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The gift of grandparents and the elderly

We recently celebrated the first World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, inaugurated by Pope Francis and celebrated on July 25, the day before the Church honors Sts. Anne and Joachim, the grandparents of Jesus. By calling this special observance, our Holy Father recognizes the gifts and contributions of our grandparents and elders, and he invites the entire Church to honor these venerable members of our human family.

Pope Francis often mentions his grandmother Rosa, who was an important influence in his life. He speaks of her role in forming his faith as a boy and as a young man, and his vocation to the priesthood. Our elders and our grandparents are often wonderful witnesses of faith who hand on the faith to us, their descendants, as a gift of love. My own grandparents loved our Lord, lived their faith, and shared that faith with their children and grandchildren. I remember their prayerful devotion and their love for the Church, which certainly left a mark on me and my family. Grandparents and the elderly transmit the gift of faith not only by their words, but by the way they live their lives, transparent in faith and in hope for eternal life. Because of their advanced age, the elderly can sense the approaching day when they will meet our Lord, and they teach us to live in anticipation of that great day.

There is a certain wisdom that can come with age, a clarity about what matters and what doesn’t. After long years of joys and sorrows, gain and loss, success and failure, the elderly have a perspective about life and a sense of wisdom that can be valuable for all of us. We do well to listen to what our elders have to say and to learn from their wisdom. Experience is a great teacher, and the elderly still have much to teach us about life, family, friendship, and faith. Their memories of past events and local history is a great resource for our families and our parishes. The experiences of our grandparents can help us to understand where we came from and where we’re going. And in a personal way, I’ve always enjoyed hearing the stories of our older priests who have so much pastoral experience and wisdom about priestly life.

In their own way, our grandparents and older friends can be the contemplatives of our parishes. Their lives may not be as active as they once were, and perhaps they spend more time at home because of the limitations of age or infirmity. But their quiet lives might allow them now to pray more often, more deeply, and more generously. Our elders might have the time to pray for their families and friends, for their parishes and their pastors, for the Church and for the world. Even those who are confined by illness have the freedom to enter deeply into the mystery of Christ’s own cross and suffering. As they join their own sufferings to his, they can become powerful intercessors for the needs of others, and the scope of their prayer can be practically unlimited. Old age might diminish our freedom and strength, but it can’t diminish the power of our prayers. The aged will always have a unique mission and purpose through the call to prayer and intercession.

Too often the elderly are regarded as a burden, no longer productive members of society. The euthanasia movement, which becomes more aggressive with every passing year, tells us that some lives are not worth living and should therefore be ended. The elderly who are ill and infirm are especially vulnerable to this mindset, which masquerades as compassion. Rather than dispose of the elderly, we should cherish them, support them, love them, and receive the love that they have to offer. Even in old age with all its challenges, life is a blessing and a gift, and no one should assume that the elderly have nothing to contribute. If nothing else, they remind us to think of someone beside ourselves.

One common affliction for the elderly is loneliness and isolation. Oftentimes, they have lost their independence and have fewer opportunities to interact with friends and neighbors. During the past year, the pandemic forced many of our grandparents and older friends to be alone and isolated from those they loved. Visiting an elderly neighbor is a true act of charity, especially for those who are homebound and dependent on the help of others. A phone call or a card can remind our elders that they are remembered and loved, that we are thinking of them, and that their lives are still valued.

This World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly reminds us that God has a plan for us in every season of our lives. Pope John Paul II famously wrote: “Old age might diminish our freedom and strength, but it can’t diminish the power of our prayers. The aged will always have a unique mission and purpose through the call to prayer and intercession.”
Francis speaks of his own call to the Chair of Peter in Rome even when he had already reached the age of retirement. God was not finished with him yet! Reflecting on his own experience as an elder, he say, “The Lord is always—always—close to us. He is close to us with new possibilities, new ideas, new consolations, but always close to us. You know that the Lord is eternal; he never, ever goes into retirement.”

To all of you who are grandparents and to all the elderly, I offer my own greeting and word of gratitude. Each one of you is a beloved child of God and a cherished member of the Church. We thank you for all you have done to bring up your families and support your neighbors. We thank you for handing on the gift of faith and witnessing to that faith throughout your lives. And we thank you for your prayer, which sustains us and brings us closer to God. Like Sts. Joachim and Anne, like Abraham and Sarah, and like all the elders in the Scriptures, you have an essential part to play in the unfolding of salvation history. We ask God to bless you and support you every day of your lives.

Quotable
St. Jane Frances de Chantal
Feast day Aug. 21

“Hold your eyes on God and leave the doing to Him. That is all the doing you have to worry about.”

Diocese of Fargo Official Appointments/Announcements
Most Rev. John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo, has made the following appointments, announcement, and/or decrees:

Robert Pecotte, who was ordained to the presbyterate for the Diocese of Fargo in 2004, received the favor of a dispensation from the obligations of the clerical state from Pope Francis, effective May 28, 2021.
Nothing is known of St. James the Greater’s early life, though it has been established that he is the son of Zebedee and Salome and brother of John the disciple. The title “the Greater” was added to St. James’ name to help distinguish him from the Apostle James “the Lesser,” who is believed to have been shorter than James “the Greater.”

St. James the Greater was one of Jesus’ first disciples. James was fishing with his father and John the Apostle when Jesus came to the shores of the Sea of Galilee and called for the fishermen, who were unable to catch any fish that day, to dip their nets in the water once again. When the fishermen followed Jesus’ instructions, they found their nets full, and after emptying the fish on board, the boats nearly sank from their weight.

Later, James was one of only three called by Jesus to witness his Transfiguration, and when he and his brother wanted to call fire upon a Samaritan town, both were rebuked by Jesus. Following Christ’s Ascension, James spread the Gospel across Israel and the Roman kingdom. He traveled and spread the Word for nearly 40 years in Spain.

James returned to Jerusalem and was martyred for his faith by King Herod. St. James the Greater is known as the first apostle to die. He was not allowed to be buried following his martyrdom, so some of his followers took his remains to Compostela, Spain. In the ninth century, his remains were discovered and moved to a tomb in Santiago de Compostela. Today, his remains can still be found in the Cathedral of Santiago.

In the Diocese of Fargo, St. James Basilica in Jamestown was named for St. James the Greater.

Historical information from Catholic Online.
There are several questions here, so let’s deal with them in order.

Why do we pray to Mary? This is probably one of the most asked questions and is often a focus of criticism. Perhaps the place to start is the word “pray.” In English the word “pray” means simply “to ask.” It does not mean “worship.” Many Protestants equate the two terms, but they are not the same. In Catholicism the word “worship or adore” is latria. This is the adoration given only to God. Catholics do not worship Mary as a goddess and we do not consider her divine. She is human just as we are, but she was chosen by God to be the Mother of Jesus who is God with us. Therefore, we call her Mother of God. We give her what we call dulia, which means “honor or venerate.” As in the command to honor your father and mother. When we ask her to pray, we are asking her to pray for us.

St. Paul recommends intercessory prayer for others and such prayer does not end when someone dies and goes to heaven. St. James wrote, “the prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects.” Those in heaven can and do pray for us. That includes all the saints. We consider them to be our elder brothers and sisters in Christ who constantly pray for us before the throne of God. Praying to Mary and the saints is scriptural and part of Christian tradition all the way back to the early Church. One of the earliest prayers dates from the third century, “Mother of God, [listen to] my petitions; do not disregard us in adversity, but rescue us from danger.” In the catacombs, there are inscriptions asking for the prayers of the saints. Beneath St. Peter’s basilica was found the inscription, “Peter, pray for the holy Christian men buried near your body.” Thus we see devotion to a saint, prayers to a saint, and prayers for the dead all common practice in the early Church.

Our Code of Canon Law says in canon 1186: “To foster the sanctification of the people of God, the Church commends to the special and filial reverence of the Christian faithful the Blessed Mary ever Virgin, Mother of God, whom Christ established as the mother of all people, and promotes the true and authentic veneration of the other saints whose example instructs the Christian faithful and whose intercession sustains them.” There are a variety of ways that we show our devotion and ask the prayers of Mary and the saints. Many of these come from the long history of the Church and the wide variety of cultures that are part of our faith. These are tried and true ways to pray. The rosary has pride of place for Latin Catholics, but there are many other forms of prayer. Novenas, litanies, scapulars, medals, and other such devotions are part of the treasure of the Church. Catholics are free to pick which ones they find helpful.

Prayer is both simple and complicated. It is simple in that it can just be reciting the rosary. However, if one truly meditates on the mysteries of the rosary, you get into deeper concepts quickly. Faith deals with complicated issues, and so at times is complex in its answers. Our Catholic devotions can appeal to both the simple and the complicated parts of our lives. You can read part four of the Catechism of the Catholic Church for a summary of our teaching on prayer.

Given all of this information, what should we do? Personally, we can choose which devotions to Mary and the saints foster our spiritual lives. Everyone has different personalities and needs and there are plenty of ways to pray. Mary is not only the Mother of Jesus, but also the Mother of all of us who by baptism become brothers and sisters of Christ. Mary is our mother too and will always pray for us. We can also choose special patron saints who we ask to pray for us, maybe the one you are named after or your confirmation saint. These devotions help to remind us that we are part of the communion of saints and are never alone.

We can also share these things with our Protestant brethren. Many harbor misconceptions about the Church and our devotion to Mary and the saints. Christ is indeed our “one mediator between God and man,” but he invites all of us to pray for each other. In no way does our devotion to Mary and the saints diminish Christ. In fact, it leads us to a deeper relationship with Christ. Mary has only one command recorded in scripture, “do whatever he tells you.” Mary always leads us closer to her son. Catholics know this from 2,000 years of experience dating back to the Apostles. This is a great gift we can offer to non-Catholic Christians.
The Blessed Sacrament and faith

This month’s article reflects upon the greatest of all the Sacraments, the Holy Eucharist. It is the greatest because it is Jesus himself. All the other Sacraments are grace-causing signs. The Eucharist, or Blessed Sacrament, contains the author of all grace, Jesus Christ.

