 and canonized by Pope Pius XI in December 1933.

_Historical information from Catholic Online._

---

**Prayer for Priests**

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

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

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• Rolla - Presentation Medical Center
• Valley City - Sheyenne Care Center

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WORLD DAY OF PRAYER for Vocations

SUNDAY, APRIL 25, 2021
Our questioner asks, “Since Jesus never talked about sex, aren’t the rules and regulations about it man-made?” In response, let’s begin with the first premise of the question: did Jesus indeed say nothing about our sexual conduct? Then we will consider what it is to be God-given or man-made.

We can look to the Gospels for Jesus’ teaching on the topic, powerful though brief. Although he did not elaborate on the many particular issues we face in contemporary society, he gave us enough basic principles from which we may continue to discover God’s will for our sexual conduct.

When questioned about divorce and remarriage, Jesus responded, “From the beginning God made them male and female... and the two shall become one...” He reiterated God’s plan for the permanence and fidelity of marriage and conjugal life shared between husband and wife (Matt. 19:3-9).

What we call the “natural moral law” is that which God reveals to us through human reason guided by faith. Its principal precepts are found in the Decalogue (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] 1955-60). In his teaching on sexuality and human conduct in general, Jesus notably raises the bar, setting higher standards for those who desire to enter the Kingdom of God in heaven. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, we hear him call us to purity of thought and action: “You heard it said that you shall not commit adultery. What I say to you is, he who looks lustfully at another has already committed adultery in his heart” (Matt. 5:27-28).

In these brief passages, Jesus gives us a mentality for obedience to God’s will for human sexuality. Paul’s epistles further address some issues such as the value of celibacy (1 Cor. 7) and the virtue of self-control (Gal. 5:22). He also warns us about fornication and other “works of the flesh”: “Those who do such things will not enter the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:19-21).

Making a distinction between what is “God-given” and what is “man-made” sets up an artificial opposition of the two, as if it is either one or the other. Our Church reminds us in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, that God reveals fundamental truths in both Sacred Scripture and our ongoing Tradition. The Holy Spirit guides the Church in prayerful discernment of these truths. (cf. CCC 2032-38)

Our moral law is a “work of divine Wisdom,” (CCC 1950) and “man participates in the wisdom and goodness of the Creator who gives him mastery over his acts and the ability to govern himself with a view to the true and the good” (CCC 1954).

In the realm of human sexuality, our contemporary culture presents new challenges to fundamental teaching. Homosexual “marriage” (non-sacramental civil partnership) and transgender surgeries add to the growing list of challenges including contraception, cohabitation, and in-vitro fertilization. These are the kind of subjects where one might accuse the Church’s magisterium of coming up with man-made rules and regulations.

Yet it is precisely because we have ongoing medical, scientific, and cultural developments leading to new problems, that our Church teaching authority is entrusted with the responsibility to provide guidance for the People of God in these perplexing questions. We believe that God continues to speak to us and reveal the divine will through our popes and bishops, as well as theologians and those faithful who prayerfully listen for God’s guidance. Our official teaching on matters of sexuality comes from the magisterium, and they will not contradict what God has already revealed in Scripture and Sacred Tradition. We believe that God continues to speak to us and reveal the divine will through our popes and bishops, as well as theologians and those faithful who prayerfully listen for God’s guidance. Our official teaching on matters of sexuality comes from the magisterium, and they will not contradict what God has already revealed in Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

Catholic teaching on human sexuality, particularly on the most current controversial issues, is often subject to criticism, judged as being too harsh or out of step with the times. Sadly, the reverse is true: the times are often woefully out of step with the eternal laws of God.

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Catholic teaching on human sexuality, particularly on the most current controversial issues, is often subject to criticism, judged as being too harsh or out of step with the times. Sadly, the reverse is true: the times are often woefully out of step with the eternal laws of God. The term “man-made law” is most often used by those who don’t want to accept the wisdom of the Church’s response to the question. If anything, the term most appropriately applies to those regulations passed by legislators who either directly oppose, or refuse to consider, God’s say in the matter.

In summary, our Catholic teachings on human sexuality and sexual conduct are ultimately God-given, and not merely “man-made rules and regulations.” The Church as moral teacher seeks to help all of us discern what is best for our ultimate happiness and act accordingly with the help of God’s grace.

Editor’s note: If you have a question to suggest for consideration in a future column, send to news@fargodiocese.org.
In last month’s article, we spoke about how the sacraments bring God’s grace to us, by his power working through created reality. This month we examine the Sacrament of Baptism, the gateway sacrament to all the others. Knowledge of this sacrament, and what God has done for us through it, will surely fill our hearts with amazement and gratitude.

The word Baptism in Greek means to plunge, dip, or immerse. It takes on the image of something being so immersed into a solution that it assumes the qualities of that solution, like a cucumber soaked in vinegar becomes a pickle. The plunging into the water produces a change; the one baptized takes on new characteristics and a new identity.

Baptism is defined as the “Sacrament of regeneration by water in the word” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1213). The specific grace given by Baptism produces a regeneration, a rebirth, within the one baptized. Why do we need rebirth? Because of the state of our first birth. St. Paul says that by nature we are born children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). We have no right to friendship with God and even deserve eternal punishment because we inherit the sin of our first parents. But God, rich in mercy, doesn’t want to leave us in the state of fallen nature. He provides a way for our rebirth, so that we might become children of mercy, his adopted children.

Baptism brings about this change or rebirth. Remember that the outward sign of the sacraments points to the inward grace. In Baptism, the outward part is the water poured three times (or the person being fully immersed in the water), along with the minister saying, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” This outward rite shows us a few things about what is going on within.

The first effect of the grace of Baptism is that sin is forgiven. Whether an unbaptized person is an adult or infant, they have the guilt and punishment of Original Sin. God washes that sin away in Baptism. We use water every day for washing clothes, or hands, or countless other things. So God uses our senses to teach us about his work within the soul.

But water isn’t only used for washing. We also use water for nourishment; we need it for life. Many of our cities are built beside bodies of water. A supply of water is crucial for life on earth, animal and human. God also gives life through the waters of Baptism. Whose life? His life. We are baptized into the Trinity, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The grace of Divine Life flows into our souls. Just as our parents shared their life with us in our first birth, so God shares his life with us through the rebirth of Baptism. Through Baptism God makes us just, or righteous, and worthy of friendship with him. He makes us his heirs and coheirs to eternal life in his own son, Jesus Christ. He opens up for us the gates of heaven, which were closed to us before because of our first parents. He joins us to Christ, our Head, so that we, the members, can receive the gifts of grace and truth that flow from him (John 1:16-17).

Through Baptism, God also seals our soul with a permanent character, which can never be relinquished. In ancient times, the Roman soldiers would have the mark or character of their legion tattooed on them, as a sign that they belonged to that legion. Similarly, when God claims someone for his child, he never takes back that choice, even if he or she rejects him. The mark, or character, on the soul is an ongoing source of our identity in God, bringing rights, duties, and special graces. Because of this permanent character, a person may only receive Baptism once.

We possess great dignity when we are made members of God’s family. In gratitude, it is good to put on our calendars the date of our Baptism, and that of our family members. If we celebrate natural birth, certainly, we should celebrate the day of supernatural birth. Celebrating the day of Baptism helps children see how important that day is to our salvation and relationship with God.

Also, Catholic parents have a great obligation to make sure their children receive Baptism shortly after birth. Because of its importance to the soul, both in taking away the punishment of Original Sin, and in bringing Divine Life and grace, Baptism should never be delayed. In danger of death, it should be given immediately, and can even be administered by someone who isn’t a cleric; anyone can baptize with the right intention, using water and the correct formula.

Let us thank the Lord Jesus for saving us through the cleansing water of Baptism and for pouring his life and gifts into our souls through the waters of life!
The Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (PBVM) are establishing a new home at Riverview Place, a retirement community, in Fargo. They once called Riverview home from 1960 to 1981 before relocating to the building on 32nd Street South, Fargo and establishing a retreat ministry there. Within the last few months, most of the sisters moved to Riverview and some elsewhere in Fargo.