The essential teaching on the Blessed Sacrament comes down to two dogmas: the Real Presence and Transubstantiation. The Real Presence means that after the words of consecration pronounced at Mass by the priest, the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity become truly present. Jesus said at the Last Supper, “This is my Body. This is my Blood,” clearly meaning that the bread and wine truly became His Body and Blood. When he told the disciples to “Do this in memory of me,” he wanted them also to transform bread and wine into his Body and Blood. When he told the disciples to “Do this in memory of me,” he wanted them also to transform bread and wine into his Body and Blood. Jesus’ presence in the Sacrament is real; it is him, not a mere symbol or reminder of him.

St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:27–31 warns about taking Communion unworthily. He says that to receive the Sacrament unworthily is to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (that is, guilty of the Lord’s death), and that the person eats and drinks judgment upon themselves! Interestingly, he blames unworthy reception for why many people become sick and die. Why would St. Paul use such strong and energetic language to warn about improper use of a mere symbol? Why would he speak about God’s judgment over a memorial meal? Why would people be getting sick and dying, unless they were guilty of abusing the very Body of the Son of God?

Next, Transubstantiation. To explain the fact of the Real Presence, the Church teaches the dogma of Transubstantiation. It means that what was bread and wine before the consecration, ceases to be bread and wine, but becomes, is replaced by, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Normally, when a substance (what a thing is) changes, the appearance also changes. If a stick burns, it becomes ash. The substance of a stick is no longer present, and the appearance matches that change. In the Eucharist though, by a miracle, God allows the natural qualities of bread and wine to remain (how they look, smell, taste, etc.), but the substance has completely changed. It would be like the stick becoming a cow, but still looking like a stick.

This teaching has many advantages for us. First, God desires to give himself as food (John 6). He desires to nourish our souls just as food nourishes our bodies. But it would be repulsive for us to eat another body in its true form. Therefore, God allows the external qualities of bread and wine to remain in the Blessed Sacrament, since they are basic foods for humans. Thus, we may truly eat the Body of Christ, but in the natural qualities of bread and wine.

Next, in receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in a way that is hidden from our senses, our faith is stretched. Saying that what looks to be bread and wine really is the Body and Blood of the Son of God is somewhat scandalous to rationality... until we remember that the God who created the world out of nothing, can certainly change bread and wine into His Body and Blood, without changing their appearance. No matter how great our theological knowledge, the Real Presence and Transubstantiation will always remain a matter of faith.

To conclude, let us ask ourselves, do we really believe that Jesus is present in the Blessed Sacrament? And next, if we really believed, how would that change us? How would this faith change what we choose to do on Sundays? what time we arrive for Mass and when we leave? how we dress for Mass? how we act in the sacred space of the church? the reverence we offer as we approach the moment of reception of Communion? the kind of churches we build? the kind of music we sing at Mass? Ask yourself, if a non-Catholic visitor came to Mass and watched me (us) throughout, would they have the impression that I really believe that I meet God in the Blessed Sacrament? Ask yourself, when my children and grandchildren observe me at Mass, do I give witness that I really believe in the Real Presence?

In truth, the faith is “caught” more than it is taught. People will be attracted more by how we live our faith than by our explanations of it. We can talk about the Blessed Sacrament “until the cows come home,” but others will encounter the truth more by the love and reverence we show. Be the one who shows total devotion, love, and reverence for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Others will soon catch on.
Prioress of Annunciation Monastery celebrates 25th anniversary

Valley City native Sister Nicole Kunze, a Benedictine Sister of Annunciation Monastery, Bismarck, celebrated her Silver (25th) Jubilee of monastic profession on June 19 in a Eucharistic celebration at Our Lady of the Annunciation Chapel with the monastic community, family, and friends. She has served as prioress of Annunciation Monastery since 2016. She is pictured here with her parents Allen and Marilyn Kunze. (submitted photo)

Blessing of three crosses near Balfour

The Drake Knights of Columbus Council #5856 sponsored the blessing of three wooden crosses on a hill one-and-a-half miles west and one-and-a-half miles north of Balfour. The construction and placement of the crosses was a project between Tom Alme and his son, TJ Alme, both of Balfour and Council #5856. On June 14, Father Tom Graner blessed the crosses in a formal ceremony with several Knights from the Drake Council and their spouses attending. Soon to be added will be 20 small white crosses representing each child killed at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. on Dec. 14, 2012. These crosses were constructed by Tom shortly after the shooting. Pictured left to right are Donald Zuther, Father Thomas Graner, and Tom Alme. (submitted photo)
Russ and Mary Mauch, parishioners of St. John the Baptist’s Church in Wyndmere, hosted the annual Rural Life Celebration on their farm June 27. They operate a sunflower receiving site for North Dakota, South Dakota, and Canadian farmers as well as grow corn and soybeans. After the prompting of Father Troy Simonson, pastor of St. John the Baptist in Wyndmere and St. Arnold’s in Milnor, the Mauch family decided to host the fourth Diocesan-wide event that celebrates rural life and asks for God’s continued blessing on the land.

“It was fun to see everybody and meet new people,” said Russ. “We met some folks from north of Grand Forks, someone from Steele... some people came from a long way.”

“I thought that it was very successful,” said Mary. “All the surrounding parishes—Wyndmere, Mantador, Moorhead, Lidgerwood—helped to set up, take down, serve food, direct traffic, and brought animals—the cattle, horses, chickens—it wouldn’t be possible without everyone contributing.”

In his homily, Bishop Folda pointed to the faith of Jairus, whose daughter was dying, and the woman who suffered from illness for 12 years as inspiration for farmers during difficult times.

“They put all their trust in Jesus, and he heard their prayers.” said Bishop Folda. “To the woman who had suffered so long, Jesus said, ‘Daughter, your faith has saved you.’ And she was healed. To Jairus, he said, ‘Do not be afraid; just have faith.’ And Jesus restored life to his daughter. Both of these people were moved by faith to put their trust in our Lord, and our Lord responded to them in their need.”

“You who are farmers know that working the land is an act of faith. We do our part, we carry out all the necessary steps to raise our crops and our herds, but then we have to entrust the whole project to God. Creation is given to us for our use, but we aren’t in total control, so we need faith, and we need prayer. When we pray, we express to God our dependence on him, our need for his help and his care.”

Bishop Folda blessed animals and machinery, celebrated Mass, and afterwards those gathered celebrated with a meal, fellowship, and a bouncy house. The Mass took place outside and was finished before it started to rain, so both Father Simonson and Russ’s prayers were answered.

“Father Simonson was concerned about the rain, but I was praying for it,” said Russ.

Rural communities have “special God-given role” as stewards of the land and creation

By Kristina Lahr

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. –Deuteronomy 8:10
AROUND THE DIOCESE

ND Catholic Daughters of the Americas gather for annual convention

By Laurel Ann Dukart, Immediate Past State Regent

State Officers and State Chaplain were installed during Mass at St. Bernard’s Church in Belfield. Congratulations to the newly installed State Officers and State Chaplain:

• State Regent: Mary Baer, Ct. Mother of Perpetual Help #2148, Belfield
• 1st Vice State Regent: Deb Johnson, Ct. St. Ann #261, Fargo
• 2nd Vice State Regent: Sue Judd, Ct. St. Gerard #2518, Valley City
• State Secretary: Rita Mastel, Ct. Immaculate Conception #322, Bismarck
• State Treasurer: Angela Scheett, Ct. Marquette #677, Grand Forks
• State Chaplain: Rev. Father Shane Campbell, Ct. Mother of Perpetual Help #2148, Belfield

“Holy Spirit, Come Zoom with Us” was the theme of this year’s virtual 52nd Biennial ND State Catholic Daughters of the Americas Convention held on May 1. The National Director/Supervisor, State Officers, and State Chaplain met in Belfield, members of Local Courts met in their hometowns, and all joined together via Zoom.

Catholic Daughters of the Americas participates in the religious, charitable, and educational apostolates of the Church. The organization engages in creative and spiritual programs that provide its members with the opportunity to develop their God-given talents in meaningful ways that positively influence the welfare of the Church and people throughout the world.

Bishop David Kagan zoomed in to welcome us and give his blessing for a good convention. Keynote speaker Jean Gatz shared tips on how to unwrap God’s many gifts. State Officers read names of deceased members, and Charlotte Kitsch and members of Ct. St. Mary #268, Devils Lake led a memorial rosary.

A highlight of each convention is when Local Courts share their court symbols. A court member explains the meaning of their symbol and how it relates to their court. Some symbols this year were: ice cream social; a sheep (Harvest Hope Farms); St. Patrick’s Day luncheon; life-size three-month old fetus wrapped in pink/blue blankets; Mondays for Mary; The October Rosary; backpack program; St. Gianna baby/mom shower; and blankets for Confirmation students.

Each convention delegates vote on a State Project for the next two years. The 2021-2023 State Project is the Women’s Care Center in Bismarck, Devils Lake, and Fargo. Local Courts and the State Court will donate to this project over the next two years.
The ongoing pandemic in Chimbote, Peru continues to devastate the poor we serve with the highest mortality rate in the world, health systems in collapse, and a vaccination rate of less than 5%.

The economic collapse in the cash economy due to COVID-19 quarantines and minimal government support has resulted in severe hunger for the poor. The elderly and handicapped have been even more affected due to their lack of mobility and increased risk from COVID-19. Feeding the hungry has been a part of our mission over the past four decades. This crisis is the worst we have seen.

With additional funding from donors and redirecting funds from other programs, humanitarian aid has been our top priority over the past 16 months. Working with community leaders and authorities helped us to identify those in greatest need and to receive permission to deliver aid during the quarantine.

Additional food supplies were provided to our existing soup kitchens, but capacity to serve more people was essential. Assembling food and water packages at our mission that could feed a family for a week and be delivered to those in quarantine became an ongoing program. We also identified Olla Comuns (Common Pots) in neighborhoods where meals were prepared and shared with those in need, so we provided supplies.