“This time we’re not moving as a community,” said Sister Paula Ringuette. “We’re kind of spread out now, without easy access to each other. It’s a new experience, but Riverview is making it easy for us. People are so welcoming and friendly. We couldn’t ask for more.”

When the convent on 32nd Street was built, there were 40 sisters living there. There are now 19, which meant many empty rooms and more space than they needed.

“We are mission led,” said Sister Paula. “There are many times in our history when we’ve moved from the familiar to the new. Religious life is always a time of change, so it’s not strange we would find ourselves in a position like this again. Through all the changes—even the ones that are hard—we can find joy in them.”

The PBVM sisters moved from Ireland to Fargo in the early 1880s when they opened a school and established a religious order. The sisters also built many health care facilities in rural North Dakota including in Carrington, Grafton, Langdon, Park River, and New Rockford (closed), which are now community-run operations. Their mission grew to include retreats, social work, and housing.

Without the retreat space, Sister Paula said it will take time to reestablish the focus of their mission moving forward.

“Since we aren’t living in the same place, we don’t have the easy access to the community that we had before. We’ll miss that very much. It was a place where many people found peace. Now we just need to find a new way of sharing our lives with others, inside and outside of Riverview.”

While the transition is difficult, the sisters in Fargo move with hope for what the future holds.

“The marvel of it is that nothing happens that doesn’t have some connection to where God is leading us. We have a wonderful place here, and there are great possibilities that could happen here.”

“We’re so pleased to welcome these Sisters to Riverview,” said Executive Director of Riverview, Kari Dew. “Every resident deserves the very best care we can possibly provide. I have to admit there’s a special place in our hearts though for religious women who have dedicated their lives to following God’s calling in order to serve others. We’re honored they have become part of our Riverview community again.”

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**Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary return to Riverview 40 years later**

By Kristina Lahr

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FATHER JOHN FALCON, a priest of the Diocese of Fargo, died suddenly on Feb. 22 at his home in Alcester, Warwickshire, England. He was 56 years old.

Father Fallon was born Mar. 29, 1964. Growing up he was an altar server at his home parish of Our Lady and St. Joseph Catholic Church in Alcester. He was accepted into priestly formation by Bishop James Sullivan of Fargo and moved to North Dakota. Father Fallon was ordained a deacon at Little Flower Church in Rugby in March of 1995 and was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Fargo in Rugby on June 3, 1995 by Bishop Sullivan.

In his time serving the Diocese of Fargo, Father Fallon was a parochial vicar at St. Michael’s in Grand Forks, and a year later was named administrator for St. Mark’s Church in Conway, St. Joseph’s in Lankin, and St. John’s in Pisek. In 2000 he was named pastor for those parishes, then in 2002 serves as pastor of St. Patrick’s in Enderlin, Our Lady of the Scapular in Sheldon, and St. Henry’s in Alice. He was pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Fingal in 2005, then become parochial vicar of St. Olaf’s Church in Finley, St. Lawrence in Jessie, and St. George’s in Cooperstown in 2006.

Father Fallon retired in 2007 due to poor health and returned to England where he lived until his death. He is survived by his parents, Marie and Patrick Fallon, his brother Michael and family, and his sister Rosalind Marie. Father Fallon’s funeral Mass was held Mar. 24 in Alcester, with burial in Studley, Warwickshire, England.

Bishop Folda leads the faithful in prayer, consecrating the Diocese of Fargo to St. Joseph at a special Mass on March 19 as part of Pope Francis’s declaration that the year 2021 will be the year of St. Joseph for the Universal Church. The Consecration to St. Joseph Mass was held at St. Joseph Church in Devils lake, fittingly on the Solemnity of the Feast of St. Joseph. (Photo by Paul Braun | New Earth)

Retrouvaille is a program designed to help struggling marriages regain their health. It helps husband and wife rediscover or reawaken the love and commitment that originally brought them together. The program is highly successful in saving hurting marriages, even bringing reconciliation to couples who have already separated or divorced. Retrouvaille is a peer ministry of volunteer couples that can help you learn the tools of healthy communication and healing.

For more information, Call (701) 356-7903 or visit HelpOurMarriage.com
More than eighty men gathered at the Franciscan Retreat and Conference Center in Hankinson on March 12–14 for a retreat to explore the Church as a refuge in these difficult times.

Coming from the Dioceses of Fargo, Crookston, St. Cloud, and Sioux Falls, plus the Archdioceses of St. Paul/Minneapolis and Chicago, the men heard about obedience as a virtue from Father Jayson Miller, Director of Liturgy and Priest Secretary to the Bishop of Fargo. In his Saturday morning keynote, Father Miller explained what obedience is and what it is not, especially considering Aquinas, holy scripture, and modern-day saints.

“Obedience is the most praiseworthy of the moral virtues, since by it, we give to God what is our greatest possession: our own will,” he said.

Father Peter Anderl, pastor of St. Boniface Church in Lidgerwood, reviewed fatherhood, manly example, and responsible family leadership from the perspective of St. Joseph.

Other testimonies were presented by Ecclesia Domestica (“church in the home”) laymen from the St. Cloud Diocese. Ecclesia member Luke Waltman made a passionate plea, calling men to pray the Rosary daily. He outlined the fruits obtained when men establish this habit personally and in their families. Ecclesia president Kevin Olson called those present to “stand their post” in family and in parishes.

“We are in a spiritual battle against a culture that would destroy what we believe in,” Olson said. “We cannot send the delicate to the front lines. Pick up the sword of the spirit real men are called for!”

Informal small group sessions were interspersed with these talks, where retreatants informally explored in more depth the presentations they were hearing. In addition, each man participated in an hour of private spiritual direction with one of the dozen or so priests and deacons who attended.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was celebrated each day of the retreat. Exposition and adoration were available throughout each night, and the Rosary and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy were prayed each day. On the last evening, the men’s urgent personal needs were addressed through prayer ministry.

Father Anderl was impressed with the events of these three days.

“This was a time of fraternal bonding such as I have seldom seen. Men who hardly knew each other on Friday morning were opening up and sharing, which indicates substantial spiritual growth. As a result, we saw deep, deep healing among these men. There was freedom to love God with an undivided heart.”

A follow-up men’s retreat with Ecclesia Domestica has tentatively been scheduled for March 18–20, 2022.

Our California Carmelite Sisters have arrived and we hope our warm welcome will keep them warm during the colder days.

Ecclesia Domestica men’s retreat convenes in Hankinson

By Luke Waltman | Coordinator of Ecclesia Domestica
As we enter into the season of Easter, let us be filled with joy at the amazing gifts God has given us. God loves us so much that he gave us his only son, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life (cf. John 3:16). What greater joy and freedom can we have than to know that Jesus atoned for our sins? He has opened every door for us to be with him forever in heaven if we choose to follow him.

God didn’t just save humanity. He saved each of us personally and intentionally as his own son or daughter. “Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you” (Isaiah 49:15). God’s love and desire to be with us continues throughout our lives. Through every joy and sorrow, he is there. In what way have you experienced his presence and blessings? Why do you strive to follow him, even when it’s difficult? How has God changed your life?

These questions are the backbone of your testimony to your faith. St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. John shared their conversion stories in their epistles. They knew that stories have great power to inspire and teach, more than any textbook could. As Pope Paul VI wrote: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (Evangeli Nuntiandi, 41).

In the Diocese of Fargo, Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) missionaries and Young Disciples missionaries learn to share their testimonies with those they encounter. St. Paul tells us that to share the faith with others, we must “always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope” (1 Peter 3:15).

“Our testimony is something that no one can refute,” said Seyha Saumweber, FOCUS Missionary at the University of North Dakota (UND) in Grand Forks. “It is our own personal encounter of the living God and how he has changed us. I don’t think a majority of Catholics think about our own testimony. St. Paul talks about how he came and preached ‘not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God’ (1 Cor. 2:4-5). This ‘demonstration of the Spirit’ is his conversation. We hear how Paul once persecuted the early church but through the power of God, he came to know Jesus Christ and became a powerful witness to the faith. He shared this with many people, and they became converts to the faith. By our lives and fidelity to the faith we can bring others to know the love of God.”