However, more was needed in the poorest barrios, especially in our new service areas of San Pedro and Cambio Puente in the invasions on the outskirts of the city. With funds from St. Michael’s of Prior Lake that had been raised to build homes on mission trips that could not happen, new soup kitchens were built and outfitted in San Pedro and Cambio Puente. Community members now cook meals for hundreds of families with supplies we provide.

With fish as a main staple of the Chimbotanos, our Mission team reached out to a local partner and fishing company, Hayduk. We were able to negotiate for 4,000 pounds of fresh fish at...
deep discount to be put on ice and delivered to the Bella Vista neighborhood in Cambio Puente.

The mission team set up at the new San Miguel soup kitchen with the fish and bags of bread from our bakery, Solidaripan. Without refrigeration in their homes, the fish would be salted, and one of the favorite meals of Causa with fish, potatoes, and onions would be prepared.

However, word soon spread into the neighborhoods surrounding Bella Vista. Hundreds of families lined up and patiently waited to receive bread and fish to feed their families. One by one for many hours, beneficiaries humbly presented plastic bags, tubs and buckets to receive and walk home with their precious fish and bags of bread. When the lines kept forming and getting longer, there was anxiety that some would be turned away. Over 350 families were served that day. No one went home empty-handed.

It was a day of wonder, solidarity, faith, and gratitude that we could feed thousands of people in a day and provide what many beneficiaries and ACAF staff believe was a miracle. During this COVID-19 crises, we have provided over 300,000 meals compared to 75,000 the previous year. New humanitarian campaigns are sorely needed and will continue to be delivered as resources allow.

Thank you for all that our friends and parishes in the Fargo Diocese have done and continue to do to allow our Fargo-based mission to impact and transform the lives of the poorest of the poor in Chimbote, Peru. We ask for your continued prayers and support.

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Local parish podcast a hit with parishioners

By Paul Braun

It all started with the COVID-19 pandemic. When Masses were suspended at Holy Family Church in Grand Forks in March 2020, three staff members in the parish office decided to do a “Hello, we miss you” video on the parish Facebook page for parishioners.

“We had different groups participate to try and reach out to those who were homebound,” said Stacey Hanson, Business Manager at Holy Family. “It was well received. Once we were able to attend Mass again, we did more videos, giving updates weekly on selling Scrip fundraising gift cards and welcoming people safely back to the parish.”

After a few weeks, the trio stopped producing the videos, and were immediately asked why by some of the more regular viewers.

“They missed us as much as we missed them,” said Hanson. “We decided to keep going weekly, informing viewers about events at Holy Family with special guests from different ministries and events.”

The video’s creators held a contest to name the show, and CIA, Christians in Action, won out. Hanson says the videos are a wonderful resource to get out information for Holy Family. “We hear comments from people that we ‘crack them up’ giving information while being who we are,” said Hanson. “We also see it as an evangelization tool.”

Anyone on Facebook can see the show on the Holy Family Grand Forks Facebook page. The producers of the show hope that people see that the Catholic Church has people like them; younger and anything but perfect, and welcoming to everyone. Hanson says they see CIA as using comradery, chemistry, and their God-given talents to bring information to people in the digital age.
Does a parish really die when the parish church closes for good? Not according to members of the former St. Patrick’s Church in Hurdsfield. Although their church closed in 2019 after 112 years of service to the faithful, the last of seven Christian churches to close in the city, parishioners wanted to create a lasting memory to attest that their church once stood and was a thriving place of worship in the Hurdsfield area.

On June 22, about 30 former parishioners gathered in the Catholic portion of the Hurdsfield city cemetery to dedicate a monument to the memory of their church and parish. Parishioners authorized the purchase of the memorial marker out of parish funds that remained after the church closed.

“This is one of the things we wanted to do, to have some sort of recognition of our church out here,” said Carol Rask, a former parishioner. “A parish doesn’t really die; we just keep on living at different churches.”

Four pastors representing neighboring parishes that absorbed St. Patrick’s parishioners when the church closed attended the memorial dedication. Father Brian Bachmeier, of St. Augustine’s Church in Fessenden, led the prayers and dedication, and was joined by Father Terry Dodge of Sacred Heart in Carrington, Father Kevin Boucher of St. Cecilia’s in Harvey, and Father Thomas Graner of Holy Family in McClusky.

“I feel the closure of a parish is part of the Paschal Mystery,” said Father Boucher. “Although our mortal bodies die, there is eternal life that awaits us. And although a corporation may come to an end, those who were a part of it and still living move on to the other places, so there is a resurrection that follows that. We’re blessed at our parish to have some of these members there.”

Parishioners also set aside funds when the parish closed for perpetual care of the graves of the faithful buried near the new marker. Remaining funds were sent to surrounding parishes. Members of St. Patrick’s felt it was fitting to place the marker near the graves of those who pioneered the Catholic faith in the Hurdsfield area and kept the parish alive for so many years.

“The church is closed, but I look at this as a way to say thank you,” said Carol Rask. “It’s a little heartbreaking, but it’s fulfilling to see that we did this; that instead of just our church closing we did this as a way to say thank you.”

Although there is no more Catholic church in Hurdsfield, the building is still in use. It has been turned into one-room apartments with shared laundry and restroom facilities. The kitchen and gathering area in the former church basement are being used for the same purposes for those who rent rooms. It’s a fitting legacy left behind by 112 years of fellowship and hospitality that was once the parish family of St. Patrick’s.
St. Alphonsus Elementary celebrates 100th anniversary

St. Alphonsus Elementary School in Langdon is proud to celebrate 100 years of great faith-based education. St. Alphonsus kicked off the celebration with an ice cream social on July 16. On July 17, the school was open for music, tours, and visiting. Many St. Alphonsus alumni showed up to celebrate the wonderful achievement. Bishop Folda celebrated Mass at St. Alphonsus Church, and the St. Alphonsus School Foundation served an appreciation supper afterward to over 350 people. The staff of St. Alphonsus School are honored to continue offering a great education to all students for many years to come. They would like to thank all those that attended and shared great memories.

Bishop Folda celebrates Mass on July 17 at St. Alphonsus Church in Langdon for the 100th anniversary of St. Alphonsus Elementary School. (submitted photo)

8th grade class of 2001 stands with their (and current) 8th grade teacher, Sue Bata. (submitted photo)

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Respect Life Office – Diocese of Fargo
In January, Pope Francis announced a new celebration in honor of grandparents and elderly. The World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly will be celebrated every year on the fourth Sunday in July, a date that coincides with the feast of Sts. Anne and Joachim, grandparents of Jesus.

The theme for the inaugural celebration was “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20), to express the closeness of the Lord and the Church to every older person, especially as so many experienced isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The theme is also a call to action for older people and grandparents who have a mission to evangelize, pray for, and encourage young people in their faith.

All are called to keep the eldest among us part of our lives. Grandchildren and youths are invited to be present in the lives of older people and keep their hearts open to the wisdom and love of their elders.

The following is Pope Francis’s letter to grandparents and elderly.

**Dear Grandfathers and Grandmothers,**

**Dear Elderly Friends,**

“I am with you always” this is the promise the Lord made to his disciples before he ascended into heaven. They are the words that he repeats to you today, dear grandfathers and grandmothers, dear elderly friends. “I am with you always” are also the words that I, as Bishop of Rome and an elderly person like yourselves, would like to address to you on this first World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly. The whole Church is close to you—to us—and cares about you, loves you, and does not want to leave you alone!

I am well aware that this message comes to you at a difficult time: the pandemic swept down on us like an unexpected and furious storm; it has been a time of trial for everyone, but especially for us elderly persons. Many of us fell ill, others died or experienced the death of spouses or loved ones, while others found themselves isolated and alone for long periods.

The Lord is aware of all that we have been through in this time. He is close to those who felt isolated and alone, feelings that became more acute during the pandemic. Tradition has it that St. Joachim, the grandfather of Jesus, felt estranged from those around him because he had no children; his life, like that of his wife Anne, was considered useless. So the Lord sent an angel to console him. While he mused sadly outside the city gates, a messenger from the Lord appeared to him and said, “Joachim, Joachim! The Lord has heard your insistent prayer.” Giotto, in one of his celebrated frescoes, seems to set the scene at night, one of those many sleepless nights, filled with memories, worries and longings to which many of us have come to be accustomed.

Even at the darkest moments, as in these months of pandemic,
the Lord continues to send angels to console our loneliness and to remind us: “I am with you always.” He says this to you, and he says it to me. That is the meaning of this Day, which I wanted to celebrate for the first time in this particular year, as a long period of isolation ends and social life slowly resumes. May every grandfather, every grandmother, every older person, especially those among us who are most alone, receive the visit of an angel!

At times those angels will have the face of our grandchildren, at others, the face of family members, lifelong friends, or those we have come to know during these trying times, when we have learned how important hugs and visits are for each of us. How sad it makes me that in some places these are still not possible!

The Lord, however, also sends us messengers through his words, which are always at hand. Let us try to read a page of the Gospel every day, to pray with the psalms, to read the prophets! We will be comforted by the Lord’s faithfulness. The Scriptures will also help us to understand what the Lord is asking of our lives today. For at every hour of the day (cf. Matt. 20:1–16) and in every season of life, he continues to send laborers into his vineyard. I was called to become the Bishop of Rome when I had reached, so to speak, retirement age and thought I would not be doing anything new. The Lord is always—always—close to us. He is close to us with new possibilities, new ideas, new consolations, but always close to us. You know that the Lord is eternal; he never, ever goes into retirement.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells the Apostles, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20). These words are also addressed to us today. They help us better understand what our vocation is to preserve our roots, to pass on the faith to the young, and to care for the little ones. Think about it: what is our vocation today, at our age? To preserve our roots, to pass on the faith to the young and to care for the little ones. Never forget this.

It makes no difference how old you are, whether you still work or not, whether you are alone or have a family, whether you became a grandmother or grandfather at a young age or later, whether you are still independent or need assistance. Because there is no retirement age from the work of proclaiming the Gospel and handing down traditions to your grandchildren. You just need to set out and undertake something new.

At this crucial moment in history, you have a renewed vocation. You may wonder: How this can be possible? My energy is running out, and I don’t think I can do much. How can I begin to act differently when habit is so much a part of my life? How can I devote myself to those who are poor when I am already so concerned about my family? How can I broaden my vision when I can’t even leave the residence where I live? Isn’t my solitude already a sufficiently heavy burden? How many of you are asking just that question: isn’t my solitude already a sufficiently heavy burden? Jesus himself heard a similar question from Nicodemus, who asked, “How can a man be born when he is old” (John 3:4)? It can happen, the Lord replies, if we open our hearts to the working of the Holy Spirit, who blows where he wills. The Holy Spirit whose freedom is such that goes wherever, and does whatever, he wills.

As I have often observed, we will not emerge from the present crisis as we were before, but either better or worse. And “God willing... this may prove not to be just another tragedy of history from which we learned nothing... If only we might keep in mind all those elderly persons who died for lack of respirators... if only...
this immense sorrow may not prove useless, but enable us to take a step forward towards a new style of life. If only we might discover once for all that we need one another, and that in this way our human frailty can experience a rebirth” (Fratelli Tutti, 35). No one is saved alone. We are all indebted to one another. We are all brothers and sisters.

Given this, I want to tell you that you are needed in order to help build, in fraternity and social friendship, the world of tomorrow: the world in which we, together with our children and grandchildren, will live once the storm has subsided. All of us must “take an active part in renewing and supporting our troubled societies” (Fratelli Tutti, 77). Among the pillars that support this new edifice, there are three that you, better than anyone else, can help to set up. Those three pillars are dreams, memory, and prayer. The Lord’s closeness will grant to all, even the frailest among us, the strength needed to embark on a new journey along the path of dreams, memory and prayer.

The prophet Joel once promised: “Your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men will have visions” (Joel 3:1). The future of the world depends on this covenant between young and old. Who, if not the young, can take the dreams of the elderly and make them come true? Yet for this to happen, it is necessary that we continue to dream. Our dreams of justice, of peace, of solidarity can make it possible for our young people to have new visions; in this way, together, we can build the future. You need to show that it is possible to emerge renewed from an experience of hardship. I am sure that you have had more than one such experience: in your life you have faced any number of troubles and yet were able to pull through. Use those experiences to learn how to pull through now.

Dreams are thus intertwined with memory. I think of the painful memory of war, and its importance for helping the young to learn the value of peace. Those among you who experienced the suffering of war must pass on this message. Keeping memory alive is a true mission for every elderly person: keeping memory alive and sharing it with others. Edith Bruck, who survived the horror of the Shoah (Holocaust), has said that “even illuminating a single conscience is worth the effort and pain of keeping alive the memory of what has been.” She went on to say: “For me, memory is life.” I also think of my own grandparents, and those among you who had to emigrate and know how hard it is to leave everything behind, as so many people continue to do today, in hope of a future. Some of those people may even now be at our side, caring for us. These kinds of memory can help to build a more humane and welcoming world. Without memory, however, we will never be able to build; without a foundation, we can never build a house. Never. And the foundation of life is memory.

Finally, prayer. As my predecessor, Pope Benedict, himself a saintly elderly person who continues to pray and work for the Church, once said: “the prayer of the elderly can protect the world, helping it perhaps more effectively than the frenetic activity of many others.” He spoke those words in 2012, towards the end of his pontificate. There is something beautiful here. Your prayer is a very precious resource: a deep breath that the Church and the world urgently need (cf. Evangelii Gaudium, 262). Especially in these difficult times for our human family, as we continue to sail in the same boat across the stormy sea of the pandemic, your intercession for the world and for the Church has great value: it inspires in everyone the serene trust that we will soon come to shore.

Dear grandmother, dear grandfather, dear elderly friends, in concluding this message to you, I would also like to mention the example of Blessed (and soon Saint) Charles de Foucauld. He lived as a hermit in Algeria and there testified to “his desire to feel himself a brother to all” (Fratelli Tutti, 287). The story of his life shows how it is possible, even in the solitude of one’s own desert, to intercede for the poor of the whole world and to become, in truth, a universal brother or sister.

I ask the Lord that, also through his example, all of us may open our hearts in sensitivity to the sufferings of the poor and intercede for their needs. May each of us learn to repeat to all, and especially to the young, the words of consolation we have heard spoken to us today: “I am with you always!” Keep moving forward! May the Lord grant you his blessing.

Prayer for the first World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly

I thank You, Lord, for the comfort of Your presence: even in times of loneliness, You are my hope and my confidence, You have been my rock and my fortress since my youth!

I thank You for having given me a family and for having blessed me with a long life. I thank You for moments of joy and difficulty, for the dreams that have already come true in my life and for those that are still ahead of me. I thank You for this time of renewed fruitfulness to which You call me.

Increase, O Lord, my faith, make me a channel of your peace, teach me to embrace those who suffer more than me, to never stop dreaming and to tell of your wonders to new generations.

Protect and guide Pope Francis and the Church, that the light of the Gospel might reach the ends of the earth. Send Your Spirit, O Lord, to renew the world, that the storm of the pandemic might be calmed, the poor consoled and wars ended.

Sustain me in weakness and help me to live life to the full in each moment that You give me, in the certainty that you are with me every day, even until the end of the age.

Amen.
I was eleven years old when I heard that a plane hit the World Trade Center. I was on the bus on the way to school awaiting the morning news jingle on the radio. My friend and I sang it every day, followed by our own news broadcast featuring commercials of our made-up businesses and declarations of how unjustly long our bus ride was.

That day a reporter cut the jingle short to announce, “a plane hit the World Trade Center!” I had no idea what the World Trade Center was and was annoyed that they’d cut the jingle. Why should I care what’s going on in New York? Who was dumb enough to fly a plane into a building?

My class spent a portion of the day watching the news. I recognized a real tragedy had occurred that had all the teachers upset, and there seemed to be an unspoken rule among the students that we’d cut the antics for the day. As the days, months, and years passed, I learned about the Pentagon, where to find Afghanistan and Iraq on a map, and that wars existed outside my textbooks.

*The Only Plane in the Sky* broadened my perspective of that tragic day and the days to come. The book is an “oral history,” written as a flowing conversation involving those who worked in the World Trade Center, emergency personal, firefighters, reporters, senators, teachers, students, those working closely with President George Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney, family and friends frantically trying to reach their loved ones, and more.

Each paragraph features a different person, and the following paragraph picks up where the previous person left off, presenting multiple perspectives of the same event. The result is a gripping, fast-paced, and often disturbing snapshot of humanity in crisis.

The suspense of this book comes not from learning what will happen but in experiencing the details of the human experience in what feels like real time. I found that the details that impacted me the most were often the smallest and least consequential. One reporter shared that after hearing of the first plane strike, he took a shower before heading to the World Trade Center site. By the time he got there, the site was covered in a foot of dusty glass and debris, making his shower pointless. A New York Police Department inspector noted the number of women’s heels in the streets that were abandoned as people fled the area.

The faithful will be pleased to see several instances of the Catholic Church amidst the chaos, including the heroics of New York Fire Department chaplain Father Mychal Judge, citizens who credit Jesus for giving them courage, and a first responder who feared a priest would scold him for washing his face with holy water. It’s encouraging to see that where there’s tragedy and confusion, Jesus is there in the midst.

As we approach the 20th anniversary of 9/11, I highly recommend this book for everyone and especially to those who were too young to understand the events as they unfolded that day.

Sixteen years ago I was a new Catholic with young children. I sought the advice of a local Catholic mom who has a very large family. Her children were mostly grown up and all remained strong in the faith. I asked her, “What is your best parenting advice?” She smiled and said, “Pray for the future spouses of your children.” I thanked her but thought, “Really? That’s it?” as I stood there feeling overwhelmed like so many young moms.

Nevertheless, my husband and I took her advice, so if any of our children are blessed to be married to yours someday, know that we will have been praying for them for most of their lives! The benefit of this prayer to future family members (or to the Church in cases of religious vocations) is obvious, but there are also less evident benefits. This is one of three easy ways to be a spiritually proactive parent.

**PRAYING FOR FUTURE SPOUSES**

Praying for future spouses reminds you to pray for your immediate family. Something feels off if you aren’t also praying for your own spouse and children. Another benefit is that when children pray it, it reminds and encourages them to prepare for their future vocation. When prayed daily, it puts the concept of a holy marriage onto one’s lips on a regular basis, acting against Satan’s efforts to eliminate that concept from our vocabulary.

This simple prayer is an easy way for any parent and child, no matter how distracted or stressed, to be proactive, hopeful, and to bless their own family, the greater Church, and the world.

Our children range from a college student to an infant with many in between. I believe that being spiritually proactive is essential to raising Catholic children.

**GIVE EXTRAVAGANT AFFECTION**

When it comes to sharing faith, relationships are everything. The importance of extravagant affection in raising children was mentioned in the February 2021 *New Earth* by Gregory Popcek. I agree strongly with him. His message reminds me of a story I heard of a person visiting Italy who witnessed a father showering his young child with affection. He was kissing the child repeatedly and shamelessly, just full of love. It was a beautiful image of God’s love to the observer.

Dr. Popcek wrote that only 7% of children receive the affection they need to thrive. So for most of us, there’s no harm finding ways to add a little more affection. God in his mercy has given us the ability to share his love with others through simple glances, words, and gestures. They only take a moment, cost nothing, and open our children’s hearts to us sharing our beautiful faith with them.

Expressing extravagant affection towards children seems unthinkable when we’re exhausted or upset, but with God’s grace it’s possible. So many times I have had to “fake it ‘til I make it” with this one, but it’s worth it because it’s extremely powerful.