It’s time to tell our stories

This Easter season, examine and share how God has worked in your life

By Kristina Lahr

Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.

—St. Paul VI
But what if you’re a “cradle Catholic” and have never fallen far from God? Do you still have a testimony? Even if you’ve never fallen into a deep life of sin and had as dramatic of a conversion as some (praise God for that!), you still have a story to tell. Every day, at any moment, you can choose to turn away from God. So why don’t you? Why do you pray? Why do you go to Mass? What draws you to Reconciliation? God is very creative and can work through infinite situations for every personality and background. Your testimony may not include any dramatic moments but small, quiet moments that could easily fade from memory.

“On the college campus, I encounter many students who were raised in a good Catholic family that never really did anything ‘wrong’ in their life,” said Saumweber. “But this a beautiful testament to why raising children in the faith is so vital. I think with our culture becoming so secular, it’s great to see that there are faithful families depositing the light of faith to the next generation. You have a story and I encourage those of you to pray how God has moved and worked in your life.”

So how does one share a testimony? Using the FOCUS model, a testimony has four “acts.” As you examine your life and pray for God’s inspiration and clarity, consider how you would share your story of faith in three, ten, or fifteen minutes. Having more or fewer details in your story will help you be prepared for whatever situation you find yourself in.

Act 1: My life before I knew Christ

What was your life like before you encountered Christ personally? Someone could be living a life of deep sin to being a “cradle Catholic” whose life is not quite centered on Christ yet. A good question to ask yourself is, “What kind of person were you socially, emotionally, and spiritually before you encountered Christ?” (FOCUS). If you were really entrenched in sexual sins or other extreme behaviors, give enough details to give people an idea of what happened without focusing on what you’ve done. Remember a testimony is ultimately about what God has done for you!

Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope (1 Peter 3:15).

Act 2: How I came to know Christ

Our conversion is a lifelong process where we give God our yes each and every day. However, there are key moments in our lives where God has specifically revealed his love for us. It doesn’t have to be something dramatic like, “at Mass I saw the heavens open, and I heard the voice of God speak to me!” Maybe this happens to some, but more often it’s more different to pinpoint these moments. It could be that you were catechized well in your home and your family taught you to pray every day and through these moments you encountered the love of Jesus. Ask the Lord to reveal how he has shown his love to you.

Act 3: My life in Christ

What does your life look like now as you pursue a life centered on Christ? Maybe you decided to start praying every day or go to a few daily Masses a week. There are many ways this could manifest itself, but ultimately it is a life striving after Christ. A good question to ponder is, “how has a relationship with Jesus allowed you to live a life that is freer, fuller, and more joyful” (FOCUS)?

Act 4: Invitation

One of the most important parts of giving your testimony is to invite the person into a deeper encounter with God. Ultimately our testimony is a Gospel presentation of how God has worked in our lives. When sharing your testimony, keep in mind, “what do I want to reveal about God in my story?”

Our stories aren’t over. If you are struggling to have faith or don’t feel that you have a relationship with Christ, don’t worry. God is always working in our lives, always drawing us into deeper communion with him should we desire it. Ask him to reveal himself and any roadblocks or sins separating you from him. If you are not ready to share your testimony, draft one anyway, just for yourself. Maybe you’ll find that God is closer
to you than you think, or it’ll awaken a deeper desire in you to know him more intimately.

You don’t have to be a saint, have the Bible memorized, or understand every Church teaching to share your testimony. If you feel the Holy Spirit prompting you to share your story when the opportunity arises, be without fear, and ask him to speak through you with joy and conviction. Even if you think your efforts are a failure, we have no way of truly knowing how our words affect others.

Our world is starving for the Good News. If we ask God to bring us opportunities to share our faith, don’t be surprise when he takes your offer. And when he does, be ready.

Testimony of Seyha Saumweber,
FOCUS Missionary at UND

I was adopted into a great Catholic family. Growing up we went to Mass every Sunday and I participated in some youth group activities. When I was about 16 years old, I was given the option to come to Mass on my own because I was able to drive. I’m sad to say that at that time I thought sleep was more important than worship of God. I stopped participating in any activity related to church, and I started to wrap my identity in sports and social clicks. I would go occasionally with my parents on big days like Christmas and Easter, but I was starting to fall away from the faith. I got into partying and impure relationships with my girlfriend at the time. This continued into my first year of college.

By the time I went to college I was 19 years old. I continued to live the same kind of worldly life in college as I did in high school. But one day I was playing soccer and a FOCUS Missionary came up and introduced themselves to me. We began a friendship and he started to invite me to come with him to Sunday Mass. I was a little nervous since it had been a while since I’ve been to church. However, I am so grateful because through my relationship with this missionary I was able to go on a retreat where I encountered Christ. On the retreat I had the opportunity to go to confession and turn my life towards serving God.

Since that retreat I started to pray daily and to grow in my relationship with God. My life used to be centered on myself and the pleasure I can get out of this world, but now it’s focused on serving God and his people. I am in no means perfect, but every day I am striving to grow closer to God and to do his will. I hope that my story inspires you to reflect on the many ways God has called to know him and to love him.

Ryan Modahl of Fargo gives his testimony at the Convocation of Parish Leaders at Avalon Events Center in Fargo on Nov. 30, 2018. (Diocese of Fargo)
Some folks worry that the term, “domestic church” potentially leaves out a lot of people. Can you be a domestic church even if your family doesn’t look like the stereotypical “ideal Christian household” (whatever that means)?

The term, “domestic church” is specific, but it’s not exclusive. The first-century Christian idea of family represented a radical departure from the pagan Roman understanding that family was based on blood. Christians taught that ties of grace were even more binding than ties of blood. All the baptized are brothers and sisters in Christ, and those ties were meant to supersede all other earthly connections. This represented a radical revisioning of what it meant to be “family.” The “domestic church” is certainly rooted in the natural family, but it is simultaneously much broader, because it’s ultimately a divine institution, not merely a human one.

It’s helpful to think of a “domestic church” as a household of persons who are 1) united to God and each other through the sacramental life of the Church and 2) committed to living out the Christian/Trinitarian vision of love in their relationships with each other and the world. Let’s break this down.

“A household of persons united to God and each other through the sacramental life of the Church” means that it’s grace, not necessarily blood, that makes a household a domestic church. Of course, just living under the same roof doesn’t make a domestic church happen any more than standing around in an empty church building makes Mass happen. In both cases, the people who have gathered together have to be intentional about what they’re doing. That’s why, in addition to sharing a sacramental connection, a domestic church must also be committed to “living out the Christian/Trinitarian vision of love in their relationships with each other and the world.”

Although the world has its own ideas about love, Christian disciples are meant to live and promote a uniquely Christian vision. For Christians, loving someone means being in intimate communion with them—like the Trinity is; and giving everything we have to help each other become everything God created us to be—like Jesus did. The domestic church’s mission is building deeply grace-filled, intimate relationships rooted in the commitment to work for each other’s ultimate good that whatever the makeup of your household, the degree to which you can say that the people you live with are united by sacramental grace and committed to living out the Christian/Trinitarian vision of love in all your relationships is the degree to which you can say your household represents a true domestic church. Likewise, the degree to which this isn’t true of your household is the degree to which God is calling you and yours to grow.

It’s important to note that, in this model, married households rightfully enjoy special pride-of-place, but not because they represent some kind of human ideal. They deserve special respect because they share a stronger sacramental connection, and because, as “icons of the Trinity” they’re better equipped to witness to Trinitarian love. Other households aren’t lesser domestic churches and married households aren’t automatically “ideal.” There are just different kinds of domestic churches—all of which share some sacramental connection and each of which witnesses to Christian/Trinitarian love.

But what about single people? Aren’t they excluded from domestic church life? Certainly not. For the Christian, there is no such thing as an individual. To be human is to be in relationship with others. Whenever possible, and even if they live separately, single Christians should actively seek out opportunities to participate and serve the domestic churches they grew up in or (in the case of Christian grandparents, for example) gave rise to.