**GO TO ADORATION**

We’re called to go beyond the precepts of the Church, and children give us extra motivation to do this. How important does our faith appear to them if we just do the basics? One of the most impactful ways to go beyond the precepts is to take them to adoration. Children remember experiences.

It might sound crazy or impossible but consider the convenience. You can go to adoration for any length of time and with any aged child. You can cater the experience to your child beyond saying prayers. They may prefer coloring pictures or drawing, or getting a “tour,” or being read to, or cuddling. If you do parent-child nights out, going to adoration can be a part of that.

If your children get disruptive, you can take them out. In fact, you can just plan on that in the beginning. You can offer a reward like a Popsicle or a trip to the playground for going or staying quiet for a while.

**BEING PROACTIVE CAN BE EASY**

In Proverbs 27:23-24, King Solomon reminds us to “Take good care of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; for riches do not last forever; nor even a crown from age to age.” What a grave reminder. We and our children may be in a good place spiritually right now, but it’s wise to plan ahead. Praying for your children’s future spouse, giving extravagant affection, and going to adoration are three easy ways to proactively counter spiritual afflictions that are bound to come.
From June 21 to July 2, 80 children busied the fields, playground, and campgrounds of St. Ann’s Mission in Belcourt for St. Ann’s Summer Camp. Thirty camp counselors and support staff from 17 states and two Canadian provinces provided a loving, fun, and faith-filled environment for the children of the Turtle Mountain Reservation.

Camp songs and archery arrows filled the air while canoe paddles cut through the waters of Father’s Lake behind St. Ann’s Mission Church as children scurried to their various stations with excitement and enthusiasm. There were arts and crafts, big games, daily Masses, and daily teachings.

The theme for the two weeks was “He Came for Me,” focusing on the heart of the Gospel message, known as the kerygma, which states that God loves us and has a plan for us. Sin affected this plan and thus death entered the world. To save us from sin and death, God sent his son Jesus Christ to suffer and die for us to give us eternal life, and we receive this gift of eternal life by responding in faith and becoming members of his body, the Church, through the sacraments.

There was a deep desire for faith and spirituality in these kids, some who had never been to church before. Many children requested to be baptized or to receive their First Holy Communion because of attending. One child, when he heard that another group was going to spend time in Eucharistic Adoration, asked his counselor if he could go again instead of going to the playground. Another, when everyone else had a shark, lion or tiger painted on their face, wanted to have “Jesus’ blood” and the phrase “Jesus loves me” painted on his face.

Daily Mass and daily prayers were quite moving as the children belted worship songs out from their hearts and respected the sacred silence with reverence. As camp ended with Sports Day and an outdoor Mass, the blue team celebrated by sliming their favorite camp counselors. As the children said their goodbyes, both the children and their counselors shed tears because of the deep impact of the relationships formed at camp.

Forming faith in the forest on the Turtle Mountain Reservation
By Father David Brokke, S.O.L.T., parochial vicar of St. Ann’s Church, Belcourt

Summer camp would not be summer camp without canoe rides. (submitted photo)

Father David Brokke, S.O.L.T., leads campers in an activity on the steps of St. Ann’s Mission Church in Belcourt. (submitted photo)
Saying good-bye is never easy, but I will try. After writing for over half a decade, this will be my last article as the Director of Development and Community Relations at Catholic Charities North Dakota. This fall will take me and my family from Fargo to a new opportunity in Bismarck. There is much I will miss in Fargo and at Catholic Charities, and so while I am excited for this new adventure, I’m also sad about all of the wonderful people and places we will leave behind. I hope to see them all again soon!

Looking back at the last half dozen years we have accomplished so much. With your help we have more than tripled our annual fundraising and development totals. We have launched a new guardianship for the elderly program, significantly increased our AASK program, and added the Post Adopt program. We have also done numerous radio and television appearances to help raise awareness of the great work you support. We have also implemented a beautiful, new format for our annual report, which will be sent out in August to our faithful supporters from this past year.

It truly seems to me that whatever we accomplish is the result of a team effort. All of the trials and the great successes we have had at Catholic Charities have been your trials and your successes too. There are so many wonderful, generous supporters of Catholic Charities and the other great nonprofit organizations in our state. People here genuinely love one another and care about each other. I am so incredibly blessed to have been a part of this area, with many new friendships created along the way.

I am confident Catholic Charities will continue to be successful for many more years because of our values rooted in Christian faith, sustained by hope, and guided by charity. I encourage all of us to strive to live out the fundamental principles of Catholic Social Teaching, namely the life and dignity of the human person; the call to family, community, and participation; our rights and responsibilities; the option for the poor and vulnerable; the dignity of work and rights of workers; solidarity and subsidiarity; and care for God’s creation.

I am excited about the future of Catholic Charities North Dakota. This organization exists to serve those in need and advocate for the common good. Its 100th anniversary is in sight, with plans already underway for some wonderful birthday celebrations throughout 2023. You will also continue to receive updates about Catholic Charities through Catholic Charities Sunday at the end of September, and different times throughout the year. I look forward to seeing many of you in Bismarck, Fargo, or across North Dakota, wherever we may meet. We are deeply blessed to live in this great state where we have the freedom to raise our families and worship the Lord as we desire. May God bless each and every one of you each day of your lives!

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In my vocation as a Little Sister of the Poor, I am involved in several aspects of our mission of hospitality to the elderly. One of my favorite things is organizing creative activities for our residents, so I’m always looking for new art projects they might enjoy.

Recently, I became intrigued with collage as an artistic medium. After watching a few online tutorials, I reached out to a professional collage artist to ask her if she had ever taught frail seniors or people with disabilities.

I was touched when I received a personal reply from Elizabeth St. Hilaire the very next day. She gave me some tips about supplies and suggested that I explore the work of collage artist Eric Carle, whose style she thought might correspond to our seniors.

I wasn’t familiar with Eric Carle, at least by name, but when I googled him, I recognized his colorful style from children’s books I’d seen when visiting my nieces and nephew. The more research I did, the more fascinated I became with Carle’s life and work.

Carle’s childlike spirit and peaceful, carefree creative process really struck me. Both Carle and St. Hilaire create vibrant “paper paintings” featuring many elements from the natural world, along with adorable animals and intriguing human beings. But while St. Hilaire creates her impressionistic images using tiny bits of hand-printed collage paper, Carle’s works are created using pieces of tissue paper he fills with seemingly random brush strokes, circular patterns, dots and splatters of paint. His style is whimsical and a bit primitive.

Watching a video of Eric Carle creating art in his studio and engaging with children, I was struck by his serene attentiveness to his craft, to nature and to other people. I couldn’t help but think that his life could have taken a very different turn.

After completing art school, returning to the United States, and working for several years as a commercial artist in New York City, he was drafted into the U.S. army during the Korean War. He could have become hardened or cynical, but he didn’t.

In 1967 Carle was hired to illustrate his first children’s book, a job that changed his life. He then devoted the rest of his life to writing and illustrating children’s books—70 in all, with over 170 million copies sold! Recent interviews reveal a man very much at peace, someone who grew wiser, more insightful, and more childlike as he aged.

Eric Carle’s approach to life seems tailor-made for our present situation. “Simplify, slow down, be kind,” he often said.

And on a wall in the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art is the following inscription: “Children’s books remind us in uncertain times that there is still much we do know: Kindness matters. Laughter is essential. Caring for each other is everything.”

Carle passed away in his home in Massachusetts on May 23. While visiting my family in New England the week after Carle’s death, I had a conversation with my young cousin, a precocious six-year-old. She told me about dressing up as a character from her favorite book, The Very Hungry Caterpillar, for a recent school assignment.

The Very Hungry Caterpillar is Eric Carle’s most popular title. I asked her what makes her appreciate Carle’s books so much. Her response stunned me. Eric Carle, she said, “makes simple beauty out of pieces of nothing.”

I don’t know if Eric Carle was a Christian, but his life and work seem to epitomize Gospel simplicity and Pope Francis’ vision of older people as guides who can help the young formulate their own dreams.

As I grow older I pray I will be able to make simple beauty out of pieces of nothing like Eric Carle did.
Catholic Action

CHRISTOPHER DODSON
Executive director of the North Dakota Catholic Conference, which acts on behalf of the Catholic bishops of N.D. to respond to public policy issues of concern to the Catholic Church

California Attorney General Rob Bonta put North Dakota on a list of states to which California employees may not travel using state funds. Bonta acted pursuant to a 2016 California law that prohibits state-funded travel to states that have laws that discriminate or allow discrimination against people because of their “sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.”

The offending new North Dakota law, according to Bonta, is HB 1503, the bill to protect student free speech, association, and religious rights. The bill had strong support from the North Dakota Catholic Conference, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, and various religious groups. Although no Democrat voted for the bill, it had support across the wide ideological spectrum that makes up North Dakota’s Republican Party.

The bill did not address issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, or discrimination. Most of the bill set forth protections for student expression of speech. The portion of the bill that apparently offends the state of California is this: “An institution may not discriminate against a student organization with respect to a benefit available to any other student organization based on a requirement of the organization that leaders or voting members of the organization: (1) Adhere to the organization’s viewpoints or sincerely held beliefs; or (2) Be committed to furthering the organization’s beliefs or religious missions.”

In other words, a state university cannot prohibit a student club from asking its members to agree with club’s viewpoints or beliefs. A Catholic club can be Catholic. A Marxist club can be Marxist. A Democratic club can consist of Democrats.

Apparently, that was too much for Bonta, who somehow concluded that the new law would allow clubs to discriminate against people based on sexual orientation. In truth, the law does no such thing. It only allows exclusion from a club based on beliefs, not anything else.

Ironically, Bonta and the state of California apparently have no trouble with the alternative of mandating that student clubs accept everyone, even if that undermines that very purpose of having a club in the first place. So much for freedom of association and free speech from the birthplace of the Free Speech Movement.

The absurdity, however, does not stop there. Last year the federal government adopted a regulation that, with regards to religious clubs on campuses, does exactly the same thing as North Dakota’s new law. In other words, every college campus in the nation, including every college and university in California, has to protect the right of religious clubs to preserve their own identity. If California’s travel ban was more than political show it would apply to every college and university in the country, including the over two hundred campuses in California.

Unfortunately, we don’t have to look as far as California to find inexplicable behavior by state government.

The North Dakota Department of Health decided that North Dakotans should affirm and celebrate multiple sexual orientations and gender identity by posting a calendar of “pride” events around the state. The events listed celebrate same-sex relationships, same-sex marriage, gender fluidity, and even drag shows. That’s right, the Department of Health website promoted drag shows.

Whatever one thinks of these types of activities, it is difficult to see what “pride” events and drag shows have to do with public health and why the state used taxpayer money, even if nominal, to promote these events.

The Department of Health falls under Governor Burgum. Eventually, word got out about the department’s web page and it was taken down. Radio host Scott Hennen asked the Governor’s office for an explanation. The only response he received was that the calendar was there for “Pride Month” and was temporary. The explanation is not satisfactory. Pride Month was in June and the events listed ran through September. Moreover, it does not explain the ultimate question of why the calendar was ever posted in the first place.

The Health Department might have removed the calendar, but it still has a “Guide to Using Personal Pronouns” which tells North Dakotans that they should address people by their preferred pronoun, even if it doesn’t match their biological sex and, apparently, even if it means engaging in a lie. The pronouns include ze/hir/hirs, ze/zir/zirs.

It may be one thing for the Health Department to direct its employees to use these new creations in our lexicon, though even that might infringe upon an employee’s religious rights and sensibility. It is another thing, however, to pronounce to the people of North Dakota that they should use these words. Moreover, again, what does it have to do with public health? That web page is still up.

Ridiculousness abounds.
I’ve reached the age (68) when people tend to compare their idyllic childhoods to the present sorry state of the world. You’ve heard it all too often, but over the last 60 years the American scene has changed dramatically. Here are a few examples:

- During my childhood (the 60s), Ten Commandment monuments dotted the landscape; some 40 years later, these quintessential testimonials to our common Judeo-Christian heritage began to tumble, quite legally (Alabama, 2003; Oklahoma, 2009; Arkansas, 2017; New Mexico, 2017).
- In 1960, about 63 percent of all Americans attended church on Sunday; by 2020, this had shrunk to roughly 24 percent.
- When I was a child, sodomy was rare, taboo, and illegal; today, thanks to the stunning success of the LGBT movement, all this has flip-flopped. Anyone courageous enough to warn that homosexual activity is intrinsically disordered, a violation of natural law and an attack on the sanctity of marriage, is apt to be promptly and forcefully shouted down as “homophobic” and “intolerant.” Please note that I’m speaking of homosexual activity, not homo sexual orientation, or same-sex attraction. The Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly differentiates between the two. On the one hand, “Under no circumstances can (homosexual actions) be approved” (2357); on the other, people with homosexual tendencies “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity” (2358).

When discouraged by current events, I’ve ventured to share my perceptions with friends, hoping they’d cheerfully persuade me that my fears of an accelerating moral fall are exaggerated. But so far they’ve all agreed with me.

My friends have readily concurred with my assessment: yes, we are living in times of increasing moral darkness. Why be surprised? Did not St. John Paul II warn us back in 1995 of the possibility of a “new spiritual crisis, whose dangers are apparent not only at the personal level but regarding civilization itself” (Evangelium Vitae, 68)? My spiritual director, who is nobody’s fool, refers to our times as “the new dark ages.”

It may well be that a good deal of the church attendance of my childhood had more to do with fitting in with the surrounding culture than with a sincere belief in Christ Jesus. However, it seems fair to say that while my friends and I grew up in a society that mostly respected the Christian faith, today’s children will come to maturity in one increasingly hostile to it.

If I am correct, how will we remain faithful to Christ the King as we are increasingly ridiculed, calumniated, and marginalized? Where will we gain the strength to swim against an increasingly virulent tide that may include even our own family and friends? From God obviously. He will be with us always, “to the close of the age” (Matt. 28:29). I’d like to suggest three unsurpassable sources of his grace.

**THE EUCHARIST**

We have to begin here, since the Eucharist is the source and summit of all Christian life (Lumen Gentium, 11). The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass gives us Jesus, the Bread of Angels, our Bread of Life on our perilous journey back to our heavenly Father. Faithful assistance at Sunday Mass provides the surest way of growing in friendship with Christ, and strengthens us to remain true to the teachings of the Catholic Church even if those around us do not. Time spent with the Lord in Eucharistic adoration will further deepen our relationship with him.

**SACRED SCRIPTURE**

“Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ,” as St. Jerome said. Living as we do in a society increasingly hostile to the Gospel message, we can’t afford to be ignorant of Christ’s teachings. Which is to say, we all need to read the Bible daily, beginning with a prayer to the Holy Spirit, who will teach us all things and bring to our remembrance all Christ has taught us (cf. John 14:26). A good place to start is the Gospel of Luke, followed by the Acts of the Apostles. These twin books highlight the life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit, the same Paraclete who continues to strengthen, guide, and console us.

**MARY, VIRGIN MOST FAITHFUL**

Finally, let us turn to the powerful intercession of the mother of Christ and our mother, who remained faithful to her crucified son on Calvary when others fled. She can be trusted to win all the graces we need for our difficult times. Let us pray the rosary daily, if not in its entirety than at least a decade to honor the mysteries of Jesus and Mary. I also recommend consecrating oneself to Our Lady, either through St. Louis de Montfort’s True Devotion to Mary or Father Michael Gaitley’s 33 Days to Morning Glory.

The Eucharist, Scripture, and Our Lady mark a sure path to God and our heavenly home in any age and at any time.
It’s seems hard for me to believe that I will be starting my third year of seminary formation this fall. My first two years have gone by quickly despite the semesters that seem to take forever. What has been even more amazing to me have been all the places that God has taken me that I never would have expected to go.

In May, I finished my first two years of pre-theology at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, Md., which is where I will continue with my next four years of theology. This summer however, instead of being in a parish in the Diocese of Fargo, I am in Omaha, Neb. at Creighton University participating in the Institute for Priestly Formation (IPF) program. This nine-week program has a relaxed seminary feel but is focused primarily on the spiritual growth of the seminarian. There are about 150 seminarians from across the country to attend this program each summer. We have classes every day, but there is also plenty of time for prayer and leisure built into the schedule.

This program has allowed for a lot of spiritual growth for me this summer. Some seminarians here have had big, memorable moments with the Lord in prayer, but that isn’t quite the case for me. For me, I’ve noticed a slow but steady growth in my love for the Lord. I have also been able to rest and recognize his presence better in my life, something that can be tough in the busyness of typical seminary semester. Through all of this, more than anything, I have noticed a greater trust in the Lord.

One of the first things that happens during IPF is we go on an eight-day silent retreat. For me, this retreat went slow for the first four days. I didn’t feel God stirring me much in prayer. It was challenging and quite frustrating. I questioned whether I was going to receive much fruit from this retreat. The last four days seemed to go better, and faster too, but it was still a little frustrating for me. At this point, I felt myself being challenged to trust God even more, despite my growing desire to be back in the Diocese of Fargo at a parish.

During my struggles, I reflected and prayed with John 21:18 which says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you fastened your own belt and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will fasten your belt for you and carry you where you do not wish to go.” I found a lot of consolation in this verse. I felt Jesus asking me to trust him with everything in my life and that he was giving me the strength to do so. I found myself able to say “yes” to the things that I didn’t want to do.

My experience at IPF has allowed me to grow much closer to the Lord than I expected to this summer. Instead of disliking my summer and wishing I could have been elsewhere, I’m now thankful for being at IPF and for all the generous benefactors who’ve allowed me to have this opportunity. My experience will certainly strengthen me to continue to say “yes” to the Lord in the future, wherever he decides to take me.
Another smart use of your IRA

While you may initially appreciate the income, as time goes on, the higher withdrawal requirements can sometimes push you into a higher tax bracket, increasing your taxes.

A few years ago, Congress made the Individual Retirement Account (IRA) charitable rollover permanent. The rollover law allows taxpayers who are required to withdraw money from their IRAs to give directly to charity. Because the rollover counts against your required minimum distribution (RMD), making an IRA rollover gift to an organization could reduce your income and taxes.

The IRA rollover is a great way for you to help support your Catholic parish, diocese, or other ministry. While you won’t receive an income tax deduction for a rollover gift, you also won’t pay any income tax on the transfer.

The transfer only works for IRAs and not with other retirement accounts. An important feature to remember is that any gifts to charity that come from an IRA need to come from the IRA itself. So, to realize the tax advantage, the charitable gift should originate and be dispersed by the IRA custodian. For your own unique situation, check with your tax advisor or the custodian of your own IRA account for advice.

Here are some of the requirements for making an IRA rollover charitable gift this year:

- You must be age 70½ or older
- You must transfer money directly from your IRA to a qualified charity
- You can give annually up to $100,000 from your IRA

Companions on the journey of life.

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– Mary Jo Zacher, Director of Mission Integration and Chaplain

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Home is Here."
Come to Drayton for a classical music performance

Dr. Jay Hershberger, piano, and Dr. Gregory Hamilton, cello, will perform music of Beethoven and Rachmaninoff at St. Edward Church in Drayton on Sept. 19 at 3 p.m. A dessert buffet will follow the event. Free will offering.

Join us for 40 Days for Life, starting Sept. 22

Mark your calendars for the start of the National 40 Days for Life campaign Sept. 22–Oct. 31! You are called to be part of this important prayer effort to bring an end to abortion across our nation and world. The North Dakota 40 Days for Life effort will begin at 8 a.m. Sept. 22 in front of the abortion facility at 512 1st Ave. No., Fargo. Our campaign will provide a peaceful, prayerful presence there from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day of the campaign. Persons can sign up for an hour of prayer by contacting the Pregnancy Help Center at (701) 284-6601 or in Fargo (701) 356-7979. Email phc@polarcomm.com or visit 40daysforlifend.com.