That said, if a person really does not have a viable connection to their own domestic church, Christians must do everything we can to make them an active and welcome part of our domestic churches. The early church did not attend to widows and orphans by creating social welfare agencies. They opened their doors and welcomed the stranger into their midst as a true brother or sister in Christ. Certainly, social services are essential, but they can’t possibly replace the authentic opportunities for accompaniment that the domestic church can provide.
On Feb. 16, Broden Frolek walked up to an ambo at St. Boniface Church in Lidgerwood, from a pew where he’d been sitting, to thank family and friends for their steadfast support over the past months.

A Mass of Thanksgiving had just been offered to celebrate his recovery from a near-fatal accident. With a surprising steadiness and confidence, the young North Dakota State University student, 19, expressed his gratitude, calling his life “a living testament to the power of prayer.”

Watching, Mason Falk, 21, flashed back to that chilly day in late November when he and a few friends had come upon the scene of the single-car accident in Sargeant County; a still-unexplained crash that had left his closest cousin in a fetal position, with bones protruding from one of his legs, along with a broken rib and traumatic brain injury.

“As soon as I brought my headlights to the highway, perpendicular to the slough, we saw the car, upside-down and facing the opposite way,” Falk says. Immediately, he called Broden’s father, Aaron, who was part of a convoy of about 10 vehicles searching for his son.

Three hours earlier, Broden had left his parent’s home in rural Lidgerwood to watch an Ultimate Fighting Championship match on television with some friends. But his memory of that trip has been erased.

“I remember what I was doing earlier that day,” he says, “but I can’t remember stepping a foot into the vehicle.” He woke 11 days later, confused, at Sanford Medical Center in Fargo. Little by little, friends and family have helped fill in the known details.

A COUSIN’S PERSPECTIVE

Though Falk was tired that evening, he says, his cousin’s disappearance woke him up. After spotting Broden’s overturned car in the black night, with the help of his car headlights, he got out of his vehicle, running through the icy, water-filled slough to reach the car.

“The water was about knee deep, and as I got closer, I stopped. I just froze. I was like, ‘Am I ready for what I’m about to see?’” Falk recalls.

Falk’s roommate, Devan Round, a nursing student, didn’t hesitate. “He ran up to the car, and noticed a little water on the roof,” Falk recounts. “He got down on his hands and knees and checked, and said, ‘He’s not in there.’” He noticed a single shoe inside.

“The water was about knee deep, and as I got closer, I stopped. I just froze. I was like, ‘Am I ready for what I’m about to see?’”

Falk recalls.

Falk’s roommate, Devan Round, a nursing student, didn’t hesitate. “He ran up to the car, and noticed a little water on the roof,” Falk recounts. “He got down on his hands and knees and checked, and said, ‘He’s not in there.’” He noticed a single shoe inside.

“It was a really cold night, and very windy,” Falk recounts. “You could only hear the cattails” moving in the wind. “Devan got on top of the car and started yelling.” Suddenly, he heard a voice. “Just a little mumble.” He jumped off the car to investigate.

“God did everything perfectly,” mom says of son’s inspiring recovery from car rollover

By Roxane B. Salonen
Originally published in The Forum

Broden Frolek.
(submitted photo)

Broden’s brother Blaise, 12, visits him in the hospital for the first time in December 2020. (submitted photo)

Broden offers gratitude during a Thanksgiving Mass on Feb. 16 at St. Boniface Church in Lidgerwood. (submitted photo)
“Broden was north of the car about 10, 15 feet in a little spot, about five-by-five feet, on top of the ice, surrounded by the cattails,” Falk continues. “It was the only bare spot all around.”

They called 9-1-1, and Round began checking for injuries, noticing Broden’s bruised head. “He wasn’t conscious, but he was speaking. It sounded to me like Latin,” Falk says. “Broden, it’s Mason. We’re here,” he’d said. That’s when the words from Broden became clearer. “He was praying the ‘Our Father,’ just little bits. So, I knelt down and started praying with him.”

Falk says he figured leg amputation was imminent. “We were also thinking ‘hypothermia,’ along with brain damage. “His lips were purple, almost pale, but he wasn’t even shivering.” They later learned that, incredibly, there’d been no signs of hypothermia. “It was like God was watching over him the whole time.”

About ten long minutes later, an ambulance arrived, and the waiting—and earnest praying—began.

A MOTHER’S PERSPECTIVE

Tonia Frolek had a foreboding feeling the week of the crash, she says, and sensed it was connected to Broden, the oldest son of her 10 children.

That Nov. 28 night of his disappearance, she’d turned in early, exhausted from a long day of work at St. Gerard’s nursing home in Hankinson, she says, leaving her cares with Jesus and his mother, Mary.

Several hours later, she woke to her daughters’ panicked voices. Broden was missing. After calling Aaron, she gathered the rest of the kids and started praying.

The car rolled multiple times, landing 200 feet from the road, Tonia says. “They later saw a path where he must have tried crawling to.” The searching cars had passed by that dark stretch of road numerous times.

“I know by faith he was not there alone,” Tonia says through tears. “The fact that he was lying in the only dry area is a miracle in itself,” she adds, noting that with brain injuries, cold can minimize the damage. “I just feel like God did everything perfectly for him to be able to recover like this.”

Throughout his recovery, Broden continued praying the “Our Father,” adding lines as his condition improved, prompting one nurse to ask Tonia, “Is he really religious?” “No more than anyone, I guess,” she responded, chuckling.

But for over a week, her son remained in a coma-like state, the head trauma extensive. In those moments, Tonia says, she felt powerless, except for the power of prayer.

BRODEN’S PERSPECTIVE

When he “came to,” Broden says, he wanted answers. “I told my speech therapist, ‘I’m mad, I’m frustrated. I can’t remember what happened.’” When she asked if he really wanted to remember the accident, Broden paused, realizing the answer: No.

He soon learned of friends Falk had gathered in Fargo to pray, almost nightly, until Christmas break. “We have a lot of Lutheran friends, but by the end of it, everyone knew the Rosary,” Falk says. “Broden would do the same for any of us.” At an invitation, Bishop John Folda even joined the students one night.

A GoFundMe effort, and healing Mass for his benefit back in Lidgerwood, also encouraged him, he says.

Broden’s faith began growing, too, with each uttered line of the “Our Father.” “Before the accident, I was sometimes rude to my siblings. I was going to Mass on Sundays, but it wasn’t enough,” Broden says. “Now, I pray four or five times a day, and for other people, too.”

Life has changed, but not his aspirations. Broden wants to complete his degree in agricultural-systems management and join the family’s farm business. For now, he says, he’s grateful for each day, and heartened by the responses of others.

Though he still can’t recall praying the night of the accident, Broden says it just came “automatically.” He’d been taught since childhood that “When you’re in trouble, pray, and God will keep you safe and healthy.”

A PASTOR’S PERSPECTIVE

The Reverend Peter Anderl calls Broden “the real deal,” noting that his honesty and innocence make him especially receptive to God’s promptings.

But he’s been equally impressed by how the accident has drawn others to God. “During the healing Mass for Broden, people were holding onto every word with all of their hearts, minds and spirits,” he says. “When we finished, Broden (in Fargo) began to speak.”

“When two or three come together in Jesus’ name, amazing things happen,” Anderl says. “People have come back to church who hadn’t been for decades. They’ve said, ‘This inspired me to want to deepen my faith.’”

Anderl says the Church teaches that Jesus comes to us through four means: the holy sacrifice of the Mass, the consecrated priest, Scripture, and gatherings of the faithful. All four merged the evening of Dec. 2.

“As soon as we began to pray, I knew Broden would be fully healed,” Anderl says, noting that additional graces have followed, including perpetual Adoration at St. Boniface, allowing people to “pray directly in front of the Lord in the Eucharist” 24-7.

He’s also watched the family draw even closer to God, spending countless hours with their son, pleading, begging for healing, he says. And Broden has “never wavered.” “He’s a great kid, without guile—the kind a mom would want their daughter to marry.”

Anderl concludes, “The more we pray, the more we receive, and how life-changing it is.”

A long road of recovery lies ahead, Tonia says, with therapy continuing twice weekly. But daily, she’s reminded her son could have died. “I always tell the kids, ‘Life is precious, so don’t be wasteful with it. Take care of your life and what God has given you.’”

Falk says he knew Broden wouldn’t give up. “But seeing him from that night to where he’s at now—it blows my mind.”

“The progress so far gives us all hope he’ll be back up here (at NDSU) in the fall, and we’ll see Broden smiling again,” he adds. “We’re already seeing him smiling; he’s always laughing and making everyone feel better.”
Rugby teenagers accept challenge to fast from their phones for a week

By Paul Braun

Imagine being challenged to give up your cell phone for a whole week. Could you do it? Could a typical teenager do it? That’s what State District Judge Michael Hurly of North Dakota’s North East Judicial District wanted to know.

Judge Hurly teaches a Wednesday night Religious Education class with Mary Schmaltz to 11th and 12th graders from Little Flower Church in Rugby. In a recent meeting with the students and their parents, Judge Hurly talked about the growing body of evidence he sees that cell phone use and social media are having an increasingly negative effect on teens. Using real data, statistics, and experience from his own court room, he brought home the message of the dangers kids face with social media and technology.

The result was his challenge to have the teens and their parents give up cell phones for one week to see how it would affect their decision making, communication with friends and family, and their social interactions. He gave up his phone in solidarity with them.

At first the teens didn’t want to do it, but the idea eventually caught fire and they gave up their phones as a group. The results surprised many of them:

Katelyn Duchscher – “It was kind of scary because the whole world is powered by phones. It gave me more time for prayer and family, and I took up some fun hobbies like crossword puzzles and playing the piano again.”

Amber Selensky – “I had to plan out my day more and let my mom know what I was doing beforehand. I couldn’t make spontaneous plans like I usually do. I think everyone should try to take small breaks from their phones, but I don’t think people should completely disregard them because they are a useful tool.”

Alec Wolf – “I didn’t think I could do it and thought it was a bad idea, but it turned into a good experience. I spent more time with my family and did more socializing with them.”

Isabella McCabe – “I’m currently writing a paper on how social media is affecting the mental health of teens, and this was a great way for me to get information. Going to bed without my phone allowed me to have more time and to focus on talking with and praying to God.”

Judge Hurly says he hopes the teens learned something about themselves by interacting more with their families and peers first-hand rather than through technology. He thinks it’s ironic that teens are losing communication skills while communicating with each other virtually. He hopes to see other schools in the area take up the challenge as well.

Shanley senior organizes blood drive to assist shortage

Kate Busek, a senior at Shanley High School in Fargo, looks over data with her father, Kent Busek, during “Kate’s EPIC Blood Drive” on Feb 24. What began as a simple senior service project for her religion class to help replenish COVID-19 related shortfalls of donated blood, turned into a media event. Vitalant Blood Donations of Fargo ran the clinical portion of the blood drive, and AM 1100 The Flag radio in Fargo did live broadcasts. EPIC Properties Management provided the space for the blood drive event along with gifts to donors. Spicy Pie rewarded donors with a free slice of pizza. About 40 donors came during the day and 32 units of blood were collected. (Photo by Paul Braun | New Earth)
Along with the recent Year of St. Joseph designation by Pope Francis, this year has also been marked by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) for a special new initiative called “Walking with Moms in Need.” This aligns perfectly with the spirit of our agency’s mission, as “Guided by our Values, Catholic Charities North Dakota serves those in need and advocates for the common good of all.” Helping new moms and their little ones has been at the heart of our agency for over 98 years, starting out first as the Catholic Welfare Bureau, then called Catholic Family Service, and now as Catholic Charities North Dakota. Thus we are excited to help take the lead in working with both North Dakotan dioceses on this new effort.

As we commemorate the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, I invite you to consider if the Lord may be encouraging you to become more involved in this and other respect for life efforts in your own parish and community.

― Chad Prososki

With pregnancy workers in offices across the state, Catholic Charities can travel to or meet virtually with new moms anywhere in North Dakota. Thanks to the generous support of our two dioceses, the parishes, and many individual donors, there is never a charge to any expectant moms or dads as we help guide them through their options of parenting and adoption. With our caring staff members, we are able to provide education on parenting and help create a strong support network for those who choose to parent their child. For those who wish to pursue adoption, we can accompany them throughout the process. Making a loving plan to help another family realize their dreams of parenting is a wonderful, life-giving decision for the birthparents, child, and new adoptive family.

One of the primary goals of “Walking with Moms in Need” is to spread the word about all the great resources available to expectant parents. Along with our own services, our licensed, professional social workers are familiar with different programs to help the poor and those in need across the state. Thus we have already begun creating a directory of available resources for moms, and diocesan leaders will be inviting parishes to collaborate in identifying additional local providers. We also plan to create new awareness materials as a part of this effort, including posters and prayer cards for each parish. Hopefully we will be able to offer special events during this year as well.

The Easter season emphasizes new life, so it’s a perfect time to consider how each of us can also walk with moms in need. As we commemorate the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, I invite you to consider if the Lord may be encouraging you to become more involved in this and other respect for life efforts in your own parish and community. To learn more about our pregnancy, parenting and adoption program visit Catholic-CharitiesND.org. You can also find more about this initiative at walkingwithmoms.com. Your participation in the Walking with Moms in Need effort is a great way for our parish communities to serve as a light to the world.

We also rely on your generous financial donations to offer our pregnancy and parenting support to anyone for free through Catholic Charities, and to provide adoption services at the lowest cost we know of within the state of North Dakota. Yet just like your generous financial gifts, we also depend on your important word of mouth recommendations to refer those in need to our services. Without the many kind friends and family who become “connectors”—people who tell others about our programs—we may never have the opportunity to assist some of those who are most in need.

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Learning from Horton: say what you mean, mean what you say

Dr. Seuss’ fourth book was published in 1940 and met with critical acclaim. It features an elephant whose large ears and long trunk provided the ideal infrastructure for the artist’s distinct lumps and humps.

Today, the homely hero of “Horton Hatches The Egg” feels like a symbol of what we are sorely lacking in a culture that sets us up to be flighty and fickle. He reminds me of a Gospel principle I have found more challenging now that I’m a parent.

The tale begins when a lazy bird, Mayzie, becomes bored sitting on her egg and recruits Horton to take over, vowing to return soon. He agrees and pledges loyalty.

His resolve is tested the first night with a wicked storm. “This isn’t much fun,” remarks Horton, perched on the nest and soaking wet.

Once Mayzie lands in Palm Beach, she decides to stay. Winter arrives, and Horton is covered in icicles. “But Horton kept sitting and said with a sneeze, ‘I’ll stay on this egg and I won’t let it freeze. I meant what I said and I said what I meant… an elephant’s faithful 100 percent!’

From his perch on the egg, Horton endures endless abuse. At each hardship, he repeats his promise as a pep talk: “I meant what I said and I said what I meant… an elephant’s faithful 100 percent!” His identity becomes his mantra.

Horton lands in a traveling circus, and—lo and behold, after 51 weeks of dutifully warming that egg—it begins to hatch just as Mayzie happens upon them. She claims ownership of the egg, which shatters and stuns, revealing a winged baby elephant.

Dr. Seuss asserts the rightness of the outcome: “And it should be, it should be, it should be like that! Because Horton was faithful! He sat and he sat! He meant what he said and he said what me meant... and they sent him home happy, 100 percent!”

Horton’s statement has since been borrowed by politicians selling straight talk, never bothering to credit Seuss. They could also cite the Bible, where the principle was first articulated. In the Gospel of Matthew, we are presented a teaching on oaths: “Make good to the Lord all that you vow” (Matt. 5:33). And then comes a memorable verse: “Let your ‘yes’ mean ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ mean ‘no.’ Anything more is from the evil one.”

I remember reading this as a girl and finding it simplistic. Yes means yes, no means no—yeah, yeah, yeah, got it.

I find it much harder as an adult, fielding invitations and opportunities that seem fine and lovely but are actually demands on my time and threats to my priorities. Putting first things first, I’ve come to realize, is no small feat.