Join us Oct. 3 for the Walk with Christ for Life

Bishop Folda invites the faithful of the diocese to join him in the annual Eucharistic procession, Walk with Christ for Life, on Respect Life Sunday, Oct. 3. The day’s events will begin with Holy Mass at noon, at St. Mary’s Cathedral in Fargo. This will be followed by a prayerful, peaceful procession to the state’s only abortion facility. A short prayer service will be held outside the abortion facility, and then those gathered will return to the Cathedral for Benediction. Lunch will be served in the church social hall after Benediction. The walk is sponsored by the Diocese of Fargo Respect Life Office. For more information, call Tim at (701) 356-7910.

Catholic United Financial invites you to show your “Hometown Pride” in photo contest

Catholic United Financial is hosting a photo contest to celebrate the unique, memorable, natural, or historic cities, towns, and neighborhoods we serve in the Diocese of Fargo. The theme of the photo contest is “Hometown Pride.” Catholic United wants to share your photographic evidence of why your hometown or neighborhood is a hidden treasure of the Upper Midwest! This could include photos of a landmark or hidden waterfall in your area, a scenic picture of your Church, your favorite part of the local county fair, a colorful float in a neighborhood parade, or a picture of family fun at a local attraction.

Selected photos will be featured and shared in a special 2022 calendar available to all members and friends of Catholic United Financial.

Submissions will be accepted until Sept. 1. For more information or to submit your photos, go to catholicunitedfinancial.org/photocontest. Contact Susan Detlefsen, (651) 490-0170 or sdetlefsen@catholicunited.org with questions.

Vaccinations and end of life decisions: A Catholic moral overview and guiding principles

What is the Catholic understanding of vaccine morality and human freedom? Do you have questions about how to complete a Health Care Directive? Can a person discontinue treatments such as dialysis or have a DNR? What about providing nutrition and hydration? Join Father Tad Pacholczyk, PhD., in a discussion on Catholic health care principles that guide persons and family members who are facing current medical decisions or would like to plan for future health care needs. Father Tad currently serves as the Director of Education for the National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia and is a featured columnist in New Earth. The workshop will be held Oct. 9 from 9–11:30 a.m. at St. Mary’s Cathedral in Fargo. If desired, join us for Mass at the adoration chapel at 8 a.m. with coffee and rolls to follow. This event is sponsored by St. Mary’s Cathedral and the Diocese of Fargo Respect Life Office and is free and open to the public. For more information, contact Tim at (701) 356-7910.

Catechist retreats available Aug. 27 and Aug. 28

Come away for a day of retreat at Maryvale, Valley City on Aug. 27 or Lake Metigoshe Ministries, Bottineau on Aug. 28 where Father Andrew Jasinski will direct a retreat with a series of talks reflecting on words, “Go to Joseph.” These retreats are primarily for those involved in catechesis, however, all are welcome. The day will begin at 9 a.m. and end at 4 p.m. Deadline to register is Aug. 19. Register at fargodiocese.org/catechistretreat. Contact at mary.hanbury@fargodiocese.org or (701) 356-7909 with questions.

Get Connected with the Diocese of Fargo
LIFE’S MILESTONES

Lynn and Kate Boll, parishioners of St. Philip’s Church in Hankinson, celebrated their 50th anniversary on June 12. They were married at St. Philip’s and have 5 children and 10 grandchildren.

LaVern and Margaret Chaput celebrated their 50th anniversary on June 26. They are parishioners of St. Alphonsus Church in Langdon.

Duane and Darlene Czapiewski of St. Michael’s Church in Grand Forks celebrated their 50th anniversary on June 18. They were married in Fisher, Minn. and have 3 children and 2 grandchildren.

Richard and Clara Elless, parishioners of Holy Cross Church in West Fargo, will celebrate their 70th anniversary on August 20. They were married in St. Joseph’s Church in Crosby, Minn. They have 6 children, 3 grandchildren, and 5 great-grandchildren.

Jim and Carolyn Exner, parishioners of St. James Basilica in Jamestown, will celebrate their 60th anniversary on Aug. 19. They were married at St. Mathias Church in Windsor. God has blessed them with 3 children and 6 grandchildren.

Edwin and Iona (Evans) Goeser, parishioners of St. Joseph’s Church in Devils Lake, celebrated their 64th anniversary on July 6. They were married at Ascension Church in Minneapolis. They have 5 children, 10 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren and 1 on the way. Edwin also celebrated his 95th birthday on July 13.

Ray and Helen Novotny celebrated their 70th anniversary on May 23. They were married at St. John’s Church in Lidgerwood. They have 5 children, 14 grandchildren, and 21 great-grandchildren.

Sam and Ann Piatz, parishioners of St. Philip Neri Church in Napoleon, celebrated their 60th anniversary on June 12. They were married at St. John’s Church in rural Zeeland. They have 7 children, 9 grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren.

Simon and Patricia Schwan, parishioners of St. Lawrence O’Toole Church in Michigan, will celebrate their 74th anniversary on Nov. 25. They were married at Sacred Heart Church in Caro, Mich. and farmed in the Michigan area since 1950. They have 7 children, 19 grandchildren, 42 great-grandchildren, and 3 great-great-grandchildren.

SHARE LIFE’S MILESTONES

As a way to celebrate life and love, we encourage parishioners in the Diocese of Fargo to send a photo and news brief for anniversaries of 50 years or 60+ years or birthdays of 80+ years to: New Earth, Diocese of Fargo, 5201 Bishops Blvd. S., Suite A, Fargo, ND 58104 or news@fargodiocese.org.
Edward and Elaine Selensky, parishioners of Little Flower Church in Rugby, celebrated their 60th anniversary on July 24. They were married at Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Karlsruhe. They are blessed with 9 children, 23 grandchildren, and 6 great-grandchildren.

Father Edward Sherman celebrated his 65th anniversary to the priesthood on June 9, and Father William Sherman celebrated his 66th anniversary on June 11. (l to r) Siblings Edward (9), Anne (3), and William (13). Anne joined the Franciscan Sisters in Little Falls, Minn. Sister Anne passed away in 2006.

Fred and Jane Wirth celebrated their 50th anniversary on July 24. They were married at St. Mary’s Church in Munich and spent most of their married life there farming and raising their family. They retired to Fargo in 2016 and are parishioners of Holy Cross Church in West Fargo. Fred and Jane are blessed with 5 children and 6 grandchildren.

Leo and Arlene Hoffner, parishioners of St. Boniface Church of Esmond, celebrated their 70th anniversary on July 17. They were married at St. Boniface and are still at home on the farm north of Esmond. Leo and Arlene are blessed with 6 children, 18 grandchildren, 19 great-grandchildren, and 2 great-great grandchildren.

Anne Axtman, parishioner of St. Anthony’s Church in Selz, celebrated her 96th birthday on July 29. Anne and her late husband Andy, who passed away in 2015, are blessed with 4 sons, 3 grandchildren, and 5 great-grandchildren.

Verna Marcotte, parishioner of St. Michael’s Church in Grand Forks, celebrated her 92nd birthday on July 19. Verna and her husband of 72 years, Ovide, are blessed with 11 children and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Michael Wolf, parishioner of St. Anthony of Padua Church in Fargo, celebrated his 80th birthday on June 24. He served as the St. Anthony of Padua, Fargo, Knights of Columbus district deputy. He’s been married to Darlene for 58 years and has 2 children and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Barb Zacher, parishioner of Holy Spirit Church in Fargo, will celebrate her 90th birthday on Aug. 12. Barb (and her deceased husband, Al) has 4 children, 2 of whom are deceased. Barb also has 6 grandchildren, and 10 great-grandchildren.

**Diocesan policy: Reporting child abuse**

The Diocese of Fargo is committed to the protection of youth. Please report any incidents or suspected incidents of child abuse, including sexual abuse, to civil authorities. If the situation involves a member of the clergy or a religious order, a seminarian, or an employee of a Catholic school, parish, the diocesan offices or other Catholic entity within the diocese, we ask that you also report the incident or suspected incident to Msgr. Joseph Goring, vicar general, at (701) 356-7945 or the victim assistance coordinator, at (701) 356-7965 or by email at victimassistance@fargodiocese.org. To make a report of sexual abuse of a minor and related misconduct by bishops, go to ReportBishopAbuse.org or call 1-800-276-1562.
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

High Mass was celebrated July 21 in St. Leo’s Cemetery, Casselton, on the altar of a memorial shrine erected in memory of the late Msgr. John Quillinan, long-time pastor of the Casselton parish. The memorial is built of irregular pieces of polished granite. The cross which tops the shaft of the monument was originally on a smaller monument which Msgr. Quillinan himself had erected years prior at the entrance of the cemetery. Junior and senior choirs of St. Leo’s Church were directed by Miss Agnes Arrell, and veterans formed a color guard.

50 years ago — 1971

An all faiths chapel at Grafton State School was dedicated July 11. The dedication ceremony was highlighted by the appearance of Mrs. Sargent Shriver, sister of the late President John F. Kennedy. In a brief address to the audience of over 400 she shared her love of God and she proposed the residents and their families taught those outside the facility that character is higher than intellect. Father Joseph L. Hylden was recognized as “the man who planted the seed.” The $250,000 chapel was built with money from various organizations and individuals throughout the state.

20 years ago — 2001

With praise and gratitude to Almighty God, the Diocese of Fargo joyously announces the ordination of Most Reverend Samuel Joseph Aquila as Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Fargo. According to the Code of Canon Law, the coadjutor bishop is appointed the vicar general of the diocese. When asked what his initial reaction was upon hearing his appointment by Pope John Paul II, he admits he was stunned. “I was totally surprised by the call to serve in this way, and I felt humbled and honored that the Holy Father was confident in trusting this ministry to me.” The crest will have an eagle because of the family name. Aquila, in Italian, and also in Latin, means eagle. His motto, “Do whatever he tells you” is from John’s Gospel whose symbol is also the eagle.