As a parent, it’s even harder to say what I mean and mean what I say. My reflex is to respond as quickly as possible—not necessarily as thoughtfully. There have been times I’ve answered a young child without knowing what I have just agreed to.

I’m learning the value of taking a pause to give myself space for thinking—and to let my kids see that. I’m discovering the merit of a response like, “I don’t know yet” and “Let me think about it.” And I’m trying to halt my fast-talking, people-pleasing impulse long enough to size up a commitment before saying yes or no.

In the end, we are defined by the promises we keep. I want mine to honor the values and people I hold dear. –Christina Capecchi

His resolve is tested the first night with a wicked storm. “This isn’t much fun,” remarks Horton, perched on the nest and soaking wet.

Once Mayzie lands in Palm Beach, she decides to stay. Winter arrives, and Horton is covered in icicles. “But Horton kept sitting and said with a sneeze, ‘I’ll stay on this egg and I won’t let it freeze. I meant what I said and I said what I meant... an elephant’s faithful 100 percent!’”

From his perch on the egg, Horton endures endless abuse. At each hardship, he repeats his promise as a pep talk: “I meant what I said and I said what I meant... an elephant’s faithful 100 percent!” His identity becomes his mantra.

Horton lands in a traveling circus, and—lo and behold, after 51 weeks of dutifully warming that egg—it begins to hatch just as Mayzie happens upon them. She claims ownership of the egg, which shatters and stuns, revealing a winged baby elephant.

Dr. Seuss asserts the rightness of the outcome: “And it should be, it should be, it should be like that! Because Horton was faithful! He sat and he sat! He meant what he said and he said what me meant... and they sent him home happy, 100 percent!”
Did you know that some of the campuses of the North Dakota University System prohibit Catholic student clubs from being truly Catholic?

This is one of those “I didn’t think it would happen here” stories.

Freedom of association goes hand-in-hand with freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Free speech and religious liberty mean little if people cannot join together under a shared belief and unite in their messaging and activities. Indeed, Jesus called us to come together. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

Free speech, religious freedom, and freedom of association are also part of the university experience. A college is a place where ideas can be shared, debated, and analyzed with respect for each other. It is also a place where students can unite with other students of similar interests and beliefs. This is why colleges and universities have so many student clubs.

How, then, did colleges and universities, including here in North Dakota, decide it was acceptable to infringe upon the right of student clubs to preserve their own mission?

It started some years ago. Under the guise of “diversity” and “inclusion” campuses started to require clubs to accept “all comers,” even if the “comer” did not agree with the club’s mission. If the club has a policy that restricts who can become a member or leader, the club is denied the same benefits as other clubs, such as access to meeting rooms, posting space, and use of student activity fees.

The Christian Legal Society (CLS) at Hastings College of Law, a part of the University of California, had a statement of faith that, among other things, required the members to be Christian and believe in traditional marriage. The law school said that the statement of faith violated the school’s all-comers policy. CLS challenged the policy and in 2010 the case reached the U.S. Supreme Court. In Christian Legal Society v. Martinez, the Supreme Court, in a 5-4 opinion authored by Justice Ginsberg, found that these policies do not violate the U.S. Constitution. Some colleges and universities viewed the decision as an invitation to enact more such policies. We now know that some of North Dakota’s state-run campuses did just that.

Legislators introduced House Bill 1503 to protect students’ free speech and religious rights in several ways, including prohibiting the North Dakota University System from enacting “all-comers” policies. To the surprise of many, the university system admitted during testimony in the House that some of the campuses have already enacted such policies, and it did not appear willing to change that practice. In fact, it opposes HB 1503 in its entirety.

The Trump Administration enacted a regulation prohibiting state-sponsored campuses from enacting “all comers” policies that discriminate against religious clubs. The North Dakota University System testified that it was in the process of revising its policies to comply with the regulation.

The proposed revision, however, does not remove the need for HB 1503. For one thing, it is apparent that the system is only making the change because it is required to by federal law, not because it is the right thing to do. The Biden Administration could rescind the rule and we would have no guarantee that religious clubs would be protected.

Second, the federal regulation applies only to religious clubs. Clubs based on ideas have no protections. Democratic clubs could not guarantee that their members be Democrats. Republican clubs could not guarantee that their members be Republicans. Pro-life clubs could not require that members and leaders believe in the sanctity of human life.

Insisting that student clubs be free to adhere to their own mission is not condoning undue discrimination. Nor is it about allowing discrimination based on race, sex, or even sexual orientation. It is about the preservation of the group’s beliefs. Student groups on the state-run campuses should not be discriminated against because of what they believe.

By the time this column appears in print, the fate of HB 1503 might be decided. Whatever the outcome, we must be vigilant about these creeping attacks on free speech and religious liberty.
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June 23 - 27 Red Willow | Biford, ND
July 14 - 18 Pelican Lake | Bottineau, ND
July 21 - 25 Camp of the Cross | Garrison, ND
July 28 - Aug 1 Pelican Lake | Bottineau, ND

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

All camp sessions will resume as normal this year. Mask regulations will be determined by each campsite’s leadership this summer, and we will still be following state and local recommendations.

For more information, and to register go to our website: www.trinityyouthcampnd.com

*Registration is due one week prior to the start of each session
At the conclusion of a seminarian’s third year of theology, he is ordained a deacon. With this being my third year, the mixture of excitement and nervousness grows as June approaches. Naturally, this leads to a lot of self-reflection, even more than a seminarian is accustomed to! Am I ready? Do I have the gifts to be an effective herald of the gospel? Have I manifested the signs of a man called to ordained ministry?

These were big questions for myself in prayer this year as I entered my third year of Theology: “Lord, do you want me to get ordained ‘on time’ or is there some area of my formation that I need a little extra time to grow in so I can be a holier and more effective deacon in my future ministry?”

The Lord in his Divine Providence decided to give me an answer over my eight-day silent retreat in January. During this time, I poured out my heart to the Lord in prayer by raising all my concerns, fears, and reasons for the approaching ordination. I would raise questions such as, “Lord what about all my weaknesses?” Or “what about all my sins?” To my surprise and delight, the Lord answered both of these questions simply and directly. To my question concerning all my weaknesses, he spoke to me through the words of St. Paul: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). To my question regarding all my sins, he said to me: “You are not your sins. Your sins do not define you. I define and say who you are. You are my beloved son in whom I have chosen to be his deacon and his priest from before I was even conceived. I’m not just some last round draft pick. God is not choosing me to become his deacon and his priest because he has run out of options and

As my eight-day silent retreat drew to a close, I did a holy hour where I prayed through my entire life from my early childhood years all the way up to the present day. God the Father showed me how he has never failed me and how he has always generously provided for me. In my latter years, he specifically showed me how he has generously worked through me and provided for me in my apostolic assignments while at seminary. As I shared all this with my spiritual director, I came to confidently realize that God has chosen me to be his deacon and his priest from before I was even conceived. I’m not just some last round draft pick. God is not choosing me to become his deacon and his priest because he has run out of options and

My diaconal discernment

no one else is willing to do it. I am made for this. He made me specifically for this vocation.

My spiritual director then asked me how this all made me feel. I told him that by myself I feel weak, and I am nothing. But with God, I feel almost bulletproof. We both laughed but then we came to this same conclusion.

As I approach my deacon ordination, I have nothing to fear. For God made me for this vocation to the diaconate and the priesthood from the start. He has already taken into account all my strengths, my weaknesses, and my sinfulness. Since God has always generously provided for me and has never failed me in the past, I can have great confidence that he will continue to never fail me and to provide generously for me in my future life and ministry as a transitional deacon and one day as a priest.

This whole experience was truly all so amazing and so humbling for me. Now as I approach my deacon ordination, whenever someone asks me, like Father Metzger, the director of vocations, did recently: “Joseph, are you ready to be ordained a deacon?” I can say with the utmost peace and confidence, “I’m ready. Let’s do it!”
Your will is one of the most important documents you will ever sign. There are certain things to avoid in order to do it right. Here are five of the more critical “don’ts” to consider:

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

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

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

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

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

We have an excellent packet of information about wills and estate planning that is yours for the asking. If you would like a will/estate planning guide, contact me at steve.schons@fargodiocese.org or (701) 356-7926.