Pope released from hospital, prays at Rome basilica

By Junno Arocho Esteves | Catholic News Service

Ten days after undergoing intestinal surgery, Pope Francis was released from Rome’s Gemelli hospital, the Vatican confirmed.

In a statement released July 14, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said that after leaving the hospital midmorning, the pope visited the Basilica of St. Mary Major to say a prayer of gratitude before the icon of “Salus Populi Romani” (health of the Roman people).

The pope thanked Mary “for the success of his surgery and offered a prayer for all the sick, especially those he had met during his stay in hospital,” the statement said.

After praying at the basilica, the pope returned to his Vatican residence, the Domus Sanctae Marthae, Bruni said.

The pope was admitted to Gemelli hospital in the early afternoon July 4 to undergo “a scheduled surgical intervention for a symptomatic diverticular stenosis of the colon.”

He underwent a three-hour left hemicolectomy, which is the removal of the descending part of the colon, a surgery that can be recommended to treat diverticulitis, when bulging pouches in the lining of the intestine or colon become inflamed or infected.

Initially expected to remain in the hospital for seven days, the Vatican said July 12 that the pope would “remain hospitalized for a few more days in order to optimize his medical and rehabilitation therapy.”

During his stay, the pope continued working and spent time visiting patients at the hospital.

In his Sunday Angelus address July 11 from the 10th floor balcony of his suite of rooms at the hospital, Pope Francis said his time in the hospital gave him the opportunity to experience “once again how important good health care is” and that free, universal health care, especially for the most vulnerable, is a “precious benefit that must not be lost.”

“It needs to be kept,” the pope said. “And for this, everyone needs to be committed because it helps everyone and requires everyone’s contribution.”

The evening before his release, Pope Francis visited Gemelli’s pediatric oncology ward, which also is on the 10th floor, and greeted the young patients, their families, and the staff.
A Catholic school in Lansing, Mich., and two school parents are suing state officials over the state’s requirement that students wear face masks in school, saying this violated the school’s religious practices. A lower court sided with state officials in the suit filed last October when the mandate was in place for school students.

On July 21, this case went before a federal appeals court even though most of the state’s COVID-19 restrictions were rescinded in June. The complaint is from Resurrection School, which has a small student body of 150 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The school, part of the Church of the Resurrection, emphasizes a traditional curriculum, according to the school’s website.

Its pastor, Father Steve Mattson, told WILX, an NBC affiliate in Lansing, that the case still went forward out of a concern that the mask mandate “can be reinstated at any time and we want to be able to get in front of it.” He said students fifth grade and younger at the school never wore masks during the previous school year, when the school stayed open in-person all year, and there was no spread of COVID-19.

Last December, Judge Paul Maloney of the Western District of Michigan did not grant the school’s request for a preliminary injunction to ban enforcement of the state’s mask mandate for students in grades five and younger stressing the requirement was neutrally applied and did not target religious schools. The lawsuit pointed out that some of the plaintiffs’ students suffered from allergies, breathing or focusing issues and that the masks interfered with their ability to keep up academically and socially.

“The challenged orders single out children who cannot tolerate masks, making them unable to participate in religious education,” it said.

It also said wearing face masks “communicates the message that COVID-19 continues to be a terrifying and deadly threat” even for young students who are socially distanced. It added that “science and data do not support this message or the mask mandate” and that a mask wearer is showing that one has “surrendered his or her freedom to the government.”

“During this current political climate, a mask has become a symbol. And because a mask has become a political symbol, the wearing of a mask is a form of symbolic speech,” the lawsuit said.

On July 20, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended schools require masks for students under the age of 12 since they aren’t eligible yet for COVID-19 vaccine.

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“As the Catholic faith teaches, we are relational beings. And our existence as relational beings points to the Holy Trinity. A mask is disruptive to this essential element of the Catholic faith, and it is disruptive to the teaching of young children,” it said.

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Eric Seitz was ordained to the priesthood August 8, 2020 for the Diocese of Fargo. Two months later, his father Ben was ordained to the diaconate.

Father Seitz, now parochial vicar at St. John the Evangelist parish in Wahpeton, told CNA that his father had been considering the diaconate for many years before it finally came to fruition.

Father Eric said although he entered holy orders before his father did, it was his father’s holy example that helped nurture his faith to the point of discerning the priesthood.

“Just looking at things from my perspective, really his example as a Christian man was what gave room for my faith to grow, and helped me to learn about how serious [faith] is, in an age when so many people pass it off,” he commented. “I would say just his vocation as a Christian man was what helped me to discern my vocation.”

Father Eric serves as parochial vicar to Father Dale Lagodinski in the rural town of Wahpeton. Deacon Ben currently serves at Sts. Anne and Joachim Catholic Church in Fargo, about 50 miles north.

Growing up in an Air Force family, Father Eric said the family moved around frequently, but the tug he felt toward the priesthood followed him as he attended a Catholic school in each city where the Seitzes settled.

In seventh grade during a penance service, he said the idea of becoming a priest flitted into his mind as he contemplated what his future might hold.

“As I was going through the rest of middle school and into high school, I kept on hearing from different people that they thought they could see me as a priest,” he recalled.

“So by the time I got to the end of my junior year of high school, I realized I had to start making some decisions. I went on a discernment retreat, which was really helpful, and was talking with my pastor and the vocation director and my parents and all of that.”

He decided to go to seminary straight out of high school. He struggled somewhat at first with his own decision, saying that in addition to a call to the priesthood, he also had a desire to get married.

“And as I was going through seminary, I started noticing within myself that the priesthood wasn’t just something that God wanted for me, but it was something that I wanted to do as well. This wasn’t being imposed on me; it was my heart’s desire to go through with this,” he said.

Father Eric said he remembers his father Ben talking about wanting to join the diaconate when Eric was only in fourth grade, but he remembers having to wait for “God’s timing” to be right. Ben was unable to join the diaconate until after he had settled down and left the military, since the military archdiocese does not offer a diaconate program, Eric said. Ben ultimately earned a Master’s Degree in Theology, and his final formation took five years.

Father Eric said his mother, a convert to the faith, is very supportive of her son’s and husband’s vocations, and will sometimes call him to request he pray particular Mass intentions.

In terms of advice for those still discerning their vocation, Father Eric has simple advice.

“Stay calm and talk to somebody who is wise that you can trust,” he said.
As the man in green scrubs emerged from our state’s only abortion facility, I was distracted by a couple who’d come by, asking us prayer advocates if we had any ailments needing healing and if they could pray over us. We formed a little circle to receive their prayers. But as the flash of green caught my eye, I quietly departed the small gathering, curious.

“Excuse me,” I said to the worker as he walked down the sidewalk, away from our group, “Do you perform abortions?”

“Well, all of us there take part in abortion in one way or another,” he said. His forthrightness surprised me.

“So, what do you do, exactly?” I asked.

“I’m a phlebotomist, so I mostly do blood draws and make sure the clients are healthy.”

By this point, we’d both stopped walking and had paused in front of a nearby eatery. I could feel the stares of the patrons eating their tacos outside, just inches from us, but this seemed important enough to continue. It’s not everyday abortion workers willingly engage with us.

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He was proud of his work helping women, he said, and made it abundantly clear he did not like how we judge and shame women. “Wouldn’t it be better to do something to help them from coming here in the first place, like educating them on birth control?”

I explained that many people are doing different things to address unplanned pregnancy, but those praying at the sidewalk were called specifically for this mission. As a mother of five children, and one who has lost another child through miscarriage, I understand the grief mothers go through in experiencing a child’s death as well as the joy in having them; I couldn’t imagine any of my children not existing. So, I’d come to let other mothers know that if they don’t feel ready to have a child, support and help are within reach.

As he persisted in his accusations, I tried explaining our intentions, showing him some of the literature we give the women, encouraging him to consider our true aims, not just what he’d been told by others. Though he didn’t seem too open to my sharing, he wasn’t hostile, either. When I challenged him about his reason for being there—mentioning post-abortion trauma, and the women we’ve met who deeply regretted their abortion—he responded, “Well, it’s just a clump of cells.”

It surprised me to hear that old line. “You know, you are ‘just a clump of cells,’ too,” I offered. “We both are. What if a certain ‘clump of cells’ slated for abortion could have cured a horrible disease?”

He paused. “I still don’t agree with you, but that’s something to think about.”

It was a start. As we continued on, in a respectful manner, a longtime abortion worker walked quickly past us, turning to tell him, “You’re talking with someone who is hateful, by the way!” Having gone to Mass earlier and asking God to keep me calm, I was unruffled.

Later, when sharing about this exchange in a Facebook group for local Catholics, one member noted his surprise that a phlebotomist would use the “clump of cells” argument. “You’d think he, of all people, would know better.” Later, another remarked, “I thought the ‘clump of cells’ argument had been refuted long ago.” Indeed, it seemed that science and technology had disproved that false contention several decades ago.

Though I don’t know whether the abortion worker was moved by our discussion, I certainly was. That he stopped to talk at all indicates he may feel the need to justify what he does. I’d guess something in his soul isn’t settled. Here, I find a glimmer of hope.

Only God can remove scales from eyes, but I hope you’ll join me in praying for a phlebotomist to come to know that God arranged every cell in his body in a unique, unrepeatable fashion. With God’s grace, may he turn away from abortion work to claim his true destiny, not of destruction, but undeniable delight in this exquisite, blessed thing called life.

Phlebotomist uses “clump of cells” to defend work

SIDEWALK STORIES

ROXANNE B. SALONEN

Mother of five, writer for The Forum and CatholicMom.com, speaker and radio host for Real Presence Radio
Do you know where we are?
The answer will be revealed in the September New Earth.

Where in the diocese are we?

Last month’s photo is of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Rock Lake.