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LIFE’S MILESTONES

Art and Ione (Undem) Anderson of Rogers celebrated their 70th anniversary on Feb. 9. Ione is a parishioner of Sacred Heart Church in Sanborn. They were married at Camp Carson, Colorado Springs, Colo. They have 6 children, 12 grandchildren, and 14 great-grandchildren.

Louise Hartl will celebrate her 100th birthday on April 28. Louise is a devoted parishioner of Sacred Heart in Cando. After all the ups and downs of life, she continues to have a positive attitude and a smile for anyone who visits.

John and Alice (Eisenzimmer) Bohl, parishioners of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Balta, will celebrate their 60th anniversary on April 10. They were married at St. John’s Church in New Rockford. They have 2 children (one deceased). They are blessed with 2 granddaughters.

Ovide Marcotte, parishioner of St. Michael’s Church in Grand Forks, will celebrate his 97th birthday on April 30. Ovide and his wife of 72 years, Verna, are blessed with 11 children, many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Richard and Barbara Borg, parishioners of St. Catherine Church in Valley City, will celebrate their 60th anniversary on Apr. 8. They are celebrated by their 4 children and spouses, 5 grandchildren, and 5 great-grandchildren.

Josephine Miller, parishioner of St. Margaret Mary’s Church in Drake, will celebrate her 100th birthday on April 14. She married Constantine Miller on Oct. 4, 1938, and they lived on a farm near Orrin until moving to Drake in 1999. Constantine passed away in 2001. They have 9 children, 35 grandchildren, 60 great-grandchildren, and 28 great-great grandchildren.

Ernie and Becky Bozovsky, parishioners of St. Anthony of Padua Church in Fargo, celebrated their 50th anniversary on April 3. They were married at Nativity Church in Fargo. They have 4 children and 7 grandchildren.

Catherine Franklin celebrated her 99th birthday on April 4. She is a parishioner of St. Catherine’s Church in Valley City. She and her late husband, Lyle Sr. (who died in 2002) had 3 children. Catherine presently lives at Eventide in Jamestown.

Catherine Palmer celebrated her 100th birthday on Jan. 5. She is a parishioner of Sacred Heart Church in Carrington where she was the organist for over 60 years. She was married 57 years to John Palmer, who passed away in 2002. They were blessed with 3 children, 8 grandchildren, and 18 great-grandchildren.

Mary Weigel, parishioner of St. Philip Neri in Napoleon, will celebrate her 100th birthday on April 23. Her husband of 67 years, Aloysius, passed away in 2011. She has 8 children and numerous grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren. Mary is a resident at the Napoleon Care Center.

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.
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
Reverend J. M. Belleau, pastor of Assumption Church in Pembina, found a new purpose for the airplane – crop “blessing.” Father Belleau flew around the countryside, covering Pembina, Joliette, and Bowesmont territories, landing in different farmyards where conditions permitted. It took the priest two hours to bless the crops over a territory which ordinarily requires a full week by car. Father Belleau is a licensed pilot and a member of the flying priests club of America “The Wings of Mercy.”

50 years ago — 1971
The Shanley Chorus raised money to finance their trip to the National Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, D. C. The 103-member boys chorus was invited to give one of three special concerts in connection with the annual festival. They also sang on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and at the National Shrine where they met Patrick Cardinal O’Boyle. The chorus was under direction of Brother Michael Collins.

20 years ago — 2001
On a typical midwest spring day in April, St. Mary’s Cathedral in Fargo began the first known perpetual adoration in the Diocese of Fargo. Bishop James S. Sullivan presided at the Mass followed by a solemn procession around the church ending at the tabernacle. The Catholic Encyclopedia defines Perpetual Adoration as “the practically uninterrupted adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.” This means St. Mary’s Cathedral plans to have at least one person present before the Lord 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

EVENTS

Grand Forks church sponsoring spaghetti pie take and bake event
Holy Family Church in Grand Forks is sponsoring a Spaghetti Pie Take and Bake on April 11. A serving for four will be bagged and ready to go anytime between 8:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. Meal includes spaghetti pie, salad, breadsticks, and dinner mints. Proceeds go to the Human Needs Committee. Free will offering.

Live your life in joy, freedom, and peace
Tim Mosser will lead a Praise-entation on May 2 from 1 to 4 p.m. at St. John’s Church in Wahpeton. This is a mini retreat for youth, women, and men. All faiths welcome. No registration required. Tim Mosser is the director of the Respect Life office for the Fargo Diocese and uses music, humor, and real life stories to share the joy of the Gospel.

Maryvale to lead mother-daughter retreat
Head to Maryvale in Valley City for a Mother-Daughter Retreat on May 26 from 6 to 8:30 p.m. This retreat will provide mothers and daughters with mutual experiences of prayer and sharing along with personal prayer time. Brief conferences will enable retreatants to engage in helpful conversation. Suggested donation per person is $20. Register by May 19 at dorothy.bunce@fargodiocese.org or (701) 845-2864.

Diocese of Fargo to sponsor women’s retreat Aug. 13-15.
Join the Diocese of Fargo for Jesus Approaches: A Women’s Retreat, led by award-winning author and writer Liz Kelly. The retreat will include conferences, time for prayer and rest, social time, Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, and the opportunity to go to confession. It will be a chance to step out of the routine and stress of daily life in order to encounter the Lord Jesus through prayer and inspiring talks. This retreat is Aug. 13–15 at the Franciscan Retreat Center in Hankinson. Register at fargodiocese.org/evangelization-retreats-workshops.

Sacred relics coming to Cathedral of St. Mary April 30.
The Cathedral of St. Mary in Fargo is presenting a teaching and exposition of Sacred Relics on April 30 at 6:30 p.m. Father Carlos Martins of the Companions of the Cross will bring an extraordinary Vatican collection of over 150 relics, some as old as 2,000 years. Among the treasures will be relics of St. Joseph, St. Maria Goretti, St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Thomas Aquinas, and St. Faustina Kowalska. There will also be a portion of the Veil of Our Lady and one of the largest remaining pieces of the True Cross in the world. Those in attendance will be able to examine and venerate each relic. Throughout history, many healings have been worked in the presence of relics; and many have been come about through this ministry. You are encouraged to bring your articles of devotion (such as rosaries, holy cards, etc.) and pictures of ill friends/family members, which you will be able to touch to the reliquaries as a means of intercession.
On March 7, Pope Francis expressed joy at the vitality of the Church in Iraq despite years of fierce persecution. Celebrating Mass in the Franso Hariri Stadium in Erbil, the pope praised the country’s dwindling Christian community for its care for the poor.

“The Church in Iraq, by God’s grace, is already doing much to proclaim this wonderful wisdom of the cross by spreading Christ’s mercy and forgiveness, particularly towards those in greatest need,” he told an estimated 10,000 people gathered in the stadium.

“Even amid great poverty and difficulty, many of you have generously offered concrete help and solidarity to the poor and suffering. That is one of the reasons that led me to come as a pilgrim in your midst, to thank you and to confirm you in your faith and witness.”

“Today, I can see at first hand that the Church in Iraq is alive, that Christ is alive and at work in this, his holy and faithful people.”

The pope was visiting the capital of the Kurdistan Region on the final day of a three-day trip to Iraq intended to strengthen the hope of the country’s persecuted Christian minority and foster fraternity and interreligious dialogue.

On his first foreign trip since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, Francis made history by becoming the first pope to visit Iraq.

In a mark of the visit’s impact on the war-ravaged country, Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi declared March 6 a National Day of Tolerance and Coexistence in honor of Pope Francis’ landmark meeting with the country’s top Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

Celebrating Mass on the Third Sunday of Lent, the pope noted that many Iraqis bore “the wounds of war and violence... both visible and invisible.”

Near him stood a restored Marian statue vandalized by the Islamic State during its occupation of villages in the Nineveh Plains from 2014 to 2017. The statue’s hands hung from sockets in a reminder of its mutilation.

Many Christians were forced to flee their homes, seeking refuge in the Kurdistan Region and abroad. Before Saddam Hussein was deposed in 2003, there were 1.4 million Christians in Iraq. Today there are no more than 250,000.

“The temptation is to react to these and other painful experiences with human power, human wisdom. Instead, Jesus shows us the way of God, the path that he took, the path on which he calls us to follow him,” the pope said, preaching in the stadium named in honor of Erbil’s first Christian governor, assassinated in 2001.

There was a joyous atmosphere at the Mass, with a small group from the Neocatechumenal Way at the back of the stadium leading festivities before the pope’s arrival. The Prayer of the Faithful was said in Assyrian, Arabic, Kurdish, and English, in a sign of the diversity of Iraqi Christianity.

Reflecting on the day’s Gospel reading, the cleansing of the Temple (John 2:13-25), the pope said, “Jesus not only cleanses us of our sins, but gives us a share in his own power and wisdom. He liberates us from the narrow and divisive notions of family, faith and community that divide, oppose and exclude, so that we can build a Church and a society open to everyone and concerned for our brothers and sisters in greatest need.”

See full article at catholicnewsagency.com.

Diocesan policy: Reporting child abuse
The Diocese of Fargo is committed to the protection of youth. Please report any incidents or suspected incidents of child abuse, including sexual abuse, to civil authorities. If the situation involves a member of the clergy or a religious order, a seminarian, or an employee of a Catholic school, parish, the diocesan offices or other Catholic entity within the diocese, we ask that you also report the incident or suspected incident to Msgr. Joseph Gor-ering, vicar general, at (701) 356-7945 or the victim assistance coordinator, at (701) 356-7965 or by email at victimassistance@fargodiocese.org. To make a report of sexual abuse of a minor and related misconduct by bishops, go to ReportBishopAbuse.org or call 1-800-276-1562.
On March 15, the Vatican’s doctrinal office clarified that the Catholic Church does not have the power to give liturgical blessings of homosexual unions.

Answering the question, “does the Church have the power to give the blessing to unions of persons of the same sex,” the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) responded, “negative.”

In an accompanying note, the doctrine office explained that blessings are sacramentals, and “consequently, in order to conform with the nature of sacramentals, when a blessing is invoked on particular human relationships, in addition to the right intention of those who participate, it is necessary that what is blessed be objectively and positively ordered to receive and express grace, according to the designs of God inscribed in creation, and fully revealed by Christ the Lord.”

“Therefore, only those realities which are in themselves ordered to serve those ends are congruent with the essence of the blessing imparted by the Church,” the CDF said.

For this reason, it is not licit to impart a blessing on relationships, or partnerships, even stable, that involve sexual activity outside of marriage (i.e., outside the indissoluble union of a man and a woman open in itself to the transmission of life), as is the case of the unions between persons of the same sex.”

The ruling and note were approved for publication by Pope Francis and signed by CDF prefect Cardinal Luis Ladaria and secretary Archbishop Giacomo Morandi.

The CDF’s note did not state the origin of the dubium submitted to the doctrinal office, but noted that “in some ecclesial contexts, plans and proposals for blessings of unions of persons of the same sex are being advanced.”

In recent years, German bishops in particular have been increasingly outspoken in demanding “discussions about an opening” towards acceptance of practiced homosexuality and the blessing of homosexual unions in the Church.

Following consultations in Berlin in late 2019, the chairman of the marriage and family commission of the German bishops’ conference declared that the German bishops agreed that homosexuality is a “normal form” of human sexual identity.

The topic also plays a central role in one of four forums that constitute the controversial “Synodal Process” underway in Germany.

The CDF explained in 2003 that “the Church teaches that respect for homosexual persons cannot lead in any way to approval of homosexual behavior or to legal recognition of homosexual unions.”

German bishops who have publicly voiced support for the blessing of same-sex unions in the Catholic Church include Cardinal Reinhard Marx of Munich and Freising, Bishop Georg Bätzing of Limburg, Bishop Franz-Josef Bode of Osnabrück, and Bishop Heinrich Timmerervers of Dresden-Meißen.

Bätzing, the president of the German bishops’ conference, in December 2020 called for changes to the section on homosexuality in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Expressing openness to blessings of homosexual unions, he said, “we need solutions for this.”

On Feb. 23, Bishop Peter Kohlgraf of Mainz defended his support for a book of blessings and rites for homosexual unions. The book followed a May 2020 publication from Austria about how same-sex couples might receive a formal, liturgical blessing. Kohlgraf suggested that Catholics with homosexual inclinations cannot all be expected to live chastely.

The call for liturgical blessings of same-sex unions is part of a wider push by some German bishops to change the Church’s teaching on a number of issues, including on the sacraments of priestly ordination and marriage.

CNA’s German partner agency, CNA Deutsch, reported that Bätzing has suggested that the Vatican Synod of Bishops on synodality, scheduled for October 2022, could help implement German “Synodal Way” resolutions not only in Germany, but throughout the Catholic Church.
Smiles gave away the save this Ash Wednesday

There’s something so beautiful and life-giving about a simple smile. And in these times of COVID-19 and masks, this strikes me in a particular way. The smile on a human face is a true gift from God, revealing and expressing delight of the soul.

In our advocacy and prayer ministry at our state’s only abortion facility, smiles can take on a variety of meanings. Sometimes we see people walking past the escorts, smiling in a manner that seems almost theatrical, going out of their way to tell the workers how “very much we appreciate your awesome work!” But we’re not fooled. We know that this kind of smile, in this context, in this manner, exposes a deception deep in the soul. Only in that way is it a truth.

Other times, the darkness of this corner in our city can only be overcome by a lightness of heart. Though our work is somber, we must, at times, smile at one another and even laugh together. The need to bring, in moments at least, levity to offset our close proximity to evil cannot be underestimated.

In all of the smiles I’ve encountered on the sidewalk, however, none can top the one I encountered this Ash Wednesday. This day on the sidewalk tends to be especially heartbreaking. As Catholics, we’re already facing the heaviness of Lent when we approach the sidewalk of the abortion facility. We’ve just been reminded that we are dust, and of the gravity of our actions. The ashen cross comes with us and seems to burrow into our skin.

But this year, something beautiful happened this day. I had tried talking with a mom on her way in, and when she went inside anyway, I attempted to converse with the two friends who’d accompanied her, a male and female. The female friend shook her head, said something in broken English I couldn’t quite make out, and ran across the street to her car. But not before hearing our assurance that we could help her friend; that it wasn’t too late for her to come back out.

“You don’t have to go in. You can come back out. We’re here for you.” These were the words, we later learned, that had stayed with the mom; words that—as she raised a pen once inside the facility to sign away her rights to her baby, giving an abortionist permission to take her child from her womb and still its beating heart—made her freeze.

As she’d later share, our words echoing in her head—that simple invitation to come back out—had prompted her to pick up her cell phone and dial her male friend. “I’m supposed to sign these papers, and I don’t know what to do,” she’d said. “Don’t do it. Come out,” he’d responded. “We’ll help you.”

I was praying the Rosary with a small group when I saw, off to the side, the mom emerging from the building, and one of our newer advocates approaching her. They stood in the parking lot nearby, and I soon noticed that rather than rushing away from the advocate, the mom had stopped. They were talking, and—wait, what was I seeing? Smiles! Beautiful, bright smiles. A tap. A hug. Clearly, this was no ordinary exit. Those smiles gave away that this could well be a save.

A few more advocates joined them, and soon, I, too, was walking over to the little circle that had formed, just feet from the facility, to confirm, congratulate, and hug. It wasn’t an illusion. This mama had chosen life for her child, and she was so happy. We were elated with her.

The advocate who first responded led the mom and her friends to Women’s Care Center to continue her journey of “yes.” All because she’d heard our words—words that often seem futile: “You can come out...”

By the time this reaches you, our Lent 2021 will be complete, and the effects of Easter morning will be upon us. But I marvel in reflecting on this Ash Wednesday miracle; to recall how, even as our 40 days in the desert were beginning, God was reaching out to remind us that while our journey would be hard at times, the Resurrection would be coming. Indeed, we had just glimpsed it.

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 May New Earth.

Where in the diocese are we?

Last month’s photo is of St. John’s Church in Saint John.